

Mentoring for Mid-Career Faculty

Welcome to the deep dive. Today we're uh tackling a really interesting phase for university faculty. That time right after tenure. You know, you've cleared this huge hurdle, but then what happens next?

Yeah.

It's a time with well loads of possibilities, but maybe also a point where you wonder about direction or you know the energy for what's next.

Exactly. And that's what we're digging into today. We're drawing on this great resource. It's called Level Up, a mid-career guide for faculty. Okay.

It's written by faculty for faculty which I think is key and you can find it on the center for faculty excellence website.

Good to know.

And our focus today is really sharp figuring out the skills you might need for those future goals and just as importantly the kind of support that helps you keep going, right? Like a strategy for thriving in mid-career, not just surviving.

That's a good way to put it. Thriving.

Okay. Level up. I like that. Sounds active like growth.

So let's start with those future goals. After 10 years done, what sort of things do faculty start thinking about and how does that change the skills they need?

Well, what's interesting in resources like Level Up is just how varied those ambitions can be. I mean, sure, becoming a full professor is definitely a common one, right? The next rank.

Yeah. But people also think about um developing really innovative courses, maybe taking on leadership roles in their department or even schoolwide roles. Oh, okay.

Or maybe really boosting their research impact, you know, going for those major external grants, but it broadens out quite a bit. It really does. And the skill shift follows that. It becomes about identifying what you need for these new goals. It's less about proving competence for tenure and more about like actively shaping your contribution moving forward.

Okay, shaping your contribution. So, it's not just business as usual. Let's take an example. Say someone's interested in maybe moving into administration. What kind of specific skills does Level Up talk about for that path?

That's a great one because it often feels like a bigger leap. Level Up really emphasizes that admin roles need well a different toolkit than straight up research or teaching.

Makes sense.

It mentions needing to understand how the university actually works on a larger scale.

You know, things like budgeting, strategic planning, managing people, that kind of thing.

Right. The operational side.

Exactly. So, to get those skills, the guide might suggest uh seeking out chances to be on university committees, maybe shadowing administrators.

Oh, interesting. Like an apprenticeship

sort of. Yeah. We're taking specific workshops on leadership or management. It's about proactively grabbing that institutional knowhow and those leadership skills.

It sounds almost like learning a new language. Yeah.

Professionally speaking, developing a whole new set of competencies.

That's a good analogy actually.

Okay. So, skills are one piece. The other big thing we wanted to touch on is support. Level up being by faculty for faculty. I bet it has some real insights into how support needs change after tenure. What does it say?

It definitely addresses that. Level up points out that Yeah, the really intensive mentoring or maybe reduced service loads you had pre-tenure often shift. They might lessen. But crucially, the need for support doesn't just vanish. If anything, mid-career can bring its own uh hurdles, its own challenges,

like feeling stuck maybe.

Exactly. Feeling stuck, maybe unmotivated, exhausted even. The publication mentions those feelings. So, it really highlights how important it is to actively build and use different kinds the support networks. You don't want to feel isolated,

right? So, what does that support actually look like? What should people be looking for?

Well, what's great about Level Up is it talks about a mix of things. It still sees value in senior faculty mentors, but maybe the focus changes. It's more about guiding those bigger career questions, not just tenure rules.

So, broader strategic advice.

Precisely. And it also talks up the power of peer groups, you know, colleagues at a similar stage sharing what's working, what's not, maybe just keeping each other accountable, accountability partners almost.

Yeah. Yeah, kind of. And then really importantly, it points towards tapping into university resources like the center for faculty excellence we mentioned. They often have things specifically for this stage,

right? The institutional support. You mentioned the center for faculty excellence houses the level up guide itself. What other concrete help might faculty find there for navigating midcareer?

Well, starting with guides like Level Up is great for just thinking things through, but these centers often offer workshops, you know, things on leadership skills. grant writing, even work life balance, which can be huge mid-career.

Yeah, definitely.

They can also help you network, connect you with people outside your usual circle, maybe find mentors or collaborators across campus. It's about using the structure that's already there to help faculty succeed.

So, it sounds like the key message for faculty hitting that mid-career point is first be intentional. Really think strategically about what you want to do next, those post tenure dreams.

Yep. Be proactive.

And then take a hard Look at the skills you'll actually need to make that happen and actively look for ways to develop them.

Absolutely. Identify the gaps and fill them.

And finally, don't assume support disappears. Recognize it changes. And it's kind of on you to build and tap into those networks, peers, mentors, university resources to keep that momentum going.

Couldn't have said it better. Level up. And guides like it really frame mid-career as a time to leverage everything you've learned and build and really invest in next chapter, your continued impact.

It's an opportunity, not just a plateau.

Exactly. A chance to really shape what comes next in your academic life.

So for you listening, maybe take a moment. What are those aspirations calling to you now beyond just getting tenure? What skills do you think you might need to nurture to reach them? And maybe think about your current support system. What does it look like? And where could you maybe strengthen it? Perhaps checking out your own university center for faculty excellence could be a good first step. That level up guide or something similar. might just spark ideas for your next chapter.