

Transparency



“One of my primary sources of stress is getting funding for my lab and I am not alone! For internal grants there is never any feedback provided which is very disappointing as I am sure that many of us could benefit from that. I also feel that for many of the internal awards, the recipient(s) is pre-decided. Again there should be more transparency about this mechanism.”

“One huge stress is the lack of information and the lack of standards regarding many important processes, such as -- quite critically -- promotion and tenure reviews. It is surprising that for a profession that prides itself on rigor and depth, there is such little transparency and visibility into (a) what the standards for these processes are, and (b) how those standards are applied.”

Transparency means making all kinds of information available and easy to find. This also includes providing clear and actionable feedback about faculty members’ work and what is needed for advancement. Only 60% of the faculty responding to the 2019 Faculty Quality of Life Survey felt they had adequate information and feedback about what it takes to succeed as a faculty member.

Some departments and schools are thoughtful and organized about providing transparency. Bylaws are posted on the department website and reviewed and updated by the faculty regularly. There is a standard plan for how to on-board and welcome new members to the department that includes review of important policies and a contact list for accomplishing various administrative tasks. In other cases, leaders make the mistake of believing that if they have said something once, it has been communicated. For information to reach everyone it must be repeated many times using different media – in department meetings, via email, on the department website, in one-on-one meetings – and also over the course of time. Often people will not hear a message unless it is of relatively immediate importance to them, so making sure important policies or available programs are reviewed and communicated every year can help faculty members receive the information when it is pertinent to them.

Another issue from the 2019 Faculty Quality of Life Survey had to do with adequate information about leadership opportunities and the opportunity to serve on important committees. Having a voice in decision making about the direction of the department also emerged as an issue. These suggest a lack of transparency and inclusion and the possibility that important opportunities for advancement are being communicated through informal networks. This can create an impression of inequity and may skew leadership roles and important committee participation to an older “insider” network that is closed to newer and more identity diverse faculty members. The solution to a problem like this is to deliberately identify opportunities and develop a system to publicly post and communicate about them with the whole department.