

Academic Life

A Guide for Prospective Faculty

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If you are considering application for a position on a pharmacy faculty, or if you are a current pharmacy faculty member and are considering another position, it is important for you to examine the potential of the position from a number of perspectives.

From a general viewpoint, you should know that institutions define and place differing emphases on scholarship, teaching, research and service. Understanding these terms and degrees of emphases within a specific institution can be of immense help as you seek to get the best match of your abilities, interests and career goals. Critically examining, for example, a school's mission and organization, its policies regarding faculty development and emphasis on orientation of a faculty member new to an institution should be essential components of any career move.

The questions posed throughout this guide are intended to help you understand the institution under consideration well enough to make an informed decision about accepting a position. Before making any final decisions you should be sure that you have satisfactory responses to each of these questions as well as any other issues and concerns that may come to mind during the interview process.

Organization

Mission

A mission statement describes the general purpose and/or goals of a particular institution, group or entity. A mission statement of a university may be broad, vague or at times lofty. As one moves downward through the university structure to the college or departmental levels, however, mission statements should become more specific in describing the goals of the particular unit.

1. Is there a mission statement for the university?
2. Is there a mission statement for the college/ school?
3. Is there a mission statement for the division/ department?
4. Are the mission statements congruous?
5. Do the mission statements complement personal goals?

Administrative Structure

Understanding the organizational structure of the university college and department will assist you in establishing a sense of the lines of authority within which you will be expected to work.

1. What is the organizational structure within the school? What are the expected changes of administrative personnel in the near future?
2. What have been the recent changes?
3. Is the faculty at the university or college unionized?

Faculty Orientation

In order for any faculty member to be maximally effective (especially during the initial years of his or her career), it is imperative that the mechanics of university life are explained. There must be sufficient explanation and documentation for faculty members to function and avoid frustration within the university's bureaucracy. Knowing how you will be "cared for" when you first come on board, then, should be a primary concern.

1. Is there a university "faculty handbook"?; a school "handbook"?
2. If the faculty is unionized, is the union contract consistent with the policies and procedures outlined in the faculty handbook? Does the contract augment the institution's policies and procedures?
3. Is there a formal orientation program inclusive of school facilities, policies and procedures for new members of the faculty?
4. What are the university benefits (e.g. medical, recreational, retirement)?
5. Is there a specific job description for the position?
6. What are the policies regarding outside consulting and patents?
 - is support staff available for these activities?
 - what constitutes conflict of interest with the university?
 - are there university conflict-of-interest guidelines?
7. How are vacations arranged?
8. How do I arrange absences during times with teaching commitments?
9. What has been the funding pattern over the last five years for faculty salaries and operating budgets?
10. How are university and college administrators evaluated?
11. Are there standard grading policies to which the school faculty must adhere?

Faculty Development

Faculty Evaluations

Receiving constructive feedback from one's superiors and peers is critical to the growth and development of a faculty member. The mechanisms in place in the college for such feedback will be important to you once you have joined a faculty and, therefore, should be addressed forthrightly during your consideration of a position.

1. How often is feedback on performance provided?
2. Who performs the evaluation?
3. What specific factors are evaluated?
4. How is teaching effectiveness evaluated?
5. What type of input is obtained from students regarding teaching performance?
6. What are the merit evaluation procedures?
 - who does the evaluation?
 - what will be your input options prior to the merit decision?
 - is there a process for rebuttal of the merit decision?

Promotion and Tenure

Tenure is defined as a right to hold a position. In academia it is, in essence, guaranteed employment for life. Requirements to achieve tenure differ among institutions. Tenure decisions are based on achievement in several areas which may be defined differently by individual institutions and could have the most far-reaching effects on your long-term career accomplishments.

1. How do the university and school define scholarship?
 - what activities/achievements are considered as evidence of scholarship?
 - what activities/achievements are considered as evidence of effective teaching?
 - what is considered as evidence of professional activity?
2. How do the university and college define service?
 - how is patient care responsibility differentiated from university and college service?
 - what activities/achievements are considered as evidence of service?
3. How do the university and school define research?
 - what activities/achievements are considered as evidence of research? what materials are included in a promotion/tenure packet (e.g. outside letters)?
 - what are examples of exceptional cases in which tenure was granted earlier than usual at the institution (scenario that exemplifies the P&T requirements)?
 - what is the timetable for reappointment/ promotion/tenure?
 - what alternative appointment tracks (nonregular, clinical tenure, etc.) are available? is it possible to switch between tenure and non-tenure tracks?
 - what credit is given toward promotion and tenure if a faculty member has previous experience?
 - how are the promotion and tenure committees constituted? who may vote for various ranks?
 - are there specific criteria published for promotion to various professorial ranks?
 - is there a standard list of journals or other publications in which faculty publication is acceptable toward promotion and tenure?
 - how often is faculty progress reviewed by P&T committee(s)?
 - what documentation is required for the P&T review process? where is the information kept and who is responsible for updating it?
4. How successful have members of the department been in achieving tenure during the past five years?

Leaves of Absence (Sabbaticals and Research Leaves)

Leaves are granted to university faculty members to provide opportunities for the reflection, research and professional development essential in a scholarly community. These opportunities are considered essential tools for faculty career enhancement and redirection.

1. What are the sabbatical, developmental and research leave policies?
2. How have individuals in the college taken advantage of sabbaticals or research leaves?
3. What level of funding is provided to faculty wishing to take a sabbatical or research leave?

Faculty Work Assignments

A work assignment policy describes the expected workload for a faculty member. It may be defined in terms of minimum or maximum credit or contact hours taught, student:faculty ratios, committee assignments and percentage of time allocated for research. It is important to have a clear understanding of expectations regarding work assignments before moving into a position.

1. What are the expectations regarding the balance among teaching, research and service?
2. What are the specific responsibilities associated with the faculty position?
 - course coordinating responsibilities?
 - lecture hours per semester/quarter?

- individual student advising?
- advising student organizations?
- continuing pharmacy education program development and participation?
- specific patient care responsibilities required?
- committee assignments?

As a new faculty member, will I be assigned a lighter teaching load?
for how long?

will graduate teaching assistants be assigned to the department, specific courses?

Research Issues

Research is the major thrust of university life for faculty in most institutions. The research expectations, levels of support and research related policies and procedures differ among institutions and should be fully articulated and understood in deliberations related to new positions.

What type of internal review and paperwork accompanies submission of a research proposal to an outside funding agency?

Who is responsible for grant administration and management (e.g. university official, college business officer, departmental secretary, primary investigator)?

Are seed grants available through the university or school/college?

may personnel be hired off seed monies?

What is the availability of research equipment?

What are the overheads on grants and contracts at the university?

How are overhead, salary savings and residuals distributed from grants and contracts?

Will the dean/department chair support the development of faculty research interests?

provide adequate laboratory space?

computer equipment?

start-up funds?

Support Issues

To avoid the inherent frustrations of not having the appropriate support to complete faculty tasks, an understanding of what is available prior to joining the faculty is important. The availability of support staff and services certainly can enhance or detract from the quality of your life as an academician and should be given ample consideration as you weigh your career options.

What type of administrative or technical assistance is provided?

how many other faculty members use the same support persons(s)?

will you have your own personal computing equipment?

what kind of wordprocessing, personal computing equipment does the support team have? is it compatible with what you have?

What type of audiovisual services are available?

what type of technical support is provided to assist with A-V resources?

how state-of-the-art is the equipment?

What are the policies regarding photocopying, telephone use, etc.?

is there sufficient quantity of equipment to meet the needs of the faculty?

What are the travel support policies for all faculty?

are faculty expected to fund travel from research funds?

are there any university funds available to assist faculty with travel for meeting presentations?

What level of support is available for faculty members' graduate students, residents and fellows?

Personal Issues

Will this position enhance my career?

How will this career move affect my family or other responsibilities?

What are the costs and availability of affordable housing?

Will my spouse be able to find suitable employment?

Is this the kind of community in which I wish to raise my children?

Does the institution offer assistance in relocating?

And Finally,

Is the nature of the campus and community such that I can make myself comfortable and highly productive for the next several years?

If after careful consideration of the issues raised in these pages the answer to this final question is affirmative, then we encourage you to actively pursue that new pharmacy faculty position or that step up toward which you have been working.