

Ep. 084: Professional Development for New Faculty

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Dr. Jennifer Friberg joins Jim Gee to explore how instructors new to Illinois State University can get started developing their teaching and other skills, while still balancing all of their new obligations. They talk about the challenges of course design for someone new on the job, how new instructors can find their place (and their voice) in their department, and the many services for both new and early career faculty available through the Center for Integrated Professional Development.

Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim

JEN: I'm Jen.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching

JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching, a podcast from the Center for Integrated Professional Development here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee, and joining me once again, our Director of Scholarly Teaching. Why are we laughing? It's Dr. Jennifer Friberg. Hi, Jen.

JEN: Hi, Jim I feel like I was just in this seat.

JIM: You were, and you may be for a while today. Yeah. So, well, you know, welcome back. We were talking earlier this week about what we wanted to do for this particular episode, looking at the time of year and looking at some of the projects that we've been working on here at the Center this summer, that are not related to a certain change in learning management system.

JEN: We won't talk about that today.

JIM: We don't need to talk about that today. But what we do want to talk about is what we do at our Center for new and early career faculty and taking it from not just kind of a listing of the menu options that we have available to people but talk really about, what are some practical things that people who are going to be new to teaching to campus, whether they're tenure track, non-tenure track, even graduate teaching assistants, what can they do to prepare for fall? And then of course, we do want to go over the menu a little bit.

JEN: A little bit, yeah.

JIM: Yeah. So, what are your initial thoughts about new faculty and some of the well, first of all, how do we- what is- what are new faculty members?

JEN: What are new faculty? Who are they? They are our brand-new faculty. And in that, we would subsume our tenure line faculty who are just starting their first year, their first semester teaching with us here at ISU, but also new course instructors that might be

non-tenure track or even graduate teaching assistants. These are folks who are joining us here on campus for the first time, and there are new faculty, and we would consider them to be new faculty for their first semester or two. And then there's sort of a smooth...

JIM: Yeah,

JEN: Not really even talked about the transition to early career faculty, which-

JIM: We will talk about that a little bit later. I think it's I know this happens on other campuses, for those who listen to the podcast who aren't at Illinois State or maybe for some folks who are the term faculty gets used in many different contexts. Right?

JEN: Right.

JIM: To the point where when we talk about faculty success, we are a little concerned that we don't want that to alienate people who aren't tenure line research conducting faculty members. So, when it comes to teaching, especially faculty is kind of a more of an umbrella term. Right.

JEN: Right. Right. And we broadly use course instructors, but they're when we're talking about new faculty, there are some different considerations for our tenure line, folks, that might not be something that is as cumbersome for our non-tenure line faculty. And so, there's there yes, there's a lot of crossover. And yeah, we aim to include not exclude but we say faculty, and that in this context, when we're talking about supports and structures, and sharing faculty success. Yeah, we're putting everyone in one basket.

JIM: So, it's been a while since you've been a new faculty member on our campus. It's been a while since I've been a new instructor on our campus. But can you kind of, in the spirit of what you're talking about, can you kind of highlight what are some of the challenges that people face? You've just signed on the dotted line. It's the new fiscal year, you're getting ready to start, you're going to be teaching classes in August, well, this year, August 21.

JEN: Right, right. Well, most of us, when we start out, are given new courses to design and develop. And so, for your general tenure-line faculty member coming into campus, they may be preparing to teach two or three classes they've never taught before. And so, getting those classes, you know, wrangled designed well, in thinking about how to set up the learning experiences for their students in the coming semester, that's a pretty big hill to climb. You know, faculty are content experts, they wouldn't be hired to teach if they weren't, but thinking about how to put all that content into usable modules or usable, you know, individual course, sessions to have them make sense and be cohesive. And, you know, and work students to the finish line in the way that, you know, is advantageous to the students. Right, right. You know, it's, it's a lot to undertake. And our new faculty have a lot that they are expected to do outside of teaching. And so, I think that for me, and for those I've talked to, the single biggest roadblock, initially, is finding balance, figuring out how much time do I spend teaching

versus writing up my dissertation to have it published, you know, that sort of thing. And there's a tension there that's difficult at first, I think.

JIM: Sure. Sure. And I think that those who, you know, when you come on board, and certainly there are new faculty members who have taught at other institutions either in graduate school or as a faculty member, you know, in their own right there, who are bringing their syllabus with them, and they're just going to try to make it fit and whatever they already know what the textbook is, and all that other stuff. My experience was, you know, as a part-time non-tenure track faculty member. Well, and even taking over someone else's course when I was still in graduate school here, come to think of it was, alright, here's all my stuff, you know, go with God. Right? Yeah, and it was, and they went off into their other thing, which was great. It was nice that they had faith in me. But I had to make the decision of, so, I did have something to work with, right? But I had to make the decision of how much change do I make?

JEN: And that's hard. If you have someone else's materials, you have their words and their content, but you don't know their intention. You know, so, yeah, I always struggle with that my colleagues in CSD were always so, lovely to share, especially early on in my my career here. You know, their PowerPoints and their, you know, the things that they did in courses that I was taking over. But personally, I found that was more disruptive than helpful, because I spent so, much time trying to decode what they had done, that it would have been easier for me to start over. That's a totally personal thing, though. I'm sure plenty of people will go in exactly the other direction and disagree with that, so,

JIM: Well, and in your discipline, Communication Sciences and Disorders, CSD, my knowledge of that department is that it is a very regimented program. Is that a fair way to put it? I don't know if that's, in other words, one course leads into another. Maybe in some cases more than others?

JEN: Yeah. You know, we've got our undergrad and graduate program, and neither is lockstep graduate is more so, cohort-based where there's, you know, it's undergraduate. There are definitely prerequisites, but because the students are learning about individual disorders, yeah, it can be kind of constructed in different ways.

JIM: Yeah. And the reason I brought that up was because that's another consideration that I remember having in one particular class I took over, early on, which was, this was the class that fit into a lot of other classes within that particular area of the major, right. And not only did I have the learning outcomes I felt that the students should achieve but they're also all of my new colleagues, were looking over my shoulder to like, you're telling them about x. Right, right. Right, learning about Y. Right.

JEN: And, you know, I think it's so, interesting, because so, going back to Randy Bass, I've talked about him in other podcasts, but he back oh, gosh, I want to say 99, he published an article that talked specifically about the need to problematize teaching, and in the same way that we do scholarship. So, you know, if you're a faculty member, and you go into the break room, and you say to someone, I don't know what I should

do with this survey data, and what statistics should I run? And should I do regression, you know, whatever the case might be. Those conversations are thought to be very scholarly in nature, and they're really respected right up to two high level intellectuals talking about part of their work, this is great. And Randy Bass talked about the fact that we need to do the same with teaching and hold conversations about what we do as teachers and decisions that we make as course instructors with that same rigor and respect. And so, you know, along those lines, I hope that our new faculty feel encouraged to problematize their teaching and go into some of their peers, you know, offices and say, This is what I want to do with this class, what effect will that have on the classes down the road? Like have those conversations about? Okay, how do we set our students up to really succeed in this program? And how do we make it cohesive? And here's what I want to do, but I don't want to stand in the way of, you know, the downstream. And I think that new faculty should feel that they can do that.

JIM: Yeah, I agree. I think that sounds very empowering in that, and very practical in some ways, because the culture is different in Okay, here's a, here's a dumb statement, the culture is different in different academic departments.

JEN: Nuh-uh, you don't say!

JIM: But there are going to be some places where they are very collaborative, or there may be some places where there's a program coordinator that is much more active amongst their faculty colleagues, as opposed to other ones. And there are some that are like, Hey, I don't want anyone telling me how to do my thing. So, I'm not going to tell you how to do your thing, right? Where you're asking for that input, at least, you know, maybe not marching orders, but at least a perspective. So, it sounds like one way to strike that balance is to have a conversation with your colleagues.

JEN: Absolutely I, you know, I would encourage that you at least can get a barometer reading of what that culture, you know, where that request or that you know, conversation could go. But I think the nice thing is even if you don't feel like you can have those conversations because of whatever reason with your immediate peers. There's lots of opportunities on campus, you know, different support networks and learning communities that we have through our Center. And you know, one of the things that I think is underutilized by new faculty on our campus, our consultations with our staff, you know, the ability to sit down and say, Hey, I really don't feel like I can talk about this with my peers. Yeah. What do you think? You know, what, what do you think? What kind of resources? Do you know of what does the evidence suggest. So, you know, we can have those kinds of conversations in our departments, schools, units, and outside, with supportive structures like ours.

JIM: Yeah. And so, if people are listening to this, and they are interested in a consultation, whether you're new faculty or not, you can go to [pro dev dot Illinois state.edu](http://prodev.illinoisstate.edu). There's a Teaching Support tab up at the top of the website. And that will get you to a whole list of different things we do, including consultations, it does surprise me a little bit when you say that only because, well, and this is certainly not a scientific readout of the situation, because we know that there are some departments who when they are interviewing, when they have a position that you're trying to fill, the candidates will

come by and talk to us about our services. And other departments don't do that. Whenever I do, those sort of candidate welcomes we call them now. They're always very excited to learn about the kind of the breadth and depth of consultations that we do. A lot of them I find are coming from places, if they have a Teaching Support Center, it's much more of on the technical underpinnings. Maybe there's one person who is doing a combination of professional development and SOTL. Part time as a release you know, a one course release or something. So, anyway, so, yeah, hopefully we can get the word out about that and get more people involved in that. So, you talk to also about support groups and stuff like that. And that journey kind of starts for new faculty on our campus with what we love to call because, hey, we're a college campus. And we like our acronyms and initialization, N F O

JEN: Which stands for New Faculty Orientation.

JIM: Yeah, it's not really a whole profound that at least wasn't a torture dagger. So, we've done previous podcasts back mainly in the before pandemic times when nfo was kind of all crammed into one day. We have, we've talked before about how we have spread it out a little bit over the course of that week. Why did we do that?

JEN: Actually, it was the pandemic that led us to that.

JIM: Okay.

JEN: And, yeah, it was I think it was primarily the pandemic, I used to be that faculty NFO was all day, the Monday before the fall semester started. And it was, like drinking out of the firehose, there was so, much information that was coming at new faculty, and it was it was just a lot. And when we had to move to a virtual environment for NFO, in 2020, we were looking for ways to not be on Zoom for eight hours. That seems that seems to be, you know, not a good choice. And so, how could we, you know, parcel out what we felt were the critical things that faculty needed, right away before the fall, semester started, supports, resources, ideas, connections. And so, we got to the point where we had a morning, welcome session, and then spread-out other content through the week with other campus. colleagues and collaborators, folks from different units. And, you know, that sort of thing.

JIM: And I think we've also found that, that that's just a little more convenient for people. You know, because if you are new faculty, you may not already be in the area, you're probably you may be moving in and maybe setting up house you need to go you need to go open a bank account, you need to find childcare.

JEN: Absolutely. Well, this also had the benefit of allowing other faculty to join us. So, it's not just the new faculty at some of the programming for NFO is sometimes it's early career, sometimes it's open to everybody, depending on the topic. So, you know, we tried the one of the main objectives for NFO for us and our staff is we plan this is thinking about how do we expose our new faculty to networks, right, you know, so, they can, can really feel like they've found a home here at ISU. And I think, Dana Karraker, who is our Assistant Director for Educational Development Program, she is the lead on all the events, the big events that we do NFO, our symposium, that sort of

thing. She's done a lovely job of, of trying to really build a community amongst the new and early-career faculty. And I think she's been very successful with that

JIM: The pendulum did swing back the other way, just a little bit, we felt it was important to have some sort of a face-to-face event. And some of these workshops through the rest of the week are not they're not entirely online, some of them are also face-to-face. But that Monday event, the week before classes start, when everyone is coming in. It's a chance for them to sit next to people who are in similar circumstances, if not in a similar discipline. You get, you get fed a little bit, that's always good. But it's not like you said it's not the whole Firehose day where you spent eight hours at the Student Center, going through workshops, and then you have to go schmooze with the president at the university residence and be coherent

JEN: And be coherent. Yeah.

JIM: So, for those who are who are eligible to attend New Faculty Orientation, you should have already been communicated with I know Dana and our colleague, Chasity Logan, that takes up a good deal of effort near summer to get that all organized. But if people want to find out about what happens at New Faculty Orientation, you can go to our website again, ProDev.Illinois State.edu. And there is a group of quick links on the homepage and one of them is New and Early Career Faculty. So, that will get you there. So, we can wrap up a little bit by doing what we what we kind of teased at the beginning. What does that threshold look like, between new and early career faculty? What, what is it? Is it like breaking the sound barrier? Is it just? Is it just a does it? What does it like?

JEN: It probably depends on each individual's experience, right? I'm not gonna say that nine months and one day into the job, you automatically get a new title, your early career faculty, you're no longer new, new faculty, I think people who come here a little more seasoned might, might fit into the early career, you know, role or persona, maybe a little bit sooner. But, you know, really, we would consider anyone in their first year here, new faculty, and then they transition the first three years could be, you know, considered the Early Career Zone. And, you know, we have special programs and groups that are targeted just at those faculty so, that the network building and, and connections that are built that first year, starting with NFO, can continue.

JIM: Yeah, yeah, the Early Career Learning Community, which has had different names over the years. But it's essentially been the same thing. It's been one of our more successful programs, I really do believe it really is a chance to build, as you said, on those relationships that you may begin at, at New Faculty Orientation. But it's also a really great way to keep in contact with people that you're not otherwise going to see.

JEN: Absolutely on campus. And these become trusted colleagues because they aren't in a position where you're working with them every day, most of them. And I've sat in on enough of those meetings where I know someone will come to the table and say, I had this really awesome thing happened today. And they'll talk about it. But equally, they'll say I'm having this problem. And I don't know how to fix it. And for whatever reason, I don't feel comfortable talking to my people about it in my department. And you know,

there's some really, really wonderful conversations that happen in what I would consider to be sort of a Las Vegas zone, you know, what happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas, it becomes a kind of a circle of trust, you know, with the folks trying to help each other out, which I think is great.

JIM: Yeah. And there's usually a theme to the meetings, there's, there's usually, if there's not actual reading, you know, sometimes they provide a book. But we have always told new faculty members that we also realize how busy you are. So, we don't expect you to read the book, there's an executive summary or something like that, you know, it'll be the topic, and then you can get to it when you can get to it.

JEN: So, with our new Center structure, we're doing more with research. So, we you know, we're bringing research and creative activity into some of what we're doing with the early career, folks. And you know, so, it's, it's, we're trying to appeal to the whole Yeah, faculty member. Yeah. And that is, you know, stay tuned, more coming.

JIM: Yeah. Well, but I did want to ask you to, I don't want to say, put on your Cross Endowed Chair in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning that because I know you wear it all the time. Should a brand new to campus in Fall 2023 faculty member be concerned about doing some SoTL work? Or is that something that, that's a good thing to do a little year two or year three?

JEN: I think that, you know, I'm gonna say SOTL is never bad. But I will say that unless you come into the university with that already as part of your research agenda, that actually new faculty are probably better positioned to apply SOTL than to do SOTL initially. So, you know, I think Rumor has it, there's going to be a podcast talking about what scholarly teaching is. And that's really what I'm describing here. So,

JIM: rumor has it

JEN: Yes. So, you know, use the publish SOTL to inform evidence informed, evidence based, you know, kinds of pedagogies in the classroom, and we certainly stand ready to help people find that. Yes,

JIM: Exactly, exactly. And I guess a good a good cap to that whole thought, and perhaps to our episode, today, is the summer following your first year here. So, your first full summer as a faculty member, we still offer its metamorphosis has been optimized, somebody called design your course when I sit down to potential candidates for jobs who come in, I say, look, you're going to be busy in the fall, you're going to inherit a course you're going to make the best of it, you're going to, and I am going back to that idea. By the way, my advice would be, don't try to redesign that course completely. You know, starting August 14, or whatever it is, you tweak what you need to tweak, but try to try to, you know, communicate ahead of time with your students about what you may change and etc. Spring, you'll have a little bit more time over winter break, if you want to tweak it if you're if you're if you're doing the same course again, you know, I know some people have different ones all spring, you're going to be sick of that by summer, so, it's time to go in and design a course. So, if I remember correctly, design your course is really kind of based on the idea that if you can redesign or

designed from the ground up one course, you can apply what you learned in that, in that professional development experience to knock out other courses.

JEN: Absolutely. And as part of our Summer Institute, that's where we have what we call our deeper dives. And so, we have many cohorts, actually, that are focused on either planning a SoTL project, or redesigning a class for equity, diversity, inclusion, or to infuse civic engagement into a course or global curricula. And so, DYC is a program that's for any course, and we do have those experiences for specific kinds of Yeah, you know,

JIM: and DYC has always been pitched for new early career. absolutely crushed, right? Yeah. All right, Jen. Well, thank you so, much.

JEN: Thank you.

JIM: And that's all the time we have for this episode of Let's Talk Teaching. Find out more about well, pretty much everything we've been talking about today. One more time. Pro Dev, that's ProDev.IllinoisState.edu. For Dr. Jennifer Friberg and for all my colleagues here at the Center, until we talk again, Happy Teaching!