

Building local leadership in research education

Scenario 6: Utilising the involvement in research education coordination for career development

You have just completed a term as REC, and your Head of Department/School is having trouble finding a replacement. She has identified someone – Andy – who is worried about the time it will take and whether it will detract from his burgeoning research program. Andy is also planning to apply for promotion to Associate Professor in three years' time. Since you had been promoted during your term as REC, Andy comes to you for advice on (a) should he take the role; and (b) how could the role improve his promotion chances.

1. What answers would you give Andy? Should he take the role? How could the role improve his promotion chances? What would he need to do?
2. If he decides to take the role, what would you suggest he do to document his role for promotion?

Additional information

Below are a number of issues that might be raised in discussion or, as facilitator you might like to pursue with a group. Following each issue there are a number of suggestions for consideration.

Issue: Promotion committees don't take account of (or adequate account of) administration and service activities.

All promotion committees and institutions are different. Having a named administrative role, and documented outcomes from that role, can be advantageous to promotion. Consider doing the following:

- Find and read the promotion criteria at your institution. Which criteria might apply to REC work?
- Can REC work be thought of as more than administration? Is it research leadership? Research development/mentoring?
- Is it possible (and acceptable in your discipline) to publish research related to the REC role?
- In many institutions doctoral education is critical to their research strategies. How might REC work be contributing to these strategies?
- Ask around to find RECs that have been recently promoted. Ask if you could see some of these. How have these RECs framed their work in promotion applications?
- Have a plan for why you are taking on the role and the broad things you would like to achieve.

Further resources available from www.first.edu.au

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Issue: the role entails a lot of 'busy' work that is difficult to document.

Promotion committees need evidence of all the wonderful things you've been doing? Again, being a little inventive can help:

- Spend a bit of time thinking about what would constitute evidence. There are conventional measures like student completions, student satisfaction (each institution will have breakdowns of these, sometimes to departmental level), enrolment numbers. There is also evidence of activities – symposia, new courses, workshops, social events, etc.
- Keep a file or email folder of things you've been doing. When you set up a new activity etc, transfer notes, emails etc to this file. When you go to apply for promotion, you don't have to rely on your memory
- Put comments from candidates/supervisors in that folder as well.
- Put any thoughts you might have (e.g. what worked, what didn't, what you'd do in a perfect universe) in that folder

Issue: REC work takes too much time

Depending on the specific expectations of the role in different contexts there can be a lot of work in this role. Trying to reduce the workload is a possibility, but perhaps not the most realistic. There are different ways to manage the workload that you might like to implement:

- Can you streamline the work using technology (e.g. GoogleDocs, electronic forms etc)?
- If you are finding fielding questions from candidates is becoming too disruptive, why not set (and stick to) 'office hours'. At that time, you can be in your office to deal with issues immediately either face-to-face or on the phone. Advertise these hours and encourage candidates to use them.
- A variant on office hours is a regular (e.g. fortnightly) 'coffee' hour.
- If chasing up supervisors (for various reasons) think about doing it face-to-face or on the phone. This can be quicker than the to and fro of emails.
- Allocate a specific time in your week where you do your REC work. Stick to it as much as possible. Let people know that they will get a timely but not immediate response. Of course 'urgent' things come up but these occur less frequently than you think.
- Think about time management in general. The UK's Thinkwell 'Balanced Researcher' [<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/CMS/files/Vitae-Balanced-Researcher-June-2008.pdf>] has some good tips.
- Discuss with your head of department (or equivalent) what is expected of the role. Get clear parameters if possible.
- Do you get any workload allocation for your REC work? If not, what type of case could you make for a workload allocation? Are there models of

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workload from other departments/faculties/universities you can use to try to develop one.

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