



# Surviving the First Year as New Faculty during a Pandemic

Swenson C\*

Minnesota State University, USA

**\*Corresponding author:** Cheryl Swenson, Minnesota State University, 20845 Holiday Ave Lakeville, MN 55044, Tel: 612.860.0846; Email: cheryl.swenson@mnsu.edu

Editorial

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As we near the end of the academic year, I find myself reflecting back on the challenges and successes of being a new faculty member. To put this whole adventure in a clear lens, one has to bear in mind that the beginning of my tenure occurred during a world-wide pandemic; a time when the faculty did not know day to day whether we would be required to shift to all distance learning, return to face-to-face classes, or create a whole new delivery system for our students. It was a year that forced me to learn as much as the students I serve.

We are a combined faculty of PhD, DNP, and APRNs with PhD degrees; a balance that should be a solid recipe for success, however, with the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant turnover in the FNP-APRN faculty, and the entire faculty working remotely, it posed a difficult transition into a new faculty role. We are living in zoom meetings and working hard to keep all of the plates in the air spinning, but we miss the opportunity to collaborate with fellow instructors in person. Having had the luxury of sharing office space with my colleagues in past teaching positions, I can clearly see how much is lost when we are separated, even if it is a necessity.

Like many graduate nursing programs with an advanced practice offering, mine is in the process of sunsetting the MSN-FNP track into a doctoral prep DNP-FNP track. I teach the final year clinical courses, as well as facilitate and guide the clinical internships. Being the inaugural class in the BSN to DNP-FNP track, my courses had not been previously taught. I started in the fall with a list of objectives, the AACN essentials for doctoral advanced nursing practice, and a go-live date. This is an intimidating position for any faculty, and though I had taught before, I was definitely aware that I was stepping into uncharted territory. With only remote access to my colleagues, this year presented unforeseen challenges in getting established in my courses and addressing all of the responsibilities of my faculty position. As I reflect back on the past year, I have come up with some survival skills that I would like to share in hopes that the wisdom gained

can assist other new faculty to ease the transition to their academic role.

## Mentors

Request a mentor/preceptor right away. I was assigned to a faculty member who had taught for many years and knew the program inside out. We quickly developed a strong working rapport, and this has literally been my lifeline. I have had positions in the past where my mentor and I was not a good match. If I were to run across this situation again, I would not hesitate to request another preceptor. Along with my assigned mentor, I also found that seeking out other faculty that was relatively new to their positions was a big help. Since they had recently navigated the role of new faculty, they were able to offer some indispensable advice.

## Research

Find out everything you can about the program. I found that reviewing a curricular gap analysis provided a good review of course content to meet the NONPF essentials. Adding your college's specific program outcomes was also enlightening. I came into a program that was preparing for a CCNE accreditation visit; so much of the content about the inner working of our program was readily available. It was time consuming, but a valuable endeavor. Request to review syllabi and other material from established faculty; study the course progression and content. Not all faculties are comfortable sharing their intellectual property, so you will need to get permission, but this is a good way to see what your colleagues are teaching so you can build on the momentum that your students have in progress.

I found that the more experienced faculty was wonderful about sharing their work; nurses are such generous, caring people. I had several excellent syllabus examples to review, and exemplary course designs, which gave me solid direction for the hybrid model that the university is using during

the pandemic. This assisted me in course preparation and my students were able to continue using a format that was familiar to them, increasing their participation and ultimate success. The key take away here is that I had to seek people out to help. Asking for help was humbling, but the response was always positive and helpful.

### IT Resources

Make friends with your IT department. Our university uses the Desire to Learn (D2L) software. The expert who is assigned to the nursing faculty has been indispensable. When setting up the course shell, learning to create videos, uploading tests, and the grade book, I required a significant amount of guidance. I honestly do not know how I would have survived without this assistance. This is an ongoing relationship, as I still have so much to learn, but connecting with the expert to prepare the online content has been a game changer in my course development. The college has a center for excellence in teaching and learning available to faculty. This was another resource that I found valuable.

### Student Relationships

The reason one goes into academia is to ensure the success of the students. Since my students were moving through a curriculum progression that was new, there were

glitches identified along the way. By making frequent checks with the students about how things were going turned out to be very valuable. Hearing first-hand the students' perspective gave me insight into their learning needs and how to better meet them. This evaluation provided a mutual benefit, though it required me to apologize on more than one occasion as I was enlightened to gaps that were brought to my attention.

### Professional Development

It will soon be time to address the end-of-year report for my professional development plan (PDP). Though warned by my colleagues about being too ambitious in my first year, I will have gaps in meeting some of the goals. It reminds me to be more precise with what I can realistically accomplish in next year's PDP. I will have to forgive myself for not meeting all the goals. I honestly gave it my best shot - I hope the dean sees that I, like my students, remain a work in progress.

In closing, I hope I was enough – and did enough. I hope the students in my guidance were able to grasp the vital content they will need to survive as advanced practice nurses, whether they choose to move into a clinical practice setting, leadership role, or joining the halls (or zoom rooms) of academia. I hope I was enough.

