# Mentoring

# Transcript

Teresa Valais

I'm Theresa Valley instructional designer with the Faculty Academic Center of Excellence at Towson University. That's it. The purpose of the faculty success, higher Ed Conversations Podcast is to engage faculty and conversations to support professional growth with the aim of enhancing faculty and student success. In today's podcast, we'll discuss faculty mentoring at Towson University, and we're thrilled to be joined by three distinguished guests. Let me introduce Samuel Collins, professor of anthropology, specializing in urban studies, social media design, anthropology and information technologies in the United States, and in South Korea. Among other books and articles, he is the author of All Tomorrow's culture anthropological engagements with the Future and co-author of Networked Anthropology. He is one of the founding fellows of FACET and has served in a variety of capacities over the past three years. Welcome, Sam.

Samuel Collins

Happy to be here, Teresa.

Teresa Valais

We also have Jennifer Potter, professor and chair in the Department of Communication Studies. She teaches and researches in the area of intercultural communication. Jen has served as the FACET faculty, mentoring fellow the past two years. She focuses on creating faculty mentoring opportunities at TU. A passion that began as she took on leadership roles in her own department and began to realize the importance of faculty mentorship. Welcome, Jen.

Jennifer Potter

Thanks for having me.

Teresa Valais

And we have Kelly Elkins, who joined Towson University 10 years ago and is a tenured full professor in chemistry. She has over 20 years experience in higher education as a researcher, professor, principal investigator, and author. She specializes in project management, mentoring, publishing and service to the profession. Kelly is in her second year with the FACET Fellows program and is currently the FACET Scholarship fellow welcome Kelly.

Kelly Elkins

Thanks for having me.

Teresa Valais

Happy to have you all. So to get started, can you share with us a little about the expertise you provide faculty as facet? Fellows and how you identify and serve the needs up to you faculty.

Jennifer Potter

Sure, the fellows program at Towson University is designed to encourage faculty to connect with other faculty who serve as fellows who can provide their colleagues with expertise in the areas of research, teaching, leadership and mentoring.

Samuel Collins

So this past fall, the fastest fellows collected data from a needs assessment of faculty and all the colleges at the beginning of this year. And we've looked at the results. They suggest that there are several key areas where faculty desire support, and I think that many of the FACET programs meet that support and we'll be using this data as we move forward into programming for next semester. The results suggest that. Faculty are interested in receiving support in mentoring, leadership, development, research, development, grants and fellowship. And the other big area that faculty highlighted in their comments was this need for methodological support, especially around things like statistics, qualitative methodologies and.

Sam Collins

I think just grant writing and. Research writing skills in general.

Kelly Elkins

And so that goal, Sam and I are working on a workshop toward scholarship and research, especially in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Towson has always been focused on education, undergraduate and graduate education, and. But it's a a place where established and highly regarded researchers come as well. And so we want to to help those people as they join Towson and start their careers here. To to be able to continue to do that research that they've become with students and get get grant funding for that and be able to write up those papers. So you know, we heard from a lot of faculty time is a big issue and we want to help you kind of plan your time. Help you network to the offices and help that you can get here at Towson to help. Efficiently use your time, help you with strategies for teaching, planning your classroom, everything from your blackboard site, Theresa here can help you with that. Working on grading and assessment strategies, planning discussions in the classroom. And really anything teaching, research, scholarship and mentoring Jen here has a really nice workshop on mentoring that you can take. How to be a better mentor. A lot of us study to be great researchers. But we maybe don't think of ourselves and highlight our mentoring skills and practice those skills, so we can. It was a great I was a pilot session. It was a great experience and learn how to have conversations as a. And I think on the.

Jennifer Potter

Flip side of that. Not only in training new folks to be mentors who want to work with other faculty, but also helping new faculty find mentors. Right. And so. One of the great things about facet, I think, is that you really can find you can find teaching workshops. You can find research workshops. You can find all of these resources specific for teaching and research, but then. There's also this. Whole component for mentoring specifically, which is really designed to help folks meet whatever their goals are, and so maybe it's just something as simple as finding some connections. On campus. Not really a specific goal related to teaching and research, but that's sort of one of the things I think that the faculty mentoring program can provide and that Sam and I built really intentionally into the mentoring framework we built last year, which was to try to find as many ways for faculty to engage in mentoring as we could. And so to pull all of those. Different opportunities out and build them in a framework that faculty could see various entry points that might be helpful for them through facet.

Samuel Collins

Right. I think what we see coming out of the survey is the result of. Two things, one of them coming out of at least part of the COVID pandemic. And the second thing is the move to R2 for Towson University. Both of these things create in people a lot of excitement and a lot of anxiety. And over the past two years. A lot of the things that we would associate with mentoring, formal or informal mentoring at all levels of university has not been available, at least not in the same way. And on the flip side of that now or we see people looking for those opportunities looking for the networking and thinking about what it's all going to mean for their future?

Jennifer Potter

So ultimately, I think what that tells us is that, you know, FACET becomes this really wonderful place for faculty to go for virtually anything, but especially when we're talking about faculty mentoring, really trying to focus to help faculty find the resources they might need. So if faculty need to find a mentor, facet. Can help if they want to find workshops that they can attend. That happens at facet. If they want to have some individual mentoring and try to talk to a particular person about their career path, we can also work on that. So those various opportunities give us a really. Nice breadth of options for faculty as they think about their career paths.

Kelly Elkins

Yeah, one of those that was popular in the spring and participants reported that they found really useful was the FACET writing space and that's ongoing on Fridays in in facet. In the library in 404 B and we have some other upcoming panels and programs that have proven really useful to faculty. In the past. We did a full panel last spring. We've got another one coming up this spring. For those of you looking for sabbatical ideas, especially funding your sabbatical. We have one-on-one appointments. We're happy to connect with you and work on things that are in that that you need help with on A1. On one basis. And we really want to spend more time on that this year. Everything doesn't have to be a webinar or a panel or a big planned event. You know, we will. We will meet you. And help you. With whatever you want. Want help with.

Samuel Collins

Right. You know, I I just met with a bunch of people on research methods and when we just talked about what they were doing, what they wanted to do, one of the things that FACET can do is help you build your team and. One of the comments that seemed to occur over and over in various versions in the survey was where do I go? You know, I'm trying to do this research. I feel like I don't have this expertise in this area. Where can I go for that? This university is full of people who are experts in all kinds of methods, and yet they're in their own subject areas. But all of us. Humanities, arts, Social Sciences, sciences, we all are following some kind of methodology and to some extent we can share that with each other. And I think that's one of the bridges that can help people to build up into a research team that can publish that. Get grants and this is one of the sort of collaborative things that I think FACET can do really well because we're position. And not in any one college, but with all the colleges.

Jennifer Potter

It reminds me of, like, academic Twitter, only locally to his health and university, where, you know, if you I don't know how to do this thing. How do I do this thing instead of just a tweeting? To the world and hoping somebody will. Answer, But I think that. That is something that we're doing really well, which is able to make connections for others. That's like, oh, here's somebody who does that same methodology and can at least answer some of your questions. And maybe that becomes part of a research team. But even if it doesn't, at least you find somebody on campus who can help you answer those questions.

Teresa Valais

I can imagine for new faculty that must be especially important in particularly those looking for interdisciplinary collaboration, yeah.

Samuel Collins

Typically, I mean the biggest source of anxiety for new faculty is precisely that research program. And I mean, sure, they're concerned about teaching and everything else, but it's the research program that really drives their anxiety. And I mean, there's various places where they can go, but we are one place where. They can come for help.

Jennifer Potter

Well, I think as part of that, one of the things that FACET really, really does well for interdisciplinarity is just to help folks find those people. So you're right, Sam, when you're new, you have no idea who you might even reach out to. You're not going to search every faculty member on their department websites, because that would be a disaster. So trying to find people and even if you ask someone in your department, they may not know anyone else either. And so having somebody with a a little bit wider view. In this office, I think is really. Helpful to just say, well, I don't know if. This is exactly. What you want, but here's a starting place. Here's a person that I know that might be able to help you, and that tends to lead to some other connections as well to at least give faculty a starting place to make some of those.

Kelly Elkins

And there, you know, there are a lot of affinity groups here at Towson. There's affinity groups for underrepresented faculty as well as there's groups, especially around different ideas and interests especially. In the School of Emerging Technologies, and those can be really useful. For starting new collaborative areas of research, but also for gaining internal funding to start those projects that then you might want to seek external funding for if things go well. Likewise, we have BTU, Baltimore, Towson University partnerships, which is another great way if we have community minded work that we're doing and and need to get started. And then hopefully again, we can find external funding to keep these things going and grow those activities. And so you know. We we as fellows can be since we've been here for a little while, we can be a great place to point to, to people who would be in the know or in the right offices to help you get your work done more efficiently.

Jennifer Potter

I think the. Officers point there Kelly is really good because sometimes it's not looking for collaborator, collaborators or other faculty, but. Knowing which office to go to or what staff person you might need to connect with to get something done even on the grant side, like who are the folks I need to talk to to have an understanding of how to do this? This particular external funding project, and that's not always clear to new faculty as well. And so giving them some opportunities to just. Find those people and to give them names, here's who you can. e-mail makes a huge difference.

Samuel Collins

Yeah, I was just preparing for a meeting after this meeting, which is the social design Special Interest group from the School of Emerging Technologies that our our colleague over in College of Education we on song just started and I'm a part of that. And yeah, the the. Design stuff is one of these areas that brings together faculty from all over the university. We have stuff for social media and for other areas that again all about sort of recognizing the links that are already there and then hopefully being able to capitalize on them for research and for grants.

Kelly Elkins

And another big area that maybe we don't think of as faculty, that's really important is promoting our work and being out on social media. Jen, you mentioned Twitter, academic Twitter internal to Towson, but but it we you know we can connect you to staff in the media marketing and department. Here at Towson to help you promote your projects or what you're doing with students, come to your class or document or even connect you to partners if you want to be on an expert list. And so there's, yeah, there's a great wealth of knowledge here and yeah, we hope you check us out.

Jennifer Potter

And I think one of the other things that's really important about the faculty mentoring is that sometimes it's not about the teaching or the research. It's just about like feeling good at the university and finding your people. That you connect with personally who have shared interest, whatever that might look like, and sometimes that's going to be folks in your department and sometimes you're going to want folks outside of your department and. If you don't know anybody outside of your own department, that can be really isolating for any number of reasons, right? Just these are the only folks that I ever interact with and some of that comes naturally as you start to get on committees and you start to do university service. But those first few years new to the university, I think figuring out how to find folks just to connect to. And it, you know, social things, I want to be able to go hang out with somebody. I want to find somebody who also likes coffee, whatever it might be, that having a resource like FACET where you can kind of go to a workshop and meet some new folks that you might never have met otherwise or interact with at a social gathering, that maybe FACET is helping to Co sponsor. Those are ways that faculty can also just feel more connected to the university, which is in some ways just as important as the teaching and research that they're also completing.

Samuel Collins

Right. And also one of the areas where people really have missed out over the past 2 1/2 years, they and even now we have not returned to the kind of regular rotation of social events for most of the faculty for obvious reasons. And those in formal meetings. In whatever form are are ultimately positive, not only in terms of like how people feel, part of the university, or how they're socialized to the university, but in all those indirect ways that can lead back to teaching and research and service.

Teresa Valais

In the area of faculty research, how can mentoring help faculty succeed, especially as we move toward R2?

Kelly Elkins

So you know, faculty that have been here a while came in, perhaps on a teaching load of four courses per semester. More recently, it's been pretty consistent in many departments that faculty start at 3:00. Courses in their first three years per semester, and more recently, we're seeing that that some faculty are being offered opportunities to teach maybe 2 courses per semester, especially as they ramp up their research. So what we're finding is that there will be perhaps. Faculty that will have a lighter teaching load, but what? What are we? What are we expecting from that right? So the university is still very focused on teaching and learning, and the expectation is that the faculty then will shift their efforts towards scholarship, especially that can involve students. And so that scholarship, of course, in a lot of departments, especially my own like chemistry requires supplies and reagents that are not free. And so, you know, we will have to get grants to be able to do that work. So some of that scholarship time will go to, you know, writing and submitting and. Trying to win grants to to fund that work so that we can involve more students. But you know then in the end when we get done doing all this incredibly exciting and rewarding work with the students and finding out, you know. New data and new results. Maybe building new models in our fields. It's important to put the work out there. I always tell my students that, you know, if we're if we're not going to be a part of the conversation. Then it's like we haven't done the work because nobody knows what we did here. And so it's really important to be a part of the conversation. Going to conferences, publishing our work, and sometimes we think, well, geez, you know, in grad school, you know, I. We wouldn't publish our work until you know we could submit it to nature or science and you know, how am I going to do that while I'm teaching, you know, three classes per semester. And I think the important thing to realize that we are involving students, we're doing work that is important or we wouldn't be doing it and. You know, even maybe more incremental gains or knowledge that we've learned is useful to put out to the community. So we're not duplicating efforts and wasting grant resources and so maybe we need to recalibrate, right, that the kinds of papers that we're five year full time. Efforts when we are in grad school or postdoc are not the kind of publications that we can get out with undergrads. Even over a several year time frame, but we can still get out meaningful work and it is important to close that loop. You know, to finish, to finish the work in the form of a publication.

Samuel Collins

Right. And actually this is one of the areas that Kelly and I have been working on. So you know, one of the insights that we have into a move to R2 is that we should first look at what we're already doing well, rather than try to completely reinvent our. Publication schedule for what we imagined in our two. To be one of the areas that Kelly was saying is the scholarship of teaching and learning that we are already doing things in the classroom. We're generating data and that's meaningful data that could could lead to changes in pedagogies on new student research and other kinds of positive impacts. The question for us at FACET has been, can we encourage scholarship of teaching and learning and can we channel it into journals that can also count for faculty members P&T file and ultimately for their promotion of the university?

Kelly Elkins

Yeah, talking. You know, I've been serving department chairs and in, in, in the colleges around the House and university this fall. And while the chairs seem to be at a consensus, those that I've talked to that it's important for faculty to engage and. Work in their discipline, especially if there were startup costs involved and we funded equipment and supply. Wise, but that if faculty are involved in in doing innovative work in the classroom that they can disseminate that P&T committees. Will consider that work as well as the more traditional research work that they came in, thinking that they were going to do.

Jennifer Potter

And I think. That the ways in which mentoring comes into play here is not only through sort of the various resources that FACET is offering around grant writing and the writing groups, and all of the ways in which FACET has this program. Main piece but it's. Also, if you have the opportunity to have the individual mentoring, there's something really great I think about having a mentor who can say so. Where are you on that project or I'm behind on my project? How about you? Right. So it's not just it's having somebody for accountability purposes. At least, that's what. I always need. Is somebody to say have? You completed that. Task no I have not, but now I must. And so that's really good. I think for faculty, but also hearing from a mentor where they struggle in research and what they do when things aren't going according to plan and all of the ways in which roadblocks become really difficult to manage. And so hearing those experiences I think is really helpful not. In a, it's not going to make somebody successful overnight. To complete the project. But I do think it gives folks some perspective and makes. It feel more attainable. If they're worried about where they're at in their in their research production.

Kelly Elkins

Yeah, absolutely. There's a reason why we call them swags scholarly writing accountability groups. And there's something about knowing that we have this, you know, internal deadline on a weekly basis that you know you're going to report to your writing group, what you've been doing. And you know, you need to have been making some progress. On writing up, you know, doing the literature search or writing the background or writing up the methods or charting, or tabulating or statistically analyzing data, and that you know each week, if we make a little bit of progress at the end of the semester, in fact, just as we teach our students and we break up and chunk assignments. You know, the paper will be written.

Jennifer Potter

I also think of groups help you realize that sometimes you're overly. Ambitious. So you start. Off at the beginning and say I'm going to complete, you know, 17 pages in the next two hours. No, I'm not. And so you learn, really. Quickly that that's not quite possible and to have a little bit more realistic goals as you move forward, which I think is. Also really helpful.

Kelly Elkins

Even if it's, you know, I always tell people that it's important to work, whether the the research is in your schedule on a week or weekly basis or on a daily basis. But do one thing in that time frame. Whether that is you're ordering supplies or you're reaching out to a colleague cuz you know. You need help. With the statistics or you're. Doing an ill request because you need a resource that's not here at the library, even those small things will take you forward on that research and completing the work.

Samuel Collins

I think that. That the biggest value for the for the SWAG type group is that even though writing and research can be very alienating and you can be entirely alone, you're not. It's like Coldplay for toddlers. We're all undergoing the same kinds of processes. And we have the same concerns. We're all working on avoiding deadlines, and yet we must complete whatever it is that we promised to complete. And so they can really help for that and. You know, I think the feedback from people who have done those has been very positive and that's offered some and they've been offered in other colleges too. And ultimately, people come out of them not only with this finished piece of work, or at least progress on a piece of work, but they also come out of it with a network of. Other scholars that might not be in the same area, but they're all working towards the same things.

Kelly Elkins

And I think this is really important. Behavior to model to our students, right? So in this move to R2, we're going to have more graduate students. Hopefully we're going to graduate more graduate students and more programs, and we need to be modeling this research behavior that's going to help them to attain that doctoral degree. And obviously that requires a lot. Of time in the lab or time on their project, whether that be the physical lab like my lab or the computer lab or writing, you know, writing a a major book or set of articles and some of the book fields but that. That being able to define the research question and then work on this project overtime collect enough results and then write that up, that's really. That's the core. Of learning how to do research and that's really why you know, those students are coming here to be able to learn how to be researchers, and then they'll use that. As they go forward in their careers.

Teresa Valais

Well, you certainly have shared a lot of great tips and food for thought here, and we certainly welcome faculty at the House and to take advantage of our mentoring program here through facet. As we close up the podcast today, what are two steps our listeners can take today?

Samuel Collins

Well, they can go to the FACET website and they can look at the events that we're planning for the springtime. They can look at some of the programs that we have in place, which include mini grants and other opportunities for people. They can also go down to the list of FACET fellows and they can click on one of those people or all those people, and they can contact us and ask US questions and see if we can set up a meeting, which we'd be so happy to do.

Teresa Valais

Any last thoughts to the panel?

Kelly Elkins

So I would like to say to new faculty, you know, think critically about service work that you're offered and whether that aligns with your goals and things that you want to gain expertise in. Often junior faculty offered opportunities to serve on, way more committees. And they truly have time for. And so you do have to be a little judicious. Obviously you need to. Be able to serve your department. And meet your annual plans. But we need to be cognizant that we have teaching duties and we have research that needs to get done as well. And so it's really important to really think critically. And then I would say another thing, check out our writing group on Fridays. That's another great feature that passed it.

Jennifer Potter

Teresa Valais

We want to thank our guests, Professor Samuel Collins, Professor Jennifer Potter and Professor Kelly Elkins for today's faculty mentoring episode. Your contributions embody our FACET by faculty for faculty tagline. And to our audience, we'd like to thank you for tapping into our faculty success, higher Ed Conversations podcast series. The FACET Podcast series generates conversations on important topics that support faculty, professional growth, and student success at Towson University.