

Best practices for end-of-year conversations

The end-of-year conversations between junior faculty or faculty on continuing appointments and their chairs/directors are designed to be opportunities for professional development, not a part of the formal evaluation process. However, for junior faculty these meetings provide essential feedback and opportunity for improvement before the formal third-year and tenure reviews. For faculty on continuing appointments, these conversations are an opportunity for the department chair/program director and the faculty member to discuss accomplishments, challenges, and plans for the future.

Junior faculty, faculty on continuing appointments, and senior faculty have noted that these end-of-year conversations don't always work well, and the quality of the mentoring junior faculty and faculty on continuing appointments get through these conversations varies immensely. Thoughtful organization of these meetings is one step towards facilitating the development of a community of mentors. Based on conversations with current and former chairs/directors and untenured and recently tenured faculty members, here are some suggested best practices for end-of-year conversations.

In advance of the meeting:

Suggestion: The department chair/program director should ask the junior faculty member or faculty member on a continuing appointment to submit a list of topics/questions/concerns that they want to discuss at the end-of-year meeting.

***Rationale:** Doing so encourages them to reflect on their trajectory (perhaps in consultation with mentors or other trusted colleagues) in advance of the meeting, and it allows the chair/director to get input on these topics/questions/concerns from other senior colleagues prior to the meeting.*

Suggestion: The senior faculty in the department (and the special review committee members, if relevant) should meet before the end-of-year conversation and discuss the work of the junior faculty member or faculty member on continuing appointment, identify strengths and areas for improvement, consider ways to provide support, and review the topics/questions/concerns brought forward by the faculty member.

***Rationale:** This provides a way for the end-of-year conversation to represent the perspectives of all senior colleagues (and special review committee members), not just the chair/director. In addition, having such a meeting encourages senior colleagues to be aware of each other's perspectives and speak with "one voice" so that they don't confuse colleagues with markedly different advice. By triangulating their perspectives, sometimes the senior colleagues can identify a small issue before it becomes a bigger problem or in the case of experienced faculty on continuing appointments can learn how they can support further development of valued colleagues.*

Scheduling the meeting:

Suggestion: Schedule the end-of-year conversation as a meeting with a clear agenda that is built from the input of the faculty member, seniors colleagues (where appropriate), and the chair/director. Make sure there is sufficient time for uninterrupted conversation.

***Rationale:** When chairs/directors have the end-of-year conversation without an agenda over a cup of coffee, it is not always clear to the faculty member whether it is a substantive end-of-year meeting or just another collegial conversation.*

During the meeting:

Suggestion: The conversation should be both reflective (looking back over the past year) and prospective (looking ahead to the coming year and beyond) considering teaching, scholarship, and service. Depending on

whether the conversation is with a tenure-track faculty member or a faculty member on a continuing appointment, the categories of teaching, scholarship, and service will apply differently.

Rationale: *If the conversation gets bogged down in a single topic area (e.g., course evaluations in a particular course in the past year or plans for an upcoming research project or new course development), other topics might be overlooked or be interpreted by the faculty member as being unimportant.*

Suggestion: The chair/director should ask the faculty member how they are soliciting feedback on their teaching (e.g., ask for samples of blank course evaluations used and with whom they have discussed this feedback, ask whether a trusted senior colleague or LTC student observer sat in on a class, etc.) as well as asking about the major strengths and weaknesses that have been identified in the feedback that has been received. The chair/director should strategize with the faculty member about ways to respond to the feedback and how mentors, LTC resources, and the department/program can be helpful.

Rationale: *Chairs/directors cannot require faculty to share course evaluations, but it is important that the chair/director get a sense of how their colleague is working to assess and improve their teaching. The chair/director should help the faculty member develop an approach to addressing teaching concerns.*

Suggestion: The chair/director should identify strengths and accomplishments, and the chair should also clearly discuss potential problem areas with an eye towards helping the faculty member think through ways to address the issues.

Rationale: *Junior faculty and faculty on continuing appointments need to be aware of potential concerns in advance of a formal review process. At the same time, the faculty member should not be expected to find ways to address the issues completely on their own.*

Suggestion: Both the chair/director and the faculty member should leave the meeting with a shared understanding of next steps -- priorities for the faculty member in the coming year and support that the chair/director and department/program will provide. These next steps should be shared with senior departmental/program colleagues (and special review committee members).

Rationale: *Both the junior faculty member and the senior colleagues need to take responsibility for the professional development of the faculty member. Articulating a shared understanding of the priorities and responsibilities of the faculty member and the department/program for the coming year can be helpful, particularly if the chair/director rotates or the composition of the department /program changes.*

A. Topics that junior faculty have identified as helpful to discuss:

- Review the teaching schedule for the coming years so that junior faculty members are clear on what they will have an opportunity to teach and what they will be required to teach. This is an opportunity for junior faculty to express goals and hopes for future courses.
- Strategize together about new teaching assignments and review the cumulative number of new preps for junior faculty members.
- Discuss the balance of conference presentations, publications, grant writing, creative work, and other activities as part of the scholarly agenda.
- Invite junior faculty members to share long-term goals (beyond immediate teaching assignments or current research projects) and identify what support they need to achieve those goals.
- Reflect on the sustainability of the teaching workload, research project plans, etc.

- Consider the role of junior faculty members in the department and in service to the college.
 - Are they doing too much? Are they doing too little?
- Ask junior faculty members who they turn to for mentoring outside the department.
 - Do they have mentors in their discipline outside of Carleton who can provide guidance about scholarship?
 - Are they using their assigned mentors at Carleton, or have they found someone else at Carleton outside of the department?
 - (Ideally, junior faculty members would have multiple people to mentor them in different domains. Help encourage the development of a network of mentors.)

B. Topics that have been identified as could be helpful for faculty on continuing appointments:

- Discuss preparations for any upcoming scheduled reviews.
- Review their teaching schedule for the coming year and their goals related to those classes for the coming year.
- Consider innovations that the faculty member has implemented in their courses in the past year and how they can be sustained.
- Plan for the future to accommodate potential leave requests.
- Discuss overall professional goals for the next several years and how the department/program or the College can provide support for those goals.