

## **Kennesaw State University: Teaching is the Key**

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Kennesaw State University (KSU; in Kennesaw, GA; 25 miles northwest of Atlanta) is a rapidly changing university. Chartered in the mid-1960s as a junior college, the college gained four-year status in 1978 and moved to university status in 1996. The student body is also changing rapidly, with the first dormitories opening in 2002 and the total number of students increasing by 25% to almost 18,000 from 2002 to 2004. KSU has had master's programs scattered around campus since 1985 and thus has a Carnegie classification of Master's Colleges and Universities I.

The KSU Psychology Department does not offer graduate degrees, choosing instead to focus on quality undergraduate instruction. The department is housed within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, along with Departments of Communication; English; Foreign Languages; History; Political Science; and Sociology, Geography, and Anthropology. This alliance of departments (many of which have a strong service orientation), combined with Kennesaw's history and Psychology's focus on undergraduate education, has led to a unique situation for Psychology faculty with respect to performance evaluation. Consistent with the situation for the entire university, all Kennesaw Psychology faculty must use teaching performance as the first item on which their evaluation takes place. However, rather than having scholarship mandated as the second area of emphasis, as is common at many schools around the nation, Psychology faculty choose their second area to emphasize—either scholarship or service. Thus, Psychology faculty can choose to work on a teaching/scholarship/service track or a teaching/service/scholarship track. The track chosen provides the basis for evaluation for both tenure and promotion. Although KSU has not assigned percentages of time to devote to each area, a faculty member's primary evaluation comes from the first two areas.

Early in the fall semester, each new faculty member has a conference with me (as chair of the department). We review the requirements within each of the three categories so that new faculty are fully informed of the expectations before they decide which area to designate as their second and which to list as third. At that time, we also develop a list of goals on which the faculty member will work during that first semester. These goals will form the basis for the evaluation that takes place after the first year, which for new faculty is actually only one semester (KSU's evaluations are on a calendar year cycle), so it is important to set immediate goals that are realistic and attainable.

The primary focus is on establishing high quality teaching from the outset. Success in the classroom is vital to the new faculty member's performance rating. I also work with the new faculty member to establish realistic, attainable goals for the second area of emphasis. Faculty who choose scholarship, for example, typically have research projects already underway on which they can work during that first semester. Faculty who choose service as their second area will need guidance about how they can begin to use their skills to focus on serving the department and, perhaps, the college. During the first semester, I am happy to see a new faculty member working on the first two areas, so I am content to let the third area slide. During the goal setting for the second year, then we can add some goals for the third area of emphasis.

The workload within the department is conceptualized as 24 semester hours a year, with a teaching load of approximately 21 hours (teaching load is only approximate because we have courses that credit the faculty member with 2, 3, 4, or 4.5 hours toward the load). The 3 hour difference (reduction) between 24 and 21 is given to the faculty member in recognition of time spent on the second and third areas of emphasis.

The evaluation format at KSU entails each faculty member compiling a self-report in each of the three areas of responsibility (teaching, service, and scholarship), which they submit to the chair. The chair evaluates each faculty member in each of the three areas with one of three possible labels: not achieving expectations, achieving expectations, or exceeding

expectations. Because of the relative rank ordering of the three areas, faculty would be best served by exceeding expectations in their first (teaching) or second areas rather than their third.

With a great deal of background in place, I can finally address the question of what KSU's Psychology Department (and many other teaching-oriented schools) looks for in an outstanding job candidate. First, in the Kennesaw system, it should be abundantly clear that our first criterion is an applicant's teaching ability. To this end, graduate students should get as much teaching experience as they possibly can (Benson & Buskist, in press). There are two reasons for this recommendation. First, we want to know as much about applicants' teaching ability as we can. In our opinion, it is far better to have taught a class as the sole instructor than to have served as a teaching assistant. Also, it is better to have taught more classes than fewer and to have taught a variety of classes, particularly those related to the position description. The second reason for graduate students to get as much teaching experience as possible is to strengthen their applications. Job applicants should use their cover letter and statement of teaching philosophy (see Korn, 2003; Seldin 2004) to communicate their view and vision of teaching. These documents give applicants a chance to write about their teaching experience as engrossing and invigorating despite its challenges. Candidates should provide teaching evaluations (from students, peers, or supervisors) to show that not only have they taught classes, but also that they have taught them well.

The second most important aspect about becoming a psychology faculty member at KSU depends, of course, on one's second area of emphasis. For candidates interested in service, we are looking at service to the department, the school, the university, the community, and the discipline. Obviously, we do not expect extensive service involvement by a single faculty member at all of these levels, but the list gives an idea of the possibilities. Coming from a graduate school environment, many applicants might think more along the lines of scholarship than service, but service may be particularly suited for candidates who are training in applied areas or for candidates whose scholarship is in applied areas.

Candidates who are interested in scholarship should know that KSU is not a typical university research facility. Although the Natural Sciences have moved into newer facilities with laboratory space, the Psychology Department is housed in one of the original junior college buildings that was built as a classroom and office building, so there are no laboratory facilities. Because Psychology is part of the Humanities and Social Sciences, the administration has less knowledge about the need for lab space. Although we are pushing to convert space into lab facilities, the rapid growth at KSU has put all building space at a premium for classrooms and faculty offices. Despite these limitations, several psychology faculty at Kennesaw have active research programs and count scholarship as their second area of emphasis. The reality of the situation, then, is that prospective faculty who wish to pursue scholarship must either be able to do so with limited equipment and space needs or to find collaboration opportunities with colleagues (perhaps from their graduate programs).

In conclusion, the future of Kennesaw's Psychology Department seems as bright as that of the university. A new building is on the horizon, the number of majors is up (more than 600 at last count), and there are several new faculty positions to fill in the near future. These trends show no signs of slowing as both the department and university continue to grow.

#### References

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