

# **Support Resources for New and Existing Faculty from Historically Underrepresented & Marginalized Groups**

## **Strategies for Belonging & Success**

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# For New Faculty

WELCOME TO MOUNT ROYAL!

YOU BELONG HERE!

- If you are a member of an underrepresented or marginalized group\*, you might feel uneasy about how best to navigate systemic barriers that might already exist in your new workplace, especially the barriers that disguise themselves as 'neutral' policies or 'workplace culture'.
- Here are some tips and strategies:

\***Note** from Gülberk: Some contract faculty belong in this category as well, whether or not they belong to any historically underrepresented or oppressed group, based on their race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, ability, neurotype, or age. For the administration's practice of employing faculty, who have the same credentials as tenurable or tenured faculty, as "contract" amounts to a "**caste system**" in academia. The ones who belong to the lower cast feel undervalued, just as any person who belongs to one or more historically marginalized group does.

# Engage with your Faculty Association

- **Mount Royal Faculty Association:** Your primary advocate for Collective Agreement (CA) violations.
- **Key Actions:**
  - Connect with your MRFA **Grievance Officer** early — not just during a crisis, so that it's easier to connect with them when/if you face a problem.
  - **Join the EDIA Committee:** Joining gives you the chance to provide input during the bargaining mandate development and connects you with the most "system-literate" colleagues on campus.
- **Grievances:** A tool to challenge systemic issues affecting the whole department.

# Adopt three mentors

1. **A Mount Royal navigator:** A senior faculty member (ideally outside your department) who can review your permanency or tenure & promotion files with a cold, analytical eye to ensure your labour is being framed in "administrator-speak."
2. **Identity mentor:** A faculty from the group you identify with, for emotional safety/sanity checks for micro-aggressions.
3. **An academic mentor external to MRU:** For tenure letters and national visibility.

# Protect your time required for research and scholarship

- **Strategy:** Use the "one-in, one-out" rule for committees.
- **The Documentation:**
  - Log hours spent on "informal" mentoring of students and present them as "**Student retention labour**" in annual reports.
  - Get a written confirmation of service expectations from your Dean to protect your Tenure & Promotion, or Permanency file.

# Learn the university culture

- Learn the unwritten **rules that determine** who gets promoted, who gets resources, and how power actually flows through your department.
- In your first year, **be “visible but quiet”**: Attend the meetings and social events to observe the dynamics, but wait until you have a firm grasp of the political alliances before taking a strong stance on departmental “civil wars”.
- Watch **who does the housekeeping work of the university**: Observe who speaks up in meetings and who responds to them and how.
- **The vibe check**: Is it a “closed-door” culture (everyone works in isolation) or a “hallway” culture (frequent informal collaboration) in your department? Align your early habits with this to avoid being seen as an outsider.
- **Find safe harbours**: Other faculty from underrepresented groups. Ask them:
  - “What is the one thing you wish you knew about this department’s culture in your first year?”

# The 'paper trail' audit

Before you talk to anyone, look at the documents that reflect the university's actual priorities versus its marketing.

- **Past tenure & promotion or permanency files:** Ask your trusted mentor or colleague if you can see their successful T&P dossiers from the last five years. Look for the patterns: Do they value high-impact journals, or do they prioritize community-engaged research?
- **The Collective Agreement (CA):** Read the "Management Rights" and "Faculty Rights" sections. The culture is often defined by the tension between these two.
  - You can speak to the Faculty Association's Labour Relations Officer for details, too.
- **Departmental meeting minutes:** Request minutes from the last two years. This shows you which faculty members dominate conversations, which topics are "taboo," and how decisions are actually made (by vote, by consensus, or by decree).

# Use the “information interview” strategy

In your first six months, ask 3–5 colleagues for a 20-minute coffee (virtual or in-person). Ask specific, culture-focused questions:

- "How is 'collegiality' defined in this department?" (Note: This is often a coded term for "conforming to existing norms.")
- "What does a 'successful' faculty member look like here after five years?"
- "How are disagreements typically handled in departmental meetings?"

# For existing faculty

- Some faculty think that they face discrimination and/or they fail to get tenure and promotion or permanency even though they think they meet the criteria.
- When you are "doing everything right" but the system isn't reflecting your value, it can lead to "weathering" – the physical and mental erosion caused by chronic stress.

**What are some strategies for you to maintain your mental and physical well-being while striving to succeed?**

# Mental well-being:

## Cognitive & emotional guardrails

Systemic bias often makes faculty feel like they are failing individually. You must decouple your self-worth from the institution's evaluation.

- **External validation audits:** Create a "kudos folder." Save every positive e-mail from students, external peer reviewers, and community partners. When the internal culture feels hostile, read these to remind yourself that your impact is real, even if your department is failing to acknowledge it.
- Ensure you have a **friend or mentor outside academia**, to remind you that you are valued as a person.

# Physical well-being: Managing the stress response

Chronic discrimination triggers a constant "fight or flight" response, which impacts sleep, digestion, and cardiovascular health.

- **Completing the stress cycle:** Stress isn't just in your head; it's a physiological loop. To "complete the cycle," engage in physical activity (even a 20-minute walk), deep breathing, or creative expression after a particularly draining departmental meeting. This tells your body it is no longer "under attack."
- **Radical rest as resistance:** In a system that demands over-productivity from marginalized faculty, **rest is a political act.** Set a "hard stop" for work at least one day a week.
- **Sensory boundaries:** If your office environment feels culturally or socially taxing, find "neutral zones" — a different library, a community café, or working from home — to reduce the frequency of micro-stresses.

# Strategies for the tenure, promotion, and permanency struggles

If you feel you are meeting the tenure, promotion, or permanency criteria but being blocked, the stress often comes from a sense of powerlessness.

Reclaim agency through these steps:

- **Request a "progress to promotion" meeting:** Do not wait for the formal review. Request a meeting with your Chair and/or Dean and ask: "I believe I am meeting criteria X, Y, and Z. If you disagree, can you provide a written gap analysis of exactly what is missing?" Having this in writing prevents "moving goalposts."
- **Engage the Faculty Association (FA) early:** If you suspect bias is impacting your promotion, ask an MRFA representative to attend your T&P or permanency meetings as an observer. Their presence alone often forces committees to adhere more strictly to the written criteria.

# Community & collective care

Systemic problems require collective solutions. Isolation is a tool of discrimination.

- **Affinity groups:** Join the BIPOC Network, the QriTical Hub, the Indigenous Faculty Collective, or start new support groups at MRU, such as a "Neurodiversity Network." Sharing stories reveals that the "promotion block" is often a pattern, not a personal failing.
- **External networking:** Focus on building your reputation nationally and internationally. If your local department is biased, a strong set of external letters from top-tier scholars in your field becomes an undeniable shield during your tenure review.

# Four pillars of resistance

- **Trust your perception:** Systemic discrimination often involves gaslighting (making you feel like the problem is your "productivity" rather than the "barriers"). Trust your gut and your data.
- **Boundaries are professionalism:** Saying "no" to extra service isn't being difficult; it is protecting the university's investment in your research and teaching.
- **The "paper trail" is peace:** Keeping your "bias log" and "kudos folder" off-campus gives you a sense of control and a "Plan B" if you ever need to involve your Faculty Association.
- **Your value is absolute:** Tenure or permanency are contracts, but your brilliance and your contribution to your field belong to **you**, not the institution.

# Helpful resources

- CAUT Equity Toolkit
- Workplace Mental Health Takeaways Toolkit

TAKE CARE AND KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!