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Panel I. Professional Development of Early Career Faculty

Challenges and Opportunities of Early Career Faculty at Research Universities

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I would like to thank Dr. Broder and the organizers of this symposium for the invitation to participate in this panel. I am not sure I am the best individual to share in this panel. I know there are many in this room with more experience and more capable than me. Nevertheless, I am very excited to share about my experience in the tenure track. Prior to joining UGA I spent 8 years at the University of Florida, Citrus Research and Education Center where I got promoted and tenured. My appointment was 70% research and 30% teaching but because I was not at the main campus, I only taught one graduate course a year using remote technologies. In that time I found that my vocation was teaching and wanted to teach undergraduates as well. I was delighted to find the opening of my current job. I jumped into the opportunity and was fortunate enough that I got an offer. So far it has been a great experience, especially through the teaching academy. As I practiced for this panel, I could not make it shorter than 20 min so I thought to give you an abstract. However, since we are running a little behind, I will just cover a couple of keywords.

Gratitude

Gratitude towards students is vital because they are the ones who are in the trenches doing a lot of hard work. Not all fill our expectations but most do and they really carry us on their shoulders. I have been fortunate enough to have students smarter than me and to whom I owe a lot. Similarly technicians for those of us lucky enough to have had one they contribute immensely.

I am very grateful to my faculty mentors who have supported me throughout my career. There are several nice more senior faculty members willing to help than one can think. I was mentored by one colleague who has retired and even after that he continued to give me very good advice. My mentors at UF peer observed my classes, reviewed my research proposals, and listened to my concerns. I owe them my current job as well.

Ending the day with a sense of gratitude, helps a lot relieve the stress of the tenure track.

Excellence

Excellence is not necessarily publishing in Science or Nature. If you see my list of publications, you will find out that there are good, solid, and there is not an extremely long list. But they are the best I could possibly do. I cannot but think about the Cub Scout motto: "Do your best". That is excellence considering how smart people in academia are. A couple of very kind professors who were concerned because I had not published a lot within the first years of my track to tenure, advised me to publish what I had now and worry about quality later. To that I answered that I

could not compromise quality. Again, do not think my publications are Nobel Prize-like, but they are the best I can. I also asked, if in academia I cannot pursue my ideals, where? There is too much unnecessary stress placed on publication to the detriment of quality. I also remember, when I was a graduate student, an assistant professor suffering from a lot of stress asked me to submit for publication a project that some other graduate students and I did in class. I honestly did not find that very good, I found some potential inaccuracies in our report and I said that, I did not think it was worth publishing. He replied that he had seen worse, to which I replied: "Not with my name" This may sound arrogant but that was not my best.

At the end of the day, the only person one faces is oneself. I think that gratitude and the pursuit of excellence are two good tools to tune and appease our conscience.