

## *CCAS case study for inclusion in the New Deans Seminar*

### **Faculty Member at a Crossroads**

Dean Neoteric looked in dismay at the faculty annual report that had just been handed to him by Chemistry Department Chair Al Kemmey, wondering how things had gone so badly amiss. Flo Reene, an Associate Professor in her third year at rank at Leading Research University, had been a rising star when the college had hired her away from a competing institution six years ago. The college had been aggressive in its recruitment efforts, making a major investment not only in her salary and start-up package, but in creating a Lecturer position in the Chemistry department for her husband, which was subsequently converted to tenure-track. Unfortunately for all involved, the husband had been unable to meet the department's research expectations, resulting in his termination two years ago. While he had readily secured another position in industry, doing so required a long-distance relocation, effectively placing Reene in the role of single mother to the couple's two young children. The challenges of a long-distance relationship had proven insurmountable, resulting in their divorce. The strain imposed by Reene's personal struggles had carried over to her professional role; her engagement in scholarly pursuits and professional service had all but ceased, and her instructional performance plummeted, as reflected in poor teaching evaluations and frequent student complaints. Her current annual report provided no evidence of improvement, and in fact, was so scant as to be unacceptable. Not helping matters, according to Kemmey, was the state of Reene's relationships with her chemistry colleagues. While she had never disputed the appropriateness of the department's decision to terminate her spouse's employment, it seemed evident to the department chair that several of the senior faculty had distanced themselves from her after making the difficult personnel decision, segregating her within what had been a highly collegial unit. In that she was one of only two tenured female faculty members in the department - the other being a soon-to-retire full Professor - her isolation was very noticeable, particularly, Kemmey feared, to the two recently hired female Assistant Professors in the unit.

Kemmey had approached Neoteric for her guidance in addressing the situation. Failing to act seemed certain to result in the continued downward spiral and ostracism of a highly capable faculty member, someone who potentially had 20 years of employment ahead of her. While Kemmey was committed to seeking a better outcome, he was at a loss as to how to effect a turn-around. What advice should the dean offer?

### **Questions:**

1. What factors may be contributing to Reene's performance issues?
2. Are there issues besides those of Reene's performance that merit attention?
3. What are the likely costs of inattention to this situation?
4. What strategies should Dean Neoteric suggest the chair undertake to address the situation?
5. Would your thoughts as to how Chair Kemmey should proceed differ if Reene was identified as African-American, and the only person of color in the unit? If so, how?

### **Acknowledgement of Support and Disclaimer**

This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 0930138. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.