

Tips for saying no (or yes on your terms)

In April 2020, the UD ADVANCE Institute hosted an online networking event for faculty to discuss ways to say no strategically when we are asked to take on a new commitment that we think may not align with our professional priorities. The following is a list of suggestions abstracted from the discussion. The list is not intended to be chronological, is not exhaustive, and not every suggestion will apply to every situation. Pick and choose which of the ideas might work for you.

- Don't feel pressured to say "yes" immediately. Ask for a few days to think the request over.
- Ask for the details in writing, formally or in email. Review the details and clarify, if necessary, before committing.
- Think about the relevance of the commitment relative to your professional goals. Take some time to consider whether it makes sense to take on the role or to say no. Some requests may seem out of line with your goals at first, but if you take some time you may recognize that accepting the role will help your career.
- Consult with a senior colleague (perhaps your formal mentor). Ask them to help you evaluate whether you should accept the new role, or, if not, how best to say no.
- Identify a person to be your "say-no buddy." This may be a peer, someone that you can bounce requests off of to help you evaluate if a new thing is best for your long-term career. (And of course, you should do the same for your buddy!)
- When you say no, explain why you can't take on the role. For example, perhaps you are writing a book or are working on a big grant proposal. Or maybe you are already on several committees and can't take on another responsibility. Don't assume your chair knows or remembers everything that you are doing. Recap the details in writing and send it to your chair after the conversation.
- Say yes, but with a specific limit on the time you will devote to the job.
- Say no and be proactive. Suggest someone else for the job. (Don't suggest others who are likely to be overburdened with service.)
- If you are the only person with the knowledge or skills to take on the role, suggest someone else who could be trained to take on all or part of the job.
- If you are truly the only person who can do the job, then you may have some bargaining power. If you agree to accept the job, consider what resources you will need (e.g., a course buyout or funds for extra research support) and ask for it.