

## Colleen Ryan Named Vice Provost for Faculty at Tufts University



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Colleen Ryan, associate vice provost in the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty & Academic Affairs at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB), has been named vice provost for faculty at Tufts. She will start in the position on July 1.

Ryan currently holds the rank of professor of Italian in the Department of French and Italian at IUB, is an affiliate faculty member in the Department of Gender Studies, and was the director of undergraduate studies for Italian from 2015-2023. Her areas of expertise include Italian cinema and literature, gender and sexuality studies, curriculum development for foreign languages, and Italian American/Italian diaspora studies. She has received multiple teaching awards, published widely across her various research interests, and held numerous leadership roles in service to her university and the profession. At Tufts, she will hold a tenured faculty appointment in the Department of Romance Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences.

Throughout her career, she has focused on building highly collaborative partnerships with faculty and students in service of their professional growth and development. She has also led several strategic, campus-wide initiatives aimed at advancing opportunities for women and mid-career faculty.

*Tufts Now* spoke with Ryan (also the parent of a newly minted Tufts graduate) about her background and what she hopes to accomplish in her new position.

### **As vice provost for faculty at Tufts, what will you be responsible for?**

**Colleen Ryan:** In the broadest terms, I will be responsible for making sure that people enjoy coming to work and can do their very best work in terms of teaching, research, and service. Ultimately, I want Tufts faculty to feel seen, heard, valued, and supported in every way that relates to their profession.

### **How can we support faculty at all stages of their academic and professional careers?**

First, we can look, observe, be present, and be engaged. Above all, we can listen. It's important to be visibly and transparently working with, and for the faculty. As someone who has been a faculty member for such a long time, I think that people in leadership positions need to be on the ground and demonstrating that they understand what the day-to-day concerns of faculty members of all ranks and in all disciplines are, as well as how these concerns shift and evolve over time.

In any given year, there are political and socio-cultural events that affect the climate of our workplace and therefore shift priorities and the types of support faculty need. I think it's important to be—and be perceived as—thought partners and collaborators in the career trajectories of every faculty member.

### **How will you help to ensure equitable promotions across schools?**

I think it's important to partner with other offices, leaders, and stakeholders to make sure we have a common understanding of what we mean by equity and access to all of the various opportunities. We have to find ways to support each other in opening the doors and very proactively inviting people in, giving them a seat at the table and a voice in decision making.

We have to remember that there are human beings at the base of any possible faculty situation that we encounter. Ultimately, we need to come together to address issues such as equity as a strategic, caring, human-focused and problem-solving team.

### **How will your office support the university's commitment to creating a welcoming and inclusive community at Tufts?**

Joy is central to what we do, as faculty and administrators. Ultimately, we want to help each individual at this university—whatever their backgrounds, their strengths, their identities—find their pathway to personal and professional joy because that is the way they're going to give their best work and their best educational experience to the students at Tufts.

One thing that struck me in my interview phases was how many people told me that they love working at Tufts. There are going to be problems to solve, but to have that foundation to build on in any community, any professional environment, is amazing. It means that a large portion of the people coming to the table will be really invested in those conversations.

### **What are some of the ways you've fostered collaboration across different schools, disciplines, or programs in your previous role?**

My experience at Indiana University has had me working across all schools and disciplines for a variety of efforts such as the campus-level Tenure Advisory Committee, the Initiative for the Advancement of Women, and the Male Advocates and Allies for Equity program. Recently, I also led university efforts to conceive and launch a Conflict Management and Mediation Services program.

Beyond my direct portfolio, I have been consistently involved in everything that the vice provost for faculty's office does—from new faculty orientation to mentoring programs, to sabbaticals, to all sorts of awards and professorships.

Several of my initiatives have been cohort-based with the two-pronged goal of supporting not only faculty's teaching, research and service, but also their sense of community, care, and belonging. We're helping faculty grow their networks through sponsored programs in smaller groups with regular meetings.

One of the most successful things we've done is create a monthly meeting space for women and allies solely for the purpose of socialization. It's a safe space to have informal, mentorship-style dialogue. So, while we're supporting faculty in all of the practical and logistical milestones necessary, we're also creating community and fostering this sense of inter-human purpose that I think is very important. And we need to be there. We need to be present, to remember that many of us in administration are also faculty [members].

### **What is the focus of your own research and scholarship?**

My earliest work was on Italian cinema and Italian women writers. My focus of late is on Italian American studies, coming at Italian studies from within the United States or a diasporic lens. Within that landscape, my emphasis is on gender and sexuality. Currently, I'm writing a book on Italian American female film directors. I also have another book project on Italian American theater in the second half of the 20th century.

A secondary area of my research is Italian foreign language pedagogy. I've always been the director of language instruction charged with teacher development, and I have several publications that are more pedagogically oriented around Italian such as teaching Italian through the arts, teaching Italian through theater, a textbook, teacher training guides, etc.

### **What inspired you to pursue this course of study? Do you have an Italian background yourself?**

Three-fourths of my identity is Italian American, but I grew up with generations that were trying to downplay their ethnicity to better assimilate and blend. It wasn't until my junior year in college, while studying abroad in France, that I went to visit my [Italian] relatives in Italy and experienced a sort of epiphany that deeply inspired my wish to understand my culture of origin and its rich, if difficult, history. Certain professors along the way inspired me to continue taking the next step toward pursuing a master's and a Ph.D.

### **What's one contribution you hope to make as the new vice provost for faculty?**

In short, I hope to productively uphold the goals and the values of the university by highlighting and amplifying the shared humanity of diverse stakeholders and functions across the Tufts campuses.

If I could share one message it would be to count on us. Come to us, tell us what matters. Count on us to [be able to] find ways to support your concerns, your practical issues, yes, but also your aspirations, your dreams, the things that make the best version of you. That's what we're here for.

Source & Image Credit: [Tufts University](#)

