

Local Associations and Faculty Development

By Gerie B. Bledsoe

Faculty development programs have been controversial at many colleges and universities over the past two decades. When linked to faculty evaluation systems, faculty development programs are usually regarded with suspicion by local Association leaders.

The reality is that faculty development programs are important to continued professional growth of the faculty. The 1991 National Education Association publication, *Faculty Development in Higher Education: Enhancing a National Resource*,¹ presents a thorough review of policy and outlines acceptable standards and procedural criteria for faculty development programs. The publication suggests a proactive role for faculty leaders in the design, implementation, and evaluation of such programs.²

This article elaborates on the role of local Association leaders in faculty development programs and reviews some of the recent theories of faculty development.

Definitional Differences

Gaff defines faculty development as a “process that enhances the talents, expands the interests, improves competence, and otherwise facilitates the professional and personal growth of faculty members” (1975, p. 14). Who could oppose such a well-directed concept?

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The problem may not be definitional. Faculty development has always meant different things at different institutions. For a small group of scholars of higher education, faculty development has been *primarily* a way to improve the quality of teaching on campus. At the university level, these faculty development efforts have been largely ineffectual, given academe's dedication to published research. One only needs to review the 1990 report, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* from the Carnegie Foundation, to appreciate the problems surrounding this issue.

At the community college level, a lack of resources and heavy workload have precluded much progress in faculty development. Community college faculties have been largely deprived of opportunities and resources for professional development. Some progress has been made at liberal arts colleges, however, where good teaching has always been central to the institutional mission, and resources to support teaching are generally more available.

For some administrators and faculty leaders, primarily at public institutions, “faculty development” has been a code for identifying and dismissing “weaker” faculty members. This is especially true when development follows a summative evaluation and the obligatory writing of an “improvement plan” or remediation. In one Midwestern university that took this remedial approach to faculty development, tenured faculty members were subject to dismissal without due process if their improvement plan was unsuccessful.

At the University of Hawaii-Manoa, by contrast, faculty may participate in a faculty development program closely monitored by their union, the University of Hawaii Professional Assembly. Every University of Hawaii-Manoa faculty member expects to be evaluated every five years. If this evaluation discovers serious deficiencies, the faculty member writes a development plan with the department chair or dean. The faculty member may also request the assistance of the special faculty committee to write the plan.

This special committee is the Manoa Faculty Development Committee. All committee members are jointly selected by the

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president of the university and the president of the faculty union. The committee reviews individual faculty development plans and considers requests for faculty development grants. These grants may be used to fund leaves, travel, workshops and institutes, computer equipment and support, training, and assistance in improving teaching skills. Each year, the faculty union may initiate a review of the entire program.

By playing an equal role in the selection of committee members, by being able to intervene in individual development plans, and by having the right to initiate a review of the program, the faculty union and its appointees serve to protect the fairness of the faculty development process at the University of Hawaii-Manoa. This level of participation is relatively unusual for faculty unions, but it makes the evaluation and development process more acceptable.

But the emphasis on remediation in Hawaii may be somewhat passe. It is far more fashionable today to talk about the concepts of "professional growth" or "career development" of faculty and staff—terms that seem relatively benign. But the overall faculty development concept continues to engender suspicion in the minds of local Association leaders. Is this suspicion warranted?

Faculty Development—Lately

In recent years, proponents of faculty development have expanded the scope and purpose of the term. Many of these new ideas have been collected in a volume edited by Dan Wheeler and Jack Schuster titled *Enhancing Faculty Careers*.

Instead of concentrating on improving teaching, the scholars represented in this volume now emphasize the "career development" of faculty through a systematic program involving three interrelated developments in the life of a faculty member:

Professional growth—meaning teaching, scholarship, research, and service.

Personal growth—refers to the individual faculty member's

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expanding knowledge and interests, apart from scholarship. Institutional growth—as careers develop, the institution develops. A positive relationship should exist between the purpose and goals of the institution and those of the faculty member.

Naturally, faculty leaders might be somewhat suspicious about the implications of “institutional growth.” This suggests that the institution has interests that are greater than the fundamental rights of individual faculty members. But, again, the reaction to this concept will reflect largely the tradition and atmosphere on campus and the personalities of the individuals—faculty members and administrators—involved.

Right from the start of the faculty development debate, proponents have advised that such programs should never be foisted upon faculty, that faculty must be involved significantly in the design of these programs and the decision to implement them. This view prevails even more strongly in today’s literature.

According to Allan Tucker (1981), who wrote one of the most complete studies of the role of the department chair: “Faculty members must perceive a need to change before they will commit themselves to participating in a faculty development area” (pp. 100-102). They must also see a need and know where to go for assistance. Tucker concludes that many faculty will continue to view developmental programs as infringements on their busy schedules.

To contend with this perception, faculty members are being encouraged by the experts to reconceptualize their careers—to understand that their career has three major periods: the beginning, middle, and end. Furthermore, during the longer middle period, there will be “intermediate periods,” where unique opportunities will be presented, making transitions possible.

Faculty members, especially the newer or younger, are being counseled to recognize these opportunities and, if appropriate, take advantage of them. Training, continuing education, and leave programs should increase the ability to take advantage of these career opportunities.

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If career development is accomplished, the experts theorize, faculty members will feel empowered, in control of their lives, and not trapped in their current position, a situation aggravated by the lack of mobility from one institution to another. Faculty morale and the atmosphere on campus would be significantly improved.

The not-so-hidden message here is that faculty members who are unhappy with teaching or their institution would be encouraged and assisted in developing interests and skills that might lead them to seek more satisfactory positions inside or outside the institution. Again, a serious question is raised for faculty leaders, especially if coercion appears to be threatened or involved.

Designing and Implementing Faculty Career Programs

Proponents of faculty development have long advocated using faculty committees to design such programs. But the most recent thinking proposes a more comprehensive approach involving:

A major administrative commitment, including resources and rewards.

An education program on campus to support, including a positive statement of purpose.

A systematic, integrative approach that also maintains traditional programs (sabbaticals, leaves).

Demonstrated success, modestly at first.

Assessment of needs and demographics (age, race, gender).

Insistence on quality and evaluation of the program.

Assurance of confidentiality where needed.

Use of in-house resources where possible.

Keeping institutional goals and program goals together.

The experts point out that these new programs should be developed incrementally, on an evolutionary basis. They also recognize that no single program can be used successfully at all institutions to initiate programs for faculty renewal and development.

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The Local Association: Supporting Faculty

The faculty Association's role as bargaining agent is prescribed by law: to provide fair and adequate representation for its unit members. It must protect and promote the interests of the faculty or staff through negotiations, the meet and confer process, and grievance and arbitration procedures.

The question arises: Is it proper for the union to accept, initiate, and support a faculty development plan that suggests that some or all of the faculty *need* development? Furthermore, is it proper for the bargaining agent to allow the administration or faculty committees to decide that some faculty need or deserve such opportunities while others do not?

I submit that, because it *is* the responsibility of the faculty union to promote its members' professional and economic status, it *should* initiate and support *qualified* faculty development programs. NEA policy appears to support programs that are:

Designed by faculty.

Implemented by joint action of faculty and administration.

Voluntary for the individual faculty member.

Open to all and equitable.

Adequately funded.

Administered and evaluated by faculty, especially if awards of leaves, sabbaticals, funds, etc. are involved.

Uncoupled from any disciplinary action.

If implemented and followed faithfully, these seven provisions would virtually guarantee collective faculty control of the program while protecting individual rights. Whether or not this degree of control would be necessary will depend on how much trust exists at the specific institution.

It was clear to the proponents of faculty development that such plans should not be forced on the faculty. After all, if the faculty refuses to participate, the plans are doomed. Such plans should not be seen as remedial, but as a natural part of teaching and scholarship. The faculty association would continue to protect the

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procedural rights of the faculty through the grievance and arbitration process.

It is also important to understand and appreciate the newer concept of “career development.” New faculty, in particular, should work with their department chairs, faculty committees, and key administrators to ensure that their personal development and institutional goals are moving in the same general direction. Obviously, if they go in different directions too long, tension and even conflict may result. Good communication and planning over the individual’s career is essential to precluding such problems. Faculty members also must be willing to take advantage of professional growth opportunities.

Providing faculty members with a wider perspective on their professional life through career counseling and opportunities to work outside the institution gives them a better understanding of their options. Temporary positions with business and industry, in particular, give some faculty new perspectives on their goals in the classroom while permitting them to explore career options. These opportunities may improve the academic quality of the institution, as they lead to other careers—inside or outside of their college or university.

I have long objected to the faculty attitude, “Woe is me, I can’t do anything except teach.” Those who teach in colleges and universities are intelligent, articulate people who are quite capable of earning a respectable living in “the real world.” But economic necessity may be ending their limited perspective since many faculty are being forced to engage in consulting or other forms of business activity outside the walls of ivy.

Finally, how do faculty leaders rationalize seeing money go into development plans instead of salaries or benefits? There is no universally correct answer here, as each institutional situation will be different. Salaries need improvement at many institutions, fringe benefits costs are enormous, but what are the faculty’s long-term priorities and needs?

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Under certain circumstances, faculty might be better off if more funds are available to support their professional and personal growth and allow them to explore career options. This might contribute to improving morale, self-esteem, and mobility.

Confronting Real and Ideal Worlds

Faculty leaders must ensure appropriate faculty participation in designing and implementing faculty development programs. Association leaders are obligated by law to protect their colleague's contractual rights. They also recognize that academics have a responsibility to themselves, their profession, and to their institution.

Today, many union leaders in the public and private sectors, including those in academe, recognize that a greater degree of cooperation with management is necessary to confront the challenges of today and to correct and avoid the mistakes of the past. Reduced public resources make this a difficult concept to follow when unions are literally fighting to save their members' jobs and protect their compensation from freezes and reductions.

If, in the past, our institutions had been able to do more with the concept of career development—including career planning and re-training—perhaps the current apprehension and agony over retrenchment and reassignment would be less severe. The chronic shortage of resources has largely prevented the establishment of decent professional support programs at most American colleges. In fact, the most basic of these programs—sabbaticals or paid leave for developmental purposes—is not found at many institutions. It is the magnitude of troubles in most parts of the country today, of course, that seem to make these concepts seem somewhat trivial, if not superfluous.

Again, we confront the duality of the real and ideal worlds in which academics dwell. Academics believe that, if faculty and administrators approach faculty development with mutual trust and

respect for each other, they could agree on programs—standards and procedures—that would be seen as supportive, effective, and fair. The entire institution, especially our students, would benefit. We know, too, that our aspirations are usually greater than available resources and higher than the intentions of those who refuse to share authority. Regardless, let us continue to aspire for that ideal world, even in the face of adversity.

Notes

¹Cited hereafter as *Faculty Development*.

²See *Faculty Development*, p. 29. Chapter 1 (pp. 7-9) reviews relevant NEA policy. This booklet and the recommendations about faculty development made therein, however, do not constitute NEA policy.

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Author Notes

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