

Professional development in teaching and learning for early career academic geographers: Contexts, practices and tensions

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Abstract

This paper provides a review of the practices and tensions informing approaches to professional development for early career academic geographers who are teaching in higher education. We offer examples from Britain, Canada, Nigeria and the USA. The tensions include: institutional and departmental cultures; models that offer generic and discipline-specific approaches; the credibility of alternative settings for professional development in teaching and learning; the valuing of professional development and of teaching in academic systems of reward and recognition; and the challenges of balancing professional and personal life. We summarize concepts of good practice and suggest opportunities for future research.

Key words: Early career geographers, academic cultures, preparation for teaching

Introduction

Early career academic geographers are challenged by the competing professional demands of teaching, research and service. After a multi-year graduate¹ experience that emphasized research with limited, if any, teaching responsibilities, they often begin careers in which the majority of their time may be spent on teaching, although the institution may still strongly value research. Not surprisingly, many have reported that the time required for teaching is a major source of stress (Solem & Foote, 2004). Demands of emerging technologies, administrative pressures and increasingly competitive campus climates make it challenging to balance teaching, research and service while maintaining a personal life (Hardwick, 2005). Why do some succeed and others not? How much might success reflect the characteristics of the individual or the environments within which they work? In the context of this paper, we ask what might institutions and departments do to foster success in the teaching role. Are there barriers that could be removed to ensure a positive experience?

In addressing these questions, we offer examples from four national contexts, Britain, Canada, Nigeria and the USA, which are selected because we have personal experience of their institutional structures and practices. In considering these settings, each of which has roots and ties within the Anglophone geography, we aim to illustrate how approaches to professional development as they relate to the teaching component of the early years of an academic career vary across and within the systems of higher education. We suggest a way in which preparation for teaching might be strengthened. Exploration of other traditions within the increasingly globalizing worlds of higher education would be productive (Nerad & Heggelund, 2008). The tensions about teaching and learning encountered by an early career academics do not occur in isolation. There is substantial advocacy around the idea that academic work must be rethought because of the rapid changes occurring in higher education and because of the angst about the impact that these changes may have on the quality and value of higher education (Gappa et al., 2007). For the purposes of this paper, we define an early career academic geographer as a person who is within the first five years of completion of doctorate, and who has chosen to work in academia. In

this paper, we further focus on the experiences of the early career academic as they relate to undergraduate teaching.

Practices and tensions

Practices that aim to prepare geographers for their teaching roles vary considerably both within and among countries. In some settings, there are courses which may be either mandatory or optional; in others, individual mentoring may be offered, while in others, and quite commonly, early career faculty rely substantially on interpreting the approaches of their colleagues and on their past experiences as students. Some of these practices are very formal, while others may be very informal. We identify five types of tensions associated with these practices. They reflect differences in organizational cultures and philosophies about the value of various orientations to teaching and professional development. They are influenced by the specific circumstances in which an individual enters a faculty position, for example, whether opportunities available in the labour market at the time of search for an entry-level appointment are congruent with personal aspirations. Additionally, changing national and local funding priorities in higher education impact the support that is allocated to professional development for the teaching role.

The first tension we address involves institutional and departmental cultures. These range from the degree to which research or teaching is emphasised in the institution to the support given to teaching by successive departmental heads. An extreme tension, for example, is likely to be felt by early career academics in the environment of the British research-intensive university and department where, in the context of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and its budgetary implications, teaching is undervalued and perceived to play little part in promotion. In Anglophone West African institutions, enduring financial crises place pressures on academics to devote attention to external donor-driven projects and consultancies (Awumbila, 2007) while service demands can also be high. The second tension concerns the relative emphasis of the model of professional development in teaching and learning: is it mainly generic, mainly discipline based or does it offer synergy between the two (Grace et al., 2004)? Academics often have stronger loyalties to their disciplines than to their institutions and may think they can learn more easily through their discipline; conversely, some may find sharing disciplinary practices to be stimulating and may consider application of generic ideas to be more effective for developing pedagogical skills. A third tension relates to the settings in which professional development is provided and how these settings may affect its credibility and the geographer's degree of engagement with training and support. The fourth relates to ways in which participation in any training courses and teaching more generally are valued, assessed and rewarded. Often these are linked to the first tension about cultures. Finally, all these tensions may combine to produce strains in the balance between professional and personal lives. Such strains at the extreme may result in early career academic geographers leaving academia. In the following sections, we will examine each of these tensions in more detail by offering examples from Britain, Canada, Nigeria and the USA.

Tension 1: Cultural contexts

The experiences of early career faculty are influenced by the cultures of which they are a part. Without doubt, universities are culturally complex organisations (Sackmann, 1997), with the cultures of both the department and the institution significantly influencing the experiences of early career academics (Knight & Trowler, 2000).

Institutional cultures

Across both the national and international contexts, the expectations for research, teaching and service or administration vary among institutions (Astin, 1996; Knight & Trowler, 2000). The balance of duties seems to be situated on a continuum between highly research-intensive universities at one end, and more teaching-focused universities at the other. At one end of this spectrum, for example, would be the Russell Group representing the 20 leading research universities in the UK, the first generation of federal universities in Nigeria established between 1948 and the early 1970s, and US institutions identified by the Carnegie Classification system as 'research universities, very high research activity'.² At the other end are the more teaching-oriented institutions such as the 'new' universities in the UK, the polytechnics, monotechnics, colleges of education and state and private universities in Nigeria, and the two-year community colleges in the USA which offer associate (pre-baccalaureate) credentials. In the Canadian context, institutions range from those with a research-intensive focus (e.g. group of 13), who typically offer programmes in the medical/doctoral categories, to comprehensive institutions that focus more on undergraduate education. Where an individual finds initial employment may lead to tensions between their expectations and practices and those of the institution in which they are employed.

While the research-intensive cultures of some US and Canadian institutions affect the nature of an early career faculty member's experience, the most clearly evident culture is fostered by the RAE (the future Research Excellence Framework, REF) in the UK which has emphasised the research component since the national initiation in 1986 of a formalized assessment process of the quality of research (RAE, 2008). This informs the selective national distribution of funds supporting higher education (HEFCE, 2010). On the basis of RAE scores, universities are ranked in tables published annually in a variety of major newspapers. For example, The Guardian offers the opportunity to compare programmes in 46 subject areas offered at nearly 150 universities and higher-education colleges in the UK (MacLeod, 2009). The ranking systems and their implications for funding have drawn the less research-intensive universities into the research culture, because a portion of their resources is based upon their research productivity (Dill & Soo, 2005).

The criteria that will be considered for their retention and promotion are important influences on the experiences of early career faculty. These again are shaped by whether institutions and departments consider themselves to be teaching or research intensive. In principle, across the USA, UK and Canada teaching, research and service/administration are all considered for promotion. Yet in the UK, the RAE has led to the belief that promotion is only on the basis of research (Boyer et al., 1994). In reality, most institutions will consider all elements, but the weighting and the expectation or standard placed on each activity will vary depending on the institution. In Nigeria, 'confirmation' of appointments is normally based on satisfactory teaching and demonstrated potential for scholarship.

The nature of the institution and the funding culture influences the teaching opportunities of early career academics. In North America, it is common for graduate students to be engaged in a substantial amount of teaching during their studies (Golde & Dore, 2001; Austin, 2002; Harland & Plangger, 2004), thus building their teaching and learning experience. Such opportunities may,

however, be seen primarily as a way to provide financial support for graduate study (and also to subsidize the costs of teaching) rather than as systematic preparation for a multi-faceted academic career. In Nigeria, graduate students also have the advantages of assistantship schemes. At the University of Ibadan, for example, students in advanced stages of graduate education in any discipline are offered support to obtain skills in teaching and research, but such opportunities are not widely institutionalized. Furthermore, when the Nigerian Universities Commission (the regulatory body charged with ensuring quality standards) recently proposed to make this postgraduate diploma in education a requirement for entry to positions, the academics resisted strongly. External pressures in the UK can work against graduate students' obtaining teaching experience. When funding is tied to the research grants of faculty members with expectations that doctorates will be completed within three years (Mroz, 2008), opportunities and motivations to undertake 'extra-curricular' activities such as gaining teaching experience or developing pedagogical knowledge and skills are reduced. Additionally, a negative consequence of limiting focus to a specifically defined research theme can lead to a lack of alignment between the skills gained through doctoral studies and the work undertaken in an early career position.

Finally, the amount of teaching required by early career faculty varies across countries and types of universities. In the USA, for example, a faculty member in a research-intensive university may be expected to teach two courses per semester and have graduate teaching assistants to manage laboratory and discussion sessions, and to help with grading. A faculty member in a masters department may teach three courses per semester with modest assistance from teaching assistants and faculty member in an undergraduate-oriented institution may teach four courses per semester, without any or very little teaching assistant support. In the USA, Canada and the UK, institutions commonly provide new staff with a reduced load as they begin their career, especially in a research-intensive institution, though the length of time for this condition is variable. In contrast, in Nigeria, early career faculty are generally expected to contribute to high teaching and service loads. As budgets in higher education shrink, early career faculty may find themselves in temporary teaching positions, for example as sessional lecturers in Canada or as adjuncts or non-tenure track appointments in the USA, with their duties limited to teaching and with the prospect that they may be marginalized in their contacts with other faculty and allocated fewer resources (e.g. teaching assistants and professional-development resources).

Departmental cultures

Knight and Trowler (2000) argue that improvements in teaching will only occur if departmental cultures are conducive to better teaching. In this respect, leadership, especially of the department head/chair, and interests of faculty are central. A leader who supports the development of an early career faculty member as a teacher as well as a researcher will promote greater engagement in programmes designed to enhance teaching than one who more single-mindedly values research. Teaching 'innovators' within departments (those who experiment with techniques in an effort to improve their teaching, and share their findings with their colleagues) may offer an alternative role model and encourage leaders and colleagues to work on teaching (Lueddeke, 1999), but if support for such engagement is predominantly dependent on the influence of individual innovators, then it might only be a temporary phenomenon and will not likely be sustained. If these individuals move to another institution or if a department head changes, innovations may be lost. In such departments, there

is the need for continuity and succession planning to support early career faculty in their adaptation to their new careers.

Tension 2: Professional development: generic, discipline specific or both?

In this section, we take up the tension between generic and discipline-specific approaches to professional development. It has been argued that over time an early career academic travels along a continuum in the understanding of teaching and learning. Early in an individual's teaching career, learning is likely to be viewed as a teaching-centred activity, but over time there is movement towards a student-centred approach (Akerlind, 2007). If focusing on a teacher-centred approach to learning, early career academics may align their understanding about learning more to discipline-specific professional development. Later on the continuum, if there is a transition towards a student-centred approach, academics may increase interest in generic professional development of teaching and learning. They may also come to appreciate broadening their networks to include colleagues in other disciplines.

Reviewing changing visions within the faculty development literature, Amundsen and McAlpine (2008) identified an emphasis from the 1960s to the 1980s on workshops and seminars to develop teaching and learning competencies. By the 1990s, the range of approaches expanded to include intervention by professional consultants, workshops, seminars and courses, mentoring programmes and action-based research including classroom research. Amundsen and McAlpine's work identifies three areas of focus for development of teaching and learning competencies: the first addresses skill development in order to resolve a specific teaching problem; the second involves the development of abilities to use a particular method or approach to teaching and learning; and the third focuses on learning to enhance one's teaching by reflection on practice. These orientations may occur at both disciplinary and institutional levels. Most recently, the concepts of research on teaching and learning (identified as the 'scholarship of teaching and learning') and mentoring relationships have emerged as foci. An early career academic might expect to receive the skill-development component in a discipline-specific event, whereas the development of ability to apply a specific method or approach might occur at the institutional level (i.e. in a more generic framework).

Tension 3: Professional-development settings

Settings for professional development vary cross-nationally as well as institutionally. In the UK, there are two primary models. At the institutional level, generic training is offered through the staff teaching and learning centres. Additionally, the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre sponsors 24 discipline-specific centres such as Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences (GEES, 2010) that was established in 2000 based at the University of Plymouth. These aim to support and enhance learning and teaching in those fields. GEES offers a range of activities and resources such as conferences, departmental workshops, online resources and the journal, Planet. The GEES two-day workshop for Early Career Lectures has been conducted nine times since 2000 with 226 attendees. This model will, however, change in the future as the Higher Education Academy scales back and these centres may become virtual hubs (Attwood, 2010). Within Canada and the USA, professional development tends to be offered on campuses through teaching and learning centres. Many of these provide generic activities and also support discipline-specific activities within academic departments (i.e. they operate as a centralized location providing

decentralized services). The extent to which departments forge relationships with such centres is variable (Monk et al., 2001). In Nigeria, generic programmes at the institutional level appear to be the more common approach, though the National Universities Commission offers online courses on pedagogy. External funding may also support efforts at individual institutions, as in a programme at the University of Ibadan where a grant from the (US-based) MacArthur Foundation supports the Capacity Building in Pedagogical Skills programme for faculty across disciplines and of any level.

Leadership by disciplinary organizations represents another possible arena for supporting the professional development of early career academic geographers. In the USA, the Geography Faculty Development Alliance (GFDA, 2010; in which some Canadians have participated) offers week-long workshops which, since 2002, have engaged more than 350 advanced graduate students and early career faculty. Additionally, GFDA-organized workshops have been offered at regional and national geography conferences of the Association of American Geographers; GFDA fosters a culture of support, highlighting the interconnections between teaching, research and advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning across the discipline (Solem & Foote, 2006; Foote, 2010). Following on from GFDA, the Association of American Geographers received funding from the National Science Foundation for the Enhancing Departments and Graduate Education in Geography (EDGE) project that conducts research (Solem & Foote, 2009a; Solem et al., 2009b; Monk et al., 2001), offers workshops at national and regional conferences and has published two books with related web-based activities; one addresses career development for early career academics and the other focuses on teaching geography at the university level (Solem & Foote, 2009b; Solem et al., 2009a). Introducing both generic and discipline-based perspectives, these initiatives aim to foster widespread change, a challenging task in a context of the large, decentralized academic world of the USA.

The Association of Nigerian Geographers has no formal programme for teaching preparation, but over the years has had a strong focus on the teaching of high-school geography. Some early career academics in Nigeria are able to participate in informal mentoring programmes like the Staff Life Experience Forum that operates in the Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan. This forum is an informal, interactive opportunity for senior faculty members to share their experiences with a view to enhancing faculty development among staff and to cement cross-generational exchanges. In addition, Babcock University (a first-generation private university in Nigeria) assigns two to three junior academics to a senior academic to guide them along their career path. These interactions could be formal or informal. Recognizing the gaps in resources, some publications have been developed in Nigeria to support early career academics (Olorunnisola, 2005) and strategies for effective teaching (Babarinde, 2009). In Canada, national scale initiatives have been limited in part, because education is part of the provincial mandate and not the national mandate. At the 2010 Annual Meeting of the Canadian Association of Geographers, a proposal was accepted by the Association which would see them offer a certificate in geography teaching. The proposed certificate would require completion of work that is both geographically focused and incorporates some general pedagogy. It will more closely resemble the GFDA model than the UK approaches. The first workshop in this series will focus on successful field trips, a geography signature pedagogy. It is unclear how receptive faculty and graduate students will be participating in this initiative.

Tension 4: Valuing professional development and teaching

Building on our discussion of institutional, departmental and organizational cultures and practices, we now briefly examine whether and how formal professional development is valued as a component of the preparation and work of early career faculty, both by institutions and by early career faculty themselves. In the UK, and increasingly internationally, “substantial training of 120–500 hours duration is now well embedded in many institutions” (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004, p. 88). Training is often compulsory and sometimes linked to probation or tenure (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004). If the activities are mandatory, individuals may be resistant and benefit little whereas those who participate voluntarily are likely to be more engaged and learn ways in which they can improve their teaching and receive more positive responses from students (Ho et al., 2001). Individual identity, values and past experiences may also shape the responses of early career faculty, especially if their research preparation has socialized them to devalue teaching (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004) and led them to pursue research assistantships to support doctoral studies, because these are perceived as more prestigious than appointments as teaching assistants.

Furthermore, when the programmes offered are commonly generic (Neumann, 2001), those who identify primarily with their discipline may further devalue such professional development. If early career academics do not see their course reflecting the geographical disciplines, they may be less engaged. As Clark et al. (2002) have highlighted, the success of the Geography, Earth and Environmental Science Subject Centre (GEES, 2010) reflects its role in providing disciplinary support across institutional lines. A further consideration for programmes in geography is the issue of the heterogeneity of interests and ways of knowing in the discipline, especially across the physical–social science boundaries, which may isolate early career faculty within departments.

Another key consideration is the extent to which teaching and related professional activities are perceived to ‘count’ in the advancement towards promotion or tenure of the early career faculty member. The phrase ‘publish or perish’ is often heard, speaking to the understood value of research and publication, whether this is a formal requirement of the institution or not. But all programmes neither equally value the volume of publications nor all publications are considered equal. Cross-nationally, evaluation criteria and processes vary. In Nigerian universities, research and service take priority, with emphasis on publication in international (rather than domestic) journals. The length of the initial evaluation time may influence both the depth and the breadth of teaching and learning development that may occur during this period. In Canada and the USA, the evaluation time to tenure review is 5–6 years, whereas in Nigeria and the UK, the period to ‘confirmation’ is normally assessed after three years.

In the review process, the question arises on how to evaluate teaching performance. Student evaluations and classroom observations are commonly used (though the latter is not included in Nigeria). Recently, compilation of a teaching portfolio/dossier by the faculty members has been introduced in North America, in which selected teaching materials, evaluations and personal reflections on one’s teaching are combined in a single reflective document on an individual’s teaching (Seldin, 1997). Student evaluations commonly include quantitative analysis of responses to Likert-scaled statements about the class content, the instructor’s teaching ability or the transformative learning impact on the student, while some forms include opportunities for open-ended feedback.

Such evaluations vary in what they reveal and how findings are reported. Some may measure only class content, others only teaching effectiveness, or only student impact; they may not always be statistically reliable or valid (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007). Classroom observations appear to be conducted more often in institutions focused on excellence in teaching, while teaching materials may be reviewed either in conjunction with a classroom observation or separately.

The extent and nature of the publication of research are highly weighted in research institutions and admired at other institutions, with attention to the prestige of journals and the use of citation indexes becoming common in research institutions. Writing for interdisciplinary, public policy or non-academic audiences may be considered for promotion, though valued differently across institutional and national settings (Jaeger & Thornton, 2006; Phaneuf et al., 2007).³ While service to the institution, the discipline and the community may be specified as a criterion, how it may be evaluated is commonly not clear and it may be overlooked in favour of research and publication (Jaeger & Thornton, 2006). Again, institutional cultures vary. A US two-year college that recruits its students locally may want faculty to be visible in community activities and may value teaching success more highly than top-level publications. A high-level research institution may place more weight on the grants and publications associated with faculty research and classes may be taught by non-tenure track faculty and teaching assistants. How early career faculty understand these differences, especially as they come to their position from research-oriented doctoral programmes, is not clear.

Tension 5: Balancing professional and personal lives

Beyond the tensions associated with the demands of meeting research, teaching, advising, professional development and service requirements, early career faculty have to cope with the challenges of balancing their professional and personal lives (Austin, 2002). This issue has become more evident as contemporary faculty members are more diverse than was common in earlier generations when faculty consisted primarily of married men with wives engaged full time in caring for home and family (Bailyn, 1993). While today, both men and women are concerned with the balance of professional and personal life, women face greater challenges during the early career (and pre-tenure) years because of their biological clocks and normative cultural expectations about gender roles (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2004; Odejide et al., 2006). In the Nigerian context, women may face restricted opportunities for participation in professional-development activities because of assumptions about their family commitments. In Canada, the USA and the UK, issues of increasing faculty diversity in terms of 'race', ethnicity, sexual orientation and national origins have multiple implications. Minority faculty may feel the added responsibility of serving as role models for minority students (Adams, 2002), and also be called upon for more university service than their majority culture peers. Women may still be the lone representative of their gender in a department that can present mentoring issues, both in terms of demands from students and of mentors for themselves. Gender-based salary differentials can remain an issue (Perna, 2001), especially in the USA, in which contracts are individually negotiated.⁴ Additional and different challenges are experienced by significant growth in numbers of early career academic foreign-born geographers (especially from Asian countries). Their challenges are inflected by gender, place of origin, immigration status, family issues and language fluency in English. With respect to teaching, these faculty express their need to re-evaluate the expectations of students and the

approaches in the classroom compared to those of their home countries. They are also more likely than native-born faculty to be teaching GIS and technical courses than human or physical geography (Theobald, 2009), which may involve them in demands such as managing equipment. The extent to which evaluations and faculty development programmes are sensitive to such individual and group distinctions remains a question.

Good practices

The importance of the socialization experiences of early career academics for their success in teaching and research has long been recognized (Corcoran & Clark, 1984). As we have indicated, this socialization occurs in multiple settings within academia. Often the culture within the department, led by the chair/academic head, has a stronger influence on how an early career academic will value teaching than does that within the institution. The importance of colleagues and especially of the department chair/head in setting and sustaining that culture is critical to the success of an early career academic in teaching. One very effective way that department chairs/heads can assist early career academics to succeed is through the creation of mentoring relationships (Hardwick, 2005). Well-designed and executed mentoring relationships that benefit both the mentor and mentee have been shown to increase job satisfaction and increase the likelihood that individuals will remain in their profession (Ewing et al., 2008). The design and execution of the mentoring relationships are key to their success (Foote&Solem, 2009). These relationships need to be built on trust and openness. Relationships that enforce a contrived collegiality will not be successful. Other contributors to failing mentoring relationships include: lack of time, insufficient planning, poor matching and failure of either the mentor or mentee to fully understand the complexities of mentoring relationships (Ewing et al., 2008). Traditionally, mentoring relationships have involved an 'expert' mentor and 'novice' mentee. An alternative is to create a network of novices to provide mentorship among one another (Angelique et al., 2002). The network not only functions to provide mentorship but also functions like a community of practice.

The socialization experiences of early career academics can be strengthened through the creation of a community of practice around teaching and learning (Gibbs et al., 2009). Such communities are designed to engage groups of people, for example, multidisciplinary faculty on a campus, in sharing sets of problems and concerns as well as passions about a topic, deepening their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger et al., 2002). Beyond institutions, higher-education organizations⁵ and online communities within subfields can be useful sites for sharing perspectives and resources nationally and/or internationally, an example being through the International Network for Learning and Teaching Geography in Higher Education (INLT, 2010). Peer mentoring and communities of practice on teaching fit Austin and McDaniels' (2006) preparation strategies for early career academics by providing opportunities for modelling teaching behaviours and as a forum for conversations (both formal and informal). The other preparation strategies identified by Austin and McDaniels (2006) include: professional seminars, internships and certificates. Professional seminars and certificates have been discussed in a variety of settings (i.e. through professional organizations like the AAG and the CAG; through department/institution initiatives like that offered at the University of Ibadan for senior graduate students; and, through institutional activities of teaching and learning centres). Internship opportunities (e.g. as teaching assistants) are provided to a large number of graduate students within North

America, though frequently these do not go beyond 'learning by doing'. Such teaching opportunities are rarer in the UK and Nigeria.

Clearly articulated expectations for teaching that are understood by both academic leaders, in particular, academic chairs/heads and early career academics have been illustrated in all four nations considered to contribute to a better experience. Balancing professional development in teaching and learning to include a combination of highly credible, discipline-specific, often teacher-centric development with the more generic, often student-centric development provided from centralized teaching and learning centres contributes to the development of an early career academic's teaching approach.

Conclusion

Our comparative account demonstrates the diversity of contexts, experiences and support offered to early career academic geographers who teach in higher education. That breadth is hugely impacted by where their learning occurs. Departmental and institutional cultures often override the influence of a national context for teaching and learning. There is a visible tension between the credibility of discipline-specific professional development and the more generic forms typically offered by campus teaching and learning centres. The value placed on teaching and learning may be evident in the credibility of institutional policies surrounding requirements for professional development. Administrators and faculty often have quite different perceptions of mandatory requirements than that of the optional approaches. How teaching and learning are assessed and weighted by reward and recognition schemes varies across types of institutions and there can be a clear disconnect between the emphasis placed on teaching in mission and vision statements and the emphasis applied in performance reviews. The diversity of situations, backgrounds and perspectives of individuals as they seek to establish a balance between professional and personal life further necessitates that universities broaden their understanding and policies in order to attract and support the diverse population of potential faculty members.

The extent of alignment of individual expectations to those of departments' and institutions' expectations can contribute to success (or lack of success) of early career academic geographers. A system that clearly articulates teaching expectations and promotion/tenure policies and practices can increase the likelihood of individual and collective successes, as can development of and support for initiatives such as mentoring and communities of practice among individuals who share common concerns. Interpretations of good practice suggest that discipline-specific and generic programmes serve complementary purposes that can move the early career teacher along a continuum from teacher-centred to student-centred approaches in their pedagogy. It would be valuable to explore and initiate ways of combining the generic offerings of university teaching and learning centres with discipline-specific approaches, of offering cross-institutional programmes within disciplines and of encouraging departmental leadership to foster and support mentoring relationships within departments, both for research and teaching.

Further understanding of the academic identity of the early career academic geographer may provide insights about how to enhance their experiences, thereby the learning experiences of their students. To pursue such research, we need to examine in more depth the formation of academic identity as it relates to teaching. Such research might include exploration of passions, confidence,

attitudes towards self-reliance and help seeking, how individuals manage time, their participation in networks, perceptions of barriers to change and use of available supports. Understanding geographers' interpretations of such themes could contribute to fostering a developmental trajectory for individual, institutional and organizational approaches to enhancing teaching and learning by early career academics.

Notes

1. We recognize that terminology varies cross-nationally. In this paper, we have used North American terminology: 'graduate', rather than postgraduate and 'faculty' rather than 'staff'.
2. The Carnegie Classification as revised in 2005 includes over 30 categories of US institutions of higher education using criteria such as types of degrees offered, institutional size, orientation and location (Available at <http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/>; accessed November 2010).
3. Nigerian institutions place value of interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary publication, for example, and the valuing of such work may be increasing in the USA, for example, as funding agencies foster multi-disciplinary research on complex environmental and societal problems.
4. In Nigeria, salaries in the public universities are uniform regardless of university status, discipline, gender and ethnicity; and private universities feel some pressure to follow these scales in order to retain faculty.
5. The publications and conferences of the American Association of Universities and Colleges which focus on undergraduate education and address such themes as global education and diversity issues offer resources of value to geographers (Available at <http://www.aacu.org>; accessed 10 June 2010).

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