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Personal Consultation and Contractual Planning in Stimulating Faculty Growth: The Faculty Development Program at Northern Illinois University

L.Terry Oggel and Edwin L. Simpson

The Faculty Development Program at Northern Illinois University attempts to address a specific, newly-recognized though long-standing need of tenured faculty: it provides a means, formerly not available through university support, for faculty to alter academic careers, either in a relatively modest way by shifting their field of specialization or much more dramatically by initiating careers in entirely different areas in academia. In this way, the program provides a method for faculty who have grown dissatisfied with their careers to be revitalized and to continue to have productive academic lives. Though by no means a majority, a significant number of faculty sense they are trapped, perhaps as a result of the explosion of knowledge or because of rapid technological changes. With this program, these people now have a new lease on a career. In a sense, the NIU Faculty Development Program is a program for renewal.

The Development of Faculty Development at NIU

The first attempts to create the program at NIU were made in the late 1970s. The university president applied to the governing board for approval to institute a new program specially designed to meet what was seen to be the challenge of the 80s for any university or college: in a time of retrenchment, how to respond to new research and/or teaching needs. In 1981, the board granted approval, and the Faculty Development Program, with its own budget and a staff of two part-time faculty members who serve as coordinators, was established within the provost's personnel office. From the beginning, the high-level institutional and board support has been a significant enhancement for the program from the point of view of both the faculty and the administration. It showed the university was serious about addressing these needs. The entire university community, including the Board of Regents and even the faculty, who are skeptical at best regarding any new administrative unit, has welcomed the program and given it full cooperation.

Of course, there were clear reasons behind the creation of *this* program. Like most universities, NIU already had other programs which were also "faculty development," broadly defined: sabbaticals, internally-funded summer research stipends, an office to assist faculty with external research funding, a program for improving teaching and rewarding outstanding teaching. The new program, the only one called "faculty development," addressed needs unmet by the older programs but fully as legitimate and consequential for the university's intellectual health.

In emphasizing this personal approach toward faculty, NIU is in line with many other schools across the country during the last twenty years. Though the tradition of sabbaticals goes back to the 1880s, in general, "faculty development" programs have existed only since the 1960s, and formal, national recognition of faculty development as an important function of higher education is even more recent. 1974 was the watershed year: the Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges initiated a program that supplied faculty development facilitators, and *Change* magazine published "Faculty Development — A Time of Retrenchment," which accurately predicted that the 80s would

have to be a time for resourcefulness. Development programs changed dramatically after this, to recognize faculty as total human beings working in academic settings with needs that more often than not exceeded what sabbaticals and the usual incentives could provide. NIU's program conforms to this trend, away from the early 20th century typing of faculty as "professors," whose needs are generic, predictable, strictly professional, and static throughout a career, to the modern perception of faculty as individuals whose needs are specific, unique, personal as well as professional, and continually growing throughout a career.

Barriers to Development

But all this does not mean that the new program would meet no obstacles. A specially designed program was needed because there are a number of barriers to faculty members' changing their careers. The time-honored traditions of colleges and university structure, including disciplinary departments, mean that the institution is slow to change and therefore slow to respond to the needs of those who work within it. The pressure of tradition is for permanence and constancy among faculty. Under these circumstances, it is frightening for a faculty member to decide to make a change in his/her career. The investment of time and money over several years is one concern. Loss of a reputation or of prestige developed through years of scholarly work is another. And there are more elemental fears: will tenure be jeopardized? Will rank be risked? How much time and money will be lost in making a shift? Considerations such as these loom so large that change is beyond serious consideration even though faculty may be dissatisfied with what they are doing or perceive that their personal and professional satisfaction could be improved in another area.

This emphasizes the negative however. There is a strong positive side. What is often overlooked by individual faculty and the institutional officers who could respond to the need for career redirection are the numerous generic skills and the level of intellectual sophistication a mature faculty member brings to a new career track. The seasoned scholar, with 15 or 20 years of experience in conducting research, writing and teaching, has proven talents that are attractive to many

other disciplines within the university. The NIU program seeks to lower the barriers to faculty career development by capitalizing upon the capabilities the faculty member already possesses.

Conducting the Program

To initiate the program, it was necessary to create a climate of collegiality and trust between the faculty member who wants to change and the Faculty Development Coordinators who can assist with the change. There follows a thorough examination and discussion of options, which include such already-existing avenues of assistance for faculty development (broadly defined) as internal and external research support, support for the improvement of teaching, and the sabbatical program. After issues are clear, the coordinators construct a development plan for the individual concerned, carefully tailored to meet that individual's needs. It protects the faculty member's professional status and explains in detail expectations and objectives; it provides the means to accomplish those objectives — released time for teaching or other responsibilities, assistance for travel, maintenance, and tuition.

In keeping with the principle of cutting through institutional "red tape," the program is administered in a refreshingly simple and streamlined manner. Essential to the program is the rule that the individual faculty member must initiate the process. Without a prior motivation for change and some initiative by the faculty member, no successful program could be achieved. With it, however, almost anything is possible. From the individual's point of view, enthusiasm for an academic career is rekindled; from the university's point of view, a disinterested or dissatisfied faculty member is improved and morale is raised.

In most cases, the period of transition (retraining) takes from one to three years, usually preceded by a significant amount of beginning-level retraining by the faculty member working on his/her own. Plans may range in cost from \$10,000 to \$20,000 and may extend over four fiscal years. While this is a significant for the university, when weighed against the alternatives (hiring additional staff or having no staff at all in a developing area) and the benefits (satisfied faculty,

prudent use of skilled, already-proven individuals), it is not by any means excessive. And because there is a "multiple effect" (i.e. money contributed in support of a plan by the Faculty Development Program is matched by significant contributions by both the college and department), maximum benefit is derived from the program's budget. Furthermore, the chances for a successful transition are high. Those who are unsure about changing careers lose interest early, during the planning and discussion stage.

The early planning stage contributes significantly to success in achieving the objectives of a faculty member's development plan. The consultation and planning that precedes approval of the formally documented agreement is a demanding procedure which is in part specifically designed to counsel out the ambivalent or faint of heart. During this stage, the coordinators, working closely with the individual and on behalf of the individual with administrators on all levels, reach agreement on literally dozens of issues, large and small: reduction of teaching load, tenure transfers, new courses to be taught upon completion of the retraining period, identification of off-campus sites for training experiences or additional course work, procedures for regularly monitoring and evaluating progress during the transition period, a formula for departmental merit evaluations during the retraining period, and others. In all these matters, all parties (chairs, deans, the provost, and the individual faculty member) must agree, and all are encouraged to contribute. Departments, colleges, and the faculty development office contribute financially while the major contribution by the individual is time and effort. The document which is eventually signed by all parties scrupulously protects the faculty member in matters of salary, tenure, and rank.

Individual Cases

So far the program has produced three broad kinds of proposals. These represent a profile of faculty development plans facilitated by the program coordinators. The plan for Charles F. Wellcamp, for example, addressed the needs of an older faculty member who returns from an administrative role after several years of service and finds himself no longer current in his field. In offering him assistance to

become familiar with the application of microcomputer technology to secondary teacher education, the program has not only revitalized his academic career but has also provided instruction for students who will need to know microcomputer technology when they launch their careers as secondary education teachers. Prior to Professor Wellcamp's retraining, microcomputer literacy had not been part of the training of secondary school teachers at NIU.

The second broad type of agreement is represented by the plan for Professor Foster. It also involves computers, but does so in a far more dramatic way since it involves a faculty member's shift not merely into a new specialization within her present discipline but into an entirely new field — a professorial position in computer science. In this instance, Professor Foster is moving from a different college — from Education to Liberal Arts and Sciences. Her transition required special provisions in the agreement to detail clearly the arrangements for eventual transfer of tenure and rank, for salary adjustments, for merit review by peer personnel bodies, and for many other issues. The plan carefully outlines steps of Professor Foster's move and represents administratively the most demanding sort of agreement the Faculty Development Program has been called upon to make. In cases like this, the faculty member is literally beginning to build a career anew, and this introduces risks along with potential benefits. The Faculty Development Program was created to make possible career shifts scarcely thinkable till now; it does so by minimizing the risks and by making the potential benefits materialize.

The third kind of agreement is the most common. In it, a faculty member who has been in a theoretical area wishes to move into an applied area within the same discipline. In Professor Wolfe's case, the desire to refocus his career into the sociology of aging coincides with his department's general move into applied sociology — the development of a criminal justice emphasis. An investigation Professor Wolfe conducted as part of his agreement uncovered a breath of interest in the study of aging across the entire campus. One corollary benefit to Professor Wolfe's retraining is that a pan-university committee was created to move toward collaborative teaching and research in this new area. NIU already has several outstanding scholars in the study of the social, physical, and mental aspects of aging and it is ripe

for organized expansion into this area. Again, not only is the individual served by the shift, but the institution is as well.

Faculty Reactions to the Program

Faculty response to the program has been exciting to witness. As faculty members explore the possibilities of growth into areas of interest or discover ways of moving more quickly and assuredly to the cutting edge of their present discipline, they react most enthusiastically and energetically.

Because of this highly favorable response, the program enjoys several advantages. Since it was conceived to address the needs of a few faculty, rather than large numbers, quality of individual plans is emphasized over the quantity of contracts written in a given year. Also, other than through a brochure detailing the program and some general announcements regarding it, the special help which the Faculty Development Program can provide is communicated primarily by word of mouth. Very little in the way of promotion has been needed.

Responses of approximately 40 faculty members who have contacted the coordinators for conferences vary from almost complete disbelief to guarded jubilation when the individual learns what assistance is possible in a plan thoughtfully prepared that meets the program's criteria. Comments range from "I never thought the institution really cared about what happened to me once I had committed myself to one department in the University," to "I didn't even consider the possibility of changing my life in academia — it appeared any revitalization was going to come from things outside my work." The enthusiasm and energy put into replanning an academic career, sometimes by one who is beyond mid-life, is marvelous to behold. Sharing in this planning reassures the Faculty Department Coordinators about the need for this type of development opportunity and the benefits it has to offer.

Future Development of the Program

Now that the program is well established and the ways it can help faculty are more apparent, the coordinators are focusing their efforts upon expanding the forms of assistance and streamlining the proce-

cedure for having the plans approved. Several ideas have been generated from brainstorming, participant and advisory group reactions, interaction with administrators, and from personal reflection by the coordinators after one-and-a-half years of experience. One idea, for example, is to identify faculty across the campus who have altered their careers on their own. Although they accomplished their transition before the Faculty Development Program was established, these people serve as impressive models to whom aspiring faculty can be directed to get more ideas about development opportunities and how their personal development — now with university support — can be accomplished. Successful faculty development projects undertaken before the program was initiated have helped in formulating new faculty development plans more quickly, be of a higher quality, and succeed with far fewer obstacles than before.

Another idea is to organize opportunities for interested faculty to meet in small, informal groups to explore options in the development process and possibly to meet with faculty who have already successfully completed plans through the program. Still another thought for the future is to create an organizational network that provides more development experiences outside the university at a reasonable cost and with a minimum of inconvenience to faculty members. For example, the program could identify opportunities for domestic faculty exchanges, internship positions in business or industry, or involve faculty in a mentoring program with colleagues at other institutions. All of these are possibilities for expansion of the NIU Faculty Development Program.

Conclusion

In its first year and a half, the Faculty Development Program at NIU has established itself as responsible and compassionate. It addresses the twin needs of institutional concern for high-level productivity and for a prompt response to shifting societal needs on the one hand, and of some faculty members' desire for a change in their careers on the other hand. These problems, which are in bold relief during difficult times, exist in milder forms during even the best of times. Northern's Faculty Development Program is an administrative re-

sponse that addresses these problems in difficult, as well as the best, of times. Indeed, in growth periods, institutions have responded to change by adding new faculty, not by retraining existing faculty. If institutions considered retraining even during the good times, however, the bad times might not be as severe. Thus, NIU's Faculty Development Program is a program for all seasons and is providing national leadership in the area of staff planning at large institutions.