Senior Faculty Career Attitudes: Implications for Faculty Development

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In 1988, we conducted an in-depth survey of senior college faculty to determine their attitudes toward their careers. Specifically, we studied the relationships among personal development, career development, and job satisfaction. In this essay we first summarize the data and analyze faculty satisfaction and development. We then consider the implications of all this for faculty development efforts, with the hope that research on faculty behavior and attitudes can influence faculty development programs.

Method

We distributed a 20 page questionnaire to 1564 senior faculty at six institutions in central Virginia. The colleges represented almost the entire range of higher educational institutions (a community college, a small traditionally black university, a liberal arts college, two small universities, and a large research university), thereby representing the diversity of American higher education. "Senior faculty" was defined as all tenured faculty at the rank of full, associate, or assistant professor.*

Of the 1564 questionnaires sent out, 1135 were returned for a response rate of 74%, well above the norm for surveys of faculty. Eighty-two percent of the respondents are male; 18% female. Ninety-four percent are white.

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*At one surveyed institution, there is no tenure, but a system of multi-year contracts.

Findings

We divided the data into two categories: job satisfaction, and personal and career matters, and tested for significant differences among disciplinary categories, races, and genders.

Satisfaction

General satisfaction levels are high. Nearly half (47%) of all respondents reported being "very satisfied" with their faculty careers; most of the others (44%) reported being "somewhat satisfied," while less than 10% indicated they were "not very satisfied" or "not at all satisfied." These percentages did not differ significantly by either institution or discipline. Further, fully 87% of respondents reported their careers to be at least as satisfying as they had expected upon entry into the profession, although significant differences were found by discipline, ranging from 70% among the humanities faculty to more than 90% of those in the health professions. Eighty-two percent of all respondents would "probably" choose a faculty career again.

As expected, ratings of overall satisfaction were significantly related (at either .001 or .01) to many other survey variables. Positive correlations with satisfaction included satisfaction with use of abilities, satisfaction with advancement, degree to which faculty found their current lives rewarding, rank, time devoted to faculty roles, perceived influence, consistency of interest in a specialty area since graduate school, perception of when their best work was done, anticipated retirement age, and personal health. Inverse correlations with satisfaction were found with the extent to which faculty were feeling "stuck" in their careers, the extent to which they questioned whether "this is all there is," feelings of restlessness, interest in or chances of moving to another institution or career, and existence of unmet goals.

Variables *not* related significantly to overall satisfaction included: years as a faculty member and years at current rank; importance of research to the institution; effort compared to others in the discipline; most important accomplishments, by type (teaching, research, service); and all demographic variables.

To determine which combination of responses best predicted overall satisfaction, we undertook a stepwise multiple regression analysis, using overall satisfaction as the criterion variable. A total of 16 predictor variables emerged from this analysis (p .05), accounting for 71% of the variance in satisfaction (Table 1). Not surprisingly, the strongest single

predictor was the extent to which the respondent's career had met or exceeded expectations. Of the next four variables, three (amount of recognition from administration, perceived influence in the department or school, and satisfaction with standard of living) reflected characteristics of the institutional environment, while one (career stuckness) reflected a more personal assessment. These five variables together accounted for 57% of the total variance in satisfaction.

Personal and Career Matters

Career History. Confirming findings by Sorcinelli (1985) and Fuhrmann, Armour, Wergin, and Janha (1988), survey faculty in the humanities decided to enter academe earliest (55% in undergraduate school or earlier), and those in the professions decided latest (70% in graduate school or later). For all respondents, either the desire to teach or the attraction of the academic lifestyle was most often highlighted as the single most important motivator in their decision to become professors, with significant differences by discipline ($X^2 = 128.86$; p .001).

TABLE 1
Stepwise Multiple Regression: Overall Satisfaction

Variable	Cumulative R^2
1. Satisfaction vs. expectations as graduate student	29
2. Recognition received from administration	42
3. Extent to which career is "stuck" (negative)	49
4. Perceived influence in department or school	53
5. Satisfaction with standard of living	57
6. Feelings of "restlessness" in career (negative)	59
7. Feeling "free" (vs. "tied down")	61
8. Interest in same specialization since tenure	63
9. Self-rating of performance: Service	64
10. Commitment to work	65
11. Importance of other scholarly/creative activities to institution	66
12. Satisfaction with how time spent	67
13. Satisfaction with variety in work	68
14. Opportunities for community service	69
15. Importance of research activities to self	70
16. Recognition received from faculty outside institution	71

Compared to other fields, a larger percentage of faculty in the humanities (40%) were motivated by the desire to teach, while a larger percentage of social scientists ranked academic lifestyle (35%) as their major motivator. A consistent minority of faculty (11% to 15%) in the natural sciences, social sciences, and health professions also listed the opportunity or the desire to do research as the single most important motivator in making their initial career decisions.

Professional Activity and Accomplishments. These senior faculty reported that they spend about 50 hours a week on the job. Significant differences were found by disciplines (F = 13.93; p .001). Faculty in the humanities and the health professions indicated they spend the greatest number of hours (53) working, while those in other professions the fewest (45). The respondents invest about the same level of effort as when they first received tenure. They spend about 45% of their time in teaching, 24% in service, 21% in research, and 8% in other creative/scholarly activities. Significant differences were found among the disciplines for each of the major categories of effort. Among the disciplines, humanities faculty spend the most time teaching; health professionals spend the most in service; natural scientists spend the most in research; and other professionals spend the most in other scholarly/creative activities. In contrast, the health professionals spend the lowest percentage of their time teaching, other professionals in research, and natural scientists in other creative/scholarly activity.

Across the board, senior faculty reported remaining active in teaching, serving, and researching. Within the last five years a majority of these faculty have published articles (77%), taught new courses (68%), received outside funding (63%), acted as paid consultants (60%), experimented with alternative teaching methods (60%), and served in elected or appointed posts in professional organizations (53%).

Overall the respondents rated themselves "very good" to "excellent" in teaching, "very good" in service, "good" to "very good" in research, and "very good" in other creative/scholarly activities. About two-thirds of the respondents felt their immediate supervisors would rate them "better than average" compared to other faculty in their divisions; 80% agreed with this rating.

When looking at these same components of their work, the respondents see teaching as "very important" and service as "somewhat important" to them. Teaching was viewed as less important to the institution than to the respondents themselves, while the reverse was true for research activities.

Ninety-three percent believe they have at least equal control with outside forces over their career, with 68% feeling they control most or all of their careers. Despite this feeling of control, 42% of the respondents indicated that since being awarded tenure, they have felt "stuck" at some point in their academic career development. A greater percentage of faculty in the humanities (55%) than in the other disciplines had this sense of "stuckness" ($X^2 = 17.66$; $p < .01$). Factors the respondents gave most often that contributed to this feeling of "stuckness" were lack of funding, diminished energy, conflicts with administration, being outside the "in group," an unchanging work environment, and lack of intellectual stimulation and opportunity.

When faculty were asked to list their most important professional accomplishments, 53% of the entries dealt with teaching-related activities, 25% with research/scholarly activities, 11% with service-related activities, and 11% with other activities. Significant differences were found among the disciplines ($X^2 = 56.85$; $p < .001$). A larger percentage of faculty in the humanities (62%) and in the other professions (58%) indicated "teaching" more often, while a larger percentage of faculty in the natural (43%) and social (33%) sciences listed "research."

Almost two-thirds (63%) of the respondents indicated they had developed a "niche" for themselves within the institution; of these, 28% listed an area related to teaching, 22% to service, 17% to research/scholarship, and 33% to other areas. Over half (55%) indicated they had developed a niche beyond the institution; of these, 7% related to teaching, 17% to service, 17% to research/scholarship; and 60% related to other areas. Only a small percentage of the respondents (15%) indicated they had already done their best work; and others indicated either that they were currently doing their best work (43%) or that their best work was still ahead of them (42%). A significantly greater percentage of those in the social sciences (51%) and the humanities (48%) than in the other disciplines believed their best work is yet to be done ($X^2 = 18.73$; $p < .01$).

Career/Life Issues. These faculty, with a mean age of 50, are experiencing traditional midlife issues. A majority agrees that they are examining their lives more now (65%), that they are more committed to their work (70%), that they are thinking about their legacies (66%), that they feel more vital (59%), that they are concerned about the amount of time they have left in life (56%), and that their work loads are heavier (63%). A majority disagrees that "this is all there is in life" (65%), that they are becoming bored (72%), and that they feel very restless in their careers

(69%). They are split evenly on whether they have more opportunities for continued growth and development than they have had previously. On issues concerning the relationship between their professional and personal lives, they are split evenly on whether the most important things in their lives involve work, and a slender majority (53%), except for the humanities faculty (63%), agrees that it is difficult to draw the line between work and leisure. The respondents tend to agree that their moods depend on how their work is going (67%) and that other things (e.g., personal/family life) in life are more important than work (73%), even though 60% also agrees that they tend to subordinate other aspects of their lives to their work.

When asked to describe their lives right now, most tended toward the adjectives "interesting," "enjoyable," "worthwhile," "full," "hopeful," "free," and "rewarding." They also described themselves as "overworked" and "pressured." None of these descriptions varied significantly by discipline.

Disciplinary Differences

We have learned a great deal about how faculty live their lives differently depending on their disciplines. Very few of the other studies of faculty have taken disciplinary differences into account, yet these differences may help to explain many of the tensions in campus climate. Put simply, members of different disciplines lead different professional lives. They place their emphases differently; they are motivated differently; and they find different avenues to satisfaction. Nevertheless, most studies of faculty have presented the professoriate as if it were a single homogeneous group.

Areas of commonality do exist among the disciplines. There are no significant differences by discipline in overall satisfaction. There also are no significant differences by discipline in interests in moving to another institution, in making plans to leave present institutions, or in expected retirement age.

On the other hand, there are areas of significance which help us identify a profile of faculty by discipline:

Humanities faculty. Of all the disciplines they are most likely to
- spend the highest number of hours per week on the job;
- devote the highest percentage of this time to teaching;
- have been motivated to enter the profession by the desire to teach;
- list teaching as their most important accomplishment;
- say that it is difficult to draw a line between work and leisure;

- collaborate least with colleagues;
- say they are stuck in their present jobs;
- claim that there is a gap between their expectations for the profession and the reality.

    Social Scientists. Of all the disciplines they are most likely to

- have been motivated to enter the profession by the academic lifestyle;
- list research as their most important accomplishment;
- want to do further research in the future.

    Natural Scientists. Of all the disciplines they are most likely to

- devote the highest percentage of their time to research;
- list research as their most important accomplishment (with social scientists);
- find their institutional community with colleagues from various departments other than their own (with the humanities and natural science faculty);
- report working less hard than others in their disciplines;
- maintain that they are least likely to hold jobs outside the academy.

    Health Professionals. Of all the disciplines they are most likely to

- spend the most hours working per week (with the humanities faculty);
- devote the highest percentage of their jobs to service and the lowest percentage to teaching;
- move to other institutions;
- spend an extra five hours a week in leisure or family activities;
- collaborate with colleagues on professional matters;
- discover high correspondence between expectations for the profession and the reality.

    Other professionals. Of all the disciplines they are most likely to

- work the least number of hours per week (still far above the national work week of forty hours);
- devote the highest percentage of their hours to creative/other scholarly activities and the least amount to research;
- spend five extra hours a week in leisure and family activities (with health professionals).

Minority Differences

For the purpose of this report all minorities (Asians, Blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics) were grouped together to give a sufficiently large sample. A more detailed analysis of racial and gender differences in responses can be found in Armour, Fuhrmann, and Wergin, (1990). There was no difference in overall satisfaction between minority faculty and their

white colleagues. There were, however, some significant differences on specific items.

Minority faculty have been at their institutions significantly less time than their white colleagues and spend less time in their roles as faculty each week. They are more likely to decide to enter the profession out of a desire to help others. They believe that their institutions value teaching and service more highly and research less highly. They personally rank service and research higher to themselves. They are twice as likely to be making plans to leave their current institutions and to move to different careers. They are more inclined to believe they work harder than others in their disciplines. They are less satisfied with the quality of their higher administrations and more satisfied with their students. They are less satisfied in seeing the results of their work, but they agree that they are thinking about leaving legacies. They disagree more that it is difficult to draw a line between work and leisure. They are more inclined to find life "easy," "free," and "easy going." They are most inclined to find their institutional communities in their institution as a whole rather than in their departments. They are almost twice as likely to be responsible for a dependent adult.

In sum, minorities gave significantly different responses from white colleagues on 26 of 132 comparisons.

Gender Differences

While, again, there was no difference in overall satisfaction, of the 132 comparisons women gave significantly different responses from male colleagues on 65 items (49%). Women have spent less time at their institutions, less time in rank, and less time tenured. They tend to be at the lower ranks and to concentrate in the professional disciplines rather than the natural sciences. They spend a higher percentage of their time teaching and less doing research; and, not surprisingly, they rank teaching more important and research less important to themselves personally. They are more likely to believe that their most important accomplishments lie in teaching rather than research or service. They rate themselves better teachers and servers and worse researchers. They are less likely to claim higher than average influence within their institutions, and they are less likely to believe they have niches at their institutions. They rate their chances of moving to other careers higher. They are more likely to claim they spend more time working now than when they entered the profession. They are more satisfied than male colleagues with their recognition from students – but less satisfied with a wide variety of aspects of professional

and personal life: use of abilities, pursuit of professional interests, use of time, professional collaboration, advancement, physical working conditions, job security, teaching load, use of leisure time, and community service. Nevertheless, they are more likely to say that their lives are "worthwhile," "full," and "rewarding," but that they are "overworked" and "pressured." Personally, they are most likely to find their social communities from people from within their departments. Given five additional hours a week, women are more likely than men to wish to spend it on personal leisure and less likely to wish to spend it with their families. They are more likely to anticipate retiring early, to have never married, to have no children at home, and to have no responsibility for a dependent adult.

Since women differ significantly from their male colleagues on nearly half of the survey items, it is clear that the genders see the profession quite differently. Both men and women are generally satisfied with the profession, but women are attracted to different aspects of the job and frustrated by some of the key components of the academy.

Discussion

This study took a broad look at faculty careers, as reported by faculty members themselves. Our evidence supports the view that senior faculty remain internally controlled, vital, and productive. Ninety percent express overall satisfaction with their careers, and nearly as many would choose an academic career if they could make the decision again. Level of satisfaction does not vary significantly by race, gender, or academic discipline.

The vast majority of faculty have remained active in all three areas of teaching, scholarship, and service. Faculty see the various components of their jobs as important to themselves and to their institutions. They rate their abilities high in all three areas. More than two-thirds express strong feelings of control over their careers, meaning that they can decide how much time to devote to an activity, where to put their major emphases, and when to shift from one interest to another. Adult development theory supports the ideas that to be content, adults must view what they are doing as important to them and to their employers and they must have some measure of control over the important decisions in their lives (Erikson, 1982; Levinson, 1978, 1986). The high level of satisfaction among faculty is in part owing to their sense of efficacy and control.

Levinson (1978) discussed the importance of adults finding a niche, and we have seen that most faculty believe that they have found a special

place for themselves either in their institutions or in their disciplines. Most also feel more vital and committed to their work than ever before, and they report that they are presently doing their best work or have yet to do it.

In this survey we see evidence of the importance of administrative support to faculty satisfaction. In particular we have seen that recognition for faculty from administrators is one of the best predictors of faculty satisfaction. Lawrence and Blackburn (1988) and Boice (1986) found the congruence of faculty and administrative views on the importance of teaching a major factor in satisfaction. Although they and we have studied different aspects of faculty careers, we have all come to realize the important role administrators play in the level of faculty satisfaction.

Implications for Faculty Development

One of the primary reasons for undertaking this research was to provide us with information that would better enable us to assist faculty in our own institution with the development of their careers. We wanted our faculty development efforts to be guided by research data. From among various interpretations of the results, we offer the following observations about the relationships between faculty views of their careers and faculty development programs.

1. Published reports tend to view senior faculty from either an *institutional* or an *individual* perspective (Caffarella, Armour, Fuhrmann, and Wergin, 1989). Institutional portraits paint bleak pictures of senior faculty who increase costs, reduce flexibility, and create problems of low morale and stagnation. When faculty are viewed from their own perspectives, a different picture emerges: senior faculty are satisfied, productive, and vital. Middle age, from this point of view, is a time of change, growth, and increasing influence.

Both of these perspectives are essential if one wishes to develop a full picture of college faculty. In terms of faculty development, institutions need to be challenged to view faculty from the vantage point of the individual faculty member and to provide an environment which encourages individual faculty to use their creative energies most effectively. Administrators and faculty developers need to view senior faculty not as burdens, but as internally controlled adults, full of energy and clear about what they want to do with their lives. In short, we need to think less about how to impose teaching skills upon a recalcitrant faculty and more about how to uncover latent talents and provide a means for their expression.

2. Senior faculty values related to teaching, research, and service often differ from perceived institutional values concerning these areas. While most faculty see themselves as productive overall, they believe that their emphases on teaching, research, and service differ from those of administration. In particular, faculty tend to hold teaching more important than they believe the institution does and research as less important. There are wide differences among faculty on their views of the importance of teaching and research, but their match with perceived institutional values is not good.

Faculty are clearly tuned into the "business of the business" (Zemsky, 1989). They know what it takes to be successful at their institutions and are keenly aware of the paradoxical nature of rhetoric vs. rewards. They look for signals from the administration as to what is important. Greater correspondence is required between espoused values and values-in-use. Faculty become demoralized when they hear administrators voicing public concern for teaching but then hear only about research at promotion time.

The fact that women differ even more strongly than men from perceived institutional values is important. The centrality of teaching in the lives of many female faculty is bound to affect the institutional climate as women enter the profession in increasing numbers and rise in rank.

These differences provide an opportunity to examine institutional values closely. Perhaps the institution, its students, and society in general would be best served with renewed commitment to teaching.

Nevertheless, the value of research remains important. All concerned with higher education must renew serious examination of the relationship between teaching and research, and must develop behaviors that are consistent with their rhetoric. For faculty development programs, a renewed emphasis on teaching and learning demands greater attention to assisting faculty in examining and improving their teaching behaviors.

3. A number of variables related to satisfaction are heavily influenced by the institutions: recognition from administrators, perceived influence, and congruence between personal interests and institutional values. The perceptions of administrators concerning the value of faculty — and their actions on behalf of faculty — have clear impact on faculty satisfaction. In order to provide support for faculty, administrators must be fully aware of faculty efforts and successes, must communicate respect, and must encourage faculty efforts which meet the interests and needs of the faculty as well as those of the institution. The faculty development program needs

to work with administrators and faculty to recognize different mechanisms for acknowledging achievement.

4. Significant disciplinary differences exist regarding faculty activities, interests, and needs. Gender, age, and racial differences are also evident. Faculty from different groups may appear alike in overall satisfaction, but they differ significantly about the details of that satisfaction. The very nature of the career of a humanities professor differs in important ways from that of, say, a professor in the health professions.

Faculty development should vary by discipline, race, and gender, paying more attention to the communities to which faculty relate. For example, faculty development in a liberal arts department should be different from that in social work or sculpture. Faculty development programs might also want to consider how the strengths of one department might be used to enhance development in another quite different department. For example, perhaps humanities faculty, who value teaching and who teach most often, could be used to assist faculty outside the humanities in developing teaching skills. Or perhaps English and art teachers could compare techniques for providing subjective and personal feedback to students about their creative endeavors.

5. Senior faculty experience traditional issues of midlife, and institutions need to be aware of the implications for the way faculty do their jobs. For example, it is common for people in midlife to become more concerned about leaving legacies. They want to have an impact on the next generation, to make their marks. This might mean that faculty become interested in mentoring junior faculty or graduate students. Or they might begin to devote more time to writing their *opus magnus*. Administrators need to be aware of shifting values.

Administrators and faculty developers must appreciate the important issues of midlife and recognize the implications of them for career development. Simply stated, institutions need to remember that the issues facing young, untenured faculty are quite different from those facing midlife faculty. Faculty development programs must be informed about the chief themes of adult development literature.

6. The foregoing observations suggest that the most meaningful faculty development may occur within departmental settings, with chairs assuming major responsibility. We might decentralize faculty development activities as far as possible and make them consistent with the pedagogy of individual disciplines. We must recognize different departmental cultures and missions, and might do so by relying especially on departmental

chairs for local initiatives. Faculty development programs should also provide support for chairs.

There are problems with this implication. Most chairs are not trained for this role and frankly have other priorities for their own workloads. Additionally, there are different types of chairs, and some are personally better suited to this role than others. Some chairs do not even see a problem with faculty. (One recently told us, "Good teachers are born; there is little I can do to improve a bad one.") One goal, therefore, of faculty development programs should be to equip chairs to assist their faculty. Chair development is the first step to faculty development.

7. A relatively small group of faculty (about 10%) are seriously unhappy with their careers and are unlikely to be productive. The problems they create are disproportionate to their numbers. When administrators think of the problem faculty on their campuses, they tend to think of people from this group. When they think of faculty development, they often think of programs which will solve problems for these faculty. In a small department, in particular, these faculty can be quite visible.

Faculty development programs should deal with these faculty on a case by case basis. Their problems should not be ignored, but they also should not be allowed to define faculty development for all faculty.

The pervasive theme of the implications of these research findings is that the major goal of faculty development is to help faculty *develop individually*. The emphases must be on *develop* and on *individually*. Most faculty can be encouraged and aided in their efforts to develop to their full potential. Faculty developers and administrators should not look on faculty development as a cure for something that is wrong since most faculty are working well toward their own and their institution's goals. The best faculty development program will be one which understands career issues, midlife changes, and individual differences.

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