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Selected Characteristics of New Faculty: Implications for Faculty Development

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Faculty new to The Ohio State University take part in a New Faculty Orientation Program. Prior to the 1990 orientation, The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) surveyed the new faculty members as part of our continuing faculty development effort. The survey questionnaire sought to acquire data on new faculty expectations and needs, with emphasis on background information, concerns about professional well-being, and specific expectations about support for their teaching. The survey considered several variables and their interactions: (a) personal characteristics, such as age and gender; and (b) professional characteristics, such as predicted or anticipated percentage of total appointment designated for teaching, advising responsibilities, and previous teaching experience.

This paper reviews the method of the study and summarizes the findings of the new faculty survey. One should note that, while these findings are applicable to similar research universities, they are not as generalizable to all college and university settings, although other studies suggest there are similar themes across a variety of academic environments (Sorcinelli, 1988; Turner & Boice, 1987; Fink, 1984; Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981). The implications of this study for faculty development are considered with the hope that the findings can benefit other faculty development programs, particularly at other research universities.

Method and Sample Characteristics

The sample surveyed here consisted of 89 new faculty hired between the months of January and July of 1990. The response rate to the survey was 45.6%. The majority of these new faculty (67%) have PhD degrees, with 22% holding professional degrees (e.g., MD, DVM) and the remainder (11%) having master's degrees (e.g., MA, MSW). The average age of the respondents was approximately 33 (range=below 30 to 50 and over). Sixty-one percent were male; 39% were female. Sixty-six percent were appointed in tenure-track positions, 24% to lecturer positions, and 10% were hired with tenure. This sample was heterogeneous with regard to discipline, with nearly all colleges represented.

Findings

The data were divided into two categories: (a) background information characteristics and (b) expectations and concerns. Data were then analyzed using StatWorks for any correlations and significant differences among the variables. StatWorks is a basic statistical software package that offers data sorting and data transformation. The statistical software of this program permits descriptive statistics, cross tabulation of data, t-test, correlation of data, simple and multiple regression of data, and analysis of variance.

Background Information Characteristics

Background information characteristics of the study revealed that 87.5% of the 89 new faculty respondents had previous teaching experience. However, of this 87.5%, only 37% had previous training for teaching, such as formal coursework on teaching, workshops, reading, and internships. One can only infer from this percentage that institutions are not clear on how they place teaching responsibilities. Twenty-five percent indicated that the percentage of total appointment time for teaching was specified. Further analysis of the data indicates a positive correlation (.58) between previous teaching experience and percentage of total appointment time specified for teaching. A perfect correlation (1.00) was found between previous teaching experience and tenure, which strongly suggests that tenure is offered only to new faculty who come from traditional teaching backgrounds, and that teaching plays a vital part in achieving tenure. While there was no significant difference between gender and having tenure, a negative correlation (.56) was found between female faculty members and being on tenure track. This survey also showed that the number of female faculty members that were hired with

tenure was disproportionately low compared to male faculty members hired with tenure. Of the 39% of new female faculty members hired (34), only one was hired with tenure, 22 were not on tenure track, and the remaining 11 were on tenure track.

This study found that 44.4% of the faculty survey respondents had no previous teaching experience as a teaching assistant at a four-year college or university, 76.7% had no previous teaching experience as a tenure-track faculty member at a four-year college or university, and 54.6% had no previous teaching experience either in an adjunct or nontenure position at a four-year college or university. Data pertaining to previous training for teaching revealed that 62.5% of the new faculty who responded to the survey reported having no formal coursework on teaching, and 51.2% had no training in the form of a workshop. This would suggest that teaching is not being looked at seriously as a worthy subject of study among many institutions of higher learning.

Expectations and Concerns

What concerns, if any, do you have about your teaching or advising responsibilities? Many new faculty members expressed concern about the pressure of writing proposals and obtaining grants interfering with their teaching and advising responsibilities. As one assistant professor noted:

I am concerned that I will bend to the pressure of publishing and lose interest in teaching. Even those faculty who have a high commitment to teaching will ultimately lose interest if incentives in the form of raises and promotion lie elsewhere.

Respondents also expressed concern about the impersonal nature of large-class instruction, and the expectation to teach and adjust to these large classes in addition to finding how to acquire and develop new teaching skills. Further, they shared concerns regarding freedom to teach what faculty felt was important as well as learning effective approaches to designing a new course. Anticipating their advisory role and being unfamiliar with Ohio State rules and policies, a few of the new faculty were a bit apprehensive about advising students.

What are your expectations regarding the satisfactions connected with being a faculty member? The respondents listed several areas of satisfaction connected with being a faculty member. For the most part, these areas were teaching and contact with students. Many expressed satisfaction in watching students learn and being challenged to stretch their own learning with new ideas.

Probably the greatest satisfaction is knowing that one had kindled the interest of curiosity in a student where little or none was obvious before.

Other areas of anticipated satisfaction in being a faculty member that were reported include: having a secure job and income, being surrounded by professional colleagues and eager students, having a successful record of publication and funding, having freedom in work hours and location, and maintaining contact with colleagues nationally.

What are your expectations regarding the frustrations you will experience as a faculty member? Many respondents expected problems with time management and being “pulled” in too many directions—wearing the teacher, researcher, and service hats. Consistent with other findings (Sorcinelli, 1988), they also anticipated frustration with the administration concerning curriculum development, conflicting pressures of research versus teaching, and, in particular, not gaining recognition for teaching and professional service during tenure hearings. Another assistant professor stated:

I feel totally clueless about how to do anything—start a course, write a proposal, buy equipment, choose a graduate student, you name it. Training is needed for academic growth.

New faculty respondents also anticipated frustrations about not having enough resources for the classroom, not having enough time to do everything that needs to be done, dealing with students who are difficult to motivate, finding a teaching and research balance, being new to the field, and balancing commitments at work and at home.

What experiences thus far have been most helpful in getting you ready to begin your role as a faculty member? Prior experiences in teaching in other capacities, such as being a teaching assistant, being an adjunct professor, or being a tenure-track faculty member provided positive experiences for some faculty members in preparation for their new positions. However, quite a number of the survey respondents stated that the new faculty orientation was the first opportunity presented to them for expanding their professional capabilities.

When asked how the university can further help new faculty as they begin their responsibilities, many new faculty members requested that the Center for Teaching Excellence sponsor quarterly seminars on topics pertinent to research and teaching. Some of the respondents even went a step further to suggest establishing a mentoring program, supervising their classroom teaching, holding presentations throughout the year on ways to improve instruction, and circulating descriptive literature about available teaching

resources (e.g., human, technical, and audiovisual support). One visiting assistant professor even boldly suggested having voluntary sessions for new professors at which they could give lectures to one another and receive peer feedback. Another assistant professor wrote:

In graduate school, I had a network of support, but now I feel like I'm in this alone.

Discussion and Implications for Faculty Development

This study took a broad look at the background information characteristics and concerns and expectations of new faculty, as reported in a survey. It was conducted based on the assumption that the factor most predictive of success in faculty development is depth of knowledge about faculty. In other words, information about major faculty characteristics—their concerns, talents, and deficiencies—is fundamental to an effective program of professional growth (Blackburn, Behmyer, & Hall, 1978; Wergin, Mason, & Munson, 1976). The findings indicate that faculty see the beneficial effects of opportunities to further their professional growth. In general, results from the survey suggest that many of the new faculty members support the statement that effective time management and excellence in teaching are essential.

New faculty arrive with various experiences, skills, and knowledge. Some are experienced educators; others have never been in a classroom in the role of instructor (Miami-Dade Community College, 1989). As indicated from this survey, approximately half can be expected to have had previous employment experience in other areas of the country. This diversity, and the fact that new faculty are appointed to their positions at different times during the year, mandate that faculty and instructional development offices provide resources for individualized guidance and support. As one professor remarked in this survey, there is a need for flexibility so that attention to various needs can create a climate conducive to maximum faculty development and performance. In planning faculty development programs to accommodate diversity within new faculty, it is important to allow for a wide range of opportunities. Programs such as new faculty orientation, therefore, should include activities that support faculty in various stages of their professional careers.

Some of the findings from this study are consistent with those of Baldwin and Blackburn (1981), in that faculty characteristics, expectations, and

concerns are much broader than just assistance with teaching. Faculty development programs now need to broaden their focus to include many of the professional, organizational, and developmental concerns of new faculty. Many of the new faculty anticipated concerns about the campus administration. There needs to be a strong relationship between key campus administrators and faculty development offices to make administrators more aware and understanding of the relevant issues involved in their role in developing a productive faculty. Experiences at our campus have shown that this relationship is vital in promoting teaching excellence.

It is clear that faculty new to the university need to feel welcome, to develop collegial relationships and a sense of belonging, and to identify with the college or university. This suggests certain roles that faculty and instructional development staff need to assume in order to be particularly effective. Perhaps a process is needed whereby faculty mentors or associates are selected, trained, and assigned to new faculty to provide support during the first year of appointment.

From the literature base and knowledge gained from this survey, one may infer that gaining information about background characteristics, expectations, and concerns will further help in the instructional development efforts and needs of some faculty. It can help the instructional development staff determine what programs and initiatives would provide the greatest benefit in faculty development. A better understanding of these characteristics is the beginning of awareness in developing strategies designed to enhance a faculty member's knowledge and skills. Many university campuses do a marginal job of aggregating and analyzing information about their new faculty. For example, the information gathered from this survey can help to ascertain the areas in which new faculty feel more at ease and in what aspects they desire help. This would serve to illustrate the need for faculty development specialists to know more about their clientele.

It is important to recognize the significance of continuing faculty development. Strong faculty development programs are crucial to effective teaching at research universities. Our orientation for faculty new to The Ohio State University recently has included attempts to determine new faculty needs and expectations. Our continuing and future faculty development programs can be strengthened and enhanced through incorporation of these findings into our program implementation and program development. Faculty development specialists can play key roles in assisting faculty to cultivate and sustain vital teaching careers by assuming a more active role in assessment of development efforts. A needs assessment for faculty new to the university

must be supported with mentor programs, clear and careful resource development and promotion, and constant evaluation and modification of faculty development programs. Intake assessment and subsequent follow-up provide critical support for new faculty at research institutions.

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