

# ADVANCING HIGHER EDUCATION

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## TOWARD THE PROFESSORiate OF THE FUTURE: CRITICAL QUESTIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND AMERICA

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As it does for other sectors of American society in a 21st century global economy, the October 2008 financial crisis represents a wake-up call for higher education and the professoriate. Because the financial crisis has exposed vulnerabilities in the American and global economic systems, underscoring limits in areas such as resources and credit availability, it increases pressures to make American higher education more cost-effective and productive. A likely decline in public dollars and parental capacity to pay may increase competition among colleges and universities for resources and students, making applications of technology and faculty-institutional collaboration ever more important strategically. Compounding the current uncertainty, higher education is in the midst of a demographic downturn in high school graduates and a generation turnover of its faculty. As is in other fields such as engineering and the medical professions, the supply of qualified candidates for higher education positions may be inadequate to replace the retiring generation.

Colleges and universities that are most successful in this challenging environment will find ways both to respond nimbly and to empower their faculties—their most critical human resource—to achieve their full productive potential.

This will mean an adroit balance of top-down management and collaborative governance, combining urgency, teamwork, and respect for academic freedom. Inter-institutional and international partnerships and exchanges will be an expanding part of the mix as recognition of the interdependencies and diverse interactions within the global system grows. Increased support for faculty professional development and institutional rewards for faculty contributions will become more important in strategic planning and resource allocation.



The foregoing strategic environment frames this essay describing the professoriate of the future. Because there is much to be gained in reducing administrator-faculty tensions and public misunderstanding of faculty that undermine effective institutional functioning and public support for higher education, this piece seeks to humanize the faculty—their training, goals, sources of motivation and satisfaction, their professional needs at various stages of their careers, and the tensions within their professional, family, and personal lives. Such an understanding will help colleges and universities to develop effective policies in partnering with their faculties to meet these daunting challenges. Indeed, successful institutions will take a page from *Good to Great* (Collins, 2001) by engaging and supporting their “good people”—the faculty.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Meeting the higher education challenges of our time ultimately must focus on the faculty. How faculty are trained to be faculty members, their motivation and sources of satisfaction, the match of their expertise and adaptability to educational needs, and the relative health and vitality of their college and university settings are critical in determining the ability of the faculty to serve their institution’s mission and to address society’s educational imperatives in an increasingly interdependent and rapidly changing global environment. The educational challenges of the 21st century are daunting and often contradictory. A complex and divisive world demands improvements in academic quality but, at least in the United States, is less and less willing to pay for it.

The focus of graduate education in preparing faculty has become ever more discipline specialized, but faculty more and more must become pedagogical and cross-cultural specialists able to teach and advise an increasingly diverse student population for local to global careers and citizenship. Faculty must also become educational measurement specialists able to assess student learning outcomes and conduct program reviews for continuous academic improvement, and curriculum specialists able to develop innovative new programs incorporating cutting edge technologies and methodologies meeting the requirements of emerging career fields—all the while satisfying expanding evidence-based accountability demands. And, while graduate education is commonly a lonely and isolating experience, faculty roles are increasingly collaborative—more like the community of scholars’ collegial ideal than ever before!

No one seriously questions that the role of the faculty is essential in meeting these challenges. Yet, the blame for education’s shortcomings, whether concerns about quality, mounting costs, or responses to accountability demands, is frequently laid at the feet of the faculty. But, almost nowhere does higher education provide formal preparation enabling faculty members across the disciplines to gain the diverse expertise on which the success of the educational enterprise rests, afford meaningful educational support as faculty struggle to succeed in a profession with such escalating expectations, nor attempt to understand in any depth the human side of the professoriate as a strategic prerequisite for sustained improvements in academic quality and accountability.

Reflecting forty-plus years as a faculty member and academic administrator in public and private higher education settings across the country, including three positions as a liberal arts dean or chief academic officer, this essay explores questions and issues regarding faculty identity and motivation, graduate preparation, institutional socialization and professional development, workload and work satisfaction, work and family balance, and an array of institutional relationships. It draws on an understanding of faculty perceptions and needs learned from the development and analysis of results from three national opinion surveys of faculty at various career stages and institutional types over the past decade and the creation of faculty professional development programs responsive to findings from these surveys. The goal is to illuminate the faculty experience in ways that assist colleges and

universities to work optimally with faculty members, promoting high satisfaction, productivity, and loyalty, while simultaneously improving academic quality and enhancing the attractiveness of the faculty career.

The evidence suggests that institutions successful in reducing faculty-administration tensions and misunderstandings through partnership and collaborative governance, plus providing professional development supports responsive to various stages of the faculty career, and introducing workload alternatives attuned to individual faculty member talents and interests, will win out as the competition to attract and retain faculty becomes increasingly intense. Such actions will assist institutions to respond nimbly and cost effectively to competitive pressures and to become more attractive to the professoriate of the future during the generation turnover as baby boomer faculty retire in large numbers over the coming decade.

### **THE HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE**

For the most part faculty members are not well-understood and are, perhaps, under-appreciated in the media and by the public at large. Higher education and the nation survived the era of faculty bashing that dominated the decade of the 1990's. At least for the moment, the impacts of the late twentieth-century academic culture wars, political outrage over higher education costs, and criticisms of college learning outcomes have subsided somewhat. Higher education continues to be held in high esteem in a nation fascinated by rankings and student competition to gain admission to the best colleges. In recent years colleges and universities have completed fundraising campaigns on a scale unheard of less than a generation ago and the past decade has witnessed a boom in campus capital construction.

Indeed, there is much to celebrate in the advances that have been made in this decade. Enrollments are at all-time highs, faculty have made gains in salaries, faculty members and administrators at many institutions report improving working relationships, and junior faculty members appear more satisfied than a decade ago with the support their institutions provide during the early career. Many institutions, including large research universities, appear to be becoming more student-centered, providing supports and rewards for teaching effectiveness and expanding opportunities for students to participate in internships, honors programs, service learning, undergraduate research, leadership development, and study abroad. Students, themselves, seek to foster greater community on campus in an era when text-messaging widely symbolizes networking and cooperation.

Yet, there are ominous signs on the horizon. Although American higher education enjoys an unparalleled reputation as a signature American industry in an increasingly competitive global economy, the rest of the world, with China and India leading the way, may be catching up. Certainly, the United States no longer acts as the great magnet for the world's best minds as many countries invest increasingly in their own educational infrastructures. In expanding opportunities for their "best and brightest" these countries may become formidable competitors in producing high quality educational outcomes. Moreover, this phenomenon is occurring as the American faculty "baby boomers" retire in large numbers. Faculty replacements for the baby boom generation have yet to be identified in adequate numbers as graduate program enrollments remain flat and government and industry attract a growing share of new doctorates. Schools already report attracting weak faculty candidate pools in some fields, a trend that is likely to intensify.

Unlike K-12 education where a projected shortage of two million elementary and secondary teachers over ten years was forecast several years ago, higher education has paid insufficient attention to the issue of future faculty supply, other than in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, mathematics). Higher education faculty demand is expected to be significant. North Carolina, for example, has projected a need for 10,000 new faculty over the next decade (Berberet *et al*, 2005). The California State University system expects to hire 1,000 new faculty per year, at least until the middle of the next decade (The California State University, 2005). In 2000 the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada forecast a need for 3,000 new faculty each year through 2010, suggesting that Canadian and American institutions will increasingly compete for the same pool of faculty candidates

(Elliott, 2000). Moreover, the trend that has resulted in less than one-half of current new faculty hires being offered tenure track appointments may further depress future faculty supply (Finkelstein *et al*, 1998).

There is no shortage of global problems that faculty expertise might tackle for societal benefit and student learning. Coming shortages of natural resources, continuing environmental degradation, looming hazards of climate change, and the ongoing threats of poverty, disease, and terrorism cry out for solutions to which the academy might contribute. Faculty will be called on to prepare students in growing numbers who are prepared for effective participation in the global economy. Outcomes of the present financial crisis are still uncertain, but it seems clear that education will play a critical role in maintaining American vitality in a global system where the emerging economies of many countries are growing much faster than that of the United States. Fostering a quest for innovation, an entrepreneurial spirit, and capacities for effective leadership are qualities the academy must nourish in intellectually substantive ways.

### **FACULTY PREPARATION AND MOTIVATION**

Interpreting faculty members' behavior and their roles in shaping the well-being of American higher education begins with an understanding of their graduate school preparation, professional identity and motivation, and campus experiences. Quite literally, persons who become faculty members cherish the life of the mind and scholarly discovery. Surveys consistently demonstrate the powerful motivating role for faculty of the intellectual pursuit of one's academic discipline, a habit nurtured and honed in graduate school (Berberet, 2008; Berberet *et al*, 2005; McMillin and Berberet, 2002). But this isn't all. Faculty members care about students and teaching, whether at a liberal arts college, a research university, a community college, or the rapidly growing comprehensive sector where liberal arts and professional studies are integrated in the curriculum. They also seek a nurturing academic community where collegiality and the community of scholars ideal will have meaning and substance. Finally, faculty members desire to impact and improve their institutions and contribute to societal needs; they become frustrated and alienated when the institutional culture and/or administrative actions appear to thwart these aims. Indeed, growing recognition of what motivates faculty is reflected in the movement toward transparency and collaborative governance and decision-making in faculty-institutional relationships. The ultimate good news, perhaps, is that faculty members say overwhelmingly that they "enjoy their job."

Stereotypes about "publish or perish" and "scholars who can't teach" probably have more to do with the focus of doctoral preparation in the research university setting where all future faculty are trained than with actual faculty values, perceptions, and work habits. Surveys reveal that faculty members in all types of institutions, including research universities, care about students and spend more time teaching than they believe their institutions expect or desire (Berberet *et al*, 2005; Rice *et al*, 2000; Austin and Rice, 1998). Surveys also document that many new faculty feel their graduate work poorly prepared them to teach, advise students, serve on committees, collaborate with colleagues, and think across disciplines (Berberet, 2008; Rice *et al*, 2000). This perception may suggest that graduate schools persist in a one-dimensional research model of future faculty preparation to which many graduate faculty members themselves may not subscribe. Although some graduate schools in the 1990's instituted "preparing future faculty" programs focused on teaching, the lion's share of this preparation appears to be taking place on hiring institution campuses where faculty mentoring, learning communities, teaching circles, advising workshops, scholarly colloquia, and professional development planning are occurring at the behest and with funding support of department chairs, deans, and provosts eager to maintain the currency of faculty expertise, to foster an improved working partnership with faculty, and to enhance student learning outcomes.

Graduate schools have been criticized in the past for failing to take a broad human development approach in doctoral studies leading to academic careers. It may be that a preoccupation with research makes the American graduate school ill-equipped to prepare future faculty for academic settings where student learning outcomes are central to the institutional mission and faculty institutional citizenship critical to effective institutional functioning. Perhaps

hiring institutions are best-equipped to perform these tasks, which it appears they do well on campuses where the tenure probationary tract or some similar full-time faculty “apprenticeship” over a period of years is in place. Hiring institutions appear able to orient new faculty in ways that foster a strategic “fit” with institutional mission, socialization patterns supportive of the particular institutional culture, and faculty-institutional partnership responsive to changing institutional and faculty professional needs over time.

This division of faculty preparatory roles may have its perils, however, due to the generational turnover of the faculty as baby boomer faculty members who started their careers in the higher education growth heyday of the 1960’s and 1970’s retire over the coming decade. Not only is concern growing that there will be a shortage of well-qualified candidates to replace this retiring faculty generation, a fear thin candidate pools in some fields reinforces, but graduate school enrollments have essentially been flat over the past decade. Compounding this situation, surveys of doctoral students suggest both a decline in the attractiveness of the faculty career and dissatisfaction with the direction and lack of support they receive in their graduate programs (Golde & Dore, 2001). Consequently, increasing numbers of new doctorates are choosing careers in government and industry, sectors where the employment demand for holders of the doctoral degree are increasing and salaries are higher. Finally, countries such as China and India that in recent decades have supplied a large percentage of United States graduate students who entered the American professoriate are significantly expanding higher education and absorbing in faculty careers a growing percentage of their nationals, especially in the fields of mathematics, science, engineering, and information technology. The implications that a shortage of qualified new faculty would have for American national security and international competitiveness are sobering (Council of Graduate Schools, 2005).

The imperative to improve student learning outcomes for purposes of national security, international competitiveness, and domestic vitality has its parallel in an imperative to invest in faculty development in order to maintain currency in faculty expertise in a rapidly changing world. Employment demand projections make clear that the American work force of the future will require the effective participation of all of our citizens to meet national economic needs. This effort will require closing the academic achievement gap between wealthy, largely white suburban schools and low-income, high-need inner-city schools where most African-American and Hispanic students reside. Educating an increasingly diverse student population with huge educational needs for a rapidly changing information economy is an awesome challenge. It calls for continuous renewal of faculty expertise, new strategic collaborations between faculty and their institutions, and new ways of using educational resources more effectively, including K-20 partnerships and greater collaboration across higher education sectors.

### **THE EVOLVING FACULTY PROFESSIONAL MODEL**

This human development approach to improve learning outcomes—whether for students or faculty—has significant implications for the faculty professional model which new faculty appear widely to embrace. The revival of the pragmatic American educational tradition extending from John Dewey through Alfred North Whitehead, Ernest Boyer and Alexander Astin has also contributed. Pragmatism assumes a symbiotic relationship between theoretical and experiential knowledge in learning, i.e., that learning occurs both in the classroom and in the world and that understandings of reality are at least partially situated in the particular context of the learner. Such a philosophy supports the growth of internship, undergraduate research, servant leadership, study abroad, and other applied learning programs in recent years, as well as Boyer’s assertion that teaching is the highest form of scholarship. On many campuses, including the mid-size comprehensive members of the Associated New American Colleges, liberal and professional learning are being integrated intentionally in the curriculum in order that education might better serve multiple objectives—enhancing personal meaning, career development, and democratic citizenship.

This exciting new world for higher education, which Peter Senge’s “learning organization” and Donald Schon’s “reflective practitioner” models foreshadowed some two decades ago for colleges and faculty members, respectively, underscores the ability to integrate knowledge across disciplines and the multiple roles faculty must perform for

higher education to achieve its mission in the 21st century. In meeting the challenges, there is evidence of an emerging alliance among early career faculty members, academic administrators who support faculty professional development needs at various career stages and partner strategically with faculty in advancing the institutional mission, and boards of trustees concerned about student outcomes and higher education service to national needs. Early career faculty members are looking for a meaningful academic community and opportunities to help their institutions improve and grow. They appear to be less adversarial in their view of administrators than the generation of faculty they are succeeding and more interested in collaborating to develop programs and to advance the institutional agenda.

Survey data suggest that major strides have been made toward gender equity as women have entered the professoriate in growing numbers in recent years (Berberet, 2008). Significant progress has been made in achieving salary, tenure, and promotion parity, a development reflected in similar levels of professional satisfaction among men and women in academe. Male faculty members have begun to devote amounts of time to home and family responsibilities that are comparable with their female counterparts. Although the data suggests that new female faculty may feel less confident that graduate school has prepared them well for faculty roles and responsibilities than their male counterparts, by early in their careers there is evidence that women feel more in control of their lives and academic careers than men. One can only speculate whether the decline in recent years of gender-related institutional tensions has directly translated into greater faculty willingness to collaborate institutionally. Conversely, it seems clear that early career faculty members expect their institutions to be supportive of their desires to achieve balance in their work and family lives.

Early career faculty appear to have achieved greater balance in their work and family lives than their late career counterparts, but the effort to balance time between teaching and research and work and leisure appears to be increasing as a stressor. Indeed, in a recent survey of ANAC early career faculty members, more respondents reported suffering from stress-related ill-health than those who responded in the negative and both men and women indicated they spend only about seven hours each week in leisure activities with family, friends, and entertainment events (Berberet, 2008). The teaching v. research tension may be a reflection of the ramped up scholarly expectations of faculty across higher education in recent years. Stress-related ill-health would seem to be a warning that although faculty members entering the profession appear less ideological in their views of higher education and cultural issues than late career faculty, tensions about issues such as workload and salaries lay just beneath the surface.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

Colleges and universities would be well-served strategically by working closely with faculty on professional development planning, not only to create a sense of partnership and empowerment in faculty-institutional relationships, but to reflect institutional sensitivity and support for faculty professional needs and aspirations (perhaps personal, as well) at various life and career stages. With the active involvement of administrators, many hiring institutions appear to be effectively meeting orientation and socialization needs of early career faculty on the tenure track. The evidence is less clear that institutions, for example, are systematically nurturing the leadership development capacities and scholarly maturation of mid-career faculty, or addressing the anxiety that time in a rapidly changing world “has passed me by” which older faculty seeking professional renewal often express. Professional development during the mid-career will help to assure career-long vitality. An understanding of adult development theory, including the narrowing of interests and quest for a meaningful legacy of the latter career, can be decisive in helping institutions either to provide late career faculty members with attractive institutional opportunities to make a difference, or, through indifference, to put at risk late career faculty institutional commitment.

That higher education institutions should view faculty members as a critical human resource in the fullest sense of the word is the strategic bottom line of this essay. As learning organizations in a cost-conscious environment, colleges and universities must view faculty expertise as a crucial resource for both student and institutional learning. The former is obvious in an era preoccupied with student learning outcomes. The role of the faculty in the latter is generally under-appreciated in our management-oriented culture. What needs to be more fully recognized is that faculty expertise cuts across all fields necessary to manage institutions and to meet challenges well, and that faculty cooperation and collaboration is essential for optimal organizational efficiency and effectiveness. Who better than faculty, for example, to help their institutions grasp and plan for the dramatic implications of such emerging strategic issues as the sustainability movement which has environmental, energy, infrastructure, curricular, and student life dimensions that affect virtually all facets of campus operations? In the face of such an imperative, when effective action has the potential to save millions of dollars and, also, to better educate students for global realities, the full cost of resource wasteful and organizationally debilitating differences between faculty and administrators is brought into stark perspective.

Consequently, colleges and universities should view the lifelong learning of faculty members as being almost as important as the learning outcomes achieved by students. Faculty members are highly influential as personal and professional role models for students. If some faculty members have a shortcoming it may be that much of their knowledge is largely theoretical, untested through wide and varied worldly experience. This insularity may lead such faculty to communicate a certitude about complex issues that is frustrating to critics on and off campus. All the more reason to be sure that professional development opportunities are in place that provide faculty members with a range of experiences for integrating theory and practice and thought and action, i.e., knowledge from both theoretical and experiential perspectives. In the 21st century world where the settings for knowledge acquisition are rapidly expanding from the traditional school to the Internet and various corporate and academic for-profit institutions, the traditional academy must be vigilant in safeguarding its credibility and relevance to the needs and experience of students and the concerns of the larger public.

### **CONTINGENT FACULTY**

It is hard to write about faculty these days without mentioning, at least in passing, the increasing use of part-time or adjunct faculty, a practice widely viewed as a cost-cutting measure damaging to student learning and exploitive of part-time faculty members. Unquestionably, an over-reliance on adjuncts, especially simply to reduce higher education costs, both exploits such faculty members and denies the institution the many essential roles regular full-time faculty members play beyond the classroom—assessment of learning outcomes, student advising, curriculum development, strategic institutional planning—that shape higher education's well-being. Yet, adjunct faculty also bring unique professional and other expertise and larger world interests that may not be present in the regular full-time faculty. Sophisticated and humane campuses are finding new ways to value and reward the contributions of adjuncts, such as providing fringe benefits, faculty voting rights and promotion opportunities, salaries proportional to workload rather than minimal per course stipends, and greater job security, along with regular performance reviews and access to professional development supports. This not only both safeguards faculty quality and tends toward a single class of faculty but it is the right thing to do.

### **CONCLUSION**

Change may be the only assured reality in looking to the future of faculty and institutions of higher education in an increasingly global context. Our world demonstrates remarkable capacity to create the unsettling and the unexpected, in the process continuously challenging the ability of education to respond. Unquestionably, technology will play an ever greater role in both learning and human efforts to manage the earth, but it also seems clear that the human touch faculty members provide will continue to play a crucial role, especially in undergraduate education. Cost and accountability demands will continue to grow—as the list of claimants for public dollars continues to

grow—pushing institutions and their faculty relentlessly to ever-greater collaboration in the search for synergies and efficiencies. As the availability of well-qualified faculty talent becomes more acute, at least for the next 10-15 years until the rising birth rate might be expected to replenish the supply of new faculty, the marketplace will drive up faculty salaries adding to cost pressures. Inevitably, institutions will make greater investments in faculty professional development both to ensure the currency of faculty expertise and to recruit and retain good faculty members. Far-sighted institutions will devote increasing efforts to understand the likely patterns of the future in strategic terms and to plan with their faculties how to maximize faculty contributions for institutional benefit and high faculty satisfaction.



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