

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT: THE CHALLENGE GOING AHEAD

U.CHANDRAMOULI

Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies
PSCMR College of Engineering and Technology, Kothapet,
Vijayawada-520001

ABSTRACT:

When faculty development is viewed as an ongoing need and when we approach faculty development as a long-term, continuous effort, community building becomes a part of the process. During the last 20 years, there have been major disruptions in higher education including: a decrease in state funding of public institutions, an increase in technology, a shift in student demographics, and a growth of interdisciplinary work. In the past two decades there has been an increase of information and communication technology which has resulted in new ways for higher education to be delivered. As the shifts in higher education require faculty to enhance their skill sets, institutions will need to advance the necessary programs and resources to deliver high-quality faculty development. Historically, faculty development has been centralized and handled university-wide by offices on campus. However, in the last ten years faculty development has been at the department or unit level. As we enter the twenty-first century, faculty developers have identified three areas that are driving change and shaping the future of faculty development.

Key words: Interdisciplinary, Changing Professoriate, Global presence, Diversity, Study groups

Introduction:

When faculty development is viewed as an ongoing need and when we approach faculty development as a long-term, continuous effort, community building becomes a part of the process. Carefully designed faculty development approaches can facilitate and create a culture that supports a thoughtful focus on teaching, while at the same time, nurture a sense of connectedness and collegiality across the organization that is vital to continuous innovation and improvement. This paper focuses on analyzing the various factors to improve the collegial culture at a higher educational organization in India. The growing number of blended, online, and distance education courses, programs, and degrees offered by institutions of higher education offers challenging new opportunities to re-examine teaching and learning. Carefully designed faculty development approaches can create a culture that supports a thoughtful focus on teaching, while nurturing the sense of connectedness and collegiality that is vital to continuous innovation and improvement in post-secondary institutions.

The Future Role of Faculty

During the last 20 years, there have been major disruptions in higher education including: a decrease in state funding of public institutions, an increase in technology, a shift in student demographics, and a growth of interdisciplinary work. These disruptions have produced new needs for higher education to address. As individual institutions begin to address the future needs of higher education, they must pay close attention to the development of faculty. Faculty development is a “strategic lever for institutional excellence and quality, and a critically important tool for fostering institutional readiness and change in response to the array of complex demands facing universities and colleges” (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013, p. 97).

Given the importance of faculty in institutional success this paper discusses more details about each of these disruptions, the future role of faculty, and a few faculty development models worthy of consideration.

The Changing Professoriate

Professors today are facing a growing array of changing roles and responsibilities that will require them to engage in ongoing professional growth. Faculty developers in our study described faculty members as being in the midst of transformational changes to their traditional roles and tasks, and identified several fundamental challenges facing faculty and their campuses.

The Changing Nature of Teaching, Learning:

The changing environment for teaching, learning, and scholarship was identified as the third pressing challenge for faculty and institutions, a challenge resonant with implications for faculty development. The need to engage in student-centered teaching was identified as one of the top three challenges confronting faculty members and the most important issue to address through faculty development services and activities. For many faculty members who are accustomed to lecturing while students listen, learner-centered teaching may require new and unfamiliar teaching skills and raise fears about lack of coverage of content or less control over assessment activities. Learner-centered teaching, however, allows students to do more of the learning tasks, such as organizing content or summarizing discussions, and encourages them to learn more from and with each other. Teachers, on the other hand, can do more of the design work and provide more frequent feedback to students (Weimer 2000).

Increasing Multiculturalism and Diversity

An emphasis on increasing diversity requires an expanded focus on how we can foster learning environments in which diversity becomes one of the resources that stimulates learning—and on how to support faculty with students who learn most effectively in different ways. Faculty developers identified the issue of multiculturalism as it relates to teaching and learning as one of the most important issues that needs to be addressed through faculty development services, but there was great disparity between perceptions of the need to address these issues and the extent of relevant faculty development services being offered (Sorcinelli et. al 2006).

Traditionally, campuses have tended to focus diversity efforts in student affairs, suggesting that diversity concerns are a student development rather than a faculty development issue. Faculty members themselves may be reticent about addressing issues of diversity in and outside of the classroom because of a lack of training. For faculty members to be able to meet the learning needs of a diverse student body, they will need to stay abreast not only of new developments in their fields, but also of the characteristics of their students, the various strategies for teaching to multiple learning styles, and the possibilities for facilitating learning offered by technology. Faculty development programs can promote teaching methods and strategies that increase students' capacities for problem-solving, teamwork, and collaboration — skills required in a rapidly changing and increasingly global world. Further, they can provide guidance for engaging all students, particularly in the classroom, about the sensitive issues surrounding gender, religion, race, and ethnicity. Investing in such programs offers a means of ensuring that we cultivate teachers and students who value diverse ideas, beliefs, and worldviews, and promote more inclusive student learning. In these contexts, faculty development programs can help build faculty capacity both for meeting the needs of students and incorporating new disciplinary content about issues of diversity across the curriculum.

More Technology

In the past two decades there has been an increase of information and communication technology which has resulted in new ways for higher education to be delivered (Gehrke&Kezar, 2015). Institutions now offer a higher number of online courses and degree programs to students world-wide. In this manner, many institutions have adopted a global presence. By providing online education options, universities and colleges have the potential to find new streams of revenue. Yet, technology investment is costly because universities and colleges need to establish the necessary infrastructure (e.g., computers and software) and fund ongoing expenses. Technology investment calls for institutions to provide ongoing training and maintenance, internet, access, and electricity (Njenga&Fourie, 2010). Additionally, other ongoing costs can include copyright clearing, access, and adapting learning materials.

Knowledge and Skills in Technologies

Today's students are more diverse and have great amounts of knowledge in technologies. Similarly, future students will expect their educational experiences to include opportunities that include technologies. Because of technologies becoming highly infused into higher education, faculty will need to develop the necessary skills and resources to incorporate these into their teaching practices and curriculum (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013).

In order for faculty to further develop their technology skills, institutions must develop the capacity to support the use of these technologies and provide a variety of opportunities that take into account faculty's diverse learning needs. In turn, faculty members will need to increase the use of technologies into their classes, and learn to teach in "blended and online environments" (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013, p. 89). In some disciplines faculty members also need to develop skills in new technologies for their research. By investing in the development of faculty, institutions are more likely to provide their students a quality education.

Developing Cultural Competency

In this manner, faculty members must develop the capacity to serve students' diverse learning needs. Universities and colleges must provide faculty members with professional development opportunities that will help ensure the necessary institutional capacity needed to serve and reap the benefits of a highly diverse student body (Smith, 2009).

Interdisciplinary

It is often argued that we need interdisciplinary approaches to solve the big problems of the world. Within the last 20 years institutions have articulated their goal of adopting Interdisciplinarity (Sa, 2008). Faculty and students are encouraged by some institutions to do work across disciplines through research and courses. More specifically, institutions have created a wide selection of interdisciplinary programs. These programs and courses allow for students to be "educated for change" and prepared for global challenges. Students are asked to work on real problems, requiring them to strategize in producing solutions across borders (Lash, 2012). By expanding students' breath of education, they will be better equipped to think about major problems, making them prepared for an interconnected world.

Looking Ahead

As the shifts in higher education require faculty to enhance their skill sets, institutions will need to advance the necessary programs and resources to deliver high-quality faculty development. Historically, faculty development has been centralized and handled university-wide by offices on campus. However, in the last ten years faculty development has been at the department or unit level. (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013). In the future, higher education institutions will need to consider other possibilities for how to organizationally structure faculty development. Options may include having departments and individuals head their own faculty development and creating networks with external organizations (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013). Some literature points to the need for higher education institutions to partner with national accreditation bodies and other associations to further agendas that would improve the experiences of students and faculty. There is a large repertoire of active learning strategies from which faculty can draw, including student-led discussions, team learning, peer learning, oral presentations, writing-to-learn activities, case studies, and study groups. Faculty development programs can convene successful teachers to share these approaches with their colleagues through campus-wide seminars or forums. They can also provide course development funds to recognize faculty members who develop learner-centered activities.

Conclusion

As we enter the twenty-first century, faculty developers have identified three areas that are driving change and shaping the future of faculty development. The impact of the changing professoriate is a major influence. How do we develop and sustain the vitality of our entire faculty—newcomers, midcareer, senior, and part-timers—as faculty roles change? A second factor is the increasingly diverse student body. How can we invest in faculty development as a means of ensuring that we cultivate more inclusive student learning environments and provide our best educational practices to all students, including those traditionally underserved by higher education? The third shaping influence is the impact of a changing paradigm for teaching, learning, and scholarly pursuits. Faculty development will require a larger investment of imagination and resources in order to strategically plan for and address new developments (e.g., teaching for student-centered learning, retention, learning technologies, assessment) while not losing sight of our core values and priorities.

References:

1. Allen, D., and Ryan, K. (1969). *Microteaching*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
2. Ananthakrishnan, N. (1983). Microteaching as a vehicle of teacher training—its advantages and disadvantages. *Journal of Postgraduate Medicine*, 39 (3), 142-3.
3. Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
4. Redden, E. (2015). Integrating international students. In *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (pp.25-27). Educational Testing Service. Retrieved from <https://www.insidehighered.com/>
5. Paulsen, M.B., "The Relation Between Research and the Scholarship of Teaching," *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 86, 2001, pp. 19–29.