

## FACULTY DISSATISFACTIONS; A QUESTION OF MISSION?

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In preparation for these remarks, I reread the Fall, 1985 issue of Change, which presented a collection of articles on the state of the professoriate. In that issue, I found these rather depressing titles: "The Faculty at Risk," "Goodbye Mr. Chips?" "The Threat From Within," and "The Faculty: Deeply Troubled."

College faculties were characterized as fragmented, disgruntled, and deeply troubled. Morale was said to be shaky, the pressures great, and the rewards for college teaching small. The Carnegie Foundation report concluded that "rebuilding the professoriate" should be a major priority for higher education and for the nation. The rebuilding task was given high priority for the next decade for two reasons: First, because of the unusual opportunity brought about by the retirement of large numbers of faculty members hired during the boom years of higher education. Second, because to judge from the analyses that Jack and others are providing, faculty morale is at low ebb right now..

The opportunity to hire new faculty members, however, is not going to solve the problem unless the conditions that account for the poor morale of this generation of faculty members are corrected. What should we do differently if the upcoming generation is not to meet the same frustrations as the current

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generation of faculty members?

I do have some suggestions, and since 15 minutes isn't very long--at least to the speaker--I am going to get right at it.

I believe that faculty members are simply asked to do too many disparate things. We expect them to teach, to do research, to be available to students, to serve on committees, to assign--and grade--more written work, to revise the curriculum, to work with the community, and in the special case of women and minorities, to serve as role models of what super-achievers can accomplish. And in the new drive for academic excellence, we expect them to do all of these things well. It is not, I think sheer work load that bothers faculty as much as the lack of satisfaction that comes from spreading oneself too thin across a variety of tasks, none of which can be done especially well.

The major culprit in the problems we now face with faculty is the failure to define the mission of the institution. No institution can be all things to all people, and expect individual faculty members to perform well such a wide variety of tasks.

If institutions insist on very broad definitions of their functions, then one solution is to permit faculty members to define their priorities as individuals. Some colleges do reward faculty members on a contract that specifies where faculty members decide to place their priorities --70 percent on teaching, 20 percent on research, and 10 percent on community service, for example, might be the preferred time allocation for a faculty member who then agrees to be evaluated accordingly.

The priority that is most out-of-line, in my opinion, is the role of discipline-oriented faculty research in teaching institutions. We seem to be losing sight of the fact that most colleges and most universities are teaching institutions. The Carnegie classification lists 103 research universities, or a mere 3 percent of the institutions in this country. If one includes all doctorate-granting universities among those making legitimate research demands on faculty, we are still talking about fewer than 7% of the 3389 institutions of higher education classified in the recent Carnegie classifications (Chronicle of Higher Education, July 8, 1987). Research productivity has become a virtual requirement for faculty members who wish to "get ahead" in their profession. Yet about 40% of all college faculty members are not currently doing any research that will lead to publication. No wonder morale is shaky.

Perhaps there will always be tension between research and teaching in institutions that have dedicated themselves to scholarship, but we have not sold the public, legislators, or even faculty members on the notion that faculty research is a major mission of the majority of colleges and universities. Eighty percent of the faculty in liberal arts colleges and comprehensive universities say they are more interested in teaching than in research, and about the same proportion believe that "teaching effectiveness, not publication, should be the primary criterion for promotion." (Carnegie Foundation, 1985). Faculty, in four-year teaching institutions are telling us, at least in surveys and interviews, that while they are interested in spending more time ~~to spend~~ with students, they perceive scant reward for

such activities. There is something wrong when perceived rewards are that far out of line with <sup>legitimate</sup> interests.

Many thoughtful scholars and administrators deplore the overemphasis on research, but there are few suggestions about what to do about it. The problem is exacerbated when the research emphasis seems to be supported by faculty collectively when they recruit new colleagues and make tenure decisions, even if as individuals they say they would prefer to spend their own time on teaching.

Let me review briefly the forces that maintain the research emphasis, and then I'd like to close with a proposal for an alternative that I believe would offer real advantages to institutions that do --or perhaps should--define themselves more clearly as teaching institutions.

There is a widely believed myth that involvement in research improves undergraduate teaching. I term this a "myth" because there is ample evidence to suggest that there is very little relationship between teaching effectiveness and research productivity, however measured. For me personally, there is simply no question that my research and writing take time away from my teaching. It is very hard to defend the proposition that advanced research in one's discipline enriches teaching. A quote from Ernie Boyer's book, College illustrates the common experience. "My research area is the first 25 years of 19th Century literature," said one young faculty member, "How could concentrating on that make me a better teacher? I'm a language teacher and coordinator. Every hour I spend in the library writing is an hour I am not working on my other key assign-

ments." (Boyer, 1987, p. 123).

But since there is also no negative correlation between teaching and research, it is necessary to explain why time given to research doesn't seem to interfere with teaching. One explanation is that talented, hard-working people do many things well. Another is that there probably is carry over from the intellectual stimulation of one's own learning to the intellectual energy required for good teaching. Teachers do need to stay intellectually alive. For some teachers, intellectual stimulation might well come from research in their discipline. For others, it will be found in activities related to their teaching field; for still others, it might come from a passion for something completely outside their field of formal study.

If the purpose of a "research" or "scholarship" requirement in teaching institutions is to improve teaching, rather than to advance knowledge, then why not base promotion on teaching performance? If the involvement in research does, in fact, enrich teaching, then it should show up in teaching performance.

This leads to my second observation. It is sometimes argued that judging faculty on their research is easier and more objective than judging them on teaching performance. Although we have few studies inquiring into the extent of agreement on quality of research, anyone who has participated in tenure review is aware of wide variation in judgements about the quality of research --which is one reason that we lean heavily toward using number of publications as a measure of research productivity. Yet, getting published in juried journals is increasingly easy as the supply of journals rises to meet the

demand of authors, if not of readers. Judging research productivity via the numbers game is no more viable than counting the number of students registered for a class as a measure of teaching ability. At least we can demonstrate that students tend to be rather good judges of teaching ability, and that agreements on good and poor teachers tend to be reasonably consistent among students, peers, and administrators. In any event, there is little evidence to suggest that judging faculty quality on the basis of research is any more objective than judging them on the basis of teaching ability. It is nonsense to say that we cannot tell a good teacher from a poor one, and judging faculty on any criterion that is not consistent with the mission of the institution is counterproductive.

Unfortunately, in the present climate, research does count, even in institutions that have no research mission. It offers immediate and tangible rewards to both administrators and individual faculty members. For administrators, it brings discretionary money into the institution; for faculty, it does much the same thing. It buys extra secretarial help, travel, books and equipment. The material benefits of research are just as great in a teaching institution as they are in a research university.

Moreover, there are prestige, as well as material benefits, for research. Unfortunately, research visibility has become the accepted route to academic prestige, for both institution and individual. Many an ambitious administrator has sought upward mobility for his or her institution through recruiting research talent, regardless of the mission of the institution.

And that has been relatively easy in recent years. College presidents and deans have been able, in a buyers' market, to attract faculty members with impressive research credentials and visibility not previously experienced by middling colleges and universities. Many a so-called "emerging" institution has been able to brag that they have attracted a young PhD from Yale with a small start on publications in some esoteric field. This gains instant credibility for the department and the institution and is seen as desirable, despite the fact that if the bet on the new recruit turns out to be correct, he or she will leave the institution for a research institution with colleagues, resources, and a mission appropriate to his or her research interests.

These, then, are the usual reasons given for the support of what I believe to be a counterproductive practice for higher education as a whole: 1. The conviction that involvement in research and advanced scholarship improves teaching. 2. The belief that research productivity is a more objective measure than teaching performance of faculty worth. 3. The prestige and tangible rewards that research carries for both institutions and individuals.

Although some aspects of these reasons are, to the best of our knowledge, invalid, others are quite valid and create a reward system that is likely to perpetuate the increasing tension between research and teaching in teaching institutions.

I would like to conclude these remarks by proposing an alternative that keeps what is valuable in faculty research and yet reaffirms the teaching mission of the overwhelming majority

of institutions of higher education.

For the past two years, I have been proposing that all college teachers should be doing classroom research. By classroom research, I mean the formal assessment by teachers of the impact of their teaching on the students in their classrooms. My proposal was initially sparked by the intense interest in assessment, especially by state agencies and other third-party assessors. The primary purpose of assessment, I contend, is to improve student learning, and the handle educators have on this is the quality of instruction. Assessment, therefore, is most likely to result in improvement when it is carried out by those most responsible for the delivery of instruction. *that is classroom teachers.*

A second reason for proposing classroom research is that there is increasing doubt that future progress lies in further discovery of generic principles of learning that apply across all fields of college-level study. Research that focuses on the specifics of teaching mathematics, or history, or foreign languages is most likely to give us new knowledge. If this is the case, then the task is simply too huge for a small number of educational researchers, who whatever their research skills, lack an understanding of the structure of the subject matter and how it is learned. We actually do need an army of researchers to tackle the complex questions involved in teaching and learning. ~~Whereas~~ <sup>#</sup>Whereas I have grave reservations about the value to society of much of the research that is done by academics in search of upward mobility, I think there is every reason to expect classroom research to have a useful payoff in our search for improved approaches to teaching and learning.

Finally, I believe that classroom research will take teachers and their intellectual curiosity into the classroom rather than away from it. Classroom research has the potential for collaborative study within departments and it offers faculty experimenting with useful models of classroom assessment opportunities for visibility and leadership with their disciplinary peers in other institutions.

My purpose in teaching faculty to do classroom research is to join teaching and research in a united effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning. I believe this type of research is best accomplished by disciplinary specialists in their own classrooms, and that teaching will be improved by the intellectual stimulation generated and by the results of self-directed assessment. My strategy in proposing classroom research is not to fight the research issue, but to redirect it so that faculty in teaching institutions can devote their energies to the common mission of the institution.

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