DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 695 HE 016 291

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TITLE Meeting the Challenges: Developing Faculty Careers. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Research Reports, No. 3. FYI Executive Summary.
INSTITUTION Association for the Study of Higher Education.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 83
CONTRACT 400-82-0011
NOTE 6p.; This executive summary has been extracted from the full report (ED 232 516) and reprinted unchanged, but with a shortened bibliography.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Development; *Careers; *College Faculty; Educational Change; Educational Research; *Faculty Development; Futures (of Society); Higher Education; *Job Satisfaction; Literature Reviews; Rewards; Social Change; Well Being
IDENTIFIERS PF Project

ABSTRACT

Criticism of education has brought with it a reduction in the status of the teaching profession. The effects of this on faculty have been worsened by changes in career rewards and responsibilities brought about by the economic problems of higher education institutions. Colleges can no longer overlook the needs of faculty. Both life cycles and careers move through a series of identifiable stages. Among careers, the academic profession is unique. It is a solitary, unchanging activity with a reward structure that emphasizes research rather than teaching. Faculty development programs that have evolved have shown limited effectiveness. A new type of program, Faculty Career Development, includes faculty retraining, career changes, and early retirement incentives. This new focus raises questions about the future of academics as a career. To promote a healthy climate, educators must become more knowledgeable about adult development and career stages. A reform of the academic reward system is needed. The present crisis can be turned into an opportunity for revitalizing faculty careers. This document includes a 19-item bibliography and an order form for related research reports available from the Association for Study of Higher Education, including the full report upon which this summary is based. (DC)

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What changes are affecting higher education?

Once again, American society finds itself in transition. The nation's social, economic, and political values are being transformed as we prepare for a postindustrial future very different from the industrial past that propelled the United States to a position of world leadership and economic dominance.

The changes of the past 20 years go much deeper than finances. Virtually every aspect of our national life, from defense to social security, is being questioned. Naturally, education is not exempt. The long history of social support for education has given way to increasing criticism. It is suggested that educators don't know what they are doing or that they are failing either to do what they should be doing or to do what they claim to be doing. The back-to-basics movement is gaining strength, the public investment in education is declining, and educators are being expected to provide a quick fix for the many ills from which our society is currently suffering.

This devaluation of the educational enterprise has brought with it a concomitant reduction in the status of the teaching profession. Faculty members, who entered the profession under very different conditions, have watched their purchasing power shrink with each salary check. As they unionized to buttress their shrinking economic status, they discovered that they also were losing the esteem and social status that the professoriate had enjoyed since World War II. Educational institutions, responding to social, political, and economic challenges, are fighting for their own survival. Many have instituted industrial management systems and have increased demands on employee contribution, productivity, and commitment. These attempts to secure institutional vitality have compounded the morale problem facing the professoriate.

The severity of these blows to the morale and sense of well-being of the faculty has been increased by dramatic changes in faculty careers. Traditional academic rewards have been reduced, teaching loads have been increased, and departments and programs have been eliminated. Faculty are being asked to expand their roles into new disciplines and new activities. Junior faculty have little to look forward to, and senior faculty have begun to feel that they are perceived as obstacles and as an unwelcome burden on the institution's salary account.

These changes have resulted in widespread dismay, anger, confusion, and resentment. Colleges and universities can no longer afford to overlook the legitimate needs and hopes of faculty no matter how intense the struggle for institutional survival becomes. It is the faculty who shape the image and the future of their institutions. They are also central to the mission of the institution. It is, therefore, essential that their concerns be heard and addressed.

How can faculty be helped?

To understand the needs and hopes of the faculty better requires some familiarity with the current research on life cycles and career stages. Erikson (1950, 1978), Erikson and Erikson (1981), Levinson (1978), Sheehy (1977, 1981), and Gould (1978), among others, have demonstrated that psychosocial development and change continue throughout adulthood and into old age. This process has been charted as a series of distinct stages, each bringing its unique concerns, needs, and responsibilities. Thus, the ways in which faculty members can be helped will depend to a considerable extent on the stage of psychosocial development through which the individual is progressing.

Similarly, research on careers has demonstrated that careers, like individuals, move through a series of identifiable stages challenging the individual in different ways and producing new sets of needs. Super (1980), Hall (1976), Hall and Nougaim (1968), and others have elaborated these stages and the demands they produce. Ralph (1978), Hodgkinson (1974), Baldwin (1979), Brookes (1980), and others translate generic career

development research specifically to the demands of faculty careers. Through an understanding of the specific issues they confront along their careers, faculty can be helped and their vitality and contribution maintained.

What's special about academic careers?

The academic profession has a number of singular characteristics. Many faculty appear to drift into the profession rather than choosing it (Light, Marsden, and Carl 1973). Young academics soon discover that teaching is a very solitary activity, that the profession is not supportive of norms of sharing, and that they are offered little guidance, mentoring, or support. Studies of the academic culture suggest that it is not conducive to the continued growth and development of its professionals (see, for example, Freedman et al. 1979). Moreover, the preparation graduate students receive bears little resemblance to what most of them do as faculty members. The emphasis in graduate school is on research in a chosen field; teaching typically receives little attention. Similarly, the reward structure in higher education favors research and publication heavily and pays little more than lip-service to excellence in teaching (Ladd 1979, p. 5).

Perhaps as a result there appears to be ambivalence about academe's principal function: teaching. Faculty rarely discuss teaching—their own least of all—and are encouraged to pay homage to research and publication rather than to classroom activity (Light, Marsden, and Carl 1973; Tuckman 1979). Because no generally accepted norms for measuring effective teaching have yet been devised, it is hard to evaluate what goes on in the classroom. Thus, a faculty member is denied any objective, concrete evidence of having accomplished anything at all. Moreover, faculty face a career in which the basic enterprise is unchanging; what they do one year they can expect to continue to do with only minor changes for the foreseeable future.

Where does faculty development fit in?

To help offset these negative factors, the profession has had a tradition of supporting individual faculty as they pursue their own scholarly interests. This tradition was radically altered over the past decade, primarily in response to the impact of the social revolution of the 1960's in higher education. Traditional curricula and teaching approaches were not responsive to the insistent demands of the new generation of college students. To help faculty, programs of faculty development were rapidly designed and implemented on hundreds of campuses. Rather than supporting individual scholarly enterprises, these new programs were aimed at "improving" whole groups of faculty by equipping them with new techniques for the classroom, new ways of designing curriculum, new systems of grading, and new course content. The research of Smith (1976), Centra (1978), Gaff (1975), and others examines the various types of faculty development programs that have evolved. However, faculty participation in established programs has been limited, and serious questions have been raised regarding their effectiveness. Results were never overwhelmingly impressive or enduring. The programs suffered from some of the same problems that education often suffers from: the results were hard to measure and difficult to evaluate.

Recently, another kind of faculty development has arisen: Faculty Career Development. The approach here is extremely pragmatic and include refined linkages to faculty evaluation; faculty retraining in the new high-demand, high-technology disciplines; efforts to help faculty move out of teaching into the corporate world; and the spread of early retirement incentives. Clearly, this represents a kind of development, but it is not necessarily academic or scholarly development.

Although these new initiatives contain much that is commendable, they also raise questions about the future for academics and for academic careers. Some faculty have been forced to pursue their academic careers on a part-time basis, moving from institution to institution as positions arise. Some have opted to develop a second, external, career to supplement their income and also their need for continued growth. Others have simply given up, suppressing the values that led them to education and choosing instead to pursue another line of work. A few have elected to retire early.

What lies ahead?

A dynamic relationship exists between the development of individual faculty, the development of their careers, and the overall well-being of institutions of higher education. It is essential not to lose sight of this point as institutions struggle for survival because most institutions already have, by and large, the faculty they will have 20 years hence. This fact adds urgency to the importance of educators becoming more knowledgeable about adult development and career stages. With that knowledge they can help promote a climate in which the elements of community and diversity (Erikson and Erikson 1981) can thrive.

A reform of the academic reward system also is urgently needed. At present, there is little support for teaching faculty and little recognition of the importance of what goes on in the classroom (Ladd 1979). Faculty who want to get ahead have to depend either on publication or on a switch into a primarily administrative role (Tuckman 1979). Until the formal academic reward system gives equal weight to teaching, putting it on a par with publication and administration, it is hard to see where teaching faculty—and they are more than three quarters of all higher education faculty members (Ladd 1979)—will find the strength and support they must have in order to become and remain dynamic, involved, vital, and generative.

Higher education faces a particularly demanding span of years during which financial resources seem certain to continue to be limited. Simultaneously, all faculty and all institutions face the enormous challenges created by the technological explosion. There is no doubt that education will survive. The really interesting question is whether educators will merely hunker down, stubbornly maintaining as much as possible of the Golden Age of the fifties, or whether, through a greater awareness of adult development needs and potentialities, we will turn these challenges into an unequaled opportunity for refocusing, reshaping, and revitalizing the traditional pattern of faculty careers. That is the challenge offered by the present crisis.

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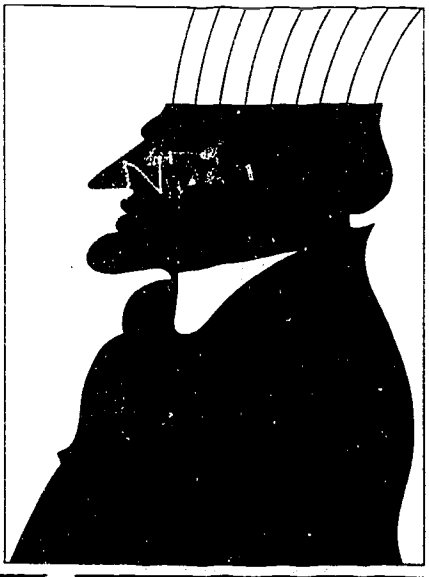

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This publication was prepared with funding from the National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. 400-82-0011. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of NIE or the Department.

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