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ABSTRACT

Approaches to develop a new understanding of academic careers are discussed. For many faculty members, a key issue is how to adjust their understanding of an ideal career to contemporary reality. During the 1970s, almost all of the professoriate saw its standard of living decline, a decline that stabilized by the early 1980s. Job mobility is seldom now a viable option. Under these conditions, tenured faculty may feel trapped at their institutions, and administrators also face a loss of flexibility in managing their tasks in the face of reduced funds. New information on adult development and new conditions for the academic profession have prompted efforts to revise the model of academic life established in the 1960s. The adult years are now seen as dynamic and marked by changes that can be anticipated and identified by age, activities, interests, and psychological development. Recent thinking about careers stresses the need for progression, for changed roles and responsibilities. In addition to the common suggestion to promote teaching as an honorable calling, approaches to providing variety in the academic career include: providing opportunities for different types of teaching assignments, involvement in professional activities, special endeavors in research or curriculum development, and replacing tenure with a different evaluation system. (SW)

AAHE-ERIC HIGHER EDUCATION

RESEARCH CURRENTS

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Research Currents

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One fact about higher education has remained constant through many years of change. The faculty is still the institution. And a college's effectiveness still depends on how successfully its faculty carries out its educational mission.

But the laundry list of current woes—declining enrollments, reduced financial support, and over-expanded enterprises—directly affects faculty work and careers. Consequently, institutional and faculty interests clearly intersect at the point of ensuring vital institutional environments conducive to productive work and a healthy sense of purpose.

This *Research Currents* reports on efforts to develop a new understanding of academic careers based on emergent knowledge about adult development and given today's financial stringencies.

Faculty and administrators share long-range goals in common, but their day-to-day concerns seem to center on different and sometimes conflicting problems. Faculty members at many institutions face diminished opportunities for professional growth as they understood that concept when they entered academic life. Administrators, on the other hand, must deal with the complex task of managing reduction rather than expansion; they tend to focus on issues such as finances and student-faculty ratios and overlook issues of faculty vitality.

For many faculty members, the key issue is how to adjust their understanding of an ideal career to contemporary reality. The majority of faculty members are in mid-life. Twenty years ago, they entered the academic profession in a period of great expansion with optimistic expectations about career opportunities. But changed conditions in higher education have made many of these individuals take a new look at their lives.

What are these changed conditions? During the seventies, almost all of the professoriate saw its standard of living decline, a decline that has just now stabilized (Annual Report 1982; 1983). Job mobility, that very effective mechanism for promoting good matches between professors and institutions, is seldom now a viable option. In the 1960s, the turnover in tenure-track positions was about 8% annually. In the 1970s, it dropped to 2% per year; in the 1980s, a vacancy in a department simply may not be filled (Hellweg and Churchman 1981; Mortimer, Caruso, and Ritchey 1982). This situation is likely to continue for some time. The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education estimates that "The current level of net additions is about zero and will remain at that level or below it for much the rest of this century" (1980, p. 80).

Under these conditions, tenured faculty may feel trapped at their institutions. Many are likely to spend their entire academic careers performing essentially the same tasks. Any job, no matter how important or satisfying initially, is unlikely to command enthusiastic support if it offers no variety or monetary incentives (Kanter 1979).

Administrators also face a loss of flexibility in managing their tasks. There is simply very little money to go around at institutions. When it comes to faculty, administrators may see dollar signs in place of the faces of tenured faculty. They may view a decision to grant tenure as a long-range "capital outlay" (Chait 1980, p. 211). A faculty member tenured at age 35

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at age 65. These costs would rise to more than $800,000 if retirement were at age 70. For five tenured faculty members, costs in salary and benefits could reach $4 million (Chait 1980).

Administrators may also see expenses for tenured faculty as a fixed cost. By 1978-79, tenured faculty made up 68 percent of the staff at public universities and 64 percent in private universities. Four-year public colleges reported that 70 percent of their faculty had tenure and private colleges had 62 percent tenured faculty (Atelsek and Gomberg 1980, p. 3). Moreover, the majority of tenured faculty members are not slated for retirement until the end of the century. The median age of faculty in 1978 was 47; just over 10 percent of the faculty was 60 years or older; only 6.6 percent was between 30 and 34 years old (Corwin and Knepper 1978, p. 52).

Administrators and faculties face a common issue: how to work with the personnel and institutional resources at hand. New approaches to career issues are needed.

Matching Model and Reality

Most higher education careers today bear little resemblance to the model of academic life established in the 1960s (Shulman 1979; Ladd and Lipset 1978). The model may even be harmful to some faculty members for whom it serves as a standard for professional and personal self-evaluation. Many may fall short. Now, new information on adult development and new conditions for the academic profession have spurred efforts to revise this model so that it is more congruent with what faculty members really do and with how they feel about their careers (Brookes and German 1983).

Since the late 1960s, the concept of adult development has gained popular acceptance and scientific respectability. The adult years are now seen as dynamic and marked by changes that can be anticipated and identified by age, activities, interests, and psychological development.

Researchers may construct different theories to mark the stages of adult life, but they are in general agreement about the broad norms for adult males. (Research on developmental patterns are likely to be different for men and women; separate research on women is being undertaken—(Astin and Davies 1983; Gilligan 1982).

Levinson (1978) provides a basic framework for adult male development. From ages 22-28, men enter the adult world, establishing life goals, and find an occupation compatible with their values and ambitions. The age-thirty transition is marked by a reexamination of early decisions (marriage, occupation); necessary changes are made. The settling down period between 33-40 is stable, characterized by family commitments and career development. during the late settling down period (ages 36-40), men feel the need to achieve earlier objectives and desire independence and authority. Mid-life transition (ages 40-45) is another period of evaluation and a time during which goals may become more limited, major life changes may occur, and new development begins. During middle adulthood, from 46-50, men more clearly carve out their individual personality and provide themselves with opportunities for continued self-renewal and creative involvement. After age 60, during late adulthood, individuals establish a new balance between social and self-involvement (Baldwin 1979; Brookes and German 1983).

Some employment situations acknowledge the dynamics of adult development by providing employees with career ladders that recognize their changed interests and capabilities. The traditional academic model, however, glosses over such changes, assuming that there is one road only to professional achievement. The model recognizes two stages. Before tenure, faculty engage in teaching, research, and community service during approximately seven years of probationary experience. After tenure, these activities continue until retirement. Rewards and prestige center around success in research and publication. A theory of dynamic development does not enter into this model.

Recent thinking about careers stresses the need for *progression*; employees need opportunities for growth so they can be optimistic about their future and productive in their present tasks (Kanter 1979). Career-development concepts also stress people's need to change roles and responsibilities.

When theories of adult and career development are joined, they present concepts that serve both the individual employee and the employer:

> The relationship between career and adult development is dynamic: dynanism results in changing substantive contributions to the workplace on the part of the individual. It also results in changing attachments to the career. For, although every individual has the potential to continue to grow and develop throughout life, it appears that all careers reach a plateau and, eventually, go into decline . . . beyond a certain point, the needs of the individual will almost certainly take precedence over the needs of the career, and, therefore, the organization (Brookes and German, 1983, p. 16).

Faculty careers present special types of problems. Opportunities for growth in an academic career are limited, but the length of the career is long, encompassing many periods of change in adult life. In higher education institutions, most jobs have short "ladders" for career growth. There are few opportunities to progress in ways that will yield more challenges, higher pay or influence, and increased skills (Kanter 1979, p. 3). This situation is particularly true for more recently tenured faculty whose average age at the time of tenure has been 32. Furniss asked young faculty about their long-range plans and found that:

> often the response is an absolutely blank stare. Apparently it has not occurred to them that more working life lies ahead of them than all the growing up, preparation, and working they have done so far (Furniss 1981, p. 18).

The need to think in such long-range terms is relatively new. The average age at which faculty members receive tenure has declined. Those who entered academic careers with their doctorates in the late 1940s and early 1950s started as instructors; were made assistant professors at 33; became associate professors at 38; and were full professors at 48. With

retirement at 65, they were full professors for only 23 years. But a faculty member who achieves tenure today at 32 and will retire at 70 faces a 38-year span of professorship.

Faculty members may reassess their careers at any time, but those in middle years are more likely to do so because of "boredom, discontent, or new interests" (Baldwin 1979, p. 148). Those who entered the profession in the early 1960s with great expectations about their contributions to society may face another kind of disillusionment. A survey of Danforth and Kent Fellows from those years, who are now in midcareer, revealed a loss of idealism about their careers that is "serious, and qualitatively different from the 'de-illusioning process' that Levinson and others find occurring normally in the development of young adults (Rice 1980, p. 5)." Slightly younger tenured faculty note especially their lack of mobility. One Kent Fellow confesses: "I am dying a slow professional death in my present position. Given the present situation in academia, there may not be a ladder to climb" (Rice 1980, p. 5).

Creating Solutions

Such comments present an image of a professoriate whose dissatisfaction pervades and weakens the academic enterprise. But that is hardly a fair generalization. In fact, dissatisfaction is more likely to occur at certain key periods during a faculty member's life, ones that coincide with crucial stages in adult development (Baldwin 1979). Many faculty in their middle years—the dominant groups on most campuses—are likely to encounter such a critical stage. Their issues are personal and professional and affect institutional health.

At one time, administrators (who can face similar issues) may have held that such problems should be resolved by the individuals concerned. But a more enlightened personnel policy makes successful resolution of faculty members' problems an institutional concern as well.

There is no universal antidote to the problems that faculty members face; solutions of all sorts are available. Most proposals implicitly or explicitly call for a revision of the inherited career model to acknowledge professors' needs to be challenged and to grow personally and professionally. They recognize that the former model may exacerbate professors' problems, since its narrow terms often tell faculty they've fallen short of their personal and professional aspirations and the expectations of their peers. Such a narrow model inhibits development.

> . . . if the model dictates total devotion to a specialty throughout a life, then it also denies an acceptable place for a person who might well develop and exercise a second set of talents for part-time use outside the academic world [for example]. The standard model would discourage this deviation (Furniss 1981, p. 63).

Given this view of the model, any change may seem revolutionary. In fact, the different approaches that have been tried or suggested do not turn the academic model on its head. They merely widen opportunities and give value to extensions of the traditional faculty role.

The oldest suggestion for change is still the newest: promote teaching as an honorable calling. "Teaching is the activity that engages most faculty for most of their lives (Ladd and Lipset 1978)." As long ago as 1958, the dichotomy between the value accorded research and the way most faculty actually spend their time was noted as a source of tension in the profession (Caplow and McGee 1958, p. 82). Brookes and German (1983) recently urged that teaching deserves rewards as rich or richer than research and publication:

> Teaching is primarily a craft; it can be developed, polished, and perfected over a lifetime. Thus it can satisfy adult needs for growth and can offset the feeling that, professionally, life ends with a tenured full professorship (p. 35).

Baldwin (1983) suggests several approaches to providing variety within the structure of a traditional career. These include opportunities for different types of teaching assignments; involvement in varied professional activities; periods of special focus, *e.g.* research, teaching, curriculum development; and *ad hoc* institutional projects. He recommends that institutions develop personnel policies and reward systems that encourage such innovations in the span of faculty work.

Proposals for reforming or doing away with tenure represent another effort to restore vitality to the academic profession. Most often, advocates of this approach see tenure itself as the cause of stagnation. They argue that it binds the professor to the institution and generally removes any *institutional* incentive for further professional development.

To get around this problem, while retaining the academic-freedom protections that are the objective of tenure, the National Commission on Higher Education Issues (1982) proposed that administrators and faculty develop a system of post-tenure evaluation on campus. Such efforts are usually launched by administrations that are concerned about their "tenured-in" staff, but these evaluations can be useful to faculty:

> The evaluation process, subtly, almost subconsciously, creates an expectation of progress and advancement . . . [Faculty at one institution] stressed the value of the [faculty-developed] plans [upon which faculty members would be evaluated] as a means to orchestrate departmental activities and as a means to learn more about the interests and ambitions of colleagues (Chait and Ford 1982, p. 183).

Speaking against any substitution for the traditional tenure system, Kingman Brewster, Jr., former president of Yale University, argued that tenure is indispensable to an institution that seeks to maintain a vital academic community. It is so important, in fact, that Yale would be extremely unwilling to dismiss a faculty member for any but the most egregious problem (1972).

But some faculty members might want to dismiss themselves. Furniss (1982; 1983) argues that some faculty members might be better served if they explored external options. In such cases, where a threatened loss through retrenchment does not provide a negative incentive for career reexamination, faculty could be supported in their explorations

through enlightened institutional policies. Furniss points out that the American Association of University Professors' statement on leaves of absence stipulates that such leaves be used for professional growth and development in an intellectual endeavor of the professor's choosing, with a required return to the parent institution. Such a policy, Furniss observes, may inhibit faculty from taking initial steps outside academe.

Institutional policies that allowed for such a step, including provision for consulting activities that do not impinge upon academic duties, would seem to be an effective way to help faculty members in mid-career to explore new options. In fact, many institutions have such policies and thereby provide for career exploration. However, the policies are couched in such terms that they may seem more negative than encouraging (Furniss 1981, p. 103).

Independent scholarship—scholarly work conducted on a free-lance basis—is also gaining in popularity (Gross and Gross 1983; Lightman and Zeisel 1981). Its emergence promises to stir a lively debate between those who believe that a generation of scholars will be lost because academic employment is virtually unavailable, and those who argue for nontraditional approaches or the tenure system (Baer 1983; *Chronicle of Higher Education* 1983).

Shaping the Future

Several studies to investigate contemporary faculty life are underway. Howard Bowen (1982) has begun a study of "The American Professoriate" that will provide a sociological portrait of faculty; discuss compensation, working conditions, and efforts to modify them; and make recommendations on the problems and needs of the profession. Burton R. Clark (Stadtman 1983) has also launched a study of the academic profession that will look at external forces now shaping faculty lives.

R. Eugene Rice (n.d.) is investigating faculty career patterns and possible alternatives. He is looking at ways to provide faculty with a variety of options that take adult-development theory into account. He is also interested in linking this knowledge to information on institutional structure and function.

An academic career built upon the traditional professional model—with tenure as the ultimate goal—may disappoint many faculty members who ask, "After tenure, what?" The faculty career "ladder" needs to be expanded to accommodate a variety of options that should be open to faculty at mid-career and beyond.

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