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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the stressors that contribute to burnout occurring among community college faculty and the methods that can be used for alleviating its development. Contributors of burnout stressors are discussed from both the societal and system levels as well as those stemming from gender, ethnicity, and length of service. In addition, research is explored concerning the contagious dimension of burnout on the institution. The paper concludes with suggestions for alleviating burnout that include (1) reducing faculty-student ratios, (2) giving faculty more opportunities for other professionally linked activities, (3) developing better administration/teacher relationships, (4) reducing paperwork requirements and unnecessarily complicated work procedures, (5) creating more interesting and comfortable work environments, (6) placing individual needs on a par with institutional needs, and (7) rewarding faculty for scholarship and career development as well as encouraging creativity. The purpose of these suggestions is to reengage faculty in the educational process and to assist them in overcoming the powerlessness, meaninglessness, or isolating conditions that can affect them. Contains 34 references. (GLR)



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# AN OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES SURROUNDING FACULTY BURNOUT

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

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### INTRODUCTION

Faculty burnout is a phenomenon of growing proportions. Paine (1982:17) traced the emergence of the term back to the mid-1970's, but points out that "it has many roots, including the psychiatric concept of patients who are burnt out." Early studies examined burnout in a variety of helping professions. Schwab (1986:18) indicated that there is now a high level of interest in teacher burnout and that accounts are increasingly appearing in the literature as "many teachers are leaving the profession while fewer are choosing to become teachers." Faculty and administrators, alike, are expressing apprehension about the problem. Todd-Mancillas (1988) discussed faculty concerns about this problem and administrative concerns are reviewed in the Academic Leader (1987). The International Conference on Improving University Teaching (1984:254) concluded that "the growing interest in stress and burnout in academe is natural and legitimate, and, consequently, there is a need for more studies on these phenomena in academe, their determinants, consequences, and coping techniques,"

According to Maslach (1982:30), burnout is a "syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind." A major effect of burnout in higher education is low faculty morale resuting in reduced involvement in the educational enterprise. Community colleges are now confronted with assessing the level of burnout, its impact for them, and how to reduce burnout to maintain maximum functioning particularly as it



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affects the quality of teaching. Alfred (1985:2) asserted that effective community college teaching is in danger of becoming obsolete as faculties distance themselves from involvement in their work as they experience "the sociological condition of 'alienation'." This is seen as faculty become tenants within the institution and do not participate intimately with governance, reduce their interaction with students outside of the classroom, and as the faculty find primary satisfaction outside of the college. Alfred predicted that there will be increasing detachment as they experience powerlessness. meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the stressors that contribute to burnout occurring among community college faculty. Additionally, methods of alleviation of burnout are included. There is heavy reliance on excerpts from a major research project by Johnson (1989) in discussing both of these dimensions.

### STRESSORS

## Societal Stressors

Keller (1983:12) identified the primary forces currently affecting higher education that may stress the system. These include: changing student clientele; disintegrating college curriculum; increase in competition within higher education; the technological imperative; the faculty conundrum (age, faculty salaries, and reassertion of institutional values and needs over the academic profession's own values and expectations); and, the tightening grip of outside controls, specifically the rise of public power. The California Postsecondary Education Commission Report (1984:40) analyzed social and



economic trends, and identified multiple pressures on California postsecondary education that have resulted in public demands for educational results which can be identified and measured.

There are societal stressors which have directly affected the California community colleges. Staffs have been subjected to intense stress as they have attempted to achieve their missions and still maintain solvency. The funding patterns of the last few years have impelled districts to increase student populations to attain maximum funding and then to limit enrollments in order to avoid penalties for exceeding the cap that was placed on enrollment. The struggle to enroll just the right amount of students has required a reordering of programs, and has resulted in academic and vocational programs attempting to maintain and/or increase the college's share of financial resources.

The multiple missions of preparing students for transfer to four-year institutions and providing remedial, vocational, and recreational classes during times of regressive financing have created stress for all involved in community college education in California. There have been specific internal pressures resulting from budget cuts for EVC faculty that are common to other community college faculties in California. Pressures include the increasing use of part-time instructors who do not receive pro-rata pay nor assume the responsibilties of full-time faculty (participation on committees, office hours, curriculum development), but who serve an economic function. The stress has been compounded by additional pressures to increase both Weekly Student Contact Hours (W.S.C.H.) and Full Time Equivalent (F.T.E.) resulting in large increases in class sizes regardless of the nature of the discipline or specific university requirements for transfer courses. A



reduction in administrative and support staffs resulting from the budget cuts is the source of another pressure.

The California community college system "operates in a maze of seventy locally elected boards sharing authority with the chancellor and statewide board over policies for one hundred and six individual campuses" (Santa Cruz Sentinel:8/4/87). This bureacracy has effected the resignation of the recent chancellor of the state's community colleges, Joshua Smith, who cited the floundering of day-to-day operations due to the "chains of bureacracy" as the major reason for his resignation. This organizational complexity and confusion coupled with governmental fluctuations in funding and requirements has created continual uncertainty for the state's community colleges during the 1980's contributing to the lowering of faculty morale.

Coping with the multiple societal stressors affecting California community colleges has translated into personal stress for many community college faculty. These stressors include: responding to the expectations of achieving multiple missions with minimum funding, the internal stresses from the increasing use of part-time faculty and reduction of full-time faculty who in the past shared in professional responsibilities, and the requirement to increase W.S.C.H. and F.T.E. in disciplines attempting to meet transfer requirements that can only be met with smaller class sizes. Collectively, they hold the potential to exhaust the most dedicated faculty.



## System Stressors

The Carroll and White (1982:41) ecological model indicates that burnout not only has effects on the organization, but must be studied within the system of which it is a part. The ecological model considers the person as operating in a microsystem (the smallest social unit of organized work) which is part of a mesosystem (the larger complex of smaller work units that comprise the institution) which is affected by an exosystem (non-work ecosystems that directly impact on the worker such as the surrounding community, legislators, accountability systems, his/her family) and the macrosystem which consists of the larger cultural and world-wide complex. Each of these systems requires altering if burnout is to be alleviated.

Clagett (1980:23) also concluded from his research at Prince George Community College that faculty stress should be "seen as an organizational outcome, rather than as symptomatic of defects in the personalities of its casualties." Shinn (1982:79) developed a theoretical model from her research on burnout in which "group and organizational coping are hypothesized to be more effective than individual coping with job demands." Maslach (1982:9) agreed that attention should be focused on the job situation in which individuals find themselves and that the bulk of the evidence she has examined "is consistent with the view that burnout is best understood (and modified) in terms of situational sources of job-related, interpersonal stress."



### Additional Stressor:

The literature indicated that there are three other stressors that may be major contributors to burnout: gender, ethnicity, and length of service. The ACE Commission on Women in Higher Education Report (Shavlik, Touchton, & Pearson, 1987:6) claimed that "Serious inequities remain in the hiring, promotion, tenure, and salary of women faculty and in the hiring, promotion, and salary of women administrators and staff." According to this report, women faculty comprise only twenty-seven percent of total faculty. A recent report (Santa Cruz Sentinel, 3/27/88) indicated that in California women make up thirty-five percent of the full-time faculty positions. At Evergreen Valley College women comprise forty-two percent of the total faculty.

Based on the ACE Commission on Women in Higher Education Report (1987), there is every reason to suspect that being a female with predominantly male faculty would exacerbate, if not create, feelings of burnout. As women are "singled out, overlooked, ignored, or otherwise discounted on the basis of unchangeable characteristics such as sex, race, ethnicity, handicap, or age" an unfavorable climate is created (p.8). The International Labour Organisation's Report III (1985:25) confirmed that women are even more subject to stress than their male colleagues and, that

The few women who do manage to reach the top of the ladder encounter various difficulties, such as the feeling of isolation, of having no model to follow, of having to fight against preconceived ideas about women in general and of not being on an equal footing with their male colleagues. These various forms of stress come on



top of all those connected with family and household tasks which, in most cases, the women continue to cope with on their own. (p. 25)

Hill et al (1989:29) studied the impact of mentoring and collegial support on faculty success and found that "In academe at least, it appears that having a mentor is helpful to both genders, but that being male is even more helpful in terms of scoring high on various success indicators."

Filan, Okun, and Witter's 1986 study found that gender is not significantly related to job satisfaction, however, Van Wijk (1982:84) indicates that "job satisfaction scores increase directly with increases in responsibility at ascending levels in the organizational hierarchy." The relationship between gender and burnout may vary among positions within the educational institution. Maslach and Jackson's (1986:22) review of studies of educators using the MBI finds that there have been few studies focusing on those in administrator categories.

Seidman and Others (1983) interviewed minority and non-minority faculty teaching in community colleges in California, New York, and Massachusetts in an attempt to determine the faculty's role in community colleges achieving their goal of increasing equity of access to postsecondary education. In the process of this research, they identified the variables that operate for minority faculty in addition to the forces affecting all faculty. They determined that minority faculty "must also process the complex interaction of racism, social class, power and opportunity, as these factors affect their everyday lives as faculty members in community colleges."

(p. 51) An outcome of this for minority faculty is that "once they have secured their positions, it seems that they often have to work harder, do their job better, more thoroughly, more conscientiously, than their



nonminority colleagues." (p. 54) Additionally, as Koltai (1984:27) pointed out, the ethnic makeup of the faculty does not always fit the ethnic mix of the students which may create another ethnicity related problem. It would seem that minority ethnicity is an attribute that very likely contributes to burnout. Nonetheless, Armour et al's review of faculty studies (1987:5) found that race does not seem to be a prominent determinant of faculty stress and Matteson and Ivancevich's (1987:247) review indicated that blacks do not burn out as much as whites. However, only a limited amount of research has been done to examine the relationship of race/ethnicity and burnout.

Other research suggested that those with longevity of service are particularly susceptible to burnout. Harnish & Creamer (1986) studied community college faculty hired during the early growth years of the community college movement, after they had been in their jobs ten or more years, and examined the relationship of length of service to faculty stagnation and diminished job involvement. The researchers identified the routinization of work as a core problem leading to stagnation. Routinization, accompanies teaching longevity. Armour et al (1986:91) conducted in-depth interviews with all of the senior faculty in the humanities at Virginia Commonwealth University and identified major themes for these faculty. They were "monotony, lack of advancement, lack of conviction, lack of community, changing mission, lack of leadership, and a stultifying reward structure." Altman (1986:122) confirmed at the same conference that "stress and burnout are phenomena which are of special significance to senior academics and which, in the absence of countermeasures, can result in null performance or at least greatly diminished performance of faculty." He



considered unrelenting stress, disillusionment and boredom as major causes of faculty burnout.

## Contagiousness Dimension of Burnout

Johnson (1982:34) suggested that burnout is contagious for healthcare workers and that group burnout can result. Group burnout has a cycle, according to Johnson, that has tremendous impact on an organization. The burned-out individual has a negative attitude toward other staff resulting in unwillingness to help others which increases stress on the rest of the staff. The occurring staff burnout is exhibited through loss of patience with patients and family. The staff becomes blaming and angry at one another, negative to other departments, other departments then ignore requests, and the result is increased stress on each staff member.

The contagiousness dimension of burnout has not been widely researched, but it does potentially pose a serious threat to the mental health of faculties. Altshuler and Richter (1985:60) concluded their report of the vitality of community college faculty by calling for quick action in dealing with burnout as they believe it is "like the cry of 'fire' in the theatre--the cry spreads as quickly as the fire. The disease, although preventible, certainly is contagious." Armour et al (1987:5) also indicated that the sense of detachment that burnout produces can be contagious for students and colleagues.

The contagiousness aspect of burnout can potentially incapacitate an institution as it spreads through faculty, administration, classified staff, and



students. The literature suggested the need for vigilance in identifying this problem and the need to quickly reduce and eliminate it.

Research conducted in the San Jose/Evergreen Community College District by Johnson (1989; 88) which tested research questions generated from this partial review of relevant literature produced the following conclusions:

- 1. Full-time faculty burnout continues to be a problem for Evergreen Valley College.
- 2. The cluster system is a contributor to EVC's full-time faculty burnout.
- 3. Gender, ethnicity, and length of service are not significantly related to burnout.
- 4. Burnout is contagious and is now being experienced by faculty who previously (1985) did not indicate that they had it. Additionally, EVC administrators, and classified staff are experiencing burnout.
- 5. San Jose City College's full-time faculty are also experiencing burnout.
- 6. Community colleges that have previously used a cluster system of organization have discontinued it and have returned to division-department systems.
- 7. The contributors to EVC's full-time faculty burnout are identified and center on treatment of faculty, budget concerns, administrative style, organizational structure, communication problems, and environmental problems. Faculty are burned out from being treated indifferently and without respect, ignored in the real decision making in the college, working in a system that has them separated organizationally and physically from



their discipline colleagues, not being given rewards, and from working in an environment in which inadequate physical conditions are not remedied.

## ALLEVIATION OF FACULTY BURNOUT

# Methods of Alleviating Burnout Suggested by the Literature, <u>EVC Faculty, and Cluster College Personnel</u>

- 1. Recognize that burnout exists.
- 2. Reduce faculty-student ratios.
- 3. Provide "times out" in the form of sabbaticals, travel, special projects, research, and attendance at conferences and workshops.
  - 4. Provide training in minimizing burnout.
  - 5. Create interesting, comfortable work environments.
- 6. Reduce paperwork and unnecessarilty complicated work procedures.
  - 7. Open communication channels and encourage use of them.
  - 8. Clarify organizational objectives.
  - 9. Provide feedback to increase a sense of significance at work.
- 10. Employ sensitive administrators who are consistent and will provide appreciation, recognition, and respect to faculty.
- 11. Provide flexible teaching schedules with diverse teaching assignments.
- 12. Use administrative leadership and faculty to assess burnout, recreate interest in the educational process, and to formulate procedures to cope with stress and burnout.
  - 13. Place individual needs on a par with insitutional needs.



- 14. Make faculty true partners in the governance and decision-making processes.
  - 15. Have knowledgeable and sensitive department chairs.
  - 16. Reward faculty for scholarship and career development.
  - 17. Encourage creativity and reward it.
  - 18. Develop a health promotion program.

These are specific suggestions that can be implemented by the institution. Recognition by administrators and faculty is foremost that full-time faculty burnout is a serious problem that requires attention. Burnout needs to be regarded with the seriousness that others are giving to it (Todd-Mancillas, 1988; Gmelch, 1983; University of Georgia, 1986; International Conference on Improving University Teaching, 1984; Schwab, 1986). There needs to be recognition that specific steps can be taken to create a healthy organizational climate that will promote faculty vitality and assist in preventing and reducing burnout.

It is in the best interests of the institution to do so. Melendez and de Guzman (1983) described potential outcomes of burnout for the institution and Minnehan and Paine (1982) pointed out its economic costs. Carroll and White (1982), Clagett (1980), Shinn (1982), and Maslach (1982) all call for burnout to be studied within the context of the system of which it is a part. It should be seen as organizational outcome and modified in terms of situational sources of job-related, interpersonal stress (Maslach, 1982). This implies that without organizational attention, the problem is unlikely to be significantly reduced.

EVC faculty suggestions for alleviating burnout. The EVC faculty members who were interviewed suggested additional factors beyond those



already mentioned. While they are specific to Evergreen Valley College, they may be appropriate for other community colleges and communication studies faculty in particular.

Faculty perceived reduced teaching loads as important and felt that administrators should assist faculty in teaching what they want to teach. Appropriate status should be given to faculty members. A faculty brochure should be produced and distributed that would include a picture of each faculty member and a listing of his or her recent accomplishments. The faculty should be given authority in the budgeting process. High quality, voung instructors should be sought to strengthen the present faculty. Interviewees suggested that they need increased teaching support in the form of aides and classified staff to do typing and copying. The cluster system should be dispensed with and the college restructured to make it education oriented rather than business oriented. Additionally, faculty felt that community building is needed and that old wounds, scars, and battles should be eliminated to facilitate integration of newer teachers into the system. New facilities are needed and should include a faculty center and a performing and creative arts center. Faculty need to have better preparation facilities, a centralized mailroom, and improved classroom environments that have appropriate temperatures and specialized equipment. Faculty salaries should be increased and the number of administrators should be reduced producing savings that could be used for aides and tutors. New classes need to be designed and the elective program developed.

These suggestions are what the EVC faculty felt would assist them to alleviate their burnout. If effective community college teaching is in danger



of becoming obsolete, as Alfred (1985) suggested, they are worthy of immediate attention. These suggestions and the ones previously mentioned provide a conduit for reengaging faculty in the educational process and to assist them in overcoming the "powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement" that Alfred referred to. (p. 2) Certainly, some of these suggestions are more heavily weighted than are others, but cumulatively they provide much of the solution to the burnout problem on the Evergreen Valley College campus.

These suggestions are offered with the awareness that each academic institution is unique. To effectively reduce burnout among a particular faculty, examination of the contributors to burnout and the self-perceptions of those suffering from it will offer the most effective methods of alleviating it.



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