

*Pushing, Pulling, and Prying: Renewing Senior Faculty Performance Through College Dean Efforts*

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*Abstract*

The quality of college faculty members is directly linked to the institutional experience that students encounter, and as such, administrators and leaders are deeply concerned about the productivity, professionalism, and ability of their faculty. One result has been an extreme investment in faculty development and renewal activities, including those coordinated by department heads, academic deans, central university offices, and even self-directed programs. Research has suggested that faculty members' level of institutional investment, and resulting output, varies based on career stage and possible rewards, and that this may be especially true for long-serving, senior faculty members. The current study was designed to draw upon the expertise of academic deans to identify and offer a recommendation on their agreement as to the most effective strategies for renewing and increasing the efforts of senior faculty. Through a three-round Delphi survey, 15 deans identified 43 unduplicated strategies, of which there was strong agreement (greater than 4.0) on nine of them, including: Develop career plan for accomplishments until retirement, restrict activities such as ability to teach summer school or overload), and shift to less essential functions, such as consulting the dean.

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Bai (1999), among others, has noted that a college or university's strength is directly tied to the quality of its faculty. Bai referred to the faculty member as the life blood of a university, and the efforts of these individual are so important that virtually all institutions measure the performance of teaching, and many even employ centers or institutes that cater to improving the performance of faculty. As faculty members teach, conduct research, and provide service, they create a culture on campus that influences how well students learn and how they engage in the life and activities of the campus. In turn, the direction and focus of the campus directs much of the vitality of the faculty member (Chan & Burton, 1995).

The role of deans and department chairs has changed greatly over the past several decades. Once squarely focused on faculty and student affairs, these administrators have increasingly been forced to become experts on technology, grant writing, fund raising, public relations, and outcome measurement. To meet the needs of many of these changed priorities, administrators have relied increasingly on faculty to perform their jobs well, and to perform them differently than in the past. This has been referred to as the change of college from institutional leaders and decision-makers to its current status as a managed profession (Rhoades, 1998). The challenge to administrators, then, is to find ways to harness the talents of faculty members and use those talents to meet the diverse needs of the academic unit, and this is particularly true for senior faculty members who have often been hired under one set of expectations (such as teaching) and who are now expected to conduct a wider variety of activities (such as conducting more research, grant writing, and fund raising).

A concurrent problem administrators are facing has to do with the funding available to hire talented faculty members. During the prolonged recession, higher education enrollments have increased without a similar increase in available funding, resulting in more students with the same size of faculty. Administrators, therefore, have been challenged to get more and different activities from their existing faculty corps.

The purpose, therefore, of the current study was to identify a series of strategies that administrators use, and agree upon, that are effective in rejuvenating senior faculty members. By creating a battery of faculty development strategies aimed at senior faculty, college administrators should be in a position to be more efficient in their work and might hopefully be able to continue to serve large numbers of students in a quality manner with limited resources.

### *Background of the Study*

#### *Faculty Development*

Faculty development has consistently been noted as one of the most important activities undertaken on a college campus. Conceptually, faculty development can take the form of remediation, meaning that some activity improves a deficiency that the faculty member has, such as improving teaching, teaching a faculty member how to be an advisor, improving research skills, etc.

Developmental activities have been housed centrally at a senior administrator's level, such as a provost, and have also been delegated to deans and academic department heads. Budgetary concerns, along with changing interests and work assignments (greater focus on research) have led some universities to close or re-direct the efforts of their faculty development centers, suggesting both the importance of such centers and their vulnerability (Glenn, 2009). Despite changes to centralized faculty improvement efforts, faculty quality remains one of the

central concerns of academic administrators. This concern is especially true for those with primary responsibility for the academic enterprise, namely deans and department chairs (DiLorenzo & Heppner, 1994; Andrews, 2000).

Many faculty development activities take on characteristics of adult learning programs and are built upon a foundation of performance improvement. This means that faculty development activities are personally and professionally relevant to the faculty member, and are often tied to measurable outcomes, such as increased use of technology in teaching, use of experimental or differentiated instructional techniques, advising strategies to relate to different generations of students, new techniques for research methodology, and among many other activities, those related to grant writing and finding research funding.

Faculty development activities can be individually selected by a faculty member with an interest in improving his or her performance, and implemented through self-prescription. Alternatively, faculty development efforts can be directed by department heads, deans, senior administrators, and even faculty development centers housed within an institution. The primary advantages of self-directed faculty development, or those coordinated and offered at the departmental level are that the topics covered in the activities are specific to defined interests and/or needs, while those coordinated by an institution tend to be more general and have applicability across a variety of disciplines rather than narrowly focused on an individual or academic discipline.

There are also a variety of external faculty development providers. Once primarily the domain of conferences, faculty development now takes place through webinars and online courses provided by private companies. Wexelblatt (1991) also argued that some of the best faculty development takes the form of playing, that is, unstructured, free-thinking, creative

activities that positively impact both outlook and enthusiasm toward a discipline or activity such as teaching. This suggests, then, that faculty development, whether formal or informal, structured or unstructured, can be available to faculty members in nearly any environment at almost any time.

### *Career Stages of Faculty*

The typical faculty career begins with advanced, doctoral level training and education resulting in the awarding of a terminal degree. The most common entry-level faculty assignment is as an assistant professor with a probationary period of seven years, with tenure and promotion to the rank of associate professor occurring in the sixth year of employment. Upon awarding tenure and promotion to the rank of associate professor, the most common minimum number of years in rank is four prior to the potential application for promotion to full professor. Many institutions also make use of primarily honorary or symbolic titles (university professor and distinguished professor are examples), and many institutions also make use of term contracts rather than traditional faculty ranks and assignments. The foundational structure of a faculty career, however, allows for career promotion twice, once to associate and once to full professor, and within this framework of a 40-year career, the study is situated.

As early as 1973, Bess suggested that faculty interest in different work-related activities, such as teaching or writing, may be correlated with career stage and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Bess specifically explored work motivation in the context of student development and their life cycles on campus, noting that at different times in the student's life cycle, the student has a need for a different level of support and interaction, and that this might be provided (or not provided) by faculty members at different stages in their careers. Kolstoe (1975) similarly examined the faculty-career from induction to earning tenure, and offered personal

commentary on faculty life post-tenure. His primary observation was that senior faculty must find ways to cope with their station in the faculty ranks, and with few opportunities for career progression, faculty members must find joy and satisfaction in the activities of teaching and discovery.

Knefelkamp (1990) explored what he referred to as the "ecology of academic life" (p. 11) from a developmental psychology perspective, and noted how strongly the environment a faculty member works in influences trust, satisfaction, opportunity for renewal, and willingness to evolve and change throughout a faculty member's life. The same concept was introduced, albeit briefly, in Burnham, Hooper, and Wright's (2010) advice-related book to faculty members seeking promotion and tenure. The Burnham team specifically noted the waves of enthusiasm and effort pre- and post-tenure and promotion, noting the potential decrease in effort and productivity (aka, burnout) following receiving tenure.

Career stage has been somewhat linked to scholarship productivity. Ramsden (1994), for example, explored faculty productivity in Australia higher education, and found that early exposure and success in research activity tended to indicate a faculty member's career-long interest and high productivity throughout a career. Ramsden also found other variables that correlated with high productivity, however, age and early exposure were central in his predictive model.

### *Research Methods*

As an exploratory study, the research made use of a three-round Delphi survey instrument with 15 academic deans from universities that offer doctoral degrees. The institutions were selected from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2006) listing of universities. Using a table of random numbers, 15 institutions were selected, and each

institution's website was studied to identify an academic unit that included a college or school of education. These colleges or schools were then reviewed to identify the academic dean of the college, and the individual dean was sent an email asking for participation in the study. The sample deans were utilized with replacement, so that if a dean declined participation, the original listing of doctoral institutions was re-consulted and another institution was identified. In total, 53 deans were contacted to develop a listing of 15 deans to participate in the three-round Delphi study.

The Delphi survey technique is most appropriate for environments where expertise is geographically diverse, and anonymity among participants is important. The process allows all individuals an equal voice in identifying responses to a particular prompt, and the also allows the participants an opportunity to reflect on both group norms and their ratings of items prior to making a final decision about the prompt (among others, Miles, 1997).

In the current study, respondents were asked to *identify up to five ideas, strategies, or experiences you have or have utilized for rejuvenating faculty who have been employed in your academic college for more than 15 years*. The subsequent prompt asked responding deans to rate the level of agreement that they held for the possible effectiveness of each idea, strategy, or experience.

### *Findings*

Using a sampling with replacement procedure, 53 deans were ultimately contacted to secure 15 deans who committed to complete all three rounds of the Delphi survey. Of those committing to participate, all 15 completed the first round survey and developed an inventory of 62 possible strategies for rejuvenating long-serving faculty members (an average of 4 per respondent). Once edited for duplication, a total of 43 strategies remained to be rated by

academic deans. One dean withdrew from the search following the first round; however the statements generated by that dean were included in the second and subsequent surveys, and the study continued with only 14 participating deans.

The overall mean rating for the strategies for senior faculty renewal was 3.22, with nine strategies agreed to between the "agree" (4) and "strongly agree" (5) range that the strategy would be effective in rejuvenating the senior faculty member. Nearly twice as many (n=15) strategies were rated between "undecided" (3) and "agree" (4) with the potential effectiveness of the strategy, 18 strategies were rated between "disagree" (2) and "undecided" (3), and one strategy had a mean average rating below "disagree."

As shown in Table 1, deans agreed most strongly with three strategies (above 4.50 on possible 5.0 rating), including "develop a career plan for accomplishments until retirement" (mean 4.80), "restrict activities (such as ability to teach summer school or overload)," (mean 4.59) and "shift to less essential functions, such as consulting the dean" (mean 4.50). Deans agreed least with the strategies of "force to participate on campus committees" (mean 2.01), "have teach only underclassmen" (mean 2.01), "have teach only Honors (high ability) students" (mean 2.01), "explain and develop understanding for better faculty performance" (mean 2.00), and "teach more survey courses" (mean 1.87).

### *Discussion*

Findings of the survey provide key insights into how academic deans envision working with faculty. Strategies generally fell into three categories: faculty development or changing the pattern of behavior, giving up on trying to change behavior and accepting the faculty member as a liability, or negotiating the faculty member's workload to find some acceptable or appropriate use for the faculty member for the balance of the faculty member's career. Interestingly, there



was no clear agreement on which strategy might be most effective, although there were creative approaches to remove senior, non-productive faculty from interaction with others. Additionally, the perspective suggested by the participating deans was that often senior, non-productive faculty have let their skills become obsolete or more accurately, that the world of technology and knowledge production and dissemination has changed greatly and that the process or experience of being a faculty member has somehow not provided appropriate opportunities to remain current to workplace changes. Perhaps, then, the implied suggestion of these deans is that faculty development must be holistic, appealing to teaching and research, and must be incorporated and integrated at every stage of a faculty member's career. Waiting until a faculty member has reached a problematic, senior stage, for example, may well result in the approach suggested by one dean to "do nothing - wait the faculty member out" (mean 3.99).

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Table 1.

*Mean Ratings of Faculty Renewal Efforts for Senior Faculty*

N=14

Strategy/Renewal Effort	Mean	Mode	SD
<i>Over 4.0 (9)</i>			
Develop career plan for accomplishments until retirement	4.80	5	.711
Restrict activities (such as ability to teach summer school or overload)	4.59	5	.982
Shift to less essential functions, such as consulting the dean	4.50	4	1.765
Create a specialist with a background in adult education to work with re-teaching the faculty member	4.31	4	1.268
Make part of a high performing research team that will assign a task to the individual	4.25	4	1.000
Develop incentives for improved performance	4.22	4	.819
Minimize exposure to students even at a cost to the college	4.14	3	1.267
Provide a peer-mentor of approximately the same age to collaborate with	4.01	4	.683
Provide more graduate assistant support	4.01	4	1.823
<i>Between 3.0 and 3.9 (15)</i>			
Do nothing - wait the faculty member out	3.99	4	.999

(table continues)

Table 1, continued

Strategy/Renewal Effort	Mean	Mode	SD
Allow for a differentiated workload	3.99	4	.901
Send to off-campus teaching training	3.97	4	1.100
Restrict or do not assign merit, performance, or cost of living raises	3.95	4	.723
Assign to more advising	3.94	4	1.001
Use as a grant writer	3.90	4	1.111
Hire an external performance coach	3.87	4	.899
Meet with department chair on a weekly basis to focus on performance	3.75	4	1.203
Meet with similarly performing faculty on a regular basis	3.60	3	.950
Hire an external evaluator to document the faculty member's performance	3.51	3	.791
Have faculty member create own behavior change goals	3.50	3	.892
Have the faculty member identify retraining opportunities	3.50	4	1.111
Have participate in online discussions daily about improved performance	3.45	3	.698
Place in an office with a higher performing faculty member	3.26	2	.700

(table continues)

Table 1, continued

Strategy/Renewal Effort	Mean	Mode	SD
Release time from teaching	3.16	3	.999
<i>Between 2.0 and 2.9 (18)</i>			
Establish negotiated performance goals	2.99	3	.892
Take away travel money	2.89	3	1.01
Send to on campus faculty development center	2.67	2	1.239
Send to only national research conferences	2.65	3	1.021
Send to research skills development workshops	2.52	3	1.502
Provide different office	2.50	3	1.437
Send to national conferences	2.49	2	.438
Make teach online	2.46	2	.991
Provide reading materials	2.45	2	1.111
Provide video materials	2.44	3	.998
Participate in webinars	2.41	2	1.928
Send to a writing center	2.10	2	1.259
Give new classes to teach	2.10	2	1.00
Have teach only upperclassmen	2.02	1	.820
Have teach only underclassmen	2.01	1	.821
Force to participate on campus committees	2.01	1	1.222

(table continues)  
Table 1, continued

Strategy/Renewal Effort	Mean	Mode	SD
Have teach only Honors (high ability) students	2.01	1	.932
Explain and develop understanding for better faculty performance	2.00	1	1.00
<i>Under 2.0</i>			
Teach more survey courses	1.87	2	1.5723