

Mid-career and Senior Faculty: Maintaining Vitality and Productivity

Daniel W. Wheeler

27 FIC, East Campus, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0904

Beginning in 1810 at Harvard Univ., mid-career and senior faculty were presented with opportunities for faculty renewal and development through sabbatical leaves. The focus was on increasing knowledge, skills, and research, particularly as a content expert. Faculty also attended their academic discipline annual meetings and conferences to increase content development.

Even with strong academic traditions and professional autonomy, some institutions began to provide expanded professional development activities, particularly to address teaching. However, the focus was often on seminars, with the major outcome to increase the subject matter expertise of the faculty.

Starting in the late 1950s, the academic and popular literature began to reflect a developmental perspective about faculty as adult learners in addition to content experts. Erikson (1959), a leading developmental psychologist, described stages aging adults must address. Of particular interest is the tension between "generativity" and "stagnation." More in the popular vein, Sheehy (1976) wrote the best selling book *Passages* based at least on some scientific background, which highlighted that adults continue to learn and grow. Studies by Vaillant (1977), Levinson et al. (1978), and Gould (1978), through interviews with adult males, further defined various developmental tasks for adult learners to address. Additionally, Gilligan (1982) provided the other gender perspective of growth and development that broadened the understanding of adult learning as learning embedded in relationships.

FACULTY AS SUBJECTS OF RESEARCH

The first academic application of this adult development framework to faculty resulted from a dissertation by Baldwin (1981) directed by Blackburn at the Univ. of Michigan. This study indicated faculty can be described in five stages: 1) new assistant professors, 2) late assistant professors, 3) associate professors (mid-career faculty), 4) early professors, and 5) late stage professors. Each stage was identified as having unique needs. Mathis (1979) and Menges (1985) proposed a similar framework, primarily based on academic rank.

These studies indicated that as faculty moved into mid-career, they dealt with new issues, including career plateauing, career disappointments, and a new perspective on life in the institution. Essentially, they were established and needed to either continue on a well defined career line or make adjustments to new roles.

Beginning in the 1980s, the Carnegie Foundation (1984, 1988, 1992) and the National Center for Education Statistics (1988) sponsored surveys to learn more about faculty—their demographics, interests, and needs. For example, the Carnegie studies found that over 70% of faculty see a preferred role in teaching, with many expressing little interest in research. Yet, more faculty believe there is a great press for research and hold expectations that tenure will only be achieved by publishing. Certainly, this has always been true of the elite research institutions, but, as pointed out by Bowen and Schuster (1986), the research-publication expectation now permeates all types of institutions. Thus, a common refrain from faculty in these "institutions in transition" is that they were hired to teach and now they are expected to do research.

Another influence in meeting career needs and decisions of mid-

career faculty emanated from the career planning literature (Bolles, 1975; Hagberg and Leider, 1982). In particular, the American Association for Higher Education supported and published three books in 1981 by Baldwin, Furniss, and Nelson that focused on renewal and new career directions (some outside of academe). Part of the impetus for this work was the glut of academics in the humanities and some of the social sciences who needed to find meaningful employment, often outside of academe. Such career planning efforts challenged the notion of "The One Life: One Career Imperative" described by Sarason (1979), because the difficult conditions made it necessary. In some cases, mainstream academics began to examine some aspects of their careers.

FACULTY CAREER COUNSELING AND PLANNING

Against this background, more programs and activities have been targeted to mid-career and late career faculty. Many institutions have sabbatical and other leave programs that encourage more than content expertise, including personal development. Bland and Schmitz (1990) list 25 citations for higher education career counseling or planning but only in eight institutions. Rice (1985) identifies several career programs, primarily in Minnesota and the Dakotas, supported by the Bush Foundation.

Some institutions, including Loyola of Chicago (R.M. Barry, unpublished) and the Univ. of Nebraska-Lincoln (Wheeler, 1990) have provided a range of opportunities for faculty to do career planning and to consider new directions in their professional/personal lives (Wheeler, 1990). Faculty have also used the services of employee assistance programs, frequently seen on many large campuses, as well as campus career planning and counseling services. Faculty career consulting (Wheeler, 1988, 1990), based on a synthesis of career planning concepts with a teaching consultation model (Wheeler and Mortensen, 1984) has been developed. Evaluation by Wheeler and Bond (1985) indicated career consulting provided a process for some faculty to make changes.

Lunde and Hartung (1990) describe the Nebraska NUPROF (Nebraska Univ. Professional Renewal of Faculty) program in detail and design. Follow-up studies (Fink, 1987; Lunde et al., 1991) indicate faculty do make major changes and internalize the process in their lives. Simpson (1990) described a process of renewal that parallels the change process in NUPROF and provides other examples of continuous faculty development.

DEPARTMENT CHAIRS AS FACULTY DEVELOPERS

To encourage department chairs to work with faculty on their professional/personal goals, various resources, influenced by the faculty career research, have been generated. Tucker (1992), based on his extensive workshop experience with department chairs, created a generic list of professional and personal development activities. Creswell et al. (1990), in interviews with 200 chairs in 70 diverse institutions, identified a wide range of strategies chairs used to encourage faculty growth and development.

Creswell et al. (1990) report that chairs suggested strategies that worked in improving the performance of faculty in teaching and research. Even though multiple strategies were provided, the authors synthesized a four-step process: 1) Detect the signs of faculty needs, 2) Explore the options individually with the person, 3) Collaboratively develop a plan for action, and 4) Enact the plan and monitor its results.

Some faculty seem to have an intuitive sense of self-monitoring in which they assess the possibilities and make adjustments in career direction while they are in control of their situation. Anything chairs

Received for publication 29 Jan. 1996. Accepted for publication 11 June 1996. The cost of publishing this paper was defrayed in part by the payment of page charges. Under postal regulations, this paper therefore must be hereby marked advertisement solely to indicate this fact.

and colleagues can do to encourage this kind of self-reflection and measured adjustment is an important investment in the future.

One preventative strategy is mentoring from other faculty. Wheeler and Wheeler (1994) described nine mentoring needs of mid-career faculty. Sometimes this may emanate from senior colleagues, but it can also come from junior faculty. Sometimes, chairs have suggested that these newer faculty can invigorate and provide new frameworks for the established faculty. For more discussion, see Wunsch (1994) and Creswell et al. (1990).

Unfortunately, some faculty, many of whom seem to believe they are provided with a guaranteed right to study whatever their area of interest for their lifetime, can become entrapped in what Schuster (1990) describes as "academic cul-de-sacs." To move out of these situations requires letting go of a strongly socialized expectation in which the message may be that this is the lifelong passion that should be pursued at all costs. To alter direction is often interpreted as a failure and provides a sense of a professional vacuum with the plea, "What else could I do?!"

Therefore, extensive career consulting is needed by these faculty to redirect their abilities. Once the faculty member has resolved the feelings of disappointment, and various rationalizations of why his or her aims are not being supported, the necessary adjustments often can be made quickly and effectively.

Boice (1986) developed a scheme based on a contingent reward format for chairs to use to engage disengaged faculty. By using a range of contacts from acknowledging a faculty member on a continuous basis to more intensive interaction, Boice (1987) has demonstrated that by using these strategies, faculty can be re-engaged.

Lucas (1994) prefers a goal focus to help burned out or unmotivated faculty. She suggests asking questions about their original goals when they entered academia and then a focus on what has been accomplished and what is possible at this time. She describes the chair as the catalyst to develop skills and talents.

Creswell et al. (1990) also indicate that many faculty are candidates for refocusing or redirecting careers to meet more crucial institutional needs. Sometimes refocusing happened because of performance problems, but it often was initiated by the chair because of needs in the department. These efforts usually required defining a plan for development, which often required a new set of skills and knowledge. Sabbaticals or short-term leaves were sometimes used to accomplish the plan.

As pressures for accountability and personnel flexibility continue and probably increase, administrators can expect more need to plan for vitality and redirection of mid-career and late career faculty. Department chairs and faculty peers will need to identify strategies to build and maintain an environment that encourages new direction of faculty.

Literature Cited

- Baldwin, R.G. 1985. Incentives for faculty vitality. *New directions for higher education* no. 51. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Baldwin, R.G. et al. 1981. Expanding faculty options. *Amer. Assn. for Higher Educ.*, Washington, D.C.
- Baldwin, R.G. and R.T. Blackburn. 1981. The academic career as a developmental process. *J. Higher Educ.* 52:598-614.
- Bland, C.J., and C.C. Schmitz. 1990. In: An overview of research on faculty and institutional vitality. In: J.H. Schuster and D.W. Wheeler (eds.). *Enhancing faculty careers: Strategies for development and renewal*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Boice, R. 1993. Primal origins and later correctives for mid-career disillusionment, p. 25-34. In: J.J. Finkelstein and M. W. LaCelle-Peterson (eds.). *Developing senior faculty as teachers. New directions for teaching and learning*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco. (Fall)
- Boice, R. 1987. Coping with difficult colleagues. *Dept. Advisor* 2(4), 5-8.
- Boice, R. 1986. Faculty development via field programs for middle-aged, disillusioned faculty. *Res. in Higher Educ.* 25:115-135.
- Bolles, R. 1975. *What color Is your parachute?* Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, Calif.
- Bowen, H.R. and J.H. Schuster. 1986. *American professors: A national resource imperiled*. Oxford Univ. Press, New York.
- Clark, S.M. and D.R. Lewis (eds.) 1985. *Faculty vitality and institutional productivity*. Teachers College Press, New York.
- Creswell, J.W., D.W. Wheeler, A.T. Seagren, N.J. Egly, and K.D. Beyer. 1990. *The academic chairperson's handbook*. Univ. of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.
- Erickson, E. 1959. *Identity and the life cycle*. International Univ. Press, New York.
- Fink, L.D. 1987. *Revitalizing the faculty: An evaluation of the professional renewal project in the College of Agriculture at the University of Nebraska and the University of Minnesota*. Unpublished paper, Office of Instructional Services, Univ. of Oklahoma.
- Furniss, W.T. 1981. *Reshaping faculty careers*. Amer. Council on Educ., Washington, D.C.
- Gilligan, C. 1982. *In a different voice*. Howard Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Gould, R.L. 1978. *Transformations*. Simon and Schuster, New York.
- Hagberg, J. and R. Leider. 1982. *The inventurers: Excursions in life and career renewal*. Addison-Wesley, New York.
- Levinson, D., et. al. 1978. *The seasons of a man's life*. Ballantine, New York.
- Lewis, K. (ed.) and J.T. Povlacs Lunde (assoc. ed.) 1988. *Face to face: A sourcebook of individual consultation techniques for faculty/instructional developers*. New Forums Press, Stillwater, Okla.
- Lucas, A.F. 1994. *Strengthening departmental leadership: A team-building guide for chairs in colleges and universities*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Lunde, J.P. and T.E. Hartung. 1990. Integrating individual and organizational needs: The University of Nebraska-Lincoln in Schuster, J.H. and Wheeler, D.W. (eds.). *Enhancing faculty careers: Strategies for development and renewal*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.
- Lunde, J.P., D.W. Wheeler, T.E. Hartung, and B.J. Wheeler. 1991. Second-order change: Impact of a college renewal program over time. *Innovative Higher Educ.* 16:2, 125-138 (Winter).
- Mathis, B.C. 1979. Academic careers and adult development: A nexus for research. In *Current Issues in Higher Education*. Amer. Assn. for Higher Educ., Washington, D.C.
- Menges, R.J. 1985. Career-span faculty development. *College Teaching*: 33, 181-184.
- Nelson, W. 1981. *Renewal of the teacher scholar*. Assn. of Amer. Colleges, Washington, D.C.
- Rice, R.E. 1985. *Faculty lives: Vitality and change. A study of the foundation's grants in faculty development, 1979-1984*. Northwest Area Foundation, St. Paul, Minn.
- Sarason, S.B. 1977. *Work, aging, and social change*. The Free Press, New York.
- Schein, E. 1978. *Career dynamics: Matching individual and organizational needs*. Addison-Wesley, Reading, Maine.
- Schuster, J.H. and D.W. Wheeler. 1990. *Enhancing faculty careers: Strategies for development and renewal*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.
- Sheehy, G. 1976. *Passages*. Dutton, New York.
- Simpson, E. 1990. *Faculty renewal in higher education*. Krieger, Malabar, Fla.
- Tucker, A. 1992. *Chairing the academic department: Leadership among peers*. Macmillan, New York.
- Vaillant, G.F. 1977. *Adaptation to life*. Little, Brown and Co., Boston.
- Wheeler, D.W. 1988. Career consulting: A critical segment of a comprehensive faculty development program, p. 195-215. In: K. Lewis (ed.) and J.T. Povlacs Lunde (assoc. ed.). *Face to face: A sourcebook of individual consultation techniques for faculty/instructional developers*. New Forums Press, Stillwater, Okla.
- Wheeler, D.W. 1990. Providing career consulting services to midcareer faculty, p. 84-105. In: J.H. Schuster and D.W. Wheeler (eds.). *Enhancing faculty careers: Strategies for development and renewal*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Wheeler, D.W., and S. Bond. 1985. *Faculty career enrichment (1982-1985)*. Final Report to the Layman Foundation, Lincoln, Neb.: May.
- Wheeler, D.W. and L. Mortensen. 1984. *Career and instructional consulting with higher education faculty. To improve the academy*, 3, POD Network in Higher Educ. New Forums Press, Stillwater, Okla.
- Wheeler, D.W. and B.J. Wheeler. 1994. *Mentoring faculty for mid-career issues*, p. 91-98. In: M.A. Wunsch (ed.). *Mentoring revisited: Making an impact on individuals and institutions*. New directions for teaching and learning (Spring). Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Wunsch, M.A. (ed.). *Mentoring revisited: Making an impact on individuals and institutions*. New directions for teaching and learning (Spring). Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.