Developing the Next Generation of Faculty: Taking a Learning Community Approach

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*The traditional goal of new faculty orientation has been to ac-
culturate incoming instructors by providing them information
regarding institutional expectations, the student body, and
funding opportunities. The author advocates a new model that
focuses instead on the development of a learning community
approach. This model recognizes the particular characteristics,
strengths, and interests of the next generation of new faculty,
and intentionally aligns them with the needs of the institution.
The outcomes of the learning community are a stronger, more
resilient faculty and an institution capable of adapting to the
rapidly changing landscape in higher education.*

The landscape of higher education is rapidly evolving, as institutions navigate cultural, social, and economic challenges that are expanding the traditional role of a faculty member. The emergence of alternate higher education industries, such as Udacity, Coursera, and edX, has increased the demand for online and hybrid courses and forced faculty and institutions to rethink traditional pedagogies and curricula (Barber, Donnelly, & Rizvi, 2013). The learning styles and preferences of today's students, which tend to be collaborative and experiential, with a reliance on technology (Bass, 2012), put further pressure on traditional pedagogies. Community and business leaders expect higher education institutions to apply knowledge to solve local problems and stimulate economic development (Austin, 2002; Meyer, 2012), thus pressuring faculty to shift to more interdisciplinary and applied approaches to both teaching and scholarship.

Faced with incorporating new approaches and technology into their teaching, faculty members are simultaneously expected to increase their productivity and participation in institutional efforts. There is greater em-

phasis than ever on publishing and bringing in external dollars through outside funding as a way to document return on investment and demonstrate departmental productivity (Mintz, Savage, & Carter, 2009; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2006). Increased pressure for data-driven accountability and documented learning outcomes means that faculty are expected to do assessment and other administrative tasks on top of their traditional duties (Hainline, Gaines, Feather, Padilla, & Terry, 2010; Sybinski & Jordan, 2010). In short, the modern academic workplace demands that faculty do more with fewer resources, as most institutions have eliminated faculty positions or reclassified tenure-track lines, while raising teaching and advising loads (Clawson, 2009; Delphi Project, 2009). This is particularly challenging for new faculty members, who are generally ill-prepared by their doctoral programs for the responsibilities of the job.

Inadequate Graduate School Training

Many academic researchers have written about the failure of graduate programs to adequately prepare their students for the modern academic workplace (Austin, 2002; Gaff, 2002; Helm, Campa, & Moretto, 2012; Nyquist, 2002). These programs continue to prepare doctoral candidates mainly to assume positions in graduate programs, where research skills are emphasized. Whereas candidates with teaching assistantships do some teaching of mostly introductory classes, they are generally unprepared to assume the full range of traditional academic work assignments (Austin, 2002; Gaff, 2002; Nyquist, 2002), let alone tackle the expanding role demanded by the changing higher education landscape.

Austin (2003) has articulated the following eight skills and qualities necessary to the success of future faculty: (1) solid grounding in their fields as well as the ability to address interdisciplinary questions; (2) knowledge about the learning process and a wide range of teaching strategies; (3) ability to incorporate technology in their pedagogy; (4) understanding of the concepts of engagement and service in their institution, and how scholarship can link to service; (5) the capability to communicate effectively with various audiences on and off campus; (6) experience working with diverse groups; (7) appreciation of institutional citizenship; and (8) understanding and appreciation of the core purposes and values of higher education. These skills remain critical to the modern academic workplace.

The Preparing Future Faculty program—established in 1993 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools—and other initiatives have attempted to redress some of this lack of preparation and to promote the skills Austin has advocated,

but these programs have reached only a fraction of graduate students (Council of Graduate Schools, 2003). Given the research showing that graduate programs inadequately prepare future faculty for the full range of skills necessary to be successful academics, it is critical to provide new colleagues with a program that helps them develop those requisite skills. An intentional, comprehensive focus on new faculty development can help colleagues become the most productive teachers, scholars, and collegial citizens possible.

In order better to develop these incoming faculty members, institutions should consider moving beyond the traditional new faculty orientation model to adopt a learning community approach. Such an approach can provide the time, structure, and facilitation crucial to this substantive development needed for new faculty. This model can have significant strategic benefits, both for the individual faculty members themselves and for the institution. Whereas a traditional faculty learning community is focused more directly on teaching, this model broadens that focus to include the professional competencies that new faculty must embrace in order to be successful in today's institutions of higher education. Furthermore, this approach can create the opportunity for reciprocal interactivity, wherein new faculty members begin to push cultural and pedagogical change while being enculturated to the institution.

The Case for a Faculty Learning Community Approach

Historically, new faculty orientation, to the extent that it has existed, has been a brief introduction to employee benefits and a "meet and greet" with some members of the academic administration (Doyle & Marcinkiewicz, 2002; Eble & Noonan, 1984). With the rise and expansion of faculty development programs and centers for teaching and learning in the 1960s and 1970s (Schroeder, 2011), some new faculty orientation programs have expanded their scope to encompass one or two days before the start of classes. In addition to meeting administrators and learning about benefits and academic policies and procedures, faculty members receive basic information about teaching at the institution (Schechner & Poslusny, 2010). These sessions traditionally take a "talking heads" approach, where faculty members listen to panels of colleagues delivering an overwhelming amount of information.

This pre-semester orientation model has limited learning outcomes. One limiting factor is its timing. Faculty receive enough basic information that they may be ready to teach their classes, but they can only absorb so much at this point in time. Being newly arrived on campus in most

instances, they are already overwhelmed, navigating their way through such logistics as parking, computer access, setting up their offices and labs, preparing for classes, and mastering course management systems. Furthermore, new faculty members do not know what they do not know before classes start, as they have not yet assumed their regular teaching, scholarly, collegial, and advising duties.

Another limitation is the short duration of this pre-semester orientation model. More time is needed to achieve the "higher-order" goals of new faculty development that will best serve both the faculty members and the institution. Such goals might include integrating the new faculty into the culture and mission of the institution, strengthening the relationships between members of the new faculty cohort and with other departments and divisions on campus, and exploring how innovative pedagogies might transform the cohort members' teaching. A further limiting factor to the pre-semester orientation is the "talking heads" approach that does little to jumpstart the cohort-building or cultural integration process of new faculty. A different approach is needed to effectively meet the needs of new faculty in the contemporary academic workplace.

Taking a faculty learning community (FLC) approach is a promising way to achieve comprehensive faculty development for the next generation of faculty, while concurrently furthering institutional goals. Cross (1998) has articulated three compelling reasons for the creation of learning communities: "philosophical (because learning communities fit into a changing philosophy of knowledge); research based (because learning communities fit with what research tells us about learning); and pragmatic (because learning communities work)" (p. 4). As lifelong learners drawn to collegial interactions with others, faculty members are an ideal constituency for learning communities (Fulton & Licklider, 1998).

Faculty learning communities evolved from student learning communities, which were conceptualized in the 1930s by Dewey and Meiklejohn to encourage active and student-centered learning in the classroom and to create a coherent curriculum that serves to connect disciplines (Cox, 2001). According to Cox (2001), a pioneer in the field at Miami University, faculty development programs embracing learning community concepts emerged in the mid-1970s, although the term *faculty learning communities* did not become widely used until the publication of Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* in 1990 (Glowacki-Dudka & Brown, 2007).

Numerous studies have pointed to the positive outcomes of FLCs on participants and their institutions, including building community (Cox, 2004; Cullen & Harris, 2008); establishing communication across disciplines and strengthening collegial relations (Boud, 1999; Cox, 2001);

developing faculty into better educators through a deeper understanding of pedagogy (Cox, 2004; Shulman, 1986); promoting collaboration and reflective practice (Cox, 2004; Cullen & Harris, 2008; Layne, Froyd, Morgan, & Kenimer, 2002); advancing the scholarship of teaching and learning (Cox, 2001, 2004); facilitating lifelong learning (Nyhan, Cressey, Tomassini, Kelleher, & Powell, 2004); and fostering civic pride and participation (Cox, 2001, 2004). Furthermore, studies by Cox (2001) and Cullen and Harris (2008), among others, have asserted that FLCs can help change the institutional culture by transforming institutions into learning organizations.

Cox (2001) argues that a further positive outcome is that FLCs can give faculty the support, structure, and resources necessary to encourage them to become agents for institutional change. He posits that graduates of faculty learning communities "have a perspective that goes beyond their discipline and includes a broader view of their institution and higher education" (p. 70). Furthermore, Cox articulates that FLC graduates "are likely to take responsibility for involvement setting institutional goals, pursuing difficult campus issues, and contributing to the common good" (pp. 70-71). Schlitz et al. (2009) argue that because the group dynamic encourages mutual trust and personal empowerment, "faculty are more willing to accept change and to try new approaches, especially when change and new approaches emerge from the group and everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the solutions" (p. 133). A learning community for new faculty can give these colleagues the support and structure necessary for them to enhance and share expertise they may bring to the institution, while imagining and devising ways to disseminate this expertise more widely in their own departments, divisions, and schools. New faculty can thus foster pedagogical and cultural change from the bottom up, as it were, to help position institutions to better respond to the changing landscape of higher education.

The evidence of positive outcomes for FLCs has led faculty development professionals to incorporate them into their programs (Cullen & Harris, 2008). Many types of cohort- and issue-based groups have used the FLC approach, but new faculty development programs have not generally followed suit (Cox, 2004). Where FLCs have been used for junior faculty development, the more prevalent model has been to let faculty "survive" their first year before inviting them into a learning community, as they are already overworked (Cox, 1995). If structured properly, however, the learning community can help address some of the workload concerns by sharing tips and strategies that will help new faculty work more efficiently. The FLC also provides a supportive environment for new faculty in which to cope with first-year challenges. Excluding first-year faculty

from the learning community approach represents, therefore, a missed opportunity for the faculty and the institution alike.

Finally, a learning community approach may be particularly appropriate for the generation of faculty now entering academe. Customized to meet their needs, an FLC can take advantage of powerful synergies between the particular characteristics, strengths, and interests of next-generation faculty and what institutions need to do to adapt to the rapidly changing higher education landscape.

The Next Generation of New Faculty

The full-time professoriate is aging. The Higher Education Research Institute (2005) estimated that over 54% of full-time faculty members in the United States were aged 50 or more in 2005, and the first wave of Baby Boomers, born between 1943-1960, reached the age of 65 in 2008. Even though there is no longer a mandatory retirement age for college professors (Hainline et al., 2010), there will be an increasing number of retirements given the demographics of faculty (Puri, Graves, Lowenstein, & Hsu, 2012).

As young faculty members are hired to replace retiring Boomers, faculty development programs need to keep in mind that these professionals are not just younger versions of their senior colleagues. This cohort of new faculty is more diverse than ever before (Rice, 2004). It also increasingly reflects the characteristics of the generation born between 1982 and 2002 or so (Howe & Strauss, 2003), popularly referred to as *Millennials* or *Generation Y*. Numerous publications have described this generation in the popular press and literature (Meyers & Sadaghiani, 2010). While faculty development programs should be cautious about stereotyping this cohort of new faculty, because not every individual will align with the profile, there seem to be some emerging themes that deserve attention as institutions seek to better recruit, retain, and develop these colleagues. So, what are the characteristics of this cohort, which I will refer to as "next-generation faculty," that might affect how we structure our development programs?

Maxwell (2009) has written that next-generation faculty members have different expectations for themselves, for the institution, and for the workplace culture than their predecessors did. In particular, according to Maxwell, they have different concepts of work, the role of work in their lives, modes and frequency of communication, loyalty to traditional institutions, and what they consider markers of success. Next-generation faculty members generally want work-life balance, flexibility, autonomy, and satisfying working conditions (Fogg, 2009). They will typically want

to understand and engage with the mission of the institution (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). This cohort is achievement-oriented and wants comprehensive professional development opportunities so that they can advance in their career in an expeditious and structured fashion (Walker, 2009).

Next-generation faculty members may also bring different characteristics and preferred learning styles to the workplace and academe. In an academic setting, they are generally drawn to learning that is meaningful, interactive, and collaborative, while also being integrative, structured, and empowering (Black, 2010; Bowen et al., 2011). Furthermore, they tend to resonate with the idea of lifelong learning (Walker, 2009). These learning preferences advocate for professional development that is offered in an interactive, collaborative, and integrative environment. Institutions of higher education wishing to recruit and retain the best and brightest of this generation need to be responsive to these expectations and preferences.

A learning community approach to new faculty development can be designed to meet these new colleagues where they are and respond to their concerns. The FLC's inclusive and collaborative approach will appeal not only to next-generation faculty, but also to the seasoned faculty members from other institutions and those with careers outside academe who may be among the new faculty cohort.

Designing a Faculty Learning Community Approach to New Faculty Development

A faculty learning community can take many forms. Cox (2004) promotes a very structured model, which he defines as "a cross-disciplinary faculty and staff group of six to fifteen members . . . who engage in an active, collaborative yearlong program with a curriculum about enhancing teaching and learning, and with frequent seminars and activities that provide learning development, scholarship of teaching, and community building" (p. 8). But FLCs can vary in their structure, goals, and participants. They can either be cohort-based, developed to address the needs of a particular group of individuals (for instance, first-year faculty, women faculty, senior faculty), or topic-based, designed to explore a subject of interest to an interdisciplinary group of faculty. The curriculum may be more or less structured, but important features include intentional community building, collaboration, inquiry, and the flexibility to pursue topics of interest to the group.

The curriculum of an FLC for next-generation faculty should be structured to encourage interaction, collaborative inquiry, and reflective practice. Much like our students, next-generation faculty want to

be engaged and integrated into the learning process instead of being lectured to (Nicholas, 2008). Just as educators are increasingly moving to a learner-centered paradigm for students, faculty development programs need to incorporate our evolving understanding of the nature of learning into our work with faculty. The use of social media, where appropriate, and online resources to supplement or enhance face-to-face gatherings is likely to resonate with this cohort. It is important to ask for continual feedback from new faculty and be open and responsive to their suggestions. Thinking creatively and intentionally about creating a collaborative and innovative environment will help to engage next-generation faculty and enhance their learning.

Because no FLC can tackle all of the issues and questions facing new faculty, the cohort should carefully consider which threads of inquiry to pursue. The agenda of the new faculty learning community will, thus, flow organically from the interests and needs of the group. Because the idea of collaborative inquiry may be new to incoming colleagues, and they don't yet know what they need to know, the facilitator should be prepared to offer support and guidance for this shaping of the agenda. Potential threads of inquiry could tie together several of the skills and qualities Austin (2003) identifies as necessary for successful faculty members.

One potentially rich area of inquiry would be the benefits of adopting innovative pedagogies, which would provide a way for new faculty to explore several related issues or questions over a series of meetings. Faculty, for example, might first explore the core purposes and values of higher education, to think critically about how the institution might best fulfill its mission in the current landscape. This would help faculty focus on articulating learning outcomes and set the context in which to investigate innovative teaching strategies. Faculty could also study the demographics and expectations of next-generation students through readings and discussions, reflecting on and brainstorming about how best to engage and educate them. At this point, new faculty would also draw on their own professional experiences as professors, teaching assistants, and students to add to the discussion. The cohort might then explore how certain innovative pedagogies, be they high-impact educational practices or the use of instructional technology, can effectively engage and educate next-generation students.

New faculty might then choose a case-study approach to investigate how these teaching strategies might be implemented in different contexts and disciplines. Cohort members might strategize about how to assess the impact of these pedagogies and design an activity or exercise that reflected an innovative teaching approach to use in one of their courses. The activ-

ity would be piloted and assessed, and the results would be shared with the group. Faculty members could then modify their implementation of the activity or exercise to reflect the assessment results.

With this thread of inquiry, faculty would think about establishing their course objectives and learning outcomes in the context of the core purposes and values of higher education. They would acquire knowledge about the learning process and reflect on a wide range of teaching strategies. The cohort would also think about implementing innovative teaching approaches that would help achieve these objectives and learning outcomes while effectively engaging next-generation students, who are more economically and ethnically diverse. Furthermore, new faculty would practice evidence-based outcomes assessment and course redesign to reflect those results.

A related thread of inquiry might be the role of scholarship in today's academic landscape, where topics to be explored might include how scholarship can link to teaching and service, softening the silos that are often constructed around these responsibilities. Participants might be interested in discovering interdisciplinary ways to collaborate on scholarship, either within the cohort or with contacts at other institutions. They could investigate the nature of engagement and service and brainstorm ways their scholarship and expertise could be applied to solve local problems in partnership with community officials and agencies. Then, the cohort could explore the nature of administrative support for scholarship at the institution, the fundamentals of writing grants, and in-house and external funding for conference travel and research. They could also strategize about ways to balance time for scholarship with teaching, service, and family responsibilities.

In practice, cohort members might research and design a scholarly project that responds to a local community or agency need, or pursue an outside grant that would fund a research project. The cohort would act as a support in the design and implementation of the projects, with the results disseminated to the group. As a result of this thread of inquiry, participants would explore ways to address interdisciplinary questions, understand the link between scholarship and service, and communicate effectively with diverse audiences on and off campus. They would also acquire knowledge and tools crucial to supporting their scholarly agendas. This learning community approach could not only help faculty to develop the skills and competencies they need to be successful, but also give them tools to meet the challenges posed by the changing higher education landscape.

In addition to the benefits that this collaborative inquiry can have for

new faculty, the work can also help promote change at the institution. To support this objective, facilitators should help set the investigations of the FLC in the context of current institutional priorities or goals. In addition, the FLC facilitators should create opportunities for participants to disseminate their work to the wider campus community. This would have the beneficial effect of connecting new faculty to established colleagues in other disciplines and divisions as they help shape faculty by presenting their findings and sharing their expertise.

Recommendations

Follow Best Practices of FLCs.

Cox (2004) has established the following as components of successful FLCs: mission and purpose; curriculum; administration by a trained facilitator and support from staff; connections between cohort and facilitators and between the FLC and the wider community; faculty and administrators as affiliated participants; meetings and activities (seminars, retreats, conferences, social gatherings); scholarly processes (literature, projects, presentations, publication); assessment (of faculty development and of FLC program components); and rewards to participants whether in the form of reassigned time, professional expenses, or recognition by the administration. Each institution should customize its FLC for new colleagues according to the learning goals established for the FLC and the resources available to support it.

Incorporate Best Practices of New Faculty Development.

In addition to following best practices, the FLC should be designed along evidence-based guidelines that exist for effective new faculty development: conduct the program over an extended period of time; incorporate the program into the overall faculty development structure; create an inviting environment; improve teaching, scholarship, and service practices; and identify a specific resource person, such as a mentor or sponsor (Morin & Ashton, 2004). In order to incorporate the new FLC into the existing faculty development program, it is desirable to design follow-on experiences for the cohort. Have program graduates meet with the next year's cohort and do some informal peer mentoring of their new colleagues.

Because next-generation faculty are very concerned with their professional development, they will most likely respond well to creative and intentional mentoring (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). It is advisable to offer

multiple mentoring options to the cohort if possible. The learning community will encourage mutual mentoring between cohort members that comes from collaborative inquiry and problem solving. The nature of an FLC also enables group mentoring of the cohort by the facilitators. If feasible, consider matching each new faculty member with a formal mentor who is apprised of the learning goals of the FLC. All mentors should be educated about the perspectives, expectations, and strengths of next-generation faculty, as well as about the FLC approach, so that these mentoring relationships can flourish to the greatest extent possible.

Consider Next-Generation Faculty Expectations
When Establishing Outcomes for the Learning Community.

When thinking about the outcomes of the FLC, it will be important to consider the expectations of next-generation faculty. Because this group wants to be a part of a community, the FLC should aim to build ties between cohort members and other campus constituents through professional and social networking opportunities. The FLC should also encourage understanding of and integration into the institutional mission to resonate with the cohort's general desire to be aligned with institutional goals and direction (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). The collaborative inquiry practiced by participants in the FLC will give the cohort tools for continuing such inquiry throughout their career. A learning community model puts incoming colleagues in a better position to actively accomplish these higher-order outcomes of new faculty development by offering the time, structure, and support to do so.

Assess Your Efforts.

It will be important to assess how your learning community for new faculty is meeting its objectives. Participants should be asked to evaluate progress toward achievement of learning outcomes at regular intervals so that necessary adjustments can be made. This feedback can be gathered through quick online surveys as well as direct checking in with the cohort. When designing survey questions, reflect on both the outcomes of the threads of inquiry and the higher-order goals of new faculty development. Sample questions on a Likert scale for the higher-order goals might include the following: "To what extent has the new faculty learning community (1) helped you build connections with other cohort members? (2) helped you build connections with established faculty? (3) helped you build connections with colleagues in other campus divisions?

(4) increased your understanding of the institutional mission and your place in it? and (5) increased your understanding of and appreciation for collaborative inquiry?"

Survey questions should also link directly back to the threads of inquiry. If the cohort has pursued a thread on innovative pedagogies, for example, sample questions might include these: "To what extent has the new faculty learning community increased your understanding of (1) the core purposes and values of higher education; (2) the student learning process; (3) innovative pedagogies; (4) evidence-based outcomes assessment; (5) course redesign based on outcomes assessment; and (6) how to be a reflective practitioner about teaching." Open-ended questions might ask for qualitative evaluation of the effectiveness of the learning community approach. It will be important to ask questions that document what new faculty members know and are able to do as a result of participation in the learning community. The outcomes assessment should drive modifications to the new faculty learning community in order to better meet its goals.

Conclusions

Because first-year faculty members need substantive professional development to help them gain the full range of skills necessary to be successful in the professoriate, a comprehensive approach is needed. A faculty learning community offers significant benefits to incoming faculty as it provides the time, structure, and facilitation necessary to foster the development of the requisite professional competencies.

This approach to new faculty development should also prove appealing to next-generation faculty, because the collaborative, flexible, and autonomous nature of the learning community will likely resonate with their learning preferences (Cullen & Harris, 2008). The structure, direction, and developmental support will also match what they are looking for in a learning environment. Finally, the learning community approach meets next-generation faculty's expectations to be integrated into the community and the mission of the institution while developing the lifelong learning skills of collaborative inquiry and reflective practice.

Because faculty learning communities can be used to foster institutional change, opportunities should be developed so that first-year faculty can disseminate their expertise and newfound skills to their departments and divisions. In this way, new faculty can start to affect change in faculty culture, helping the institution respond to the rapidly changing situation in higher education. The characteristics and strengths of this next generation mesh well with the approach afforded by FLCs, creating synergies

for development and change that can be effectively harnessed to advance both the professional success of these new colleagues and the well-being of the institution.

Acknowledgment

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