

What's Old Is New Again

Alternative Strategies for Supporting Faculty

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After many successful years as a teacher and a scholar in the humanities, a professor at a prestigious research university questions the value of her research focus. A colleague in the social sciences feels as if he's reached a plateau in his teaching. A senior health sciences professor admits the fire has gone out of his commitment to the university. A talented assistant professor is almost overwhelmed by the anxieties that accompany his quest for tenure.

These are the kinds of faculty issues that leaders at Emory University grappled with as they drafted a report in 1994 that would guide the university's future development. "Choices and Responsibility: Shaping Emory's Future" was the result of long, intense talks throughout the Emory community. As a

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guide for the years ahead, it emphasized building a stronger community, achieving an appropriate balance between teaching and research, encouraging interdisciplinary scholarship, and enhancing the infrastructure for scholarship.

But a significant question remained: How to put these stirring ideas into action? Put another way, what would be the most effective way to improve upon existing levels of excellence in scholarship and teaching at a growing research university?

A typical university response to this question—largely determined by administration—would be to design special-purpose programs directed toward improving faculty members' teaching techniques, grant-writing abilities, or other skills. But these typically bureaucratic approaches to faculty development often fail to take into account the highly autonomous and creative nature of scholarly work. At Emory, despite high levels of satisfaction with overall support for research and teaching, only half of the faculty in a 1998 survey rated existing faculty development opportunities favorably.

While Emory's academic leaders deliberated on possible alternatives to the traditional approach to faculty development, an answer appeared from an unexpected direction—a seminar series on the Emory campus that lasted from 1989 to 1996. Findings from this series sparked insights about whole new approaches to enhancing faculty scholarship that connect with the enduring spirit of collegiality and inquiry so vital to any flour-

ishing academic culture.

EMORY'S GROWTH AND SCHOLARLY MILIEU

Emory's rise from regional to national prominence as a research university began in the late 1970s with the help of a large endowment gift. As other academic institutions have learned, the gift brought with it an unavoidable responsibility to focus on future development. At Emory, the university's leaders did just that—and achieved impressive results. Over the next 15 years, faculty numbers increased by 50 percent and research support rose by 450 percent. At the close of fiscal year 2001, sponsored research totaled over \$247 million and endowment surpassed \$5 billion by December, 2001.

Emory is now a first-rate university with about 12,000 students and 2,500 faculty in the arts and sciences, medicine, nursing, theology, law, business, and public health. In 1997, Graham and Diamond ranked it as one of the top 10 rising research universities in the private sector.

Such rapid expansion over a mere two decades has created a powerful double-edged sword. Emory's investment in highly-focused scholarship and research could serve to diminish its traditional culture of broad intellectual exchange. Now Emory faces the challenge of pushing individual scholarship to even higher levels while also strengthening opportunities for scholarly collaboration across the university.

THE LUCE SEMINARS

The experience that would profoundly shape our thoughts on how best to create that environment began in 1989. The

Luce Seminars, supported by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation and university-provided release time from teaching, brought together groups of 10 to 12 faculty each year from across the campus each year. During each spring semester for eight years, participants met twice a week in structured seminars to explore scholarly topics of common concern, like human nature and responsibility, and to experience intellectual community across disciplines. No academic fences were erected, no theoretical barbed wire strung.

After the seminars ended in 1996, the university conducted a study in order to understand its influence on the scholarly work and attitudes of faculty participants. The study revealed that most of the program's participants experienced intense intellectual stimulation through their involvement in what one of them called an "intellectual sanctuary." Reported benefits, in turn, included positive influences on subsequent teaching, research, and service.

Some faculty were inspired to try new approaches to teaching that drew in people or ideas from other disciplines. For example, two participants from the humanities and social sciences subsequently team-taught a multidisciplinary course. Similarly, a natural scientist collaborated with a humanities faculty member on a course blending science and literature. Another learned to use new narrative techniques in articles published in scientific journals, saying, "It's that kind of weaving across the disciplines that I honed in the seminar." This interdisciplinary attitude of the seminar participants is best summed up in a comment by another social science participant who reported, "I don't approach any topic without... wanting to know what other disciplines have said about it. I am

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a better teacher, a better professor...[and] a better citizen of the community, because of the seminar.”

Other faculty said that the seminar reinforced new directions in their careers or research. For instance, some health scientists discovered alternative resources and ideas for using their professional expertise to serve their communities. One reported gaining “a powerful renewed sense of responsibility” for applying academic knowledge to community service.

The program also helped faculty to overcome their isolation and to feel more connected to colleagues throughout the campus. One senior faculty member admitted that before the seminar he “was in Timbuktu in terms of relationships with the university. As I got more acquainted with the larger community, it has filled the void.”

As we reflected on similar reports from seminar participants, a conclusion began to emerge: The Luce Seminars succeeded because they strengthened the university's cultural milieu for scholarship without increasing the formal expectations of faculty performance. Program participants sensed the university's support for the intellectual development of its faculty—and that spirit resonated throughout the campus as news of the program spread.

The opportunity for scholars to interact and collaborate across disciplines was also a key value of the program. The merging of institutional and professional cultures helped enhance the art of faculty scholarship and interaction in a deeper and perhaps more lasting way than programs more explicitly targeted toward improving a “checklist” of presumably needed skills.

When asked about the opportunities and barriers related to cross-disciplinary interaction and collaboration at Emory, many key faculty members said they especially value approaches to faculty development that permit grassroots initiatives to flourish and, just as important, that reduce administrative structures that might impede such initiatives. Interdisciplinary scholarship thus requires both cultural and structural support. When universities provide such support, faculty interaction, intellectual development, and job satisfaction—as well as the ties between research and practice related to collaboration across disciplines—are likely to improve.

ENABLING FACULTY TO FLOURISH

As a result of the eight-year seminar program, we now understand that meaningful and lasting faculty development programs are more likely to take hold when the impetus for change emerges directly from faculty at the grassroots level. Success depends on the faculty's ability to shape for themselves the kind of scholarly experience that best unleashes their desires, talents, and skills. We've found that an enabling rather than coercive approach to faculty development creates an environment that reinforces key faculty values like autonomy, collegiality, truth, and creativity. A faculty's strong sense of shared values and directions reduces the need for codified

structures and procedures.

Traditional ideas about the “community of scholars” and current models of organizational behavior both support this approach (See *Resources*). In an example of such traditional ideas, Daniel Coit Gilman at John Hopkins and Robert Maynard Hutchins at the University of Chicago built on the ideas of Cardinal Newman when they assumed that the quest for truth and knowledge flowed, in part, from familiar discourse within a local community of scholars. And there is a large body of evidence substantiating the proposition that teaching and research are enhanced by high levels of dialogue, support, and collaboration. Initiatives aimed at enhancing the environment for scholarly development work best when they resonate with the values of collegiality and inquiry that scholars already cherish.

At the same time, scholarship in organizational theory describes how organizations are able to adapt effectively to new conditions. More particularly, the post-industrial economy of the late 20th century has created new kinds of workplaces. The resulting knowledge-intensive, innovative settings, like the academy, require workers to exercise high levels of professional autonomy. Structures that enable rather than coerce professionals help them perform their jobs more effectively, while reinforcing commitment and encouraging creativity.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

A seminar series for faculty open to all of the university's departments and schools continues the legacy of the Luce Seminars at Emory. Informed by the study, the provost and a committee of former Luce Seminar participants are guiding the evolution of the current program.

Building on lessons learned from the seminars—as well as experience gained through other faculty discussion series—we are investigating additional ways to strengthen support for faculty scholarship. These ways rely on non-intrusive, enabling structures that both use and contribute to traditional academic values. At the same time, we are attempting to understand and document more fully which approaches work best for what. For example, we are trying to determine the specific types of initiatives that are best for supporting teaching excellence, what particular strategies we should use to create and maintain university-wide intellectual initiatives, and how best to support scholarship and intellectual community at different stages in a given faculty member's career.

Guiding Teaching Excellence. In 1996, before the findings from the Luce Seminars were in, the university initiated a series of faculty focus-group discussions about various aspects of teaching quality and improvement. Conducted by a faculty commission on teaching, the talks brought together faculty from various schools and departments to share ideas. The commission then deliberated on ways to express these ideas through enhanced support of teaching excellence.

The commission's report, entitled "Teaching at Emory," reflected broad support for improving the balance in the priorities accorded and the resources allocated to teaching as opposed to research. The commission also noted some of the particular conditions needed to achieve a better balance, including clarifying Emory's mission and educational goals, supporting intellectual community in the realm of teaching, recognizing teaching as a multifaceted activity, and understanding the responsibility of students.

Although the commission recommended that Emory establish a relatively traditional teaching center, faculty again chose a more grassroots form of assistance. They urged the provost to found a "council" instead. Rather than immediately recruiting a professional staff schooled in faculty and instructional development, the provost created a new University Advisory Council on Teaching made up of faculty representatives from across the university. The job of this Council is to determine directly what kinds of teaching support faculty might need. The Council draws on Emory's own faculty expertise to sponsor seminars, lectures, and workshops on topics like teaching portfolios, new teaching technologies, and other teaching-related issues.

Supporting Cross-School Initiatives. In fall 1999, the university set about to gain a fuller picture of cross-school research and teaching initiatives in order to understand their genesis, evolution, status, and potential future. A faculty advisory group guided the study's direction, which included in-depth interviews with the leaders of 12 multidisciplinary centers spanning diverse fields of knowledge including law and religion, African-American studies, and the blend of

RESOURCES

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social and natural sciences that composes neuroscience.

Results of the study helped reveal how the university can best enable and support cross-school intellectual initiatives. Results also helped identify potential communities of faculty who share related intellectual interests, and whose further development as explicit and intentional communities might be fostered. In addition to a paper summarizing the study's results, a brochure highlighting the uniqueness of these initiatives has been circulated widely throughout the university.

Focusing on Career Stages. Another study was launched in fall 1999, centered on a series of semi-structured interviews designed to reveal the best ways to support faculty members' scholarship and collegial interaction at different stages of their careers.

During the first round of this study, data are being gathered from participants in five faculty cohorts: those who have completed one year at Emory, those who have completed four years, those who have recently received tenure, those who have been promoted to professor, and those who are approaching retirement. For each stage, about 10 faculty members are being interviewed; 16 additional faculty from across the university will serve as advisors.

Taking our cues from previous studies of the Luce Seminars and the "Teaching at Emory" project, we hope this ongoing investigation will reveal additional ways in which the university can enable faculty to excel in teaching, research, and service throughout their careers.

By creating an enabling rather than a coercive organizational setting to enhance faculty development, Emory has tapped into an ongoing dialogue among faculty and has collaborated with faculty about the types of programs that best serve their needs. By looking more closely at these issues through carefully designed studies of impact, we have also found an important new role for institutional research. Not only can systematic information-gathering and analysis provide a valuable account of how a university enacts its mission and progresses toward