DO AS I DO: MODELING SCHOLARLY LEADERSHIP AS DEPARTMENT CHAIR

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Abstract

With increased attention to administrative duties, the traditional role of department chair as model scholar is changing dramatically. This paper describes some of the ideas that can inform the creation of a realistic and attainable role of scholarly research and writing, and the accompanying dynamic processes that help balance the administrative, management, and additional responsibilities of academic department leaders.

Introduction

The metaphor of academic departments as a family can apply to the various roles different faculty members play when it comes to research and publication, two of the most prevalent forms of scholarly work in academia. As such, there is usually at least one accomplished faculty member who plays the role of oldest child, leading the way with a long list of publications, honors, and research awards. There may also be a prodigious younger sibling who began establishing himself or herself as a star while still in graduate school. In one corner may be an uncle who had a productive period several years ago but has been content to offer advice and wisdom while sitting on the sidelines. Finally, there is a cousin who has recently moved to town and challenges the notion that research and scholarship are important tenets of the new academic realm and instead should be replaced with creative teaching or collaborative efforts of service. How does the head of this assembled group find a way to nurture, motivate, and inspire each member to fulfill his or her scholarly responsibilities? What can the leader of an academic department do to demonstrate, model, mentor, and lead the faculty in all areas of scholarly work?

Beginning with the activities most critical to achieving the institutional and department mission, the department chair must help the faculty evaluate, identify, and articulate these activities in terms of how they relate to faculty scholarship. How does a department chair help the faculty embrace the idea that productivity in scholarship is the norm for the entire department? Can this role be delegated or is there something inherent in being the department chair that requires the leader to be a role model as well as advocate for scholarship? What are the barriers to achieving widespread participation in scholarship among faculty? Also, what support and maintenance resources need to be in place for the continuous development of faculty scholarship?

The Traditional and Changing Roles of Faculty

Traditionally, the three main segments of academic work are teaching, research, and service. While teaching remains the most visible work of faculty members, and can be the most time-consuming, the other two activities also favor heavily in decisions for promotion, tenure, compensation, and development. This is not likely to change when examining significant trends in colleges and universities, such as the upward drift of institutions towards becoming identified as research institutions, the proliferation of adjunct and contract faculty positions, and an expanded interest in quality of life issues, sometimes referred to as work-life balance (Hamilton, 2005; O'Connor, Greene, Good, & Zhang, 2011).

As institutions seek to grow from community or junior colleges to 4-year colleges, from colleges to universities, and from universities with a focus on teaching that become universities classified as research institutions, the emphasis on research as an integral part of all faculty work grows, too. If institutions are granted additional funding or wish to enhance their reputations, increasing research activities becomes one of the most prevalent means of achievement.

The demands of academics to fulfill all three of these segments are influenced by available resources, especially time and money. In a study of faculty time spent on specific types of work, Towes and Yazadian (2007) found that the average faculty member works 50 hours a week, mostly related to teaching activities. The hiring of part-time, adjunct faculty to share teaching responsibilities, although a logical solution, is fiscally impractical. The downturned economy has forced private and state-funded institutions to re-evaluate faculty priorities. Harnisch (2011) noted the shift of state-funded public institutions to a productivity and performance-based funding model. The importance of faculty scholarship is secondary to "market principles being integrated into academic operations, believing that evaluating performance based on a few metrics is antithetical to academic freedom" (p. 8). Faculty assume additional roles including student advising, scheduling, program assessment, and course development, in addition to teaching and maintaining a research agenda. How can faculty find the time and motivation to add more responsibility and work to a filled-to-the-brim schedule?

The debate among faculty about the role of research and its relationship to teaching can also add to decisions about how best to allocate time and talent. One controversial study focuses on the idea that teaching and research are "mutually supporting" and complementary (Marsh & Hattie, 2002). In a meta-analysis conducted over a 7-year period, these researchers found that the tasks of teaching and the tasks of research are independent and thus, uncorrelated. While there is much support for combining teaching assignments and experiences with research to produce ideas for research and create a research agenda, the results of their analysis clearly show most faculties include those who are excellent teachers, those who are

expert researchers, those who are good at both, and those who are good at neither. Thus, administrative decisions about hiring, teaching assignments, or research appointments should take into consideration individual qualities related to the specific job needs and not make assumptions based on expertise in one area or another.

One suggestion by those who study the increasing importance of research for faculty, and the implications of that focus, is to understand the motivation of faculty to become involved with research explored in several studies (Fairweather, 2002; Marsh & Hattie, 2002; Tien, 2000). Results of these studies point to varying interpretations of the role of faculty in different types of institutions, as well as a lack of consensus about how best to allocate time to research, teaching, and service. Additionally, in a study of 320 faculty members at 10 business schools, Chen, Gupta, and Hoshower (2006) found that different factors play a role in whether or not a faculty member engages in a robust research agenda. Their data revealed that not only is research productivity positively correlated with tenure status and negatively correlated with length of employment, but also that as faculty reach tenure status, their motivation for intrinsic reward versus extrinsic rewards increases. These results suggest that universities and departments need to do a better job of analyzing how best to motivate individuals or at the very least encourage approaching categories of faculty in diverse ways to motivate them to spend additional time and effort on research and scholarly development.

Differentiating Faculty Needs

As expected, there are stages in an academic's career that reflect the productivity and effectiveness of each individual. While not everyone spends the same amount of time at each stage, most everyone does move through these stages, as reflected by assignments, promotion, years of experience, and other activities. For example, Selingo (2008) reported the results of a survey of more than 15,000 academics from 89 colleges in the "Chronicle of Higher Education". The data revealed that academics are most optimistic at the beginning and at the end of their careers, demonstrated also by the revealing statistic that those who are most satisfied in the survey participants were in the 65+ age category with the least satisfied falling into the category of being in the late 40s age group or those who have been in the job for more than 8 years.

New faculty members represent an opportunity for the department chair and other leaders to encourage a research-expected ethos through careful mentoring and guidance. It is also important to note that a study of new, younger faculty (Gillespie et al., 2005) uncovered the importance to them of collegial interaction. Ensuring that the typical isolation and individualism marked by many academics of the past is not the pattern within a department could help make the transition more satisfactory at this critical initiation period.

Those coming fresh from the dissertation experience may need to re-focus on a

different research agenda befitting their current academic status. It is also interesting to note that relationship building between new faculty and their former dissertation chairs, can produce a positive productivity in future research for both new and veteran faculty (Urgin, Odom, Pearson, & Bahmanziari, 2012). In fact, discussing with new faculty their relationships with their dissertation chairs can provide insights into how best to facilitate successful partnerships between newcomers and the experienced faculty they now join.

With views changing regarding retirement, there may be a significant number of faculty who are older and have been productive throughout their careers and/or have worked under multiple administrative leaders.   In fact, the data on older professors (65 and beyond) indicates that this group of academics maintains publication and research productivity until retirement (Dorfman, 2009). Connecting new faculty with highly productive veteran faculty may be a beneficial relationship for both parties. No matter what the ages or stages of faculty, the makeup and dynamics of the faculty pose unique challenges in motivating each individual to improve.

Certain disciplines may have intrinsic characteristics that either encourage or discourage research. For example, Santo, Engstrom, Reetz, Schweinle, and Reed (2009) suggested that faculty research productivity in teacher education departments typically falls below that of other departments in part because of the faculty focus on teaching. Knowles, Cole, and Sumsion (2000) explained that schools of education might be overly influenced by the practice of teaching, including their necessary involvement with schools, leaving little time for research activities. Levine (2007), in his treatise on the education of researchers, also noted that some doctoral programs in education do not emphasize the development of research skills as much as some other content areas. This could result in faculty members over-extended in teaching and service and underprepared for the rigors of research and publication.

Personality also may play a significant role in research productivity and aptitude. The work of research and publication may be more attractive to introverts than to extroverts according to new evidence by author Susan Cain (2012). In her book, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking,* Cain discussed research on creativity that highlights the fact that "introverts prefer to work independently, and solitude can be a catalyst to innovation" (Cain, 2012, p. 74). The value of her work lies in helping department chairs understand that many academics may not be well-suited for every aspect of their job requirement, as some may be more comfortable naturally with teaching or collaboration while others may function better and can be productive and creative only in isolation. Negotiating the blending of extroverts and introverts, among other characteristics, makes the job of bringing a faculty together to create an atmosphere of scholarship even more complex.

Department Chairs: Developing a Personal Philosophy of Scholarship

Leading an academic department carries with it unique challenges that differ from leadership roles in other arenas, such as business or industry. For example, department chairs serve more than one set of constituents, as they are tasked to implement institutional mission and policy to faculty, as well as to represent the faculty needs to the administration. In the past, department chairs were selected to serve based on their scholarship, academic reputations, and spheres of influence within their discipline (Hecht, Higgerson, & Gmelch, 1999). Today, the tasks of a department chair vary considerably but can include making and evaluating budget decisions, leading the processes of hiring and promotion, studying data to create plans to boost enrollment and retention, and pursuing faculty consensus building and development, among others. This work is often undertaken with little or no training or prior experience as an academic leader (Gmelch, 2004). The additional time spent on administrative duties often prohibits the chair from making a commitment to continuing personal scholarly interests as an academic endeavor.

Understanding the trade-offs associated with department chair duties and the probable eventual return to regular faculty status, department chairs must evaluate the importance of maintaining some degree of scholarship and solidifying commitments to research that make sense in terms of time and productivity. The price of leading a department can be steep in terms of continued scholarship without a realistic plan in place. Honestly evaluating the contributions that can be made with administrative demands is a key to managing stress and maintaining some semblance of balance coupled with self-appraisal of research skills and work habits related to research and publication activities. Acknowledging the costs and benefits of decisions about scholarly work may be a critical first step in setting realistic goals about where and how to expend time and energy. From there, each department chair must decide what about these decisions should be shared with faculty and how best to share them.

Part of the responsibility of leadership includes managing personal goals and expectations related to research and publishing. While the shift to concentrate on the department rather than personal or individual goals is expected, the loss of the latter may actually diminish the personal and leadership power of an academic leader (Schwinghammer et al., 2012). Finding ways to collaborate with others on scholarly activities, both inside and outside the department should be a priority. Again, expressing personal balance issues to colleagues helps demonstrate the chair's understanding of the same dilemmas faculty face when they feel overwhelmed by the demands of teaching, service, and scholarship.

Suggestions for Promoting Scholarship among Faculty

With a personal philosophy and commitment to scholarship in place, the next step for the department chair is to focus on the rest of the faculty. With new faculty, in particular, there will be many questions about what is expected, as well as a tendency to set unrealistic goals about research and publication. In an interesting

view of working with faculty, Cramer (2006) described how to handle both overachievers and underachievers. Each group requires attention and a different set of strategies to build a foundation of scholarly work as an integral part of the job. For those who begin with a strong background and who continue to add to their professional activities, finding ways to recognize them to the dean and others in the department can demonstrate attention and support. Interestingly, the excuses of those who cannot seem to get on track with scholarly work, ranging from content-specific, skill-specific, or time-management issues, require varying approaches.

For example, if a faculty member is dealing with escalating family or personal problems, the chair needs to determine if there are resources from the university or community that could help and determine whether this is a situation that has a definite time period after which more pointed counseling about expectations is needed. If the problem is that the faculty has limited output with no completed or published articles, or is focused on obscure topics that hold little chance of being embraced by the academic community, the chair may need to meet with those individuals to discuss possible consequences early on regarding failure to achieve expectations with follow-up assistance with resources, including a mentor, to support success.   Ensuring that dialog about scholarship remains at the forefront of all department meetings and conversations can reinforce its importance and provide additional opportunities for assistance and strategizing among the faculty. Discussing the process of research, as well as opportunities for research collaboration and resources that support research, inside and outside the university, can underscore the reality of scholarship expectations and activities in the lives of academics.

Department Communication

Department communication, verbal and written, has the potential to influence the focus on scholarship. How much of department meeting agendas are focused on issues related to research and publication? How often do e-mail messages underscore faculty opportunities or accomplishments in scholarship? If the expectation is that scholarly activity is important, then related messages should be obvious throughout all communication, including informal discussions among faculty. While the department chair cannot possibly control or set the agenda for all faculty communication, he or she can ensure that the messages emphasize that research and publication are imperative in all appropriate meetings and situations. If the message to the faculty is hidden or submerged, there is room for doubt about its importance, especially in the minds of those who feel inadequate or underprepared to meet expectations, including new faculty (Adams, 2002).

Finding innovative ways to bring up aspects of scholarship without appearing unrealistic or outlandish requires a delicate balancing act. Again, if the department chair is not fully committed to scholarship, this can backfire. Discussions about work-life balance is one place to insert comments about time, energy, and the self-discipline required to conduct research in addition to the more obvious discussions

about tenure and promotion (O'Connor, Greene, Good, & Zhang, 2011). Support in teaching load as part of capacity is also a type of confirmation that demonstrates the priority that research and publication carries in many universities, particularly those designated as research institutions.

Innovation and commitment can be disrupted by ineffective communication, a trait very few people think applies to them. Everything from high morale to well-run processes of admission, enrollment, advisement, teaching, and learning depends on effective communication. Asking others for feedback and genuinely accepting constructive criticism or noting compliments is easier to describe than to accomplish. If your goal is to change the level of research and scholarship in your department, your ability to clearly communicate the goals and to gain faculty support of them depends on good communication. Considering the consequences of ineffective communication and the rewards of effective communication, time spent periodically reflecting on and evaluating this leadership characteristic can be worthwhile as a technique to emphasize research quality and output.

Barriers to Productivity/Bridges to Success

The research previously cited on faculty productivity barriers (Santo et al., 2009) discussed self-discipline as a significant factor in research and publication activity. Interestingly, faculty who were in the most productive category of that study were also those who designated specific time to staying current in their fields of study and devoted less time to service-related activities (Santo et al., 2009, p. 126). Again, discussing these factors and following up with ideas for support, whether offering feedback, providing ideas for collaboration or future research directions, and arranging for specific time for research and research skill development, are important strategies for department leaders.

Partnering for mentoring or collaboration is an effective strategy for many academics. While some partnerships are strictly for mentoring, a blend of mentoring/collaboration can prove to be effective in producing research publications and presentation with many faculty members (Gillespie et al., 2005). In addition to traditional pairings of veterans with new faculty, inviting interested faculty from other departments, or even other colleges to form research groups or pairs, can be intriguing and invigorating to veteran researchers.

Whatever the pairing, the department chair can facilitate the success of these groups by leading discussions about the power dynamics of groups, the need for setting realistic expectations, time commitments, an agreement of the type and rigor of peer review, and the necessity of each group or pair to develop a means of assessing frequently their relationship and the outcomes produced. Pairs or groups are often the setting for new faculty or unproductive faculty to gain clarity about what it takes to be a good researcher (Levine, 2007). It may also be useful to carefully select a committee within your department to set up a process for presenting options and facilitating collaboration for your faculty and support them with resources and your

time. As in many organizations filled with highly skilled, clever employees, it is beneficial to remember that not every employee is a talented asset (Thompson, 2010). To facilitate new processes, collaboration, writing groups, or research pairing, spend energy and resources on those who express interest and commitment to helping lead this endeavor.

Many universities, particularly large, public universities, have well supported, institution-wide research centers that offer assistance and resources for all faculty and students. However, some departments, including those with established institutional centers, have found success in developing an *in-house*, department research center specifically devoted to their faculty. A decade ago, the School of Education in Denver set out to develop such a center chronicled in an article by Goodwin, Kozleski, Muth, Rhodes, and White (2006). The department chairs in the School of Education began with an extensive needs assessment that led to development of a mission to help faculty develop research agendas that "could stand the test of peer review in respected journals" (Goodwin et al, 2006, p. 254). The center was staffed with research associates who worked with faculty on everything from how to use and incorporate software in managing and analyzing data to assistance in identifying potential journals for publication, help with literature searches and manuscript preparation, and workshops to deliver training, among other functions. During the first year of operation, the remarkable results included increased satisfaction by faculty regarding their interest in scholarly activity and an increase from 36 to 62 faculty-produced publications (p. 260). This example helps illustrate types of support that may energize a department in its fulfillment of personal and institutional goals related to research and publication.

One of the major stumbling blocks to establishing a strong research agenda, both personally and for a department, is tackling the deficiencies honestly. Is someone unproductive because of skill deficiency or lack of commitment? Does the department rely on the same people to produce research without expecting them to contribute to the development of others in the department? Do you, as chair, prioritize other goals ahead of research or feel too overwhelmed with your own workload to lead a needed change among your faculty? Are their personal, intrinsic benefits to being a productive researcher that are dismissed or misunderstood by some who feel research is rewarded only by promotion and tenure? These questions deserve careful consideration for making any type of important change within a department.

The challenges of leading highly educated, talented, and independent academics are enormous. If research is a priority for you and your department, the actions and work of the department should reflect agreement and consensus for achieving excellence in scholarship.

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