

Postdoc Academic Chat #9

Tuesday, June 16, 2015

How To Enjoy Your Academic Job - And Get Tenure In The Process

READINGS

#1. Integrating Work and Life: A Vision for a Changing Academy

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#1. Integrating Work and Life: A Vision for a Changing Academy

This month's Carnegie Perspectives looks at future directions for faculty development . It is by Pat Hutchings, Mary Taylor Huber, and Chris M. Golde and is #28 in the monthly series called Carnegie Foundation Perspectives. These short commentaries exploring various educational issues are produced by the CFAT. The Foundation invites your response at:

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Imagine that you could gaze into a crystal ball and see 25 years into the future. What will the life of an effective and productive faculty member in your favorite academic department be like? How will he or she achieve a productive balance among the various elements of faculty work and life? The crystal ball seems awfully cloudy to us; the one thing that seems certain is that the life of a faculty member joining a department tomorrow will be quite different from the life lived by a faculty member retiring today.

These questions are pressing because the academic profession is nearing a moment of great change. The large cohort of faculty hired during the late 1960s and early 1970s will retire during the next decade, and a new generation is coming in. We urgently need policies and practices that affirm and ensure the dignity, humanity

and intellectual excitement of academic careers for higher education to remain vital. Higher education's future depends on the creativity with which it can provide for the professional growth of all faculty and for flexibility in the shape and timing of their careers.

The challenges are urgent on two fronts.

Academic work will require a new and larger set of abilities and skills. Teaching a more diverse population of students requires deeper knowledge of pedagogy than before, and advising now extends into new domains like service learning and undergraduate research. In most fields, scholarly work is becoming increasingly collaborative, interdisciplinary and practically relevant, at the same time that expectations for productivity are on the rise. Public service involves greater reciprocity between academic and community partners, while academic decision-making in today's complex educational, financial and legal environment takes more time and thought. And for many, the trio of teaching, research and service may be joined by business and economic enterprises. Integrating these work domains will be a particular challenge.

"Work - life balance" is the catchall phrase that encompasses a variety of needs for flexibility in the timing and pacing of faculty careers. The ever-increasing demands and pace of academic life are stretching many faculty members to the breaking point, placing further pressures on the boundaries between personal and professional domains. Workplace policies developed in the past no longer fit current realities. Women and men alike are trying to find new ways to handle family responsibilities for children and aging parents. Few policies address the needs of the growing proportion of part-time and non-tenure-track faculty members, nor of the growing ranks of retiring faculty members who are still vigorous and able to make meaningful contributions.

Surprisingly, these two conversations about the work and life of faculty are rarely connected. The first set of issues focuses on changing faculty roles and rewards in keeping with an expanded conception of scholarly work. The second set of issues focuses on the balance between faculty work and life at all of the stages of faculty careers.

In March of 2006, the Carnegie Foundation in partnership with the Sloan Foundation convened a group of distinguished participants active in each of these conversations, who created a vision of professional development to meet the challenges for the new academy (see the online Professional Development for a Changing Academy Report).

Six principles emerged from the discussions:

1. Begin professional development in college and intensify in graduate school.
2. Provide flexibility for work-and-life issues throughout the academic career.
3. Recognize, develop and reward multiple talents and contributions.
4. Foster long-term planning and preparation.
5. Cultivate leadership throughout faculty careers.
6. Strengthen networks that encourage learning.

These principles rest on an expansive view of professional development. On the one hand, policies and practices (family leave, retirement policies, tenure clock flexibility) must allow a diverse professoriate to maximize effectiveness. On the other hand, opportunities for learning throughout the career (engagement with the scholarship of teaching, interdisciplinary networks, civic engagement opportunities) should be widely available.

Traditional notions of professional development are broadened in three directions: when, who and how. Professional development should not be reserved for assistant professors or for those who are somehow deemed ineffective; instead, it starts in graduate school and meets the needs of faculty members throughout their careers, including through retirement. Professional development should reach all faculty members, especially those with temporary appointments who often feel excluded from the college community. We must also recognize the important roles played by many academic staff members. Flexibility, a broadened view of what the work entails and how the work is done, should also undergird professional development efforts.

These principles are just the beginning of the conversation. We invite readers to dream with us. How can faculty life in the future balance and integrate various work roles and the personal and professional? In light of that answer, what professional development practices and policies will help ensure that that vision becomes reality?

2. Reimagining Faculty Work

Below is my edited version of a summary prepared by James Yao of Texas A&M University, of an article by J. P. Bean, "Alternative Models of Professional Roles: New Languages to Reimagine Faculty Work," *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 69, No. 5, September/October 1998, pp. 496-512. While you probably won't agree with all the comments, they do give us something to consider as we rethink faculty work roles in the coming decade.

Regards,

Rick Reis

Quantity over Quality

"... the language currently used at research universities to describe faculty work is constraining regardless of its source. It emphasizes quantity as opposed to quality, extrinsic as opposed to intrinsic characteristics of work, a lack of trust of faculty members, and an emphasis on the procurement of resources."

Research Hegemony

"Once, the undergraduate curriculum held the faculty together: we taught and students learned, and that was our main engagement. After the success of the Manhattan Project and other uses of science in World War II, the research hegemony arose. Undergraduates, once the chief focus of faculty attention, became fodder for the graduate research enterprise; universities became not just big business, but big businesses."

The Language of Higher Education

" How do we talk about higher education now? This the language I hear: efficiency, productivity, technology, credit hours generated, grants with overhead received, accountability, assessment, competition, costs, total quality management. This is not the language of education or morality or scholarship or learning or community; it is the language of counting, accountants, accountability and, to a greater or lesser extent, it is how we imagine our enterprise. ... There is pressure to increase the size of classes, whether learning is improved for students or not, and pressure to increase the scale of funded research, whether the research is driven by need for knowledge or not. ... There are pressures to forego research that might take several years to complete in favor of scholarship that becomes trivial as faculty search for the smallest publishable unit on the shortest possible timeline."

Extrinsic vs Intrinsic Rewards

" ... We are role models for students not only as professionals but also as human beings. It is unlikely that any new definition of faculty work can ignore students. ... One should work for the development of one's discipline, or one's self, or of knowledge and expression. ..

"When our extrinsic rewards are high, we have won the game of evaluation, but we may or may not have served ourselves, our disciplines, or our students. The primary extrinsic rewards for faculty are salary and promotion. ... To endorse materialism, to teach our students this value through our example, to export this value through international students around the world, raises the specter of

sustainability. ..."

Rampant Workaholism

"Perhaps the greatest danger to faculty members is that the definition of their roles will endorse workaholism as a virtue. ... First and foremost workaholism is a pathology, not a virtue, even if it is rewarded and even if it is a norm. A person addicted to the process of work is out of control.

"Addiction relies on processes such as the promise, which takes a person out of the present time into the future. ... Another process is external referencing, in which one's sense of self is developed outside oneself. Faculty members often depend on external references, like the editors of refereed journals, to assess their worth as scholars. A third process is invalidation. Here the addict defines into nonexistence ideas that she or he doesn't like or can't control. ... Hard work is to be admired; workaholism is not. .

"Three desirable things to consider in a new definition of faculty roles are to be true to ourselves, to value students, and work for intrinsic reasons. Simultaneously, we should avoid externally defined roles, the primacy of extrinsic rewards, and workaholism. ... It is time to move beyond the language of counting and accountability and consider describing faculty work in new languages. ..."

Reimagining Our Work

"Utopian societies fail, but utopian ideals can be guides, reminders of our potential. It is not realistic in this society to ignore what accountants say, else your account becomes empty. ... When one's work is more influenced by the potential to increase income than by disciplinary needs, something is amiss. ... There is little doubt in my mind that if such a university existed, the best faculty and the best students would flock to it. As a result, it would become one of the wealthiest and most productive institutions.

"It is time that we take responsibility for our own work, define our role broadly, and contribute to the society that supports us. Although we are not likely to escape public scrutiny, only if we are accountable to ourselves can we be accountable to the public. Only if we reimagine our work, can we serve the soul of the world."

#3 Making Trade-Offs in the Use of Faculty Time

Below is an excerpt from "Teacher - Scholar Report," by a faculty focus group at Brigham Young University. Reprinted with permission.

Successful teacher/scholars tend to jealously protect portions of their time; they each have ways of seeking out personal time that is renewing for them. However, these faculty members also allow students considerable access. In general they seem less willing to engage in "community-building" activities on campus and collegial encounters that are not specifically tied to teaching or research. This ties to other research that shows effective faculty avoid administrative positions and limit committee work. We noted that all seemed to stress the importance of family support for their work activities.

Although these faculty members appear to have well-defined goals and focus, not all put in long work weeks, differing from the research that indicates long hours are a defining characteristic of effective faculty. Newer faculty tended to view longer hours as a necessary investment in establishing their careers than midcareer faculty.

GENERAL STRATEGIES

- *Many effective teacher/scholars are able to compartmentalize their work, allowing them to focus on the task at hand.
- *Several indicated that it's hard to juggle multiple tasks, but even when they have a heavy teaching load, they can take care of some of the mechanical and organizational tasks relating to research. By staying close to their research, these faculty are able to jump right in without much delay when a block of time becomes available.
- *One faculty member's experience highlights the value of "multiplying effects." "When you have a win/success in some area, it tends to multiply. I look for activities and tasks which have the potential for those multiplying effects. I wrote a paper that was accepted, and so I was asked to edit a special issue of a journal which then led to editorial contacts with a number of people. The momentum in research tends to build, as you get some wins, you establish a beach head, and you're able to go on. " These faculty members try to identify those things which they do well, and then try to channel resources into those areas.
- *"Small successes tend to generate multiple opportunities in other areas if you manage them well. For new faculty, I think publishing their dissertation is a good starting strategy, then create a research agenda that builds on their strengths. "
- *Some faculty appear to waste valuable time upgrading computer equipment and programs that have minimal impact on their ability to get work done. These teacher-scholars make sure that improvements they take on in the name of efficiency are worthwhile.

*Several of these faculty members will sometimes not answer their office door. In so doing they are trying to limit distractions and dedicate portions of uninterrupted time to serious scholarship. "Part of working smart is you've got to quit doing all the stuff that doesn't matter. I see so many of my colleagues, and I fall into this trap myself, spending too much time reading the paper, reading the magazines, upgrading their software, surfing the net, whatever it might be.

"Sometimes say to yourself, 'I'm not going to answer the phone. I'm going to put a please-do-not-disturb sign on the door.' If you avoid opening the door when it has a do-not-disturb sign showing, people will learn that if the sign is up, they should come back another time. The word will spread. If on the other hand, you always answer the door, no one will obey the directives you might leave on the door."

*Several individuals recommended setting aside personal time. For some, an hour each day was sufficient. For others, extended vacation during teaching breaks was the best strategy. One faculty member stated, "Every day, I have an hour which is mine. Nobody can take it from me. I might use that time to read or exercise, or do nothing at all. But I don't let anybody or anything take that hour from me. I find that hour really helps keep me feeling refreshed and alive."

*Family support seems crucial to these teacher-scholars. "Enlist the support of your family and have a schedule that helps you use time efficiently. Put people first and things second . . . Get some life priorities, because the faculty members whom I've seen fail, some of them have had problems with support of the spouse, the schedule, etc. "

MAXIMIZING TEACHING AND RESEARCH TIME

*These faculty members felt that the life of an academic can be like having more than two full-time jobs. For them, teaching and research would take as much time as is available. They believe it's important to establish some priorities for how much time and effort to devote to these responsibilities.

*One faculty member offered, "If possible, try to schedule classes at times in the day when you're better at teaching, and avoid scheduling classes during times when you're a productive writer and thinker. In order for this to work, you really have to know yourself. Experiment a little and before long you will know how to best schedule your day's activities. "

*Course improvements can often require big time investments. These faculty tended to wait during the term breaks to take time to assess how the class went,

and identify some changes that would improve the course. Then they would implement those changes. This strategy allows them to make improvements in their courses without having to sacrifice other activities (e.g., research projects, grant proposals, etc.).

*Organize yourself and be realistic. There really is no trick. There is no magic pill that you're able to take that suddenly allows you to teach a full load and write two articles every semester without a lot of hard work."

*Using class time to present their research activities and ideas helps them to reduce their class preparation time and provide important feedback on the paper or presentation that they are working on.

*One suggestion was to somehow optimize the time available for class preparation. "You could spend all day thinking of ways to make your class better or attending committee meetings. You have to make a conscious choice, "This is where I stop. them, and pick their brains. Even if you get contradictory advice, your movement up the "learning curve" will be tremendous - and every one likes to give advice.

* Volunteer up front for certain service assignments. Most faculty would just as soon not do any service or committee work but this is not reasonable or even desirable. You need to pull your weight so why not be proactive and volunteer for service assignments that have high leverage for you. Examples include serving on the department graduate admissions committee (gives you a first look at the best students in your field), and serving as coordinator of biweekly department seminar series (highly visible, brings you in contact with visiting experts in your field).

NOTE: "It is easier to say NO to things you don't want to do if you have already said YES to things you do want to do."

* Don't answer your phone every time it rings! Let it go on to voice mail, then block off one or two periods during the day for returning calls. Do the same with e-mail.

• Do NOT do consulting until after you have tenure. It is a time-sink of the first order and does little or nothing for your research productivity.