1983

Career Stages: Implications For Faculty Instructional Development

Lynn L. Mortensen

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/podimproveacad>

Part of the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#)

Mortensen, Lynn L., "Career Stages: Implications For Faculty Instructional Development" (1983). *To Improve the Academy*. 36.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/podimproveacad/36>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in To Improve the Academy by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Career Stages: Implications For Faculty Instructional Development

Lynn L. Mortensen

Adults proceed through predictable stages of development with needs and emphases changing in each stage. Erikson's eight ego stages (Erikson, 1950) and Havighurst's developmental tasks (Havighurst, 1952) were early attempts to describe how typical adults progress through life stages. The critically acclaimed *Seasons of a Man's Life* (Levinson, 1978) investigated in more depth the transitions and stages of development of adult males. Recently, some attention has been given to the application of the concept of adult career stages to faculty in academe.

Current Research on Career Stages of Faculty

Data have been reported in two studies that have been conducted at research universities to investigate the particular concerns, needs and interests of faculty at different career stages. Academic rank and number of years teaching were used as categories for career stages.

In the first study, interviews with forty-eight faculty were conducted at a major research university. Braskamp (1981) used the three professional ranks as three qualitatively different eras of development. It was found that *Assistant Professor's* primary goals were focused on "becoming — a good teacher and researcher, establishing a reputation, gaining the respect of others, and getting promoted," (p.3). They were concerned with establishing themselves and advancing in the profession. *Associate Professors* had a "sense of mission"

to make a difference in people's lives and improve society, (p.11). They were concerned with finding a balance between professional and personal life. *Professors* wanted to have an impact on the profession and expressed desire to help others, (p.16). They were concerned with re-examining their work to this point and deciding their future course. Faculty in all three ranks identified teaching and interacting with students as a major source of enjoyment.

Similar findings were reported in a study by Roger Baldwin (1979). He broke down the categories of rank into number of years teaching. Faculty in five categories were interviewed. (1) Assistant professors in their first three years of teaching worked to get their careers established and felt some pressure and concern about the future. They were receptive to help from others with more experience. (2) Assistant professors with more than three years of teaching were more confident about their abilities and performance, and sought recognition and advancement. Some were discontent with teaching, with the institution and with their own achievements. (3) Associate professors enjoyed peer recognition, were actively involved in campus-wide activities and were satisfied with their career to date. (4) Full professors more than five years from retirement were deciding whether to maintain basic career activities or move in a different direction. They questioned the value of their vocation and enthusiasm for teaching and research declined somewhat. Limited opportunities for professional growth led in some cases to disillusionment or depression which affected performance. (5) Full professors within five years of retirement generally had a high degree of career satisfaction and were reflective and content with professional achievements. They had limited goals for the future, engaged in no novel projects and had decreased enthusiasm for teaching.

Instructional Development Needs Identified by Faculty at Different Career Stages

If it can be accepted that faculty do proceed through predictable stages, what implications does this have for instructional consultants working to help faculty improve their teaching effectiveness? In a study at the University of Nebraska (Mortensen, 1982), some similari-

ties were found to exist between the needs faculty expressed for their work with an instructional consultant and typical concerns identified by the literature for faculty at different stages in their career.

The individual consulting process used at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UN-L) Teaching and Learning Center consists of an instructional consultant and an individual faculty member working together to analyze his/her teaching. Based on the U-Mass model for teaching analysis, the process consists of diagnosing, data-collecting, investigating alternative teaching strategies and evaluating the outcomes. Activities may include one-on-one conferencing, analysis of teaching materials, consultant observation of classes, videotaping of classes, mid-term student feedback, and use of printed and mediated resources. Faculty participate on a volunteer, confidential basis and may decide to be involved in any combination of activities for a period of a few weeks to several semesters.

Because faculty initiate contact with the consultant, the sample in the study consists of faculty who, for one reason or another, are interested in their own teaching. Consequently, the results do not necessarily generalize to all faculty at a research university. However, some implications can be drawn for instructional consultants who work with faculty to help them with their teaching.

Interviews were conducted with thirty-four faculty members at UN-L. Each faculty member had worked individually with an instructional consultant from the Teaching and Learning Center to improve his or her teaching. The faculty members in the study were chosen to represent a variety of academic ranks and disciplines and various numbers of years of teaching experience. Faculty in the study had participated in an individual consulting process at least two years earlier and had met with an instructional consultant at least three times in one semester. The thirty-four faculty who were interviewed were chosen from a possible sixty-four faculty members who fit the above criteria. Three were interviewed in a pilot study and thirty-one were interviewed in the main study.

Faculty were asked what impact individual consulting had on their teaching. All of those interviewed found the consulting process useful and most had changed their teaching as a result. These changes were considered improvements by the faculty members.

Those faculty who had taught approximately the same number of years tended to have similar kinds of responses. They tended to reveal some of the same needs and concerns as other faculty teaching for approximately the same amount of time. Because of this tendency, the responses from faculty members who were interviewed were grouped into four categories according to number of years of teaching experience. The categories were: (1) new faculty who had been teaching up to five years; (2) faculty who had been teaching from six to twelve years; (3) faculty who had been teaching from thirteen to twenty years; and (4) faculty who had been teaching twenty-one or more years.

Faculty in the first category, teaching up to five years, expressed the need for non-threatening, supportive assistance from the consultant. Each of the respondents in this category said they contacted a consultant because they needed help and support, because they were unsure and needed confidence, and because they wanted to improve and were open to accepting help. They wanted specific ideas to use in their teaching.

In the second category, ten of the faculty members interviewed had been teaching from six to twelve years. They contacted a consultant because they were dissatisfied with student evaluations or because their department chair suggested that they do. In addition to help from the consultant, four faculty members in this group mentioned a difference in institutional environment as contributing to their changing their teaching. Each of them had come from an institution where teaching was not supported. The most dramatic changes in teaching were reported by this group of faculty. Some completely changed their teaching philosophy and instructional strategies.

Eight faculty who had been teaching for thirteen to twenty years made up the third group. Respondents expressed their disillusionment with teaching, their decrease in enthusiasm for teaching and their dissatisfaction with not doing as good a job as they felt they had in previous years. Faculty in this group needed new ideas and a fresh approach to teaching. If they were given specific ideas on things they could use, they felt they were helped by the consultant and felt better about their teaching. Changes made were not dramatic changes in philosophy or teaching strategies but specific instructional modifica-

tions within their existing teaching style. Faculty in this group needed to feel better about their teaching.

Seven faculty members interviewed were in the fourth category, those who had taught twenty-one years or more. Some had personal problems or problems with the institution. All were dissatisfied with student evaluations and felt out of touch with students. Students, in their view, were not performing as well as they did in previous years. These faculty members expressed a need for specific ideas to help them with their teaching. They were also looking for an objective analysis of their teaching, not for someone to make them feel better. Those who did not get specific ideas did not change their teaching and did not view the consultant as helpful.

While faculty members at different career stages expressed similar needs and concerns, it must be recognized that faculty varied considerably in their professional development and achievement. Braskamp (1981) suggests this is due to the interaction among several factors: "The situation of employment; the competencies and skills of the person and their own expectations; the meaning given to the situation and their own achievements and the fit of the above and the accomplishments of the faculty member," (p.18).

Nonetheless, some implications for faculty development and for instructional consultants can be drawn from existing data on faculty career stages.

Implications for Instructional Development

Implication #1—Diverse opportunities for instructional development are needed throughout one's career because needs and interests of faculty change at different career stages. As Baldwin suggests, "In order to keep faculty challenged and enthusiastic, the policies and practices of colleges and universities must be flexible enough to accommodate the different vocational situations of professors at successive career stages," (p.18). For example, new faculty need support, are open to ideas, and will listen to experienced faculty. Baldwin states, "My research has shown that early vocational experiences have a major impact on the later career development of college professors. This knowledge stresses the urgency of proper institutional support of

new teachers," (P.18). Support for teaching can be in the form of individual consultation, special seminars on teaching for new faculty, an organized program of classroom observation of experienced teachers, departmental discussion on teaching, and monitoring by senior faculty members.

It has also been shown that faculty do have needs later in their career related to teaching. These needs could be met partially by teaching improvement/enrichment activities. Two key opportunities need to be provided and promoted. The first is activities that promote colleague interchange about teaching, for example workshops that facilitate interaction, small seminar groups that bring people together with common concerns or interest, departmental discussions about teaching issues, and senior faculty serving as mentors to younger faculty. The second is activities that allow individual faculty to analyze their teaching in a personal way, for example, utilizing an instructional consultant, participating in peer observation triads, and pursuing extensive study through a professional leave. These activities are not new ideas and are available on many campuses. The issue is one of acceptance more than availability. Administrators and faculty need to recognize the legitimacy of participating in instructional development opportunities throughout an academic career.

Implication #2— What is known about faculty career stages can provide a basis for program planning decisions but should not be the organizing framework for dealing with individuals. Just because someone is a certain age or academic rank does not necessarily mean he or she is in a crisis or a transition or experiencing needs and concerns typical of that stage. Cues should be taken from the individual and the direction of the instructional improvement activity should be controlled by the individual. Care be should taken not to project onto an individual faculty member what needs one thinks he/she has. Instead, the faculty member should identify his/her own needs. This is true for anyone in a role that involves fostering effective teaching — administrator, colleague or consultant.

Faculty at all stages have needs related to teaching, but these needs may not be the primary focus of their attention until later stages in their career. It would be an error in program planning to target any one group of faculty at a particular stage, e.g., new faculty, to the exclusion

of other faculty members, e.g., those close to retirement; using the assumption that one group is more likely to be concerned about teaching than the other.

Implication #3—Administrators play a key role in instructional improvement. When discussing the assertions about productivity made by Blackburn (1979), he said, "...nearly every positively correlated factor (to faculty productivity) resides in administrators' hands," (p.26). Perhaps more attention should be given to administrator development as an indirect way to encourage faculty instructional development. It is difficult for anyone to see the value in something if they don't see the need. With less money available for research projects and travel, and with decreased faculty mobility, comes a need to find a way to keep faculty vital and interested. Focusing on new ways to challenge and enrich faculty in their teaching role should be a prime objective of administrators.

Conclusion

Recent research supports the premise that faculty proceed through predictable career stages. These stages seem to be correlated with rank and number of years teaching. Some implications for faculty development and for instructional consultants have been suggested. An awareness of the typical needs and concerns of faculty at all stages can aid instructional consultants in program planning and in individual interactions with faculty.

Bibliography

- Baldwin, Roger. "Adult and Career Development: What are the Implications for Faculty?" *Current Issues in Higher Education*, American Association for Higher Education (1979) 2, pp. 13-20.
- Blackburn, Robert T. "Academic Careers: Patterns and Possibilities." *Current Issues in Higher Education*, American Association for Higher Education (1979) 2, pp. 25-27.
- Braskamp, Larry A. "Faculty Development and Achievement: The Faculty's View." Urbana, IL: Measurement and Research Division, University of Illinois, 1981. Mimeographed.
- Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*. New York: Norton, 1950.
- Freedman, Mervin, et al. *Academic Culture and Faculty Development*. Berkeley, CA: Montaigne, Inc., 1979.

- Havighurst, Robert J. *Development Tasks and Education*. New York: David McKay Co., 1952.
- Levinson, Daniel J. and Assoc. *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1978.
- Mortensen, Lynn L. "Faculty Perceptions of the Long Term Impact of Individual Consulting on Improvement of Instruction in Higher Education." Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1982.