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# New faculty issues—Fitting in and figuring it out

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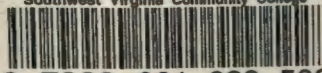
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New Directions for  
Community Colleges



# Hiring the Next Generation of Faculty

Brent D. Cejda  
John P. Murray  
EDITORS

LB  
1778.2  
.H57  
2010

Number 152 • Winter 2010

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Community Colleges**

Arthur M. Cohen  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Richard L. Wagoner  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Gabriel Jones  
MANAGING EDITOR

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*This chapter provides a portrait of faculty development in community colleges, highlighting different issues facing faculty based on location and including a review of the impact of socialization on how faculty approach their roles. Findings indicate that changing classrooms require a different type of faculty preparation and that links with regional universities are critical.*

## New Faculty Issues: Fitting In and Figuring It Out

Pamela L. Eddy

Faculty members come to the community college through a variety of routes, most often not as an intended career option (Fugate and Amey, 2000). Indeed, Townsend and Twombly (2007) underscore the varied pathways to faculty ranks at two-year colleges and point out that possession of a Ph.D. is gaining traction, but that the master's degree remains the coin of the realm for hiring in the sector. Coupled with the fact that recent research on faculty socialization (Austin, 2002; Eddy and Gaston-Gales, 2008) focuses on research university faculty versus those teaching at community colleges, community college search committees need to consider the match between candidate preparation and the skills required for successful classroom teaching. This chapter first highlights how previous socialization and preparation affect the issues faculty face as they start their careers and then discusses the areas faculty developers and academic leaders have indicated as pressing for faculty in community colleges. How faculty members were prepared, their previous experiences, and their expectations of teaching at a community college all contribute to how they conceptualize their faculty roles.

The location and focus of the two-year college also influences the experience of new faculty because context provides key environmental factors. Faculty members working in urban settings face different challenges relative to their counterparts in rural locations. In addition, size differences in student enrollment are important to the faculty experience. The research

reported in this chapter draws from two sources: data from a qualitative case study, which provides the underpinnings for understanding the impacts of how faculty prepared for their teaching positions, and data from a national study on faculty development, which highlights different faculty needs based on institutional size and location.

## **Socialization and Faculty Preparation**

Faculty as adult learners approach their teaching based on various teaching perspectives (Pratt, 1998) and ingrained schemas (Harris, 1995; Weick, 1995). Underlying schemas provide a road map for adult learners on how to interpret new information based on past experience. Traditionally, graduate programs focused on disciplinary content issues versus socializing students for teaching roles (Austin, 2001). Therefore, new faculty most often learned how to teach by observation, trial and error, and reading on areas of interest. Townsend and Twombly's (2007) recent review of the literature regarding community college faculty points to differences relative to university faculty preparation and two-year college teachers, but they focus more on degree-level differences than variations in socialization for teaching roles. They also point out that the expected role of community college faculty is that of generalists rather than the specialist roles of their counterparts in university settings. These role differences ultimately point to diverse forms of socialization for teaching roles, with community college faculty work focused almost exclusively on teaching versus the work of university faculty members, who divide their attention between teaching and research.

Given the paucity of research on the socialization and career pathways of community college faculty, I have begun preliminary research into this topic. Data from a case study of faculty at a medium-size rural community college provide an inside look at the socialization process. Given the case nature of this research, generalities for all faculty are not possible, but common themes become evident. The diversity of community college settings means that the environment (urban, suburban, rural) and size (large, medium, small) have an impact on the lived experience of faculty life in a two-year college. Pointedly, the issues these faculty members face may differ based on context; for example, those in rural areas wear multiple hats and are fewer in number.

Participants for the research were selected based on their lead-faculty status. The college organizational chart did not have department chairs; thus, some of the functions typically assigned to that position were conducted by those designated as lead faculty for units. The rationale for this requirement included recognition of the small size of units that often resulted in there being only one full-time faculty member and a desire to obtain a longer period of work as a community college faculty. A longer time in the community college setting afforded participants a perspective



on their experiences over the length of their career and experience in hiring other faculty and knowing more about the impact of preparation on induction in the teaching ranks. Semistructured interviews were conducted with six lead faculty. The format provided an opportunity for dialogue versus mere question and answer (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Ray, 1994). Data were analyzed using a framework for faculty socialization that focused on graduate programming socialization (Austin, 2001), sources of stress for new faculty (Sorcinelli, 2002), and challenges facing community college faculty (Eddy, 2005, 2007; Murray, 1999). Key findings from this research include a lack of intentional planning for a career as a community college faculty member, connections to the regional university, and links to practice.

**Lack of Planning.** As the literature suggests (Fugate and Amey, 2000), faculty participants did not plan on teaching at a community college. Serendipity brought them to their current positions, but an underlying motivation revolved around the desire to focus on teaching. One of the participants noted that she did not complete college until she was an adult. She said, "I guess I was one of the students in high school that was convinced that you just didn't need to go to college to go anywhere in your career." Her career pathway started as an international flight attendant and included stints as a small travel business owner and trainer for Sylvan Learning Centers. She found she had a knack for training and a desire to get into higher education. Along the way, she acquired both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree. She was hired at the community college for a secretarial role but started to teach when a faculty position could not be filled. She was in the process of transitioning to a new position at a nearby university in its tourism department.

Two other faculty members noted that they initially had intended to go into high school teaching. The first recounted that "as part of the student-teaching process I decided that I wouldn't like working in the high school, so I was offered an assistantship and got my master's degree in English. I started working first in [a midwestern state] and then here at the community college level." Another faculty recalled that one of her college professors told the class to have higher aspirations than teaching at the secondary level. This comment had an impact. She said, "My original intent was to teach in the high school and that didn't pan out even though I've got those credentials. So when a position opened up at the community college, I received that position." Another participant stated that his interest in teaching was sparked when he was a graduate teaching assistant at a nearby university. He became an "academic gypsy," working as an adjunct faculty at three different institutions over two years. When a full-time position opened at his current community college, he took it and has been there since 1976.

The final two participants came to their faculty roles through other routes. A faculty of psychology was completing her Ph.D. at a local

university and doing some consulting work. She commented, "I was teaching part time, and I was enjoying that more." She shifted her plans to seek a teaching position and was in the running for a position at a four-year college that did not pan out. When her current community college advertised for a full-time position, her outlook was different: "I was looking for full-time work, hopefully faculty. Essentially it was to stay in the area since I was dating at that time." She has been at the college since 2002. The final faculty participant has a Ph.D. in anatomy and physiology and a veterinary degree. She spent the first part of her career at research universities. In making her change to the community college, she reflected, "I decided I didn't want to write grants anymore, I was tired of publishing and perishing, and I have thirty-some-odd high-level publications. I just got tired of that competition for national grants and decided I just wanted to teach. So I looked around and thought a community college would be nice, and this was the only one that would consider me because I am so overqualified."

Despite the lack of planning that led each of the participants to their current faculty positions at the community college, a desire to teach was at the root of their decision making. Most were exposed to teaching during their college or graduate programs and began to seriously consider a community college option as they sought permanent employment. One faculty added, "It was much more rewarding to teach in a higher education community where I could see the difference that I could make in students' lives." The focus of community colleges on the teaching mission aligned with the value system of the faculty participants to be outstanding professors in their areas of specialty.

**Connections to the Regional University.** The proximity to a nearby university created strong links with the community college. Five of the six participants had obtained one or more degrees from the university, and several obtained their first taste of teaching as part of their graduate student responsibilities at the university. Indeed, some of the community college faculty also taught university classes in an adjunct capacity, closing the loop from university student to community college faculty to university adjunct.

It was often in graduate school that faculty had their first exposure to teaching. One faculty member noted, "When I first went to graduate school, it never occurred to me that I'd want to teach. I aspired to some big job where I'd be making six digits and traveling. Once I got into that, I hated it. I had started teaching as a grad assistant and I had always enjoyed that and thought it fit my personality better." The opportunity to teach during graduate programs offers a glimpse of what it means to teach at the collegiate level. It was often at graduate school that the decision was made not to pursue a doctorate and rather to go into teaching at a community college. Two of the participants held a Ph.D., and one had completed all work for the doctorate except the dissertation. For one, the decision not to

pursue his Ph.D. coincided with a chance to be an adjunct at the community college. He added, "You get that sense of a calling when you do it, and you know this is what I'm supposed to be doing."

One faculty noted the importance of university connections: "I have friends at the [local university] and am in their reading groups, so I have people I can talk to. I still get to see my advisor at [state flagship university] and so I still have that intellectual stimulation." Working with graduate students at the university provided an additional venue for connections. The fact that several faculty also taught at the local university meant that information flowed between the two institutions and bridges were built. Students from the university often took classes at the community college to complement their university program or because of additional course options. Given the amount of transfer credit between the two institutions, faculty members were involved in articulation agreements and conversations regarding alignment of course sequencing. The community college recently opened a new campus branch that allowed it to expand its nursing and health profession programs. One of the faculty participants noted that the community college nursing program had the highest success rate for the certification exam in the state, making it sought after for university collaborations.

**Practice.** The faculty participants noted different ways in which they stayed connected to practice. For some, this was an easier connection given the technical or vocational orientation of their programs. For those in the social sciences and humanities, the connections were with keeping current in the field and focusing on teaching and learning issues for their programs. One faculty member stated, "I evaluate the anatomy and physiology programs in the state at the community college level." She added, "I still get demands for my curriculum, and I do send outlines to other community colleges, especially nursing faculty, because they want to know why our nurses do so well."

The links to practice also occurred as community college students tried to apply their course work. One faculty recounted, "My students were motivated to learn in class; they could tell me stories of how they were taking the learning from the class back to work with them." She added that some students now contemplated psychology as a major as a result of her classes. An accounting faculty noted, "I try to surround myself with the experts that are practitioners to keep up to date, especially on the tax code." This faculty member worked to put programming online to help practitioners have increased access to course work and degree options.

Faculty participants were able to bring prior work experiences into their classroom teaching. Thus, the faculty member who spent years in the tourism business could bring in real examples to highlight the topics she was teaching. The faculty member who served as a business consultant could bring in scenarios from the field that provided examples for the student's textbook learning. Yet another faculty member works on professional

presentations and writings to help other community college English teachers improve their practice.

Faculty members were also pulled to participate in more administrative job functions. Despite the ability to work on administrative projects, the faculty participants were adamant about their desire to remain in the classroom. One faculty member reflected, "I've been able to do what I like best, which is to teach. I've never really been interested in being strictly an administrator, but I can still do things that in a four-year school or even in a larger community college would have been reserved as administrative work." As faculty members in a community college, the other aspect of their practice was supporting the administrative infrastructure of the college.

## Faculty Development Needs

Faculty development programs are in place at community colleges to help support faculty work. A national survey of community college vice presidents for academic affairs and faculty development center directors serves as the source of data regarding faculty development needs (Eddy, 2005, 2007). I selected 497 institutions from a master list obtained from the American Association of Community Colleges, and both the academic vice president and the faculty development director at each college received a survey. Response rates were 43 percent for vice presidents and 36 percent for those directing faculty development efforts. The overall response rate was 39 percent.

The portrait of faculty development at community colleges builds on the survey responses in which the majority of respondents worked in a rural location (46.8 percent), another 28.2 percent worked in a suburban college, 16.7 percent worked in urban locales, and another 8.3 percent worked in urban areas with suburban branch campuses. In general, this breakdown by location corresponds to the actual composition by location of all community colleges: 59.5 percent are rural, 21 percent are suburban, and 19.5 percent are urban.

In rating top program goals, survey participants indicated primary interest in creating a culture of teaching excellence, advancing new teaching and learning initiatives, and responding to individual faculty needs. Differences among rural and urban priorities were evident only when looking at secondary goals. Directors of programs in rural areas were more focused on programming that supported institutional and departmental needs, whereas urban leaders were not as focused on programming to support these types of faculty activities. As noted, because faculty generally come to the community college without planning for this career, support for learning more about teaching strategies is critical. Faculty working in rural areas often are pulled into administrative roles, making support for activities associated with college needs important. Faculty members in

**Table 2.1. Current Practices, New Directions, and Challenges**

## Current Practices—Important to Offer

1. Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes
2. Integrating Technology into Traditional Teaching
3. New Faculty Development

## New Directions—Important to Offer

1. Program Assessment (e.g., Accreditation)
2. Training and Support for Part-Time/Adjunct Faculty
3. Unit/Program Evaluation

## Challenges Facing Faculty

1. Assessment of Student Learning
2. Teaching Underprepared Students
3. Integrating Technology into Classroom Teaching

urban areas are able to be more focused on classroom responsibilities and require less programming in these areas.

To better understand the direction of faculty development programming, respondents were asked to rate current practices, new directions, and challenges on their campus. Currently, faculty developers are most focused on programs to help faculty learn how to assess student learning outcomes, integrate technology into their teaching, and help new faculty acclimate to their new roles. Notably, all of these areas are classroom-focused. Identification of important new directions included program assessment, training for part-time faculty, and program evaluation activities that focus on institutional needs versus individual needs (see Table 2.1). Finally, survey respondents identified the challenges facing faculty. The top challenges identified were assessment of student learning, teaching underprepared students, and integrating technology into classroom teaching. Taken together, this information indicates that faculty development programming is pulled in multiple directions, as are community college faculty.

Developing faculty members in community colleges requires a multifaceted approach. First, faculty must be prepared to meet their prime responsibility of classroom teaching. Preparation requires currency with new teaching strategies, incorporation of technology into classroom methods, and facing students who differ from those in the past with respect to demographics and preparation. Remedial work is increasingly pushed to the two-year college sector. Second, given the size of the full-time faculty base and the need to prepare for a changing of the guard of institutional leadership, faculty members increasingly take on leadership roles within the college. Assessment requirements, accreditation reporting, and strategic planning for curricular directions require faculty expertise in areas for which most are not prepared. Developing part-time faculty to their fullest

capacity is also critical because upwards of 60 percent of faculty are part-timers (Cohen and Brawer, 2008). The survey indicates a gap between the demand for adjunct faculty training and current levels of training. Recruitment efforts and developing future faculty may become an area of heightened interest as retirements persist at community colleges.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The changing nature of faculty work (Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach, 2006), coupled with demands to educate increasing numbers of Americans (Lumina Foundation, 2009), places pressure on community college faculty. The anticipated turnover in the ranks of community college faculty means that new faculty will be joining the ranks at two-year colleges. They will come to their positions with training in their profession, but not always training to teach (Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach, 2006). Changes are underway to rectify this lack of preparation. More universities are offering teaching certificates (among them are North Carolina State University, California State University-Dominguez Hills, University of Illinois, and Iowa State University), and more community colleges are providing training on classroom strategies.

Traditionally, recruitment of new faculty and succession planning has received scant attention in community colleges (Townsend and Twombly, 2007). The brewing of a perfect storm may change this perspective as senior faculty members retire, more students enroll in community colleges, and community colleges seek to offer baccalaureate degrees. This confluence of pressures on community college faculty requires a multifaceted response. New faculty are trying to fit in and figure out the institutional and teaching requirements for success, but they are not socialized for these roles in their university-based graduate programs. Following are suggestions for addressing the issues new faculty members face as outlined in this chapter.

**Institutional Approaches.** New faculty members often come from nearby universities and start at the community college while they are graduate students to gain teaching experience and supplement their income. Community colleges need to capitalize on these connections and build bridges with university graduate programs. As new faculty are assimilated into the college, institutional leaders need to underscore the ties between institutional needs and individual faculty needs. Given the small size of full-time faculty bases, these individuals are pressed into institutional service on top of their current teaching obligations. It is critical to strategize how to leverage administrative work with faculty demands in the classroom. Rural community colleges may provide a template for these practices because faculty at these institutions are already juggling multiple responsibilities. Community college leaders should contemplate how to train a cadre of faculty leaders and prepare sitting midlevel leaders for upper-level

positions. As institutions become flatter in operations, more collaborative leadership calls for increased roles for faculty members.

**Faculty Development Planning.** There is a difference between the skills required for classroom teaching and being a content expert. New faculty needs support in figuring out their roles: how to work with diverse learners, use active learning and cooperative learning to help in classroom teaching, evaluate student learning, and be a good colleague. Faculty development directors can draw on the literature regarding faculty support programs such as mentoring new faculty, establishing professional learning communities, and making resources available online for easy access. It may help to share resources and programming with other regional community colleges or nearby universities. The availability of travel grants to allow faculty to attend teaching and learning workshops and network with other professionals can offer faculty an opportunity to bring new techniques back to campus. These trained faculty members can then lead development programs on campus to share their newly found expertise.

**Individual Faculty Members.** Often interest in community college teaching is piqued through exposure to classroom teaching in graduate programs. As exemplified with the participants in this research, teaching is at the core of the faculty role at the community college. Faculty needs to take responsibility for becoming better at their trade. One means to do this is through professional development either at the college or in outside programs. For instance, the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (<http://www.nisod.org/>) hosts an annual conference focused on teaching and learning best practices. Ample books are available to help inform individual practice as well. It behooves new community college faculty to understand the culture of the community college setting, understand student learning needs, and become adept at using the technical tools to support classroom and online teaching.

New faculty members face multiple demands when they start on campus. Institutions and faculty development centers can help ease the transition with structured programs, and individual faculty can supplement this training with personal professional development. Because community college faculty members are not socialized to their new roles in four-year graduate programs, it is imperative that leaders help to fill this void and help shorten the learning curve for new faculty, which will increase the impact these new college members will have on the college.

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