

Book Review

To Improve the Academy: Resources for Faculty, Instructional and Organizational Development, Volume 28

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Publisher Description: The development of students is a fundamental purpose of higher education and requires for its success effective advising, teaching, leadership, and management. Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD) fosters human development in higher education through faculty, instructional, and organizational development. A smart mix of big-picture themes, national developments, and examples of effective faculty development initiatives from a variety of schools, *To Improve the Academy* offers examples and resources for the enrichment of all educational developers. This annual volume incorporates all the latest need-to-know information for faculty developers and administrator.

One of the most remarkable changes in the academy within the last twenty years has been the development of formal centers for faculty development, found today on virtually every American university campus. Called variously “Centers for Teaching,” “Centers for Teaching and Learning,” or “Offices of Teaching Effectiveness,” these organizations are often poorly staffed and financed, and may rely heavily on external funds for their activities. At their origins, they often lacked credibility among faculty, who, as many of us remember, learned to teach simply by getting into the classroom and following the examples of our own professors. Today, centers have become institutionalized, professionalized, and provide a variety of services. A few of these many facets include developing new teaching methods, mentoring junior faculty, and providing formative evaluation. However, they may also assist faculty in developing grant proposals, assessment plans, writing-intensive curricula, and on-line courses.

To Improve the Academy is directed primarily to professional staff—many with academic credentials--within centers for faculty development. It focuses on four themes: 1) improving the professional standards, expectations, and qualifications for centers and their personnel, 2) understanding faculty goals and priorities to foster engaged teaching, 3) the insights of scholarship about teaching techniques and their impacts on students, and 4) appropriate activities and programs for the next generation of centers for teaching. While the links between these essays are sometimes strained, on the whole, there are useful insights, not only for center professionals but also for chairs, deans, and provosts.

Section 1 might seem to be of interest only to center professionals, since it provides models and frameworks for center organization. It demonstrates a desire on the part of these

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professionals to be more integrated into the life of the University community, and even presents University committee work as both a bridge to faculty and a mechanism to increase the visibility and credibility of centers. Yet, there needs to be some caution in this vision. As the national ratio of tenure-track to contingent faculty continues to decline, university “service” obligations fall more and more on fewer and fewer tenure line shoulders. From the faculty perspective, center professionals are “administrators” and, in unionized environments especially, their participation may be seen as a threat to faculty autonomy in curriculum, teaching, and other areas. Tenure-line faculty may engage in service less if “administrators” participate more, with unanticipated consequences for universities as a whole. This section of the book also has an excellent chapter on techniques of formative evaluation through observation.

Section 2 addresses faculty, and includes some practical research and information on the effectiveness of some center activities. It includes an important chapter on patterns of faculty response to negative feedback, which could be useful to those engaged in faculty mentoring or personnel evaluation. For academic administrators such as chairs and deans, the chapters of Section 3 are especially valuable since they address several common beliefs about teaching and students. In Chapter 11, the authors posit that small classes are not necessarily more effective, and in Chapter 8, that “rigor” is not always what faculty think it is. Chapter 14 provides an in-depth discussion of academic dishonesty, and Chapter 13 takes on classroom discussion techniques.

Section 4 is noteworthy and valuable for its focus on the future. As centers seek to provide new programs to address faculty development, they are offer services to both individual instructors and the university as a whole. Universities facing budget cuts cannot often afford sending individuals to administrative conferences. Our aging professoriate requires us to foster effective succession planning. In the course of a thirty-year career, a faculty member will move through multiple roles, depending on his or her interests and opportunities. He or she may serve as a department chair, as a clinical supervisor, as a faculty senate president, an associate dean, a personnel committee chair, a dean, or even a provost or a president. Faculty development programs that take a holistic approach to career development and provide training for administrative roles will be increasingly useful, not only for individuals, but also for the academy at large. In short, Centers for Teaching are no longer sufficient for the needs of the 21st century university. A successful center will position itself to provide professional development in all three areas of faculty life: teaching, research, and service, especially administrative service.