VIEWPOINTS

Rethinking Faculty Career Development Strategies

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Faculty career development is an essential element to maintain the stability of the workforce in our colleges and schools of pharmacy. Numerous reports from American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy committees, as well as papers in this and other educational journals, have provided useful insight into the challenges and opportunities with faculty career development. Many strategies have been identified and tested that college and school administrators could implement to assist faculty members in their professional growth throughout their academic career.

Faculty work is a complex and at times a challenging process. Faculty members find themselves balancing multiple roles within and outside of their organizations, often leading to role ambiguity; dealing with stress and conflict that result from unclear responsibilities and expectations combined with what they believe are vague criteria for evaluating their success; and handling an increased workload which can lead to a feeling of being overloaded as they move through the academic or administrative ranks. Many place stress on themselves because of high self-expectations and goals for success in their academic career. The goal of a well-designed faculty career development program should be to provide the tools and opportunities to reduce stresses and should be geared to the growth and advancement over the different stages of an academic career.¹

Faculty career development goes beyond advancing our knowledge on teaching and learning; developing new skill sets to approach existing or future challenges in classrooms, laboratories, or other educational settings; or gaining experiences and the understanding needed to tackle the complexities associated with working in rapidly changing academic settings. Professional development involves continual reflection, learning, and growth, which will vary or change as an individual matures through the stages of their academic career. In addition, it requires that faculty career development activities be designed to achieve competence and self-awareness via opportunities for critical thought and reflection centered on transformational learning experiences needed for success in adult learners.² Finally, faculty career development programs must be grounded in a foundation that enables individuals to remain motivated by providing autonomy in their selection of tasks, use of

time, nature of the team in which they are working and approaches to projects; mastery in their chosen areas or passions; and to maintain a focus on a larger purpose or goal beyond their own interests.³ Many pharmacy faculty career development opportunities may not reflect the differences in the career stages of individuals. Thus, administrators must be conscious of the differences in the approaches used for faculty career development programs, particularly for new faculty members versus faculty members navigating through the assistant and associate professor ranks versus faculty members who advance to becoming professors and/or those who pursue administrative positions.

Faculty career development offerings for colleges or schools of pharmacy that are based on a one-size-fits-all model may not be effective because they do not address faculty needs and do not effectively motivate faculty members at all career stages. Colleges and schools of pharmacy must design their faculty career development programs with an emphasis on understanding and motivating faculty members at all the stages of an academic career. Dalton, Thompson and Price and Global Novations suggested that there are 4 stages in a professional career: when an individual shows dependence in their contributions; when an individual shows independence in their contributions; when an individual is responsible and contributes to the success of others; and finally, when an individual contributes strategically to an organization through their ability to exercise power.^{4,5} Furthermore, for programs to be successful they must motivate faculty members by (1) allowing autonomy in how they work on tasks, how much time they spend on tasks, and with whom they work and how; (2) providing opportunities for mastery on their tasks such that they must be able to feel the success and flow associated with mastery and centered on the concept that there is always a need for these individuals to have continued growth in their mastery efforts; and (3) focusing on programs that are purpose-driven such that these programs address issues with a larger purpose, such as the missions and goals of the college/school or the advancement of the profession.³

The key component in any faculty career development programs is time for critical and thoughtful reflection.²

Well-designed faculty career developmental activities must include a chance for written reflection and open dialogue and feedback with peers, mentors, and department chairs. The annual performance review processes must also include elements to motivate faculty members throughout their career stages. The development, planning, and implementation of these faculty career development programs require as much time as efforts to provide outstanding educational programs for students. Faculty career developmental programs must be transformational learning experiences that stretch the intellect of pharmacy faculty and stimulate their motivation as educators, scholars, and clinicians at all stages of an academic career.

The American physician, poet, professor, and lecturer Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., clearly stated this premise by reminding us that “a man’s mind, stretched by a new idea, can never go back to its original dimension.”⁶ Each of us must take a leadership role in our efforts to develop transformational learning experiences to enhance faculty

career development that addresses the needs and motivations of our faculty colleagues throughout an academic career.

References

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