

Issues and Concerns of Higher Education in Universities and Colleges

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Abstract: The research component and higher education programs at universities have been challenged due to perceived neglect of undergraduate education. Higher education, relevant research and community partnerships, have become the battle cry of many critics of higher education. Undergraduate education and research should interface. Integrating faculty research into the classroom experience creates a direct flow between discovery and dissemination, exposing students to the full range of knowledge. Faculty and students, working side-by-side on issues and problems, cultivate a spirit of collaboration, which will better prepare students for team oriented work. If the established measure of excellence is in federally funded research and doctoral programs, research and doctoral granting universities have little incentive to broaden their priorities. Conflict exists because the value system and reward structure that currently guide faculty are out of sync with the priorities of the public. These results in a disgruntled public that does not feel well served and institutions that feel misunderstood and unappreciated.

Key words: Human resource management, training and development, capacity building, performance appraisal, motivation, job analysis

INTRODUCTION

Research vs. higher education is not a new debate. The Keast Commission (1973) quoting from Logan Wilson's 1966 *The Professor and His Roles* stated: There is a rising tide of grumbling everywhere and especially in the larger institutions, about the lack of attention to effective teaching and the absence of systematic means of teacher improvement. The Commission went on to say that Institutions can do much more than they are now doing to improve teaching and to give greater recognition to it in the faculty development and evaluation process. In 1996, the Kellogg Commission, quoting the National Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, stated: With the value system favoring research and graduate students firmly entrenched in American universities, undergraduates too often become at best a responsibility, at worst an afterthought.

Relevant research has been defined as purposeful research with commercial application-a partnership with business. It appears that much of society feels that we have broken the implied contract between research universities and society, as it developed following World War II and only through increased accountability can this relationship be repaired. The stigma of the ivory tower suggests a disconnection between academia and the rest

of the world. There is a growing demand for universities to be more engaged in the communities that they serve. Realizing the value of an educated population, government and community leaders are looking to institutions of higher learning for assistance in confronting many of the problems that plague society (Bandura, 1982; Bullough, 1989). Curricula designed to cultivate citizenship and promote ethics are growing on campuses and reflect a growing awareness of community spirit.

In the past 10 years, many colleges and universities have actively engaged in integrating technology in teaching and learning. Approaches to this integration are as varied as the institutions' missions and the clarity of their aims for technology-assisted instruction. Regardless of the approach, institutions must make the necessary human and financial investments. Faculty development as part of human resource development for existing and future faculty is a pivotal investment for integrating technology in higher education; it can catalyze innovations in learning across generations. Defining what constitutes faculty development is an important first step. Expertise should be developed, not just in how to use technology or in pedagogical practice but also in how to understand learners and how they perceive technology.

HRD perspective: Human Resource Development (HRD) is an essential part of development. It is based on the concept that education and training lie at the heart of development efforts and that without HRD most development interventions will be ineffective. It focuses on a series of actions directed at helping participants in the development process to increase their knowledge, skills and understandings and to develop the attitudes needed to bring about the desired developmental change.

Human resources, along with man-made capital and natural resources, are essential for development. Many dimensions of human resource development are final end-objectives of development, e.g., literacy, better health and nutrition, economic well-being. It is generally recognized that a country's human resource capacity for productivity is a pre-requisite for social and economic development. However, the problems of development and in particular food security and poverty, are complex and improved HRD is only one of several necessary conditions for social and economic progress (Dickson, 1996; Ewert, 1987).

Sustainable development, with its management, technological and institutional aspects, clearly encompasses human resource development. Unfortunately, the term HRD has been applied to such a wide array of activities that its meaning is often ambiguous. To be meaningful, HRD needs to be carefully defined.

HRD is both a process and a goal: It involves a planned approach to learning aimed at changes in knowledge, skills, understandings, attitudes and values and in the behavior of a learner or group of learners (Sutherland and Cooper, 1993). The goals of HRD will vary with the context and the learners themselves. It is often associated with a technical goal to provide a trained work force, to promote the knowledge and skills required by a society to acquire greater prosperity; in short, to provide or build productive capabilities. However, for some educators and development planners HRD is an end in itself and its goal should be realizing human potential and developing individual self-reliance.

Institutional capacity building: Capacity-building efforts should focus on institutional strengthening, including the design of new organizational structures to improve the goodness of fit between the policy contexts for sustainable development and enacting institutions in both the public and private sectors (Warr *et al.*, 1979). These institutions include agricultural education and training institutions as well as extension agencies, research institutions, NGOs and community organizations among

others. A multiplier effect can be achieved if strong linkages among agricultural education institutions, NGOs, research organizations, public and private extension services and others are fostered. This approach recognizes that there are multiple sources of technology development and dissemination and that integrated institutional network capacity building is required (Cooper *et al.*, 1989; Bedward *et al.*, 2003).

An important question is: What new demands does the goal of sustainable human resource development put on a nation's education and training institutions? Capacity building as it relates to the strengthening of national education is critical given that many of these institutions have suffered debt-and structural adjustment-induced budgets cut in the last decade. At the same time that these institutions were suffering cut-backs and the number of youth needing jobs was expanding.

Institutional analysis is a pre-requisite for institutional capacity building (Badham *et al.*, 1998). It involves assessing how the talents and energies of staff at universities, colleges and technical schools can be enlisted and upgraded on a regular basis to improve these institutions' operations. In many education institutions, there is a lack of an effective Human Resource Management System (HRMS) (Chanaron, 2002). An institutional analysis should assess the existing HRMS and design improvements. Among other areas, there should be attention to results-oriented performance appraisal; mechanisms for improving communication to and from staff; identification of knowledge/skill gaps and staff training needs; teams skills development and the reinforcement of teamwork and transparent staff selection and promotion processes.

In recent years, declining or stagnating investment has resulted in deterioration of the quality of teaching, the quality of students and the physical and academic infrastructure (Filius *et al.*, 2000; Fischer, 1998). Institutional analyses should be applied to education systems to assess such issues as infrastructure upgrading, high recurrent costs, relevance to national and local rural and development needs and institutional capability to deal with new areas of training, e.g., natural resources management, farming systems, bio-technology and agri-business.

The issue in many countries is both the quantity and quality of trained human resources. The supply of technical and trained professionals in many developing countries, especially those in Africa, is seriously deficient. A decade ago in Africa, the number of technical personnel in many countries was <50% of the year 2000 minimum requirement. As that year approaches, it is apparent that not enough progress has been made. Even, in those

countries where the number of technicians meets the minimum requirement, there are severe shortages in certain critical fields.

The quality of higher education is of course as important as the number of educational institutions. For example, policies for improving higher education in Latin America in past decades have given priority to expansion of the educational system. The main challenge now facing higher education in Latin America is how to improve the quality rather than how to extend the coverage, which means that educational innovation, should be at the top of the agenda.

Human resource planning: Human resource planning is the process of determining future human resource needs relative to an organization's strategic plan and taking actions necessary to meet those needs in a timely manner. The primary components of the human resource planning process are job analysis, forecasting, staffing (including recruitment and selection), training, performance appraisal and compensation.

Job analysis: The primary process used for gathering current information about a job through such actions as observations, survey, questionnaires and interviews.

Job description: Details of the responsibilities and tasks associated with a given position.

Job specifications: Identifies the knowledge, skills, abilities and other employee characteristics needed to perform the job.

Forecasting: An important aspect of human resource planning is forecasting the supply of and demand for human resources for both short-term planning (1-2 years) and long-term planning (3-5 years). Both types of forecasting require looking into the future.

Demand forecasting: Determining the number of employees that the organization will need at some point in the future as well as the knowledge, skills and abilities these employees must possess.

Supply forecasting: Determining what human resources will be available both inside and outside the organization.

Recruitment techniques and issues: Recruitment is the process of finding and attracting job candidates who are qualified to fill job vacancies.

Internal recruitment: Involves identifying potential internal candidates and encouraging them to apply for

and be willing to accept organizational jobs that are vacant. Methods of internal recruitment include job banks, employee referral systems, job postings and advertisements in company newsletters.

External recruitment: Involves advertising for and soliciting applicants from outside the company. External sources include walk-ins, public employment agencies, temporary help agencies, labor unions, educational institutions, referrals from current and past employees, recruiting employees from competitors, sources and newspaper and trade publications.

Selection methods: Selection is the process of evaluating and choosing the best-qualified candidate from the pool of applicants recruited for the position.

Application forms: A form that records the applicant's desired position, serves as a prescreening device to determine an applicant's qualifications and provides preliminary compositions with the credentials of other candidates.

Employment testing measures: Any instrument, device, or information used to make an employment decision is considered a test by the equal employment opportunity commissions uniform guidelines on employee selection. A testing measure is a means of assessing a job applicant's knowledge, skills and abilities, through written responses (such as a math test), simulated exercises (such as a word-processing test), or verbal responses (a demonstration of language skills).

Interviews: Relatively formal, in-depth conversations conducted for the purpose of assessing a candidate's knowledge, skills and abilities, as well as providing information to the candidate about the organization and potential jobs.

Reliability and validity: Regardless of the selection method used, the organization must be able to demonstrate that its selection methods are reliable and valid and do not illegally discriminate against employee classes protected by eeo legislation.

Reliability means that the test will give the same result when it is given several times in the same situation, if it is split in half and each half is compared, or if the results are compared using numerous raters, as with interviewing.

Validity means that a test actually measures what it says it measures; refers to inferences about tests.

Systems that make it possible to track and monitor economic forecasts, competitors and legislation that

influences long-range personnel planning; to produce models for salary forecasts, job analysis and evaluation, recruiting, employee training and annual appraisal of employee performance; to provide benefits to current and retired employees and to report eeo policies and practices, grievance records and affirmative action to the government are known as human resource information systems (hriss).

Training: Training is a planned effort to assist employees in learning job-related behaviors that will improve their performance. An organization's training needs can be identified through three types of needs assessment: organizational, task and individual. Organizational assessment determines, where in the organization the training is needed; task assessment is what is to be trained; individual assessment determines who needs to be trained based on actual versus desired skills.

Needs assessments: An organization's training needs can be identified through 3 types of needs assessments:

- Organizational assessment determines where in the organization the training is needed
- Task assessments determine what is to be trained
- Individual assessments determine, who needs to be trained based on actual versus desired skills

Role of performance appraisal: Performance appraisals are a systematic process of evaluating each employee's job-related achievements, strengths and weaknesses, as well as determining ways to improve performance (Elliott and Sharon, 2003). They are considered valuable aids in making many HRM decisions; they are essential for distinguishing between good and poor performers. Managers can use performance appraisal information in four ways: motivation, personnel movement, training and feedback.

- Behavior-oriented approaches to performance appraisal-focus on assessing employee behavior
- Results-oriented approaches to performance appraisal-use objective performance criteria

Problems with performance appraisal: Manager should be on constant alert for problems that can arise in any performance appraisal or appraisal system. The problems include:

Halo effect: Occurs when a manager rates an employee high or low on all items because of one characteristic.

Rater patterns: Occurs when a rater develops a pattern in his or her ratings of employees. Types of rater patterns include:

Central tendency: Occurs when the rater judges all employees as average, even though their performance varies.

Leniency errors: Occur when the rater evaluates someone in a group higher than the person should be rated or when the rater is unjustifiably easy in evaluating performance.

Severity errors: Occur, when a rater tends to be unjustifiably harsh in evaluating employee performance.

Contrast error: The tendency to rate employees relative to each other rather than to performance standards.

Recency error: occurs when a manager bases an evaluation on the employee's most recent performance.

Use of compensation and benefits: Compensation refers to wages paid directly for time worked, incentives for better performance and indirect benefits that employees receive as part of their employment relationship with the organization (Engström *et al.*, 1994). Wages based on worked performed are typically identified in one or both of the following categories:

Base pay: Wages and salaries that employees receive in exchange for performing their jobs.

Incentives: Compensation beyond base pay used to attract, retain and motivate employees.

Benefits are typically considered to be a part of an employee's compensation. Benefits themselves are an indirect type of compensation, which are typically payments beyond wages or salaries that are given to employees as a reward for organizational membership.

Designing equitable reward systems: When designing a compensation system, managers should be sure to address each of the following issues:

External fairness: Expectations that the pay for a job in one organization is fair relative to the pay for the same job in other organizations.

Internal fairness: Expectations that the pay for the job the individual is performing within the organization is fair relative to the pay of higher-and lower-level jobs in the same organization.

Employee fairness: Expectations that individuals on a given job are paid fairly relative to coworkers on the same job.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

But there are several problems with the shortage explanation for out-of-field teaching. First, it cannot explain the high levels of out-of-field teaching that the data tell us exist in fields, such as english and social studies that have long been known to have surpluses. Second, in recent years it is only a minority of schools that actually have had any trouble filling their teaching vacancies with qualified candidates. For instance, in 1993-94 only 16% of secondary schools reported any difficulty filling their openings for math teachers. These difficulties cannot account for the sass data showing that in that same year, almost one-third of all public secondary school math teachers were uncertified in math.

Finally, a third problem with the teacher-shortage explanation of out-of-field teaching is the assumption that the hiring difficulties that exist are due to a lack of able candidates willing to enter teaching. The demand for new teachers and the subsequent difficulties that some schools face filling their positions, come about primarily because of teachers choosing to move from or leave their jobs at rates higher than in many other occupations. And while, it is true that teacher retirements are increasing, teacher turnover appears to have little to do with a graying workforce. In contrast, analyses I have done using data from the sass teacher followup survey show that the high rates of teacher turnover plaguing schools are far more often a result of two related causes: teachers dissatisfied with teaching and teachers seeking to pursue another career.

The implications of these findings for reform are crucial. Initiatives and programs designed to recruit new candidates into teaching, though worthwhile in many ways, will not solve the problem of underqualified teachers in classrooms if they do not also address the problem of teacher retention. In short, recruiting more teachers will help little if large numbers of such teachers then leave.

SUGGESTIONS

Faculty development should be a shared responsibility between the institution and each member of its faculty. Coordinating the effort between the institution and the individual, however, is no easy task. Who

initiates? Who decides? Who defines? In fact, most faculty development efforts fall somewhere along a continuum running from complete faculty autonomy to significant institutional control. They range, for example, from the post-tenure awards, in which senior full professors have almost total control over the disposition of the award to at the opposite end of the spectrum, new faculty orientation, in which the administration defines and organizes the activities. Others, such as grants from the Research and Scholarship Committee, balance the responsibility, with the administrators defining the area of development (i.e., research as opposed to teaching) and the faculty member pursuing individualized projects within that scope.

Private college teachers are being stretched to the limit. Expectations placed on them seem to be expanding exponentially (Evans *et al.*, 2004). Increasingly, their role encompasses not only teaching specific content and mentoring students in the love of learning, but functioning as frontline social workers.

In addition to being expected to deal with a smorgasbord of broader social problems that find their way into the classroom, many other pressures plague teachers, as an expert to ask, how does one compensate professionals for inadequate books and supplies, large classes, disruptive students, public criticism, limited assistance, increased duties and the lowest salaries paid to highly educated personnel in the nation? How does one lead a group, in which morale is so low that over 40% of survey respondents would not again select teaching as a profession and 57% are definitely planning to leave, will leave if something better comes along, or are undecided about staying?

CONCLUSION

Learning communities often require faculty to learn new pedagogical strategies such as collaborative pedagogy and greater use of technology. Clearly, the stand-alone workshop approach to faculty development is not sufficient to prepare faculty to teach effectively in learning communities. From 1996-1999, the U.S. Department of education's fund for improvement of post-secondary education (fipse) helped fund the national learning community's dissemination project of the Washington center for improving the quality of undergraduate education. In a case study, it is observed that most institutions had under-invested in faculty development. In particular, it is noted that the huge need for faculty planning time and in particular a need for

faculty members to reflect together, share ideas and address problems. In order to be successful, learning community programs need extensive, sustained faculty development opportunities.

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