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An Imperative for Colleges and Universities: Orienting and Supporting New Faculty Members

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Introduction

The confluence of four major factors is taking many colleges and universities to the “edge of chaos” where complex, adaptive systems exhibit characteristics of both chaos and order (Hock, p.116). Present and impending retirements, competition for new hires, realities of the ever-changing professoriate, and generational diversity in colleges and universities comprise these factors that are simultaneously chaotic and orderly. For example, faculty members in today’s colleges and universities represent five decades of transitional ages in higher education. Those who began their teaching careers in the 60’s are were a part of the Age of the Scholar, those in the 70’s, the Age of the Teacher, those in the 80’s the Age of the Developer, those in the 90’s the Age of the Learner, and those in the new millennium the Age of the Network (Sorinelli, Austin, Eddy, and Beach, 2006). Each decade has created change in faculty roles, with the consistent theme of higher expectations. At the same time, the makeup of the professoriate has changed radically. According to Katz (2006), “The professoriate is a mansion of many rooms. It is very hard to say what it means to be “a professor” in the contemporary United States, and it is difficult to know whether there is still such a thing as ‘the professoriate.’” (p. B8). Couple the disparity of age, experience and assignment with the huge pool of near-retirement professors (Leubsdorf, 2006), and a talent squeeze will enter the already-complex dynamics of higher education.

As colleges and universities across the nation attempt to attract and retain quality professors, an interesting issue has arisen that needs attention—we do a better job of recruiting new faculty members into the university than we do in orienting them to the new culture. Boice (1992) has documented the lack of continuity between recruitment and orientation. As he shares, “First impressions are lasting. New faculty have indelible memories of good treatment. And just as they cherish pleasant beginnings, they have particular trouble getting bad beginnings out of mind.” (p. 209). While bad beginnings may not be the norm, it is all too common for new faculty members to feel disconnected with their institutions. The Association of New American Colleges (ANAC) has developed a new academic compact (McMillin and Berberet ,2002). The compact recognizes the phases and stages of higher education careers, and the elements of assimilation to the culture of college and university life. For example, the document defines pre-hire, hiring, and early career stages with concomitant institutional and individual responsibilities (McMillin and Berberet, p. 48-49). These are important considerations for assimilating new faculty members into the cultures of their institutions. As “intruders” (deGeus, 2002), all newcomers to organizations are the human equivalent of viruses to the body. Organizational immune systems “can react to these intruders discriminately. Some may have to be repelled...some managed...and some embraced as necessary vehicles for the organization’s learning” (p. 262). New faculty orientation is a vital part of the two-way street that involves the impact of the person on the organization and the organization on the person (Menges, 1999, p. 7).

Critical success factors for new faculty have been disseminated by Boice (2000), with the term of “quick starters” ascribed to those who are most successful. As part of their success, these individuals

first and foremost established collegial support in their institutions. Forward-looking colleges and universities are becoming more intentional about the orientation and assimilation process (Colbeck, 2000; Porter 2004; Barbour, Chee, Frank, Land, Lang, Quinn and Uy, 2000; Savage, Karp and Longue, 2004; and Sorcinelli, 2001). Understanding the current state of new faculty orientation, and whether these recommendations are integrated into orientation, is a topic worth investigating.

Purpose

The purpose of this investigation is to identify current practices in orienting and supporting new faculty in mid-sized, non-Research I colleges and universities in the United States. The research considers formal orientation programs as well as other supports in place for new faculty in the first year of employment. There are four key questions which guide this research:

1. How many of the identified colleges and universities have orientation programs for new faculty?
2. Of those institutions that have orientation programs for new faculty, what are the component elements of the orientation programs (duration, format, content)?
3. What are the common elements of other types of non-orientation support provided by these colleges and universities?
4. What support would colleges and universities like to have available during the first year for new faculty that is not currently available?

Sample and Methods

The size, research orientation, and country of a college or university may impact its new faculty orientation practices, therefore a purposive sample of mid-sized (3,000-10,000 students), non-Research I colleges and universities in the United States were selected for this study. 390 institutions meeting this criterion were identified, and the provost, academic vice-president or other leader responsible for new faculty orientation was invited to participate in the study.

An on-line questionnaire was created based on the results of an analysis of the faculty orientation information found on the websites of a sample of these mid-sized colleges and universities (Lindbeck & Darnell, in press). This questionnaire was piloted, and based on the pilot feedback it was shortened. In its final form the questionnaire was 11 quantitative and qualitative questions. An email with a link to the questionnaire was sent to the identified academic leader at each institution in the sample.

Results

New faculty orientation programs

All of the 92 respondents to this questionnaire reported offering an orientation session for new faculty. While this may at first seem surprising, the presence of new faculty orientations is common (Boice, 1992). The more interesting question is the nature of these orientation sessions.

Orientation format.

Although three percent of the institutions indicated using information packets or resource lists as the

sole format for new faculty orientation, by far the most common format for orientation was face-to-face sessions. 83% of the institutions reported face-to-face orientation sessions (Table 1). When including institutions indicating a combination of face-to-face sessions and the 'other' responses (such as e-mailed modules, webinars, conference calls and online resource sites), the percentage of institutions using face-to-face sessions increased to almost 97%.

Table 1

Format of New Faculty Orientation (N=92)

Format	Percent Institutions Using this Format
Face-to-face	83.0
Information packet/resource list	3.2
Both face-to-face & information packet	5.3
Other (face-to-face with follow-up)	6.4

Time spent on orientation.

When examining the amount of time spent on face-to-face orientation sessions we looked at both the total number of hours of orientation offered and the number of days over which orientation sessions were conducted. The total number of hours of orientation offered face-to-face ranged from 2 to 48 hours with an average of 16.5 hours.

The most common duration for new faculty orientation was two days (40%) followed by one day (14%) as the next most common duration (Table 2). Although 16% of the institutions indicated durations of over five days, these were reported to take the form of an initial orientation session of one or two days followed by several days of orientation workshops throughout the year. In general, as the number of days of orientation increased, the number of hours per day in orientation decreased. Orientation sessions between one and three days in duration lasted an average of six hours per day with orientation sessions of 10 or more days in duration averaging two hours per day.

Table 2

Face-to-Face Orientation Duration by Days and Hours (N=75)

Duration	Percent Responding	Average Total Hours of Orientation	Average Hours Per Day for
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			Orientation
1 day	14.7%	6.0	6.0
2 days	40.0	13.3	6.7
3 days	10.7	19.0	6.3
4 days	10.7	20.5	5.1
5 days	8.0	24.2	4.8
>5 days	16.0	26.8	2.2

Orientation content.

There is a wide range of topics addressed in new faculty orientation. Over 80% of the institutions reported topics that connected new faculty to the policies and departments of the institution including presentations by various departments and programs, institutional policies, institutional information and technology systems and resources (Table 3).

While these topics are consistent with previous studies on orientation, others have described these topics as not adequate for new faculty orientation (Boice, 1992). Certainly one goal of orientation, in addition to exposing faculty to institutional policies, background and departments, might be to prepare faculty for their responsibilities in teaching, research and service. Looking first at teaching, over 70% of the institutions included effective teaching strategies and roles and responsibilities of faculty in the teaching process. Other teaching related topics such as syllabus creation and the student evaluation process were included by about a third of the institutions with lesson planning included by fewer than 20% of the institutions.

Research related topics were included in new faculty orientation slightly less often with expectations for research included in orientation in 50% of the institutions. Support and funding for research was included in about a third of the institutions, and establishing a research agenda was included in fewer than 20% of the institutions. A similar pattern emerged with topics related to service; 50% of the institutions included expectations for service with slightly less than 30% of these institutions including service opportunities as an orientation topic.

Table 3

Topics Included in Orientation Sessions (N=75)

Topic

Percent institutions
including this topic

Presentations by various departments and programs	91.9
Review of institutional policies (i.e academic policies, registration)	87.8
Institutional information (i.e. mission, goals, institutional history)	85.1
Technology (i.e. university systems, help desk)	81.1
HR & logistics (i.e. employee benefits, parking permits, ID cards)	78.4
Teaching related—effective teaching strategies	78.4
Teaching related—faculty roles and responsibilities	74.3
Promotion & tenure policies	62.2
Service—expectations for service	50.0
Research—expectations	50.0
Teaching related-advisement	48.6
Research—available support for research, writing, publication	44.6
Teaching related—syllabus creation	43.2
Research—funding	39.2
Teaching related—student evaluation process	31.1
Teaching related—grade submission	31.1
Service—service opportunities	29.7
Promotion & tenure—IRB, research process & logistics	27.0

Teaching related—lesson planning	18.9
Research—establishing a research agenda	18.9

One-third of the respondents also supplied additional topics included in new faculty orientation sessions at their institutions. Most of these additional topics related to the policies, information and departments of the institution such as governance (institution, faculty and student), student services, a social meeting with the institution’s president, and a tour of the campus and the library. Other topics reported were teaching-related (expectations, technology to support instruction such as Blackboard, how to work with diverse students, and working with difficult students), and a description of additional development opportunities available to new faculty (mentoring, faculty development center, professional portfolio development), and school-specific topics.

Institutions were also asked what content or activities they would like to include that is currently not included in new faculty orientation. The most common response was “nothing,” followed by effective teaching strategies. (Table 4).

Table 4

Content/Activities Respondents Would Like to Include in Orientation

Topic category	Number of comments
Nothing	10
Teaching related—effective teaching strategies/pedagogy	7
Balancing work/life & time management	5
Many of the items listed in table 3	4
More time for new faculty to process the information	4
Teaching related—using technology in the classroom	3
Mentoring	2
Promotion & tenure expectations	2

Research support & grant-writing	2
Support network	2
Teaching related—advisement	2

Non-orientation support for new faculty

In addition to orientation, the majority of the institutions (96%) offered additional support throughout the year for new faculty. Over 80% of the institutions offered new faculty support for using technology in teaching and provided new faculty with a faculty handbook (Table 5). Over 70% of the institutions offered new faculty development workshops throughout the year, thus confirming the narrative comments shared earlier in the questionnaire.

Table 5

Non-Orientation Support Offered for New Faculty (N=69)

Support offered	Percent institutions offering this support
Using technology in teaching support	85.5
Faculty handbook	84.1
New faculty development workshops	73.9
Teaching support (face-to-face)	69.6
Informational/Resource list (online)	59.4
Community of practice/networking with other faculty	59.4
Research funds for new faculty to get research underway	59.4
Teaching resources (online)	55.1
Formal mentoring program-voluntary	52.2
Research support	39.1

Reduced teaching load to get research underway	36.2
Reading list and articles	21.7
Formal mentoring program-mandatory	20.3
Help creating annual development plan	15.9
Development leave for new faculty	5.8

In addition to this support, 62% of the institutions reported a faculty development center. The title and purpose of these centers vary, but generally propose to support the professional development of new and existing faculty through available resources, workshops, mentoring, one-on-one coaching and the creation of communities of practice and other networking opportunities. This professional development and support are in the areas of teaching and learning; scholarship, research and publication; and personal development such as work-life balance. These centers have the benefit of being a source of structured and formal support (such as on-going workshops) and just-in-time support available when the faculty member needs it. A faculty development center also has the potential to create a community of practice and congeniality among colleagues which supports learning (Wenger, 1999) and aids in faculty retention (Matier, 1990).

Respondents were also asked what support they would like to have available during the year for new faculty that is not currently available. The most common answer (22%) was time off and more funding for new faculty to transition into the faculty role, develop and begin working on a research agenda, and for effective teaching advancement. A formal mentoring program was desired by 10 institutions, followed by nine institutions indicating they would like regular, on-going workshops or development opportunities for new faculty. Four institutions would like a faculty development resource center.

Conclusion

The results of this research paint a picture of the orientation experience of new faculty at these institutions. While there is some variation in the format, virtually all new faculty have access to a face-to-face orientation session of one to two days in duration. The most common topics for these orientation sessions include topics related to the institution (presentations by various departments, policies, HR and logistics), teaching (roles and expectations, effective teaching strategies), and expectations for research and service. A minority of these institutions also included tactical information on how to be effective in the role of faculty member with the more common teaching strategies information. In general these institutions seemed to be satisfied with their current orientation topics with only about one-third indicating additional content they would like to include in orientation sessions.

Boice's classic work, *The New Faculty Member* (1992), described in detail a model of what was not working and why it did not work. Boice suggested a change—an intentional and strategic change in faculty recruitment and orientation to aid in effectiveness, engagement and retention of faculty. His four-

part theory (involvement, regimen, self-management and social networks, or IRSS) laid the groundwork for a very different orientation and assimilation of new faculty. And yet well over a decade later, the model represented in the data from this study portrayed orientation sessions primarily telling new faculty what they needed to do with little support on the how or why of their new roles and responsibilities; particularly in the tenure-related area of research and publishing. In fact, the content institutions indicate they would like to include in orientation encompasses these topics that more deeply connect new faculty with how to be successful faculty members.

Many of Boice's (1992) suggestions were present in the on-going support available to new faculty throughout the year in the colleges and universities represented in this study. A majority of the institutions indicate ongoing workshops for new faculty development, often taking place in the context of a physical or conceptual faculty development center, with specific topics including teaching support, networking with other faculty and a list of institutional resources. About half of the institutions also indicated the use of a voluntary formal mentoring program. Since most of this on-going support is optional, it will be valuable for future research to investigate how many new faculty are willing or able to take advantage of this support, and the impact it has on them as they experience the first year at a new institution. While these strategies and activities are helpful, Boice (2000) suggested the successful new faculty he named as "quick starters" are more broadly supported than this, and that to be successful new faculty are required to assume a great deal of initiative in establishing their higher education careers.

In addition to the concerns raised by Boice (1992) related to the content of new faculty orientation, we now also see significant changes within the faculty workforce. Menges (1999) discussed the change in the people of the professoriate when he delineated the growth in part-time faculty and the changing assignments of full-time faculty from tenure track to other configurations has radically changed the challenges of faculty development. The percent of tenured and tenure-track faculty members has declined from about 57 percent in the 1970's to about 35 percent (Gravois 2006). Additionally, "millenniums" with a different generational archetype in how they approach their work and their preferences for learning are entering the professoriate (Prensky, 2001), while a certain exodus of senior faculty due to retirement (Leubsdorf, 2006) is also upon higher education institutions. In the face of this environment, the orienting of new faculty becomes more important than ever as we focus on the strategies to develop, engage, and ultimately to retain effective faculty members.

The challenge is clear. Multiple forces are acting on higher education, and are increasing in speed and intensity. This research indicates that the basic foundation for new faculty to orient to an institution and to role expectations is in place in many institutions. However, the deeper elements of the successful professor's role (balancing teaching, scholarship and service) must receive more attention and widespread support. For colleges and universities to develop successful, contributing faculty members, sustained orientation and on-going support for new faculty must become a part of each institution's culture.

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