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Section I

People and Priorities: Reflections on Our Work

Learning takes place at several levels—in the individual, in groups, in organizations and in the larger society. It is amazing how much of our efforts in the past have focused exclusively on individual learning. It may be that we are learning slowly as a society, and our institutions seldom seem to develop much beyond their initial geniuses. But as a group, those of us engaged in faculty, staff and organizational development in higher education have aimed at being more reflective and intentional about our learning.

The articles in this first section reflect our group’s mid-life questioning. As one of the participants in the Danforth study has remarked about his own growth, some may now be “more tough-minded, more skeptical of easy answers to complex questions, more willing to admit (our) own creaturehood within the forced matrix of history and culture.”

The three pieces we have selected for this section address complex questions and offer no easy answers. When Lance Buhl presented an earlier version of his paper in Cincinnati at the 1981 POD conference, “Living and Learning in Academic Cultures,” some felt he was too skeptical. We don’t think so. His assertion that development must be the central paradigm of education flies in the face of established practice, and in most quarters we have made little headway. As if in support of this claim, the Danforth fellows studied in the second article by Gene Rice give little evidence of growing empowerment as they
reflect on their own undergraduate dreams and the actualities of mid-life in the academy. Finally, Michele Fisher calls on us to give special attention to women faculty, who have learned well about powerlessness.

These three challenges demand more searching of our developmental assumptions, philosophy, theory and methods. Our evolution as a group of practitioners will be marked by our growing ability to empower others.