Section III: Faculty Development and Institutional Planning

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Section III

Faculty Development and Institutional Planning

All the papers in this section share a now frequently heard concern for the stagnant, trapped, and even resentful faculties that the financial stringencies of the 1980s are creating at many colleges and universities. Yet the solution of all of these authors is not simply the standard fare of faculty development — consultation, workshop, handbooks, etc. — at least not as these are offered to individual faculty members. Instead, the authors’ plea is to set faculty development in a larger context, to apply it to entire departments at a minimum and to the whole institution, especially as research reveals that institution’s long-term prospects and potential, whenever possible.

R. Eugene Rice, of the University of the Pacific, leads off this section with an excellent introduction to the first two pieces by Frederick Gaige and Carol Paul of Fairleigh Dickinson University. As Rice explains in greater detail, Gaige and Paul are particularly qualified to present the process of long-range institutional planning and its relationship to effective faculty development strategies. They argue convincingly that unless a faculty developer — or indeed any administrator — has an overview of his or her institution’s strengths, weaknesses, and future priorities, improvement work with individuals or groups may have little or no lasting impact. To improve the teaching of a faculty member in a dying department, for example, may be just a waste of already scarce resources. Gaige also reminds us that faculty who are involved in their institution’s planning process usually benefit
from the chance to learn more about their college or university, its students, and its place in the world of higher education.

The next piece, by Terry Oggel and Edwin Simpson of Northern Illinois University, turns out to be a perfect illustration of the process Gaige and Paul are arguing for. NIU is one of those rare institutions that is anticipating its future needs and retraining its own profession­ate, as necessary, to meet them. In the process, it is surprising its faculty members by showing a concern for their well-being that they had not known existed.

In the final two pieces — by Sher Riechmann Hruska of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and David and Susanne Whitcomb of the California State University at Long Beach — the focus is on the departmental level and efforts here to improve the efficiency, morale and teaching effectiveness of whole units. Again, the point is made that much of the life of a faculty member is determined by his/her department and that faculty developers may only be able to help the individual by working with the whole department. Fortunately, both articles are also full of concrete and practical details regarding the step-by-step process of departmental interven­tion.

By the end of these articles, in spite of the severe problems that they are highlighting, you will find yourself sensing that faculty development is facing an unprecedented opportunity to help institutions use a time of troubles to produce positive change.

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