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Finding the Right Match: Staffing Faculty Development Centers

G. Roger Sell
Nancy V. Chism

The Ohio State University

The quality of staff in a faculty development unit is central to its success. Yet, locating and hiring professional staff for faculty development is a recurring need not often discussed in the published literature. This article is addressed to those involved in employment decisions regarding professionally staffed centers for faculty development. It discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different staffing options, the search process, and the need to prepare future staff. The term “faculty development” is used here as a general descriptor to encompass not only organized efforts to develop the knowledge and skills of faculty, but also systematic activities aimed at improving instruction through developing courses and curricula (“instructional development”) and institutional policies and practices (“organizational development”).

The National Context

Although concerns for instructional improvement, particularly through curriculum development and alternative teaching methods, have a long history in higher education, offices and centers for faculty development only began to appear as recently as the early 1960s. Two national studies have surveyed colleges and universities in an attempt to estimate the extent of the faculty development enterprise in the United States (Centra, 1976; Erickson, 1986). Although the two surveys differed in their selected populations (Centra contacted 2,600 presidents of universities, four-year colleges, and

two-year colleges, while Erickson contacted 1,600 chief academic officers of universities and four-year colleges), their questions followed a similar line of inquiry. Taken together, the two surveys provide a general indication of the incidence of faculty development programs, the kinds of activities offered, and the ways in which the operations are organized and funded. For universities and four-year colleges, a comparison of the Centra and Erickson survey findings also reveals changes that occurred over a ten-year period. Some comparative information from the two studies indicates that:

- Depending on which population or sample is selected, somewhere between 40% and 63% of the colleges and universities had “an organized program or set of practices for the development and improvement of instruction.”
- Again depending on the criterion used, somewhere between 12% and 53% of the accredited postsecondary institutions had “a designated unit or person for the development and improvement of instruction.”
- Although comparable data are not available for the Erickson study, the Centra study indicated that, of those institutions having a designated unit for faculty development in 1976, the professional staff for these units was most frequently one full-time director, followed by four or more staff members, two to three staff members, and, finally, less than one full-time staff member; a greater number of universities than two-year or four-year colleges had units with four or more staff members.
- According to the Erickson findings, there were advisory committees for faculty development at 62% of the responding four-year colleges and universities, but committees actually coordinated or provided services in only 14% of the institutions; most typically, a dean or other administrator had responsibility for faculty development as one of his or her several duties.

Three Common Staffing Options: Advantages and Disadvantages

In both Centra’s and Erickson’s surveys, in organizations in which professional staff supports the work of faculty development (in contrast to professional committee support or delegation of parts of the function to several individuals who primarily serve other roles), three main staffing patterns can be identified. These staffing patterns include full-time staff members specifically hired for the positions, faculty members with joint appointments in academic units who work part-time at the center, or graduate students who work part-time at the center. Each arrangement has several

advantages and disadvantages, which are discussed according to the following criteria: (a) stability and continuity; (b) commitment; (c) status within the institution; (d) knowledge base on teaching; (e) knowledge base on teaching development; (f) complementarity of staffing; and (g) personnel costs.

Stability and continuity. For providing continuous staffing of a center as well as continuity of program planning, the full-time staff member is clearly the option of choice. When a faculty joint appointment extends over several years, continuity can exist, but continuous staffing of the center is jeopardized when the faculty member is attending to teaching or other non-center responsibilities. The graduate student arrangement is the least satisfactory in this respect, since graduate students' schedules depend on the demands of their graduate programs. In addition, high turnover occurs when graduate students move on to other positions or complete their degrees.

Commitment. Similarly, although all three types of staffing options can employ persons who are equally committed to faculty development work, the ability of the full-time professional staff member to focus exclusively on this function places him or her at an advantage over the other two types of staff members, who have other responsibilities competing for their attention. An additional consideration is that those drawn specifically to faculty development work may have a service orientation and a personal preference for interpersonal contact and development—characteristics that are not always associated with faculty and graduate students, who may see their main strengths and interests in disciplinary research.

Commitment may also be linked to the different reward systems in place for each staffing option. The professional staff member most logically would be evaluated and rewarded largely on the basis of efforts taken to improve instruction at the institution, whereas for faculty on joint appointments as well as for graduate students the primary motivation may be some kind of research productivity. Faculty in tenure-track appointments and graduate associates might be faced with frequent role conflict in deciding where to place their efforts.

Status within the institution. Of the three arrangements, the faculty joint appointment best fulfills the criterion of status (i.e., respect and credibility), since collegiality and institutional familiarity are powerful assets. The professional staff member can earn a similar respect, especially if the staff member: (a) has professional qualifications such as the doctorate, and has teaching and research experience; (b) is involved in professional associations and disciplinary groups valued by faculty; or (c) holds an adjunct faculty appointment. The graduate student normally has the least status, although a graduate student can have credibility if the center works with teaching

assistants. When faculty are the target audience or recipients of center services, graduate associates can help surmount their status differences through a strong personal presence and outstanding qualifications that the faculty will respect.

Knowledge base on teaching. Although experience with college teaching is important in a faculty developer, more critical is the kind of experience. For example, a graduate student who has been a teaching assistant with responsibility for grading papers or leading discussions often does not have the range of experiences that is desired; or, a professor who has lectured in physiology for many years will not automatically be able to relate to performance assessment in theatre. The ability to relate practical experiences to a body of theoretical concepts and research (e.g., teaching, student development and learning, curriculum and instructional technology) will also be an important characteristic of an effective faculty developer. Although this kind of knowledge may be found in any of the three staffing options under discussion, the full-time professional staff member is most likely to have the opportunity to cultivate it.

Knowledge base on teacher development. Faculty with joint appointments and graduate students can possess considerable knowledge of personal and professional development, consulting strategies for instructional improvement, and other skills related to the work of a faculty development center. However, this background is more likely to be found in full-time staff members, professionals who devote their careers to giving systematic attention to the study and improvement of instruction. Such professionals are most likely to have had previous experiences using videotaping and feedback, and observation instruments, and are most likely to have read broadly in the literature on professional growth in teaching. In addition, they are more likely to have pursued and to continue to pursue dialogue with others in teaching improvement, through attendance at conferences and information meetings of developers.

Complementarity of staffing. Given the broad scope of disciplines taught at most institutions, and the range of needs addressed through consulting work, an advantage of staffing a center with a variety of individuals who serve on a part-time basis, rather than with one full-time professional staff member, is increased diversity of academic backgrounds and options for center services. In addition, a larger staff increases collaborative possibilities for accomplishing many kinds of tasks, rather than only those associated with a given individual's strengths and vision.

Personnel costs. On the basis of salary alone, the full-time professional staff member will usually be the most costly in terms of absolute financial

commitment. When time and benefits are factored into the equation, however, faculty salaries are usually higher than those of professional staff members. Financial commitments to graduate students can also come close to professional salaries when the usual tuition waivers and fees are factored into the total cost, especially at research universities where a 50% appointment can run between \$10,000-\$15,000 per calendar year.

The faculty joint appointment, with the faculty member operating from his or her own office with existing secretarial support and equipment, has the advantage of low overhead. The other two options both require space, equipment, and clerical support. In addition, the graduate student appointment will usually require some supervision by professional staff with responsibilities for managing the center or program.

Summary. Clearly, there are trade-offs in choosing one form of staffing over another. Often, because of cash flow, limited funding, or availability of personnel, there are few options. In many cases, some blend of the three staffing patterns, such as a full-time director, part-time faculty associate, and graduate associate, can be used to staff a center effectively. Fit within the institutional context and the quality and complementarity of those staff who are chosen are paramount considerations.

Finding an Effective Faculty Developer

Whatever the staffing option, certain qualities are desirable in the faculty developer. The range of competencies and attributes needed for a faculty developer suggests a person who can “walk on water”—one who has a rare blend of conceptual, technical, interpersonal, and organizational skills. Such people are hard to find, and given the probability that there will be trade-offs, it is necessary to think about the specific traits and experiences that are most desirable, and the importance of each.

Faculty development personnel, if they are to be effective, must possess a wide variety of talents, but among the most important are the ability to:

1. engage in needs assessment activities;
2. design and develop strategies that promote individual, pedagogical, curricular, and organizational growth;
3. organize and implement specific programs, projects, and studies;
4. plan and deliver oral presentations;

5. conduct research about teaching and learning, and the evaluation of instruction;
6. produce print and non-print communications; and
7. establish and maintain consulting relationships.

Once the list of desired qualities and a position description are prepared, the next task in finding a staff member is building a good pool of candidates. In the case of joint faculty and graduate student appointments, the search will be within the institution. The tendency is often to appoint someone who is known, but if time and circumstances permit, a more systematic search might yield better results.

Position announcements can be circulated widely through direct mail on campus, and nominations can be sought from department chairpersons, other administrators, and faculty. A special network of affirmative action contacts can also be cultivated for referrals, further increasing the richness of the candidate pool. In the case of a full-time professional staff member, building the most diverse pool often will involve a national search. Postings in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Black Issues in Higher Education*, and other national publications, while relatively expensive, can generate widespread attention. Notices can also be sent to colleagues at other centers or to one's own professional group. If the timing is right, position descriptions can be circulated at national meetings. After the candidate pool is developed, a search committee that includes a member who is especially entrusted to foster affirmative action considerations will also help to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented.

The next task involves three stages of assessing candidates' qualifications: (a) preliminary screening; (b) pre-interview screening; and (c) the interview.

Preliminary screening. There may be many applicants for faculty development positions; a nationally posted professional position can easily draw more than fifty applicants, and university-posted graduate associate positions can also attract high numbers of applicants. A systematic search should start with some written documentation of the candidates' qualifications and interests. Often, this approach will consist of a letter of application and a resume. Letters of recommendation and a writing sample can also be requested.

In making a preliminary pass through these materials, the search committee might use a checklist or rating form to organize and facilitate comparisons, especially if there are many applicants. Appendix A contains an

example of one that was used in an actual search. The rating form requires that candidates be sorted into categories such as D (definitely pursue), R (retain for further consideration), and E (eliminate from further consideration). Experience using this system has shown that a committee working together to assess the candidates generally obtains a high interrater agreement within categories.

Pre-interview screening. To determine the relative strength of candidates within categories, the search committee may find it necessary to get more information than is submitted in a letter of application and resume. Telephone or written interviews with candidates, telephone calls to referees, and requests for videotaped presentations are ways of gathering additional and/or confirming information without going to the time and expense of personal screening interviews. Appendix B includes sample questions used in telephone interviews with candidates and with telephone calls to referees. For internal searches, telephone calls or personal conversations with those who know of the person's work will be most productive, although the proximity of the candidates means that other ways of gathering information, such as arranging to visit their classes or asking them to conduct trial workshops, might be available. A short list of candidates to interview will result from compiling and assessing pre-interview screening information.

The interview. Prior to the interview, usually scheduled for a full day in the case of a national search, it is useful to construct a set of questions that will be asked of all interviewees. These questions should be "job specific" and conform to affirmative action guidelines. In addition to interview sessions, during which various individuals and groups have the opportunity to ask questions of the candidate and the candidate has the opportunity to ask about the position, it is useful to include some performance task for candidates if personnel policies at the institution permit. Examples of these tasks include having the candidate lead a faculty workshop (which is videotaped and reviewed), asking the candidate to watch a videotape of a faculty member teaching and then talk with the committee members about how a consultation with that faculty member would be handled, and asking the candidate to draw up a planning timeline and budget for a faculty development event. Appendix C includes an example of one such task. Graduate students will not usually undergo an extensive interview, but they can be asked to abstract a research report or complete a task similar to one they would be doing on the job.

The goal of a systematic search, when coupled with continuing attention to staff adjustment and growth, is to produce long-term benefits for the center. When all of the pieces of evaluative information are compiled, there are likely to be difficult decisions to make based on committee members' assessments

of the different strengths and weaknesses associated with each candidate. Seeking advice from others and assessing the ways in which each candidate will complement the existing staff and fit within the context of the institution are important at this time.

Staffing Faculty Development Centers: Planning for the Future

As a final staffing consideration, looking to the future of our field, it is important to encourage faculty development as a specialization within the field of higher education. Schein (1972) and others have identified a number of characteristics of professions, including a body of accepted knowledge for practice and formal preparation programs at an advanced level, yet when we look at the settings in which we would expect to find such knowledge being cultivated, we find that they are lacking.

Linkages to graduate programs. In her review of doctoral programs in higher education, Townsend (1990) identified 88 universities that in 1988 offered graduate degrees in higher education. Surveys of directors of these higher education programs (e.g., Crosson & Nelson, 1986) have found that: (a) approximately 85% of the programs identify their primary purpose as the preparation of "leaders" for higher education (practitioners, primarily senior-level administrators for colleges and universities); (b) nearly one-half of the programs indicate that one of their purposes is to prepare faculty and administrators who will study higher education (researchers/scholars in field); (c) about 20% intend to prepare leaders for agencies dealing with higher education (state and federal agencies, foundations, etc.); and (d) approximately 13% specialize in the area of teaching and instruction. From the survey data available, it does not appear that any of the current doctoral programs in higher education are designed for the primary purpose of preparing administrators or staff for faculty, instructional, or organizational development programs in colleges and universities.

Two caveats should be exercised in interpreting these survey findings. First, although specific higher education programs may not specialize in faculty, instructional, or organizational development, many programs offer courses directly relevant to these practices. Such courses may focus on college and university teaching, college students and learning, higher education curricula, or the professoriate. In addition, more general courses are offered in areas such as the administration of higher education, institutional research, and the philosophical and historical foundations of higher education.

A second caution in interpreting surveys of higher education programs is that many programs have individual faculty and graduate students with at least latent interests in the work of faculty development centers and programs. We are a young profession—our earliest centers began operating in the mid-1960s. As our activities become more mature and visible in colleges and universities throughout the nation, and as our programs take on a strategic role in the life of our institutions, we may expect that the work of faculty and instructional development centers will be reflected to a greater extent in the offerings of higher education programs.

It is important to cultivate greater involvement of higher education academic programs in faculty development work. The current press for improved instruction in colleges and universities argues for the creation of some specialized programs in which students can concentrate on postsecondary instruction, curriculum, and faculty, instructional, and organizational development. Programs at institutions with strong faculty development centers can draw upon adjunct faculty from these centers and can establish internships to provide a strong grounding in practice.

The growing respect for “practice-centered inquiry” also has the potential to strengthen linkages with programs and centers. Faculty in higher education programs can respond to the dual call to produce scholars and practitioners by rooting scholarly inquiry in practice settings and problems. The faculty’s own multiple roles as administrators, consultants, and policy analysts can also benefit from such a practice-centered approach.

Linkages to faculty and graduate students in disciplines other than education. We should not overlook the opportunity of finding interested (and qualified) graduate students and faculty elsewhere in our institutions. Informal surveys reveal that a large number of professionals in our field completed their graduate work in education programs other than higher education (e.g., curriculum and instruction, instructional design and technology, research and evaluation, educational administration), in disciplines and fields other than education (e.g., psychology, sociology, political science, natural sciences), and in fields and disciplines that adjoin education (e.g., agricultural education, art education, math education, medical education, science education). Therefore, we can expect that preparing future faculty developers can take place in several settings, including our own centers.

A commitment to “growing our own.” Just as centers can benefit from employing graduate students, so, too, can centers contribute to opportunities for enhancing graduate education. Baird (1990), for example, notes these among the prevalent shortcomings in graduate education:

- Students hope to join a community of scholars. Instead, they find themselves being pushed into relative intellectual isolation from other people and concentrating in a narrow specialty that few can share with them.
- Students desire to work with professors who will guide them and reflect on their work. Instead, they find access to professors limited and at times they are subjected to treatment they consider demeaning. Women students and minorities still encounter considerable discrimination.
- Students want to engage in learning that will enhance their capabilities. Instead, graduate students may find themselves held to inquiries that reflect not their own interests and intellectual predilections, but that of their professors. What is worse, they often labor on dissertations that drag out and are doubly difficult to finish because the subject they are inquiring into is not in agreement with their own talents, motivations, and curiosity.
- Most graduate students express a strong interest in teaching. Yet, usually they are taught to neglect teaching, if not to have contempt for it. Adequate training for teaching rarely exists (p. 381).

Liaisons with a faculty development center can help to fill some of these voids and can help graduate students realize their expectations. In addition, time and effort spent in developing graduate students can have payoffs not only for their immediate positions, but for their future careers as well. Even if graduate students do not become staff in faculty and instructional development centers, many will hold future faculty and administrative positions in higher education.

Conclusions

Staffing arrangements and preferences vary by institution and faculty development center. Some of the factors that bear on which staffing options are used include institutional needs and commitments, size, complexity, mission, history, and resources available for faculty development. Choices made will entail some tradeoffs across such considerations as stability, commitment, status, and knowledge.

Organizing and conducting an effective search process is important in filling present positions. A long-term need is for faculty development centers to forge effective working relationships with graduate programs for the preparation of future professionals, and to contribute to the enhancement of these programs for both faculty and graduate students.

Although many factors contribute to the success of a faculty development unit, the quality of its staff is primary. It is critical to the immediate and

long-range health of the profession that effective practitioners are prepared for and attracted to the vital work we perform.

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Appendix A: Candidate Application Rating Form

Candidate: _____ Reviewer: _____

LEVEL

CRITERIA (Qualities)	Elem/Sec	Adult/Cont	Coll/Univ
A. Successful teaching experience			
B. Consulting with instructors for improvement			
C. Planning and implementing programs (orientations, workshops, other presentations)			
D. Use of videotaping for observation and feedback			
E. Overseeing and conducting instructional evaluation services			
F. Grant writing			
G. Development of written materials			
H. Research on instruction			
I. Communication skills			
J. Organizational skills			
CUMULATIVE ¹ :			

OVERALL RATING²: _____

¹Based on sum of item scores from A-J above; each item rated as follows:

0 = none; 1 = a bit; 2 = moderate amount; 3 = a lot.

²E = Eliminate from further consideration

R = Retain in pool but do not pursue at this time

D = Definitely pursue further information or interview

Appendix B: Telephone Questions Asked of Candidate's References

1. How well would this person work with faculty/TAs at Ohio State? Does this person have sufficient breadth and depth of experience to be knowledgeable about college teaching in different disciplines within the university?
2. Does this person have sufficient experience in faculty and staff development, such as organizing and implementing programs, conducting orientations and workshops, consulting with individual faculty/TAs, using video as a means of providing faculty/TAs with feedback on their teaching?
3. Does this person have a strong background in theory and practice of instructional evaluation, especially formative evaluation used for the improvement of teaching?
4. Can this person write proposals and manage projects that are funded for the purpose of improving the knowledge and practice of university teaching?
5. Is this person familiar with the literature on college teaching and can (s)he synthesize such literature, write clearly, and deliver professional presentations and papers?
6. Does this person possess strong interpersonal skills and good work habits such as regular attendance, punctuality, effective telephone and in-person communications, handling paperwork in a timely and efficient manner?
7. Are there other strengths of this person that you would want to bring to our attention?
8. Are there areas relevant to our position and the nature of our work that you feel this person needs to improve or develop further to be proficient?

Telephone Questions Asked of Candidate in Preliminary Screening

1. Do you have questions you would like to ask about the basic position description?
2. Do you understand the position requirements, salary range, and other expectations?
3. Please tell me why you are interested in this position and what qualities you would bring.
4. Discuss two strategies that might be used in working with faculty or teaching associates at this university, and the advantages and disadvantages of each.

5. Can you identify for me the following commonly used terms in faculty development work: wait time, Bloom's taxonomy, microteaching, formative evaluation?
6. Can you identify the following people: Wilbert McKeachie, William Perry, Ernest Boyer.

Appendix C: Sample Candidate Task

As part of the interview visit, you will be asked to design a two-hour workshop suitable for a faculty audience on the topic of "Leading Effective Class Discussions." You will only be asked to deliver one 10- to 15-minute segment of the workshop, but should bring 10 copies of the full workshop agenda, as well as any handouts that would be used.

The short workshop segment will be presented to the Search Committee and members of the Center for Teaching Excellence Leadership Council. Another 15 minutes will be allocated for discussion and follow-up. The presentation will take place in a conference room, with the audience seated at a long table. A white board is available for writing and you may request audiovisual equipment in advance if you desire to use it.