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A New Vision for the Professoriate

By Adrianna Kezar

The professoriate is at a crossroads, some would say a crisis. For several decades, there has been increasing criticism, first of the tenure track system and now at the rise in adjunct and non-tenure track faculty. Few believe the professoriate is organized in ways to meet institutional missions, deliver educational quality, or meet the goals of student success.

The critiques suggest that tenure-track models overemphasize a very narrow definition of research, discount the importance of teaching and education, and do not encourage or provide accountability for quality teaching or improvement of teaching. Yet, most higher education institutions are focused on education rather than research, even as they are staffed by professionals without the socialization, priorities, and experience to be educators. Furthermore, maintaining tenure track positions can commit institutions to lifetime wages and to fields of study where enrollments may barely exist. Without significantly shifting the tenure model, the traditional emphasis on research; a narrow view of scholarship; devaluation of teaching; lack of accountability to improve as an educator over time; and lack of some flexibility for institutions in terms of hiring and finances the current model

has and will continue to fail to support quality education or student success.

The critiques of the adjunct model are even more significant than those of the tenure-track model. This suggests that perhaps the tenure track model can be tweaked but the adjunct model is ill-suited for the significant role it plays today. Due to short term contracts, poor pay, and a lack of benefits, adjuncts turnover regularly, bringing in droves of fluctuating staff with limited or no experience teaching, providing little or no stability for the teaching force in a particular institution. Also, adjuncts typically are missing all of the basic supports that would help them provide quality instruction, including preparation time because of late hiring; access to professional development; programs for orientation, mentoring, feedback and evaluation; and other basic resources (e.g., technology, administrative support, sample syllabi) to support teaching. In addition, adjuncts are typically left out of institutional discussions about learning goals, course assignments, and textbook selection, which impacts their ability to connect their courses to broader departmental and institutional goals and to ensure student success. Many adjuncts are not granted office space and are not paid for office hours,



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also impacting their ability to be available to and support students. While the original purpose of adjuncts has a place in academe, the massive expansion does not.

We can move past these two models (adjunct and traditional tenure track) that most, in and outside academe, believe are not working. Yet, implementing structural changes to forge new faculty roles is a daunting process. Cross-institutional communication and deliberation to redesign the faculty requires a shared vision, resources, and an effective implementation process.

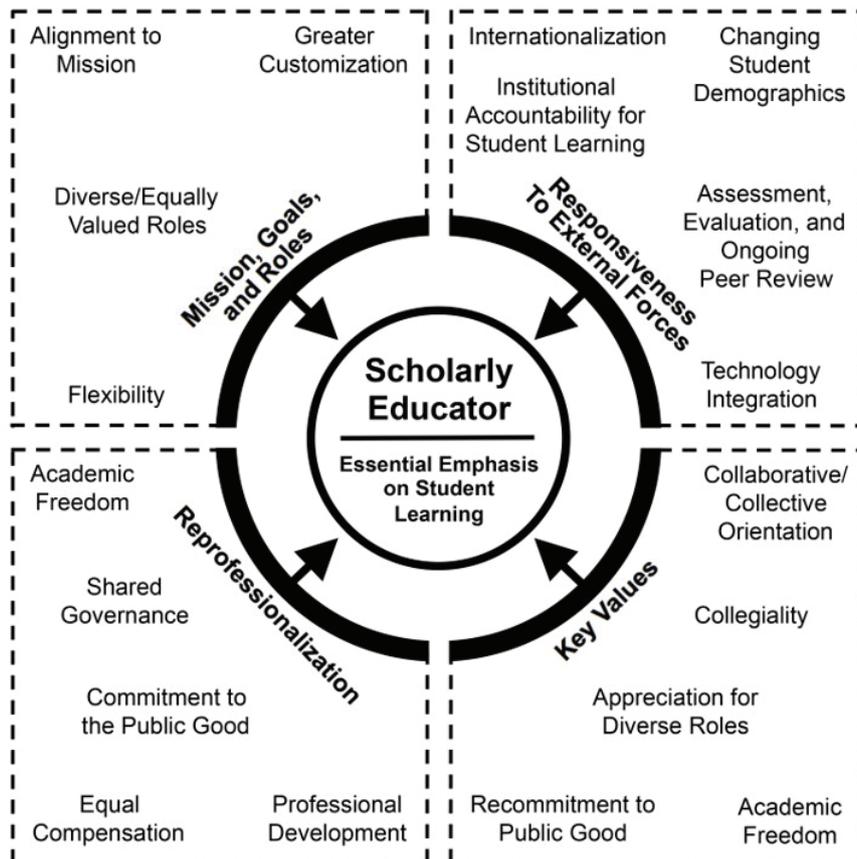
As part of the Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success, in *The Professoriate Reconsidered*, we surveyed a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., faculty of all contract types, deans, provosts, presidents, policymakers, boards, accreditors) to determine what the faculty of the future could be and to see whether a consensus exists for future faculty roles. We developed a survey about different potential aspects of faculty roles based on the literature on faculty models.

Our research identified that indeed a consensus exists. We organized these consensus findings into four foundational themes, discussed below. Areas of broad agreement indicate that developing new faculty models must be mindful of institutional and broader missions and values, recognize the need to re-professionalize the faculty, emphasize the importance of some core values (historic as well as new ones), and be responsive to changing external forces.

The resulting model focuses on the scholarly educator who emphasizes student success—there is broad agreement that this should be central to most faculty roles. This is already an implicit obligation for most faculty, including many whose roles do not formally require such commitments; for example, even in non-teaching research positions, faculty often informally mentor and advise students.

On the survey we also listed specific contract types/models/roles, and there was agreement on several different facets related to these features. There was agreement that we need more full-time non-tenure faculty track with long term contracts (e.g. 3–5 years); teaching-intensive tenure-track positions; creativity contracts where faculty can vary teaching, research, and service/engagement over their careers or combine one or two areas of focus (as being currently tested in medical schools); and customized and differentiated faculty roles (e.g. teaching only, research only). Lastly, most agreed that there should be a broader view of scholarship built into contracts that includes teaching and engagement as detailed in Boyer’s (1990) *Scholarship Reconsidered*. These contract types reflect the underlying assumptions of our model that education is primary; that roles should be customized to fit varying mission and goals; that we need more full-time faculty with flexibility to respond to changes in the environment. They also reinforce the importance of bringing back a professional model of faculty roles.

FIGURE 1. THE SCHOLARLY EDUCATOR



We have organized the themes about which there is broad consensus into the following four arcs of influence. Figure 1 illustrates the consensus model of the Scholarly Educator; the four themes are adjacent to the arrows in each box.

MISSION, GOALS, AND ROLES

Many of the current problems with faculty roles are due to a disconnect between faculty roles and institutional missions. New faculty roles should be more customizable and flexible, developed in alignment with institutional missions and in an atmosphere that values the diversity of ways that faculty support student success. Stakeholders agreed that roles should be tailored to the satisfaction of specific institutional goals and involve greater flexibility to meet multiple, complex needs. For example, a university with a mission that emphasizes community service would hire more full-time non-tenure-track faculty with a focus on service learning, and provide information, resources, and support for community engagement. Integrating all faculty into practices, structures, and supports in ways that fulfill university missions is key to institutional effectiveness. With learning as the central goal of higher education, robust and well-thought out instructor roles will remain a key aspect of institutional success.

RESPONSIVENESS TO EXTERNAL FORCES

Higher education has always faced external pressures. Ever-constrained budgets, calls for accountability, global and national political events, shifts in state and federal policies, changes in technology, and shifts in assessment all exert influences on higher education. Stakeholders agreed that faculty roles need to be defined in ways that take into account external factors, especially those that are related to student success and meeting the institutional mission. Designing faculty roles with these pressures in mind requires a more proactive stance.

These external factors present opportunities and threats that a well-thought out faculty redesign can responsibly meet. It is important to note that not all external pressures need to be addressed as some may be wrongheaded but at least considered. Acknowledging a degree of uncertainty, the following themes are likely to remain relevant: internationalization; changing student demographics; institutional accountability for student learning; assessment, evaluation and ongoing peer review; and technology.

Responsiveness to external forces would mean that graduate students would be socialized in evidence-based pedagogies, assessment, and diverse student populations and ways to support them. As faculty begin their careers, they would utilize these practices (developed in graduate school) and have ongoing evaluation throughout their careers as contract renewal is based on redefined work performance. This assumes shorter term contracts that evolve into longer-term multi-year contracts as faculty demonstrate proficiency. In order to best support changing student demographics, institutions, would hire teaching intensive tenure-track faculty that conduct research on teaching to ensure that the

institutions pedagogical practices are best supporting their changing student body.

KEY VALUES

The higher education enterprise is based on historical values that need to be reiterated and deepened. Stakeholders felt that certain historic values, established by the American Association of University Professors in its founding (academic freedom, autonomy, commitment to public good), need to be maintained in new faculty models. Stakeholders also indicated that new values—not yet held—need to be embraced, including collaboration, appreciation for diverse and customized faculty roles, valuing teaching more, and a greater commitment by faculty to institutional mission and goals.

A key theme here is collective responsibility, which is lacking in many institutions with divided faculty groups. Individualism in promotion and in other practices discourages collaboration and impedes collective approaches to problems even when cooperation and collective action would be most appropriate. Changing the values of higher education toward more collective responsibility also requires altering the research-over-teaching hierarchy in favor of other enterprise-wide values that will shape the new faculty. An example of supporting key values is institutions implementing creativity contracts so that departments might collaboratively plan the work that needs to get done and have certain faculty focus on teaching, research, or assessment based on individual's strengths and desires, and departmental needs.

It is important that universities support faculty in pursuing a variety of scholarly activities with a level of autonomy and encourage diverse roles that comport with institutional missions. Restoring old values and institutionalizing new ones are essential to forming roles to accommodate the kinds of effective faculty needed to aid institutions in fulfilling higher education's public obligation.

RE-PROFESSIONALIZATION

The need to re-professionalize faculty roles is a central factor in conceiving and developing new ones. Building structures that support academic freedom, involve faculty in shared governance, emphasize a commitment to the public good, and provide equal compensation and robust support will be central to preparing new faculty for success in achieving departmental goals and supporting students.

The de-professionalization of non-tenure-track faculty roles is surprising in the context of the historically-valued professional concept of the professor. Non-tenure-track faculty are tasked with performing the same work as their tenure-track peers without the supports, structures, and status as their tenure-track and tenured colleagues. All stakeholders in higher education agree that a new faculty built around cornerstones like professional development, participation in shared governance, equitable compensation, and academic freedom will be best able to contribute most to student success and institutional effectiveness. This essentially means building back in many of the historic faculty

supports but tailoring them to the needs of faculty who focus on teaching or research. Providing professional development for teaching faculty would mean access to conferences that focus on pedagogy parallel to the professional development support research faculty receive through funding to attend a National Science Foundation conference or gathering.

A commitment to the public good is also a key aspect of professionalism in faculty roles, whether through knowledge generation, social critique, or community engagement. Yet adjunct faculty may avoid public engagement in fear of potentially losing out on employment opportunities next term if they were to fall on the wrong side of an issue. Amidst the changing political climate regarding freedom of speech and academic freedom, new faculty roles are needed that enable faculty to leverage their knowledge for the public good and engage free speech issues on campus in a way that fosters learning and community values, protect responsible engagement with public issues, and enables faculty to defend higher education from criticisms of irrelevance. Stakeholders recognize that we need to ensure academic freedom for all faculty members through policies and longer-term contracts, even if many faculty are no longer on the tenure-track.

USING THE MODEL

This consensus model can guide institutions in guaranteeing that new faculty roles are oriented around the goals of the higher education enterprise while individual campuses flesh out the details of what the new faculty will look like in their particular contexts. It also ensures that while there will be some variation based on institutional mission or local

context, there are some shared or agreed directions across the enterprise for new faculty models.

Not only does consensus exist for a new faculty model but institutions across the country are beginning to work to help bring this consensus to reality. To help campuses with these efforts, The Delphi project has created guides to assist campuses with these discussions called the *Adapting by Design Toolkit* (<http://www.thechangingfaculty.org/adaptingbydesign.html>). We also have developed a report, *Adapting by Design* (<http://www.thechangingfaculty.org/adaptingbydesign.html>) that provides the rationale for why new faculty models are needed and examples of new faculty models that already have been implemented in the academy. These include teaching-intensive tenure-track positions, creativity contracts, and medical schools' experiments with customized faculty roles. The toolkit provides campuses a comprehensive set of methods for the planning stages of the redesign, following a stepwise process with scaffolding and worksheets to aid faculty and administrative leadership in evaluating current conditions, future goals, and what it takes to bridge them.

Over the last 200 years, faculty roles have changed through multiple iterations. In that time there has been surprisingly little discussion about how faculty roles can be intentionally designed to meet collective goals set by parents, students, policymakers, faculty, administrators, and other key stakeholders. As Dewey called for in 1915, we again need “a more intense consciousness of our common vocation.” Now we just need campus leaders—both faculty and administrators—to take up the task. 

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