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REIMAGINING PERSONNEL PROCESSES

Supporting Instructors Committed to Student Success

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Debra is a faculty job candidate who was invited for a campus interview at a regional comprehensive university. Having been on the job market for a while, she has had several campus interview experiences, but this one was unusual. During her visit, all of the questions she was asked were related to students. Students were also present at several events during the day: She presented her research to a room full of students, she attended a coffee reception with a large group of students, and students were included in meals and interview meetings alongside faculty members. As her interview day progressed it became clear to her that this department, college, and university are driven by the singular mission of student success.

It's not that Debra hadn't been asked questions about students during other interview visits, but this was the first time that students were the center of every conversation. It's not that Debra was surprised by the focus on students (her phone interview with this search committee included only questions about students), but she was struck by the consistency to which her potential future colleagues were driven to make decisions exclusively with regard to what is best for their students. For example, rather than being asked "What courses would you like to teach?" she was asked "What courses are you able to teach that you think would be best for our students?" Rather than being asked to speak about her research on its own merits, she was asked to speak about connections between her research and her teaching. As she answered these questions she came to realize that this job would provide

something that she did not previously realize she was seeking: a career in which she would be exclusively dedicated to, evaluated by, and rewarded for her commitment to the success of her students.

How would our faculty be different if Debra's story was not unusual? What would it look like if every personnel process and decision in higher education was framed from the perspective of student success? Given the faculty-centered practices embedded in personnel processes on our campuses, these might seem like radical questions. But if we want and need faculty on board with student success initiatives, we should expect that their priorities will align with their job descriptions and the criteria by which their job performance is evaluated. Many institutions already attempt to take teaching and student support into account when reviewing faculty but may not be doing it as comprehensively as possible. This chapter explores how higher education institutions might rethink elements and processes of hiring, evaluating, and promoting instructional faculty with a radical orientation toward students and their success.

We focus on the personnel processes for faculty because we believe that among all those who work in higher education faculty selection and review processes would benefit most from being reimagined. In fact, most other university staff positions are hired and reviewed with an explicit focus on how they help students succeed. For faculty, however, several other competing factors have traditionally led to complex personnel considerations: How much research is the faculty member doing? Where is this research being published? Is the faculty member serving on enough committees? Has the faculty member served in leadership positions? Is the faculty member active in the community? We suggest that these factors, while valuable, are ancillary to the more central mission of student success. Traditional tenure and promotion standards are also uniquely challenging because of their tendency to minimally include student success factors, and at worst reward practices adverse to student learning, such as relying on grading quotas and curves. Therefore, our overarching goal to radically refocus our mission on student success directs us to reimagine our personnel processes.

We know a lot about what works for students (Kuh et al., 2010), but a perennial challenge is getting faculty to engage in these practices. In an attempt to reimagine the faculty personnel process from the perspective of student success, we will follow the personnel milestones for a faculty position through the typical steps of hiring, tenure and promotion, and review. These processes are the primary way we communicate with faculty about what we value, and our priority of student success should be clearly demonstrated in them.

Faculty Job Descriptions

One of the significant barriers to reimagining the role of faculty members as it relates to student success is the way we conceive and describe the job duties of our faculty. At 4-year institutions, faculty positions typically have a three-fold responsibility for teaching, research, and service. Universities may weigh the responsibilities differently, but these are usually considered to be three distinct areas of work. Accordingly, when we write job descriptions for faculty positions, these three areas are typically listed and evaluated separately. Within this structure and its assumptions, work with students is only a fraction of what we expect faculty to do. In fact, as these roles are traditionally conceived, teaching is what we do for our students, research is what we do for our field, and service is what we do for our institution. What if we reimagined this three-part job description from the perspective of student success?

The problem begins (or is perhaps significantly reinforced) during department and university deliberations about filling faculty positions. These discussions often focus on what we want from a faculty position as opposed to what will be good for students. For example, we tend to focus on perceived needs related to traditional disciplinary subfields or necessary research areas of our faculty. We also tend to seek replacement positions (either departmental or subfield), assuming that replicating the status quo is the best way to proceed as a curriculum and a community. Our preferences for filling vacant faculty positions, or creating new ones, are usually informed by what we and our colleagues see as critical gaps in our disciplinary majors as they are traditionally conceived.

Instead, deliberations and decisions should be guided by an interest in how a faculty position will best serve students. We often start conversations about filling a faculty vacancy with the job description that already exists for the position. But to assume that this is how to begin the conversation about hiring a new faculty member misses an important question that should come earlier: Is our curriculum serving our students? Answering this question will mean ongoing attention to the success of the courses we have in accomplishing program learning outcomes. It also involves revisiting those learning outcomes themselves to track their usefulness and relevance for students. Searching for a new faculty member should be a forward-looking activity directed toward the needs of our students as they graduate rather than a retrospective look at how our disciplines have historically evolved.

In this way, a radical approach to student success pushes us to reconsider conventional ways we think about the hiring work we do within our programs. Our focus should not be on defending our disciplines or guarding

our fields and their specializations as we came to understand them in graduate school. Nor should it be about protecting our enrollments (in competition with other departments at our same university) or the boundaries between departments. Instead, we should ask our students, alumni, and future employers questions about their interests, what learning outcomes and courses they would find (or would have found) useful. In doing so, we may discover new possibilities for serving students with the faculty we hire, with the added benefit of having academic programs that actively and intentionally evolve to meet the needs of students.

As conversations about faculty hiring move to the writing of job descriptions, we should be open to being inclusive of many different specialties within our disciplines and open to the possibility of faculty whose teaching and research is interdisciplinary. Students tend to find the work of faculty doing interdisciplinary work more relevant and accessible, and those faculty are also more likely to use their scholarship for public benefit (Hurtado & Sharkness, 2008). The motivation to find candidates who are best for students should lead us to avoid overly narrowing a search to a particular subfield or research area. Even when our curricular decisions lead us to a specified teaching focus for a particular position, we should define the need as broadly as possible in a job description so as not to exclude candidates who might bring a student-centered approach and whose teaching competencies are closely related to our need. This speaks to a common problem in faculty searching of confusing a research area need for a teaching need. A job description should not exclude consideration of a strong candidate with broad field teaching ability because that candidate does not match a perceived research area need of a department.

If the primary work of faculty related to student success is teaching, then teaching should be a featured element of any position description or job posting. It would be useful to not only ask candidates for their teaching philosophy, but also for specific examples of how they have promoted student success in their classes. What is their approach to students who are struggling? How do they teach a difficult topic so that students with different levels of preparation can understand it? It is common in higher education for teaching discussions in candidate letters to focus on approaches to and experience with content. We might get more information from our candidates if we ask them to tell us how they teach and why.

We should also avoid writing job descriptions that imply that the only student-facing work of a faculty member is teaching. It is common that we expect faculty members to advise students. We also usually expect faculty to be willing to direct undergraduate research and mentor students who are both high achieving and who may require additional support. If we consider

these to be important elements of faculty work, then they should appear in job descriptions.

Given these factors, consider the difference between the following two job postings with two different job descriptions:

The Department of Political Science at Traditional State University is seeking applicants for a tenure-track position in American politics. The department seeks to hire an individual whose research focuses on the presidency and/or Congress. Candidates must demonstrate potential for excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service. Interested applicants should apply by submitting a CV and a letter addressing their qualifications.

The Department of Political Science at Student Success University is seeking applicants for a tenure-track position in American politics. The department seeks to hire a dynamic and compassionate instructor who will complement and support the primary mission of the department and university: to prepare students to be successful in college and after graduation. Candidates must demonstrate a commitment to the success of their students and potential for teaching, research, service, and advising for the benefit of their students. Interested applicants should apply by submitting a CV and a letter addressing their interest and approach to teaching and mentoring students from a variety of backgrounds and preparation levels, and abilities.

Each of these job postings might field a similar pool of applicants, but the second clearly indicates the student success expectations of the job to potential candidates. Responses to the second description would also allow a search committee more insight into candidates' approaches to students. A good search will not leave it to chance whether candidates would discuss these things in their application letters.

It is also important to note the significant impact of recruiting candidates who themselves represent the increasing diversity of students. Increasing diversity among the faculty is an institutional goal that almost all universities and colleges pursue, and for good reason. We want to emphasize here, however, the crucial role it plays in student success. Diversity and inclusion as principles in hiring is as important for the success of our students as it is for the success of our faculty, and our commitment to these in principle. As demographics shift, students benefit from seeing more faculty who are like them. Many of the suggestions support this goal, including opening a search to new and emerging fields, building a case for advancing candidates on a range of factors, and focusing a search on student needs (McMurtrie, 2016). Faculty searches committed to diversity should emphasize this commitment in every job posting and encourage sharing the job posting with an appeal for diversity in both formal (job boards) and informal (social media) settings.

Interviewing Faculty Candidates

Advertising a faculty position like the one described will hopefully generate a diverse pool of candidates ready to be interviewed about joining a faculty committed to student success. The interview stage of the hiring process is even more important for determining the priorities and abilities of faculty job candidates. Traditionally, faculty interviews are organized around learning how well a faculty member will function in a position with the competing pressures of teaching, research, and service. They usually include a presentation of research, several interview meetings with faculty and administrators, and possibly a demonstration of teaching ability. What would a campus interview for faculty look like if it were focused exclusively on finding the best candidate for students?

The first suggestion we make is that students should be included in the process as much as possible. Placing a student on the search committee is an excellent way to do this, but there are other ways of involving students in the interview and selection process. Faculty candidates should have opportunities to interact with students at some point during the interview, ideally without other faculty present. One way to do this would be to organize a coffee or snack meeting with several students who could meet with each candidate. These types of meetings allow students and candidates to speak freely about what they hope to find in a professor and a class, respectively, and what the faculty candidate will be able to offer to students. It might be useful to have students prepare questions in advance of these meetings, but impromptu discussions can also provide valuable information for students about the job candidates. After these meetings it is a good idea to have a formal mechanism for collecting student feedback about the candidates. This can be done in writing or through a meeting between members of the search committee and the students who attended these meetings.

Additional student involvement can include select students being invited to meals with the candidates. This works particularly well for a more casual conversation between faculty, students, and the candidates and tends to focus many conversations on issues relevant to students. Additionally, including students in this way signals to job candidates the important status that students have in our programs.

If a research presentation is included in the interview process, it is generally a good idea to invite students to this presentation as well. Open invitations might not produce high attendance from students, which is why some search committees decide to have candidates present research in front of a particular class. If you can find an upper level course relevant to the candidate's research, this might be an excellent way to include students in

the candidate evaluation process while also familiarizing them with current research in a field. This approach has the added benefit of evaluating how a candidate is able to discuss their research with students. When this kind of presentation is arranged, it is a good idea to encourage (or require) the first few questions to come from students before other faculty are allowed to talk.

From a student success perspective, a research demonstration is probably not as important as a teaching demonstration. For this, we recommend scheduling a single class to observe the teaching of all of the candidates being interviewed. Students should be told about the visits in advance and informed that they are all part of the team selecting a new faculty member for the department. It is a good practice to ask the students to take notes and to discuss the presentation content with the class in a future period. Student feedback on the candidates should be collected formally, with a strengths and weaknesses survey administered after each presentation. We suggest something like the following set of questions:

What are the strengths of this candidate's teaching?

Are there any concerns you have about this candidate's teaching?

Would you take classes with this person in the future? (Circle one)

Yes ----- It depends on the course ----- Probably not

Collecting student feedback from the various meetings with candidates can be a useful way for the search committee to determine how job candidates will interact with students and how comfortable students would be taking classes with or seeking help from the candidates they meet. Even if search committees are not yet comfortable giving a full "vote" to students, collecting student opinion on candidates can be an effective means for breaking a tie among committee members.

In addition to including students in the candidate evaluation process, interviews with department faculty and administrators can also provide valuable insights into candidates' commitment to the success of students. One way to do this is to arrange the pre-scripted questions so that they primarily ask candidates to talk about students. These questions might include ones like the following:

- Describe a specific challenge you encountered while teaching a student or students. What innovative or adaptive approaches to teaching helped you address the challenge?
- What primary learning outcome or outcomes do you aim to accomplish in your classes?

- In a particular classroom you could have a group of students who are planning on attending graduate school, a group of students who are struggling academically, and a large group of students in between. How are your responsibilities similar or different for these different groups? How would you ensure that each student will have the chance to succeed in your class?
- Research expectations are an important part of this position. How do you connect your research to your teaching?
- We place a high value on student-related service, including advising and directing student research. Could you tell us about strengths and interests you have related to this kind of service?
- Given the value our department places on diversity and inclusion, how do you envision integrating those priorities into your teaching, mentoring, and advising work?

You may also choose to ask questions about approaches to students in lower level general education courses versus approaches to students in upper level or graduate courses. If you would like to particularly challenge candidates, you could ask them about the purposes and values of a liberal education and how their teaching fits within them, a question even seasoned faculty may have difficulty answering. Whatever the questions, the interviewers should ask themselves how the questions might provide insight into how the candidate would prioritize and pursue the success of students.

When it is time to evaluate the candidates, search committees can collect the evidence provided through these experiences and focus deliberations on hiring the best person for the student success mission of the department. The added benefit of these interview practices is that they reinforce the student success priorities of the department to the candidate and to the other members of the faculty.

Review, Tenure, and Promotion

Even when we hire faculty members who are committed to student success, if structures and criteria are not in place to support these faculty members the focus on student success may not be sustainable. Likewise, if we have faculty who prioritize things other than student success, review and promotion criteria are the best ways to encourage faculty development in this area. If we want to change faculty behavior we have to provide reasons for them to change (Tiemey & Bensimon, 1996). The best way to do this is to attach performance review measures and rewards, including career progression, to a demonstrated concern for student learning and student success.

It is already common for a demonstration of teaching competence to be included in faculty review procedures. Usually this takes the form of student teaching evaluations, reports on credit hours generated, and a written reflection on teaching from the faculty member being reviewed. As institutions increasingly focus on direct measures of teaching effectiveness it is becoming common for reviews to also require assessment results and reports from classroom observations. These are all productive considerations in the interest of student success. Reimagining this process from a radical student success standpoint would further ask the questions “*How* are these results being used, and *what* are faculty being told about how to improve?”

Improvements require not just evaluations but also opportunities for professional development. Reviews should not only be retrospective, they should also be prospective, asking the faculty member under review to communicate their goals related to student success. Faculty should be asked to provide their student success goals and what they need from the department or university to accomplish these goals. When faculty are not able to determine how they might meet their goals, evaluators can recommend strategies or resources. When faculty members are not sure what their goals should be, evaluators can suggest student success goals related to strategic program or institutional priorities. These might include things like closing equity gaps in student performance, decreasing the failure rate in courses, or increasing student performance on key course learning outcomes.

Conducting these kinds of evaluations, and recommendations that they provide, might require adding additional data points to the review process. Reimagining faculty review procedures, including tenure and promotion, could require including classroom observations, student focus groups, feedback surveys from advisees, and classroom equity data (disaggregated student performance data from the classes the faculty member teaches). Each of these can provide valuable insights into where there might be room for improvement and can set useful benchmarks for future plans for development. We already know that the academic career is a development process (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Boice, 1992); we just need to refocus this development on student success.

It is worth noting that publicly identifying faculty-specific student success data may leave faculty feeling vulnerable. Therefore, reimagining personnel processes in the interest of student success should also include making the process a positive one aimed at improvement (rather than a negative one where we deem faculty unworthy or deficient). Even the best faculty have room to improve, and the conversations around review should be focused on how we can do that. When using any of these measures it is also important to provide faculty members the opportunity to publicly reflect on the evaluation instruments and measures that are used in the process and

propose how they plan to improve to better serve students. This might mean a written response presented to a review committee or a public presentation with time for questions and suggestions. It is also important that mentoring networks are established prior to these reviews to prepare faculty (on both sides of the review) for the conversations that occur within it (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007).

Mentoring networks are particularly important for supporting underrepresented faculty members. Additional workload experienced by underrepresented faculty, including the burden of additional student advising, extra committee work, and diversity-related institutional service, mean that extra care should be given to making sure faculty have mentors to help them navigate this work (June, 2016). This “invisible work” should be made more visible in the review and promotion process as well. Because a diverse faculty is important for student success, review processes should put a priority on recognizing and supporting the unique work often required of the faculty who bring diversity to our departments.

Ultimately, incorporating a student success framework into faculty review criteria, as well as tenure and promotion decisions, requires that bylaws and policies be changed. This may mean broadening definitions of scholarship, teaching, and service (Boyer, 1990). Academic departments and promotion committees should codify student success criteria by changing bylaws to specifically encourage and recognize of the following:

- high-impact practices as examples of good teaching
- inclusive teaching practices
- the scholarship of teaching and learning
- service to student organizations
- advising and mentoring students (formally and informally)
- directing undergraduate research
- building relationships between students and community partners

If official documents were specific in describing what counts as faculty practices that are good for student success, faculty under review (or applying for tenure and promotion) will more readily reference these practices and will more easily see that they are valued.

Post-Tenure Review

Perhaps the most ambiguous and ill-defined stage of development in the career of a faculty member comes after they earn tenure (Basu, 2012). This is due in part because such a heavy emphasis is placed on securing a tenure-track

position, navigating the probationary early years, and ultimately facing an evaluation where one either earns tenure or is forced to seek another position at a different institution. This high-stakes process in turn forces departmental, school or college, and administrative units to define clearly the expectations of development through the tenure progression so as to ensure fairness and provide transparency to the end. Tenure is typically earned when a faculty member can demonstrate sustained excellence in teaching, as well as in the areas of scholarship and/or service. But what comes after tenure? What is to be done to help a faculty member sustain excellence and engagement? And how can tenured faculty be supported in ways that do not in turn make their career post-tenure routine and without a clear goal to work toward?

The post-tenure review process varies widely across institutions both in terms of structure (How often does such a review take place? Who conducts the review? What are the materials and evidence evaluated?) and purpose (Is the review intended to be a developmental or an evaluative process? Does the post-tenure carry with it any consequential weight?). Perhaps due to the lack of consistency regarding this process, or the feeling that once an individual has earned tenure there is very little to be done to maintain effectiveness, the post-tenure review process runs the risk of being a trivial exercise without much meaning.

However, instead of viewing this relatively nebulous and essentially contested process as problematic because of its lack of definition, institutions should leverage the ambiguity and use it as an opportunity to define clear goals and expectations around student success. As O'Meara (2004) noted about the importance of defining the post-tenure review process:

As institutions initiate new post-tenure review programs or try to reform existing ones, it will be important to recognize the values of autonomy and collegiality and to consider both career stage and institutional context in designing a process that supports both faculty and institutional effectiveness. (p. 201)

With the effectiveness of both the faculty and the institution defined in terms of student success, post-tenure review ought to be a process designed to support the ongoing development and efforts of faculty to maintain excellence or find new ways of moving the needle on student success. In this way, post-tenure review becomes an opportunity for institutions to help continue the professional development process of later career, tenured faculty, which has the positive effect of helping them find new challenges to maintain their passion, creativity, and enthusiasm for their work (Wesson & Johnson, 1991). More importantly, such clear focus on student success as

the means by which one continues to be evaluated fulfills one of the most promising aspects of tenure as a concept: the protection and assurance for experienced faculty to have the academic freedom to engage in pedagogical experimentation and take risks to advance student outcomes without fear of placing their job in jeopardy.

In order to make this a successful process, there needs to be clarity developed around expectations through the establishment of clear metrics related to student success, as well as mechanisms to provide incentives for faculty members beyond just meeting minimal expectations. To begin, review bodies need to use student success metrics as differentiators for determining how to distribute sought-after rewards or resources. While success can be defined in a myriad of ways depending on the discipline or mission-based context of the institution, as much care should be put into providing clear and transparent guidelines for expectations in the post-tenure phase as is placed into the guidelines for tenure, retention, and promotion. Additionally, while the stakes may not be as high in the post-tenure process as the probationary period prior to the earning of tenure, institutions need to structure reward systems to incentivize and show acknowledgment for the good work later career faculty are doing to meet expectations in the post-tenure review process.

For instance, rather than using seniority as a means for determining preferential course assignments, course assignments should follow the preferences of those at any stage or year in their careers who are demonstrating significant commitment to the success of their students. This has both the advantage of being a zero cost, yet highly effective, way of rewarding successful and innovative practices in the classroom at the same time it ensures that successful faculty are positioned to have the greatest impact by allowing them to offer courses about which they are most passionate. Likewise, the determination of resource allocation ranging from professional development and travel funds to innovation funds and infrastructural resources can be tied back to the outcomes of the post-tenure process such that those who can demonstrate the impact of their work and efforts directly to the students should receive priority for funding. To incorporate these positive rewards for faculty members who are undergoing post-tenure review incentivizes creativity, innovation, and a commitment to an ongoing program of excellence in the classroom. Finally, building in post-tenure opportunities for individuals who demonstrate a commitment to excellence in the classroom to provide internal professional development seminars, mentoring, presentations, and workshops also engenders a sense of professional pride and appreciation that their work is being recognized and has the ability to positively impact not just their students, but all students.

In those cases where a faculty member has not demonstrated an ongoing commitment to student success, institutions must be prepared to take steps to ensure that a faculty member is supported in getting back on track. This might mean assigning a mentor for later-career faculty to aid with their development or seeking out professional development resources or creative opportunities that can spark new interests in promoting positive outcomes for students. It might also mean taking corrective action so that a faculty member not meeting expectations is excluded from pay plan increases or denied opportunities for engagement in important or influential governance committees until their performance has improved. Moreover, while the periods between post-tenure reviews may vary across institutions from anywhere between 3 to 6 years in length, for faculty members failing to meet expectations around student success, an accelerated review timeline becomes imperative.

Failure to perform successfully in a post-tenure review should result in the requirement of an annual review process to be carried out until the faculty member begins to meet expectations. If significant progress demonstrating that the faculty member is taking necessary steps to improve outcomes for students is not evident, a clear performance improvement plan should be developed and instituted. These efforts and documentation can, overtime, lead to personnel actions that require a faculty member to take steps to remediate underperformance or run the risk of jeopardizing their tenure status due to ineffectiveness. Such extreme measures are, of course, measures of last resort. Having this clearly defined as part of the developmental focus of the post-tenure process demonstrates the strong commitment of an institution to its students by ensuring that their faculty are committed to their success and are held accountable to that commitment at all stages of their career.

Conclusion

The habits of faculty are among the most mentioned factors for the low impact or slow movement of student success initiatives on campuses. Added to this, the low rate of faculty turnover might lead us to doubt that changing the faculty can be a realistic way to change a campus culture. On the contrary, however, our hiring, review, and reward structures are responsible for what faculty value and how faculty do their jobs. Concomitantly, these structures reflect an appreciation for the work faculty do to advance student success, which helps to increase job satisfaction and an overall sense of affective attachment to the University. A person feels valued because their work is valued. If our goal is to radically reorient our institutions toward student

success, our faculty are going to need to prioritize student success. This will only occur when our institutions communicate that this is their highest priority and embed this priority throughout the accountability mechanisms that are embedded in the regular career progression for faculty.

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