



Rethinking Faculty Work: Higher Education's Strategic Imperative

Judith M. Gappa, Ann E. Austin & Andrea G. Trice, Jossey Bass, 2007,

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The primary argument of this book is that rethinking academic work and workplaces must be a strategic imperative for higher education. Significant changes are occurring rapidly and if we do not confront these changes and make adjustments in how we operate, particularly in the organization of faculty work, higher education will decline in quality and value. It may be difficult in the future to attract and retain talented persons to the ranks of the faculty and faculty are the primary asset of higher education.

Until fairly recently experienced faculty at most universities have enjoyed a career much like that of their teachers in graduate school. They first accepted a tenure-track position and spent seven years or so (more in the sciences) in a probationary period in which they proved themselves to be at least adequate teachers and/or researchers. Once promoted and tenured they had the advantage of the many benefits offered to experienced faculty such as respect of peers and students, academic freedom, health and retirement benefits, autonomy in the workplace, collegiality with peers and stable employment. For many younger faculty there is no such similarity between their jobs and the jobs of their graduate teachers. Two dramatic shifts in faculty employment have occurred: there are far fewer tenure-track positions available and full-time positions of any sort are declining while part-time employment is rising. As a consequence, the faculty profile has changed markedly. Doctoral programs have not done a good job of preparing future faculty for these changes and most institutions have not come to grips with how they might provide needed support for non-tenure-track faculty in order to recruit and retain talented persons and encourage the best effort from their faculty.

The authors do not argue for more tenure-track jobs. They seem resigned to this change. Instead, they warn against the negative effects of a two-tiered faculty, that is a privileged few with tenure and the rest without. In order to maintain quality in higher education all faculty they argue should enjoy the foundational elements that attract and retain good faculty and are essential for high quality work. The most important of these is *respect* as evidenced by academic freedom, participation in governance, access to benefits, appropriate autonomy, equity in appointments, collegiality and access to professional growth opportunities. The authors provide numerous examples of good practices in these areas but also note that such practices are rare.

While a great deal of the focus of the book is on changes needed in the appointment structures for non-tenure-track faculty, the authors also present a strong case for new thinking on tenure-track appointments, particularly, but not exclusively, for the benefit of women who would greatly benefit from more flexible arrangements given their added responsibilities for both establishing themselves as teachers and scholars and managing households and rearing children. The traditional model of the *ideal worker* who could concentrate on his academic career while

his wife handled family matters is no longer viable. A new model is needed for the large number of female faculty, and indeed male faculty, for whom a healthy balance between work and home is important.

Several audiences will clearly be interested in this book. Graduate students who hope to enter the professoriate one day will find critical information on the opportunities and challenges that await them, information that many graduate programs should, but too often do not, provide. I plan to adopt this book in a graduate class I teach on faculty roles. Current faculty and academic administrators have a significant stake in the trends and issues that the book provides in a concise format that is not easily found elsewhere. Finally, scholars in the field of higher education will find a treasure-trove of useful information.

In my judgment there are several areas where the coverage and /or analysis could have been stronger. Briefly, the authors could have broadened the discussion of faculty work by referencing studies of trends in other professional fields. They might have come across ideas on how to address some of the troubling issues they discuss with faculty work and they might have been able to identify future issues that are not yet evident in higher education. At least some of what is happening to faculty roles is also happening in other professions. Second, the authors fail to provide any convincing data, or even a good argument, on how changes in faculty roles and status will have negative results for student learning, which is the real test of faculty effectiveness. What is treated as self evident by the authors should have been addressed directly. Third, while there is an abundance of good advice on what we need to do to hire and retain good faculty, nothing is said about what institutions and society in general should expect in turn of faculty in terms of effective teaching, scholarship or community building. Finally, the issue of what the recommended changes will cost is treated somewhat cavalierly. This is a very important matter given the fiscal stress in much of higher education and it needs to be addressed with more than a passing warning that to not make the recommended changes will carry a heavy price tag.

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