

Maintaining a Research Agenda at a Small Teaching College: A Faculty Dilemma

By Dr. Michele Beery, Dr. Reva Cosby, Dr. Vicki Wilson, Dr. Jeffrey Wimer, and Dr. Doug Woodmansee, from Wilmington College

At many small liberal arts colleges, faculty are expected to provide — and are rewarded for — excellent teaching and service to students and the college community.

Expectations for research may be quite minimal. Although this relieves faculty from the pressure to “publish or perish,” it does not give faculty much incentive to maintain the research agenda they developed in graduate school or to share knowledge and expertise with others in their fields. At Wilmington College, a group of five faculty members in education, biology, and athletic training met for a semester to support each other’s efforts to implement a continuing program of research and other scholarly activity. Their discussion resulted in the following insights — as well as a number of publications and presentations:

- Talk with your dean and other faculty members of your college faculty to determine your institution’s expectations and level of support for research. There may be incentives other than promotion and tenure, such as release time, conference funds, grant-writing support, and opportunities for collaboration on campus or in consortia to which the college belongs.
- Develop short-term and long-term research goals. Make sure that you’ve included some relatively easy goals to ensure early and motivating success.
- Examine your motives for research and other scholarly activity. You may not be motivated by the pressure to produce, but the opportunity to share ideas with the larger community may have great appeal.
- Seek out others on campus who are actively researching. Put together a research support group for emotional and intellectual support. It’s amazing

how insightful faculty members are, even when your research is not in their areas of expertise.

- If you have a research support group, consider setting up “clearness committees,” concentrating on the ideas and problems of one or two members per meeting rather than having all-group discussions.
- Combine scholarship with teaching. Because our colleges emphasize teaching and service, our innovations and insights are often in these areas. Consider publishing or presenting pedagogy as well as content papers.
- Think of audiences other than academics for your research. Your insights may be more broadly disseminated to the popular press, parents, the educational or business community, or special interest groups, such as African-Americans or parents of gifted children.

- Sift through work you’ve already done, including papers written in graduate school, to see if you have something worth submitting now. ERIC provides a good first step in sharing work with the larger community.
- Realize that not all publications need to be research articles. Book reviews, encyclopedia blurbs, and short essays or descriptions of innovative teaching techniques are much less time-consuming to produce and are generally much easier to get accepted.
- Collaborate with colleagues and students — both for motivation and for the insights they bring to your work.

Vicki Wilson is currently assistant dean of academic affairs for teacher education at Muskingum College in Ohio. She can be reached at <vwilson@muskingum.edu>.

ASSESSMENT...From Page 4

yourself this year?

8. How can BHBC help/support you?
9. What suggestions could you make about improving BHBC?
10. What more would you like to be doing here?

These mechanisms have been extremely helpful, especially when triangulating the responses from student course evaluations, self-evaluations, and the interview. This assists deans and department heads in identifying areas for faculty development and responding to the needs and suggestions of part-time and adjunct faculty. The process not only assures adjuncts and part-timers of their value in the academic system, it gives them a voice amidst other professionals and builds an on-going relationship with deans that otherwise can be lost in the midst of busy schedules. These mechanisms also have revealed those part-timers and adjuncts who most likely could

aspire to full-time positions or, at least, become significant members of various faculty committees (textbooks, curriculum, library, advising, assessment, etc.). The sporadic attendance of faculty meetings by part-time faculty cannot possibly address or reveal all of these needs.

While the self-evaluations may eventually be sent back and forth electronically, nothing will replace the face-to-face conferences that affirm and engage part-time and adjunct faculty in a personal way. These usually take place during June and July. The practice has been time-consuming, especially when an institution has a sizeable number of adjuncts. However, the effort will have immeasurable value in maintaining collegiality and ensuring a key, academic “return on investment.”

Kelly McMichael is associate dean of faculty development and institutional assessment at Beulah Heights Bible College in Atlanta, Ga. She can be reached at <Kelly.McMichael@beulah.org>.