Faculty Roles in Off-Campus Learning Programs

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THOSE OF US engaged in programs that call for off-campus learning experiences often fall short in our efforts to clarify faculty, student, agency, and program coordinator roles. It is particularly important that faculty roles be clarified and fully understood by communities, agencies, and educational institutions seeking to implement or improve programs combining community service and personal learning objectives.

Our suggestions for faculty role clarification are based upon our belief that young people today have far too few opportunities to assume responsibility and learn through experience. We also believe that many faculty members have just begun to realize the full potential of off-campus learning environments. If better ways are to be found for young people to learn outside the traditional classroom at the same time that they render service to the community, then we must learn how to structure useful faculty roles and how to train faculty.

There is an ever-growing number of off-campus learning programs which vary greatly in purpose, design, and process. These include internship programs, service-learning, and work-study programs. All of these different kinds of experiential learning programs have at least three distinct levels of student involvement.

1. For many students, immersion in a public need setting, in a volunteer project with people older or younger than themselves, in a bureaucratic organization, or in an engagement with others on a responsible task represents a first exposure to personal responsibility. When this is true, *exposure* becomes the primary purpose of the experiential learning program.

2. Even students with some sensitivity and exposure to human and institutional complexities may not be competent enough to perform the work to which they are assigned. *Competency development* is, therefore, a second important level of student functioning in off-

campus learning programs.

3. At the third level are students who need actual *practice* in their areas of specialization prior to completing a degree.

Each of these levels of student involvement leads to a different focus for an off-campus program, and the focus in turn requires a specific faculty role tailored to it. In designing an off-campus program, these different levels of student involvement should be considered because they have implications for faculty roles both on and off-campus.

I. FACULTY ROLES

High school students have long been involved in distributive education and other experiential learning programs. College work-study, cooperative education, voluntary action, required field work, and service-learning programs exist side by side in many communities, with little or no interaction among them. In each of these programs, how are faculty members involved? To arrive at an answer, at least three aspects of faculty participation must be examined.

Resources — One aspect is administrative support and resources available to faculty members. What incentives are provided? By whom? Who provides information to the faculty member about his role? Do students come to him or does the faculty member leave the school to meet the students? How much travel is involved? What is the setting in which the faculty members are expected to carry out their roles? The answers to these and other questions provide the background against which faculty roles can be structured, and appropriate faculty orientation can be designed.

Specific Tasks — A second aspect of the faculty role is the daily routine of each faculty member involved in experiential learning programs. What would you see if you observed a faculty member working with students in an experiential learning program? Does he use the telephone? How much? For what purposes? Does the faculty member respond to crises, or does he spend most of the time planning and communicating with agency staff, students, and colleagues? What are the number, frequency, and content of interactions with community leaders, students, and others? Do faculty members engage actively with students and community people in the project or is the faculty role consultative in nature? Observing and noting actual faculty behaviors can reveal useful information for designing new roles or restructuring old ones.

Attitudes — A third aspect concerns the attitude that a faculty member brings to his role as an advisor or counselor of students. What self-image does he project in working with students? What views and values does he articulate? What differences do these attitudes make in the way the faculty role is perceived and carried out?

An examination of these three aspects of faculty participation in experiential learning programs will provide base-line data upon which to structure or restructure faculty roles around student needs, be they exposure, competency development, or practice.

II. ROLE EXPECTATIONS EXERCISE

A further suggestion for faculty role clarification is a role expectations exercise for faculty, students, agency staff, and program coordinators. In all of the various kinds of student involvement programs and at all levels of student functioning, it has been our experience that the four major participants can benefit from meeting together to engage in a role clarification exercise. Each of the four participants (student, faculty member, agency staff member, and program coordinator) takes turns outlining on a blackboard or newsprint pad what he perceives his role to be in the program. For example, a faculty member might be the first person to list characteristics of the role he expects to perform.

The other three members of the team then take turns sorting out the prescribed and discretionary aspects of the role characteristics the faculty member has identified for himself. This means going down the list of characteristics and identifying those that are functional and those that are personal.

After the give and take created by this sorting out, the faculty member discusses what he expects of each of the other members of the group. That is, what does the faculty member expect the relationships to be between himself and the student, himself and the agency mentor, and himself and the program coordinator?

Finally, the three other participants, in turn, tell the faculty member what they expect of him or her. Once the exercise has been completed for the faculty member, someone else becomes the key person and the entire process is repeated. Among the advantages of this approach are the setting of group norms and the discovery of a collaborative method of working.

III. A FACULTY FELLOWS PROGRAM

Another approach we wish to suggest for faculty role clarification is based on the idea of engaging selected faculty members as consultants to work with staff members of community agencies. As short-term consultants to a local government agency, voluntary bureau, or private nonprofit service organization, selected faculty members can undertake two major assignments. One is to identify reasonable and worthwhile tasks which lend themselves to student involvement. The second assignment is to evaluate the potential learning dimension of those tasks for the individual student.

After tasks have been identified and their learning potential has been evaluated, representatives of agencies and educational institutions can examine program issues at three levels. Those levels are:

In-Service Training for Faculty — Faculty can broaden their knowledge of the potential of off-campus learning

environments for student growth, personal development, and career exploration.

Faculty Awareness—Faculty awareness of the richness of learning opportunities in community service settings and the need for program designs, role definitions, and institutional arrangements can be increased.

Agency Staff Awareness—Agency staff can become more aware of student assistance possibilities and their own staff roles as non-academic teachers.

An example of this approach is the North Carolina Faculty Fellows Program, which took place in the summer of 1974. It evolved out of two situations: (1) internship programs were growing in the state government departments (almost one-half million dollars were expended during the summer of 1974), and (2) the department staffs (state employees) were becoming more interested in the educational dimensions of student involvement. As a result, the Student Involvement Advisory Council (SIAC), with the assistance of the North Carolina Internship Office (NCIO), took the initiative in introducing a program designed to clarify faculty roles with respect to student involvement programs in state government.

During the summer of 1974, 26 faculty members from 17 colleges worked in this program as short-term consultants to over 500 state employees. What follows is a distillation of our experience, which we believe can be adapted by high school and college teachers.

First look at the patterns of student involvement in your area for clues about the strengths and weaknesses of faculty participation in off-campus learning programs. If faculty involvement is limited, and if there are community groups and educational institutions available to design a program, then you have a basis for introducing this approach (a faculty fellows program) in order to clarify faculty roles in off-campus service-learning programs.

Consider approaching a third party organization with wide community contacts to perform the function of a broker working in the best interest of all parties involved. A community organization is in a good position to identify useful and appropriate faculty placements.

Draw up a program design for presentation to and review by the major participating institutions. By involving the institutions that send and receive students, you can assure their participation in and support of your faculty fellows program.

Draw up procedures for selection and orientation of faculty fellows. Selection criteria depend upon the kinds of participating organizations and the emphasis you seek. The North Carolina Fellows Program used criteria designed to assess an applicant's previous commitment to experiential learning; personal expectations for such an experience with respect to individual teaching and role clarity; and appreciation of how the skills, knowledge, and interests of a faculty fellow would later be used on his own campus. In addition, male-female,

black-white, and department balances were sought.

As part of orientation, distribute the following information to the faculty fellows:
- Data on agency with which faculty member will work
- Name, address, and telephone of primary contact in the agency.
- Background notes on previous student involvement in that agency.

Our experience with three different faculty groups, each of which spent 10 days in the field, was that the major part of the first two mornings was well spent in orientation sessions—clarifying expectations, setting group norms, and providing hints about getting started. Scheduled opportunities for faculty fellows to meet to discuss their individual experiences with each other are also important. The North Carolina program participants benefitted from five such opportunities within a single 10-day period.

A report on the results of the program is helpful to the staff of agencies and educational institutions and to the individual faculty fellows. Evaluation is a matter of finding out the most and least useful aspects of the program and then disseminating that information to all parties concerned. We also recommend follow-up within agencies and individual academic departments of educational institutions. A program coordinator, who continues to monitor the liaison processes initiated during the faculty fellows program, is essential for continuity and follow-up.

The importance of assessing institutional interests, resources, and commitment prior to introducing a faculty fellows program was indicated by the follow-up experiences of our North Carolina Faculty Fellows. Hindsight in the North Carolina program suggests that not enough importance was placed on researching and assessing institutional commitment. Instead we had optimistically placed our major emphasis on selected individuals (both faculty members and agency staff members) who moved and operated within their own institutions, without sufficient consideration to the commitment of institutional resources and personnel not directly involved in the program. Comments by faculty fellows eight months later revealed frustrations with "politics" of the agency in which they worked; some minor gains in developing new courses or programs in their colleges; and some disappointment that they had been unable to introduce new off-campus learning programs as soon as they had hoped. This was probably due in part to insufficient commitment on the part of the participating institutions.

The process outlined above is not a finely honed procedure, but it identifies items of concern to people interested in improving the quality of off-campus experiential learning programs. It suggests ways of clarifying faculty roles in service-learning programs, ways which allow for both institutional and personal development.