To Improve the Academy: Resources for Faculty, Instructional, and Organizational Development, Volume 31

Groccia, James E.; and Cruz, Laura, eds.
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Book Review

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This volume of twenty-one essays comes from the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD) and is directed to faculty and institutional development staff, department chairs, faculty, deans, student services staff, chief academic officers, and educational consultants. Commensurate with their agenda to facilitate creative exploration, the essays are organized after they are collected, and arranged loosely by topic with about three essays per topic. The topics include developing new paradigms for faculty and professional development, tailoring faculty development to diverse audiences and partners, refining faculty development programs for maximum impact, reflecting on and advancing what developers do, responding to different graduate teaching assistants' needs, enhancing student learning, and advancing new pedagogical concepts. The essays are written by educators and developers throughout the POD network and undergo a double-blind peer review system. As such, they do not deal with classroom teaching and application per se, but with ways to motivate, involve, measure, and prioritize self-reflective and critical development among educators.

Several essays are of particular interest because they propose responses to changes emerging in higher education. Drawing on research into video games and their ability to attract and retain learners, for example, an essay by Kevin Yee encourages educators to apply game theory principles to course design (335-348). Even when instructors might not have the technical savvy to generate their own video game, they can apply the principles of successful gaming with low-tech options in their course design. For example, instructors might design learning

opportunities that are narratives (such as a case study or an urgent problem that needs to be solved), have calibrated difficulty and rapid feedback response (such as online quizzes that can be taken until they reach 100 percent), employ diversions (such as add-on TED talks), and generate competition.

Another essay, by Al Rudnitsky et al., describes a college-wide multiyear professional development effort that addressed the need for instructors to adapt their expertise to changing needs of students (127-143). It examines how instructors at Smith College formed a process-oriented (rather than skill-based approach) faculty learning community that explored recent research on how people learn, applying it both in their classrooms and in their learning community. They applied such principles as these: ultimately learning depends on what learners do, not what teachers do; existing knowledge has a profound effect on learners' current thinking and learning; effective learners are metacognitive in that they set goals, self-monitor, and self-regulate; and learning is socially situated and mediated; the instructor's task is to design complex learning environments and motivate students through evaluation. They contend, "understanding and deep learning that allow for better knowledge transfer and preparation for future learning are privileged educational outcomes" (133). The goal of the process, they found, was to build knowledge through discourse, idea improvement, and collective cognitive responsibility (135).

In a third essay worth noting, Michael J. Zeig and Roger G. Baldwin describe concrete recommendations to help senior faculty (sixty-plus years, about 33 percent of professors in the U.S.) develop new meaning and purpose in this phase of their academic life. They suggest that senior faculty reflect on the priorities of their career and identify what resources they need, reconsider what success means in late career, seek out co-mentoring opportunities (in which younger faculty members share their expertise with their mentors, especially in technology), and plan their own professional development. Administrators, deans, and chairs need to see senior faculty members as individuals, maintain reasonable expectations, provide relevant development opportunities, and recognize and appreciate achievement (83-86).

This volume is a valuable resource, with a rich bounty of essays geared to building, sustaining, evaluating, and promoting faculty development programs.

https://wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/to-improve-the-academy-resources-for-faculty-instructional-and-organizational-development-volume-31/