Managing an Academic Career

(Gladys N. Masagatani, H. Kay Grant)

Current predicaments that academic educators deal with, that is, the conflicts between teaching and research responsibilities, the competition within universities for promotion and tenure, and the importance of viewing the university as a complex social-political system are addressed. Recommendations for improvements in the development and education of new faculty members and suggestions for evaluative criteria for the documentation of a faculty member’s performance are offered.

In her 1973 Eleanor Clarke Slagle lecture, Jantzen (1) defined academic occupational therapy as a career specialty in our field. She stated that the educational component of the profession is both a necessary and an essential part of our total endeavor. It was Jantzen’s premise that the occupational therapy faculty member “requires both clinical knowledge and additional knowledge and skills specific to this career role” (p 74). Although many persons have commented on occupational therapy education issues in the intervening decade, occupational therapy literature has devoted little attention to the skills faculty members must acquire to meet the requirements of an academic career.

Like any career choice, the decision to make academic occupational therapy a career must be made with great care. This paper does not address the factors that go into the decision-making process but the knowledge and skills that are necessary for a career in academia after the decision has been made to pursue such a career.

Douglas (2) stated, “Higher education is a unique endeavor; it deals with minds and emotions, with facts and concepts, and dreams and ways to realize them.” More than any other organization, a college or university works with people. Higher education serves a varied clientele with very different levels of ability, interest, and motivation. However, colleges and universities are under increasing pressure to become all things to all people if they are to survive. Survival, however, is not sufficient. The objective of higher education is excellence; it cannot afford to strive for less (2). Academic faculty members are central to the survival of higher education and its standards of excellence, and a career in academic education demands knowledge, understanding, and commitment so that excellence can be maintained.

The academic educator must first know the institution. A university or college is a system with many levels. Educators must understand the interchange between systems and levels within systems; they must be able to determine clearly what the institution does best and whether, as individual educators, they are acting prudently.

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within the system. Faculty members must ask whether the institution’s missions and goals are identified, whether there is consensus on formal and informal goals, and how they can help meet these goals.

**Missions of Universities**

The missions of American universities have long reflected the dual desire to serve as providers of liberal knowledge and providers of useful knowledge. Despite the ongoing debate over whether liberal education or professional education is the primary purpose of the university, or whether the two can even coexist in one institution, professional education is well entrenched in the university (3–6). Allied health educational programs represent one kind of professional education in the university. In 1975, the National Commission on Allied Health Education (NCAHE) estimated that “more than half of the 3000 higher education institutions in the United States had at least one allied health program” (7, p 80). Because approximately 68% of professional educational programs in occupational therapy are placed in allied health academic units, it is likely that the educational beliefs of leaders in allied health education and the missions of the university affect the academic careers of occupational therapy faculty members (8).

In general, most universities have formal and informal mission statements that address teaching, service, and the advancement of knowledge unique to a specific discipline through research and other scholarly activities. Mission and goal statements may not, however, be considered to have the same relative value or meet with agreement across a university. Formal and informal mission statements and goals, individual educators will be able to identify their own roles and functions at all levels of the institution. Kraemer and Rigolizzo-Gurenlian (10) stated that understanding the organizational environment may help individuals cope more adequately with problems that confront them and may help them better understand how they fit into organizations, how functional roles are developed, and how dysfunctional roles evolve. They suggested that since it seems logical to assume that individuals want to be successful in their positions, elements in the organizational environment and in the academic role that interfere with successful performance should be investigated (10).

**Expectations Within Universities**

The educator must devote a significant amount of time to studying the structure, methods of evaluation, standards of performance, and social politics of each level of the university’s structure. The ultimate goal of this process is to establish a plan to succeed in the institution. While setting goals, academic educators need to devote equal amounts of time and energy to studying their own roles and responsibilities and the nature and methods of evaluating these expectations at all levels of the university. Institutions may vary in terms of their relative values and procedures for recognizing these responsibilities; and the new faculty member must determine early in an academic career what the governing value systems are and how to de-
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Develop methods for fulfilling the responsibilities. Faculty members must identify the department, college, and university definitions of roles, expectations, and responsibilities to design and implement activities that will meet institutional expectations.

Although the procedures and criteria may vary among universities, the rules for appointment, reappointment, tenure, and promotion usually define the faculty member’s roles in teaching, research, and service. The determination of a faculty member’s value to the university is based on written documentation of performance in these three areas.

From a management perspective, the following items were suggested by Balderston (11) as benchmarks for assessing faculty vigor and quality in a university:

a. Major publications—amounts and perceived quality and usage
b. Success rate in obtaining peer-judged research grants
c. Generalized opinion ranking
d. Officers, editors, members of editorial boards of scholarly societies and journals
e. Members of evaluation panels in research funding
f. Entering graduate students receiving national fellowships
g. Applicants of high quality for post-doctoral study and research intervals
h. Honorary appointments ... (pp 284-285).

New faculty members need to be aware that university management expectations are constant and must be addressed.

Occupational therapy faculties, along with other allied health faculties, have tended to see themselves as requiring different standards for tenure and promotion than the faculties in the more traditional disciplines. Continued pleas for different standards probably will not and should not be successful. Mettler and Bork (12), discussing tenure in allied health education, and Broski and others (13), discussing the need for increased research productivity, assert that allied health educational programs must be made congruent with university research missions in order to survive.

In contrast to the broad expectations of the university, college, and department, criteria for judging faculty members are usually more specific and more likely to include quantifiable activities. Miller (14) suggests nine categories of activities in which faculty members may be evaluated: classroom teaching, advising, faculty service and relations, management, performing and visual arts, professional service, publications, public services, and research.

In many occupational therapy educational programs, faculty members, students, and clinicians have believed that teaching should be the primary role of faculty members. Our history as clinicians, our commitment to high-quality clinical practice, and our need to maintain accredited professional programs have led occupational therapy educators to regard instruction based on the knowledge of clinical practice as their most important role.

Although there is currently a resurgence of interest in improving teaching in baccalaureate programs (3, 4), occupational therapy faculty members cannot disregard the critical importance of research, publishing, and service. In predicting future patterns of allied health education, Broski and others (13) noted that the mission of the university is to teach and advance the body of knowledge unique to the discipline. The belief that allied health faculty should be evaluated differently (i.e., not in terms of their research) has tended to remove allied health faculty from the mainstream of the university. Current allied health literature suggests a marked shift in emphasis toward the role of allied health faculty members as scholars and researchers (12, 13, 15).

Although all domains (teaching, service, research) must receive attention, and activities in each domain must be demonstrated and documented for tenure and promotion decisions, it is also important to know the informal rules of the institution; some institutions suggest the faculty member have two major areas and one minor area of performance. With planning and thought, the new faculty member must expand activities with categories such as those suggested by Miller (14) to demonstrate productivity and performance for university, college, and department expectations and evaluations.

Evaluation of Teaching, Service, and Research

Although differences in emphasis have been identified among different types of universities, Centra (16) described the most critical fac-
tors used by universities in judging faculty effectiveness as being classroom teaching, quality of publications, personal qualifications (academic degrees and experience), service on dissertation committees, and supervision of student research. Centra noted that research universities, doctorate-granting universities, and comprehensive universities and colleges place different emphasis on these factors. For example, research universities place less emphasis on classroom teaching and personal qualifications than doctorate-granting universities and comprehensive universities and colleges, and research universities place greater emphasis on the quality of publications than do the other two. Comprehensive universities and colleges place comparable emphasis on the quality and quantity of publications and college service (16).

The evaluation procedures used to review faculty members for reappointment, tenure, and promotion provide for a fairly lengthy probationary period, usually four to six years long. During this period, the educator assumes responsibility for developing and maintaining competence in the primary areas of professional education: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Documentation of performance should be viewed as a long-term task that will continue for many years. The extensive use of faculty résumés as the principal basis of evaluation has been noted by Miller (14). This suggests that faculty members must give careful thought to the preparation of résumés and to communicating their activities to their department chairs. A large portion of the written documentation that needs to be collected depends on the evaluative criteria set by the university, college, and department. It is essential that faculty members know the stated criteria, understand both the formal and informal measurements that will be used to evaluate them, and identify the types of written documentation that will best display their performance in the required areas.

**Teaching**

It is important to acknowledge that the styles and methods of teaching are determined by the objectives and content of a course. To do justice to the art and science of teaching, the following is needed: a respect for the craft of teaching, an acknowledgment that what a teacher does matters, and the development of teaching skills (17). Baker and others (18) suggest that an ideal environment nurtures excellence and that master teachers display the following attitudes: positive expectations for students, respect for students and care for the learner as an individual, value for the learning process and a strong desire to create an adult learning context, and a belief in their ability to produce a desired effect in the learner. Perhaps the important consideration is not what attitudes are best, but the acknowledgment that teacher and learner attitudes do exist and that an educator must be aware of them, be able to understand them, and be able to analyze and use learner attitudes to foster an atmosphere of inquiry (18).

Documentation of teaching may include a regularly updated résumé; a syllabus from each course taught; reports of evaluation of courses, including student and peer assessments of in-class performance of instruction; out-of-university, postcourse assessments of competency of students and critiques of the course content; letters from students, graduates, clinical supervisors, and employers of graduates; and analyses of graduates' certification examination scores in the content areas taught (14-17).

Centra (16) reported that the teaching evaluation provided by the department chair is the most important factor in assessing faculty members' teaching effectiveness, followed by committee evaluation and the academic dean's recommendation. The latter two, however, depend on materials included in an individual faculty member's dossier (16). The faculty member would do well to keep the department chair informed of teaching activities and to actively solicit written evaluations of these activities, including assessments from individuals outside the academic community (graduates, clinical personnel, and employers). Centra also cautioned that student evaluations of teaching have their limitations. Of the factors frequently evaluated by students, that is, subject matter, class size, type of course requirement, grade expected, and lecturing ability, only class size can be validated as a significant factor. Centra reported that teachers of very small classes, with only 10 to 15 students, consistently receive the highest ratings, followed by courses of 16 to 20 students, then courses of 100 or more students. Teachers of courses with 35 to 100 students receive the lowest ratings.

Other factors sometimes considered in teacher evaluation that should be reviewed with caution include research productivity, teaching load, teaching schedules, academic rank and sex of instructor, and teaching experience. Of these factors, only teaching expe-
rience warrants serious consideration. Centra (16) reported that analyses of teachers with varying years of experience show that those in their first year of teaching generally receive the poorest ratings. Teachers with one or two years of experience and those with more than twelve years receive similar ratings; teachers in the three- to twelve-year range receive slightly higher ratings, and those with twenty or more years of experience receive lower ratings (16).

Again, the faculty member is advised to review the criteria for teaching evaluations and to document only those activities that will satisfy department, college, or university expectations, avoiding the use of extraneous, hypothetical rationales for teaching effectiveness.

Research

Because beliefs about appropriate research methods and research questions vary among departments and universities, the faculty member must determine the written and unwritten research priorities that exist in the university and department. Questions of the relative value the institution holds for applied versus basic research, for large-sample versus small-sample design, or for quantitative versus qualitative studies should be examined as a faculty member sets goals for research.

Typical procedures used to evaluate research include reviews of a) entries in the resume, b) the opinions of colleagues, c) the frequency of citation of the faculty member's research in other publications, d) evaluations of research quality and continuity by the department chair and dean, and e) the faculty member's on-campus reputation (14, 16).

The number of research proposals submitted for external funding, as well as the number funded and the level of funding, may also be used to evaluate a faculty member's research efforts (16).

Publications

Scholarly publications form an important area for evaluation of a faculty member's performance. The weight given to publications varies, so the local values must be recognized by the faculty member. Accepted publications may include the following: articles in refereed journals, textbooks for which the faculty member served as sole or senior author, monographs, special reports such as those written for department or university committees, final reports of funded projects, chapters in textbooks, commentaries, book reviews, or letters to the editor. Miller (14) proposed appraisal formats for assessing the quality of a variety of publications as an improvement over the traditional practice of using the faculty member's résumé as the principal basis for the evaluation of publications.

Criteria for the evaluation of publications may be quantitative—for example, at least three submitted publications by the second year of faculty appointment and at least five publications each year thereafter—or qualitative—the reputation of the publisher in the field, ratings by colleagues within the department, published reviews of the publication, citations, or ratings by colleagues outside the department.

Service

Institutions may view service in the university, community, and professional organization as a combined category for evaluation, or they may separate these activities. However, the evaluation of service must be done with caution. For example, Broski and others (13) suggested that in order to focus attention on scholarship and research, it may be necessary to reduce committee and professional organization service. The Committee on Women and Minorities at The Ohio State University, in providing advice to new faculty members preparing applications for tenure (Preparation of applications for nomination for tenure candidacy, tenure, or promotion, unpublished data, 1983), urges similar caution: Some level of service to the department, university, and community is usually expected. We suggest you carefully choose how you will manage this contribution. Committee work can drain valuable time and energy away from other efforts. Once you have an established research program, then increased service contributions are appropriate. It would be ideal if you could plan your service efforts to correspond and complement your teaching and research interests.

Faculty Development Plans

Knowing the game and the rules is fundamental to a career in academia. The issues of career opportunities, increased competition for tenure and promotion where high ratios exist, and personal living needs such as satisfying uses of leisure time, family responsibilities, and financial obligations suggest that a personal and professional development plan is necessary.

As universities have faced financial exigencies, there has been a corresponding increase of interest in ways to assist faculty members in planning their career development. To some extent, the intent of such planning has been to provide career mobility for faculty members who are displaced when programs are disbanded or reduced. Most development plans have the following elements: an-
nal self-assessment, use of multiple data sources, development of goals for improvement of performance, setting of definite tasks and timelines for completing quantifiable activities, statements of expected evaluation methods for determining and reporting progress, and a systematic method for determining work priorities. Some examples of faculty development plans (or development contracts) include Lovette's (19) Faculty Opportunities Audit, Centra's (16) suggestions for self-assessment and self-analysis, and Miller's (14) faculty performance evaluation format.

Conway and Glass (20) suggest that a professional development plan should also include a planned socialization process. This plan should address three important issues: the need for information, the political naivety of new faculty members, and the assignment or selection of sponsors. They further suggest that information giving is more effective if information is provided in short informal sessions along with written materials. Open, honest discussions on how to deal with the academic system and opportunities to meet influential persons can expedite the development of political awareness. The assignment or selection of a sponsor may facilitate the socialization process. This plan should also include a planned participation: the price is a lopsided life of all work and little play or family and community life" (p 141). Given the sensitivity of many occupational therapists to the need of maintaining a balance of work, self-care, and play, it becomes clear that it is important to identify the issues inherent in setting personal and professional goals that will enhance an academic career.

REFERENCES

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