



INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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Hiring Faculty for the Next Century

A significant part of the workforce at community colleges is at or approaching retirement age. *Community College Week*, April 7, 1997, reported that 67% of community college presidents plan to retire in the next decade and 65% of the 110,000 full-time instructors are 45 or older—results: many full-time instructors, as well as a majority of community college presidents, will retire and be replaced in the next decade. Community colleges will lose many of their most experienced faculty, but also will have the opportunity to restaff with an eye to the sweeping changes occurring throughout higher education.

As one of those full-time instructors who is 45 (or older) and who has taught at the community college for 28 (or more) years, it is clear to me that a number of specific characteristics will continue to make faculty successful in the community college environment. In addition, faculty must possess a number of new characteristics which will enable them to meet the challenges of the next century. Even the challenges on the immediate horizon—new technologies, economic constraints, changing demographics, and an influx of underprepared students—will demand master teachers who are proficient in the use of technology and who are expert in human relations.

I began thinking about these characteristics after being disappointed by the quality of applications for several administrative and faculty positions at the college, and during a six-week faculty internship at Cirent Semiconductor, where, during a conversation with one of their industrial psychologists about problems locating qualified applicants, I was told: "You're probably not doing a very good job in explaining your expectations." It struck me that was one part of the problem; the other part was defining what those expectations were. To clearly define them, I began with negative examples—e.g., one that always comes to mind is those faculty whose dissatisfaction with their jobs grew the more their jobs deviated from their expectations which, for the most part, were drawn from the traditional, four-year institution.

Most of us understand that a community college faculty position differs significantly from a faculty position at a four-year institution. Specifically, while

teaching is the primary duty of community college faculty, faculty also play important roles in a variety of other activities, including advising and counseling students (either formally or informally); assisting in the decision-making processes of the college by serving on college committees, in the senates, and other associations; and sponsoring and/or participating in student activities which enhance student development. It is easy to understand why we must consider the level of professional expertise that is best for us.

Some community colleges, consciously or otherwise, embrace hiring practices inherited from the four-year model. For example, sometimes we pride ourselves on the number of doctorates our faculty hold, as if the doctorate were the most important indicator of a successful and productive employee. Perhaps we should ask, "Will a person who has been successful in individual, advanced research be happy teaching the same introductory courses semester after semester?" Instead of focusing so closely on degrees, we might look for a wider variety of characteristics that include expertise with technology, a dedication to student learning, the ability to use various teaching and learning strategies, a record of innovation, and a mastery of communication skills.

As important as these areas of professional expertise are, at least two other areas are equally important—professional attitudes and abilities. Having watched faculty come and go, I know that these areas, often overlooked, are vital in hiring faculty who will be willing to play all of the roles our jobs entail. Full collaboration with students, other faculty, and administrators requires professional attitudes which stress commitment, responsibility, open-mindedness, flexibility, and the willingness to work hard, among others. Successful cooperation also includes a commitment to synergy, and an ability to accept criticism, handle conflict, and motivate others.

Checklist for Hiring Community College Faculty

A faculty member who has the right combination of professional expertise, attitudes, and abilities will be equipped to meet the challenges of the next century.



Professional Expertise

- an educational philosophy which places the primary emphasis on student learning in the design, delivery, and evaluation of courses
- an appropriate level of expertise for courses she or he will be teaching
- an understanding of various levels of preparations represented in the typical classroom
- the understanding of various learning styles as demonstrated in development of course materials and assessments of student learning
- the understanding and successful practice of various teaching strategies
- a record of innovations which facilitate student learning
- proficiency in interfacing an understanding of how the academic and business worlds interface, as demonstrated in course curriculum
- the understanding and successful use of learning technology, both on-line and as a tool for distance learning
- the demonstrated ability for written and oral communication

Professional Attitudes

- a commitment to the mission and values of the community college
- a positive attitude, including the ability to see good in self and others
- flexibility, including the acceptance of and willingness to change
- open-mindedness, including fairness and the ability to see multiple perspectives
- the willingness to take risks and try new things
- knowledge of one's personal limits
- a willingness to work hard to get the job done
- the willingness to accept responsibility for professional and personal growth

Professional Abilities

- success and commitment as a team player, including the ability to engage in win-win thinking and to foster consensus
- success at initiating, executing and following up on projects, including the ability to set specific objectives and measure achieved results
- ability to accept criticism
- ability to handle conflict
- ability to motivate others
- ability to lead or to follow.

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