

Faculty Role – Trends in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Higher education instruction has come a long way from lecture and the chalkboard to instructor structured blackboard courses and now with synchronic learning where instructors schedule live classroom lectures with video back up and YouTube lectures. Due to the increasing use of adjunct or part-time professors, and the changing platforms of education to include online, hybrid and executive education, there has been much discussion on what faculty roles consist of. The automation of the knowledge worker has quickly become a phrase everyone is talking about.

The purpose of this exploratory research and discussion is to determine some of the trends in faculty roles and the influence of technology and the part-time or adjunct professors on that role as it may evolve in this century. Questions surrounding the role of faculty will inevitably lead to questions as to what it is to be a university in the 21st century.

Introduction

Talk of evolution at universities has been a constant almost as long as universities have been in existence. The movement from religious to secular institutions took hundreds of years. The move to become more inclusive is a relatively recent phenomenon as is the growth of the for-profit sector and distance education. The Chronicle of Higher Education regularly includes articles that discuss the need to reinvent the university, and politicians, in the United States and elsewhere, have called for change.

While much seems to be discussed at the organizational level, little resembling proactive discussion and action has taken place about the changing nature of faculty and their work. Where do the many changes leave the “traditional” faculty – how do these influences impact faculty work? Traditional, virtual, faculty, facilitator, manager of the learning environment are all terms that have been added to higher education vocabulary.

Who is a faculty member for the 21st century? There are those that argue that the university is the faculty. Are faculty more than knowledge workers? Will technology increasingly usurp the faculty role? Can a conglomeration of faculty and courses lead to meaningful student preparation? This exploratory research will focus on the trends in all faculty roles and the influence of technology and the part-time or adjunct professors on that role.

Influences on Faculty Role

Table 1: Influences on Faculty Role, indicate some of the factors that are impacting faculty role expectations.

Table 1: Influences on Faculty Role

Category	Factors
Technology	Online Courses, MOOCS, video links, simulations, virtual reality
Adjunct Faculty	Sage on the Stage, Guide on the Side, Facilitator, Manager of the learning environment, unions
Global	Communications, business, cultural diversity
Students	Age, returning, gender equality, Tech Savvy, customer
For Profits	Marketing blitz, buying leads
Government	Federal student aid, grants, scholarships, work study, loans, research grants
How is success measured?	Mass outcomes assessments, degree completion rate, retention levels, work placement
Accreditation	Professional, regional (U.S.), changing standards

Literature Review

While much seems to be discussed at the organizational level, little comparative data has been gathered from faculty about the changing nature of faculty and their work. Where do the many changes leave the “traditional” faculty – how do these influences impact faculty work? Traditional, virtual, faculty, facilitator, manager of the learning environment are all terms that have been added to higher education vocabulary.

Who is a faculty member for the 21st century? Boyer (1990) reconstructs what is expected of faculty and how teaching is scholarship. Considering the challenges anticipated in the future, these roles will need to be redefined once again.

This research will focus on the factors that are influencing faculty roles today and what is perceived to impact faculty in the future. Preliminary data from an international symposium indicates that there is no one-answer to the question. It also indicates that much depends on the institution in which the faculty member works as well as the country which he or she works.

Online education might be considered a disruptive innovation. Turoff (2006), in *The Changing Role of Faculty and Online Education*, describes the faculty body as traditionally being “the core of what defines a college or a university.” Online education is said to have “inadvertently helped to turn higher education into an open marketplace and provided opportunities for sizable for-profit activities that are reshaping higher education,” resulting in an “increasing chaotic market in higher education.” He goes on to discuss the consequences for higher education and concludes that in the face of inevitable change it is important that “faculty

have to return to exercising their traditional role over all the degree programs whether it be distance or online.”

Sun discusses in *Transformed Faculty Roles in a Transformed Higher Education* the impact of regional accreditation agencies on the faculty role, especially as it has to do with the effectiveness of teaching. Sun argues that changing college student demographics call for “more fitting educational delivery in the classroom.” The emphasis on effective teaching, while not new, is stressed.

Evan’s (2009) brief article, *Redefining faculty Roles*, mentions a “whole array of other new or increased obligations—training in sexual harassment, staff evaluation, material handling, new pedagogical strategies, and other aspects of professional life—and faculty loads and duties have increased substantially over the past two decades.” He states that the expectations are still defined as if the role was what it once was, not what it has become. It is undoubtedly difficult to assign values to the former and current roles, but in his estimation “the overall level of pleasure and reward has probably slipped lately.”

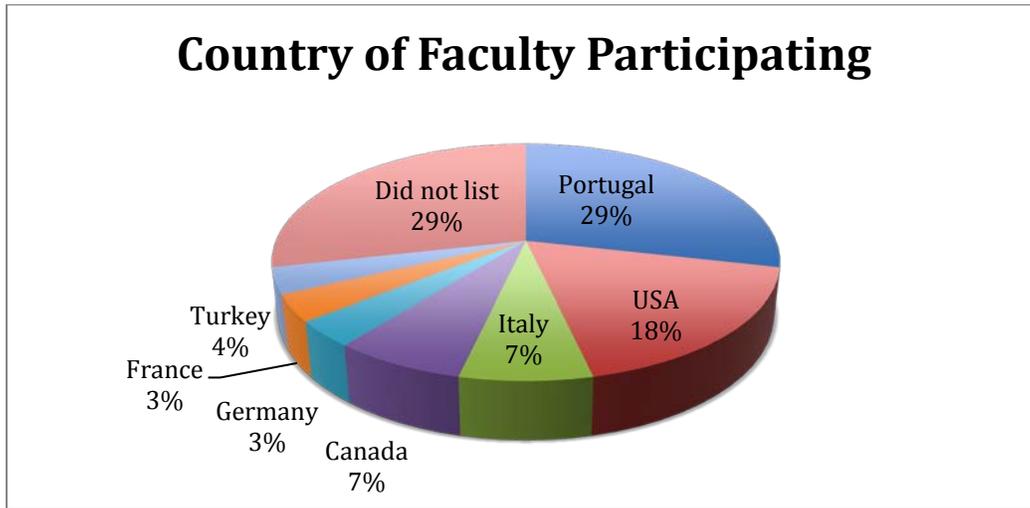
For-profit education generates discussion, and arguably has encouraged non-profit institutions of higher education to hone their business practices and to pay more attention to the student as customer. Deming et al., argue (2013) that while community colleges can do much of what the for-profits do, but at lower cost to students, the for-profits are flexible and aggressive in ways that the non-profit sector has yet to adopt. More recently *Inside Higher Ed* and others have reported on the demise of some for-profits, such as *Corinthians*. For-profits consider their students “customers,” and their faculty are considered “employees.”

When one conducts an online search for “21st Century faculty Roles” one gets more than 21,000,000 hits. Most may well not be relevant, however it does seem to indicate that there is some interest in the topic. Performing the same search using the *Chronicle of Higher Education*’s search engine yields only 297. One hopes that library electronic databases yield similar numbers. It has become rather common to hear colleagues bemoan the changes, yet when pressed few can make factual reference to a time when things were otherwise. This may well in part be a longing for good old days that never took place. On the other hand, the institution that began a thousand or so years ago has undoubtedly evolved and the pace of that evolution seemingly has increased recently.

Methodology

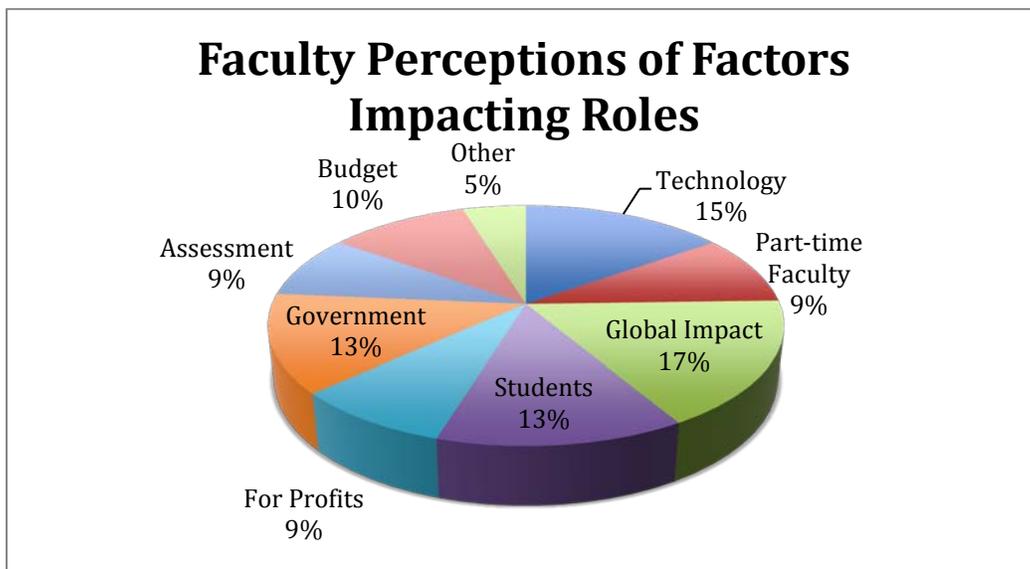
There is much to explore and discuss in this evolution. The survey provides qualitative and quantitative results with questions that are open-ended. The authors limited the discussion to the role of faculty in the 21st century as seen through the responses of faculty to the survey. The authors will review the results independently so as to limit bias and analysis will take into account a variety of literature. Descriptive statistics will be presented initially. Please see the survey as displayed in Annex A.

Figure 1: Country of Faculty Participating is shown below:



The pilot study indicated that when asked what was the most important thing faculty do as part of their jobs – faculty overwhelmingly mentioned research first, followed by teaching and student engagement. Factors impacting roles were global influences, technology and students in the initial findings. See Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Faculty Perceptions of Factors Impacting Roles



The findings are similar to what Sasse, Schwering and Dochterman (2008) found in their research in that the faculty role is broader, with faculty being more than the discipline expert. This focus has taken on a “downstream” focus in the value chain in areas of course design and student learning and assessment. Faculty felt that factors such as technology, global impact and students as making the most impact on their current role.

Conclusion

Much of what the authors have encountered seems to have to do with administrative perspectives, financial perspectives or technological perspectives. It will be informative to hear more from faculty. While no survey is definitive, the results should provide the basis for meaningful discussion as well as further research. Perhaps faculty need to have a voice to prevent their going the way of traditional encyclopedias and other sources of knowledge which seem to have gone by the wayside. This research may help faculty to find that voice. It may also help those in administrative roles to better understand the perceptions of faculty, which may differ from those of administrators.

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Appendix A: Changing Roles Survey

The Changing Faculty Role in the 21st Century

What changes have impacted your faculty role recently? Please list specific examples.

Technology

Pedagogical Approaches

Adjunct/Part-time Faculty

Global Impact

Students (Changing Demographics...Interaction With...)

For Profits

Government

Research

Assessment

Budget

Administrative duties

Institutional Mission

Other Innovations (please be specific)

What changes do you feel will impact you personally in the near future? Please list specific examples.

Technology

Pedagogical Approaches

Adjunct/Part-time Faculty

Global Impact

Students (Changing Demographics...Interaction With...)

For Profits

Government

Research

Assessment

Budget

Administrative duties

Institutional Mission

Other Innovations (please be specific)

Demographic	Institution	Country (please list)
Faculty Title:	2 year Associate Degree:	
	4 year BA/BS:	
	Masters:	
	PhD:	
	Other:	

Please list, from most important to least, the five most important things you do as part of your job
