12

Faculty members' productivity may shift over time, not as a function of age but as a function of the amount of time a senior faculty member spends with colleagues (Bland and Bergquist, 1997). This chapter shows how faculty learning communities can provide the opportunities and connections that senior and midcareer faculty need to continue productive academic lives.

Midcareer and Senior Faculty Learning Communities: Learning Throughout Faculty Careers

Muriel L. Blaisdell, Milton D. Cox

> There is . . . nothing intrinsically wrong with processed information, but there is something wrong with a society that spends so much money—as well as countless hours of human effort—to make the least dregs of processed information available to everyone everywhere and yet does little or nothing to help us explore the world for ourselves.
>
> —Edward S. Reed (1996, p. 3)

The epigram that begins this essay is a quotation from Edward S. Reed's book *The Necessity of Experience.* He advocates a shift in educational practice from mainstream practice, which emphasizes learning from books and "processed information," to learning from experience. People tend to confront the dilemma of rigor or relevance—whether to choose the high ground of research-based theory or the swampy lowlands, where problems are messy and confusing—when they reach the age of about 45. At this point they ask themselves, 'Am I going to do the thing I was trained for, on which I base my claims to technical rigor and academic respectability? Or am I going to work on the problems—ill formed, vague, and messy—that I have discovered to be real around here?'" (Schön, 1995, p. 28). This dilemma closely parallels our experience in working with midcareer and senior faculty development. As teachers and scholars, we are adept at learning from reading, computers, lectures, and other forms of processed

knowledge. But we are coming to value direct experience more and more as a complement to familiar processed learning formats.

Faculty development for midcareer and late-career faculty members is more analogous to in-service learning or continuing education than to revitalization, a word that suggests that vitality is at an ebb or even totally absent. It is essential to begin with the realistic view that faculty will have a variety of needs, including rethinking their teaching, trying new pedagogies, and even general inspiration, but it is equally essential not to begin with a negative assessment of the cohort one serves as somehow lacking, deficient, or not fully vital. McMahan and Plank (2003) call their paper about their midcareer and senior faculty program at The Ohio State University "Old Dogs Teaching Each Other New Tricks." "Old dogs" have been learning every day of their careers. As leaders and mentors of younger faculty in the university, senior and midcareer faculty are experiencing the need to shift paradigms from one that emphasizes knowledge, teaching techniques, and testing to a new focus on student learning and outcomes assessment (Barr and Tagg, 1995). Most senior faculty apply for a senior faculty learning community (SFLC) not because their teaching needs to be fired up but because they wish to take their work in new directions and because they long for sharing with new discussion partners.

Senior Faculty

Rice and Finkelstein (1993) portrayed senior faculty who joined the professoriate between 1965 and 1974, a time of expansion and optimism, as living through a significant downturn in higher education that dampened individual and generational expectations. Confident that teaching would play a key role in effecting change in academe and society, they saw research, publication, and grant acquisition come to be valued over teaching and institutional citizenship (Rice, 1980). As new faculty members embraced different priorities and rewards, some seniors found themselves out of step with their institution and their discipline. In a study of 111 senior faculty on eleven New Jersey campuses, LaCelle-Peterson and Finkelstein (1993) found that senior faculty care a great deal about teaching but find little opportunity to focus on it; collegial interaction is limited and departmental discussion of teaching is scarce, a finding that is confirmed in a study by Massy, Wilger, and Colbeck (1994). Boice (1993), in interviews with fifty department chairs who were dealing with 919 disillusioned faculty members at a research institution and a comprehensive institution, found that one third of the disillusioned faculty members were socially isolated from their colleagues and were frequent sources of student complaints. They attributed their disillusionment partly to their isolation from colleagues and students. Karpiak (1997) created a schema that represents midcareer faculty members' feelings about their career as university faculty. These feelings range from low interest marked by malaise and not

mattering, which she called marginality, to high interest and mattering, in which one's work offers meaning and the sense that one's achievements matter not only to the faculty member but also to the wider community. One lesson for the faculty developer is that these designations are not permanent features of a faculty member's life or character but are labile if university support is available to facilitate shifts from the low side of malaise and marginality toward the high side of meaning and mattering.

In the eleven years that Muriel Blaisdell served as facilitator of the Senior Faculty Learning Community for Teaching Excellence at Miami University (MU), she found the age status of the members of the community to be relevant in a way that is not always discussed. More experienced teachers are often seeking an open door to other faculty from different departments or who have very different approaches to teaching. They are ready to let new people know and see what they are doing in class. The fresh social and intellectual mix of people in the SFLC is one of its most desirable features. Even if people join the group looking for an opportunity to do a particular teaching-related project, the group itself usually ends up being a more memorable and important aspect of the experience (Table 12.1). The more senior a faculty member is, the greater the need for recognition of excellence in efforts and achievements in teaching that leads to student learning. Being chosen for membership in an SFLC is an award, not a development experience. The group is made up of people who join a kind of "intentional community."

Faculty members are eligible to participate in the SFLC if they are full-time with tenure and seven years of teaching experience at MU. As a consequence of this broad definition, associate professors and full professors work together in the community. In the eleven years of the SFLC, there have been ninety participants: thirty-nine full professors, forty-eight associate professors, one assistant professor, and one senior instructor (plus one record missing). Participants in one SFLC may also represent two generations—the eldest members of the group may have children about the ages of the youngest members. Even by the first five years of the SRLC, members' years of experience at MU ranged through every number between eight and twenty-nine. Sixteen years of experience at MU is both the mean and the median of participants. There is diversity not only in age and experience but also in departmental affiliation and leadership. Over the eleven years of the SFLC at MU, membership has come from 75 percent (33 of 44) of the academic departments, all six divisions, and all three campuses. Two participants were department chairs while members of the SFLC, nine had previously been chairs, and two became chairs in a future year. Members may be teaching in lecture halls, in seminars, in one-on-one tutorials or lessons, or via distance learning, The use of technology may also vary enormously. Faculty members come to the SFLC for many different reasons, and the community must make that diversity into an asset; almost always, it succeeds.

Table 12.1. Miami University and The Ohio State University Assessment of Faculty Learning Community Components

"Estimate the impact of the community on you with respect to each of the following program components. '1' indicates a very weak impact, and '10' indicates a very strong impact."

Component (listed in order of impact across all FLCs)	MU Junior Faculty FLC (20 years)	MU Senior and Mid Faculty FLC (10 years)	OSU Junior Faculty FLC (1 year)	OSU Senior and Mid Faculty FLC (1 year)
1. The colleagueship and learning from other participants	(1) 8.9	(2) 8.7	(4) 7.7	(1) 10.0
2. The retreats and conferences	(2) 8.3	(3) 7.8	(1) 9.0	(7) 8.3
3. Release time (Junior, Senior, MU) or funds for professional expenses (MU and OSU)	(3) 8.1	(1) 8.8	(4) 7.7	(6) 8.8
4. The teaching project	(4) 8.0	(5) 7.7	(3) 8.0	(5) 9.2
5. Seminars	(6) 7.7	(6) 7.5	(7) 7.0	(1) 10.0
6. Student associates	(7) 5.8	(3) 7.8	—	—
7. A one-to-one faculty partnership (Junior at MU and OSU: experienced faculty mentor; Senior at MU: faculty partners in learning)	(5) 7.9	(8) 5.9	(8) 6.5	—
8. Observation of a faculty partner's and others' classes	(8) 6.8	(7) 6.2	—	—
9. Consult with faculty and TA development staff	—	—	(2) 8.7	(1) 10.0
10. Faculty and TA development programs	—	—	(4) 7.7	(4) 9.3
Overall Mean for Cohort	7.7	7.6	7.8	9.4

Notes:

FLC = Faculty learning community.

MU = Miami University.

OSU = The Ohio State University.

This table includes reports from those who engaged in a particular component and rated it.

In column headings, number of years in parentheses indicates number of years surveyed.

In table body, the number in parentheses is the overall ranking of the component for all the years in which the question has been asked.

In table body, the other number is the mean for the component for all the years in which the question has been asked.

Each SFLC member at MU receives one-course release time for one semester and $500 for expenses related to his or her teaching project. This provides time for necessary reflection and sends the message that the university values their contribution.

At MU, we reviewed application and evaluation materials to answer the question "Why do senior faculty step forward to participate in FLCs?" We identified some widely shared concerns among these senior faculty (Cox and Blaisdell, 1995):

Resolving long-term problems: "After twenty years I still struggle with grading. . . ."

Need for "intersubjective verification": "I thought that [issue *x*] was just a problem in science teaching, but you have the same problem in art."

Need for new sociointellectual stimuli: "After twenty years in my department, I need some new people to talk with who don't know or care about the politics of my department."

Previous good faculty development experience: "I learned a lot in the program for junior faculty." (One third of the SFLC members were previously in the junior faculty FLC.)

Interdisciplinary interests: "I'd like to bring some social issues into my genetics class and am glad for a climate that promotes that kind of growth."

Different faculty and student expectations: "I love my field, but students see it only as a requirement and don't come to love the calculus."

Responses to student criticism: "I've tried all kinds of things, but I can't seem to get good student evaluations."

Issues related to diversity: "I wonder if my classroom is 'chilly' to anyone." "Could my curriculum be more inclusive?"

Responding to changes in students: "I feel like there has been a decline in student preparation [or motivation, or particular skills], and I'm not sure how to respond."

Responding to technological changes: "Nothing in grad school prepared me for this technology [or curriculum, or pedagogy, or student population]."

Achievements and projects: "I've wanted to work on this course idea for years and haven't had a chance." "At last I can try multimedia authoring."

Longing for time to reflect: "The release time is a big help in getting some reading done, and it gives me a chance to think."

Faculty members have greatly varying teaching loads, from one or two courses in a semester to four, and most have significant service involvement as well as student advising and research projects. Some people have contact with a few students, and others have hundreds. Leaves for research go some way to offer renewal to faculty but are too rare to fully satisfy the need for continuing education as a scholarly teacher, to say nothing of the desire many faculty members have to participate in the scholarship of teaching and learning. Full professors may feel greater freedom to publish articles on

Table 12.2. Comparisons of Miami University Junior and Senior Faculty in Their FLCs

Junior Faculty*	Senior Faculty**
Behavior at End of a Typical Seminar	
Busy, off to next activity, or, late in the day, to family right at end of seminar	Relaxed, wanting to sit and discuss items after time to adjourn
Attendance at Off-Campus Retreats	
Everyone comes, stays entire time	Some (20–25%) cannot come due to conflicts; some drop in for part
Attendance at a National Conference	
All go, travel together	Sometimes members split up and attend different conferences, then share with the FLC on return
Interaction	
Collaborative, cooperative; enjoy each other	Autonomous; some find it difficult to cooperate
Common Causes	
Rally around newness, tenure	Share individual views: administration, university politics, promotion concerns
Teaching	
Enthusiastic, upbeat, curious: willing to experiment	Some cautious, careful, skeptical; some hesitant to experiment at first
Most participants are or become "quick starters" (Boice, 1992)	

*Alumni Teaching Scholars Community for Junior Faculty (25 years)

**Senior Faculty Learning Community for Teaching Excellence (11 years)

Source: Adapted from Cox and Blaisdell, 1995.

teaching outside their research areas than assistant and associate professors may feel. Table 12.2 indicates other differences in the behaviors of junior and senior faculty in the FLCs that we have facilitated at MU over the years.

The SFLC seems to succeed because the activities of the group are multidimensional. There are a variety of people to work with—new colleagues, new disciplinary associations, student associates—plus readings in student development and faculty development literature, as well as the opportunity to work on teaching projects.

Senior Faculty *Learning*

Why do I teach? Why do you? What are your greatest challenges in motivating your students? What strategies do you find most effective? How can active learning be achieved in large lecture classes? Which sessions of the conference on college teaching gave you an idea you would like to try in your classes? These are the kinds of issues we discuss during the informal

portion of our meetings, which will often feature discussion of a reading, a guest presentation, or a presentation by a member of the group. Palmer (1976) called such meaningful encounters "meetings for learning."

Learning is a major part of what faculty and students share, and it is a shared activity through which community between them may be constructed. It must be remembered that as teaching experience increases, so does the distance from graduate training and postdoctoral research fellowships. Senior faculty have learned new fields and followed the remaking of their discipline as knowledge has increased and changed. The university benefits from supporting this transformation in both research fields and in teaching. Many senior faculty come to realize that they can benefit from knowing how other faculty members handle the necessity of reinventing their knowledge base and their methods of teaching that knowledge.

One method of nurturing this learning exchange is to set up pairings of people from widely disparate areas. Joseph Katz and Mildred Henry (1988), in their book *Turning Professors into Teachers: A New Approach to Faculty Development and Student Learning,* described their plan for such cross-disciplinary exchanges. The state of New Jersey adopted their design and called it "Partners in Learning" (Smith and Smith, 1993). Implementing a version of this plan keeps the focus on student learning by involving pairs of faculty in visiting each other's classes and in interviewing the other person's students. Not only does it serve the person who is seeking to improve the course being studied, but it also serves the visiting faculty member, granting access through the interviews to students who are learning in a different subject or methodological field.

At MU, each member of the SFLC chooses a student associate who works on projects with the faculty member and who is invited to attend selected SFLC meetings. Discussions at those meetings will often consider student concerns about grading, workload, or course development. Meetings with students generally include creative activities such as devising analogies that best describe teaching and learning. In this informal setting, students feel free to ask questions about faculty life and to share the joys and stresses they experience in their lives as students. A seminar at which faculty and students share their views of teaching and learning is a highlight of the year (Cox and Sorenson, 1999).

In the SFLC, we have found that meeting for learning off campus as well as on campus is an important element of our program. Retreats give us extended time together, allowing ideas to emerge. We travel to attend conferences and often to give papers on teaching-related research. These opportunities for extended time together are particularly instrumental in developing the cohesive feeling of community in each year's group. SFLC members have appreciated attending the meetings of the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the American Association for Higher Education. Educational policy, the future of academic institutions, and new directions in higher education are subjects of greater interest to

senior faculty than to those just out of graduate school. Members may have chaired universitywide committees or served on the Liberal Education Council, the University Senate, or other bodies that have made them aware of and interested in how MU is situated in American higher education. At national conferences, they may attend a session on how universities are facing up to the challenges of alcohol on their campuses or strategies for increasing diversity.

Each fall begins with a discussion of a focus book that is selected by the facilitator and presented to new participants at the opening retreat in the spring. Four books that have worked well for establishing conversations that last all year are *Embracing Contraries* (Elbow, 1986), *When Hope and Fear Collide* (Levine and Cureton, 1998), *Making Their Own Way* (Baxter Magolda, 2001), and *The Courage to Teach.* (Palmer, 1998). Through readings and discussions, senior faculty begin to see how they can bring to their learning about teaching the intellectual rigor and depth that they apply in their discovery research. We have seen that there is a need to make senior faculty aware of events and programs that may be new to them or that may have changed in the last few years. We invite guests to our meetings who have special knowledge of new data on student development, managing learning disabilities or mental health issues, recent initiatives to improve student and faculty diversity, service learning, or whatever the group is curious to learn. Focus books and the ensuing discussions are an important part of the sequence of developmental steps that lead to participants' production of the scholarship of teaching and learning (Cox, 2003).

In FLCs, opportunities are offered to learn from discussing issues with other faculty members, from doing projects, and from working with students. We cast our nets broadly in a search for knowledge and for projects that we can do together. We are increasingly collaborative and constructive in our collective learning style. One characteristic of the senior faculty development experience is that it is usually the teachers who are already very good who are most eager for opportunities to advance their creative and explorative talents even further, so the group develops a positive momentum as members inspire each other.

Senior Faculty Learning *Community*

Ernest Boyer, in his foreword to the Carnegie Foundation's (1990) report *Campus Life: In Search of Community,* described the general need in American higher education for renewal. He organized his findings under six distinct expressions of community: purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative. Creating FLCs as a part of a faculty development program has helped MU to give form to the *Campus Life* ideals. In the SFLC, we have made a real effort to express our aspirations for excellence in college teaching in a purposeful way and to be affirming of diverse people and teaching issues. We do our best to be just in selecting each group and in

providing a supportive and challenging environment in which good work thrives. It is in the caring and celebrative aspects of community that some of the greatest gains for senior faculty occur. A blend of intense and measurable work and hospitality is needed and appreciated by senior faculty, who are often underappreciated in their departments.

We recognize that the eight to eleven faculty members in our SFLC come from a wide variety of disciplines. If there is to be a sense of unity in the group it must come from a sense of common purpose and meaning that is generated at a level different from our academic fields. Fortunately, every group has the potential to feel that it is a uniquely compatible group. Varied academic interests and areas of specialization strengthen the group. One person's perspective provides continuing education for another individual, who may never have talked at length with an engineer in paper science or with someone who plays the oboe. That kind of interaction, friendship, and informal learning has a substantive impact on a senior teacher's interactions with students and particularly on advising that is difficult to measure. An SFLC member knows someone who is easy to call with a question about courses and curricula quite different from his or her own. The experience of being in a faculty community leads to a strong sense of universitywide citizenship that is important for morale as well as for working with students.

We like to say, "The 'C' is the key to the FLC!" Community is one of the special gifts that FLCs give to their participants and to the wider communities of which the members are a part. Even when an individual is working alone on a teaching project, the community benefits. A course or set of courses may be transformed, a new computer skill may be mastered, or an experimental pedagogy might be created. Financial support of up to $500 is available to each member for the individual project. At the end of the academic year, there will be a universitywide seminar to share achievements of individuals and of the group as a whole. The closing SFLC retreat will be a forum in which the "graduates" will share their projects with the incoming group. The retreat is characterized by the strong desire of the SFLC that is ending its year to convey to the new SFLC how much they have learned from the chance to be together.

Other Midcareer and Senior FLCs

Two FLCs that differ from the MU model mix senior and junior faculty and have been in existence for several years. The President's Teaching Scholars Program was established at the University of Colorado in 1989 to honor and reward faculty for exemplary teaching and scholarship. Members of the President's Teaching Scholars FLC serve as ambassadors for teaching and research. They establish and develop individual, departmental, and campuswide projects, including mentoring, that are aimed at the cultivation of teaching and engaged learning as well as the integration of research in teaching at the university. "Over time, we have found that this group is

composed of members who enjoy the opportunity to interact, engage and grow with colleagues whose values, generosity of spirit and concerns about education are shared" (http://www.colorado.edu/UCB/ptsp/call.html). Those appointed as teaching scholars receive a $3,000 stipend for each of the first two years; a one-time teaching development fund of $2,000; and an addition of $2,000 to their base salary beginning in the third year.

In 1988, a Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE) grant funded the first three years of the Senior Teaching Fellows Program at the University of Georgia (UG). This yearlong program engages eight senior faculty (associate or full professors who have been at UG for at least five years) in a variety of activities that include development of a teaching project in a focus course, mentoring teaching assistants or junior faculty who are teaching that course, seminars and retreats on teaching and learning, and consultation with the university president (Kalivoda, Broder, and Jackson, 2003). Each fellow receives $2,500 for the project. For success, "the keys are thoughtful planning, developing trust and esprit de corps, strong staff support, and strong leadership from faculty members who participate" (Jackson and Simpson, 1993, p. 78).

Of the sixty FLCs initiated by the five adapting institutions in the MU FIPSE FLC project (see Chapter One), only The Ohio State University started a midcareer and senior faculty program, an FLC for tenured faculty. Initiated in 2002–03, the FLC consisted of eight faculty members selected from thirty-five applicants. Each received $750, with the possibility of matching funds from the participant's department and college. They met monthly, usually during dinner, with everyone contributing toward the purchase of food. Agenda topics during the first few meetings were determined by the facilitator and later by the discussion that developed at the previous meeting. Assessment results are shown in Table 12.1. Participants felt that teaching development for posttenure faculty was important because of the push to have experienced faculty teach introductory courses, a widening generation gap (faculty age increases, but students are mostly the same age every year), and the ripple effect that dissemination will have on search committees, mentoring, and colleagues (McMahan and Plank, 2003).

Conclusion

Leaders of SFLCs may find the concept of servant leadership associated with the work of Greenleaf (Senge, 1995) and others worth considering. Senior faculty are very astute in knowing their own needs and in leading the activities they choose. The faculty developer's role is chiefly to serve as a facilitator of that process. Faculty development for senior faculty may also involve keeping the focus on translating the work we do together as faculty members into meaningful change in student learning and in making the climate for teaching and learning in the university as creative and diverse as it can be. Boyer (Carnegie Foundation, 1990, p. 16) states:

> We conclude that the quality of a college or university must be measured first by the commitment of its members to the *educational* mission of the institution. It is in the classroom where community begins, but learning also reaches out to departments, to residential halls, to the campus commons. The curriculum, too, if properly designed, should intellectually integrate the campus. In a *purposeful* community, learning is pervasive.

The maturity and determination to continue to learn throughout their career that we have seen in the senior faculty is an asset to the university. The choice to join a senior faculty learning community dedicated to teaching excellence and engaging other colleagues, to invest time in improving learning in students and faculty, is an act of generosity and should be treated by the university as a sign, as Karpiak (1997) wrote, of high "interest and caring" as well as a deterrent to feelings of malaise and marginality.

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