Call for Participation: “Wanting Something More”
A Midwest Regional Workshop Reflecting on the Professional Lives of Mid-Career Faculty

With generous support from the Lilly Fellows Program for the Humanities and the Arts, we are pleased to invite tenured faculty from any discipline who teach at private unaffiliated or church-related liberal arts institutions to apply for an engaging weekend-long workshop that will examine the working lives of faculty in mid-career (those who have taught for at least nine years but fewer than twenty years).

Central to our time together will be conversations with an eye toward the long view of how tenured academics may live meaningful and engaged lives within their institutions and their communities. The aim of the workshop, then, is to ask experienced faculty to reflect on their own sense of vocation, their service obligations, and their short- and long-term professional aims in order to better enhance the sense of community and shared commitment that might be possible at small church-related and private unaffiliated liberal arts colleges/universities. The workshop will culminate in specific plans of action for each institution represented as well as ideas for how best to support mid-career faculty that attendees will take back to their respective campuses for implementation.

Another workshop? For whom? Why?

Interestingly, earning the so-called “brass ring” of tenure doesn’t quell anxieties and frustrations faculty feel about their professional lives. In fact, surveys of faculty motivation report that mid-career faculty frequently experience post-tenure declines in focus and motivation. As Smith and Smith (1993) point out, common feelings include a sense of isolation, lack of community, and a lack of belonging. Often feeling underused and undervalued, tenured faculty too readily retreat to their classrooms or to administrative tasks and forsake the sense of vocation and mission that led them to academia in the first place (Palmer 1999). Yet we know that, as data and conversations with post-tenure colleagues confirm, mid-career faculty hunger for more authentic engagements with their institutions. This workshop, “Wanting Something More: The Callings of Mid-Career Faculty,” will bring together academics who want to reinvigorate their professional lives at the midpoints of their careers.

Although easy to give these issues short shrift amidst the demands college teachers must negotiate (high teaching loads, increased expectations for scholarly productivity, more service obligations), the literature suggests that attention to the working lives of mid-career faculty is necessary now more than ever. As Camblin and Steger (2000) observe, “Vitality is difficult to maintain if the faculty experience a loss of purpose in their work or if a sense of collegiality is supplanted by a counter-productive competitive spirit spurred on by a day-to-day struggle to survive in an environment lacking proper support systems” (p. 4). Given how faculty responsibilities have evolved (Camblin and Steger), it is critical to develop networks of support. “Simply working in the proximity of others,” Eib and Miller maintain, “does not ensure a motivating environment that enhances professional collegiality,” (2006; p. 1). This workshop also is particularly important because mid-career faculty have as part of their charge mentoring new colleagues. Yet a vibrant culture of mentoring is difficult to imagine when tenured faculty struggle with doubts over their professional trajectories. We believe we can do better. This desire to do better will not merely echo clarion calls to make do with less or to “just do it.” Instead, our workshop will inspire and equip participants to act upon their deepest professional commitments, thereby advancing a renewed ethic of call.
So how would we do this, really?

Small working groups (only 18-20 participants will finally be selected) will reflect on the morale and callings of mid-level teacher-scholars. The workshop will be held at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, September 24-25, 2010. Teams of 2-3 tenured faculty from any disciplinary home who teach at private unaffiliated or church-related liberal arts institutions may apply. We are keenly interested in participants who have an established interest in or experience with issues related to faculty development, especially as these may relate to post-tenure teacher-scholars. With a focus on teams, we hope to ensure the likelihood of successful implementation of initiatives on home campuses.

The workshop will be organized around three broad themes:

• The first, “Vocation and Calling,” will feature excerpts from among Palmer, Schwehn, Day, or Robinson, who have written movingly about passion in one’s working life. Participants will be invited to recover their original passions for teaching, learning, and scholarship by identifying sources of renewal and focus, and brainstorming how current roadblocks may be reframed to invite deeper engagement.

• The second theme, “Academic Preparation and Life After Tenure,” leverages a “missional” framework (Simon, et al., 2003) in the hopes of guiding participants through, among potential others, hooks’s and Nussbaum’s examinations of the foundational commitments of liberal education and the ways the professoriate might invigorate our professional lives.

• The third theme, “To Serve or Retreat?,” will invite participants to engage in directed problem-solving and to create action plans to take back to their respective campuses for implementation. At this theme’s foundation is Gawande’s provocative Better (2007). Reflecting on the medical profession, he wrote, “No doctor wants to believe that he or she is a bit player. . . . [And yet] it can be hard not to feel that one is just a white-coated cog in a machine. . . . None of us is irreplaceable. So not surprisingly, in this work one begins to wonder: How do I really matter?” (2007; p. 250).

**Application Information:** Two items are required for application: (1) Applicants should draft a letter of interest of up to 750 words, which details their interests and experiences with issues related to faculty development. The letter also must suggest potential “take-aways” from the workshop for your institution that the prospective participant would like to see most realized, tying these outcomes to the broader themes described above. (2) Along with this letter of application, participants must provide a letter of support from a key administrator (e.g., Dean, Provost) that stipulates that the applicant is empowered to carry out steps of implementation upon her/his return to campus. One letter per team is sufficient as long as each participant’s contribution is clear. This letter also should make explicit the administrator’s judgment of the applicant to see that implementation through. Preference will be given to applicants who honor this commitment by making their plans for implementation explicit in the letter of interest. Examples of outcomes might be mid-career faculty mentoring programs, on-campus workshops, incentive systems, or other creative ideas that fit within each institution’s mission and strategic focus.

Deadline for application of submission materials is Monday 8 March 2010. Notification of acceptance will be made by Monday 5 April 2010. Accepted applicants will receive a stipend of $500 to be applied to costs associated with travel, lodging, and the purchase of materials for the workshop. (Conference organizers will strive to keep costs for materials modest; please see below the list of sample readings we are considering.)
Please send application materials electronically (in PDF format) to the co-organizers (please send to both):

Dr. Tammy Proctor, Department of History, Wittenberg University, proctor@wittenberg.edu
Dr. Jeffrey Kurtz, Department of Communication, Denison University, kurtz@denison.edu.

References


Potential Works We Might Read


