

# A FACULTY PERSPECTIVE: INTRINSIC RESEARCH REWARDS THAT MAKE A SUCCESSFUL FACULTY MEMBER TICK

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Many factors influence faculty productivity. My remarks will focus on the intrinsic rewards that motivate senior faculty members to remain actively engaged in research. To illustrate my points, I will use personal examples or examples that colleagues have shared with me. Before I discuss my own experiences, I will present research I have reviewed on productivity in higher education.

Dundar and Lewis (1998) summarized results of several studies on research productivity. Individual and organizational attributes that have been found to affect research productivity include: individual attributes, institutional and departmental attributes, and departmental culture and working conditions. Individual attributes include: innate abilities—such as IQ, personality, gender and age—and personal environmental influences. Inconsistent results were reported when these variables were investigated. Dundar and Lewis (1998) identified as personal environmental factors the quality and culture of graduate training and the culture of the employing department. Most research studies have found a positive correlation between departmental culture and research productivity. The departmental culture refers to shared values and attitudes within the academic unit. Faculty and administrators who learned to place a high value on research as graduate students tend to foster a research-oriented culture throughout their professional lives. Faculty members who work in a research-oriented culture maintain dialogue with other researchers through internal and external communication, and seek opportunities for collaborative research projects. Departments with a research culture recruit and hire new faculty with strong research credentials or the potential to be successful researchers, and provide the faculty with development opportunities.

Institutional and departmental attributes influence research productivity. Dunbar and Lewis (1998) cited several research studies that found a relationship between productivity and the organizational size, including the number of faculty. In general, productivity is greater in larger institutions and in departments with a critical mass of faculty. “Intellectual synergy” appears to increase dialogue and cooperation among faculty members. Other research studies cited by Dunbar and Lewis (1997) did not find a positive relationship between size and

productivity. Grunig (1997) reported that other variables associated with increased research productivity are: university funding, availability of technology and computing facilities, and the number of books and journals in the library. Departmental working conditions that influence productivity include: workload policies; availability of leave-time, travel, and institutional funds for research; number of students on research support; availability of “star” faculty; and availability of nongovernmental research funds (Dunbar and Lewis, 1997). Limited institutional-level studies have been conducted on many of these variables.

What else motivates a senior faculty member? I believe there are many intrinsic research rewards that influence productivity. The privilege of mentoring graduate students has been one of the most important factors in my own productivity. Observing the professional growth that occurs during graduate school, especially during the research phase of a student’s program, is rewarding personally and professionally. Most of you can probably still recall the emotions you felt when you hooded your first doctoral student. Hopefully this same feeling of accomplishment motivates you to be an effective mentor to your graduate students and postdoctoral fellows today. An effective mentor must remain current in the discipline and actively engaged in research. Mentoring does not end with the awarding of the degree; it continues during the initial phase of the student’s early research career that spans the time beyond the publication of the research. I find it very rewarding to work collaboratively on funded multi-university research projects with individuals whom I mentored during their doctoral program. Another intrinsic reward is to receive requests from prospective students who are seeking an advisor or mentor.

The opportunity to work on interdisciplinary research teams with colleagues in other departments and universities is another intrinsic reward that stimulates my desire to remain an active researcher. Involvement in interdisciplinary teams has broadened my approaches to investigating research questions. Through this kind of research, I am often introduced to resources that were unfamiliar until I began working with colleagues from other disciplines. I also value our interaction in team meetings, our work together in the laboratory, and presenting papers together at professional meetings.

Professional recognition is another important intrinsic reward. This includes: being invited to present papers at national and international meetings; being selected to author or co-author position papers for professional associations; serving as chair of peer review panels for government agencies, foundations, and professional associations; and serving as editor of a journal or a member of an editorial review board. Accepting one of these responsibilities involves more work; however, I believe the intrinsic benefits outweigh the additional time demands since faculty gain public acknowledgement of their contributions to the discipline and recognition of their expertise. These opportunities also increase the network of colleagues with whom faculty can

consult on different topics, and can lead to multi-university or industry partnerships.

I can recall the excitement I experienced when I was asked to present one of the keynote addresses at the Asian Congress of Dietetics in Seoul, Korea. Since I was one of the few dietetic professionals in the U.S. conducting research in environmental issues, I was invited to speak on the topic: "Dietitians' Roles in Protecting the Environment." Not only did this experience provide me with an opportunity to visit Korea and speak at an international meeting, but it also gave me an opportunity to network with other researchers in my discipline and to visit with alumni who had graduated from our department. Networking at the meeting led to a visiting professor from Andong University completing her sabbatical at Kansas State University. Her goal was to learn the waste characterization methodology that we were using. Our research resulted in two publications and a collaborative research project. As another example, a professional association asked me to be the lead author on a position paper regarding natural resource conservation and management. I found it very rewarding to use my research in this way.

Other valuable achievements for faculty involve selection for a distinguished faculty award at their university or alma mater, and professional recognition by a society or association. Administrators should join in the public acknowledgement of contributions their faculty make to the profession and to their disciplines. These accomplishments should be communicated at the university level and through alumni publications.

These are some of the intrinsic rewards that have influenced my continued involvement in research and graduate education. Bland and Bergquist (1997) identified other intrinsic factors that influence a faculty member's vitality and productivity. Examples are: socialization, subject knowledge and skills, past mentors, work habits, adult career development, a vital network of colleagues, simultaneous projects in progress, sufficient time, and morale. Bland and Bergquist suggest that institutions can enhance faculty members' productivity by: establishing clear, coordinated goals that emphasize faculty members' core functions of research and teaching; providing a supportive academic culture where intellectual inquiry is valued; fostering a positive group climate that is essential for interdisciplinary research, as well as sufficient and accessible resources with frequent communication; and providing professional growth opportunities. They also recommend targeted recruitment and selection that supports the mission of the academic unit and the university.

In summary, many factors influence a senior faculty member who strives to maintain research productivity while also making contributions to the discipline and to the university. University administrators should not undervalue the benefits of intrinsic rewards, as they seek to increase the overall productivity of faculty members at their institutions.

## References

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