

Post-Tenure Faculty at Liberal Arts Colleges

Johnson Center Thursday Lunch Program

February 9, 2017

“Rethinking the Midcareer Malaise: New Lessons From Liberal Arts Faculty”

- Unpublished research from AAC&U Research Session presentation
- Karla Erickson, associate dean and chair of sociology at Grinnell College
- Jan E. Thomas, senior associate provost and professor of sociology and women’s studies at Kenyon College
- Tamara Beauboeuf, professor of women’s, gender and sexuality studies at DePauw University
- Story in *Inside Higher Ed*

Premises, Assumptions, and Goals of Research

- Most research on (and efforts in) faculty development focuses on pre-tenure faculty.
- Challenge prevailing ideas about post-tenure professors as “deadwood,” uninspired and disengaged from students and their institutions.
- Find the better ways to support faculty after tenure.

Survey and Interviews

- 239 respondents at 3 different institutions (Kenyon, Depauw, Grinnell)
- Voluntary survey
- Men and women responded in equal numbers
- 56 interviews
- Broad definition of “post-tenure,” from first year after tenure to close to retirement

Survey Questions

- Focused on mind-set rather than workload
- Sample questions:
 - "Is being or becoming a full professor important to you? Why or why not?"
 - "In an ideal week, how would you spend your working hours?"
 - "What are you looking forward to next in your career?"
 - "What motivates you at this stage of career?"

Major Findings

- Most post-tenure professors enjoy teaching and want to do more of it.
- The post-tenure period as an active phase of “navigating meaningful versus futile service, identifying new pathways in teaching and research, and finding synergies between organizational needs and one’s own creative and intellectual contributions.” (Quote source: *Inside Higher Ed*)
- Tension between the need for faculty “to remain engaged while navigating what [the researchers] conceptualize as ‘institutional trenches.’” Quote source: *Inside Higher Ed*

Typology of Post-tenure Pathways

- Synergistic citizen, weary citizen, independent agent, discouraged isolate.
- “Represent different kinds of interactions between the institution and the self.”
- “Reveal processes by which faculty engagement and growth is affected by institutional cultures and opportunities.”
- “Identifies institutional ‘channels’ allowing growth and ‘trenches’ impeding sustained faculty engagement.”
- The typologies are dynamic.

Quote source: Tamama Beauboeuf, Jan Thomas, and Karla Erickson, AAC&U Annual Meeting, “Rethinking the Mid-Career Malaise: New Lessons from Liberal Arts Faculty,” 26 January 2017; presentation hand-out

Four Post-Tenure Pathways Tamara Beauboeuf Jan Thomas Karla Erickson 2016		SATISFACTION IN CAREER		
		HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW
		ACTIVENESS & OWNERSHIP EXPERIENCE CHANNELS		PASSIVITY & RESIGNATION EXPERIENCE TRENCHES/RUTS
INSTITUTIONAL CONNECTION	STRONG	SYNERGISTIC CITIZEN *ability to re-invent self/research/teaching *ability to self-reflect on growth/change *look for and take opportunities presented *choose service to align with interests, say no at times *recognized by institution for contributions/achievements	WEARY CITIZEN *feel strong connection to the institution (which is in large part why they do so much service) but lack of recognition and reward for work they do leads to less job satisfaction *work hard doing labor that keeps institution running *enjoy service work and generally find it meaningful and important *work they do doesn't align with the reward structures of the institution *service work becomes a "trench" that is hard to get out of and does not currently lead to promotion *two types - see below	
	WEAK	INDEPENDENT AGENT *engaged in their own work although engagement with institution may fluctuate *commitment mainly to discipline or department rather than institution *service as commitment to colleagues or for self-interest *recognition typically not from larger institution (rely more on self-validation or outside institution) *feel they "don't fit in" and/or had a painful experience which led to decreased loyalty to institution *find ways to carve out meaningful career somewhat outside the anticipated institutional mechanisms *career goals out of sync with institutional norms or resources *over-representation of faculty of color and very senior women (first in their departments)	DISGRUNTLED AND DISCOURAGED *Don't feel strong connection to institution. May still enjoy some aspects of job but overall job satisfaction is low. *Long term sense of feeling unappreciated or unrecognized. *Typically very critical of institutional administration (past or current) and/or current institutional climate. *Withdraw from active engagement with service and department. *Seem stuck where they are – no plan for how to move forward unless retire	

Source: *Inside Higher Ed*

Implications

- Shifts how we imagine the “life-cycle” beyond pre-tenure.
- Provides evidence of the regularity of resilience, reinvention, and recovery as part of post-tenure careers.
- Indicates that institutional interventions may help.

Source: Tamama Beauboeuf, Jan Thomas, and Karla Erickson, AAC&U Annual Meeting, “Rethinking the Mid-Career Malaise: New Lessons from Liberal Arts Faculty,” 26 January 2017; presentation hand-out

Institutional Implications

- **MENTORING:** Crucial at all stages of an academic career, particularly at transition points.
- **MOMENTS FOR REFLECTION:**
 - “Where have I been?”
 - “Where am I going?”
 - “How can I get there?”
- **FLEXIBILITY:** Create room for multiple pathways post-tenure
- **CONVERSATIONS:**
 - “I see you.”
 - “I appreciate the work you do.”
 - “I care about you.”
- Quote source: Tamama Beauboeuf, Jan Thomas, and Karla Erickson, AAC&U Annual Meeting, “Rethinking the Mid-Career Malaise: New Lessons from Liberal Arts Faculty,” 26 January 2017; presentation hand-out

Take Away Questions

- What are some additional “pathways” and “channels” at Austin College?
- What can the Johnson Center do to support more faculty in engaged and satisfied pathways?

Johnson Center Events This Spring

- “Post-Tenure Career Reflection and Renewal” with Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore
 - Monday, February 20, 5-7pm
 - IDEA 301
 - Light dinner provided
 - RSVP “yes” to Wendy Wilson by February 16
- Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and Pedagogical Scholarship
 - Thursday Lunch program
 - Thursday, March 30
 - Kelly Reed, Randi Tanglen, and ???

Sources

- Beauboeuf, Tamara, Karla Erickson, and Jan Thomas. “Rethinking the Mid-Career Malaise: New Lessons From Liberal Arts Faculty.” AAC&U Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA. 26 January 2017. Research session and hand-out.
- Flaherty, Colleen. “[Midcareer Professors Need Love, Too.](#)” *Inside Higher Ed.* 26 January 2017.