

MANAGING AN ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT--
AN APPROACH TO COPE WITH TODAY AND PREPARE FOR TOMORROW

Thomas Rossi, Chairman of the Department of Business
Broome Community College, Binghamton, NY

There once was a song which talked of begging, borrowing, and stealing. In running the Department of Business at Broome Community College, we have done all of those--pleading for full-time lines to insure that we have a staff ready to deliver quality education in the 1980s and the 1990s; borrowing and adjusting ideas of others to fit our own particular purposes.

This article will address an approach to improve student advisement as well as to incorporate mentoring for development of our junior and adjunct faculty.

What Education Can Learn From Peter Drucker

Drucker (1973, 1980) has stressed that the role of the manager is to be responsible for the contribution of the people in the respective department or work group. A manager, therefore, must bring about synergy--that is to effectuate a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. This means that the chairperson must magnify the strengths of the people and at the same time to minimize their weaknesses. Moreover, another task of the manager is to integrate the short-run with the long-range. This means the chairperson must set objectives (along with assisting others in the department in setting theirs), motivate and communicate with faculty, measure results, as well as develop people. In Drucker's approach, a chairperson must ask what it is that can be done to assist faculty so that they can effectively perform their jobs. In addition, this means asking the question what is it that the chairperson does which hampers or hinders the performance of people in that particular department.

Since faculty are the most expensive resource in education and the one resource that needs constant replenishment and development, schools must invest in faculty today if they expect quality education tomorrow. Thus, too, heavy reliance on adjunct faculty in the short-run will come to haunt colleges, for quality education will be difficult to deliver with senior faculty retiring and no younger faculty ready for the mid 1980s and beyond.

Centralized Business Advisement-One Step in the Right Direction

A coordinator of student advisement was appointed to bring about an improved system of advisement of business students. In a study conducted by the Department of Business, we established that advisement of students took place once the chairperson had completed the other facets of the job. While chairpeople at the college bear the brunt of the burden of advisement, students possessed the feeling that chairpeople were often "too busy" to spend the necessary time for effective advisement. At a conference of the American College Testing Program on Advisement (1978), the need to make it more "intrusive" was stressed.

Centralized advisement whereby one person in the Department of Business coordinates advisement is still not a panacea; more release time is needed to undertake the advisement rather than to complete only the tip of the iceberg of the multifaceted task of providing guidance for students in the business curricula. Presently, we rely on key people to assist the coordinator in carrying out advisement. Yet, it is not as "intrusive" as it needs to be, and we are not conducting the kind of "exit interviews" needed to stem student attrition.

Mentoring For Junior And Adjunct Faculty

Each Fall the Department of Business has held a late afternoon meeting of our full and part-time faculty with a social hour to provide interaction between people in the community who are teaching the courses in our Continuing Education Program with the full-time faculty who teach these courses in our day program. These meetings have resulted in better communication among people who work in the field with our full-time faculty. However, such an endeavor does not insure effective classroom instruction. The formal part of these sessions usually address topics such as the academic policies of the institution with a mini session on appropriate teaching methodology.

In the Spring of 1980 the college sponsored a seminar by William Terrell on lecture improvement which consisted of an approach to lecture evaluation. The department developed materials for peers and students to provide feedback on the lectures which were delivered by our adjunct and junior faculty. Key full-time faculty have been visiting the junior and adjunct faculty and have been providing excellent assistance to our younger, less experienced teachers.

This has removed some of the supervisory burden of the chairperson, but more importantly it has lead to improved education in the classroom regarding lecture approaches, lesson plan development, and examination techniques. This mentoring relationship has improved our information base for future adjunct faculty decisions and has been a rewarding experience for the senior as well as the junior faculty.

References

American College Testing Program, Academic Advising-A resource document edited by David S. Crockett, Iowa City, Iowa.

Drucker, Peter. Managing In Turbulent Times 1980 (Harper and Row, New York) pp. 23-24 or Peter Drucker, Management Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices, 1973 Harper and Row, New York pp. 377-398.

Dr. William Terrell is in the Instructional Division of Virginia Tech. He identified such lecture guidelines as: Introduction to the lecture, clarity, interest level generated, pace of delivery, organization, audibility, visuals, mannerisms, and summary and closure.