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### Engendering Faculty Professional Growth

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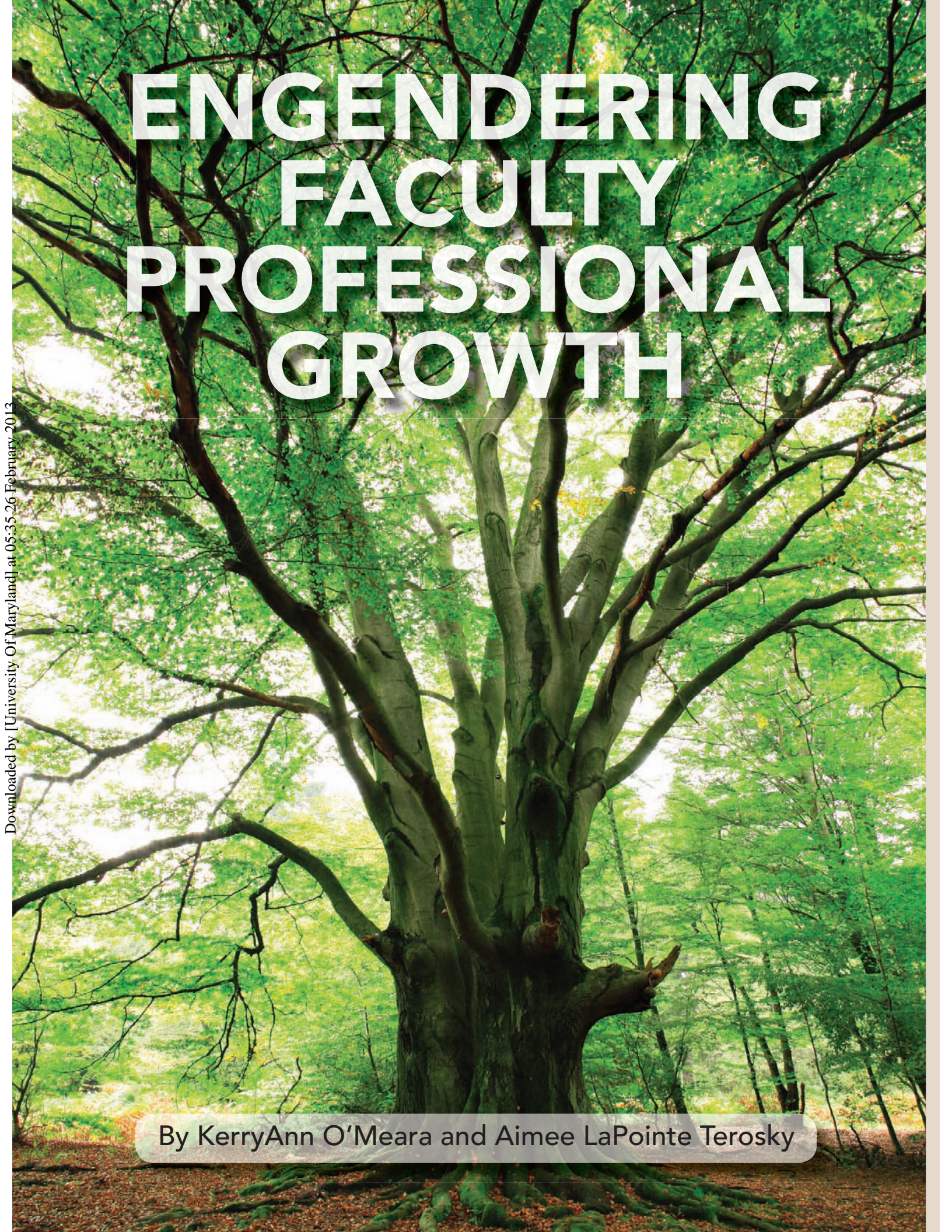
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# ENGENDERING FACULTY PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

By KerryAnn O'Meara and Aimee LaPointe Terosky



**D**uring the last 20 years, faculty have faced rising workloads, increasing amounts of top-down accountability and oversight, mounting publication demands, decreasing numbers of tenure-track positions, and an increasingly dismal job market. The current recession has exacerbated the pressure by requiring departmental budget cuts, faculty layoffs, furloughs, hiring freezes, and/or the elimination of faculty development and professional travel. Faculty and faculty development, in short, are facing challenging times.

But there is another side to the story. Over the last three decades, teaching and learning centers have proliferated; sessions focused on teaching, learning, and career navigation at disciplinary or field-based conferences have risen; and organizations and online groups such as the Professional and Organization Development Network (POD), the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA), the League for Innovation in the Community College, and the Teaching Professor (to name just a few) have sprung up. Scholarly and practitioner-based research on effective faculty development has also grown; on campuses, meanwhile, the one-time workshop is giving way to more holistic and long-term models.

Yet given that faculty represent sixty to eighty percent of higher education expenditures, the economic constraints placed on higher education threaten to halt or reverse the progress of the past 30 years. At a time when many campuses are defraying maintenance and delaying construction, the temptation to eliminate or cut back resources dedicated to the professional growth of higher education's most important asset, the faculty, is strong.

So we have developed a holistic framework for faculty development that promotes professional growth while remaining mindful of the constraints facing institutions. We define profes-

sional growth as *change that allows professionals to bring new and diverse knowledge, skills, values, and professional orientation to their work*. We have identified four key aspects of faculty professional growth: *learning, agency, professional relationships, and commitments*. These four aspects, though presented separately, are actually synergistic and mutually reinforcing.

For example, faculty members' learning happens only when they have a hand in making that learning happen. Further, such learning and agency occur and are reinforced in the context of the relationships faculty have, since they necessitate working across disciplinary and institutional boundaries. Scholarship and teaching now require the ability to develop reciprocal, engaged partnerships with other agents outside the institution, including private citizens, community partners, industry representatives, and government officials, as well as with an increasingly diverse student body and group of faculty colleagues on campus. And these relationships may be initiated or reinforced through commitment to common learning or work goals.

This framework builds on and is consistent with Blackburn & Lawrence's (1995) theory that faculty are motivated by both self-knowledge (their intrinsic commitments and sense of personal agency) and social knowledge (their sense of the kinds of learning and contributions the institution and their colleagues most value). Research in human development and psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior has made it clear that faculty growth is a continuous process that is driven both by what individuals themselves want and need and by

the specific socio-cultural, institutional, and personal context in which their identities, roles, and work are defined.

This article focuses on how environments can stimulate faculty growth by providing examples of colleges and universities that have created ones in which faculty flourish. Despite challenges such as budget cuts, shifts in leadership and priorities, and changing work responsibilities and reward systems, faculty there have been fully engaged in directing their own learning, with the help of their institutions.

And, mindful of fiscal constraints on institutions, we conclude with a table listing faculty-development opportunities and the levels of resources required to implement them. Just as higher-education administrators use census data to forecast future increases in college attendance and the resources that will be needed to meet new demands, it is critical that they anticipate the need and budget for faculty growth.

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## LEARNING

In the recently released *Professing to Learn: Creating Tenured Lives and Careers in the American Research University*, Anna Neumann situates learning, or “changed cognition,” at the center of faculty lives. According to Neumann, faculty members are expected to be “master learners.” They learn in various ways based on their identities, work roles (teaching, research, internal service, and outreach), the groups they interact with (of students, colleagues, and the public), and organizational contexts (institution, appointment type, etc.).

The changing nature of the work that faculty members are asked to do influences their learning. Many faculty members are caught off guard by the newest movements in academe—for example, requirements related to use of technology, pressures to become entrepreneurial, or demands to connect their work with teacher education and K–16 programs. Such demands can either impede or enhance learning, depending on whether a faculty member has the skills, strategies, mind-set, and opportunities to respond to challenges in generative ways.

Although learning is at its basic core an individual matter, an institution can create structures that promote and prioritize learning. Michigan State University’s Office of Faculty and Organizational Development (or F&OD, available at <http://fod.msu.edu/index.html>) is one such institution. F&OD offers workshops, seminars, cohort programs, and individual and small-group consultations to support learning about teaching, research, outreach and engagement, and leadership.

The faculty learning community program (FLC) within F&OD merits special attention because of its emphasis on fostering faculty learning through peer-to-peer “extended conversations” on areas of interest or need. FLCs consist of groups of eight to twelve faculty members, administrators, or support staff from different departments who commit to holding year-round discussion groups around a specific topic. At the start of each year, the FLC creates goals and specific outcomes for its work. To date, the primary focus has been on teaching, but the groups are now expanding to include scholarship and outreach as well.

Each FLC is led by two faculty facilitators, who organize monthly meetings, communicate with members via a Website, and manage the logistics of the group. At the conclusion of the year, FLCs “go public” with their group’s learning by presenting at the school’s spring institute poster session and, in some cases, publishing articles for research and general audiences.

The F&OD provides support services to the FLC facilitators, including help with logistics (e.g., room reservations), funding (e.g., stipends for facilitators and book and food allowances), and supplemental support (e.g., grant-writing or publishing services and training in facilitation or communication skills). By

helping to create a permanent space in which such communities can exist and thrive, F&OD helps keep learning front and center in its participants’ work lives. Yet participation is voluntary, and the focus and methods of learning are entirely determined by the faculty members themselves.

## AGENCY

A second category of our faculty professional growth framework is agency: how individuals exert their power and desire to shape contexts conducive to their “thought over time” (Elder, 1997, pp. 964–965)—or, in higher education, faculty members’ capacity to construct the contexts of their own learning and development in professional and intellectual ways (Neumann, Terosky, & Schell, 2006). Agency originating from within the faculty member can be nurtured in a professional community

that provides resources to develop and sustain it.

Agency is often intimately connected to who we are as well as what we are doing. Whether it is employed in balancing work and family issues, doing research one thinks is important but that is not valued in a department, or gaining needed resources while in a non-tenure-track appointment, faculty agency seems critical to navigating workplaces and composing meaningful careers.

Because agency, while fundamentally internal, is constructed in a social and political context (Elder, 1997; Marshall, 2000), faculty members may feel that they have different abilities to exercise it based on the intangible as well as tangible resources they bring to

the situation. For example, research suggests untenured women faculty often do not feel a sense of agency in making satisfactory work-family decisions because of a lack of professional standing and political capital in their departments (O’Meara & Campbell, 2008).

Among the many examples of colleges and universities that have created environments that empower faculty members, Adirondack Community College (ACC) of the State University of New York (<http://www.sunyacc.edu/>) is notable. With a mission focused on teaching, ACC does not have many programs to support faculty research. Yet when one of ACC’s biology professors, Holly Ahern, indicated an interest in pursuing an environmental-microbiology research agenda that involved student research assistants, ACC’s administration provided her with financial support to purchase equipment and supplies.

Additionally, the college supported Ahern’s participation in the Biology Scholars Program (an NSF-funded program administered through the American Society for Microbiology), which fosters evidence-based research on teaching and learning college-level science. Through this program, Ahern studies how her own research and laboratory-based learning about scientific concepts can be translated into student learning in her class-

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room. Using ACC funding, she has traveled to science education conferences to present her findings and network with other science educators.

Ahern has been the recipient of four grants disseminated through ACC's Professional Development Committee, which have advanced her scientific research and curriculum-development efforts. This funding has supported Ahern in developing a research course in molecular biology, which is significant because research and methods courses are not typically offered at the community-college level.

ACC has also provided the staff support for Ahern's projects, including assigning the college's grant writer to assist her with preparing research and science-education grant proposals and with assembling institutional review board materials. Much research from organizational behavior speaks to the power of individuals who actively mentor and advocate for their mentees. In this case, the institution itself is her career sponsor. The administration and Ahern's colleagues create an environment that supports her own efforts to increase her learning productivity.

Although Ahern values the financial and support-staff resources the college provides to her, she most values the freedom and vote of confidence in her research afforded to her by the school's administration and faculty development committee. Ahern explains that for the most part, the attitude of the college administration and committee has been, "What do you want to do, and how can we help you?" Administrators and colleagues have helped Ahern to assume agency as a researcher and a teacher by making sure she does not feel like she is swimming upstream but is supported and rewarded for her talents and efforts. It is in these types of environments that faculty members' sense of agency can be fostered and their contributions magnified.

### PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

A third category of the professional growth framework is professional relationships, connections with colleagues that provide personal and professional support; stimulate, facilitate, and shape learning; and strengthen faculty members' capacity to bring their best talents to bear on their work roles. Relationships with students and colleagues figure heavily in job satisfaction and motivation. Colleague connections support scholarship, provide access to mentors and allies, and can offer a sense of confirmation that enhances motivation.

Many models promoting peer-to-peer mentoring and colleagueship demonstrate that professional relationships are major sites of professors' intellectual growth. This is especially important given recent findings about the preference of Generation X faculty (those born between 1965 and 1981) for flatter organizational structures, continuous opportunities for feedback, and continuous learning opportunities (Bova and Kroth, 2001; Trower, 2008). An explicit focus on professional relationships and webs of support that are non-hierarchical, collaborative, and cross-cultural (see Sorcinelli and Yun, 2007), rather than the survival-of-the-fittest, Lone-Ranger approaches to faculty careers, can change cultures as well as individuals.

We observed an exemplary program for relationship-building at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst (<http://www.umass.edu/ofd/>). In 2007, Amherst's Office of Faculty Development (OFD) recognized a need to better support early-career faculty,

especially women and faculty of color. The OFD established a Mellon Foundation-funded mutual mentoring program, which is structured as a hybrid between traditional mentoring (senior faculty mentoring junior faculty) and networking (peer mentoring).

The program provides career planning to pre-tenure faculty through a three-part plan with varying points of entry. First, there is an individual grant program, in which individual pre-tenure faculty can design their own mentoring networks and receive \$1200 to support them. For example, a professor of biology received training in the laboratory of a nationally recognized colleague at another campus; she later taught her newly learned skills to her teaching assistants and students (NEA, 2009).

A second program consists of team grants. Teams of people (e.g., academic departments, smaller groups of people in a department, or interdisciplinary teams) can receive up to \$10,000 for programs that address one of the priority mentoring areas. They include getting to know the institution, excelling at research and teaching, understanding tenure and evaluation, creating work-life balance, or developing professional networks. A past winning team, eight assistant professors in the sociology department, met to discuss topics such as teaching, research, professional development, and navigating the university.

The OFD is flexible in its guidelines because it wants faculty members to organize themselves in ways that make sense, given their goals. A particular strength of these programs is that they begin with individual faculty members identifying their own gaps in learning and professional development and then designing strategies to fill those gaps through professional relationships. Yet the model also recognizes the role the institution can play in facilitating the extension of professional networks. Initial data confirms that faculty members view the program as helpful to their career development. This is especially true of women and faculty of color, who participate in the program at higher rates.

### COMMITMENTS

Commitments are long-term personal and professional investments that scholars make in people, programs, places, and social concerns that further the goals of higher education. Drawing on the work of developmental psychologists and sociologists (Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Parks, 1996; Perry, 1968), we define commitment in terms of conscious choice, activity, and content. Conscious choices are affirmative professional investments, as opposed to unquestioned or unexamined beliefs. For example, a professor who scans her or his field and sees the need for and decides to create an interdisciplinary center for environmental policy has made a conscious choice.

Commitments require that one *do* something. A faculty member who works diligently, week after week, with at-risk students in private English tutorials has made a commitment to the retention and persistence of at-risk students that is enacted in each tutorial session. This activity demonstrates personal dedication to particular people, groups, or social concerns that serves key higher education processes (e.g., teaching, research, community engagement, etc.)

Two additional features of commitment merit attention: reciprocity and professionalism. People sustain commitment, but in turn, commitment sustains the people who commit (Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks, 1996). Sullivan (2005) has noted that



the capacity and responsibility for commitment to public purposes mark the professional of contemporary times. The “outline of integrity in professional life,” he says, depends on individual commitments embedded in “communities of professional purpose” (p. 290).

The creators of the University of North Dakota’s orientation program had commitment in mind when developing its two-prong program for newly hired faculty (<http://www.und.edu/dept/oid/atcinfo.htm>). In the first part, new faculty and, significantly, their partners are invited to participate in a three-day state bus tour, called the New Faculty and Administrators’ Bus Tour, prior to the start of classes. Traveling with the university president and other administrators, new faculty members have an opportunity to experience the historical, natural, and cultural sites of the state; it is also a locus where they can interact closely with the president, support staff, and peers.

The president’s office created the bus trip in response to a growing desire to retain faculty recruits. Because North Dakota is a sparsely populated state with extreme climate conditions, the university needed to foster newly hired professors’ commitments to the university, the state, and the students they serve. The intent of the tour is to familiarize faculty members with the surrounding environment so that they have a better sense of what it means to teach, learn, and live in the Northern Plains. Administrators at the university hope that the new faculty members will connect their scholarship and teaching to the area, especially through service-learning, entrepreneurial, or outreach programs across the state.

In the second part of the orientation program, new faculty members participate in monthly orientation sessions. This orientation experience, known as the Alice T. Clark/UND Foundation Scholars Mentoring Program, begins with a lunch, which is followed by a three-hour exchange around the meeting topic, including issues such as balancing work and life, the tenure process, techniques to enhance teaching, and grant-writing strategies.

The University of North Dakota faculty members interviewed about the orientation programs strongly agreed that they were initially disconnected from the state. This was not surprising, since most new faculty have no ties with the state prior to arriving. Through their participation in the bus trip and the Alice Clark orientation programs, however, the faculty members have developed strong ties to the state, as well as to the institution and its students. And as a result of these orientation programs, faculty have initiated community-engagement projects, such as working with Native American communities, rural planning boards, and small-town businesses. University support of this program fosters faculty commitments to the institution and its constituents.

As previously stated, the four aspects of our conceptual framework for faculty growth are potentially synergistic and mutually reinforcing. To highlight this point, we provide the example of Smith College’s Kahn Institution program (<http://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/index.php>), in which the four categories of faculty growth work in concert to catalyze professional growth. The Kahn Liberal Arts Institute at Smith College organizes interdisciplinary groups of faculty, visiting scholars, and undergraduate students, who work collectively on research projects.

The origin of the program represents agency, in that faculty were empowered to determine how best to spend the Kahn

endowment; the result was the Kahn Liberal Arts Institute Fellows. In this program, Smith faculty members propose a broad research project based on their inquiry interests (agency), and a team of faculty, students, and invited visiting scholars (professional relationships) meets weekly to formulate and advance its project or to present findings (learning) to the Smith community.

The Kahn Institute supports the teams by assigning staff members to assist with logistics or facilitate discussion. The institute staff members manage the faculty and student application processes, and the college funds course releases for participating junior faculty members, as well as stipends for participating students. In addition to sponsorship, the Kahn Institute also creates forums for faculty members to develop ideas for future projects (commitments that foster contributions).

The Kahn Liberal Arts Institute Fellows program allows undergraduate students to serve as equal participants in the project and consequently encourages faculty-scholars to be students once again. Projects emerging from the Kahn Fellows allow interdisciplinary communities of scholars to coalesce at Smith College, thereby promoting faculty empowerment, faculty-student interactions, networking, and outreach to the Smith community. These interdisciplinary communities enable faculty, students, and alumni to make lasting contributions that enact deeply held commitments to important social issues.

### INVESTING IN PROFESSIONAL GROWTH NOW


Academic environments that act as generative, genuine incubators for professional growth (i.e., those that foster faculty learning, agency, professional relationships and commitments) are places with higher faculty retention rates and more satisfied and committed faculty. Research on the importance of individual mindset (Dweck, 2008), drive (Pink, 2009), and “pull” (Laird, 2006) via networks and relationships shows that workers, including faculty, thrive when they take control of their own growth, work toward purpose-driven mastery, and engage in positive professional relationships. Institutions that facilitate the creation of webs of support and learning, show leadership in supporting faculty commitments to key missions over time, and enhance agency in multiple areas of faculty work-life see rich dividends in increased organizational commitment, faculty retention and performance, and satisfaction (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Gappa et al., 2007; Hagedorn, 2000; O’Meara, Terosky & Neumann, 2008).

Since cost must be a key consideration in the current funding environment, in the table below we provide suggestions for activities that can be undertaken by individuals or groups of faculty or administrators to promote learning, agency, professional relationships, and commitments.

Although efforts and programs of the sort we have described here require investments not just of money but of time—possibly the scarcest resource of all—we believe that the kinds of investments exemplified in this article provide both immediate and long-term benefits for colleges and universities. The cost of not investing is ultimately much higher.

We close with a wish: that alongside the staunch “realism” of past research, journalism, and policy discussions about the constraints facing faculty members, we begin to highlight the successes in faculty development over the past 30 years

and to echo calls for more professional growth opportunities. Institutions and faculty have a mutual interest in investing in professional growth now. Strategic investments in faculty learning, agency, professional relationships, and commitments are likely to show not only tangible benefits but ones that are, as the credit-card commercials say, priceless.

**Editor's Note:** This article is adapted from and builds upon the ASHE monograph by O'Meara, Terosky, and Neumann (2008), entitled *Faculty Careers and Work Lives: A Professional Growth Perspective*, published by Jossey-Bass. The authors thank Anna Neumann for her generous feedback on and support for this article. 

**TABLE 1. PROFESSIONAL GROWTH STRATEGIES AND THEIR COSTS**

	Low Resource	Medium Resource	High Resource
<b>Learning</b>	<i>Learning bank:</i> Faculty post to a Website similar to Craigslist their knowledge and skills. They receive points to buy or trade for knowledge that they need or want to acquire—such as using Blackboard, using reflection in service learning, or talking about diversity in class.	<i>Book clubs:</i> All faculty participants read and discuss the same book.  <i>Learning spaces/retreat areas on campus:</i> Places where professors can work and read without distractions; resources are available to assist with research or teaching.	<i>Faculty Learning communities:</i> Six to eight faculty members get together two times a month for a year on a topic such as teaching innovations, diversity issues, or service learning. Doing readings together, they initiate reforms and receive feedback and help in assessing their activities from colleagues.
<b>Agency</b>	<i>Work-family initiatives:</i> Faculty must opt-out of rather than opt-in to family leave, so that they can make such decisions irrespective of the social capital they have acquired in a department.  <i>Career-management training:</i> Institutions assist faculty with career-management strategies (e.g., how to integrate teaching, research, and service or how to align service work with professional goals).	<i>Inquiry-based assessment circles:</i> Faculty join with institutional research teams to study issues of concern, through mixed methods. They jointly conceptualize the problems – such as the dropping out of at-risk students – implement the solutions, and assess them together (e.g., the Equity Scorecard project).	<i>Hierarchical and peer mentoring programs:</i> Senior and peer mentors work with faculty on career-management topics.  <i>Time-diary program:</i> Faculty participate in a time-management seminar. They complete time diaries and work with experts on better organizing their careers.
<b>Professional Relationships</b>	<i>Cross-disciplinary research days:</i> Faculty meet in small cross-disciplinary groups based on interests.  <i>Departmental professional networks:</i> Department chairs encourage faculty members to share the names and research interests of their closest colleagues in meetings and offer to make introductions to other interested faculty.	<i>Exchange programs:</i> Community partners or industry representatives are invited to participate in a department as teachers, grant-writers, or researchers, and their organization invites faculty members to perform a similar role.  <i>Research newsletter or Website:</i> A listing of on-going research or grant projects and a search for faculty with similar or related interests.	<i>Senior advisory board:</i> Senior faculty members serve on an advisory board that connects junior faculty with journals, funders, disciplinary associations, and policy-makers in their field (e.g., the NSF Advance program).  <i>Collaboration spaces:</i> Places where professors can work with their colleagues; resources are available to assist with research and teaching.
<b>Commitment</b>	<i>Research briefs:</i> Institutions created a medium for faculty and community members to publish brief policy reports and posts on cutting-edge research and its impact on the field.  <i>Awards:</i> Recognition of the more local, mission-oriented aspects of faculty work—such as contributions over 10 years or more to mentoring or orienting a community partner to the institutional mission.	<i>Orientations to place:</i> Faculty visit areas in the state or community to become aware of their constituents and the community's needs.	<i>Seed money for interdisciplinary and long-term projects:</i> Faculty receive funding for projects that will extend the impact of the university over time.

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## WEBSITES

- *Adirondack Community College website*  
<http://www.sunyacc.edu/>
- *The Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia*  
<http://www.herdsa.org.au/>
- *Kahn Liberal Arts Institute website*  
<http://www.smith.edu/kahninstitute/wellness.php>
- *League for Innovation in the Community College*  
<http://www.league.org/>
- *Teaching Professor*  
<http://www.teachingprofessor.com/author/mweimer>
- *Michigan State University Office of Faculty and Organizational Development website,*  
<http://fod.msu.edu/index.html>
- *Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (P.O.D.)*  
<http://www.podnetwork.org>
- *University of Massachusetts-Amherst Office of Faculty Development*  
<http://www.umass.edu/ofd/>
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<http://sos.und.edu/bustour/>
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