

Faculty Interview Paper

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During a recent interview with Mrs. Davidson, an instructor on tenure-track in the College of Business at Owens Community College, I had the opportunity to gain insight and understanding regarding the roles and responsibilities of a faculty member. It was obvious to me throughout my conversation with Mrs. Davidson that she is passionate about student learning and has a strong affection for teaching non-traditional students, many of whom she said have to overcome much adversity, to achieve their goal of earning a college degree . As a faculty member, she said that the biggest challenge she faces is how to best manage and organize her time as a full-time instructor, wife, mother, and volunteer.

Mrs. Davidson teaches accounting, tax, and auditing courses, but teaching is only one part of her role as a faculty member. She also volunteers for a number of committees and groups both at Owens and in the local community. She recently accepted an additional administrative responsibility serving as the facilitator for the College of Business at Owens Community College. She considers it an honor and a privilege that she was asked to assume this role and receives a small stipend above and beyond her teaching salary. As the facilitator, she arranges department meetings, prepares meeting agendas, takes meeting minutes, and coordinates the schedules and communication with all adjunct faculty in the business department. Mrs. Davidson also serves as a faculty advisor for the student organization called The Institute of Management Accountants, which meets on a monthly basis. She also volunteers as an ambassador, where she attends community events and promotes Owens Community College. Mrs. Davidson explained that she serves on a number of committees within Owens Community College, including the academic standards committee, the rank review committee, the instructional technology committee, and the faculty association scholarship committee. She said that meeting and collaborating with faculty and staff outside the business department allows her

to have a better understanding of all that is happening at Owens. In addition, she said it helps her to see issues from different points of view. Mrs. Davidson said that tenure at Owens Community College does not require a research component. Instead, tenured faculty are required to teach five courses per semester, except for summer, where the course load is reduced to two classes. In addition to service within the Owens community, service within the surrounding community is also considered when applying for tenure. Mrs. Davidson, for example, volunteers as a mentor for high school girls through the Young Women's Christian Association and is actively involved in serving as a program volunteer at her local library. The faculty at Owens are evaluated on a point system and must earn a certain number of points to advance to the next level. Mrs. Davidson will soon be applying for a promotion from instructor to assistant professor. Every three years she can reapply for the next level of promotion and her ultimate goal is to reach the highest level, a professor.

I was surprised to learn about the many roles and responsibilities above and beyond teaching that Mrs. Davidson has as a faculty member at Owens Community College. My perception going into the interview was that instructors at community colleges were not under a great deal of pressure to assume this many additional roles and responsibilities. I was also shocked to hear that tenure-track at Owens Community College requires an instructor to teach a minimum of five courses per semester. This seems like a huge time commitment on top of the expectation to serve as a volunteer both on campus and within the community. Mrs. Davidson was enthusiastic about her position, and it was obvious to me that she does a fabulous job managing the stress of her hectic schedule. I could not help but wonder how I would handle these same obligations, along with being a wife and mother.

When asked to describe the faculty culture at Owens Community College, Mrs. Davidson said it is “amazing.” She added that the environment is “friendly, yet professional.” She shared that the administration at Owens Community College encourages the faculty to get actively involved on campus, within their respective professional organizations, and within the community. The administration wants the faculty to develop relationships with staff and students. The faculty are encouraged to continually pursue professional development activities as well, but Mrs. Davidson said that the pressure to grow is less for those who are not seeking tenure. Mrs. Davidson said that the organizational structure at Owens Community College is set up in a way that promotes open communication. She explained that it is not uncommon for the president, provost, and deans to attend faculty meetings. She added that deans are easily accessible for face-to-face conversations. She said that there is not a wall between faculty and administration, rather, an open door. A portion of our class readings touched on the faculty’s role in governance. Mrs. Davidson said that full-time faculty at Owens Community College do play a prominent role in decision making related to academic programs. Faculty serve on committees and task forces representing their specific departments. While Mrs. Davidson said she is part of the larger entity, Owens Community College, much of her time and focus is spent on issues concerning the business department. Of note, was the fact that Mrs. Davidson focused on the faculty culture in relation to the administration, but did not mention the faculty culture related to staff during this portion of our interview.

As we talked about the importance of student affairs programs and services at Owens Community College, Mrs. Davidson shared that she feels it is the responsibility of all faculty and staff to have a clear understanding of the values of the college. She said that the values at Owens Community College are “service, learning, innovation, collaboration, and excellence” and that

they are embedded in the fabric and culture of the college. Mrs. Davidson believes that the purpose of student affairs is to help provide an ideal environment for students to learn. She feels that student affairs professionals meet students where they are and encourage them to take the next step to better their future. She touched specifically on her experiences in working with the functional areas of academic advising and student activities. She said that academic advisors help to take the pressure off her as a faculty member because advisors meet with students in a more personalized manner, answer basic questions, and register students for courses. Mrs. Davidson explained that the model for academic advising recently changed and now the academic advisor for the business department actually has an office located in the College of Business. She said this new arrangement allows for a faculty member and an advisor to interact with one another face-to-face on a daily basis. Mrs. Davidson also feels that student affairs professionals assist with motivating students and helping to retain students at the college. As a faculty advisor, she said she taps into the resources of the campus activities office for assistance in coordinating events for the student organization that she advises. She said that the student activities office also helps to provide ideas for marketing these events to prospective students. She concluded this portion of the interview by saying that she does not know many faculty who view student affairs staff in the same perspective that she does. She sees her relationship with student affairs staff as a partnership with shared responsibilities, but she said many faculty are so focused on student learning that they miss the bigger picture of what student affairs staff do to enhance the college experience for students. She believes that the faculty have a role in promoting the mission of the student affairs division. Mrs. Davidson is such a proponent of students engaging in campus life, for example, that she recently invited a student affairs professional from the campus activities office to speak to her students about opportunities to get

involved in a number of different student organizations. If the goal of student activities professionals is to enhance the collegiate experience for students, then the walls between student activities and academic affairs must be removed (Argotsinger, 2007). Mrs. Davidson remains committed to removing these walls and the action she took in inviting a staff member from the campus activities office to briefly present to her class shows her dedication.

As a student affairs professional, I see the value in working with faculty. As a result of my conversation with Mrs. Davidson, I have a better understanding of the need to volunteer to serve on committees throughout campus that include both faculty and staff as stakeholders. From our class readings, I agree with the idea of initially considering the question of whether or not collaboration is a good idea when exploring potential partnerships, rather than assuming that all collaboration is good. I also feel that it is important not to undervalue myself and my expertise as a student affairs professional. I do not automatically need to assume a deferential role when working with faculty (Magolda, 2005). Mrs. Davidson reiterated a point made in our class readings about being familiar with the institution's mission and values. It is important for me to be able to clearly articulate how the division of student affairs helps to support the mission of the college (Bloland, 1991). I also realize the need to recognize and appreciate faculty who do take an active interest in student affairs, by writing a note of thanks, taking them to lunch, etc. I will go out of my way to let them know that I am aware of the pressures they face and the demands on their time (Bloland, 1991). As a student affairs professional, I eagerly anticipate the opportunity to work with faculty and help to improve the relationship between academic and student affairs.

Word Count: 1,646

References

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