Interview   *Raoul A. Arreola*

Raoul A. Arreola is Professor and Director of Educational Evaluation and Development, University of Tennessee Health Science Center, Memphis.

Higher Education's Meta-Profession

Q: You're well known for your work in the area of faculty evaluation, and that has spun into a related area of interest. What is that?

I've worked with more than 200 colleges and universities to design and implement faculty evaluation systems. And what I see every time is that when an institution starts to design a faculty evaluation system, the first thing it looks at is teaching. Over time, I've worked out what I think is a useful model of teaching, composed of three major components: 1) content expertise, 2) instructional design skills, 3) instructional delivery skills.

Faculty evaluation systems tend to focus in on #2 and #3, instructional design and delivery. But it's become apparent to me that most faculty haven't had the same degree of, or perhaps any, training in those two aspects of teaching that are the most often evaluated.

As we get ever further into the high-tech arena, I realize for myself that I'm learning new technical skills all the time, just to continue being a faculty member. And that leads into my newest area of interest.

The profession of college teacher is changing dramatically. It is no longer simply a matter of knowing your material and lecturing on it. Now we must use sophisticated techniques and technologies to deliver instruction. College teaching is growing into a "meta-profession." That is, college teaching is a profession built upon or laid over another profession. For example, you arrive at your first teaching appointment with a great deal of expertise in a specific content, but now you are in a profession that assumes not only content expertise but also sophistication in instructional design and delivery.

What I'm exploring is what this meta-profession of college teaching requires in terms of training and the policies and procedures needed for faculty evaluation and development. It's evolving into something incredibly sophisticated. Content expertise is just enough to get you in the door.

The whole perception of college professor has changed.

When I first got my doctorate (in 1969), I went to Florida State University as an assistant professor. New to Tallahassee, I went to the bank to open accounts. There was a line, and I was talking with people, telling them I was new to the area and what brought me there. Next thing I know, the bank manager comes out, shakes my hand, and says, "Come with me. We're opening another line for you." When I responded with what must have been a puzzled expression, the manager stated, "You're a college professor—you don't have to wait in line?' Amazingly, the people in line smiled and urged me

to go with the manager. At that time, the profession was perceived as a very lofty calling, worthy of the utmost respect. A couple of things like that happened in my early years as a college professor, and then it all went away.

The professorial fall from grace was fast. I think one reason is we've entered the Information Age. Before, university professors were almost "priests of information?' People had to come to us for knowledge and information—we discovered it, we packaged it, and we distributed it. That's no longer true. Instead of faculty being the sole - or at least primary - source of information, there are many others, most notably the web. That's changed what it means to be a college professor. To be key resources of knowledge and information, we need to realize that the wide range of available technologies make it possible - and necessary - to respond to a greater variety of teaching and learning opportunities.

My interest is in carefully defining the characteristics of the meta-profession of college teaching. For example, one institution I know of is considering requiring all its faculty to take courses for certification in instructional design and delivery. I don't know that this is the best answer, but some steps are necessary to ensure that faculty have expertise not only in content, but also in curriculum design and delivery.

The flow of money in our society is a good indicator of its values and needs. Recent financial publications predict that the hottest investment area for the 21st century will be private, online, corporate universities. The emergence and success of private enterprises such as Phoenix University is society's way of telling traditional higher education, "You guys aren't delivering anymore, so we're going someplace else.

Q: What do you think the profession needs to do to respond to these rapid changes in the role and definition of a successful faculty member?

The profession needs to 1) recognize that college teaching is a meta-profession and articulate the requirements for being an accomplished meta-professional, and 2) consider how to develop, assess, and reward those characteristics. If I could wave a magic wand, I'd have new faculty members spend their first year in a kind of apprenticeship with accomplished professors/mentors, getting trained in the meta-professional skills of college teaching. They wouldn't get their own classes until their second year— and then would be supervised by their mentor for another year.

The only other alternative I see is to develop new degrees or certificates that faculty would have to have -- on top of their content-based degree -- before they could become faculty members. Ideally, I'd like to see that happen.

Key to all of this is a well-designed faculty evaluation system that makes clear the expectations for instructional design and delivery. And the institution should offer opportunities to learn those skills: Faculty development and faculty evaluation must go hand-in-hand.

Q: Specifically, what can department chairs do?

Chairs are the frontline people in faculty development and evaluation. The main things they could do is stress the following points: 1) Content expertise is a necessary but insufficient condition for being a good college professor; and 2) the knowledge and skills associated with instructional design and delivery are every bit as sophisticated, necessary, and worthy of study as the content being taught.

Chairs should impress upon individual faculty that successful teaching performance requires more than just knowing the mate-rial. Chairs can sponsor workshops on design and delivery on an ongoing basis. And perhaps most importantly, chairs need to foster a departmental culture that supports change and innovation.

Here's an example of a culture that does not support change. When I was heading up a faculty development unit, a guy who was teaching a large section and felt it wasn't going well sought our advice. Students weren't coming to class or paying attention, and grades were low. We helped him redesign the course to permit more student interaction, feedback, and testing. Almost immediately, attendance improved, student ratings went way up, test scores were dramatically better - the change was a great success. After the course was over, however, the dean accused the faculty member of grade inflation because course grades were higher. The faculty member asked me to talk with the dean, and I explained how the course had been changed to improve student learning. There was concrete evidence that students were learning more, and their grades reflected that. I'll never forget the sight of that dean pounding his desk and saying, "I don't care. I define a quality course as one that has a high failure rate."

The faculty member went back to lecturing and grading on the curve, thus ensuring a higher failure rate. The point is that the culture must be supportive of changes - or at least not punitive. Chairs are the tone-setters and should take the lead in shaping a culture that accepts and promotes positive change.

Q: Could you summarize the challenges ahead?

One challenge to all of us in higher education is that students are rapidly becoming more sophisticated than we are in the use of technology. We need to overcome higher education's tradition of slow, deliberate, incremental changes and somehow develop ways to respond more rapidly. If we are in a profession that deals with knowledge, information, and tools that affect the delivery of instruction, then we need to be sophisticated in the use of those tools. The traditional faculty role has been to do research, to be a content expert, and to give students the opportunity to learn. Those that could learn did so, and those that could not failed. Now faculty are responsible for much more than benignly giving students an opportunity to learn: Now faculty are accountable for student learning and learning outcomes - it's a much bigger, more active role, requiring a more sophisticated set of skills. We need to acknowledge the changes that redefine college teaching as a meta-profession and systematically provide our new and future faculty colleagues with the skills needed to successfully practice the meta-profession of college teaching in the Information Age.