

Essays on Teaching Excellence

Toward the Best in the Academy

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The Four Cultures of the Academy

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In recent years, it has become increasingly fashionable to describe organizations as cultures. Anthropologists, management consultants, organizational psychologists, and other social scientists have helped to popularize the notion that cultural analyses yield important insights about the life and dynamics of an organization. The purpose of this article is to explore this concept within the cultures of academia.

The Four Cultures Four different, yet interrelated cultures are now found in American higher education. Two (collegial and managerial) can be traced back to its origins. The other two (developmental and negotiating) have emerged more recently, partially in response to the seeming failure of the original two to adapt to changes in contemporary colleges and universities.

The collegial culture: a culture that finds meaning primarily in the disciplines represented by the faculty; that values faculty research and scholarship and the quasi-political governance processes of the faculty; that holds untested assumptions about the dominance of rationality in the institution; and that conceives of the institution's enterprise as the generation, interpretation, and dissemination of

knowledge and the development of specific values and qualities of character among young men and women.

The managerial culture: a culture that finds meaning primarily in the organization, implementation, and evaluation of work that is directed toward specified goals and purposes; that values fiscal responsibility and effective supervisory skills; that holds untested assumptions about the institution's capacity to define and measure its objectives clearly; and that conceives of the institution's enterprise as the inculcation of specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes in students so that they might become successful and responsible citizens.

The developmental culture a culture that finds meaning primarily in the creation of programs and activities furthering the growth of all members of the collegiate community; that values personal openness and service to others, as well as systematic institutional research and curricular planning; that holds untested assumptions about the inherent desire of all to attain their personal maturation, while helping others in the institution become more mature; and that conceives of the institution's enterprise as the encouragement of potential for cognitive, affective, and behavioral maturation among all constituencies.

The negotiating culture: a culture that finds meaning primarily in the establishment of equitable and egalitarian policies and procedures for the distribution of resources and benefits in the institution; that values confrontation and fair bargaining among constituencies with vested interests that are in opposition; that holds untested assumptions about the role of power and the frequent need for outside mediation in a viable collegiate institution; and that conceives of the institution's enterprise as either the promulgation of undesirable existing (and often repressive) social attitudes and structures or the establishment of new and more liberating social attitudes and structures.

Although most colleges and universities, and most faculty and administrators, tend to embrace or exemplify one of these four cultures, the other three cultures are always present and interact with the dominant culture. This is a particularly important premise for readers to consider, given that some analysts believe that hybrid cultures are undesirable or symptomatic of a fragmented, troubled

institution. While the four cultures are often at odds with each other, all four must be acknowledged and brought into any dialogue aiming to create a vital institution.

Case Study: Peter Armantrout Peter Armantrout (not his real name) is a professor of English at a relatively small state college (Fairfield). His story is significant, not because it is exceptional, but because it typifies the lives of many faculty in contemporary colleges and universities. He was forty-six when interviewed. He spoke easily, though in a rather depressed manner, about his twenty-two years at Fairfield.

Peter was an innovative young instructor during the 1960's. He experimented with new grading schemes and experiential activities in class. While reforming his own classes, Peter became involved with campus politics. Initially, he worked extensively with faculty governance, serving briefly as chair of the faculty senate. As he matured as a teacher, he became more conservative. Peter describes a slow erosion in his educational philosophy and classroom practices. He tends now to blame students for not learning what he is trying to convey. He finds students inadequately prepared and speaks wistfully about the older, dedicated students of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Peter knows that it is his own fault that he fails to make his classroom an exciting place to learn. However, he has grown tired of monotonous courses and unmotivated students, and is similarly disillusioned about his leadership at the college.

Up to this point, we might conclude that Peter Armantrout is struggling with the traditional collegial culture, which emphasizes informal and quasi-political collaboration among faculty, as well as independent research and scholarship. His interest in college-level teaching probably came from perceptions of the character and values of that collegial culture. Certainly, his early interests in faculty governance were encouraged by it. His enthusiasm for educational innovation, however, flew in the face of the dominant culture. Peter has become discouraged about the decreased support by the legislature, and is confronting some of the harsh realities of the emerging managerial culture at Fairfield.

By contrast with the collegial culture, the managerial culture values

efficient and effective educational programming and tries to assess how well specific objectives are being achieved. These relate not only to the educational mission of the institution but to those financial and operational aspects of institutional life that enable the mission to succeed. Coming from the collegial cultural perspective, Peter views the demands for accountability and managerial culture's cost containment as intrusive and offensive.

His anger at the managerial culture sparked a new interest in faculty unionization and entry into the negotiating culture. He became vice president of the faculty union and for two years served as Fairfield's representative to the statewide union. The negotiating culture emerged in colleges like Fairfield largely in response to the seemingly unilateral and inequitable decision-making processes inherent in the managerial culture. Faculty members perceived their relationship to the administration as primarily adversarial and defined their work via formal contractual processes rather than the more informal methods used in the other three cultures.

When speaking about unionization at Fairfield, Peter becomes particularly introspective. He speaks of deterioration in his relationship with colleagues who are now administrators. He believes that unionization has produced a formality and coldness that makes the college a rather unpleasant place to work. In seeking to find more community at Fairfield, as well as fulfill his own commitment to teaching, he has periodically entered the developmental culture by attending faculty development workshops and conferences on critical thinking. These activities were initially quite satisfying; but, like many aspects of the developmental culture, they seemed to have a short-lived impact and did not change his life in any appreciable way.

The developmental culture began largely in response to the lack of systematic planning and formal staff development in the collegial culture. Emphasis is on careful, collaborative assessment of resources and needs and comprehensive strategies for meeting those needs through improvement in the quality and use of existing resources. Peter personally experienced the first stages in the birth and maturation of the developmental culture during the 1960s. His interest in humanistic education then shifted into a concern for

ongoing professional development and the design of programs responsive to diverse and shifting student needs. His disillusionment with current students suggests his need for this culture. Yet his disillusionment also indicates the inability of this culture to attract or hold the attention of senior faculty.

In the end, Peter appears most interested in disengaging from Fairfield. He feels he has little left to accomplish or contribute. He has won and lost many battles, but none of them seem to be worth the energy, passion, and sacrifice that he gave before. According to Peter, Fairfield simply is no longer worth the effort. He assumes that he shares his desire for early retirement with many of his colleagues at Fairfield and other American colleges and universities. What has led Peter to this rather depressing state of affairs? Even though he may still be a fairly good teacher and wise counselor, he has ceased to be a leader. At a time in his life when he might be a wise and valuable member of the Fairfield community, Peter has chosen to look elsewhere for his professional and personal gratification. What is the source of this disenchantment? I propose that his dissatisfaction results in part from the tension between the four academic cultures at Fairfield. The sense of community that he used to find in the traditional collegial culture no longer exists (if it ever did exist). All that is left is the bickering of the faculty. He has also looked for a sense of community within the developmental culture; yet he finds that it exists only sporadically and is usually swamped by the financial and instructional pressures that besiege Fairfield.

When he looks to the managerial culture, Peter finds reality and some clarity regarding purpose and function but feels that he is not part of this culture and that it ultimately betrays or at least diminishes the academic values that first attracted him to teaching. In anger he turns to the negotiating culture. He finds it to be as irrelevant and bogged down in faculty haggling as the collegial culture.

Peter's current disillusionment stems from his vague sense that none of these cultures is adequate to meet either his own personal needs or those of Fairfield. He is correct. A more detailed examination of these four cultures is needed as a means of better understanding and helping Peter and Fairfield, as well as many other troubled faculty members and administrators in contemporary collegiate institutions.

The solution to Peter's problems lies, in part, in a new appreciation for the strengths as well as weaknesses of each culture - and the need for all four cultures to flourish. It is in the demise of one or more of these counter-balancing cultures that serious institutional and faculty problems are created and sustained.