Chapter 2
Changing the Grant Culture of a College

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ABSTRACT

In today's environment, external support for college activities has become much more than a luxury. While the basic teaching functions are funded internally, funding the research and service components of their missions is a real challenge. Many colleges seek external sources to support these functions. However, these efforts are often inefficient unless they are addressed in a strategic manner. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the components of a successful effort to redefine the culture of a college regarding external funding. The chapter describes the components of the program, its implementation, and outcomes from both administrative and participant viewpoints. Further, data that demonstrate the overall impact of the program are provided.

BACKGROUND

In the current educational climate, accountability is a major consideration for schools at all levels nationwide. Particularly, regional accrediting organizations are requiring colleges to provide evidence that their graduates are having an impact in their chosen fields. In times of economic distress, funding is one of the greatest obstacles that these colleges face when attempting to gather this evidence and when addressing the research and service components of their missions. Many colleges are forced to pursue external funding sources for program implementation, research, and service activities. Our college of education had come through a period where external funding was de-emphasized. Faculty members were not rewarded for attaining external funding and most faculty members did not see this as an important part of their responsibilities.

SETTING THE STAGE

The case study reported in this chapter took place at a large, state flagship research institution in the Southeastern United States. Like most research universities, its direct mission is teaching, research, and service. However, the university describes itself as a student-centered research university with an academic community united in its commitment to enhancing the quality of life for all people in its state. The university, through administrative support, had transitioned to a research university with all the infrastructure and logistic support usually associated with such a mission. In fact, most of its colleges and the faculty in those colleges had embraced this mission. It was clear that central administration support of a college depended, to at least some extent, on its success in implementing this component of the mission. This transition at the university had taken place over about a 30 year period.

This specific example was from its college of education that had increased its research profile through significant publication of journal articles and books by its faculty, but had not participated, to a significant degree, in the benefits of external funding. The college strived to provide teaching, research, and service that not only addressed state and regional interests but also accommodated national and international perspectives. The unit prepared practitioners committed to excellence both academically and socially based on engagement through the ongoing processes of reflection and dialogue that lie at the heart of socially-responsible, theoretically-informed, and research-based effective practice. The university has about 30,000 students and the college about 3,000 students and 100 faculty members.

This case study describes a shift from a culture that had a rather benign neglect of external funding to one that valued the opportunities that external funding provided while embracing the challenge. To implement this change, a strategic action plan was developed, focusing on increasing external funding that addressed the mission of the college. The plan included four critical elements: administrative support, appropriate policies, grant support infrastructure, and professional development. These four components provided a framework for action to increase external funding. First, we present some of the literature upon which our plan was based. Next, we explain the four elements of the strategic action plan and discuss their implementation at our college. Special emphasis is placed on the roles of the administration and the participation of faculty members. Finally, we describe the results of our plan. We conclude with implications for other colleges.

Not only is it difficult to fund critical functions of our institutions today, accrediting agencies and others are requiring that more information be provided about our effectiveness in the form of evidence-based outcomes. This approach requires instructional programs to "utilize existing evidence from worldwide research and literature on education and related subjects . . . [and] establish sound evidence where existing evidence is lacking or of a questionable, uncertain, or weak nature" (Davies, 1999, p.109). Evidence-based education has become associated with teacher education programs. Cibulka (2009) has indicated that National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) was beginning a redesign of the accreditation of teacher education that included an evidence-based approach. Others have considered the value of evidence-based approaches for teacher education programs (Brusling, 2005; Niesyn, 2009; Webster, 2009). For example, Niesyn (2009) presented research results that supported the use of evidence-based teaching strategies for special education. Conversely, Webster (2009) maintained that teaching is more managerial than scientific and does not fit that model. In any event, the problem with implementing evidence-based techniques in a time of unprecedented financial difficulty is how to fund these new approaches (e.g., Stuart, Tondora, & Hoge, 2004).

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