

Chapter 14

Motivating Teaching Excellence: Lessons from U.S. Teaching Awards

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the widespread use of teaching awards in the United States, little is known about whether such awards influence faculty attitudes or behaviors on teaching. Similarly, there is a lack of systematic evidence to understand what motivates faculty beliefs and actions on teaching. This chapter explores what motivates U.S. faculty toward innovation and excellence in teaching. Drawing from a national study of faculty across twenty colleges and universities, the authors find that, like other professionals, U.S. faculty highly value the support of their colleagues, particularly as it applies to innovating in the classroom and pursuing engaged learning practices. They argue there is compelling evidence to suggest that the presence of intrinsic rewards for innovation in teaching (e.g. opportunities to discuss pedagogy with colleagues and building a campus culture supportive of teaching) has greater impact on critical faculty outcomes, such as job satisfaction and commitment, than extrinsic rewards like teaching awards and even stipends.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, teaching awards have become a routine feature of the faculty reward system at U.S. colleges and universities. These awards have distinct histories and traditions at different institutions, but in general U.S. teaching awards aim to achieve at least one of three purposes: to symbolize the importance of and support for teaching at a college, to honor excellent teachers, or to create teaching role-models who can motivate other faculty to enhance their own practice (Chism, 2006, p. 589).

The rise of teaching awards in the U.S. reflects a broader trend to elevate teaching and learning on many campuses, linked in part to increased emphasis on assessment of student learning outcomes, expanded resources for faculty development, and attention to the scholarship of teaching and learning. Despite the rise in the stature of teaching, a recent report by prominent scholars of higher education in the U.S. concludes that “there remains a troubling gap between rhetoric about teaching’s value and the realities of teaching’s recognition and reward” (Hutchings, Huber & Ciccone, 2011, p. 87).

Scholarship on teaching awards in the U.S. has rarely moved beyond expository writing (Carusetta, 2001, p. 31). The most comprehensive empirical study (Chism, 2006) focuses on the criteria and standards used in the award process, not their outcomes or value. In other words, despite the widespread use of teaching awards in the United States, little is known about whether such awards influence faculty attitudes or behaviors on teaching.

These limits are echoed in related literature on teaching in U.S. higher education. Discussions about how faculty view institutional reward structures on campus are often driven by anecdotal evidence regarding what faculty value, what motivates their decision-making to change in the classroom, and how they view the best uses of their time (see for example Christensen & Eyring, 2011). Despite significant scholarship on faculty work in the U.S. (e.g., Schuster and Finkelstein, 2008), little empirical or systematic evidence exists to understand what actually drives faculty beliefs and actions on teaching. Scholarship on what motivates U.S. workers broadly across various occupations, although not focused on higher education, has demonstrated the benefits of co-worker support in encouraging employees to engage and invest in their jobs (see for example Ducharme & Martin 2000; Harris, Winskowski, & Engdahl 2007; Ng & Sorenson 2008).

In this chapter, we explore what motivates U.S. faculty toward innovation and excellence in teaching. We find that, like other professionals, U.S. faculty equally value the support of their colleagues, particularly as it applies to innovating in the classroom and pursuing engaged learning practices. Additionally, we find compelling

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