Abstract

Using qualitative case study methodology, this study examined faculty and administrator perceptions of a faculty evaluation process at a special purpose teaching university that was for the majority of its history a community college. The study explored faculty and administrator satisfaction with the process, what they considered the most important components of the faculty evaluation process to be, and whether the process led to faculty enrichment.

Through five focus groups and in-depth interviews with five participants, the themes of tensions, opportunities, and contradictions emerged. Examining the process of faculty evaluation and participants’ lived experiences with it exposed the gap that exists between the process surrounding faculty evaluation at this institution and the perceptions and preferences of faculty and administrators who are affected by or have responsibility for this process. A further analysis of the faculty evaluation process using Bourdieu’s (1997, 1993, 1992, 1990) “thinking tools” unearthed how the process structures and confines the actions of participants and perpetuates a “structuring structure” (1977/2004, p. 72).

Since faculty enrichment is an expected outcome of a faculty evaluation process, this study employed Wenger’s (1998) social theory of learning to illustrate how faculty enrichment could be conceptualized through Faculty Learning Communities. Finally, this study uncovered the unintended effects of a faculty evaluation process that has been cemented in the culture of an organization for most of its 47-year history; therefore, this study could be useful in informing the design of faculty evaluation programs at other institutions.

Keywords: Faculty evaluation; Bourdieu’s “thinking tools”; qualitative case study methodology; faculty enrichment; Wenger’s social theory of learning; faculty learning communities