

In this month's letter, Dr. Rick Valachovic, Executive Director of the American Dental Education Association, explores the perennial faculty shortage and looks at the growing presence of career switchers among faculty ranks.



Who Will Teach The Next Generation?

Private practitioners make a substantial contribution to filling out the faculty ranks, but it is unlikely they alone can solve the faculty shortage.

After devoting my last two letters to celebrating the accomplishments of our community and telling you about the many exciting initiatives brewing on our campuses, I think it's time to revisit a more sobering topic: the faculty shortage.

The surveys ADEA has conducted in recent years reveal some important trends that merit further examination. [In 2007, dental school deans reported 369 vacant budgeted faculty positions](#), and they were less than optimistic about being able to fill them.

At the time I first entered academics in 1982, new dental school faculty were typically recruited from the ranks of dental school and advanced education program graduates. These faculty candidates are now a small minority. [In 2004, ADEA found that only 7% of new faculty came directly from dental school](#), and another 16% chose academics following an advanced education program. Instead, private practitioners made up a whopping 62% of incoming faculty that year.

What does this mean for our institutions? How are private practitioners handling the transition from independent practice to the highly interdependent and hierarchical environment of dental school? How are dental schools changing to accommodate the new hires?

To find some answers, I contacted Dr. Jack Sanders, Dean of the [College of Dentistry at the Medical University of South Carolina](#) (MUSC), which during his tenure has successfully transitioned a number of career switchers. MUSC offers all new hires the support of a mentoring committee made up of the department chair, a member of the promotion and tenure committee, and a faculty mentor of the new hire's choosing. Mentors make sure new faculty members understand the promotion and tenure process and are able to balance the demands of research and service.

MUSC is a little unusual in that all of its faculty positions are tenure track. There's an expectation that all faculty will demonstrate intellectual productivity, and the university also strives for excellence in teaching. Its [Apple Tree Society](#) meets periodically to offer faculty development opportunities that range from discussing the merits of small-group learning to offering technical assistance with Blackboard or other software. The university's [South Carolina Clinical and Translational Research \(SCTR\) Institute](#) also operates the [SUCCESS Center](#), which links researchers to a wide range of services and connects junior faculty with senior faculty willing to critique their research ideas. Finally, the College of Dental Medicine has its own [Center of Biomedical Research Excellence](#) (COBRE), which meets monthly and helps develop new investigators.

MUSC's commitment to providing concrete ways to transition career switchers reflects Jack's personal philosophy. "We don't let dentists practice on people until we certify them through assessments," Jack told me. "I don't agree with the idea of letting any practitioner or researcher enter the classroom whether they know how to teach or not."

Another way Jack ensures that his faculty members develop competence in teaching is by taking advantage of the [ADEA/AAL Institute for Teaching and Learning](#) (ADEA/AAL ITL) offered by ADEA in partnership with the [Academy for Academic Leadership](#) (AAL). Jack even uses attendance at this valued institute as a recruitment

tool. But like the rest of our member institutions, MUSC still has to work at recruiting new faculty.

Toward the end of his 26 years as a prosthodontist, Dr. Gabie Ingraham periodically received calls from former classmates on the MUSC faculty, but he never seriously considered their overtures about entering academic life until surgery forced him to seek a new career. In 2009, he joined the faculty and was amazed by what he found at his former alma mater.

"I was struck by how motivated the faculty was to teach the students, and what a friendly atmosphere existed," Gabie told me, adding that the relationship between faculty and students when he attended school "felt like us versus them."

Gabie is one of several career switchers and ADEA/AAL ITL alums with whom I recently chatted. They shared their impressions of the program with me and their reflections on academics as a second career. Their comments reveal the challenges private practitioners face in making the transition to academic life, as well as those our schools face in fully integrating career switchers into their faculties.

Gabie credits ADEA/AAL ITL with getting him off to a good start. "It would have taken me years to figure out everything I learned in that program," he says. One of Gabie's ITL classmates, Dr. Ricky Harrell, agrees. Now a professor at the [University of Colorado School of Dental Medicine](#) (UCSDM), Ricky began volunteering at UCSDM in 2006, shortly after leaving private practice. Six months later, he was invited to join the faculty on a clinical track. Ricky appreciated the resources UCSDM made available to him, but the school had not yet started its faculty mentoring program. Ricky wanted more, and ITL offered what he was looking for.

"It was clear to me that I was brought in to treat patients," he told me, "but then courses and lectures landed in my lap. I had a lot to learn about the mechanics of education."

Among the challenges he cites in his new career as a full-time educator: not being the top dog in his own business anymore, but one of many in a huge bureaucracy; learning new technologies he hadn't employed in his practice; and dealing with smart and inquisitive students.

"I had to learn to be patient," Ricky explains, "to think about why I did things the way I did, so I could explain them. You have to be on your A game every day in practice as well as teaching, but your patients don't usually stump you with their questions."

Sending selected experienced faculty to ADEA/AAL ITL was standard operating procedure when Dr. Andrew Schenkel joined the dental faculty full-time at [New York University College of Dentistry](#). He was surprised to discover that some career switchers in the program had a poor understanding of how dental schools work. ADEA/AAL ITL quickly made apparent the distinctions between tenure- and non-tenure-track positions and between scholarly and club publications, but Andrew left wondering how career switchers who don't have the benefit of ITL or a strong mentorship program on their campuses can fully develop their second careers.

ADEA/AAL ITL also attracts a small group of private practitioners who are considering the transition to academia but have yet to make the leap. Several professional associations offer scholarships to facilitate this move and support those who have already made it. The [American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry](#) awarded one such scholarship to Dr. Cindy Slack, a Rochester-based pediatric dentist. The program exceeded her expectations, providing not only an excellent foundation for teaching but also a link to future employment. She was fortunate to discover a meeting of the minds with an ITL classmate, Dr. Lance Kisby, who was starting a pediatric dental residency program at the highly regarded [Geisinger Health System](#) in Pennsylvania. Starting in September, Cindy will teach in the program two days a month.

Other ADEA/AAL ITL grads also spoke of drawing on their class networks, contacting them with specific teaching questions or to arrange guest lectures. AAL President Dr. Karl Haden is taking steps to strengthen the alumni network by introducing social media to the AAL website and compiling a directory of program graduates. He hopes these initiatives will help alumni more easily locate faculty vacancies and help institutions locate desirable candidates even if they are not formally conducting national searches.

"I would also like to see ITL alums get more involved with ADEA," Karl adds. "The ADEA Special Interest Group (SIG) on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning would be both a tremendous resource for them and a way for them to contribute to the development of other faculty."

So ADEA/AAL ITL is one stop along the way for new or transitioning faculty. As Cindy Slack put it, "They make it clear that ITL is not the end of your quest. The program offered precise and practical information, but it also left you with the kinds of questions that prompt you to reach out to your colleagues."

Andrew Schenkel agrees. In fact, he returned to the ADEA Leadership Institute as a

Fellow in 2009 and continues to be a strong believer in the value of faculty development programs.

The undeniable satisfaction that these individuals derive from their second careers and the growth they exhibit as academicians suggests that private practitioners can and do make a substantial contribution to filling out the faculty ranks. But it is unlikely they alone can solve the faculty shortage.

ADEA's ongoing research indicates retirement is only one of several factors driving the faculty shortage. There is also a "revolving door" effect, with about 14% of all faculty leaving one institution for another each year. Still more striking, about a third of the faculty who left their institutions reported that they were going into private practice. While the lure of private practice has always been strong, our institutions traditionally made up for compensation differences by offering faculty a significantly better quality of life. Many over the last decade have determined that the lifestyle advantage no longer makes up the difference. Even faculty with tenure or tenure-track positions have left our ranks, pointing to an urgent need to refocus our attention on retaining the educators we have.

Of course, the economic recession is not making this any easier. Financial incentives are simply off the table. Many state institutions have had salary freezes in place for some time and have started furloughing their employees. Additionally, institutions long challenged to find adequate funds to recruit part-time faculty now have fewer volunteers knocking on their doors. Private practitioners who might once have donated their services are reluctant to take time away from the office.

There are no easy answers. At a minimum, we must remain cognizant of the changing composition of the faculty and strive to make academic life rewarding for those within our ranks. Programs like ADEA/AAL ITL and policies such as those in place at MUSC are making a tangible difference. They serve as a model for institutions struggling to fully integrate new hires and retain those already on board. In the meantime, let's ask ourselves what more we can do to make sure qualified and enthusiastic people are in place to teach the next generation of oral health practitioners.



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