American College of Healthcare Executives and Association of University Programs in Health Administration

Guidelines for a Faculty Practice Fellowship Program

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Joint College/AUPHA Committee  
on Guidelines for a Faculty Practice Fellowship Program  
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Introduction

On May 30, 1990, the Joint College/AUPHA Committee on Guidelines for a Faculty Practice Fellowship Program convened. Its purpose was to discuss ideas that would lead to the development of a program in which faculty members associated with healthcare administration programs would join the senior administrative teams of healthcare organizations for eight to 12 weeks. This report fulfills the committee’s charge with the hope that it will encourage greater interaction between health administration academic programs and practicing healthcare executives.

A number of factors underlie the need and rationale for a Faculty Practice Fellowship Program. Adequate academic preparation for a career in healthcare management has become a more demanding task for students and for the programs that serve them. The theoretical body of knowledge required of healthcare executives has expanded tremendously, as it has in others areas of professional and technical management. Accommodating this knowledge explosion has meant students face a longer didactic educational experience and diminished occasions for learning and professional socialization in actual managerial situations. Likewise, healthcare administration academic programs have had to turn from part-time practitioner educators to full-time university
program faculty. This ensures that students receive a university graduate education of the quality required to satisfy the requirements of accreditation and the ever-advancing expectations of the professional employment marketplace.

Today’s healthcare environment has produced new professional and managerial opportunities unimagined as recently as a decade ago. The rate of such change has been so rapid that full-time faculty are challenged to maintain both high standards of scholarly productivity and practical relevance. As a result, it is increasingly important to maintain the close and productive relationship between education and practice that once characterized education for healthcare administration. It is our hope that a Faculty Practice Fellowship Program, especially in combination with visiting healthcare executive arrangements, will bring education and practice closer together.

**Strategic Goal**
The overall goal of the program is to narrow the gap between theory and practice by exposing faculty to hands-on experience in healthcare management. If this goal is achieved, faculty members, students, healthcare executives, and, ultimately, the public will all benefit.

**Objectives**
The fundamental purpose or arranging a faculty practice fellowship is to enhance the relationship between healthcare administration education and practice. This alliance will sustain a rare attribute that has distinguished healthcare administration.

**Faculty**
The objectives of the program for full-time university graduate and undergraduate faculty are to undertake and complete a project of strategic importance to the organization hosting the visiting educator. Through this practical experience, the faculty fellow would:

- Gain insight into the day-to-day operations of a healthcare organization and the activities of senior officers. Such practical experience would help the university educator better understand such crucial matters as how executives make decisions, how projects move from inception to completion, and how the most useful analyses in nonacademic settings may result from the least complex methodologies.

- Obtain an accurate picture of the changing nature of the field in order to convey to his or her students a realistic picture of the industry they will soon enter. Educators teach, guide, and evaluate the future leaders of any field, conduct research, and contribute to the literature. Because of this, it is essential that their perspective be attuned to industry changes. Educators must be aware of the growing range of opportunities in fields such as home care, long-term care, managed care, and medical group management as well as the continuing good opportunities in acute care.

- Develop a publishable paper or case study, within their area of interest or specialization, based on their knowledge and experience. Such works would be a means of sharing with students and with other faculty those observations and techniques that hold universal importance.
• Establish contacts within the industry that might lead to research support, placement opportunities for students, and sources of data/information. Continuity of the relationship would ensure that students, academic programs, and practitioners would share the benefits of close collaboration.

• Contribute to his or her program. Insights gained by the faculty fellow would ultimately help shape curriculum content, keeping it responsive and timely.

**Sponsoring Organization**

The sponsoring organization will:

• Select a project that supports the mission of the organization and relies on the expertise of the visiting faculty member.

• Arrange access to existing databases that might otherwise be unavailable to the faculty practice fellow and provide opportunities for future joint research projects. The chief executive of the sponsoring organization might further gain co-authorship of subsequently published articles.

• Develop a relationship with a new source of talent, information, and potential employees, or build on a relationship that previously included only residencies/fellowships. As the demands on healthcare organizations and executive change, having a ready source of the right expertise or cutting-edge talent represents an important competitive advantage.

• Help to support and enhance university healthcare management programs and thus strengthen the industry. Alumni could assist their alma mater through the program.

**Suggested Activities**

1. **Develop a plan.** The university faculty member and the sponsoring executive would agree beforehand on the faculty practice fellow’s project. Ideally, it would match an item from a menu of strategic project needs of the organization with the special expertise and interest of the faculty fellow.

2. **Provide service to the sponsoring organization.** The faculty fellow would complete a project that relates directly to the mission of the host organization. For example, the faculty practice fellow’s study could evaluate the success of the organization’s efforts to change its corporate culture or to implement a new strategic plan. The program might be especially valuable for management and/or behavioral (rather than medical) researchers, since it would allow them to enter organizations as participants and observers.

3. **Develop educational products: case studies, research papers, curriculum materials.** Most university program faculty, especially nontenured or junior faculty, operate in an environment that values publishable material. Because of this, potential visiting faculty would have to demonstrate that such material would arise from their visit, in order to gain their program’s support. Therefore, their fellowship activities should be designed with this in mind.

4. **Provide evaluation of the experience.** Certainly the sponsoring executive and the faculty fellow would benefit from a postvisit evaluation of the experience relative to each party’s
expectations. These evaluations should be multilevel and provide feedback not only to the individuals but to the sponsoring organization and the university program.

**Administrative Issues**

**Qualifications and Attributes**

Educators expected to participate would include full-time faculty members of university programs in health administration, preferably those associated with AUPHA and those, if at the graduate level, affiliated with programs accredited by the Accrediting Commission on Education for Health Services Administration. Preferred faculty qualities would include a supportive academic program and practical project ideas that are consistent with the individuals professional development needs. It should be recognized that the needs and expectations of nontenured faculty will differ from those of tenured faculty.

Healthcare organizations, such as hospitals, group medical practices, associations, institutes, and those in managed or long-term care, which demonstrate serious interest in sponsoring a faculty practice fellow, would be ideal sites. Preferred organizational qualities include a history of preceptorships and a conceptualized plan for a faculty practice fellow (that is, suggested projects or areas of study). Preferred qualities of the sponsoring executive would include a demonstrated commitment to playing an active role in all stages of the fellowship—selection, activities, and evaluation—personal affiliation with the College and AUPHA.

**Duration of Faculty Practice Fellowships**

A variety of arrangements would enable interested faculty to interact with a sponsoring organization. The preferred path would be a full-time fellowship for eight to 12 weeks. This would probably be the most convenient arrangement for faculty, who could participate during a quarter of the academic year, possible the summer, or in conjunction with a sabbatical. Optional paths would include part-time participation over a longer period, perhaps up to a year, or a combination of full-time involvement followed by a period of part-time engagement. The mechanics of the selected path would be a function of the proximity of the faculty member to the host organization.

Because the intent of the program is to provide faculty with an intense, complete experience, faculty should be prepared to limit any outside engagements that require extensive time away from the sponsoring organization (for example, consulting work, guest lecture, association committees). The faculty member and sponsoring executive should agree on any outside engagements before the fellowship begins.

**Advance Work Required**

It is strongly suggested that the sponsor and faculty practice fellow develop a comprehensive written plan as early as possible. Because the faculty member and the CEO of the sponsoring organization will have agreed on at least an outline of the faculty fellow’s project work, the faculty fellow will be able to complete essential technical preparation before the visit begins. In addition, the sponsoring executive is encouraged to recommend any material the faculty fellow might need. For example, material on the history of the sponsoring organization and/or community where the organization is located would be helpful.

**Orientation**

Faculty practice fellows should supply their hosts with personal background information so that sponsoring executives can acquaint their staffs with their visitors. Executives should publicize
the visit internally and encourage staff to provide the fellow with complete support. The sponsoring executive should also arrange for the fellow to receive a complete orientation upon arrival. Ideally, this will include informal and social elements as well as a formal exposure to organizational structures, processes, and personalities.

**Compensation and Support**
The committee recommends that the host organization provide reasonable and appropriate compensation for the university faculty fellow. Faculty should also seek funding from their university programs and outside sources. This support would allow smaller or modestly endowed organizations facing urgent healthcare challenges to benefit from the presence of faculty practice fellows. Examples of such organizations include rural and urban facilities serving low-income populations.

Specific arrangements between the sponsoring organization and faculty fellow should be made beforehand as to the type and amount of logistical support that will be provided to the faculty fellow. Issues to consider include those involving housing, meals, parking, clerical/technical support, office facilities, and so forth.

**Letter of Agreement**
The university program director, faculty participant, and host organization’s CEO should agree in writing before the visit on issues such as compensation, support, advance preparation, and method of evaluation. In addition, these individuals should clarify issues concerning materials the faculty participant might subsequently develop and publish. Key among these issues are confidentiality, credit for publication, publication fees, and reprint rights.

**Conclusion**
Practitioners and educators alike recognize the need to strengthen the alliance between healthcare administration education and practice. Because today’s health administration students usually receive their education at universities with full-time nonpractitioner faculties, such students need to be exposed to the practical, real-world problems of healthcare administration. Such exposure would enhance their future ability to advance as leaders in the healthcare field. Faculty are rewarded for research, publishing outcomes, and making scholarly contributions. However, application of such new knowledge in an operational setting often is delayed pending publication or hands-on translation in field settings.

The Faculty Practice Fellowship Program would not only benefit students, but could also help revitalize productive, cooperative relationships among university healthcare administration programs, their full-time faculties, and practitioners in the full range of organizational settings relevant to today’s students’ career considerations. Such cooperation could enhance the exchange of theoretical and applied knowledge and could, in the long run, produce more effective research and healthcare management.