**Symposium Proposal:**

**Addressing Persistent Questions of Our Careers and Calling**

**Abstract**

This panel brings together a cross-section of MOBTS members to discuss questions the co-chairs have faced throughout their careers and have heard raised by faculty in other fields and at other schools: “Who are our students, and what do they need to know at the end of our class?” “What is my role in the world of management professors?” “What is my role in my school?” and “As a management professor, do I have a role outside of my professional role?” Attendees across career stages will carry on conversations about these questions, providing kindred spirits and insights to each other.

**Keywords:** Persistent Questions, Career Stages, Purpose in Teaching and Service

**Type of Submission:** Symposium

**Introduction**

Management faculty are held in high regard for their expertise, intelligence, determination and ability to develop and study complex concepts addressing the organization, functioning and behavior of managers and organizations, while being able to explain them as succinctly and simply as possible. Beginning with their PhD program, future faculty members are immersed in their field of study and the role of the professor. Older faculty are often more than just a ‘teacher;’ they become mentors, guides and even interpreters to their PhD students. However, seldom are the fundamental questions of our multiple roles explicitly addressed formally or in great detail.

While we are required to master a knowledge of the research content of management in formal classes, our training about what it mean to be a teacher in a college or university is often informal. We tend to copy the practices and exercises of our favorite teachers or those on the faculty who have a reputation for being a great teacher. The result is that we focus on the *how to be a great teacher,* while discounting or overlooking what it means to *be a great faculty member.*

The co-chairs of this session, who have known each other for almost 20 years, have frequently discussed these questions privately at previous OBTC and Academy of Management meetings, as well as with peers and friends. There appears to regular and widespread interest in developing a deeper understanding of the teaching and service roles we are expected to perform, as faculty members. There are four questions that have regularly emerged in our conversations, including in conversations with several of the panelists in this proposed session. They are:

* Who are our students, and what should they know at the end of our class?
* What is our role in the profession?
* What is our role within our school?
* What is our role in our community, as experts in content and process of inquiry?

The proposed symposium will address these questions from the perspective of the many stages of a faculty member’s professional life.

**Session Format**

*Introduction (15 minutes):*  The session will begin with a brief overview, similar to the description above, of why the four questions are so regularly topics of conversations among faculty and PhD students. Participants will introduce themselves, describing the current stage of their career, their affiliation and why they think these are important questions. The panelists were selected to represent different stages of a faculty member’s career, ranging from being a PhD student to approaching retirement.

*Responding to the Questions (40 minutes):* Prior to the session, each panelist will have identified the two most important questions to them and will have shared an outline of their thoughts about these questions with all of the panelists. This will allow the panelists to compare and contrast their thoughts, to facilitate discussion among the panelists. The panelist who is a business school dean will share her insights about what she would like to see done to improve faculty preparation and articulation of an answer within the profession and what she would like faculty members to think about relative to each question.

During the session, the panel discussion will begin with the first question, “Who are our students, and what should they know at the end of our class?” Each panelist who selected this question will make a two-minute statement about how they have addressed this question, how their response may have evolved and/or what general advice they would give to others. This process will be repeated for each of the questions. At the end of the discussion, key points will be reiterated by one of the co-chairs and noted on a flip chart. Discussion will be limited to eight minutes per question. An overall summary will be presented by the co-chairs to highlight the consensus for each question, as well as points of contrast between the answers.

*Audience Comments and Participation (32 minutes):* Members of the audience will be polled by a show of hands to see how many would like to discuss each question. We will begin with the question that has the most people interested in it. Fifteen minutes will be allocated to this question. Depending on the level of interest in discussing each question, the remaining time will be divided between them.

*Summary and Conclusions (10 minutes):* The final ten minutes will be spent summarizing the discussion. There are two general sets of outcomes that we hope to achieve. The first involves identifying the persistent questions that appear to have common answers and/or processes for addressing them. The second is establishment of *ad hoc* groups of faculty who are interested in further discussion of various persistent questions that can be continued informally.

The groups that result from the second outcome might be able to develop a ‘best practices’ framework from the first outcome that might be useful to others as they attempt to address that particular persistent question in the future. If guidelines for how to address these questions are developed, they may be especially useful as one progresses to different stages or roles within their faculty. Perhaps an informal peer advisory groups might be created that could be contacted with others who want some insight into these questions or that others could join or contact when they find themselves working through any question. If that occurs, it would be formalizing an activity that has been occurring at MOBTC for years, informally over meals and at Jim’s Place, and formally during Career Consortia.

Appendix A presents a framework that was the co-chairs developed as result of our own conversations with each other. Although we have shared it with the panelists, the comments are solely ours. They were shared with the panelists simply to serve as a reference point for them as they prepare their own thoughts about each of the questions. Each panelist can reference or ignore it as they choose.

**APPENDIX A**

| **STAGE** | **WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD KNOW AT THE END OF OUR CLASS \*\*** | **OUR ROLE IN THE PROFESSION \*\*** | **OUR ROLE IN THE SCHOOL \*\*** | **OUR ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY\*\*** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **PhD Student** | Post peer role: Facts | Pre-novice: Observer & student | Fodder (?): Teaching & research | There is one?  Who has the time? |
| **Pre-tenure** | Any level: Older brother,  facts & concepts | Novice/Explorer | Proving we can be a good member of the ‘community’. Teaching, research and service | See above? |
| **Post-tenure** | Any level: Expert or professional skeptic | Wholesalers of ideas, concepts, practices and methods | Increasingly carry the duties of citizenship in the school.  Be a role model to both students and young faculty. | Begin combining personal interests with professional skills. |
| **Mid-Career** | Any level: Synthesis | Refiner and developer.  *Teaching:* Class exercises, games, simulations, video clips, pedagogies and curriculum.  *Research:*  Ideas, concepts, practices and methods | Find niches where own interests, expertise and school needs intersect.  Become a confidant and guide to younger faculty | Find things that cross the boundaries of the both the profession and the ‘outside world”.  Incorporate them into classes and curriculum.  Find what the profession and outside world can give to each other. |
| **Late Career** | Any level: Synthesis, integration, wisdom | Role model for the comprehensive set of roles faculty play.  Counsel to young, post-tenure faculty.  Perhaps on (rare) occasions have to play the “Dutch uncle.” | Serve the broader school with skills and insights. Balance traditions, the need to change those and themselves.  Help/teach others, students, to find what they are best at and what they can contribute to the set of roles and stakeholders | Be a spokesperson for the profession, the changing needs of students (both internal and external to the school) and the changes needed in the school. |
| **Retirement** | A role model | Generation bridge builder. | Special invited roles? | Community involvement & service? |
| **Dean’s Perspective** | NA | NA | NA | NA |

\*\* Thoughts of the co-chairs only as they reflected on how their answers have evolved during their careers.