No Rookies on Rookies: Compliance and Opportunism in Policy Implementation

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No Rookies on Rookies

Compliance and Opportunism in Policy Implementation

It is common for writers and researchers to note that scrutiny of American higher education institutions has been steadily increasing in recent years. The general public and its elected and bureaucratic representatives are increasingly willing to be pointed and critical of colleges and universities. These external stakeholders are no longer willing to defer to the faculty and institutional administrators as they enforce policies and procedures that some find questionable. One example of this phenomena is the concern of the general public about the quality of undergraduate instruction and the related calls to replace graduate teaching assistants with senior faculty in freshmen-level courses. While the procedures for assigning instructors to first-year classes vary from institution to institution and department to department, in many cases colleges and universities have tried to respond to the public's demands. There have been greater efforts to provide training for graduate teaching assistants and particularly international teaching assistants. There have also been changes in who shoulders the teaching responsibility for freshmen-level courses.

This study looks at one such effort at Oklahoma State University (OSU). The university is one of two flagship universities in the state system of public higher education and has a Carnegie designation of Research University Extensive. It has proudly retained its traditional land-grant mission and image and is located in a town about 60 miles from the state's two major metropolitan centers, Oklahoma City and Tulsa. The

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main campus, which is the focus of this study, enrolls roughly 20,000 students. At the time of our study, the faculty of almost 1,000 was organized into 58 academic departments arrayed among seven colleges.

In 1994 the new president of the university, James Halligan, made increasing enrollment one goal of his administration, and he immediately began to refocus on student recruitment and retention strategies. In response to students' complaints and public criticism of the university's freshmen-level instruction and after limited and brief discussion within the OSU community, the president announced that inexperienced and international graduate students would no longer be allowed to instruct freshmen-level courses.

The Policy

The policy was labeled "No-Rookies-on-Rookies" (NROR). From its inception, President Halligan had indicated his hope that the NROR program would improve classroom experiences for freshmen. In a memo to department heads and deans, he indicated that they should "develop and implement enhanced procedures to insure experienced teachers who possess effective communication skills are present in our freshmen classes" (Halligan, memo, 1995, p. 2). Although "the policy's fine print remains vague" ("Proposed Policy," 1995, p. 4), reports in the university newspaper based on interviews with the president and provost suggested that collateral goals of the program were to enhance freshmen students' comfort and satisfaction with their experiences at OSU, to increase freshmen retention, and to improve graduate students' preparation for teaching.

The policy was a restrictive mandate to colleges and academic departments, but it was not prescriptive. It told them what *not* to do, but the policy did not set specific solutions or strategies for implementation. Thus, colleges and academic departments were allowed to formulate their own strategies to compensate for no longer assigning freshmen-level teaching responsibilities to rookie and international graduate students. The policy intent was that rookie graduate students undergo year-long training programs designed to introduce them to the realities of university-level instruction. OSU's president committed additional funding for the continued employment of rookie and international graduate students in upper-level teaching positions or other duties. Departments devised various solutions for the staffing change based on their differing interpretations of the policy, the nature of the problems the policy created for them, and the alternative uses of graduate students and faculty that fit their circumstances.

Despite this flexibility, the new policy meant changing long-estab-

lished approaches to staffing freshmen-level courses. Throughout the nation, graduate students are used as instructors in lower-level undergraduate recitation and laboratory classes. They cover entry-level classes, thereby freeing up faculty to teach coursework for majors and graduate students in the discipline and to focus on scholarly and service activities. Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) cost substantially less than full-time faculty. In addition to being cost effective, the use of graduate teaching assistants in lower-level undergraduate coursework can be justified from a professional socialization perspective. The experiences gained by graduate teaching assistants in the classroom are necessary for their development as future faculty, and many hiring institutions prefer candidates with a variety of teaching experiences prior to graduation ("Colleges Expand," 1992; Connelly, 1982). In sum, implementation of the NROR policy had substantial ramifications for departments beyond its impact in the freshmen-level classroom.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this project was to examine the implementation of the NROR policy. Specifically, we sought answers to the following questions:

1. What did departments change in their implementation of the NROR policy?
2. What factors influenced departmental responses to the NROR policy? What role did public concerns play? What role did unit contexts play?
3. What advice can be generated for those designing institutional responses to public concerns?

Related Literature

The research on policy implementation confirms the obvious: policy does not get translated directly into organizational actions. Implementation requires additional rounds of interpretation and negotiations at the implementer's level. At this level, issues and concerns may be very different, and the beliefs and values upon which decisions are made may not necessarily coincide with those of policy makers (Baier, March, & Saetren, 1986; March, 1994; Mills, 1998). Thus, assumptions and concepts applied in the literature on organizational decision making and policy implementation provide frameworks for viewing and analyzing responses to policies.

Matching themes in the literatures of both fields center on a turn to

interpretive analyses based on the assumption that people encounter circumstances that can be understood in multiple ways. People must interpret, or make sense, of those situations in order to determine how to act (Weick, 1995). They must also compare their interpretations with other people to see if they provide a reasonable foundation for mutual understanding and coordinated action (Fischer & Forester, 1987, 1993; Yanow, 1996). In other words, interpretations are applied and developed socially, and they depend heavily on the contexts in which the social interactions occur. Organizations, as social collections in which people must interpret in order to facilitate action, embody continuous exercises in sensemaking and often have contexts for sensemaking nested within contexts (Linstead, Small, & Jeffcutt, 1996; Pandy, Frost, Morgan, & Dandridge, 1983; Weick, 1995).

Interpretive processes are often particularly apparent when organizations undertake implementation of a new policy (Fischer & Forester, 1987, 1993; Yanow, 1996). In fact, the processes related to implementation are the result of negotiated interpretations of the letter and spirit of policy (Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992).

An interpretative approach to policy analysis, then, is one that focuses on the meanings of policies, on the values, feelings, and/or beliefs which they express, and on the processes by which those meanings are communicated to and “read” by various audiences. (Yanow, 1996, pp. 8–9).

In fact, as Ball makes clear,

Solutions to the problems posed by policy texts will be localised and should be expected to display ad hocery and messiness. Responses indeed must be “creative” . . . Policies do not normally tell you what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed or particular goals or outcomes are set. A response must still be put together, constructed in context, off-set against other expectations. All of this involves creative social action not robotic reactivity. Thus, the enactment of texts relies on things like commitment, understanding, capability, resources, practical limitations, cooperation and (importantly) inter-textual compatibility. (Ball, 1997, p. 10)

In some cases, this recreation results in an “interpretation of texts [that] is proactive, critical and self-assured, . . . in others, reactive, passive and unquestioning” (Bowe et al., 1992, pp. 119–120).

This aspect of policy implementation, when considered as an avenue that allows divergence from policymakers’ intent, has been viewed in two ways. Some lines of research aim to discover ways to limit policy reinterpretation (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1983). However, other researchers consider implementation reinterpretation as part of the policy process (Palumbo & Calista, 1990) that allows policymaking to be sym-

bolic action demonstrating values while ensuring that implementation serves the interests of the various constituencies, thus serving to maintain a balance of power (Ferman, 1990).

In addition to issues of policy reinterpretation, the processes of organizational decision making in response to policy pronouncements further impact policy implementation. Cohen and March (1974), March and Olsen (1979) and March (1994) provide a framework for analyzing decision making that is consistent with the interpretive assumptions discussed above.

They remind us that, in situations with multiple, uncertain preferences and unclear technology, success is often difficult to determine, and learning, therefore, has uncertain foundations. Combine this with decision processes in which participants' attention is limited and involvement is fluid, and it makes ambiguous conditions for decision making. These analysts characterize organizations with these features as organized anarchies that exemplify garbage can decision-making processes. In such circumstances, problems, solutions, and decision makers float through the organization, and decision making occurs when they come together in particular choice opportunities. Options abound, and outcomes are often unintended and various. "The 'decisions' of the system are a consequence produced by the system but intended by no one and decisively controlled by no one" (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 34). Instead, given the ambiguity organizational actors face in choice opportunities such as policy implementation, instances of decision making become "vehicles for constructing meaningful interpretation" (March, 1994, p. 199) that promote sensemaking, explain some of the ambiguity, and promote choices. In organized anarchies, we learn about who we are and what we value by seeing what we decide to do.

The typical tactics of administrative action in an organized anarchy are based on the assumption that the responsibility of leaders is to prompt the organization to a changing and more complex view of itself. Because decisions demand interpretation, they become opportunities to define the organization and its connections to its world. From this foundation, March and Olsen (1979) develop eight suggestions for those who seek to influence the course of decisions in universities and colleges: (1) devote time and energy, (2) persist, (3) get things done any way you can, (4) facilitate opposition participation, (5) engage in lots of projects, (6) provide garbage cans, (7) manage unobtrusively, and (8) interpret history.

Procedures and Method

We began by sending a letter to each department head asking if the NROR policy affected one or more of the unit's classes. Of those who

responded, only 10 department heads reported a direct impact from the NROR policy. A check of the University catalog indicated that only one of the nonrespondents headed a department that taught a freshmen-level course. We contacted the 11 heads and arranged to interview them or someone they designated as the person responsible for their departments' implementation of the policy. In addition, we interviewed college-level administrators from the two colleges whose unit heads indicated some impact from the policy.

We talked to these administrators during the spring of 1997, the second year of the NROR policy implementation. We conducted semistructured interviews that allowed participants to discuss the issues they thought were most important and permitted us to clarify points through follow-up questions and probes (Kvale, 1996). With each participant in the study, we asked about college and department instructional resources, GTA training, international GA placements, and freshmen-level course design both before and after the implementation of NROR. We also asked how each department went about deciding what to do to meet the policy's expectations—how decisions were made, who was involved in those decisions and how they participated, what the most salient considerations were, and what type of reporting about those decisions and subsequent actions were required to higher levels of the college and university. Further, we asked how the implementation had changed from the first year to the second.

The interviews were audio tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were coded by assigning a phrase summarizing the content to distinct pieces of the text. The codes served as convenient markers and facilitated analysis through comparative clustering of related textual units that helped us develop a fuller understanding of departments' approaches to implementing the policy.

Not all of the heads interviewed actually had a direct role in the implementation of the policy. For example, one head interviewed with us in order to express his pique at not being able to share in the resources made available to compensate for implementation of NROR. His department had never used rookies in freshmen-level classes, and, from his viewpoint, other departments were getting compensatory funding to do what his department had done correctly all along and without the extra money. Leaving aside this and like cases, we were left with seven departmental-level interviews (five heads, one assistant head, and one graduate coordinator at the time of implementation and three college-level interviews (involving a dean and two associate deans) as the bases for our analyses. To protect confidentiality of the study participants, we changed all department and discipline references to more generic de-

scriptors (for example, “Introduction to Alchemy” became “the freshmen-level course”).

Implementation Changes

Implementation of the NROR policy occurred in one college and seven departments of a second college, referred to here as College 1 and Departments A–G of College 2. Table 1 summarizes the changes the colleges and departments made as part of the NROR policy.

College 1 is a professional college that relies on the arts and sciences college to instruct its freshmen in the basic subjects prerequisite to studies in its majors. The leadership of College 1 had grown increasingly concerned that its faculty and staff were not more involved with its new students and that the college suffered much of its student attrition before students began course work in the college.

I think we needed to have that contact with the freshmen year. We’ve always regretted the fact that we turn our students over to Arts and Sciences. We’ve always had this concept that you’ve got to build this foundation, so we have limited exposure to the students. We lose half our students in those first two years, and, so, what can we do about that?

The administration of the college was already in the process of trying to address this concern when the president instituted the NROR policy. The policy became the spur that caused the administration of the college to accelerate its planning and decision making. They initiated a freshmen seminar in which faculty and staff met regularly with small groups of students (around 20) to discuss the professional field as well as topics generic to students’ experiences in the university. As one participant described the seminar design,

Each section could have its own focus. We also, then, offered a series of seminars that were on topics of general interest to all the sections. Specifically, we have two seminars on what is [this profession]—all the different fields, one on study and test-taking skills, one on time management, an assessment of computer skills, and a session on preparing a resume.

The administration of the college believed that the key to the new offering was not only what was studied, but also that its new students had an additional resource to aid their adjustment to the university. As we were told, “It’s the concept of, ‘I want to talk to each one of you today, and each of you should have a chance to talk in the session’ versus ‘come in, sit down and listen.’ They want students to talk and participate and get involved.”

In College 2, the task of coordinating the implementation of NROR

TABLE 1
1000-Level Instruction Before and After NROR Implementation

Unit	Before Policy	After Policy
College 1		
1000-level instructors	None	Full-time faculty, administrators and staff
Classes and size	None	Freshmen Experience Seminar @ 20 per section
New GTA training*		N/A
College 2—Department A		
1000-level instructors	GTAs	Visiting faculty members
Classes and size	Recitations @ 35	Multiple recitations @ 100
New GTA training		Faculty mentors, seminar on teaching
College 2—Department B		
1000-level instructors	GTAs	Full-time faculty
Classes and size	Recitations @ 60–80	Recitations @ 200
New GTA training		N/A
College 2—Department C		
1000-level instructors	GTAs	Full-time faculty
Classes and size	Recitations @ 40	Recitations @ 120 (1st year) 60–70 (2nd year)
New GTA training		N/A
College 2—Department D		
1000-level instructors	GTAs	Experienced TAs and part-time instructors
Classes and size	Recitations @ 25–30	No change
New GTA training		Mentoring program, rookies assigned to assist students in an individual help center
College 2—Department E		
1000-level instructors	GTAs	Part-time instructors
Classes and size	Labs	No change
New GTA training		One week orientation, sessions from COE program
College 2—Department F		
1000-level instructors	GTAs	Part-time instructors
Classes and size	Labs	No change
New GTA training		Faculty supervisor
College 2—Department G		
1000-level instructors	GTAs	Part-time instructors
Classes and size	Recitations @ 30	No change
New GTA training		Faculty group advisor

*New GTA training refers only to the time after policy implementation.

fell to the dean's office staff, who took on the responsibility for specifying what the policy meant and communicating that to the academic departments. Administrators in the dean's office approached this task in a direct manner. As we were told, NROR "has been imposed from the top

down. There was no discussion once it got to our level and below. . . . We have some people who don't like it, who complain about it to some faculty members. I just tell them, 'It's not really an item for negotiation, this is the way it's got to be.'" However, various aspects of the policy needed clarification, which members of the provost's office provided.

In the beginning, I had to make some phone calls back to the Provost's Office to get some decisions. One of them that came up was, what exactly is "experience?" They told me teaching experience can be student teaching, when you were an undergraduate. It can be having taught in a high school. . . . It doesn't have to be college teaching, it could be teaching at any level. . . . We also had to define what "international" was initially, and international was defined as someone who's from a country in which the native language is not English.

With this guidance, the dean's office staff developed the following statement to guide implementation of the policy:

No 1000-level (freshmen) course will be taught by a "rookie" (someone with no teaching experience), no international teaching assistant will be teaching 1000-level courses and no 1000-level laboratory will be assisted by an international teaching assistant. "International" is defined as those students coming from countries whose official language is not English. (Meeting distribution from Dean's Office, n.d., original is in all capital letters)

One final component of NROR was that any graduate student who could not get an assistantship due to the policy would receive an equivalent award funded from a centrally held pool of funds, that is, not at the department's or college's expense. There was every willingness to fund as many of these nonteaching graduate students as it took to fairly implement NROR. Departments were allowed to rank their graduate students and then seek to fill whatever GTA slots they had available. Students on the list who could not fill any of the available positions due to NROR were bought out. As someone in the dean's office explained:

We will give you money to move that [ineligible] person out, and you then buy another TA who is eligible to replace that person. Now the interesting question that came up was: Does that mean the next person I hire has to be somebody who qualifies? The answer to that is, no. The next person should be the next highest person in terms of qualifications or priority. We have done this so that they go down the list, and we are constantly buying out the next person on the list. There's no intent here to discriminate in terms of hiring. We've always been very emphatic about that. The next person you hire, doesn't necessarily have to be qualified to replace that person. We want you to hire the next person.

Despite the straightforward definitions of the key elements of the policy and the financial support that diminished some of the possible nega-

tive consequences of implementation, there was significant variety in implementation. What the departments of College 2 did in their implementation of the policy differed for several reasons. First, the policy as it was defined contained some distinctions that varied in applicability across the departments. For instance, rookie native English speakers were allowed to teach laboratory and discussion sessions as long as they were not the primary person responsible for teaching the course, but international students, even with teaching experience, were not allowed to teach in any capacity at the freshmen level. This meant that the departments with large numbers of international graduate students had more people permanently disqualified from freshmen teaching than other departments.

In addition, some disjunction in the policy was created because freshmen classes were defined as classes at the 1000-level. Several departments had courses intended for freshmen but with higher numbers. Thus, as one person noted,

There are some departments in [College 2] that do not have a 1000-level class. That is really kind of, in my opinion, a fluke. It's absolutely a fluke. Introduction to [one subject] should be no different than Introduction to [another subject] or Introduction to [another], but those have a 2000 number. [Another department], I think, is the same way. There are a couple of departments who have no 1000-level classes. So they, in that sense, are out of it. They still have rookies. Because those departments' classes are at a 2000 level, you can have a brand new TA who's never taught.

In effect, some classes that seemingly fit the spirit of the NROR prohibition nevertheless slid out from under its application.

The second aspect of the variation in implementation concerned the differential application of the policy by the college. Unlike the five other implementing departments in the college, two departments (B & C, Table 1) were simply told that they were to replace their teaching assistants with full-time faculty members rather than nonrookie GTAs. Training graduate students and working them into responsibilities in the freshmen level courses was not an option for these two departments. As one department head told us, "The dean's office acted unilaterally in telling the department to have full-time faculty take over all the teaching in [the freshmen-level course]. They made the policy that there would be no graduate students in the classroom, and faculty should be assigned there." In fact, a dean's office representative indicated to us that one of these departments was not under the NROR policy, and instead viewed the changes there as a separate matter. The department head, however, thought that the changes they made were part of the NROR initiative, and the requirements for that department matched those placed on an-

other department that all parties considered within the scope of NROR. One of the heads implied that the faculty-for-GTAs switch was the preferred implementation strategy of the dean's office, but that the dean's office could not apply it universally.

The dean's office took a simple approach. However, they were not able to apply that simple an approach with [other] departments because they are too large and teach too many freshmen students to be able to fully staff the courses with full-time faculty. Thus, they were allowed to continue to use graduate students in their 1000-level courses.

With the changes required by the dean's office, both departments had to increase class size at the freshmen level significantly to comply with the limits on implementation they faced.

Of the other College 2 departments, one, Department A, used the NROR policy to accommodate extensive changes in its freshmen classes, while the other four, D through G, made few changes. All five of these departments also employed some form of training, including workshops, seminars, mentorships, and progressive, monitored experiences to enhance the teaching abilities of their rookie graduate students.

In Department A, the full-time faculty compensated for some of the lost GTA instruction by increasing their offerings of alternatives to the standard, freshmen-level course. Furthermore, the money freed up by the NROR funding for graduate students provided partial funding for hiring visiting faculty members who were assigned the typical freshmen class, albeit in larger sections than before the new policy.

The remaining four departments kept their freshmen-level courses operating in much the same way as before the NROR policy. They put some form of teacher training in place for new graduate students and relied on experienced GTAs and part-time instructors to teach the affected courses. One of these was a department with a large service course, and the head felt there were few viable options to maintaining the course as close as possible to the manner it had operated in the past.

Unless we hire, you know, 30 new staff members, or 30 post docs who have experience, and don't worry about our graduate students—just let them be graduate students, and of course offer all kinds of fellowships and scholarships—basically, we at the university are stuck with putting people in the classroom who don't know an awful lot about teaching.

Another two of these departments traditionally used GTAs only in laboratory sections, and were affected primarily by the ban on international GTAs in that setting. They chose to use a fuller definition of rookies and not to use inexperienced native English speakers in their laboratories as well.

After taking an active role in interpreting and differentially applying the policy, the dean's office staff did little to govern or monitor the actions taken in the name of NROR. As a member of the office put it, "We distribute the funds and we try to answer questions—'Yes, this person can; no, this person can't.'" But, he added, "We don't dive into a department and look, but we tell them what they can and cannot do. We don't check up on them." With respect to training, he added,

that is up to the departments. We don't meddle with that. Our assumption is that they have some kind of training in which they observe, or grade, an opportunity to deliver lectures or practice—in other words, not have total responsibility of that class. They will be trained hopefully for an entire two semesters, and then after that two-semester process they are no longer a rookie. But we do not structure the training. . . . We assume that they are doing the right thing.

And, in talking about the distribution of funds under the policy:

If they need TAs to people 2000-level lab sections, then that's the place they should look to put an international immediately, before we need to buy them out. So that's another little nuance of it. But I don't know how many departments actively search other spots before they come over for their money. . . . In terms of the process of distributing that money, we just ask them how much and how many, that's all we ask. We do not verify. We do not double check.

The only sense the departments had that their activities were being monitored was through a requirement to submit a form to the provost's office on each graduate student funded under the NROR policy, a step that most considered *pro forma*. As one head commented,

The only oversight I know is filling out those forms at the end of the semester. So we simply write down that we did this and we asked them to go through these lectures and the Instructional Effectiveness Program and just send it on over to the vice president's office. We never hear back one way or the other. That's the only oversight that there has been.

Despite the lack of monitoring, the departments achieved at least a minimal level of conformity with the policy. Those few departments to which the policy applied conscientiously undertook the altered teaching assignments and GTA training required by the policy. One department head noted that

there are very few people that we have let out of the rookie program unless they have demonstrated with more than just a simple notation that they have taught or that they have some idea of what teaching is all about. We're not trying to save money by shunting them into the classroom by saying, "Oh, well, that is kind of like teaching." No, we haven't done that.

Another added,

Some of these international students do very well. Nevertheless, we have abided by the policy and not used them in 1000-level courses. . . . We interpreted the policy as conservatively as we could and decided to apply it to all our classrooms, laboratories, and recitations.

Influences on Policy Implementation

In our analysis, we were able to identify several elements that influenced unit approaches to implementation of the policy. We found the level of sympathy with the public concerns that motivated institutional policy to have a minor impact. Of greater influence was whether the implementing units had previously attended to potential problems and solutions or had not. If they had, units took a more opportunistic approach to implementation and were able to address the choice opportunities inventively; if not, the departments were reactive to the new conditions the policy produced and approached implementation as compliance as defined at higher levels of the university hierarchy.

Public Concerns

In announcing the NROR policy, the president clearly stated that it was motivated by concerns among the general public of the state and particularly those who were or could become the parents of prospective students. President Halligan indicated as much in his memorandum announcing the policy on campus:

Let me emphasize that the issue is not a matter of convincing the public that we have addressed the problem in the past or that the problem is not as serious as they perceive it to be. The public has heard that and is not convinced. We must do everything we can to change the perception and to immediately address the real problems that surface. (Halligan, memo, 1995, p. 1)

Thus, the policy was to symbolize to the people of the state the institution's commitment to undergraduate education and responsiveness to the expressed preferences of its students and others.

And the point was not lost on people inside the institution. One person told us the president "claims, and he tells the story all the time, that when he goes out and talks to the Moose Lodges and the Kiwanis Clubs and the Chambers of Commerce, and he tells them about the 'No-Rookies-on-Rookies' policy and he gets a standing ovation." The policy, in effect, signaled that the institution must be attentive to public concerns and imbued these concerns with some institutional authority. Therefore, reactions to the policy within the institution could be connected to beliefs about the legitimacy of those public concerns.

Many of the people we interviewed saw the need for and benefit from the policy. They recognized parents' desires to get the best education possible for their children. As one person put it, "Well, I appreciate what Dr. Halligan wanted to do in terms of politically reaching out to parents to make sure that they understand that OSU really cares about the kind of education people are getting." Another person added, "I can appreciate the fact that, if I was paying tuition, I would want my kid to have the best instruction, and presumably I want more than somebody that had just graduated the year before. So I understand all of that." As another person suggested, the positive feelings the policy inspired might be beneficial. "I think that any time President Halligan can get a standing ovation when he goes out and talks to groups around the state, that's a very positive thing for us."

However, several of the people we interviewed also dismissed the policy as little more than a public relations ploy, and they questioned the legitimacy of the concerns at the same time that they acknowledged the problem with the public image behind the policy. Comments such as, "The policy is not unreasonable, given the public outcry for having faculty teach and limiting the use of graduate TAs," and "the real problem the NROR policy was addressing was the public and legislative perception that faculty are not doing their jobs and are not accountable" have a suggestive undertone implying the outcry and perceptions were not justified. As discussed previously, most people we talked with did not think the public beliefs matched the reality of their departments. One person claimed that, in embracing the policy, the president "owned up to a problem that didn't exist," and he characterized the NROR policy as "silliness that wasted a lot of time."

In addition, those we talked with expressed concern about the apparent and unwarranted discrimination against international students that they believed the NROR policy embodied. For example, one commented:

Well, my perspective is that we really need to be open to international students more. It's almost as if we bring them here then tell them they are not good enough to do a little teaching, and I think that is incorrect, at best. They are some of our finest students. They understand [my discipline] perhaps better than many of the American students do at that level. I don't want to say that they are smarter but they certainly have the dedication and discipline that some of the American students don't yet have.

Another added that the treatment of international students in the policy, "makes me very uncomfortable. I would accept any skill-based criteria, but this is strictly about country of origin." Respondents also felt that complaints about any language barrier were overstated and more often

reflected cultural misunderstandings, rather than problems with the GTA's ability to speak English. Some also suggested that a problem with an international GTA's accent was an acceptable excuse for poor performance, but might not reflect the real reason a student was not doing well in a class. To underscore this, one person told us,

Since we teach multiple sections of courses, it's easier to move the students out. Usually if students have a serious problem with the TA's language, I find those are rarely solved in the class, because the students already have a set attitude. But I will take students from two different sections, both claiming language problems, and I will switch sections between them. When I check back, they say, "Oh, I can understand that one. There's no problem now."

In fact, some went so far as to suggest that the public's focus on the issue reflected a parochialism that runs counter to the internationalization of all spheres of society today.

The part that has bothered me most is the international students policy. I'm not in favor of that at all. I think undergraduate students use accents as an excuse and opportunity to say that they couldn't understand their teaching assistants, and I hate that we are encouraging that attitude. I think it encourages the xenophobia that you find out here. I've heard that same complaint from students not only in Oklahoma, but also in every place I have taught that is not located on a coast.

Another added, "It's a disadvantage if our students think that everyone is going to be like them. They need to kind of suck it up and be able to cope with other people from other cultures and other languages and things like that."

Thus, people we talked with generally discounted the public perspectives that the NROR policy addressed. Their acceptance of and compliance with the policy arose less from a perception of the legitimacy of the values and concerns that underlay the policy, but could be attributed more to either (a) structural factors such as the support for the policy within the institutional hierarchy (especially from a new and popular president), (b) the financial backing for the policy that prevented it from having a negative impact on graduate programs, and/or (c) the opportunity to address other issues and problems through the mechanisms of the policy.

Unit Contexts and Responses

Changes made by the implementing units varied substantially. The primary factor contributing to that variation was how each unit conceived of the NROR policy. In some cases, to facilitate implementation, units engaged in substantial redefinitions of the policy. They saw the

policy as a vehicle for change. Other units appear to have mirrored policy definition and implementation from higher levels in the institutional hierarchy. They chose to comply with the policy through a literal interpretation of parameters and possibilities. Table 2 summarizes these aspects of the implementation processes in each of the academic units studied.

Opportunism. Clearly, College 1 was able to parlay the attention on freshmen retention as demonstrated by the NROR focus and financial backing into support for an initiative to create a freshmen seminar and insert it as a requirement in students' programs. According to one college administrator,

We saw an opportunity to do some things we were planning to do anyway. So, we basically took advantage of the announcement and the charge to implement to do something that we had been working on, and that's our Freshmen Experience. . . . The "No-Rookies-on-Rookies" is, in some cases, looked at as a narrow concept, and in some sense, we've looked at it as a broad concept. We've looked at it as more than just not having a neophyte in the classroom in the freshmen year. We've looked at it more in terms of the total experience the undergraduates received in their freshmen year.

Staff of the college had been working on the project prior to the NROR announcement, but they realized quite early that the new policy created an impetus for getting their Freshmen Experience designs implemented.

Within College 2, a few departments demonstrated the same type of opportunism, but others did not. As one person observed, "I think there were not many departments that realized that this might benefit them. There were a couple that did, but most of them did not." Department A is one that took full advantage. As with College 1, the framework for seizing the opportunity had already been established. The study participant from Department A noted, "If you go back to 1990, we were doing changes in the [freshmen-level course] that helped. See, we were focused on changing [that course]. That was where we had the complaints."

Department A wanted to get away from having one course as the universal requirement for all students, and the departmental faculty had been developing alternative classes to better suit students' needs for at least three years. In their eyes, the problem was not the graduate assistant instructors but the introductory course itself that created dissatisfaction and needed changing. The NROR policy created the opportunity for the department to move more aggressively toward that goal and to develop a source of resources to help it happen. According to the departmental representative, "One nice thing was, this gave us a chance to look carefully at what we do at [the] entry [course] level. It prepared a fertile

TABLE 2

Interpretation and Organizational Responses to NROR Implementation

Unit	See a Problem	Legitimate Public Demand	Consider NROR Opportunity or Bother	Amount of Change	Decision-making Approach	Resources Received
College 1	Yes—Want contact with freshmen	Yes—Also concerned about effect of another college's classes on retention.	Opportunity	Substantial	Group—College administration and faculty	Moderate
Department A, College 2	Yes—Difficult freshmen course	Somewhat—Course, not TA teaching, the issue	Opportunity	Substantial	Group—Departmental administrators and the graduate committee	Significant
Department B, College 2	Yes—Problem was application of NROR program	Somewhat—Need to respond to the public	Bother	Substantial	Individual—Chair	Significant
Department C, College 2	Yes—Problem was application of NROR program	No	Bother	Substantial	Individual—Chair	Significant
Department D, College 2	No	No	Bother	Modest	Individual—Chair	Moderate
Department E, College 2	No	Somewhat—Understand parents' desires	Bother	Modest	Individual—graduate coordinator	Little
Department F, College 2	No	Doubtful	Bother	Modest	Individual—Chair	Little
Department G, College 2	No	No	Little concern	Little	Individual—Chair	Little

seed bed for what we've been doing with new courses. We told ourselves, 'Well, we better start these classes.'" While the department began offering new alternative freshmen-level classes, it now could afford to hire visiting faculty members, typically recent doctorates, to replace the GTAs in the standard freshmen-level course if they also increased the section size. "It's not directly the 'No-Rookies-on-Rookies' money, but it maybe made it possible because the 'No-Rookies-on-Rookies' is now paying for a set of TAs, so we have extra TA money that we can use."

Clearly, both College 1 and Department A of College 2 were opportunistic. They saw in the NROR policy the occasion to advance goals they had already begun to work toward. In College 1, beliefs about the necessity of intervening into the freshmen experiences of its majors led to reconsideration of their approaches to orientation and instruction for freshmen, and the NROR policy served as the vehicle promoting delivery of enhanced services to those students. In Department A, the recognition that one freshmen-level course could not serve the needs of all freshmen preceded the NROR policy. Both units were poised to redefine the policy in terms that fit their plans and ongoing efforts or to redefine their activities to fit the NROR initiative. In the process, they took advantage of the funds underwriting the new institutional policy and gained goodwill within the institutional hierarchy through engagement in the NROR program.

These two units also used collaborative decision-making processes to redefine the policy initiative and establish commitment and action to realize their new directions. They used groups of people to work on defining and preparing for their approach. According to our Department A informant, "We were changing the pedagogy in [the freshmen-level course]. . . . We would be the department administration and the graduate committee." And in College 1 an informant noted:

For years I wanted to do something very different. So I came to the management team of this college and I said I think we need to reevaluate what we have done. I think we need to have contact with the freshmen year. So, brainstorming, we came up with the idea that we would try this team-like experiment for our entering freshmen.

Compliance. Departments B through G promoted different responses to the policy (see Table 2). The issues they addressed in their implementations were those of following the policy and addressing its implications for staffing classes. They did not see a problem in their own unit for which NROR provided a solution beyond the generic and obvious admission that it is probably better to have trained and experienced GTAs

in freshmen-level classes. In effect, the departments were passive in defining the problems and reactive in their responses to them. They were “done to” and responded mechanically, rather than actively defining and creating responses.

In two departments, B and C, the problems and responses defined for them were more comprehensive and extreme than in the remaining four departments. These two departments were told to completely alter their approach to teaching their 1000-level courses after the dean’s office determined that NROR, in their cases, meant that full-time faculty members rather than GTAs would teach the courses. This suggests some opportunistic use of the NROR policy by the dean’s office staff, using the policy to affect specific changes when the conditions allowed. In the process, these two departments were able to use the extreme demands that policy implementation placed on them to get new resources in the form of additional faculty positions. As one department head explained it: “As a quid pro quo, the dean’s office let the department fill a vacant position that had been left unfilled for a time.” In addition, he was able to initiate “some discussions that will result in the transfer of a current faculty member to the department.”

The remaining four departments, D through G, implemented the NROR policy in a relatively straightforward manner. They did not feel that the problem of rookies and international GTAs applied to their departments. “In [Department E], again we never had any graduate students teaching classes so, although there were complaints, we don’t think we really had a problem.” And, according to another department head, “We have had some problems in our classrooms with our teaching assistants, but they weren’t necessarily rookies in the old days. Some of them were, but certainly not all of them, and I would certainly not say that all of the problems we had were the result of rookies.” Nevertheless, they rearranged teaching assignments to implement the policy as defined by the offices of academic affairs and the arts and sciences dean, assured that they would get the resources to fund the graduate students shifted from teaching assignments, and developed some form of training for new graduate teaching assistants.

All of the departments that complied with the mandate and did not redefine the policy for their own plans and purposes also used decision-making processes that were less elaborate and participatory. They simply duplicated, within their own department, the top-down decision processes to which they were responding. Comments from three different interviews were: “I simply assigned everyone to teach [the freshmen-level course]. . . . I just proposed my solution to the faculty and they generally accepted it without a big flap;” “I usually handled most of

that by myself,” and “I established the mentoring program for the graduate students and for the TAs, in particular.” A single individual took responsibility for making decisions and implementing the necessary adjustments. These departments had not been working on ways to adjust their freshmen-level instruction, so they did not have different frameworks for considering the “No-Rookies-on-Rookies” issues, nor did they generate different frames when confronted with the implementation of NROR. They also did not consider there to be a problem and therefore did not see a reason to act in ways that might lead to more significant changes. Instead, individuals responded administratively to the implementation and procedural actions NROR required.

Organizationally, the interpretations of actions and reactions nicely fit the organized anarchy model (Cohen & March, 1974; March & Olsen, 1979; March, 1994). The policy, ambiguously defined upon inception, evolved multiple and diverse meanings and implications over time in different departments throughout the university. The NROR policy also served as a vehicle to identify and remedy related but distinct problems in different units. One college used it as impetus to create a freshmen orientation program, and the other college used this policy to remove *all* GTAs from freshmen-level courses in two departments. Some departments saw the policy as an opportunity to improve the freshmen-level classes of the department, to initiate new graduate student training, or to create new funding mechanisms for graduate students and new faculty positions. Other departments saw the policy as an unwelcomed problem to be dealt with—it resulted in more work for heads and different work for faculty but achieved only insignificant changes instructionally or academically.

In effect, the people in each implementing unit had to make sense of the new requirements and find some way of accommodating the conditions of the policy within their units. The people we talked to did not accept NROR as a symbol of admitting to unacceptable educational practices or of verifying public concerns about foreign students acting as GTAs. They generated alternative constructions for the meaning of the policy mandate. Some interpreted the policy as a public relations posture which they had to accept as a matter of hierarchical compliance. Others were able to redefine the NROR initiative to fit previously acknowledged needs or problems. To this latter set of implementors, NROR became an expression of the institution’s broader concern for improvements in freshmen education and a conduit of resources for needs already acknowledged. These forms of meaning constructing, which required alternative definitions of demands and possibilities, had to include interchange that allowed the social aspects of sensemaking to

operate. In other words, it required “rich media,” the kind of direct personal contact that allows people to propose new meanings and negotiate them in order to settle on acceptable, new definitions (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Weick, 1995). The units that accomplished a proactive and opportunistic definition of the NROR policy had to operate more inclusive decision-making processes, including meetings in which people discussed the implications of the policy for their units and how best to respond to the policy.

Conclusions

The implementation of the NROR policy at OSU resulted in changes in freshmen-level instructional practices in the few units that fell under the formal definition of the policy. The scope and impact of the changes varied broadly. We have examined these changes and the factors influencing responses, including departments’ reactions to the public concerns that motivated institutional leaders to design and adopt the NROR policy.

Institutional Responses

As a result of the NROR program, approaches to training rookie graduate students and to freshmen-level instruction changed. Some departments employed some form of training for GTAs while also removing them from direct responsibility for teaching 1000-level courses. Freshmen instruction changed most in four units: College 1 designed and implemented its Freshmen Experience as a new approach to orienting and retaining freshmen, Department A conceived new 1000-level courses, and Departments B and C shifted instruction to full-time faculty and increased class sizes.

Decision-making processes also differed across units in this study. Units reporting minor changes in response to the NROR policy made top down decisions. Department heads or other designated individuals devised solutions and implemented them with relatively low levels of input from faculty and students in their departments. In contrast, units reporting major changes employed committees and collaborative decision-making structures. Department heads and college administrators recognized certain concerns and were able to link them with the president’s NROR policy. They engaged in garbage can decision making at its best (March & Olsen, 1979).

In effect, the institutional administration mediated the intent of the public through its definitions of the NROR policy within the institution; then the departments further mediated the institutional influences by

how they accepted or refined the problem identified. The forms of implementation ranged from major changes producing very different educational experiences for students to nominal conformity in response to the specific directives that produced only slight differences in freshmen-level classes. The nature and impact of the implementation were substantially dependent upon the context, needs, capacity, and resourcefulness of the first-line implementors. In effect, the actions taken were several layers removed from the desires of the public, in whose name the policy was pursued institutionally. We cannot say to what extent the public would be content with the NROR implementation, if there were awareness of the narrow application of the policy created by the definitions of “freshmen,” “rookie,” and “international” or the modest changes it produced in some of the implementing departments. As so often happens in policy implementation, the countervailing influences on the implementors and the discretion they exercise result in organizational actions that reward the opportunistic and resourceful as much as the population the policy is intended to serve. However, as a symbol of institutional responsiveness to public concerns for undergraduate education, the NROR policy no doubt served its purpose.

Advice for Institutional Practice

Given the study findings and our conclusions, advice for those designing institutional responses to public concerns is clearly two-sided. We must acknowledge the practical necessity of the ambiguousness of the NROR initiative and the accomplishments of the unfettered implementation processes, conditions that could be equally productive in policymaking on other issues and in other types of institutions. As Yanow (1996) suggests, “To see ambiguous policy language as a problem to be solved in order to improve implementation chances is to ignore the reality of purposive ambiguity: it temporarily resolves conflicts and accommodates differences, allowing contending parties to legislate and move on to implementing actions” (p. 228). Policy in such cases becomes a symbol, with messages directed to both external and internal constituents. Externally, the policy demonstrates the institution’s concern and willingness to take action to address a problem. Internally, it demonstrates the need to respond to external concerns. But beyond that, a loosely defined policy not only addresses the public concerns but also affords flexibility in implementation so that new activities can also address related concerns of internal constituents. For those charged with implementation, compliance enhanced by a creative linking to existing problems and goals can further unit development. In effect, a balance of external and internal concerns can be brought to bear on the policy issue.

In the case of the NROR policy, the president issued his policy mandate after limited consultation within the institution. That type of hierarchical policymaking is not the norm in American research universities, often viewed as the exemplars of organized anarchy (Birnbaum, 1988). However, in this case, the specific policy is more accurately viewed as a symbol for an intent to push larger efforts to attract and retain undergraduate students and a demonstration of the need to act quickly toward that goal. In theoretical terms, the NROR policy presented ambiguous goals and engaged unclear technology, fundamental traits of garbage can decision-making processes. It was these aspects of the policy and the flexibility they permitted for implementers, along with the supporting funding, that allowed NROR to avoid crippling obstruction at the departmental level.

The offices of the provost and college dean, of course, had to provide further specifications to the policy. These served, in many instances as the guides for understanding the policy and as the recipes for departmental compliance. However, all the actors in hierarchical levels above the departments remained open to multiple interpretations of the policy. Even more important, they also left the monitoring and oversight of the policy thin and unobtrusive. With the exception of College 2's Departments B and C, higher-ups did not impinge on departmental creativity in responding to the presidential charge. Again applying the terminology of garbage can decision processes, they allowed various solutions to become attached to the NROR choice opportunity. As March (1994) has noted, garbage can processes do not require unrestricted choice opportunities and the free flow of problems. Rather, "the critical element of a garbage can process is that there are elements of temporal sorting. Linkages are formed, in part, because of simultaneity" (p. 205). In the case of NROR, both deans' offices and Department A were able to join already active problems or solutions to the policy and to promote activity and secure resources to support their decisions.

Whether he intended it or not, the president's policy, by allowing for flexibility in responses and rationale, used the characteristics of an organized anarchy to best advantage. The policy set the direction, communicated key values (attend to our public, improve retention, act quickly), provided necessary resources, and allowed unit decision makers to exercise their professional judgment and design responses appropriate to their contexts. We believe the policy was more externally directed and symbolic. Internally, the policy allowed decision processes to work in a variety of ways for the institution. The result, at a minimum, was restricting the countries of origin and providing prior training for people teaching 1000-level classes. However, this policy also created opportu-

nities and provided the resources that allowed more robust solutions to other problems to be implemented within the institution.

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