

Chapter 15

Faculty as Leaders in the 21st Century University

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ABSTRACT

Increased participation in institutional leadership is one of the most important changes demanded of contemporary faculty. This chapter summarizes findings based on interviews of eight current academic leaders. Interviews employed a qualitative ethnographic approach, strengthened by Flanagan's classic critical incident technique with purposive convenience sampling. Leadership narratives from lived experiences of interviewees illuminate issues, problems, perspectives, and opinions about contemporary academe, including changes in higher education and with today's college students. This chapter discusses administrative leadership tools and provides insider insights about idealistic expectations for administrative leadership styles versus realistic actualizations. This chapter further discusses useful skills in four areas: communication, collaboration, organization, and work-life balance. The rich data from the interviewees provide rare perspectives of how contemporary faculty-turned-leaders can view and influence leadership responses to the changing face of higher education in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education faces profound challenges in the 21st century. As complex socio-cultural, political, economic, and technological forces impact how faculty teach, and how students learn, changes in higher education increasingly demand symbiotic changes in faculty roles. Although institutional leadership is one of the most important faculty roles and contributions today, fewer are stepping into the roles, a trend that began in the 20th century and appears to be increasing in the 21st century (Kezar, Lester, Carducci, Gallant, & McGavin, 2007). Apprising faculty of various leadership roles and their accompanying challenges ensures not just survival but success in an evolving climate. This chapter examines the reflections of eight individuals fulfilling institutional leadership roles in American post-secondary

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7438-5.ch015

education. Supported by an examination of evolving American colleges and universities and subsequent changes to faculty leaderships, data were collected using a qualitative phenomenological approach utilizing structured ethnographic interviews and lived experiences. The results provide rare perspectives on how contemporary “faculty-turned-leaders” can view and influence today’s higher education. Themes that emerged from data include: changes to student finances; reflections on today’s students; past experiences that have shaped institutional leadership; and self-acknowledged unfamiliarity with the scope of the various leadership positions. Four best practice skills that interviewees identified as helpful to future faculty-turned-leaders were: communication; collaboration; organization; and work-life balance.

BACKGROUND

Since the establishment of America’s first formal institution of higher education in 1636 (Morrison, 1935), U.S. institutions have continuously evolved. That is, as higher education grows and changes, new leadership perspectives and skills are needed. This section briefly reviews American higher education and the changes faculty members experience as they move into administrative leadership positions. This section also discusses the study’s methodology and describes participants whose views and opinions provide advice for faculty-turned-leaders in the early 21st century.

Evolving Post-Secondary Institutions

American higher education experienced significant changes in the 20th century and continues to face profound challenges in the current century. A range of social, political, economic, and technological factors has impacted the academe in complex, intertwined ways. While a detailed consideration of issues influencing changes is beyond the scope of this chapter, they have received ongoing attention both from within and outside the academe. Within higher education, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Education* provide continual coverage, while institutions such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) regularly publish reports addressing issues in higher education and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) (2018) publish their annual “Top 10 Higher Education State Policy Issues.” Outside academe, mainstream media like the *New York Times*’ Education Life section regularly examines topics of interest, as does the *Wall Street Journal*.

Furthermore, today’s issues are quite numerous. While some “have been there since Aristotle” to quote one of the interviewees (Stan), others are continually arising. For example, some issues discussed in the Trends section of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* are the corporatization of higher education, the need to increase graduation rates, reduce bias, increase diversity, and promote freedom of speech as well as a continued focus on inclusivity, gender identity, religion, and sexual orientation. In addition, the AASCU’s latest report (2018) states that this year’s hot-button topics including many proposed changes to federal policy, the federal tax bill’s pressure on state revenue and higher education funding, the impact of the potential Higher Education Act reauthorization, the fate of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), weapons on campus, sexual assault, and campus freedom of speech.

As far ranging and complex as these issues are, what is of concern in this chapter are concomitant changes for faculty roles. Not only do the complex socio-cultural, political, economic, and technological forces impact *how* faculty teach and *how* students learn, but they also demand increasing changes in faculty roles. One faculty role that is changing greatly is the call to “leadership,” which is the primary

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