

Empirical findings of the case studies also reveal that some universities appear to be more innovative than other universities within the same system. The author explains this as due to the organizational life cycle where newer institutions are less bound by tradition and extensive bureaucratic procedures. Also in the category of innovators are those institutions which are disadvantaged by either geographical position or small size.

This study provides educators with both a comprehensive understanding of curriculum innovations and also of government influence toward changes. Governments can learn ideas and suggestions of how to influence curricula innovativeness within higher education systems. It seems like a win-win situation for all readers.

I suspect this book will not be as easy to access as others in the higher education market because of its European publisher, but for any serious students of higher education curriculum and/or government influence within higher education, this study is a must read. You will not be disappointed in efforts to locate it!



Leaming, Deryl R. (1998) *Academic Leadership: A Practical Guide to Chairing the Department*. Jaffrey, NH: Anker Publishing Co. Pp. 332. Price: \$35.95 US.

Reviewed by Edward S. Hickcox, Faculty of Education, The University of Manitoba.

This book is a practical “how to do it” compendium of advice about managing a university academic department. Deryl Leaming, currently Dean of the College of Mass Communication at Middle Tennessee State University, was a Department Chair at four universities over a twenty year span. So he speaks from experience.

The book is divided into 26 relatively short chapters on topics ranging from the Habits of Successful Chairs to Managing Change. There are four broad categories as follows (my categorization): mechanics of the chair’s job, strategies for improvement, tough issues faced by chairs, and getting a grip on what’s ahead. Just about every conceivable aspect of the Chair’s job is at least mentioned.

Most chapters consist of personal observations and comments by the author, augmented by materials, forms, checklists, and general guidelines gleaned from various universities and also from articles and reports by chairs from other universities. For example, in the chapter "Dealing with Sexual Harassment," the author describes various kinds of sexual harassment, refers to some legal cases involving harassment, and provides two tables from a casebook about sexual harassment which provide tips to faculty for avoiding complaints and suggest ways to discourage harassment.

There is much to applaud in this effort. For someone contemplating accepting a chair's position or someone new to the job, there is a comment on just about anything that might come up in the course of a term of office. And there are specific guidelines for attacking problems. There is so much ground covered, in fact, that I imagine some likely candidates would be scared off. Only a super person survives the demands described here. Nevertheless, if you are on the job and don't know how to deal with a tenure case, you simply turn to the chapter on tenure and promotion and there will be suggestions, models, terms of reference, and the like. It is an administrative cookbook.

There are some good insights. The most interesting, for me, was the Chapter dealing with Generation X students, and faculty. Generation X people were born between 1963 and 1981. According to Leaming, Generation Xers lack identity, tend to be slackers, have a strong sense of deprivation and the like. He notes they are the first latchkey generation and as such have a strong sense of independence which, coupled with a strong sense of insecurity, makes for a peculiar kind of vulnerability.

Leaming, predictably, has a list of strategies for dealing with the new student population, strategies which boil down to providing lots of support but not exercising close supervision and not intruding on personal or professional lives. The advice is not really new, and can be applied to nearly everyone, as Leaming notes, but I think he is right to suggest a new breed of academic coming on line. It is a different challenge for leadership.

A lot of what is covered here is somewhat mundane stuff, and as a result, the writing tends to be pretty dry. Leaming tries to liven things up by referring often to his long administrative experience in universities, augmented by the occasional humorous anecdote. I wish he had done more of this.

There are some rather important limitations in this book, in my view.

While Leaming is not specific about the departments where he was chair, they must have been very large. He suggests that chairs have quite sweeping power relative to budget, hiring, dismissal and a number of other functions. In budgeting, for example, he mentions PPBS Systems, Performance Budgeting, Responsibility Center Budgeting, among others. He has quite an extensive treatment of how to go about fund raising.

In my own experience at various universities, I do not recall being part of any unit big enough for such sophisticated approaches to functions. There might be three or four faculty in a department. Perhaps as many as fifteen. Especially now with downsizing, departments are so small that you could caucus in a phone booth. I think what Leaming describes is really what deans in most Canadian universities do or even presidents.

In the department where I was chair for nine years, with a faculty of about ten, budgeting took hardly any time at all. Most money was earmarked from other levels or from research projects. I could decide to order coffee for meetings, I guess.

There are big departments, of course, at Canadian universities. The English Department at the University of Alberta has about 60 full time faculty and perhaps 20 part time. Leaming's basic approach would fit better there.

Is there anything left out? Well, yes. When I think of what I did mostly during my tenure as a chair, I recall meetings, preparing for meetings, attending meetings, organizing them, chairing them, writing them up. There is no chapter about meetings, and references to them are sparse. Perhaps it's different in the U.S., but in Canada attending meetings is what administrators do. What I would want to know about meetings is what to do when a faculty members erupts in anger and stomps out slamming the door? What do you do when you call a meeting and no one shows? To what extent does collegial decision making operate at the Department level?

A bothersome aspect of the book is Leaming's really superficial use of conceptual and theoretical materials. I am not sure a cookbook needs this kind of support at all, but Leaming, perhaps in some deference to his university environment, sprinkles in references to theoretical treatment in the literature. But they tend to be superficial.

The chapter on leadership is a good example. There is hardly a topic in administration or management that has been dealt with more thoroughly than leadership. Yet Leaming picks out a notion of leadership

which was popular perhaps fifty years ago, the idea that effective leaders possess certain common traits. The bulk of research these days focuses more on behavioural aspects, on contingency, on problem solving, on collegiality and participation. Learning proceeds after this opening generalization to list traits he thinks are essential for successful leadership. Pretty weak in my view.

Finally, I am concerned about the large emphasis on conventional wisdom. Nearly every page includes some quite self evident statements that are not all that useful. "If you care about your department, you will want all faculty members to perform at a high level." (p. 40). "All of us make mistakes, and when we do, we should be willing to admit them." (p. 115). "Just as you should be honest and forthright with faculty in your department, you must likewise be honest and forthright with your dean." (p. 237) There is nothing to argue with in these statements; but also there's not much to learn. To an extent, the whole book is like this.

Personally, I would prefer something which really analyzed the department chair's role relative to other positions, isolated and discussed in depth a few of its problems and tensions and offered some suggestions for future development of departments. Even questions about whether we ought to have departments would be interesting.

Also, I would want to come up with some thoughts that are perhaps a bit off the mainstream, provocative, not totally safe. The most fascinating administrator I ever worked for is Bernard Shapiro, now Principal of McGill. He had some different thoughts about university administration. For example, he said, you should not file away very much of what comes across your desk. You hardly ever need what's in the files, and you can cover easily if there is a request for a piece of paper. One on one meetings should last only a few minutes. Shapiro also avoided every group meeting he could possibly avoid, and he left meetings early if he saw a chance, even ones he was running. Consequently he had a lot of time to pursue his own interests. Not bad.

While there are pluses and minuses, I think it is fine to put this book on your shelf, especially if you can buy it out of the department budget.

