

The Resource Handbook for Academic Deans

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THIRD EDITION

American Conference
of Academic Deans

LAURA L. BEHLING | EDITOR



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LAURA L. BEHLING, EDITOR

Sponsored by the
American Conference
of Academic Deans (ACAD)

ACAD
AMERICAN CONFERENCE
OF ACADEMIC DEANS

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THE AMERICAN CONFERENCE OF ACADEMIC DEANS

The mission of the American Conference of Academic Deans (ACAD) is to provide academic leaders who share a commitment to student learning and to the ideals of liberal education with networking and professional development opportunities and to support them in their work as educational leaders.

ACAD is committed to the ideals of a liberal education and supports academic leaders in their work.

ACAD supports academic administrators as they strive to promote and support the ideals of a liberal education.

ACAD is a membership-driven organization that provides academic leaders with the resources they need to excel in their field.



<http://www.acad-edu.org/>



PREFACE

A few years ago, literally on the eve of becoming the chair of ACAD's board of directors, I had coffee and a chat with Joseph Subbiondo. Joe is currently the president of the California Institute of Integral Studies, but in the 1980s, he served a term as the ACAD board chair. In our conversation, he shared a thought that resonated powerfully. All of us who serve as academic administrators first completed advanced degrees and climbed up the professorial ranks. After spending years mastering the work of teaching and researching in our first disciplines, we were called to work for which we were mostly unprepared. We became academic administrators, and then, Joe explained, we had to master a second discipline.

The parallel really is striking. The process of earning a doctoral degree involves tremendous focus and, even today, does not commonly include purposeful preparation for college teaching. Rewards are the fruits of narrowing our field of view and excluding distractions. Even as part of a team, the doctoral student must demonstrate the ability to make and defend original contributions, and the doctoral degree becomes, in a sense, a license to do autonomous research. When we begin faculty work—teaching, doing research, contributing to campus governance, and serving the profession—we quickly learn that doctoral study really only prepares us for part of the job, and we must learn from our colleagues and from trial and error how to do the other parts. After several years, we might come to feel that we have achieved some degree of mastery of the first discipline.

When making the transition from faculty work to academic administration, we discover that there is little in faculty work that prepares us for administrative work. The community of colleagues on our campus that supported our mastery of the first discipline isn't there to support mastery of the second discipline. The mission of ACAD is to provide academic leaders who share a commitment to student learning and the ideals of liberal education with networking and professional development opportunities and to support them in their work as educational leaders. Joe Subbiondo put that mission in perspective for me: ACAD exists to help deans, provosts, and other senior academic leaders master their second discipline.

ACAD was founded in 1945. At that time, the college president leaders of the American Association of Colleges, the forerunner of today's American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), recognized the need for an organization to support academic deans in their work. ACAD and AAC&U have remained closely linked and jointly sponsor an annual meeting. For the past two years, ACAD has offered a highly successful Dean's Institute, an all-day workshop on the day before the annual meeting. ACAD also provides workshops at some of AAC&U's Network for Academic Renewal meetings.

In addition to its connection to AAC&U, ACAD enjoys a productive relationship with the Phi Beta Kappa Society, jointly sponsoring a biennial conference in odd-numbered falls. The first joint ACAD-PBK conference was on the topic of leadership for the liberal arts, and the subsequent conferences have explored liberal arts themes relating to global liberal education, science and the liberal education, and the humanities.

Online, ACAD provides its members a very active discussion list on which deans and provosts discuss issues and get advice from their colleagues. In fact, one of the most significant benefits of ACAD membership is the fellowship of other academic leaders. ACAD remains a "conference" of individuals, as opposed to an association of institutions, reflecting its long-standing commitment to networking and professional development.

One of ACAD's most important resources is *The Resource Handbook for Academic Deans*, and we are very pleased to introduce this third edition. In this significantly expanded and updated version of the *Handbook*, academic leaders speak to academic leaders, covering more than fifty topics organized in reference style. I have every confidence that experienced and new leaders alike will find this *Handbook* a valuable source of information and, I hope at least occasionally, inspiration.

Previous editions of the *Handbook* were published and distributed by ACAD, but we are happy to celebrate a new partnership with Jossey-Bass in publishing this edition. I am very grateful to my board colleagues for helping to nurture the partnership, especially Linda Cabe Halpern (James Madison

University), my predecessor as chair, and Marc Roy (Goucher College), the current chair. Our gratitude is also extended to Sheryl Fullerton, executive editor at Jossey-Bass for her commitment to building a relationship with ACAD. Laura Rzepka, ACAD's executive director, makes everything happen at ACAD, and her dedication to ACAD's mission is immensely appreciated. Finally, many thanks to Laura Behling (Knox College) for selflessly assuming the editorship of the *Handbook* and wrangling dozens of contributors.

Carl O. Moses
Susquehanna University
Past chair, ACAD board of directors



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The roles and responsibilities of college and university senior academic leaders—deans and provosts, and their associate and assistant deans and provosts—are many and diverse. From faculty hiring and evaluation to curriculum development and review, from working with presidents and other colleagues across campuses, to responding to external constituencies, including those who are involved in fundraising—the work of the college and campus academic leaders is not easy, and is becoming even more complex.

This third edition of *The Resource Handbook for Academic Deans* intends to provide valuable perspective and support on the challenges and opportunities senior academic leaders encounter, both deans of colleges within larger universities and deans or provosts who serve as an institution's chief academic officer (including those associate and assistant deans and provosts who work closely with such leaders). ACAD, partially through this *Resource Handbook*, provides support for a variety of senior academic leaders because the position of “dean” requires different roles and responsibilities depending on the type of institution. Such a diversity of experiences provides a diversity of perspectives, some of which may be more relevant to your particular position, but all of which provide valuable insight. As the major publication of the American Conference of Academic Deans (ACAD), the national association providing connection among academic leaders at senior leadership levels, this *Resource Handbook*, written by academic leaders and ACAD members from across the country, delivers that diverse perspective. Topics and approaches to each topic

have been suggested and written by these leaders who are drawing on their own experiences—senior academic leaders who have provided leadership for general education programs, who have understood the cycles of their own careers, and who have engaged in strategic planning, to name just a few of the more than fifty topics covered in the *Resource Handbook*.

You'll find a multitude of topics, many of which point to the new work that now takes an academic leader's attention, such as developing online courses and curriculum. You'll find entries that speak to the unique work of deans at different kinds of institutions, two- and four-year colleges, as well as universities, public and private. And you'll find that many of the topics are the ones to which senior academic leaders always must be attentive—faculty development, curriculum development, evaluation, teamwork, and, not surprisingly to those who have done or aspire to the work of a senior academic leader, the challenges of personnel and personalities on campuses.

Each entry has been written by an academic leader and reflects her or his own views and perspectives, based on personal experience. You'll find that brief scenarios begin each entry, allowing you to imagine the type of experience that you may encounter (or to find comfort in the similarities of the work we all do); entries then explore the issues raised in each scenario so as to provide you with ways particular concerns may be addressed. Each entry closes with several points of advice, including questions to ask when dealing with particular issues, perspectives to take, points to remember, or clear suggestions to help you in your work.

More than forty-five contributors from around the country and from a range of types of institutions contributed to the volume, underscoring the importance of collaboration, conversation, and collegiality. As many deans and other academic leaders will confess, this can often be lonely work, with few, if any, people to talk with on campus about the issues detailed in this volume. ACAD's *Resource Handbook for Academic Deans* understands that, and thus, offers readers a collection of perspectives on issues common to all of us. Thanks to the contributors for their willingness to share their wisdom and experiences, and to Lisa Ijiri, Mariangela Maguire, Pete Skoner, and two anonymous reviewers for their careful and thoughtful critiques of the *Handbook*. Just as ACAD remains true to its mission as a conference of academic leaders and colleagues, so too does ACAD's *Resource Handbook* provide a tangible resource for senior academic leaders to be thoughtfully effective for the good of their colleges and universities.

October 2013

Laura L. Behling
Knox College



The Resource Handbook for Academic Deans



PART ONE



BECOMING A DEAN



Preparing for a Successful Career in Academic Leadership

Understanding Your Role

Marc M. Roy
Goucher College

July 1, 2012. Charles Sessions approached his office and inwardly smiled. There was his name on the door: Dean Sessions. He could not help but feel some pride as he opened the door, set down his briefcase, and sat in the executive chair behind a beautiful desk, complete with a new computer, tablet, and smartphone. The moment did not last long. Dean Sessions felt a sinking feeling rapidly replacing the pride of a few moments ago when he noticed the piles of folders left by his predecessor. As his assistant knocked on the door and said, “The president would like to see you in five minutes, and you have an appointment with the dean of students at 9:30,” Dean Sessions had just one thought. “What have I gotten myself into?”

The feeling of being overwhelmed as a new dean is quite common. Because most deans start as faculty, very few deans have had formal leadership training. Instead, deans have risen through the ranks, all the while engaging in campus service and leadership, such as chairing committees, or directing departments, programs, or special centers on their campuses. Because they have knowledge of the institution, and the respect of the faculty, often these faculty leaders are tapped to serve as assistant or associate deans, giving them some chance to learn by watching their deans. However, there is not a “dean’s school” for aspiring deans, and many deans learn their roles and responsibilities as they begin their jobs. The learning curve can be especially steep if the dean has moved to a new institution.

The roles of deans vary considerably from one institution to another, but there are similarities. In small colleges, the dean is usually the chief academic officer and may also have the title of vice president for academic affairs or

provost. In larger universities, the dean is the head of a college and, along with the deans of other colleges, reports to the provost. Regardless of their scope of responsibilities and their type of institution, people who serve as senior academic leaders at the dean, provost, or associate or assistant levels, will encounter similar scenarios, challenges, and opportunities.

Metaphorically, deans work between a rock and a hard place, and the best way to move in that tight space is to realize that good relationships are essential for success. On the one hand, deans are champions for the academic division, especially for the faculty. On the other hand, they are administrative officers and must keep the best interests of the college in mind. These positions inevitably come into conflict. For example, the faculty may want larger departmental budgets, and there may be good reasons for increases. However, the college or university may not have the financial resources necessary to increase the budgets of some or all departments. What should be the highest priority? Should all departments be treated the same? Can the dean try to get additional funds? Any decision is likely to be met with criticism from one corner or another. Therefore, decisions about all matters need to be presented clearly so that faculty members can understand the rationale, even if they do not agree with the outcome. Even then, there is no escaping the position between the rock and the hard place.

Deans are first and foremost academic leaders working with faculty members to shape the curriculum and provide educational opportunities that are consistent with the college's mission and values. The dean needs to articulate an overarching vision while refraining from simply imposing this vision on the faculty. Along with the college or university mission and strategic plan, the vision should guide decisions about curricular changes, hiring of faculty and staff, and budgeting. There is a natural tension between serving as an academic leader and participating in shared governance. The faculty are responsible for most curricular decisions, and the dean must lead, often from behind. To walk between this rock and a hard place, a dean must be an excellent communicator.

The quality and timing of one's oral and written communication skills can lead to success or sink a dean's career. Seemingly small mistakes, such as typographical errors, can be interpreted as sloppiness or a lack of caring. Faculty members want to read high-quality academic prose, but vice presidents and staff members often prefer clear, brief messages. The faculty and staff want as much transparency as possible. Although some issues are necessarily confidential, openness helps to build trust and effective working relationships. How things are said is often as important as what is said. Unfortunately, electronic communication is limited in its ability to convey the feelings and intentions behind our words. This frequently leads to misunderstandings. Many successful deans invite faculty and staff members to speak

on the phone or in person rather than engage in lengthy e-mail exchanges. A quick way to choose a medium is to ask yourself: “Will it take more than a brief paragraph to explain the situation?” If the answer is yes, pick up the phone or call a meeting. Another useful guide comes from a question posed by a president: “Do you want your words to appear on the front page of the local newspaper?” In the age of nearly instant electronic communication, what we say, whether in writing or orally, can be shared around campus and across the country in moments, so choose your medium of communication as carefully as you choose your words.

Deans look forward to the opportunities to wrestle with big ideas and provide visionary leadership, and this is an important role. New deans can be surprised to learn that much of a dean’s daily work is management. At times, managing situations, people, and budgets interferes with the time necessary for “big picture” thinking and leadership. However, careful management and appropriate attention to detail are also important in being a successful dean. One must clearly articulate expectations and hold faculty and staff members accountable for their responsibilities. At the same time, the dean needs to empower individuals to carry out their duties. Department chairs in particular often feel as though they have very little power and influence, making their jobs quite difficult. Deans can help those individuals understand the influence that they do have. When the dean supports decisions made by chairs (and assistant or associate deans), this empowers those individuals and helps them to be effective leaders.

Being an effective manager and leader requires that deans be careful listeners, seeking out multiple points of view. Repeating back to another individual allows the dean to confirm that she has listened carefully: “What I hear you saying is that . . .” Some individuals will come to speak to the dean wanting little more than to be heard. They are not necessarily asking for the dean to solve a problem. After listening to a person air concerns, it can be helpful to ask what he would like to see done to resolve the problem and then guide the individual to find his own good solution.

Another role of an academic dean is problem solving when others are not able to do so or when it is not appropriate for them to solve the particular problem. This too can involve moving between a rock and a hard place. If the dean imposes a solution without careful listening and consultation, there will inevitably be pushback because the solution was handed down from “the administration.” Engaging faculty and staff members in problem solving allows the dean to suggest possible solutions and work with the individuals to find a solution that is acceptable to all parties. However, there are times when policy issues come into play and the dean must make decisions and impose solutions. Using careful communication to convey the decisions can mitigate any pushback that might arise.

Budget management is a critical part of a dean's responsibilities. The chief financial officer can be the dean's best friend or worst enemy. Building a good relationship with the CFO is important to success in managing budgets. Details are important. When seeking additions to the budget (or defending against cuts), clear, brief arguments are often the best way to make your case. Many college officers, unlike faculty, do not want to wade through lengthy arguments and justifications. The dean is also responsible for ensuring that departments and offices manage their budgets appropriately. A history of good management and balanced budgets is quite helpful when the dean is seeking increases in the budget. In contrast, frequent overspending will work against requests for additions to the budget.

Another important role of the dean is to hire (or oversee hiring of) the best individuals possible. One must build a strong team of assistant or associate deans and administrative support individuals. A team that you can trust and rely on in all situations is priceless. It should go without saying that overseeing the hiring of new faculty will have long-term implications for the college or university. Bad decisions can lead to difficult tenure cases, or worse. Faculty members who are good teachers and scholars but who do not get along with their colleagues can cause years of frustration and difficulty. If those individuals are tenured, it can hurt a department for decades. In contrast, hiring individuals who work well with their colleagues leads to strong departments. When the dean hires faculty members who are excellent teachers, scholars, and department citizens, and when those faculty members are supported and mentored and perform to their best ability, tenure cases can be a "slam dunk." Those individuals often become future leaders of the faculty who will work well with the dean's successors. However, search committees are not always in agreement (amongst themselves or with the dean) about the best candidate, providing the dean with another opportunity to glide between a rock and a hard place.

Many day-to-day responsibilities of the dean involve faculty and staff members, but the dean must work carefully also with other deans or vice presidents and the president. These relationships are also crucial to the success of a dean. In particular, a good working relationship with the dean of students can help to blend the boundaries between learning in and out of the classroom. Collectively, the senior leaders must support and protect the president, at least publicly. Making disagreements public can shorten a dean's tenure dramatically. Supporting the president publicly, even when disagreeing privately, requires deft movements. The communications skills mentioned above are essential in these situations.

Deans are also mentors and talent scouts. Deans need to mentor faculty, especially new department chairs, to help them develop the leadership skills necessary for them to be successful in their jobs. Fortunately, there are