

Leadership Role of the Department Chair in Private Colleges

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Abstract

The academic leader is among the most misunderstood management positions in the modern world. Little empirical research has been conducted on the academic leader, especially department chairpersons. With many decisions being made at the department level, many researchers reiterate the importance of department chairs in institutions of higher education. Also, within the academic department the chair has the most influence over faculty and academic support staff members; however, many institutions fail to recognize the importance of this unique and challenging position. Since the majority of important decisions being made at the department level there is considerable pressure and stress on the department chair. This study examined private college academic department chairs and their roles and responsibilities.

The purpose for conducting this study was to understand the unique role and dimensions of the department chair in the private college setting. Specifically, the study will analyze characteristics, roles, and responsibilities of four year private college department chairs. This was completed by exploring the research related to department chairs, and completion of a survey adapted from the Study of Higher Education and Post Secondary Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Maricopa Community College National Community College Chair Academy.

Introduction

Private colleges and universities offer students a myriad of choices in regard to educational opportunities. Education, engineering, business, science, and fine arts are some of the academic disciplines that students can choose to pursue. Private colleges have a unique place in the higher education industry, as institutions are often described as small, enrolling 3,000 students or fewer, and are fully committed to the education of the whole person. This typically takes the form of small faculty-student ratios, and reliance on faculty who are willing to commit to the ideal of the liberal arts experience (Morris & Miller, 2008). The benefits of these actions to define the private liberal arts college experience are multiple. Students enrolled in these colleges expect and report a greater sense of community (Gaudiani, 1997), a stronger, often personal relationship between students and faculty members (Pascarella, Wolniak, Seifer, Cruce, & Blaich, 2005), faculty who emphasize teaching (Henderson & Buchanan, 2007), an easier access to responsible, senior administrators by faculty and students (Pascarella, Wolniak, Seifer, Cruce, & Blaich, 2005) and students find an ability to express their individuality and experience diversity in ways and to a magnitude that is often not found in large public universities (Umbach & Kuh, 2006). This study explores the department chair as a front line manager in private institutions.

Department Chair: An Overview

The academic leader is among the most misunderstood management positions in the modern world (Gmelch, 2004). Little empirical research has been conducted on the academic leader, especially department chairpersons. According to Roach (1976), 80% of all university decisions are made at the department level. Gmelch and Burns (1994) wrote, "The department chair person has been identified as key in the management of today's colleges and universities"

(p. 79). With this many decisions being made at the department level, many researchers promote the importance of department chairs in institutions of higher education. Also, within the academic department the chair has the most influence over faculty and academic support staff members; however, many institutions fail to recognize the importance of this unique and challenging position (Seagren, Cresswell, & Wheeler, 1993).

With the majority of decisions being made at the department level there is considerable pressure on the department chair. Gmelch and Burns (1993) studied 564 department chairs and the levels of stress in their position. Their findings indicated that the department chair has a larger workload than most administrators in higher education. Gmelch and Burns (1993) wrote that an increased level of stress leads department chairs back to the classroom to avoid the daily pressures of department management. Department chairs feel two main types of pressure in their position: being effective leaders and productive faculty members (Gmelch & Burns, 1993).

The department chair is often caught in a state of flux because they have to be a mediator between faculty and administration (Tucker, 1984). Further, this position is the only academic manager that has to interact with people on a daily basis in which they have made decisions regarding their working environment (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). Deans, vice presidents, and presidents rarely have contact on a regular basis with all of their subordinates. Because of this, the decision-making process between department chairs and upper administration is different. While department chairs are not considered to be prestigious high profile positions in higher education, they are needed to insure the efficient day-to-day operations of the department (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999).

There are many motivating factors that inspire people to become department chairs. Financial gain, a sense of duty, personal development, and being in more control of the

environment are just a small number of the motivating factors in choosing to be a department chair (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993). Faculty who choose to become chairs have different intrinsic and extrinsic reasons that encourage them to become leaders of their department. While the motivation may be different for each person, there is one over- arching theme that develops regarding choosing this profession. According to Gmelch and Miskin (1993), the theme that developed most often was a willingness to serve. They had a desire to assist their fellow faculty members, and build a strong academic department (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993). While the financial gain and increased authority have benefits, most chairs said that was not the primary reason they elected to serve as department chair.

Department chairs generally do not have a great deal of managerial training before they enter the position. Institutions rarely have any on-campus preparation for a person accepting this position (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). They usually lack the administrative experience needed to effectively transition from a faculty member to a leadership position (Tucker, 1984). The primary qualification many chairs bring to the position is that they have gained a measure of personal and professional respect from their faculty peers (Gmelch & Burns, 1994). While this is a tremendous quality to have, this has little value pertaining to running an effective academic department. Many department chairs initially feel lost and overwhelmed in their new position because there is such role ambiguity (Seagren, Cresswell, & Wheeler, 1993). Department manuals and literature documenting procedures in a department are usually non-existent. Chairs are one of the few positions in higher education where people are hired to perform highly complicated tasks without any administrative training (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). On-the-job training is the standard approach for people entering this position (Strathe & Wilson, 2006). The learning curve can be extensive for this person because

of the lack of administrative training and experience. This can lead to frustration and despondency if the person is not assisted by the dean or fellow chairs in their first year of service.

According to Tucker (1984), there are characteristics and skills that an effective department chair will have. A good chair will have good interpersonal skills and the ability to work well with faculty, staff, students, deans, and other members of the institution. Psychological characteristics an effective chair will have include aptitude, physical stamina, maturity, judgment, attitude, reliability, and dependability. Also, they will be able to identify problems and resolve them in a timely manner. The chair will also be able to adapt their leadership styles to fit different and unique situations. Setting department goals and making satisfactory progress in motivating the staff and faculty to meet the established goals is another important skill. The department chair must search for and discover the best method in motivating their faculty members to meet objectives. Department chairs should be active in their profession and have respect for their professional colleagues. Tucker also emphasized that the position of department chair varies from department to department, and that each chair must use his or her skills within the institutional framework that correlates with the department and institution.

History of the Department Chair

There is little research that has been conducted on the historical development of the department chair (Vacik, 1997). Vacik wrote that the department chair position was being developed during the period of 1870 to 1925. According to Tucker (1984) the need for academic departments was necessary for institutions to categorize their faculty and operate efficiently. Several events in history influenced the formation of departments in higher education. The Civil War affected colleges because faculty and staff were called to military service. Another event

was the Morrill Act, which provided financial assistance to select institutions for starting programs in engineering and agriculture, which added more academic programs and faculty. Additional significant factors were the influence of business and industry wanting a more specialized and educated labor force.

As the society moved from being agriculturally based to more business and industry focused, the demand for colleges to produce business graduates increased. According to Dyer (1999), academic units began to increase in number from the 1880s to 1890s. During this time period, institutions realized there was a need to provide a more liberal education. Business and government agencies began to fund research in specialized areas, which led departments to have administrators to oversee the area. Also, during this time period, a hierarchy of professors developed, creating a competitive environment for faculty (Vacik, 1997). Both Dyer and Vacik wrote that the development of the academic units developed by outside companies who wanted specialized education related to their field rather than the changes originating within academe. Because of the development of separate academic units, the department chair positions were formed. It was necessary to have administrators oversee the operational functions of the department to insure they functioned at a high level.

Vacik (1997) wrote “the federal government and private sector business and industry had played a role in the definition and evolution of the department chair position” (p. 106). These factors were the primary reasons for academic departments developed leaders of their departments. Vacik also identified that “there are identifiable factors and incidents in the historical development of higher education which impacted the formation and growth of the department chair position” (p. 107). Vacik’s study indicated that there are 29 factors, incidents and trends that helped shape the department chair position into its current form. The primary

factor identified was the role of the government in creating legislation for occupational education that colleges had to implement within curriculum.

Roles of the Department Chair

The role of a department chair has changed since its inception over 100 years ago (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). The role can change often depending on the type of institution where the chair is serving (Seagren, Cresswell, & Wheeler, 1993). The main roles of a department chair are faculty developer, manager, leader, and scholar (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993). Each one of these roles can assist the department in growing into a stronger academic department. Also, these roles can conflict because the chair has many things occupying their time, and it is difficult to dedicate the time needed to each of these roles.

Faculty development is one of the primary roles of the department chair (Seagren, Cresswell, & Wheeler, 1993), as faculty are the lifeblood of the institution and are essential to the academic department's success. Also, the professional development of faculty will not only assist in the professional growth of faculty, but it will provide a solid foundation for the academic department (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). According to Tucker (1984), there are six guidelines to developing quality faculty members: aim for cooperation; think big, but start small; involve faculty members in planning development activities; be eclectic in approach; start where the chance of success are higher; institutionalize faculty development efforts (p. 135-136). Chairs should provide opportunities for faculty to be involved in research, teaching and service, and, it is important for the chair to keep abreast of professional development opportunities that are on and off campus such as conferences and workshops (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). Outlining the research, teaching, and service expectations of the department will assist the faculty in meeting this criterion. If the expectations

are not being met, it is the chair's responsibility to confront faculty members on unsatisfactory performance (Gmelch & Burns, 1993). Equally important as addressing unsatisfactory performance is keeping good faculty morale (Tucker, 1984). Faculty are often not publicly appreciated for work they have completed, and administrators often forget about faculty accomplishments because their work is behind the scenes, and not viewed by people outside their academic discipline. Encouragement will motivate faculty to strive for excellence regarding their workload expectations. Faculty need to see the chair as their advocate to foster professional development (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990). When faculty perceive the chair as someone they can trust, it can enhance the relationship between faculty and department chair leading to a better academic department.

Training faculty to be good instructors is a component of the department chair's professional development plan for faculty. Faculty are typically not required to conduct extensive research at private liberal arts institutions, allowing them to have a principal focus on teaching. Numerous private institutions have an institutional mission in which they will focus on teaching rather than focusing on research (Ferrari & Velcoff, 2006). Teaching is an area where the majority of faculty in private colleges dedicate their time and resources. Department chairs recognize the importance of instruction and assist the faculty in their department to develop skills in becoming effective teachers. *The Academic Chairperson's Handbook* has five strategies chairs can implement in improving a faculty's teaching performance (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990): Gather background information; Clarify the problem; Observe performance yourself; Facilitate improvement and practice; Monitor progress and advocate (p. 61). Each of these strategies allows the chair to develop faculty into professional instructors. While each strategy can assist the faculty member, the significant point is the involvement of the

chair in improving teaching performance. Department chairs should make a personal commitment to their faculty in order for them to succeed (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990). Equally as important is the idea that department chair must be engaged in good teaching practices within their own classroom to insure they are informed of the latest teaching methods (Ramsden, 1998).

Academic research has not been a major emphasis at many private colleges, however this trend is changing, as faculty are required to maintain a level of scholarship at numerous private liberal arts institutions. Department chairs recognize this change and are putting systems in place to improve scholarship. *The Academic Chairperson's handbook* has strategies to assist chairs in this area (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990): Detect a problem situation as early as possible by having a review process in place; Once you detect a problem visit with the individual to clarify the nature of and reasons for it; Identify a plan for improvement that incorporates strategies within your control; Follow-up plan (p. 71-72). These strategies are similar to those for improving the teaching performance. The goal of the handbook was to improve the academic research abilities of faculty. By implementing these strategies, it will enhance the scholarship ability of the faculty within the academic department. According to Bland and Ruffin (1992), there are 12 things a department chair can promote to have a productive research environment: Clear goals that serve a coordinating function; Research emphasis; Distinctive research culture; Positive group climate; Assertive participative governance; Decentralized organization; Frequent communication; Accessible resources; Sufficient size, age, and diversity of the group; Appropriate rewards; Concentration on recruitment and selection; Leadership with research expertise and skill in both initiating appropriate organizational structure and using participatory management practices (p. 71). Each

of these areas has a primary focus of creating a collegial atmosphere within the department.

When there is a collaborative working environment it will increase the research productivity of faculty in the department (Ramsden, 1998).

Research has indicated that being a good manager is a difficult task for a department chair. As part of the chair's responsibility they are required to supervise academic and support staff. This leads to scores of challenges especially pertaining to dealing with the personnel issues that arise within an academic department. Also, it is important to manage all the paperwork to insure policies and procedures are properly being implemented. Staff and faculty will conflict with each other because of their various roles at the institution. A chair will act as a mediator between faculty and staff of the department (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). A chair must insure both groups have their needs met as those needs pertain to their job functions. The role of manager means that the chair is able to get the day-to-day tasks completed in a timely manner. Transactional leadership is required in this circumstance, where the emphasis is on accomplishing the task rather than providing the person with a big picture perspective. Tasks that may be considered tedious, such as paperwork, are needed in order to run the academic department.

An overabundance of books have been written on leadership; however, there are not many studies on the leadership styles of department chairs (Whitsett, 2007). The skills needed for leadership are no different in higher education than they are in business. According to Ramsden (1998), academic leaders must be provided the means and resources to have the faculty and support staff perform at an optimal level. The department chair has to be a good leader in order to run an effective department (Ramsden, 1998). A chair can develop the skills necessary to be a good leader; however it will take time and training in order to attain this goal. The chair is

the leader and spokesperson for the department (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). With this responsibility comes the task of not demeaning the faculty and support staff in a public setting, but always creating a collegial work environment. According to Ramsden (1998), it is essential that the chair always provide a teamwork atmosphere that emphasizes compromise and collaboration.

Scholarship is a difficult task for any department chair because of the time involved in running the department but, this role is needed to keep current in their academic discipline. Chairs must protect their scholarly and intellectual interests by taking time to engage in these activities (Gmelch & Burns, 1993). Unfortunately, many chairs feel their scholarship is limited because of the time it takes to handle departmental duties (Gmelch, 1991). Scholarly work not only provides a way for the chair to keep current in their discipline, but it provides insight on what current issues may be occurring in the area of scholarship. Actively pursuing a scholarly agenda, the chair sets an example to all faculty within the department reminding them of the importance of academic research.

A developing role for department chairs is that of mentor (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990). The mentoring relationship applies to faculty and the support staff of the department. The chair has the responsibility of mentoring each of these groups in their professional development. Mentoring does not come trouble-free to department chairs, especially when it pertains to staff and faculty. With the majority of chairs entering the position with little to no administrative training, the incoming chair will not necessarily be accustomed to working with faculty and staff (Aziz, et al., 2005). Mentoring is like any other skill; it will need to be practiced in order to be mastered. Since many incoming chairs are faculty members they will

usually have some experience mentoring and advising students, important skills that will be needed when working with staff and faculty in a mentoring role.

Responsibilities of the Department Chair

There are a litany of tasks a chair must perform on a regular basis to have a successful department. A chair is required to complete a variety of tasks without prior experience.

According to Tucker (1984) there are tasks chairs must do on a consistent basis: Department Governance; Instruction; Faculty Affairs; Student Affairs; External communication; Budget and Resources; Office Management; Professional Development (p. 2-3). Within each of these areas is a complex maze of information and procedures necessary to keep the academic department functioning. A chair will need guidance from a Dean as well as other department chairs in order to assist during the early years of being a department chair.

Student affairs is an area that has not been previously emphasized for department chairs, but an important function within the department. Student affairs can be a nebulous term with many definitions surrounding this concept. The chair will need to provide leadership in this area by stressing to the faculty and staff the importance of having their students experience a well rounded education. Chairs must also recruit and retain students in order to have a good student population within the academic department (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). Student recruitment can be a difficult task based on the past inexperience of the chair; however, institutions need a strong student base in order to meet their financial obligations. Students' needs are extremely diverse when it pertains to their academic endeavors. Department chairs

must insure that the students have a quality academic experience inside the classroom as well as additional learning opportunities outside the classroom.

Financial resources are limited in most private college's academic departments (Amstutz, 1992). The chair must be able to prudently use the financial means at their disposal. With unique budgetary challenges the chair needs to find creative ways to generate and spend resources. There are many functions that happen in the budgeting process, and it is important to prepare the budget, monitor expenses, approve budget transfers and other accounting tasks within a fiscal year budget (Hecht, Higginson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). Many chairs do not have an extensive accounting background, and this can pose difficulties for chairs in their first year. Finding someone who has experience in this area such as a fellow department chair will be beneficial especially in developing a departmental budget.

There are many legal issues that can affect academic departments. Legal issues can be fear-provoking events in the career of an academic chairperson. The chair needs to take preventive and active measures to avoid legal action (Whitsett, 2007). These approaches do not involve the department chair knowing all aspects of higher education law; however, a chair should be knowledgeable in legal issues that could pertain to their department (Miles, 1997). According to Miles (1997) there are some general guidelines a chair can take in protecting themselves from liability: Know the state laws governing liability; Determine the college's policies and practices regarding indemnification and governmental immunity; Learn potential liability risks; Guard against risks on the job; Determine the insurance coverage your college provides; Investigate the possibility of obtaining supplemental individual coverage (p. 122). These preventive measures can assist in avoiding potential lawsuits that may be filed. Also, it is important to keep staff and faculty abreast of these legal guidelines to avoid potential legal

troubles in the future. Another aspect that a chair may encounter pertaining to legal matters is affirmative action (Tucker, 1984). Hiring practices are ever-changing and chairs are working with human resources to make certain that proper procedures are being followed when hiring faculty or staff.

The dean and department chair relationship is something that is important to the success of the academic department. Understanding the dean of the college will enhance the working relationship as a new department chair enters the position (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999). The chair has the responsibility to make the dean aware of issues and challenges that are occurring within the department. This assists the chair in building credibility with the dean by keeping him or her abreast of the happenings within the department. Pincus (1994) identified five areas which are necessary in keeping the dean informed on critical issues: Chairs must instruct the dean about their disciplines; Convince the dean that the department is producing; Keep the dean well informed; Clarify and document requests and proposals; Form and content of communication (p. 11). No other person can keep the dean informed on academic department issues better than the department chair.

The culture of the academic department is determined by the department chair. When new department chairs take over departments they need to be aware that changing the culture of an academic department should be implemented at a slow pace (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990). There are some basic strategies that can be used when implementing change: Let things evolve naturally and slowly; Spend the 1st year observing and getting acquainted; Visit with other chairs to see how they handle situations; Look at the new “vision” as a long term commitment (p. 26). Taking it slow when implementing change is a common practice; it does not imply the chair denounces their responsibility as it pertains to the department (Creswell,

Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990). Anytime new chairs try to change the existing culture, they will encounter a resistance to the changes by some individuals (Tucker, 1984). Change can be difficult for an academic department especially if a culture has been in place for several years. According to *The Academic Chairperson's Handbook* there are several steps that need to be taken by the chair to assist in the change process. The chair will need to create a positive work environment, consider the environment of the department as a family, encourage openness and honesty as the next steps in the process, and provide feedback on a regular basis to provide direction (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990).

Gmelch (1991) wrote in his study that there are 80,000 scholars that serve as department chairs and, that 25% of them will need to be replaced every year. Stress is a leading contributor to turnover and little empirical research exists regarding department chair stress. (Gmelch and Burns, 1994). With this level of turnover at such a key position, steps need to be taken to insure the success of the department chair. Gmelch and Burn's (1993) study listed some ways to reduce the stress level of the department chair at the institutional level: Restructure the position; Purge unnecessary administrative duties; Reverse the hierarchy; Protect research interests; Train for leadership; Manage time.

They also had personal strategies for the department chair: Time management; Conflict resolution strategies; Enabling constraints; Academic productivity. Each of these steps according to the study is needed to assist the chair in alleviating the excessive workload they must face on a regular basis. Gmelch writes that department head stress must be understood in order to reduce the turnover ratio.

Section Summary

The department head has many roles they must perform in their position. They must be a scholar, teacher, mediator, and mentor to staff, faculty and students. Seagren, Cresswell, and Wheeler (1993), wrote that even though the department chair position is crucial within higher education, it is often overlooked by institutions. Academic departments generally do not invest time and resources into training their departmental leaders. Stress and burnout are issues the department head faces on a regular basis. With many responsibilities that are requested of department heads, it will be important that they have the skills necessary to lead the academic department.

Academic Leadership

According to Strathe and Wilson, “Academic leadership is not at the end of a pathway; rather it is in the middle – a place to which one goes to and comes from” (p. 5). Faculty have traditionally served as the primary source of academic leadership. Most faculty that enter academic administration will begin at the department head level. If successful at this position they will progress into different administrative positions with more responsibility. This progression is different than that of business leaders since many academic leaders have not been trained to work in administration. According to Blackmore and Blackwell (2006), leadership in academic development requires the leader to have an understanding of research, teaching, consultancy and other areas of academic work. Also, the academic leader must understand how these areas relate to each other. Blackmore and Blackwell wrote, “The head’s role in academic development requires a deep understanding of and connection with faculty roles, as well as an increasing engagement with organizational needs for continuous learning and improvement” (p. 384).

Kouzes and Posner (2006) asked the question about leaders being born or made. They humorously wrote that all leaders are born, however a true leader is made. Leadership is a skill that is learned through experience and training. According to their book, anyone can learn to lead with the proper training. Kouzes and Posner wrote “Exemplary leaders are interested more in others’ success than in their own” (p. 10). Leaders who were interested more in serving others than themselves were the ones that generally are more successful and, had a greater impact on the people they lead. There were no special set of character traits such as intelligence, physical features or soci-economic background that enabled people to be leaders. Leadership is learned through life experiences and fellow leaders. While leadership in higher education has received little attention, in recent years more research has emphasized the importance of good leadership within the academic environment.

In Daft’s (2005) book he wrote about an historical overview of leadership in which leadership theories were categorized into six basic approaches. The first theory was the great man theory, in which leaders were born with leadership traits and natural abilities of power and influence. Second, was the trait theory which researchers used in the 1920’s. Leaders had particular traits or characteristics, such as intelligence and energy that distinguished them from non-leaders. Third, was the behavior theory which was used in the 1950’s, and focused on what leaders do rather than who they are. Fourth, was the contingency theory, where leaders analyzed their situation and modified their behavior to improve their leadership effectiveness. Fifth, influence theory examined the influence between leaders and followers. Sixth, was the relational theory which researchers have used since the late 1970’s, that states that interpersonal relationships are the most important facet of leadership effectiveness. In addition, leaders build relationships through motivation, empowerment, communication, leadership, and diversity.

Even though elements of all these theories are applicable in leadership today, new theories are forming such as the emerging leadership theory. This theory focuses on change being an integral part of leadership that leaders must embrace. With the ever changing higher education environment of the 21st century, attention has turned to how leaders create changes within followers and the organization that respond to and keep pace with change in the environment. Daft (2005) wrote that leaders need to strive to create learning organizations, in which each person is involved in solving problems so the organization can grow and change to meet ever changing challenges. He also wrote, “rather than relying on hierarchical control, leaders build whole organizations as communities of shared purpose and direction” (p. 25).

Gmelch (1991) wrote about a leadership crisis that is present in higher education. Leadership in higher education faced a difficult time because of the lack of quality leaders. Gmelch and Wolverton (2002) wrote “leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth” (p. 3). According to Gmelch (2004), academic leaders must say that the time for amateur administration is over, and leaders must take a more active role higher education. Strathe and Wilson (2006) wrote, “Significant changes in the past several decades have made the academic administrative role in our nation’s colleges and universities much less attractive than has previously been the case” (p. 5). The metamorphosis from scholar to leader takes time, dedication, and patience. Also, leaders do not develop by being in a vacuum. According to Gmelch, (2004) leadership development is an inner journey, and often is the most complicated part of professional growth. Further, self knowledge, personal awareness and corrective feedback must be a part of a person’s leadership journey (Gmelch, 2004). Leadership is a painstaking process that takes many years to perfect, and is a skill not everyone develops. According to Gmelch (2004), 65% of people who accept a department chair position return to

their faculty position after serving in an administrative role. Many past department chairs refuse to return to administrative duties because it is not worth the hardship they must submit themselves to on a regular basis. Unfortunately, there are many qualified faculty members who have served in the past, or are unwilling to serve because of the administrative challenges involved in being a department chair.

Transitioning from faculty member to an administrative leadership position has opportunities and challenges associated with the change. According to Strathe and Wilson (2006), academic administrators have a precipitous learning curve in a new leadership position. The responsibilities by faculty and administrators are uniquely different requiring a different skill set. Also, with this change comes interaction with new personnel. The study indicated that peer relationships change instantaneously, causing friction between former faculty colleagues and developing new peer relationships with fellow administrators. While not all former peer relationships will be severed, the time to interact with former colleagues is significantly reduced because of the new position. With a reduction in time to spend with former faculty colleagues, there can be resentment and jealousy that develops because of the change.

Exceptional leadership can make academic work in higher education pleasant for staff and faculty (Ramsden, 1998). Ramsden surveyed 20 academic leaders to ascertain what qualities good and bad academic leaders had that made them stand out. There were several qualities that emerged from Ramsden's study as common traits leaders should have: a vision for scholarly endeavour; enthusiasm for research and teaching; clearly stated goals; commitment to the job; leading by energetic example as a teacher and scholar; honesty, integrity, fairness; open and participative decision-making; listening to staff and valuing their opinions; efficiency as a manager; getting things done with minimum fuss and maximum effectiveness; developing and

mentoring staff through delegation and support for learning; encouraging initiative; rewarding and praising good performance and not accepting poor performance; commitment to change and innovation.

The study also acknowledged traits that were least desirable in academic leaders: arrogance and self-interest; excessive leading from the front; being uncommunicative; being adversarial and confrontational; dominating meetings; complaining about what cannot be changed; not standing up for the department when its interests diverge from those of senior management; putting excessive emphasis on entrepreneurial activities and external ventures to the detriment of the department; favoritism; secretiveness; making decisions without consultation; isolating themselves; being disloyal. Ramsden's study indicated that leaders who took a vested interest in being honest, open, and fair to the people that follow them are the traits that followers desire in a leader. When a leader is dishonest and selfish, followers are less likely to respect and follow that leader. Academic leaders, according to the study were more successful if they put the needs of the staff and department above their own career goals and aspirations. Leaders should create an environment where their leadership can grow as well as instill leadership traits in future leaders. Many factors are involved in leadership, and an exemplary leader will always be honing skills and instilling leadership qualities in followers.

According to Kouzes and Posner (1995), there are five practices of successful leaders: challenging the process; inspiring a shared vision; enabling others to act; modeling the way; encouraging the heart. These practices allow a leader to be a change agent within their organization. The primary focus on these strategies was helping the individuals that follow this leader perform at their best. When a leader invests time and energy in empowering their followers, this ultimately leads to a better organization. Academic leaders that have a mission to

develop their followers personally and professionally generally have effective departments within an institution.

According to Ramsden (1998), “Leadership as seizing opportunities and realizing them in practice” (p. 94). The central theme to this quote is academic work is realized through clear goals and vision. Also, a good leader does not just expound on goals, but puts them into action. By putting goals into action, followers can see tangible results. Leaders need to practice using reflection to learn from past experiences and perfect the art of leadership (Gmelch, 2004). This will help the leader learn from mistakes as well as enhance skills as a leader.

Leadership is about always changing and adapting to the institutional environment (Ramsden, 1998). Depending on the circumstances, many academic leaders rely on the situational leadership theory. In this leadership style, the leader relies on the interaction between them and their followers to determine the best solution to the issue. This ever changing style allows the leader to quickly make decisions in the academic environment. This style takes in all factors including instincts to make a decision. Situational leadership is necessary when there is not time to form committees and seek others for assistance when making a decision.

Filan and Seagren (2003) wrote in their study that academic leadership requires many different levels of training for a person to be an exemplary leader. Leadership training in the past has been reserved for the top level administrators in higher education. There have not been many opportunities for midlevel managers such as department chairs to be involved in this type of training. This is a perplexing issue considering that department chairs significantly outnumber upper level administrators in higher education. Also, Seagren and Filan wrote that higher education is different from the private sector because the majority of leadership training in the corporate world is provided to the midlevel manager. There are some institutions that are starting

their own leadership academies to address the lack of training for their managers. Maricopa Community Colleges started an informal training process for their midlevel managers to compensate for the lack of training by their institutions. This has now evolved into an international meeting named the Academy for Leadership Training and Development. The goal of the academy is not to prepare people to be future administrators, but to give midlevel managers the tools necessary to be transformational leaders within their academic department. The skills acquired in this training will assist the department chair in being more effective in their leadership and decision making abilities. According to Seagren and Filan, there are six critical components to leadership that should serve as the groundwork for training department chairs: understanding self; understanding transformational leadership; establishing and maintaining relationships; leading teams; leading strategic planning and change; connecting through community. These six areas prepare a foundation necessary for midlevel managers to become better leaders within their institutions. Also, with this foundation managers have a new confidence that allows them to make decisions quickly, thus helping the institution react quickly to issues within higher education.

Diamond (1996) wrote that since most new department heads have little administrative experience with the tasks they must perform institutions must offer more opportunities for training. Institutions must have workshops to address issues of stress management, budgeting, and evaluation of teaching. Diamond also wrote that new department heads need to attend meetings on administrative topics, and order reference literature to learn how to handle aspects of their position. Another training component according to Diamond, is establishing a council of department heads. Arizona State University established a council as an effective way to develop

strong departmental leadership. This allowed departmental leaders to learn from people who held the same position in different academic areas.

According to Yelder and Codling (2004), several faculty in higher education are promoted based on their research capabilities and not their managerial abilities, which in turn may not make them good operational managers. In comparison, people promoted in vocational education institutions are promoted based on their managerial qualities. Their study developed a model that looks at sharing academic leadership responsibilities at the department level. The primary goal of the model is to integrate the operational manager and academic leader into a cohesive group thus, creating a better working atmosphere. In their model they developed seven principles to shared leadership: The roles and functions of academic leadership and managerial leadership must be equally valued by the institution; academic leaders and managers must collaborate and work effectively as a team; all academic staff in leadership positions must be actively engaged in teaching and or research; administration should be undertaken by competent administrators, not academic and managerial leaders; academic leadership positions should be filled by those who have already achieved academic seniority; managerial leadership positions should be filled by those with relevant experience, qualifications and expertise; both academic and managerial leaders must be committed to currency of knowledge and expertise relevant to their positions. Each of these principles is specifically designed for the midlevel manager in higher education.

Section Summary

Research related to academic leaders is similar in nature to the research regarding leaders in business. Leaders must have a vision and a desire to assist their followers in achieving their maximum potential both personally and professionally. Leaders that take an active role in

developing their followers will most often have a department or organization that is successful. There is one major difference between leadership in the corporate world and the academic world. Many researchers are concerned that there is a lack of leadership or a leadership crisis that is happening in higher education. Academic leadership is becoming increasingly less attractive to individuals based on the amount of stress and lack of incentives to become an academic leader. Literature regarding academic research writes that many institutions will continue to struggle if action is not taken to improve the leadership within higher education.

Private Colleges

In the United States private colleges have been in existence for almost 400 years. The first private college was called Newborn, which was founded in 1636. Newborn later changed its name to Cambridge, and then eventually to its current name of Harvard. According to Schuman (2005), including Harvard there are nine institutions of higher learning founded before the Revolutionary War that are still in existence today. The institutions are as follows with the year they were founded: William and Mary (1693), Yale (1701), Princeton (1746), Columbia (1754), the University of Pennsylvania (1755), Brown (1765), Rutgers (1766), and Dartmouth (1769). These institutions were critical in the formation of today's private college. They defined a pattern for American higher education that was distinct from European institutions. After the Civil War, there was a tremendous growth both in student enrollments and the number of private institutions. Also, during this time period private institutions began appearing for women and African-Americans. The number of private institutions continued to rise in the number of institutions up until World War II. After the War, the growth in higher education was primarily

in the 2 year college as well as regional state colleges and universities. While the number of private colleges have dwindled, they are still a viable option for many college students.

Initially, private institutions began to meet the needs of the church by training clergy and future leaders of their congregation. The church deemed it necessary to have literate and well-trained clergy instructing their congregation. However, in the 1700's colleges began expanding their course offerings to increase the knowledge of clergy and ordinary individuals. Courses such as mathematics, surveying, modern languages, geography, and other disciplines began to appear in the curriculum (Lucas, 1994). The addition of these new courses allowed a different kind of student to enter college for an education.

Private higher education in the United States was not easily accessible in its infancy stages. There were a couple contributing factors for this. First, education was principally intended for people who were pursuing religious careers, and planning a full-time career within the church. Second, there were not many institutions of higher learning before 1800. According to Lucas (1994), it is estimated that no more than one in every thousand people attended a college in existence before 1776. Furthermore, the number of people completing a bachelors of arts degree during this time frame is even smaller.

Birnbaum (1988) wrote about the private institution in his book *How Colleges Work*. He expounds on a fictitious institution named Heritage College where the college is located in a picturesque setting with many older buildings and manicured grounds. The students are between the ages of 18 and 21, and finished in the top percentage of their high school class. The enrollment of the college is about 1,000 students and there is a family atmosphere within the institution.

According to Birnbaum, the mission of most private colleges is to provide liberating education in the Judeo-Christian tradition as preparation for a life of individual meaning and social purpose. Birnbaum (1988) talks about Heritage College and how they have a collegial atmosphere where there is no real leader and the decisions are made on consensus basis. This type of decision making helps everyone feel involved, and that they have a say in how the college is managed. Those in leadership positions are generally considered amateurs in this environment, and have been promoted based on teaching or research prowess (Yielder & Codling, 2004). Typically, the administration came from within their own faculty ranks with little to no administrative experience. These leaders tend to know the institution well; however, they may not be as savvy when it pertains to implementing policies to make the college more efficient. Administration will not have a lot of experience at other institutions, hindering the decision-making process because they may not have the benefit of seeing different perspectives from multiple colleges and universities. The institution must have administration with a diverse background to provide insights that are unique and different to the institution they serve. A private college promotes a sense of community according to Birnbaum (1998). The culture allows a family type atmosphere where faculty and staff are personally invested in one another. Staff and faculty have a say in college operations causing them to feel involved. Private colleges have unique attributes no other institution will have. They are typically smaller than the regional institutions in student enrollment and the number of faculty and staff employed. Culture, leadership, and how the day-to-day operations perform are different at the private college. These differences offer opportunities and challenges when it pertains to how the institution operates.

According to Obenchain, Johnson, and Dion (2004), private colleges and universities are facing extreme financial operating conditions. Funding sources are decreasing while the cost of

operating a private institution is increasing. These institutions are highly dependent on tuition and fund raising to meet their operational costs. Also, they need to develop new programs as well as implement new technology to be competitive in the higher education market. The authors' findings were that private institutions have different operating values and cultures. Many private institutions are smaller and tend to emphasize values such as morale, cohesion, and the human element, while public institutions tend to be complex, large entities that operate more on rules and regulations. The organizational type will affect the innovation strategies of private institutions.

Private higher education institutions have traditionally relied heavily on tuition revenues for their operation. Historically, these colleges have realized 80-90% of their operating revenue through tuition funding, making them reliant on their ability to attract and retain tuition-paying students (Gansemer-Topf & Schuh, 2006). This means that they are not only more tuition dependent than their public university counterparts (Summers, 2004), but that they must forecast expenditures and revenues with tremendous accuracy.

Higher education has not, however, remained stable in terms of their operations and expenditures. Areas such as energy costs have more than tripled (Blumenstyk, 2006), technology-related expenditures have moved from luxury items to necessities (Lu, 2003), and campus infrastructure, including both traditional capital construction and building upgrades to beautify campuses have dramatically increased operating costs. To some extent these expenses are recurring, meaning that in order to attract and retain students, more resources must be invested into campus facilities and offerings, thus increasing expenditures while also bringing more students to campus paying tuition (Morris & Miller, 2007).

Rising costs have drastically impacted the private college in recent years. These institutions have been forced to reduce their budget and increase tuition in order to meet the financial demand necessary to run a private college. Since 1997 aid to college students has increased by 82%, however this has not covered the rapid increase of college tuition (Sander, 2007). Also, Sander wrote that two surveys from the College Board indicate the cost of higher education is outpacing inflation, family income and sources of grant aid. According to Sander, private four year institutions increased tuition and fees 6.3% in 2006, with the average cost of tuition and fees being \$23,172. This was an average increase of \$1,404.

Enrollment Management has become a concern with private colleges in the last decade. As these institutions rely heavily on tuition revenue to meet operation expenses, the pressure to have steady enrollments has substantially increased. Prospective students are now shopping for the best deal they can obtain at a four year institution. Private colleges must attract and retain an adequate student population (Tang, Tang, & Tang, 2004). Stewart (2004) wrote that there are five major challenges for enrollment managers. First, institutional data and research were essential components for planning, and implementation of an enrollment strategy. Second, the enrollment manager was to be exceptional at promoting teamwork among various constituencies on campus. Third, enrollment was an institution wide issue. Fourth, the enrollment manager was expected to be aware of technical possibilities related to the implementation and maintenance of a student information system and technology used to serve students in general. Finally, "financial resources were limited throughout higher education institutions, so the ability to advocate for resources and effectively spend funds was a critical skill for enrollment managers" (p. 25).

Another area of importance to the four year institution is securing external funding. According to Harris-Vasser (2003), there has been a decline in resources available to colleges

and universities causing institutional budget cuts. This is affecting private and public institutions causing administrators to look at other financial means for support. Most fund raising programs look to their alumni to make up the majority of the financial donations. Harris-Vaser's study gave four recommendations in assisting in the fund raising process. First, that separate offices are responsible for building and nurturing relationships with alumni and the corporate sector. Second, that the fund raising offices are adequately staffed with trained personnel and equipped with the state-of-the-art equipment and software for maintaining and tracking financial data. Third, that fundraisers be limited to no more than two per year. Finally, that pre-alumni organizations are established to build and enhance positive working relationship with younger alumni for future support.

Decisions in the private college are not always made based on policies and procedures. The mission and purpose will play a role in the decision making process (Greenbank, 2006). The mission of the institution can determine what choices are going to be made. Mission and purpose can affect everything from the admissions standards to the strategic plan (Marshall, 2004). Private institutions may have certain moral or religious standards that must be followed before a student is admitted and after a student has matriculated. Also, these standards often times apply to the staff and faculty.

Faculty often struggle because they want to work collaboratively with faculty and administration, but are locked into institutional structures and cultures that reinforce individualistic work (Kezar, 2005). Also, private institutions tend to be more concerned about their rankings in *U.S. News and World Report*, and essential decisions are based on this criterion (Chang & Osborn, 2005). With institutions relying on rankings to assist them in recruiting and retaining students this has become a key component in making decisions. Research shows that

having people participate in the decision-making process assists the institution (Greenbank, 2007). When you have a culture that promotes relationships and all inclusive decisions, staff and faculty feel valued.

Section Summary

Private Colleges have been in existence for several hundred years in the United States. These institutions started to meet the needs of the church for individuals pursuing a career in full-time ministry. As society changed from being agriculturally based to a business and industry mindset, they demanded a more skilled labor force. Private colleges began changing curriculum to meet the needs of business and industry. These institutions thrived for many years, and experienced their greatest growth after the Civil War. After World War II, the number of private colleges decreased. Other types of institutions became an option for returning soldiers, and other student populations seeking higher education. Currently, the private college is facing some difficult issues. There is an increasing amount of pressure to maintain high student enrollments to meet the budget constraints. Also, there is a need to increase endowments to fund scholarships and capital campaigns to keep the institution competitive. Mission and Purpose will always be a core component of these institutions. Private colleges use their mission and purpose to make decisions and plan for the future.

Summary

The current chapter was designed to examine the roles, responsibilities, and challenges facing private college academic department chairs. The literature review consisted of studies pertaining to academic department chairs, division chairs, academic leadership, and private colleges. The literature on academic department chairs indicated the challenges facing them are vast and many. The department head has many roles and responsibilities they must perform in

their position. They must be a scholar, teacher, mediator, and mentor to staff, faculty and students. With so many tasks that they must perform, they often feel they are caught in the middle when it comes to their position (Seagren & Miller, 1994). According to the research, department chairs were unprepared to assume their role. They often were good faculty members who were trained in teaching and research, but had very little administrative training.

Research revealed that there is a lack of leadership or a leadership crisis that is happening in higher education. Academic leadership is becoming increasingly less attractive to individuals based on the amount of stress and lack of incentives to become an academic leader. The literature revealed that for institutions to thrive it is imperative that there is adequate leadership. Very little training is given to the academic leaders causing many of them to struggle in their administrative position. Many academic leaders return to the classroom after they serve in an administrative capacity. Unfortunately, many refuse to serve in another administrative role because of the stress involved in these positions. The related research regarding academic research revealed that many institutions will continue to struggle if action is not taken in improving the leadership within higher education.

The private college has a vast history in higher education, and in the American higher education system it can be traced back to the 17th century. These institutions were primarily designed to meet the needs of the church in training clergy and church leaders; however, over time the private institution evolved enhancing the curriculum to meet the needs of business and industry. Currently, these institutions are struggling to compete and remain fiscally sound. Many private colleges have had to focus on external funding and more enhanced enrollment strategies to be a viable option in the 21st Century.

Discussion

Private colleges have many challenges and opportunities facing them in the near future. The majority of private institutions are small institutions with enrollments of less than 2000 undergraduate students. Being smaller allows for some unique opportunities that larger research institutions cannot offer. An overall sense of community was associated with a private institution. The majority of students live on campus or in close proximity thus, providing a collegial atmosphere. Many private colleges are located in rural areas which provide economic and social benefits to the surrounding area. The private institution has been a part of higher education in the United States for 400 years, and will continue to meet those educational needs for many more years.

Private colleges have a distinctive niche that they fill in terms of to the educational needs of students. They often have a religious affiliation and a mission and purpose that are different than public research institutions. These institutions not only train future church leaders they also give an education to students in the context of one's faith. Students who want a religious influence on their education find the private college a viable option.

Opportunities outweigh the challenges in private institutions; however there are some challenges that need to be addressed in order for the private institution to survive. Tuition, salaries, and energy costs continue to rise for private colleges causing financial strain on the majority of institutions. Enrollment management has become an increasing challenge in the last 15 years. With private institutions being primarily tuition driven the need to recruit and retain students is important. Students have more options available to them than ever before. Private colleges are not only competing with other private institutions they are now competing with state and local institutions. Salaries for staff and faculty have been an ongoing issue at private

institutions. The ability to attract high quality staff and faculty is necessary for the institution to be successful. Private institutions are most likely not going to be able to compete with state funded institutions on salary amounts; however they need to be competitive in order to have high quality instruction and services.

The researchers indicate many administrative leaders within higher education will be retiring in the next decade. This will lead to a leadership gap that will need to be addressed. The literature revealed that good leadership can make academic work enjoyable for staff and faculty. It will be important to have leaders who are transformational leaders. These leaders will be able to address many of the challenges facing private institutions. Many future leaders start their leadership journey as a department chair. The success of being a department chair often times determines whether or not they will continue to work in an administrative capacity.

Department chairs will have a vital contribution to the success of private colleges and universities in the 21st Century. Training will be a necessary component to insure their success. With many having little to no administrative experience it will important to mentor and train new department chairs. Countless chairs return to faculty status rather than progress to administrative positions because of the frustration they faced running a department. This trend will lead to a leadership crisis in higher education causing many private institutions to hastily hire people in administrative positions. Proper training and mentoring can reverse this trend helping private colleges to become more successful.

Department chairs are often over-looked when it pertains to the efficient operation of an institution. The position is not in the lime light and rarely does anyone notice if a department chair is doing an outstanding job. Unfortunately, it is only when something goes wrong that people notice the department chair. Many scholars refer to this position as stuck in the middle

between faculty and administration. This creates many situations where the department chair is in a no win situation. While the department chair is not necessarily considered a glamorous position every institution must have them in place. Their leadership is an essential part of the success of an academic unit. If they make a poor decision it is likely to have a more immediate impact than that of administration. Their decisions affect the day-to-day operations of the academic department.

The future of private institutions depends on having good department leaders in place. With research indicating many chairpersons retiring there is little time to start training and replacing them. Researchers identified that good leadership makes academic work enjoyable. This statement is important because of the direct impact department chairs have on students, staff, and faculty.

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