

**THE NEED TO PRACTICE WHAT WE TEACH:  
ASSESSING THE PREPAREDNESS OF CHAIRS AND DEANS TO THEIR  
MANAGEMENT APPOINTMENTS IN MISSISSIPPI'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**

**Jamye Long, Associate Professor of Management**

College of Business  
Delta State University  
Cleveland, Mississippi

**Cooper Johnson, Professor of Management**

College of Business  
Delta State University  
Cleveland, Mississippi

**Sam Faight, Assistant Professor of Management**

College of Business and Global Affairs  
The University of Tennessee at Martin  
Martin, Tennessee

**ABSTRACT**

*In the classroom, great effort is made to educate the next generation of leaders on the importance of training for them and their future employees. As educators, the natural emphasis is placed on formal education, however as employees are promoted, their success often rests with their ability to manage a larger unit. In higher education the most basic assumption of managers rests in the belief that the ones who hold the administrative positions possess exceptional qualifications and knowledge to successfully guide their institutions to greatness. Included are the beliefs that prior to their current appointments, these administrators completed appropriate, relevant, and thorough training encompassing the applicable management skills. From understanding technical and legal aspects of their responsibilities, such as budgets, accreditation procedures, and pertinent laws, to ethically applying these practices with their workforces, which includes incorporating the institutions' values, all administrators are assumed to be fully knowledgeable and capable of carrying out their duties. However, these assumptions, beliefs, and understandings do not provide concrete evidence of their qualifications and in many ways could prove to be a great disservice that exposes the institutions to potential problems. Therefore, through assessing the formal opportunities of preparedness of chairs and deans within public universities in Mississippi, one can gain a better understanding of the qualifications of administrators, who frequently begin their careers in management of higher education in these roles.*

Mississippi, not unlike other states, hosts public universities seeking to educate and enlighten students through quality programs designed to provide basic theories and practices in various fields of study. Students are taught the importance of preparation for their professional roles, hence their participation in the higher educational system. Their training for success rests on the knowledge they gained through the formal educational system, on-the-job training, and ability to adapt to the changing work environment. The need for proper training is important, as expectations for success increases with seniority and promotions throughout careers.

However, that notion of training is often lost in the very educational institution the students hold to be the exam-

ple of excellence. Specifically, these institutions hire faculty based on a set of necessary qualifications, which usually includes advanced degrees, scholarly achievements, and professional experience. The students seek to learn from the faculty and, in turn, the faculty remain current in their fields in order to provide the best quality education to the next generation of professionals in that field.

Beyond the classroom, universities have a hierarchy in which administrators create, enforce, and influence policy and procedures designed to maintain the integrity and success of the institutions. In the first line supervisory role are chairs, whose responsibility rests with daily departmental operations. The chairs report to deans, whose responsibilities include overseeing the role of the college

or school, and often include short term goals and supervisory tasks on a daily basis. The qualifications of chairs and deans to hold these roles are ambiguous, as focus is placed on their qualifications in their field of expertise, although their administrative roles require them to perform managerial tasks, such as hiring and promoting qualified faculty and staff, conducting performance evaluations, resolving conflict, implementing institutional changes, completing and submitting required reports, and familiarity with and adhering to university, accreditation, and legal policies, procedures, and laws. Although chairs and deans were likely successful in their faculty roles, it cannot be assumed that their transition into management will result in great leadership and success. Appropriate training is needed to ensure these individuals possess the skills and knowledge needed in their management roles.

### PURPOSE OF STUDY

Understanding the qualifications, specifically as it relates to preparedness opportunities, of chairs and deans to hold management positions in Mississippi's public universities provides an overview of the importance placed on training these individuals to successfully reach organizational goals employing legal, ethical, and appropriate means. Additionally, through examining whether or not chairs and deans are presented with opportunities for training in the areas of management necessary to carry out their responsibilities provides insight into the degree of willingness the universities' higher administrators have in exposing their universities to potential problems.

The primary purpose of this study serves to determine the management training of chairs and deans prior to their appointments. Additionally, this study explores the continued and consistent offering of educational opportunities for chairs and deans to fulfill their management responsibilities, especially in light of ongoing legal, ethical, and institutional challenges.

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Thus far very little empirical research has focused solely on the process of identifying the training needs of chairs and deans across various universities (Aziz, Mullins, Balzer, Grauer, Burnfield, Ladato, & Cohen-Powless, 2005). It has been suggested by previous research that if chairs and deans are trained for each of their specific responsibilities there will be a reduction in role ambiguity and conflict that, in most cases, is contributed to the functioning of the unit as a whole. Effective training will help improve performance and satisfaction while reducing stress and turnover (Aziz, Mullins, Balzer, Grauer, Burnfield, Ladato, & Cohen-Powless, 2005).

The job requirements for the positions of chairs and deans appear overwhelming and ambiguous. The responsibilities are extensive and constantly expanding. At the very least, universities expect chairs and deans to hold terminal degrees and appropriate credentials, have teaching experience, and interpersonal communication skills. Those applying for chair's and dean's positions are expected to possess necessary leadership qualities and be abreast of current trends and issues. Considering the institutions of higher learning are insistent applicants meet these qualifications, it would be a foregone conclusion the schools would offer extensive training and continuing education in management skills necessary for success.

Chairs and deans face a multitude of issues while conducting the numerous responsibilities of their jobs. "Richard Ostrander, provost of Cornerstone University, said the department chairs described their main challenges as having too many responsibilities and too little time...and receiving too little training and preparation for the job" (Lederman, 2011). Administrators must be able to analyze various situations and evaluate decisions with a focus on achieving a desired outcome. Priorities are a critical component in addressing the issues associated with management positions.

There are a number of ways faculty members can become an academic chair. A faculty member can be elected by members of the department, through appointment by the dean, or through a system of rotation. "Unfortunately, academic departments spend precious little time selecting their leaders and even less time preparing them for the duties that they will assume. Typically, departments select their leaders by reaching into their faculty pools and, with little or no forethought or planning, plucking some unsuspecting soul who is then unceremoniously dumped into the fray and expected to excel at something about which he or she knows little" (Wolverton & Ackerman, 2006). The administration at various universities are aware that their chairs have risen to their positions through seniority and not necessarily because they had the aptitude for the position. "They typically receive little formal training on the administrative aspects of the jobs—budgeting, legal aspects of the hiring process, and the like" (Lederman, 2011). Seldom does purposeful selection of chairs based on perceived leadership potential take place.

A faculty member may accept the chair position for a number of reasons, which can include personal satisfaction in helping others develop professionally, a chance to build effective academic programs, the challenge of leadership, defending the interests of the department, access to deans and vice-presidents, and status and prestige (Lucas, 1986). Chairs and deans occupy key positions as leaders in higher education and, unfortunately, where strong

leadership skills are required in this position, training is not always provided. Unfortunately, only 3% of more than 2,000 academic leaders surveyed in national studies between 1990 and 2000 had any type of leadership preparation (Wolverton & Ackerman, 2006). This issue has been a discussion amongst researchers for over 30 years with minimal progress (Aziz, Mullins, Balzer, Grauer, Burnfield, Ladato, & Cohen-Powless, 2005).

Courses specific to training chairs are offered and made convenient and accessible to universities. Some include the Academic Chairpersons Conference, the Department Chairs Conference hosted by the American Sociological Association, the MIS Department Chairs/Program Directors Conference, and the Chair Academy's Annual International Conference. Many of these programs have become an annual meeting for both newly appointed and experienced chairs to learn from one another. For example, the Academic Chairpersons Conference hosts the "New Chairs Alliance", which is specifically designed to equip new chairs with many of the tools they will need.

The challenges chairs face are not isolated, as deans experience great difficulty in adjusting to their roles in management of a larger academic unit. "Today, the responsibilities of deans vary depending on the size and mission of the university and the college or school, but in all cases they include budget and personnel management responsibilities" (Layne, 2010). External and political relations, leadership, internal productivity, resource management, academic personnel management, and personal scholarship were identified as the six main areas of a dean's responsibility in a national study of academic deans (Montez, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 2002).

Probably the most significant issue facing deans is building and maintaining trust (Harris, 2006). Research supports a new leadership profile for deans emphasizing four key areas: strategic skills, innovation, relationship effectiveness, and enterprise management. Business schools are seeking more strategic-minded and integrative deans. Recently, several search committees of selecting business school deans hired candidates with organizational, strategy, and management expertise because the committees believed these candidates are the best choice to lead their institutions in today's climate (Kring & Kaplan, 2011).

In order to assist deans with understanding their management responsibilities, some organizations offer specialized programs. One of the most intensive management training programs offered to academic deans is Vanderbilt University's Peabody College's Higher Education Management Training Institute, which showcases real world scenario decision making and daily management theories of college and university leaders (Vanderbilt University, 2012). Also provided for deans are the Summer Workshop and

New Dean's Institute, which is one of the foremost training programs for graduate school deans and includes a day-long program for newly hired deans (Council of Graduate Schools, 2012). Furthermore, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business hosts the Deans Conference exclusively for business school deans and serves as a source for new ideas to advance their programs (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, 2012).

According to Bhatti (2011), "Training is the driving source in identification of the characteristics of quality education and the implementation of these characteristics" (p. 147). "In many respects, management tasks can be learned. In contrast, leadership (the ability to develop a vision, anticipate needs, inspire others toward a common purpose) is much harder to come by and is rarely addressed in professional or skill development opportunities" (Wolverton & Ackerman, 2006, p. 15).

### METHODOLOGY

The survey administered collected data pertaining to the management training of chairs and deans in Mississippi's eight public institutions of higher learning. Questions were created to evaluate the degree to which the universities were offering management training programs for the chairs and deans prior to their administrative appointments, if they were conducting consistent and continuous training for chairs and deans, and if those holding these positions were participating in management training opportunities. Surveys were disseminated to the 258 deans and chairs throughout the state, in which 73 responses were collected, resulting in a response rate of approximately 28%. More specifically, 57 chairs and 16 deans responded resulting in an approximate 29% and 27% response rate, respectively.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were explored:

- 1: Are chairs and deans provided management training prior to their administrative appointments?
- 2: Are management training programs available for chairs and deans?
- 3: Have chairs and deans participated in management training since their appointments?
- 4: Have chairs and deans participated in management training within the last year?
- 5: Are chairs and deans aware of any scheduled management training opportunities?
- 6: What is the frequency for which chairs and deans are provided annual management training?

**RESULTS**

Through examining the data collected from academic administrators in the chairs and deans positions within the eight public universities in Mississippi, the following results were extracted. It was reported that prior to their first administrative role 21% of chairs and 56% of deans received management training to prepare them for their future administrative positions. In contrast, 79% of chairs and 44% of deans did not receive management training prior to their appointments (See Figure 1). With regards to Research Question 1: Are chairs and deans provided management training prior to their administrative appointments?, the data indicate that chairs overwhelming do not receive adequate management training opportunities, whereas, slightly more than half of deans do.

Seventy-Six percent of chairs and 69% of deans reported receiving management training since their appointments. Those not receiving training since their appointments were 24% of chairs and 31% of deans. Therefore, the data show the chairs and deans have received training in the time following their appointments, thus providing an affirmative for Research Question 3: Have chairs and deans participated in management training since their appointments?

Also, respondents provided feedback regarding training they have received within the last year. 58% of chairs and 69% of deans reported they have participated in management training, and 41% of chairs and 31% of deans reported they have not participated in management training. Research question 4 asked have chairs and deans participated in management training within the last year and based on the data, some of the chairs received training whereas a greater number of deans received training.

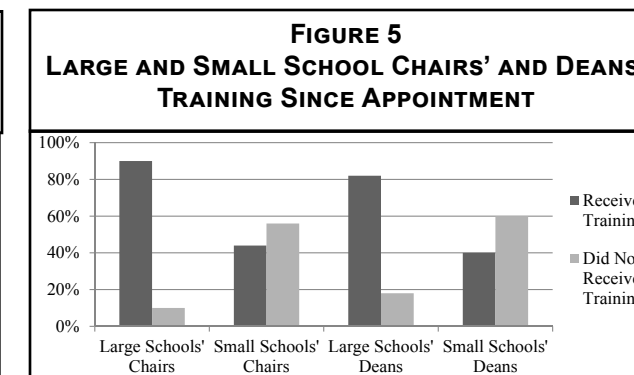
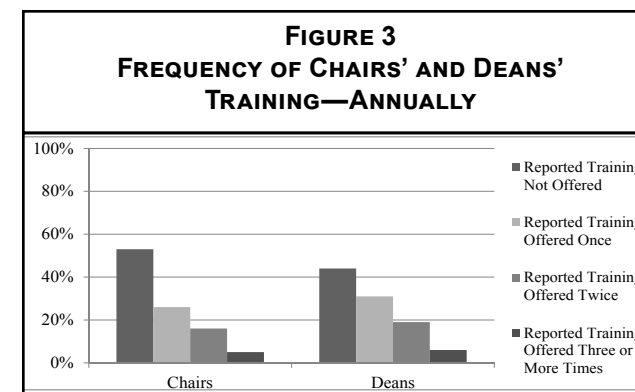
Respondents also provided insight into the availability of management training programs in which 76% of chairs and 69% of deans reported that management training programs were available to assist them in their responsibilities. However, according to 24% of chairs and 31% of deans no management training programs were available

to educate them further about their duties (See Figure 2). With a vast majority of chairs and deans receiving training that indicates an affirmative for Research Question 2: Are management training programs available for chairs and deans?

Research question 6 asked, what is the frequency for which chairs and deans are provided annual management training? Responses varied regarding the frequency of management training programs offered for chairs and deans. As Figure 3 indicates, over half (53%) of chairs and 44% of deans receive no annual training to provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out their management responsibilities. Slightly more than one quarter (26%) of chairs and just under a third (31%) of deans claimed they are provided one management training opportunity each year. Even less (16% of chairs and 19% of deans) received two annual management trainings. A dismal 5% of chairs and 6% of deans are offered three or more opportunities to train in the specialized areas of management in which their position requires.

Future training opportunities were also examined through this survey. Half of the chairs (50%) reported that they are aware of planned management training sessions designed specifically for their needs. The other 50% of chairs reported they were not aware of any future management training opportunities that they could be invited to attend. With regards to the dean's level respondents, slightly more were aware of upcoming management training sessions with 56% reporting that they had been notified of future training. However, the remaining 44% of deans claimed they were not aware of management training opportunities for their needs (See Figure 4). With regards to Research Question 5: Are chairs and deans aware of any scheduled management training opportunities?, the data shows mixed results in which approximately half of both chairs and deans reported awareness of management training opportunities.

When provided an opportunity to elaborate on their past management training opportunities, scheduled training sessions, and views on how management training can im-



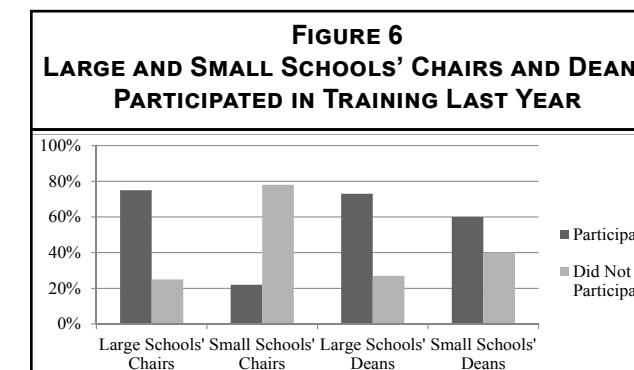
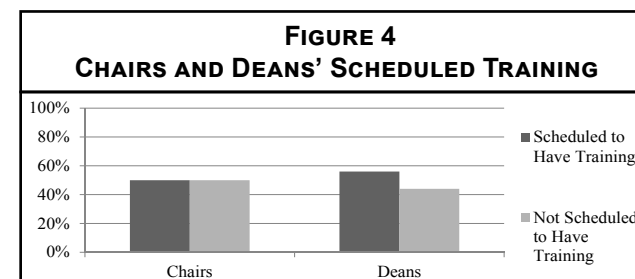
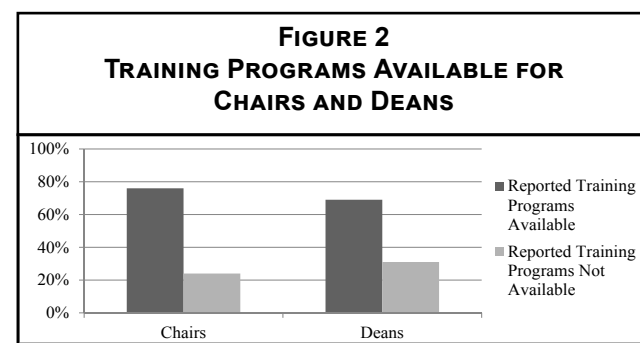
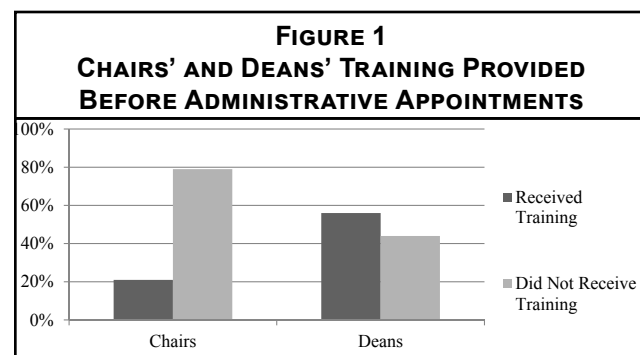
prove their effectiveness on the job, the respondents commented that they welcome management training opportunities and were optimistic that more would be provided. They also stated that the training they receive is often task specific and does little to assist in their work on a larger scale. Comments also described the critical need for continual and consistent management training for chairs and deans to be better prepared for the job, especially as it relates to skills needed to assist with high priorities at their universities, such as strategic planning, budgeting, personnel issues, and legal concerns. Respondents also expressed concern that those promoted into administration from a faculty position are seldom adequately trained, however the expectations for their success do not reflect the degree of preparedness they receive in their new role.

**Discussion**

Upon further examination of the results, a pattern appeared in which a distinct disparity became apparent. The management training opportunities for chairs and deans at larger institutions (student enrollment > 8,000) reported a greater number of past, scheduled, consistent, and continuous training opportunities as opposed to their counterparts at the smaller universities (student enrollment < 8,000). As Figure 5 shows, since their administrative appointment, the chairs and deans at larger schools claimed more management training (chairs 90%, deans 82%) than those at the small institutions (chairs 44%, deans 40%).

The discrepancy is further evidenced by the management training received by chairs and deans within the last year. The larger institutions' chairs reported 75% received training to assist them in their duties and 73% of deans also were afforded opportunities to learn more about their management responsibilities through training. In contrast, the chairs employed by smaller schools claimed that only 22% received any management training throughout the past year. Furthermore, 60% of deans at the smaller institutions were trained in management, as Figure 6 shows.

The most alarming information reported reflects the frequency in which chairs and deans receive annual training to accent their management responsibilities. Large school chairs reported that 45% received no annual management training, 30% received one training opportunity, 18% received two training sessions, and 8% claimed to have received three or more training opportunities annually. The deans at these schools reported 27% received no training annually, 36% were trained once, 27% were trained twice, and 9% participated in three or more management training opportunities each year. The chairs and deans at smaller institutions reported dramatically less training, as 72% of chairs and 80% of deans reported they received no annual training to assist them with their management responsibilities. 17% of chairs and 20% of deans received one training session, 11% of chairs and no deans received



two training opportunities, and no chairs or deans received three or more management training annually at the smaller schools (See Figure 7).

This discrepancy causes great concern, as the expectation is that administrators in these positions are fully prepared and capable of doing their duties, regardless of the size of the institution. The reasons for the inconsistency are numerous and include variances in available funding for management training, a lack of understanding of the importance of training with regards to effectiveness on the job, assumptions that faculty who perform acceptably in the classroom are easily transitioned to administration, and expectation that the individuals will seek assistance as needed rather than the necessity of a formal management training program. Regardless of the reason for the discrepancies, it is disturbing to see that the chairs and deans in small schools are not participating in management training programs that can provide valuable insight, skills, and necessary understanding into the leadership of their units.

**CONCLUSION**

While this study examined the public universities in Mississippi, it is not to exclude the possibility that other states' institutions of higher learning might also be experiencing similar challenges. With regards to the Mississippi schools, there appears to be a lack of adequate management training, especially at the smaller institutions. It is important to note, however, that the larger institutions, while providing training for their chairs and deans, do not provide an abundance of management training that is regularly scheduled and designed to the specific needs of the administrators in these positions. It is premature to conclude that since the larger schools provide more management training than their smaller counterparts that they are fulfilling the need. For both large and small schools it

is imperative that continuous and consistent training be implemented as to ensure chairs and deans are fully prepared to address the management needs of their units.

In order to offer an excellent education that includes a premier example to the students of management training for the current and future administrators at the university, it is critical that the classroom lecture be more than words and theories. Universities are responsible for adhering to the standards taught, thus have an obligation to practice what we teach.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

All research has limitations, which affect the outcomes and conclusions of the study. Through examining these limitations, future researchers can be better equipped to understand the challenges associated with the study, as well as the differences that can occur and improve upon the existing research.

Although the findings of the research reveal evidence of a lack of adequate management training for chairs and deans in Mississippi's public universities, the study was limited to eight institutions of higher learning. Therefore, any conclusions derived from the results of this study should be interpreted with caution. This could be used as an avenue for longitudinal research, which would provide a clearer picture of trends in management training for chairs and deans. The study was also limited to public institutions in one state in the southern region of the United States.

Another limitation of this study involves the generalizability of the results of this particular research. It is not certain that the findings will yield similar results across other states, regions, and private institutions. Finally, this study is exploratory in nature and has provided some promising results.

**Future Research**

While the findings of this study provide some promising results, there are several areas that need to be addressed in future research. One could explore other states and regions of the country to determine the management training of chairs and deans in those areas. Such data would identify trends across the nation and determine what regions are more likely to offer adequate management training opportunities to chairs and deans.

Additionally, future research should explore reasons for the distinct disparity between the management training offered to larger institutions as opposed to that offered to smaller institutions in Mississippi. Also, research should evaluate the possibility of differences in management training received by chairs and deans of large schools ver-

sus small schools in other locations. Furthermore, future research should investigate the reason why large school chairs and deans choose not to participate in available management training opportunities.

Finally, continued research could be conducted using private institutions to determine if their management training practices mirror that of the public institutions. Should it be determined that private institutions do not experience similar results, then a study of their practices and policies could benefit the public institutions experiencing inadequate management training for chairs and deans.

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