



From *A Guide for Leaders in Higher Education:
Core Concepts, Competencies, and Tools*
By Brent D. Ruben, Richard De Lisi, and Ralph A. Gigliotti
The following is an excerpt from the unedited manuscript.

Chapter 1
**Leadership and Leadership Development in Higher Education:
Time for Change**

In This Chapter

- Why is there an increasing need for attention to leadership within higher education?
- How have colleges and universities traditionally prepared leaders for their roles, and why is this approach problematic?
- In what ways is higher education appropriately viewed as a sector or an industry?
- What are the cross-cutting pressing issues with which higher education leaders must contend?
- Why is collaboration between administrative and academic leaders essential in addressing these challenges in higher education?

The idea that leaders and leadership are critical factors in organizational success, mediocrity, or failure is widely accepted in modern, western society (Collins, 2001; Feiner, 2004; March & Weil, 2005). In general, we believe this proposition also holds true for American institutions of higher education—college and university leaders can and do make a difference in organizational excellence, mediocrity, or failure. Since so much has already been written about leadership, it is reasonable to ask why we embarked on this project.

We have written this book because we believe that while higher education leadership is similar in many ways to other sectors such as business, government, healthcare, or PK-12 education, in important ways it is also different. A great many of the principles of effective leadership that have been shown to be of value in other sectors receive little emphasis in higher education. Properly applied, these principles can be crucial for advancement of colleges and universities¹. At the same time, special attention is also needed to take account of the unique characteristics of a higher education context. Higher education engages numerous internal and external stakeholders, has non-singular, complex, and sometimes contradictory missions, and employs an academic workforce that enjoys a unique status in organizational governance and decision making within a culture that situates individual autonomy and creativity near the top of its value system.

Individual autonomy and creativity are needed for faculty to conduct excellent and innovative scholarship in teaching and in research. In a similar way, individual autonomy and creativity allow staff to manage complex multicultural living arrangements and student affairs issues more broadly; to keep up with technology innovations and new social media environments; to develop and implement state-of-the art environmental sustainability practices; and to manage complex revenue and expense systems, among other issues. Placing a premium on

personal autonomy and creativity is a core value at the heart of the American higher education “system” and this has yielded many benefits. At the same time, these values have resulted in the creation of organizational cultures that present special challenges for those charged with the responsibility of leading. Our aim in this book is to focus both on concepts, competencies, and tools that allow leaders to blend and benefit from these tensions.

Another aspect of higher education that motivated the compilation of this volume is the need for increased attention to leadership development within most colleges and universities. We believe that institutions of higher education will benefit greatly from a heightened focus on leadership development in a number of respects, including fostering enhanced skills in the assessment of organizational and corresponding leadership needs at particular points in time (see Chapters 13 and 17), and creating additional options for effective succession planning (Chapter 19).

Leadership competencies—the knowledge and skill sets required for effective higher education leaders today—are a central focus within this book. In our view, the time has passed when disciplinary or technical excellence plus “on-the-job” leadership experience are sufficient to prepare outstanding leaders. The leadership model we propose recognizes disciplinary and technical expertise and experience as the “vertical dimension” of leadership, a dimension that is considered critically important in navigating the unique higher education context (Chapters 7–10). This dimension includes training and degree attainment in a specific field or discipline; accomplishments and mastery of aspects of that discipline; and demonstrated accomplishments in and contributions to the organization. We acknowledge the value and benefit that this “vertical approach” to higher education leadership has provided. As Doug Lederman (2015), editor and co-founder of *Inside Higher Education*, points out, higher education prospered and soared to new

heights in the latter half of the twentieth century without having to be overly concerned about excellence in leadership or in leadership development. Arguably, individuals with distinguished careers as thought leaders in their fields, who personified the virtues of higher education and were articulate spokespersons and role models, possessed essential leadership attributes for advancing the work of the academy. However, as noted by Lederman and discussed in some depth in Chapter 2, American colleges and universities now face a threat in the area of leadership, largely because the landscape has shifted dramatically since the end of the last century into the first decades of the twenty-first century. Leaders today need a more expansive, cross-cutting set of competencies to maintain and advance their institutions—competencies that have long been valued in other sectors. We consider these competencies to be the “horizontal dimension” of leadership and believe this dimension to have taken on critical importance for institutions of higher education in the twenty-first century (Chapters 7–10). What is needed now among leaders, we believe, is a way of thinking broadly about contemporary institutions of higher education—a way of thinking that involves a sophisticated understanding of the organizational and leadership challenges facing colleges and universities at all levels, a competency- and communication-based approach to leadership and leadership development, and a practical guide for current and aspiring leaders that builds on traditional competencies but expands to take account of radical changes in the higher education context as discussed in the following section.

A SNAPSHOT OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

To a large extent, what has affected the nature of the requirements for college and university leadership are the dramatic changes in the landscape of higher education. Many of the key factors that were in place in the “golden age” in the latter half of the twentieth century have shifted dramatically. These include the following:

- Dramatic declines in state investments have been accompanied by significant tuition increases at public higher education institutions.
- Large increases in the investment of public monies by the federal government have been accompanied by greater federal oversight and regulation of a sector that now includes for-profit institutions as well as traditional nonprofit institutions.
- Families view post-secondary degrees as critical for attainment of the “American dream;” however,
- The size of the student/family financial investment needed to attain an advanced degree is viewed as extremely burdensome, if not unattainable.
- The racial-ethnic-language diversity of the student body and the need to assure both diverse and inclusive student bodies are increasing, and the challenges to realizing these outcomes are substantial.
- There is growing evidence that many high school graduates in the United States are neither college- nor career-“ready;” and
- Fundamental changes have occurred in long-standing classroom teaching and learning processes, in part due to the rapid infusion of technology into the teaching-learning-assessment process.

This list only begins to skim the surface of the issues facing leaders in higher education. To an increasing degree, issues such as these pose challenges for leaders at all levels and types of institutions, and require a knowledge- and skill-set which technical or disciplinary preparation alone does not adequately provide. Consider questions such as the following: How many of these contextual factors have touched your work in higher education? How are you and your colleagues affected by and adjusting to these changing circumstances? Do you feel that your unit and your institution are dealing effectively with these and other emerging challenges? Has leadership communicated a clear vision for paths forward? Is progress in vision realization measured and communicated? Do you feel that you are part of the solution and understand your role and responsibilities in anticipating and addressing the emerging challenges of the new higher education landscape?

We want to emphasize this last question. We think it is extremely important for those who work in higher education to view these sector-wide issues as highly personal and relevant to their everyday work. This is true not only for those who occupy formal positions of leadership, but also for those whose influence as leaders occurs in more informal ways at all levels. To a greater extent than in other institutions, “informal” leaders play a fundamental role in American higher education’s ability to adapt to a changing landscape. The nature of this critical role is the focus of Chapter 11.

We intend for the concepts and tools presented in this book to contribute to the emerging literature on leadership and leadership development in higher education. We are well aware of the excellent resources for leadership development in higher education that already exist (e.g., Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Buller, 2014; Gmelch & Buller, 2015). Somewhat uniquely, this book is designed to be relevant for administrative as well as academic leaders. We do not focus on

specific academic leadership positions such as department chair (Buller, 2012), academic deans (Gmelch, Hopkins, & Damico, 2011; Krahenbuhl, 2004), or presidencies (Pierce, 2011). Instead, whenever possible we consider and discuss together both academic and administrative leadership issues. We chose this blended approach based on the belief that the “cultural divide” between faculty and staff is a long-standing and pervasive tension within higher education. In our view, the lack of a common vision and complementary commitment to addressing the challenges confronting institutions of higher education is quite often a significant source of organizational dysfunction, as discussed in Chapter 5. And, for both types of employees—faculty and staff—the transition to a formal leadership position presents its own set of issues, many of which are explored in Chapter 6.

This text does not offer specific treatment of leadership issues and challenges faced by women and by men and women from underrepresented, racial-ethnic minority groups. An insufficient representation by gender and by racial-ethnic status in academic and administrative leadership positions is a longstanding issue in higher education. The sector has made some advances, but white men continue to be overrepresented in leadership positions relative to employee (faculty and staff) and student diversity. Given this history, women and colleagues from underrepresented groups face special challenges when they occupy leadership positions in higher education. These special challenges are not specifically addressed in our book. We believe the concepts and tools presented will be extremely useful to all leaders, perhaps even more so for those who face special challenges. The final chapter of the book highlights several leadership programs specifically designed for women and underrepresented groups.

In general, this text aims to emphasize common principles, strategies, and tools for leadership in higher education for leaders in a variety of roles, at a variety of levels, in a variety of institutional types. This stems from our view that many of the most critical leadership competencies are cross-cutting and applicable across a range of positions, roles, and institutions. We address this idea throughout the book, but especially in Chapters 7–10.

Whether you are a formal or informal leader, serving in an academic or administrative role we intend this book to be a useful guide for improved understanding, self-reflection, and continuing personal and professional development.

HIGHER EDUCATION AS A SECTOR

For most faculty and many staff, their primary professional identification is field-based or discipline-based (e.g., “I am an historian” or “I am a human resources professional”). These affiliations are sometimes as strong as or stronger than one’s connections with their institution, and both are often more extensive than identification with higher education as a sector. Not surprisingly, then, many faculty members have a more detailed understanding of trends in their field—both in teaching and in research—than they do of what is going on in their home institutions and in higher education more generally. A similar pattern is often present for many staff, whose knowledge of issues in their own field may well surpass their familiarity with issues related to the teaching, research, or outreach mission of their institution, or broader concerns within higher education on a national level.

Consistent with the point discussed above, many of us have not generally thought of ourselves as being part of a sector or industry, preferring instead to think of ourselves as being

engaged in unique, specialized, and highly differentiated roles. Many staff and especially faculty members have been particularly uncomfortable with characterizing higher education as a business; however, the days in which this posture might have made sense seem now to have come to an end. Derek Bok (2013), former president of Harvard University, acknowledged the following in his book, *Higher Education in America*:

America's venture in the realm of higher learning gave no hint of future accomplishments. Nor could the handful of young men who arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1638 to enter the nation's first college have had the faintest idea of what the future had in store for American universities. . . . From these modest beginnings, higher education in the United States has grown to become a vast enterprise comprising some 4,500 different colleges and universities, more than 20 million students, 1.4 million faculty members, and aggregate annual expenditures exceeding 400 billion dollars. Within this system are schools ranging from tiny colleges numbering a few hundred students to huge universities with enrollments exceeding 50,000. (p. 9)

As Jon McGee (2016) puts it: **“colleges and universities today must be understood for what they are: large-scale business enterprises” (p. 5).**

Data provided by the United States Office of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics substantiate this point (NCES, 2013). Table 1.1 presents a snapshot view of changes in *degree-granting* institutions in the United States from 1989–90 to 2011–12. Inspection of the middle two columns of the table reveals remarkable growth in American higher education from 1989 to 2012. The numbers of degree-granting institutions, faculty, students, degrees conferred, expenditures, and endowment market values have each shown significant increases during these years. If there was ever a question as to whether higher education should be considered an

industry in its own right, data such as those presented in this profile answer that question.

Clearly, American higher education qualifies as a sector or industry—and individual colleges and universities function as businesses in many important respects.

Table 1.1. U.S. Higher Education Snapshot

| | 1989–90 | 2011–12 | Change (%) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | | | |
| Degree-Granting Institutions | 3,535 | 4,706 | 33% |
| | | | |
| Total Faculty | 824,220 | 1,523,615 | 85% |
| | | | |
| Faculty per Institution | 233 | 323 | 39% |
| | | | |
| Fall Enrollment | 13,538,560 | 20,994,113 | 55% |
| | | | |
| Enrollment per Institution | 3,830 | 4,461 | 16% |
| | | | |
| Expenditures | \$134,655,571,000 | \$488,444,000,000 | <i>See note</i> |
| | | | |
| Market Value of Endowment | \$67,978,726,000 | \$424,587,666,000 | 525% |
| | | | |
| Degrees Conferred | | | |
| Associate | 455,102 | 1,017,538 | 124% |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|------|
| Bachelors | 1,051,344 | 1,791,046 | 70% |
| Masters | 330,152 | 754,229 | 128% |
| Doctoral | 103,508 | 170,062 | 64% |
| [Total Degrees] | [1,940,106] | [3,732,875] | 92% |
| | | | |
| Degrees per Institution | 549 | 793 | 44% |
| | | | |
| Degrees per Faculty Member | 2.35 | 2.45 | 4% |
| | | | |
| Enrollment per Faculty Member | 16.4 | 13.7 | 16% |

Source: Taken from NCES table 301.20, June 15, 2015.

Notes: Faculty reflects head count and does not include graduate assistants.

Expenditure for 1989–90 is current-fund only; 2011–12 is total expenditure.

Expenditures are in current dollars.

As with other sectors, higher education is characterized by considerable breadth and variability within the industry. Institutions vary in terms of the history, size, populations served, and a variety of other factors as summarized in Table 1.2. The mission—and in many cases, the multiple missions—of colleges and universities is a further significant source of differentiation among institutions in higher education, as will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3. As noted earlier, this book is intended for faculty and staff leaders and aspiring leaders who work in a

wide array of institutional types—recognizing that increasingly skilled and effective leaders are essential in order to maintain and advance the position of prominence in the world that has traditionally been the hallmark of American institutions of higher education.

Table 1.2. Structural Diversity of American Institutions of Higher Education

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Degree Granting: | Yes/No |
| Taxpayer Subsidized: | Public/Private |
| Tax Status: | Not-for-profit/For profit |
| Program Design: | Four years /Two years/ Less than two years |
| Program Delivery: | Physical classrooms used/Online only |
| Housing arrangement: | Residences on campus/No Residences on campus |

Note: Not all combinations of these structural dimensions exist.

A Sector Under the Microscope

Many recent publications—from inside and outside “the academy”—are highly critical and/or bemoan the current state of affairs in American higher education. The attention being afforded to higher education is, itself, part of the critical leadership challenge faced by leaders in higher education institutions. We explore this issue in Chapter 4 and present information that points to dramatic increases in the numbers of articles and books written about higher education in recent years. While any attempt to summarize the various perspectives provided in these writings is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is interesting to note that critiques of higher education have been authored by those within higher education as well as by those outside higher

education. The range of perspectives vary, but those outside the academy often describe institutions of higher education as in need of change and largely unresponsive to external voices pointing to this need. Writers from within the academy, while acknowledging the need for improvements in some areas, express concerns about threats to the traditional autonomy of colleges and universities that are posed by external forces, and note the many self-initiated improvements that have been made within institutions of all types. Clearly, both the external and internal perspectives play a pervasive role in framing the work of higher education leaders at all levels, in all institutions, in all types of positions. The increased attention paid to institutions of higher education from both internal and external stakeholders represents the “new normal.” Higher education is a sector or industry that is now “under the microscope.” Stakeholders continue to ask questions such as the following, in part due to the lack of answers they perceive to be satisfactory:

- How well is a particular institution of higher education fulfilling the teaching aspects of its mission, especially for undergraduate students?
- Why is there a noted disconnect between the skills that employers demand and the type of training that enrolled students receive at the collegiate level?
- In what ways are colleges and universities creating safe and inclusive environments for student success, particularly in light of ongoing and recent controversies related to hazing, alcohol abuse, sexual violence, and racial-ethnic tensions?
- How is the institution attempting to control costs and increase revenue streams other than through increases in tuition and fees charged to students?
- Why do so many students take more than two or four years to attain an associate or bachelor’s degree, respectively?

- What is the evidence that attainment of associate and baccalaureate degrees is worth the investment from a dollars and cents perspective?
- Can more students participate and be educated through distance learning? Is learning through distance equivalent to classroom-based learning?
- Why produce so many PhD graduates each year, especially in fields in which gainful employment is scarce? (The same question is asked about certain graduate-professional degrees such as JD.)
- Why should the public invest in basic research to support faculty who then conduct less classroom teaching? Are the faculty members at research universities committed to the teaching aspects of their mission?
- What is responsible for the growth in administrative positions in higher education?
- What is the future of tenured faculty in higher education?
- Are the compensation packages of top-level leaders justified?
- How are “big time athletics” consistent with higher education’s historic mission?

Issues such as these are systemic, cross-disciplinary, and cross-functional. Today’s higher education leaders need a deep understanding of these cross-cutting issues; how they intersect; and how they affect many functional areas at all levels—and they need to be both knowledgeable and conversant with these themes. Training and accomplishment in one specific discipline or specialty is a necessary component in the preparation for leadership in higher education, but a narrow band of knowledge and expertise is no longer sufficient in preparing today’s leaders for the expansive array of challenges and opportunities that confront colleges and universities. It is increasingly important for those charged with the responsibility of leading institutions of higher

education to see the “big picture.” Such a perspective helps to create a climate in which cooperation and collaboration replace individual achievement and competition as colleges and universities grapple with complex issues that affect individual institutions and the entire sector.

Although most of our discussion will be relevant to the full spectrum of American colleges and universities, some issues faced by institutions that do not offer degrees are unique. Smith (2015) provides a cogent summary of the status of for-profit institutions of higher education, including declining enrollments and increasing government regulation. We do not offer special treatment of the business models underlying for-profit colleges and universities in this volume; however, the concepts and tools presented herein should also be useful to leaders in this sector. Additionally, there exist a number of specific issues faced by professional disciplines in colleges and universities. For example, specific issues and challenges arise from peer reviews as part of accreditation in medicine, nursing, engineering, business, or education, among other professional fields. While the particulars of these professional contexts are fine-grained and discipline-specific, many of the leadership challenges, concepts, and tools that will be effective to prepare for accreditation (accountability more broadly) in a range of professional fields and disciplines are cross-cutting in nature and are presented throughout this text, particularly in Chapters 13, 15, and 17.

In sum, we believe the ideas, concepts, and tools presented in this book will have wide applicability and utility across the spectrum of American higher education. Our approach is intentionally broad, for the challenges facing institutions of higher education require the collaboration of a community of well-prepared leaders—both faculty and staff, unit leaders and institutional leaders, in private and public institutions.

EXPANDING THE VALUE PROPOSITION TO MORE CENTRALLY RECOGNIZE LEADERSHIP

For faculty members, service to communities (local, national, or global) is often an explicit part of the mission of institutions of higher education. In contrast, service to the institution through participation on committees and in faculty governance (e.g., department meetings or school-wide meetings) may be viewed as a wasteful distraction from activities which are more central to the teaching and research mission, and hence more likely to be recognized within the academic reward structure. This is much less the case with administrative staff, whose attention and sources of reward and recognition are typically tied more directly to operational accomplishments. This “culture divide” complicates matters considerably for academic and administrative leaders who must engage both faculty and staff in organizational decision-making and governance. We discuss higher education’s “cultural divide” and its numerous implications in Chapter 5, but we want to close this chapter with a brief discussion of this issue given its importance for leaders and leadership development.

While the assumption of leadership positions typically represents career advancement for staff members, many faculty members ask why they should aspire to leadership positions. After all, if routine governance obligations are regarded as burdensome, taking time away from other pursuits, and undervalued by the institution, then formal leadership roles are likely to be viewed as even less attractive. In most institutions, recognition and incentives for serving in roles such as program director or department chair are limited. Often such contributions are not regarded or acknowledged as a significant component of one’s professional contribution as an academic—certainly not to the same extent as other components of teaching and scholarship. A further

difficulty is that many institutions of higher education lack clear markers and methods to assess excellence in leadership. In all these respects, the lack of value ascribed to leadership in higher education is quite unique in comparison to other sectors.

Since organizations value what they measure and measure what they value, failure to assess leadership contributions systematically is telling, as is the absence of systematic attention to leadership development. Both features contribute to the “Why should I care about leading?” culture that is so prevalent in contemporary American institutions of higher education.

We hope and believe these patterns are changing. It seems to us it must change, if we are to attract and retain colleagues who are willing and able to help institutions of higher education navigate the vast and growing array of fundamental challenges confronting the industry. This book seeks to encourage and assist colleges and universities to expand their value systems to include a focus on measuring, rewarding, and developing excellence in academic and staff leadership.

For Further Consideration #1: Focusing on Your Institution

- Which of the factors listed in the landscape snapshot are particularly significant for your unit and/or institution?

- What issues might you add to the list of snapshot issues based on your experience and perspective?
- How are leadership and leadership roles regarded by faculty and staff in your unit or institution?
- What mechanisms for assessing, recognizing, and rewarding leadership excellence are in use in your unit and institution?

¹ Our use of colleges and universities throughout the text is meant to describe community colleges, colleges, and universities more broadly. The following definitions distinguish these three types of institutions:

Community college connotes a nonprofit, two-year public institution that offers associate degrees to students who live locally and commute to campus. Community colleges might offer certificates as well as degree programs.

College connotes a nonprofit, public, or private baccalaureate degree-granting institution using a four-year program of study with at least some students residing on a campus. Colleges might offer certificates as well as degree programs.

University connotes a school that offers graduate degrees in addition to baccalaureate degrees. Some colleges and universities have the creation of new knowledge as central to their mission and are considered to be “research universities.”