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Academic leadership is said to be one of the most important issues in higher education today. Yet, scholars have given scant attention to the challenges and contents of deaning. Fortunately, a few scholars are investigating why and how deans do what they do, what keeps them going, how they affect others, and how others affect them. In this issue, Dean Lee Dahringer offers us his views on aspects of deaning. While the opinions expressed here are his personal views, he is well informed. He recently collaborated with Frederick Langher, Professor of Marketing at Valparaiso University, on a study of business school deans. Data reported in this essay are based on this research. Contact Dean Lee Dahringer at ldahringer@loyola.edu for a complete report on this work.

A Dean on Deaning

by Lee D. Dahringer, Loyola College of Maryland

Why does anyone become or remain a business school dean? Budgets are declining, student enrollment demand is increasing, business leaders are critical of the quality of our graduates, the number of new PhDs in business disciplines is declining, competition is increasing, both students and parents are more demanding and insisting they be treated like customers, and current faculty are retiring in increasing numbers. In other words, the business education industry is in turmoil. Furthermore, according to many deans, the job is almost a perfect violation of the first rule of management—it has significant responsibility without significant authority. The word on the street is that because of all these pressures, a business dean only lasts four years. What do we know about being a dean? Let's see what the survey said . . .



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How Long Do Deans Serve?

Research based on responses of 419 AACSB member schools reported that a dean, on average, serves five years in the current position and expects to be a dean at some institution for another five years, thus accumulating a total of 10 years as dean. This longevity is considerably more than the current four-years-and-out myth would indicate. But the 10-year figure, too, may be optimistic, as almost 70 percent of deans were new to the position. At the same time, 21 percent of current deans had worked as a dean prior to coming to their current in-

stitution, and 11 percent of the deans had two or more previous positions as deans. Prior deans did serve an average of four years in previous positions. So the prospect of four-years-and-out may be reasonably accurate if one looks at a single institution, but not for roughly one-third of "career deans" who have been at more than one institution.

Where Do Deans Come from?

Deans most commonly come from an academic background. Before becoming a dean, 90 percent have been in other academic management positions, most commonly as a department chair. Perhaps surprisingly, 17 percent of deans came directly from the faculty, apparently without other management experience. Only 7 percent of the deans came from business, while 2.5 percent came from governmental positions. Personally, I find the result especially interesting. Casually scanning job advertisements for deans' positions, with multiple openings being advertised throughout the year, one may easily conclude that candidates with a business practitioner background are highly sought after. This conclusion may be reinforced by the several position announcements for deans routinely received by most sitting deans from headhunting firms. In particular, the "brand name schools" seem more frequently to try to recruit a "senior business professional" to fill a dean's position. Smaller schools that are less involved in the "rat-

ings game” seem to focus more on candidates from academic backgrounds. Despite the seemingly high interest, only 7 percent of sitting deans came directly from business.

My view is that deans from business and industry tend to be one of two types—excellent and awful—and the majority tends to fall in the latter category, returning to business and industry as quickly as is feasible. If even roughly true, this is a very high cost entrance and exit scenario. Why might it happen? First, few business practitioners are used to “managing” a faculty. Instead of employees, they confront “independent contract intellectual workers,” a.k.a., faculty. An early business practitioner I worked with, as a dean tried, for example, to impose a dress code on tenured faculty, hired two new secretaries upon his arrival—both for his office, and sent out memos enjoining faculty to “put in a full day’s work.” He exited the school in a little over a year, seemingly at the first opportunity.

Nevertheless, a school that does, or wishes to, play the “ratings game” may be well served by attracting a senior business manager to the “head deans” position. The popular ratings polls include a significant weighting from corporate recruiters and leaders. Having one’s fellow CEOs, etc. as guests on campus fits nicely into a visibility and rating enhancing strategy. Also, the successful practitioner dean tends to be located at a fairly well-resourced school, one that can afford an “inside” and an “outside” dean. Indeed, since data indicates that deans overall spend about one-third of their time on fund raising and development activities, an “outside” dean with direct connections to corporations would seem all the more attractive. A need to improve the school’s reputation, in fact, was rated as the number one objective in importance by deans. Incidentally, four other objectives were tied for the second position—“developing faculty size and quality, school mission, improve programs, and increase funding”—arguably all related to improving reputation as well. Clearly, increasing funding and increasing faculty size and quality requires significant funding support as well as program improvement. Budget pressure, in a similar vein, was reported as the number one pressure element facing deans.

What Do Successful Deans Do?

This question is frequently asked by business leaders familiar with the organization and operation of business schools, as well as by faculty. For the record, I think any dean who lasts four years or more is successful. Deans seemed fairly clear on why they accepted their positions. The most frequent reason given was to “make a contribution to the institution” followed by “a logical career progression.” As to what they do, the first answer would seem to be “everything.” The importance ratings of a dean’s activities were tightly grouped, but tied in first place was “faculty and staff issues” and “strategic planning.” These ratings are not surprising given the decline in available business faculty, budget pressures, and exploding competition faced by today’s business schools. Yet, deans still report that they spend roughly one-third of their time on fund raising. As might be expected, the “bigger” the name of the school, the more time spent on fundraising. This seems a contradiction in terms of time allocated versus importance of activity, as fundraising was rated as number six in importance. But the time allocated is consistent with the leading importance ratings of tight budgets. As noted when asked to rank the greatest pressures they faced as a dean, “budget issues” was first, and “faculty recruitment and retention” was second, a very similar result. It is not surprising, therefore, that the most important constituencies of deans were “faculty” first, and “central administration” second, likely due in large part to the sometime difficult conversations between a business school dean and a university’s central administrators about enrollments, faculty positions and salary, and as a result, budgets.

The explosion of business faculty salaries recently has been documented elsewhere in AACSB International publications. The shortage of new faculty coupled with an increase in the number of retiring faculty has in fact created a “salary inversion”—new faculty members often commanding a higher salary than long-serving faculty members. This market-driven reality creates considerable conflict among faculty, adding to the pressure (budgetary as well) on deans.

Why Bother to be a Dean?

Deans report that their most important reward is “helping others to accomplish team objectives.” Tied for second in importance was “power to accomplish mission,” “facilitating strategic planning,” and “facilitating faculty development.” These results appear consistent with the personal skills reported as most valuable—“patience and communication” skills are critical to accomplishing such rewards, regardless of the organization. Contrary to popular wisdom, “prestige of position” and “financial rewards” were the least important rewards for deans. As any serving dean would likely tell you, they do not have faculty friends. They just know other deans.

How Do Deans Get Things Done?

Being a dean involves spending a great deal of time with faculty—especially with tenured faculty who are not subject to hiring/firing/disciplinary/reward practices commonly found in the corporate world. Without many “sticks,” what “carrots” (especially given declining budgets) do deans use to achieve their goals? Given the mind-set often found among faculty of independent, intellectual contractors, it should not be surprising that “consultation” is the number one management tactic reported by deans. A very close second was “working towards a higher goal,” while the number three ranked tactic was “discussion and reasoning with involved parties.”

Current popular business literature is full of advice to “managers” to become “leaders” by focusing the organization on a vision, mission, or similar constructs that are organizational wide. Apparently, deans have been employing this tactic on a regular basis. Yet, a contradiction is at work that merits additional consideration. Almost all school reward systems are very much tied to individual faculty achievement—student teaching ratings or the number and quality of academic publications. In other words, deans must consult with faculty and central administrators (over whom they have no formal authority, but report as their second most important influence group) and motivate all to work toward “higher goals” in the general absence of a

more formal collective reward/motivation system.

Deans were also asked what personal skill was most valuable to them in working toward achievement of objectives. Overwhelmingly, deans report that the most valuable personal skill is "patience." "Communication skills" were a distant second, and all other skills were not reported as being of real importance. Perhaps patience is the management tool that allows deans to lead their schools forward, given the lack of "usual" management tools.

What's Next?

A fellow dean said to me recently, "Being a dean is all that I know how to do." While not literally true, it does seem that for a small but significant set of business academics, being a dean and trying to make changes or improvements in higher education across an entire school, or the university system level as well, represents a natural career progression. As pressures on university business education increase, pressures on business deans increase directly as well. Pressures on faculty have increased, too. Observing business education over 30 years, it is clear to me that the "deal" has changed. What I was hired to do as a faculty member is different from what today's faculty are hired to do. Yes, we still call it teaching, research, and service. But each of those categories has been expanded. Teaching is now learning and assessment, research is now intellectual contributions, and the construct of service has expanded as well. These are more than mere changes in

terminology—long-serving faculty at several institutions I've talked with believe that these shifts represent substantial changes of process as well as content. Most conspicuous is fundraising, an almost unknown responsibility until fairly recently, at least for the vast majority of deans.

Underlying these shifts is a fundamental change in the social contract between higher education, society in general, and students and their families. It seems clear that higher education has shifted from being a public good, to being a private good. Funding for public universities, for example, has shifted to a minority proportion to the total budget, for example 10 percent or less, with universities passing along costs more directly in form of significantly higher tuition and fees. Universities have responded by not only raising students' costs, but also by repositioning themselves from being "state based" to "state located," and conducting intense and professionally managed fundraising campaigns at record levels. In brief, public universities have been privatized—increasing demand for faculty to treat students differently and to perform different functions than previously.

A major responsibility to successfully execute all of these changes has been assigned to business deans, who have evolved from "business scholars" to being "business practitioners"—sharing more in common with the corporate community than with the academic community. Deans have had to change from being "self-directed" (one is hard pressed to find a ca-

reer today that offers more self-autonomy across the board than that of tenured professor) to being "event directed." A double whammy is thus dealt to deans. First, the higher education social contract has changed; secondly, deans have changed from being inner to other directed. Perhaps it should not be too surprising, after all, that "deans don't last too long." ■

FEATURE EDITOR KRISHNA S. DHIR invites papers, essays or notes for the Deans' Perspective feature column from administrators and faculty members. It is hoped that this column will become a thriving forum for dialog among our readers on issues pertaining to academic leadership. It offers an opportunity to administrators and faculty members alike to speak their minds on any and all aspects of the various leadership issues confronting them. Articles may be of any length up to a maximum of about 2500 words.

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