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

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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 though 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 example 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 super-visionary 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, al-though their administrative roles require them to perform managerial tasks, such as hiring and promoting qualified faculty and staff, conducting performance evaluations, resolving conflicts, implementing institutional changes, completing and submitting required reports, and familiar-ity 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 re-sult 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 offers an overview of their roles in training these individuals to successfully reach organizational goals employing legal, ethical, and appropriate means. Ad-ditionally, examining whether or not chairs and deans are aware of management training opportunities for training in the areas of management necessary to carry out their respon-sibilities 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 con-tinuing management training opportunities for chairs and deans to fulfill their management re-sponsibilities, 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, Balz-er, Grauer, Burnfield, Ladato, & Cohen-Powell, 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, La-dato, & Cohen-Powell, 2005).

The job requirements for the positions of chairs and deans appear overwhelming and ambiguous. The responsibili-ties are extensive and constantly expanding. At the very least, universities expect chairs and deans to hold terminal degrees and appropriate credentials, have teaching expe-rience, and interpersonal communication skills. Those applying for chair’s and deans’ positions are expected to process necessary things such as keeping up with current trends and issues. Considering the institutions of higher learning are insistent applicants meet these qual-i fications, it would be a foregone conclusion the schools would offer extended training and continuous education in management skills necessary for success.

Chairs and deans face a multitude of issues while conduct-ing 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 ana-lyze various situations and evaluate decisions with a focus on achieving a desired outcome. Priorities are a critical component in addressing the issues associated with man-agement positions.

There are a number of ways faculty members can become an academic department or chair member. Typically, members of the department, through appointment by the dean, or through a system of rotation. “Unfortunately, academic departments and chairs do not receive the support and resources they need” (Lederman, 2011). This issue has been a discussion amongst researchers for over 30 years between 1990 and 2000 had any type of leadership prepa-ra-tion (Wolverton & Ackerman, 2006). This has been a discussion amongst researchers for over 30 years with minimal progress (Aziz, Mullins, Balzer, Grauer, Burnfield, Ladato, & Cohen-Powell, 2005). 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 received training on the administrative aspects of the job—budgeting, legal aspects of the hiring process, and the like” (Lederman, 2011). Seldom does purposeful selection of chairs based on perceived leadership skills take place (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 received training on the administrative aspects of the job—budgeting, legal aspects of the hiring process, and the like” (Lederman, 2011).

The qualifications of 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, La-dato, & Cohen-Powell, 2005). A faculty member may accept the chair position for a number of reasons, which can include personal satisfac-tion in helping others develop professionally, a chance to build effective academic programs, the challenge of lead-ership, defending the interests of the department, access to deans and vice presidents, and status and prestige (Lu-cas, 1986). Chairs and deans occupy key positions as lead-ers 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 2,800 academic leaders surveyed in national studies between 1999 and 2000 had any type of leadership prepa-ration (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-Powell, 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 Sociologi-cal 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 man-agement of a larger academic unit. “The responsibilities of deans vary depending on the size and mission of the university and the college or school, but in all cases the responsibilities include departmental management (dean’s responsibilities)” (Layne, 2010). External and political relations, leadership, internal productivity, resource management, academic personnel management, and personal scholar-ship were identified as the six main areas of a dean’s re-sponsibility in a national study of academic deans (Mon-tez, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 2002).

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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 universi-ties were offering management training programs for the chairs and deans prior to their administrative appoint-ments, if they were conducting consistent and continuous training for chairs and deans, and if those holding these positions were participating in management training op-portunities. Surveys were disseminated to the 258 deans and chairs throughout the state, in which 73 responses were collected, resulting in a response rate of approxi-mately 28%. More specifically, 57 chairs and 16 deans responded resulting in an approximate 29% and 27% re-sponse rate, respectively.

Research Questions

The following research questions were explored:

1: Are chairs and deans provided management training prior to their administrative appoint-ments?

2: Are management training programs available for chairs and deans?

3: Have chairs and deans participated in manage-ment training since their appointments?

4: Have chairs and deans participated in manage-ment training programs for academic deans?

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?

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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 received management training since their appointments. Those not receiving training since their appointments were 42% of chairs and 31% of deans (See Figure 4).

When provided an opportunity to elaborate on their past experiences and training, 17% of chairs and 20% of deans received annual management training. 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 were invited to attend. With regards to the deans 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.

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) were much greater than for those at smaller institutions (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, 38% 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 im-
portance of training with regards to effectiveness on the
job, assumptions that faculty 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 manage-
ment training program. Regardless of the reason for the
discrepancies, it is disturbing to see that the chairs and
deans in smaller schools are not participating in manage-
ment 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 Mis-
sissippi, it is not to exclude the possibility that other states’
institutions of higher learning might also be experienc-
ing similar challenges. With regards to the Mississippi
schools, there appears to be a lack of adequate manage-
ment 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 reg-
ularly scheduled and designed to the specific needs of the
administrators in these positions. It is premature to con-
clude that since larger schools provide more manage-
ment 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 pre-
pared to address the management needs of their units.

In order to offer an excellent education that includes a pre-
mier 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. There-
fore, 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 pro-
vide a clearer picture of trends in management training
for chairs and deans. The study was also limited to pub-
lc institutions in one state in the southern region of the
United States.

Another limitation of this study involves the generaliz-
ability 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 re-
jons of the country to determine the management train-
ing of chairs and deans in those areas. Such data would
identify trends across the nation and determine what re-
jons are more likely to offer adequate management train-
ing opportunities to chairs and deans.

Additionally, future research should explore the 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 pri-
vate institutions to determine if their management train-
ing practices mirror that of the public institutions. Should
it be determined that private institutions do not experi-
ence 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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