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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Practicing What I Teach: Does a Career as a Higher Education Professor Inform My Work as a Dean?

Linda Eisenmann

Let me begin by thanking the many people who have helped me during my presidential year and who have provided the ongoing support that brought me to this year of serving our organization. First, John Thelin, whose invitation eight years ago to serve as ASHE Program Chair showed me an outstanding model for service to ASHE, and Jay Dee, who has filled this year's Program Chair role with energy and imagination. Our theme, "Research and Practice: Embracing Connections," was creatively supported by efforts of the Program Committee, the Board of Directors, Executive Director Patricia Farrell, and colleagues such as Caroline Turner and Sharon McDade, all of whom crafted panels and invited speakers who enhanced the scholarly and professional reach of this meeting.

Finally, I thank my colleagues at John Carroll University. My dean's office co-workers provided daily support when ASHE responsibilities inevitably affected my regular work. But I also thank members of the university community about whom you will soon hear, who have been innocent contributors and provocateurs for my thinking and development as a dean.

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Having fulfilled the delightful presidential responsibility of thanking colleagues, let me talk with you about bridging two worlds. Like most ASHE presidents, I suspect, I have spent this past year thinking about what I want to convey in this talk, about what might be meaningful for the conversation a president hopes to instigate within the organization. As I listened last year to Linda Johnsrud's presidential address, I heard the passion she raised—and the way it was returned by the audience—for the idea that we researchers in higher education must attend to how our work is needed and used by colleagues who are educational policy-makers (Johnsrud, 2008). Linda herself has faced the challenge of moving from a faculty position to that of Vice President for Academic Planning and Policy for the state system of Hawaii, a role which gives her a very different perspective on the meaning, impact, and needs of higher education. Last year's conference explored the theme of engaging with policymakers, an issue that increasingly has been embraced within our association.

As I listened to Dr. Johnsrud last year, I considered the value of having successive ASHE presidents extend each other's work, rather than each offering a different theme and focus. At the same time, my work is somewhat different from Linda's. Whereas she operates in a state system with a broad policy view (clearly the target for much of our research), I work as a college dean in a single university in the private sector. I am more apt to use policy than to make it, yet my work as a practitioner is also a key target for a great deal of the research we produce in this organization. ASHE researchers want deans and provosts, presidents and faculty members to hear what we have to say; and as a dean, I embody the capacity for a direct connection. Thus was generated the theme for this conference: embracing connections across research and practice.

With this talk, I have an uncommon opportunity to enliven the conference theme by examining my own career and work life. I became dean of a college of arts and sciences four and a half years ago, following nearly 11 years as a professor of higher education in a graduate college of education and several years before that as a researcher, teacher, and administrator in our field. Rather suddenly, I found myself in a role that we frequently study, implore, chastise, and occasionally applaud. In other words, the tables were turned. For this talk, I thought it might be interesting to think out loud about whether and how my background in the field of higher education informed me as I assumed and then grew into the dean's role—hence, my title: Do I practice what I teach?

I had planned at this point to jump right into a careful, scholarly review of issues and research, as befits a presidential address. But a few days ago, I decided to add a small personal detour to talk about my own movement into higher education. This decision was born from my growing understanding that my own history as a first-generation college student has had, and

continues to have, a major impact on my choice of career and my approach to my work.

I grew up in a working-class family as the only girl among four brothers with parents who did not finish high school due to family pressures. My parents viewed college as a luxury rather than a necessity, especially so for a girl. This talk is not the best setting to discuss the challenges of getting my parents to agree to let me work my way through school, as my brothers did, and then of the seemingly impenetrable obstacle that arose when my father died during my junior year of high school. What I can say is that, through the support of some knowledgeable and helpful lawyers at the legal firm where I worked as a secretary, I learned about federal financial aid and the world of college choice beyond Cleveland, Ohio.

My heavily subsidized undergraduate years at Connecticut College, although rocky at first, as they are for many of our first-generation students, eventually became an outstanding experience, leading me to a lifelong commitment to the liberal arts and a belief in the transformative power of higher education. My unwitting introduction to college administration came in my senior year at Connecticut College when I was invited to join what I now realize was a strategic planning committee. I was hooked. I had already begun to understand that college had made an enormous difference in my own life, but now I was seeing that there were ways to study colleges as institutions, to think about their futures, to help plan their goals, and to influence their missions. Thus was born this mixed career I now have as someone who studies higher education, but who is also drawn to its practice.

Keeping that detour in mind, let me talk about how I view the relationship between scholarship and practice, focusing first on myself as a researcher. There again, I'm split. My professorial self has two parts: I am both a historian of education and a higher education generalist. Even my doctoral degree shows this mix: I graduated from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education in the Department of Administration, Planning, and Social Policy, but with a research specialty (and a passion) in the history of education. Both of my scholarly "sides" have been further shaped over 20-plus years of writing, teaching, working with students, and practicing in the field. So, in thinking about this presentation and the types of scholarly work that I turn to as a dean, I decided to bifurcate the discussion into the two areas that inform me: historical work and higher education scholarship.

Let me also say that, in doing this, I recognize that applying scholarly ideas to higher education practice can seldom be parsed so precisely. Over one's career, many ideas, approaches, and understandings blend together, their original sources confounded with later understandings. But, interestingly, in preparing this talk, I found myself easily able to pick out specific authors, books, articles, and ideas that come to my mind when I'm on my job. It's those that I want to focus on here. I apologize in advance to all

whose work I certainly use and value but who might not be highlighted specifically here. Please understand that this list is impressionistic rather than comprehensive.

THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

First, then, the use of history. The good news, especially for the historians of education in the audience, is my firm belief that understanding higher education history is, indeed, a support in the daily practice of a dean (at least, this dean). Most generally, historical understanding gives me two particular strengths: first, the awareness that some issues have occurred before, and thus, that historical knowledge may help us put change into perspective; and second, that there is in fact a historical context for many of the issues that face us today with seeming newness, helping to explain their connections. Let me sort through how historical ideas have helped me in three specific areas: students, curriculum, and institutional change.

Students

One of the most helpful historical pieces I have read and taught over the years is a 1981 article by Harold Wechsler (1981/2007), "An Academic Gresham's Law: Group Repulsion as a Theme in American Higher Education." Interestingly, every time I teach this, I have to look up the meaning of "Gresham's Law" and remind myself that it relates to physical monetary currency. Gresham's idea was that bad money drives good money out of circulation and that people hoard their good currency so that it isn't debased by the new material. Taking this idea beyond the realm of coinage, Wechsler translates it into an argument about the cycles of new students who enter higher education over time. For instance, Wechsler challenges our general belief that poorer students were nonexistent in early colleges and that those institutions were filled with only the wealthy and the privileged. In fact, scholarship students were long a part of colonial, 18th- and early-19th century institutions (Allmendinger, 1975; Levine & Nidiffer, 1996). But, as Wechsler notes in Gresham's terms, poorer students represented a "debasement of the currency" as a new group that was very unpopular with their wealthier classmates who were training for careers in law, ministry, and statesmanship. The usual response to such a new group? Ostracize them, and push them to the side as much as possible. That is, don't let the bad money pollute the good.

What is especially valuable about Wechsler's analysis is that he then traces how the same treatment was applied to female students and African American students in the 19th century and to new immigrant students at the turn of the 20th. Each time a new group found its way to higher education and began using it for gaining the knowledge, credentials, and social capital that

would come with college degrees, the existing groups would—sometimes unconsciously, sometimes not—apply the equivalent of Gresham’s Law. Not wanting their own “currency” to be harmed, those in control of “the good money” would find ways to dismiss, separate, ostracize, or devalue the new groups and the currency that they were building.

Such a recognition, when you observe its operation over centuries, provides a different perspective on today’s issues of discrimination and of efforts by the newest immigrants or by students with disabilities to make full use of college. The pattern of hesitation, nervousness, and even ostracism has long been with us.

Historical scholarship helps me understand another student-related issue facing today’s administrators: the concern that men, now outnumbered by women on undergraduate campuses and in many graduate programs, are being, at the least disadvantaged, and at the most, discriminated against by policies and practices that seem to favor women and which have produced increasing numbers of female graduates. Many are worried that we are facing a “crisis for boys” on today’s campuses (Wilson, 2007).

My historian’s understanding of the growth of educational levels, particularly the high school, helps me see these developments differently. In my view, college at the turn of the 21st century is experiencing the same pattern that high school did at the turn of the 20th. High schools had grown throughout the 19th century, but they were generally geared to well-prepared, college-oriented students looking for classical training. Students not expecting to go on to college or to pursue a learned profession often ended their schooling at lower levels such as elementary or grammar school (Reese, 1995). But, as literacy became more important to expanded job opportunities; and as schooling was increasingly seen as a way to manage young people’s lives and their workforce entry, high school was touted as a new and important opportunity. Little by little, the traditional curriculum encouraged by college-oriented groups like the Committee of Ten gave way to what is more commonly seen today: a comprehensive high school curriculum with collegiate, vocational, and general tracks that allow a single high school to serve an array of students (Franklin & McCulloch, 2007).

A real concern emerged as high schools grew in popularity and girls flocked to the new programs much more readily than boys. Some girls imagined college in their futures, but most were drawn to the vocational training provided in high school that would lead to clerical, sales, and office jobs, as well as teaching. In other words, girls valued the credential that high school could provide as they confronted a job market that was much tighter and less flexible than it was for boys, who could more easily find skilled and unskilled opportunities without completing high school (Rury, 1991; Labaree, 1988).

This development gave rise to a notion of “the boy problem” in high school among educators who not only wanted boys to pursue training but also to become “civilized” through more education. Educational journals of the early 1900s evoke many of today’s laments that collegiate curriculum, behavioral expectations, housing, teaching techniques, and any number of features are driving men away from college. Some of this analysis may be true; our educational approaches indeed may favor “typical” female behavior more than male, but it is also true that women have learned—and may still need—the value of a college degree in certifying their marketability. In other words, the “boy problem” sounds pretty familiar to a historian.

Curriculum

Dealing with the “boy problem,” with new collegiate groups, and with the economic pressures of the job market raises a second area where historical scholarship helps me: the nature of the curriculum. I work in a small liberal arts university that offers selective graduate programs, several in professional areas. Because of my school’s unquestioned liberal arts focus, curricular issues occupy us constantly, including the need to convince students and parents that our approach indeed prepares them for lifelong learning and not just an immediate job. I can assure you that I have ready and well-used versions of speeches on the value of the liberal arts in today’s world. I’m sure that most of you in this audience experience some variant of this issue on your own campus, depending on the type of school where you teach and study.

From history, I know that this debate is about as old as American colleges themselves (Rudolph, 1977). We tend to think of colonial Harvard, for instance, offering about as classical an education as one could imagine, with Greek, Latin, Hebrew, rhetoric, and moral philosophy. Of course, in comparison with today’s curriculum, it was. But at the same time, Harvard was well aware that it was preparing the next generation of leaders for a new society and envisioned its graduates as needing preparation to move into law, ministry, and government (Cremin, 1970, 1982; Rudolph, 1962).

The historical moment when the curricular question was most widely examined was the noteworthy Yale Report of 1828, which just about all students of higher education history read now as a symbol of “let’s rally ‘round the classics” (Yale University, 1828/1989). Indeed, that report from the Yale faculty was a call to resist bringing too many “new-modelled” ideas into the curriculum. Coursework, they cautioned, was already expanding into broader sciences, different languages, and new disciplines. But the Yale Report of 1828 actually was—just like the speech I gave last week to admissions prospects—an argument for how the traditional curriculum is, in fact, the best training for jobs and for life (Herbst, 2004; Pak, 2008). The same, nearly 200-year-old, Yale Report ideas about developing one’s “mental

discipline” and exercising “the mind as muscle” can easily be used today to encourage and defend a liberal arts education.

This debate has been fairly constant in American higher education as institutions have expanded and as new groups have turned to college. Seventy years after the Yale Report, for instance, Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois highlighted the same set of questions in trying to plan the best, most appropriate education for the growing numbers of African Americans seeking a place in the professional world (Anderson, 1988). DuBois is frequently hailed for his commitment to the “Talented Tenth” and for refusing to devalue a classical education for Black students, while Washington is often seen as “the great accommodator” who advocated diminished vocational opportunities. But history helps us see that their curricular recommendations were more varied than this dichotomy suggests and that both Washington and DuBois were committed to advancing African American students (Anderson, 1988; Bieze, 2008; Cunnigen, Dennis, & Glascoe, 2006). Their dilemma, which I believe still bedevils today’s educators, is how to balance traditional with vocational training, how to prepare students for jobs and for life, and how to craft the best type of college degree.

Institutional Change

Thinking about curricular decisions leads me to my third area, and the last one I’ll consider in this section on historical understanding: that is, how history helps me understand the context of my own institution. As I noted earlier, I work at a mid-sized, liberal arts-focused, Jesuit institution where issues of curriculum are front and center on a daily basis. (In the second half of this presentation, I’ll walk you through a specific curriculum project we have undertaken.) Of course, like all institutions, my university is situated in a variety of contexts which affect its activities and decisions. For instance, we are a private institution, dealing with concomitant implications for funding and financial aid; we are part of a larger environment in the state of Ohio; we compete with other private and public schools in the Greater Cleveland area; and we are one of hundreds of Catholic institutions in the country. My background in higher education helps me understand the impact of those subsets, but the issues significant to being a Jesuit school within a larger higher education environment are informed by my understanding of history.

Let me say more about this context. There are 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in this country, and they constitute a fairly well-organized subgroup within Catholic higher education. When I started at John Carroll University, I observed that, when first confronting a question that could benefit from other people’s data, we automatically turned first to the 27 other Jesuit schools. The Jesuit network, I learned, is sturdy, effective, and supportive.

One area that distinguishes Jesuit institutions is their curriculum. Their liberal arts tradition benefits from 450 years of careful thinking by the Jesuits about what helps develop a well-educated person who approaches the world with knowledge and with integrity. For instance, my school requires of every student three courses in philosophy, two in religious studies (not theology), and one in public speaking—requirements not very common in other settings. Because of such commitments, Jesuit institutions have historically found themselves out of sync with mainstream American schools, which often have more flexible approaches to curriculum and programming (Mahoney, 2003).

Here again, I have found history helpful in understanding my university's context. America's Catholic colleges—remember the Gresham's Law phenomenon—were generally seen as parallel to the mainstream (that is, an outside group) throughout the 19th and early-20th centuries. Their students were different, the goals were more specific, their curriculum was less flexible (Gleason, 1995; Leahy, 1991). But as accreditation became increasingly important in the 20th century, with its focus on setting and sustaining standards, Jesuit schools (and Catholic institutions generally) had to decide whether to continue on their rather separate road, planning and organizing around their specific needs, or to give accrediting bodies the influence and control that would come along with their certifications.

Work by Lester Goodchild (1986) on how schools in the Midwest faced this issue provides an interesting perspective. Goodchild traces a rather painful story of how Catholic leaders slowly made their peace with accreditation. The biggest change they needed to accommodate centered around curriculum. The Catholic schools all had much less flexible and larger curricula than comparison groups; yet cutting the number of credits to better match regional standards would mean dropping courses in religion and in philosophy, which were basic to the Catholic institutions' work and sense of self. Could the colleges do this and still maintain their academic integrity? As historian Philip Gleason (1995) terms it, these schools needed to "contend with modernity" if they wanted to keep their students and give them the same boost into graduate and professional training that secular graduates enjoyed (Gleason, 1995). As Goodchild shows, the Catholic schools were well aware of the trade-offs they were making.

Acknowledging this different historical growth, including the schools' decision to allow secular bodies to frame curricular decisions, helps me daily in understanding the dilemmas at my institution, as well as the significance of value-laden decisions. Like Jesuit schools, many other types of institutions that have grown within a specialized context or that developed because of initial ostracism face such decisions around mission. Think of single-sex institutions or historically Black colleges and universities which, growing out of their own historical contexts, have had to decide how to

balance their history, mission, and future (Anderson, 1988; Gasman, 2007; Solomon, 1985).

I hope that these examples present a convincing argument that my identity as a historian of education both affects and informs my daily work as a dean. But without a doubt, so does the other half of my scholarly self, the higher education generalist who has taught, researched, and practiced across our field.

As I thought about this portion of my presentation, a huge range of concerns that I deal with regularly came to mind, each suggesting a possible way to organize the discussion. Perhaps I should talk about how work on financial aid—for instance, by Laura Perna (2008), Don Heller (2002), or Edward St. John (2003)—has helped me with my president's new program that provides free tuition to any Ohio applicant whose family earns less than \$40,000 a year? Perhaps I should discuss Clifford Adelman's studies (1999) and the work on "swirling" that help us continually interpret and discuss our school's retention rates and patterns (Braxton, 2008)? Should I emphasize my use of studies by Estela Bensimon (2005), Caroline Turner, and others (Turner, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000) in working with our newly organized Faculty of Color Organization and its concerns about diversity in our faculty ranks? Perhaps I should explain how scholarship by Jack Schuster and Martin Finkelstein (2006) has guided my work on the faculty's difficult consideration of a new "professor of practice" category? Should I address the public policy implications facing Ohio as it tries to articulate a tighter public system that might leave private schools like mine at a distinct disadvantage in the hunt for applicants? Perhaps I should discuss how work on retention for students of color has influenced the programming created jointly by our Academic Advising and Student Affairs offices (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perna, 2007)? Clearly, our colleagues have had a noteworthy and measurable effect on practice across a range of issues.

THE FACULTY PERSPECTIVE

But in thinking about the variety of ways in which I use my higher education training, I noticed that one perspective kept popping up more than others: my work with the faculty. It surprised me to realize that the faculty is generally the first constituency I consider when sorting through a problem or envisioning a solution.

Possibly, this focus results from the nature of my particular job. I am dean of a College of Arts and Sciences that constitutes nearly three-quarters of both the undergraduate and graduate faculty at my institution. As dean, I am the conduit from the faculty to the senior administration. My boss, the Academic Vice President, must include responsibility for Career Services, the Registrar, the Service Learning Center, Global Education, and others

in his considerations of academic affairs. And my president has an even wider range of constituencies in the immediate foreground of most of his decisions.

Yet my work in higher education suggests that there may be an additional reason why I often think about faculty first. I recall the argument in Robert Birnbaum's book, *How Academic Leadership Works* (1992), which I used for several years in teaching the capstone course in our practice-oriented doctoral program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. We taught that course, "Leadership for Change in Higher Education," as a final seminar where students pulled together all they had learned in the program and intentionally applied that knowledge to issues facing them in their daily practice as directors, deans, and vice presidents. My two main texts were Birnbaum and Ronald Heifetz's (1994) *Leadership without Easy Answers*. More on Heifetz later.

Although the college presidency was Birnbaum's main focus, he based much of his analysis on data gathered from academic leaders at many levels. One of Birnbaum's most surprising arguments—and one that never failed to provoke spirited disagreement among my students—was his contention that students were actually a rather insignificant constituency in a president's success or failure, because the student body turned over every few years and had a less permanent stake in institutional issues. Successful presidents, he argued, were those who satisfied three other groups: their administrative colleagues, their trustees, but most necessarily, their faculties. Birnbaum found that presidents could achieve reasonably successful tenures by meeting the expectations of colleagues and trustee boards but could claim "exemplary" presidential terms only if they managed to satisfy faculty over time.

A related finding by Birnbaum—and one that strikes me regularly at work—is how easy it is for administrators to narrow their circle of colleagues so that, as time goes on, they talk more and more to other administrators, who after all, understand their thinking and their issues, and less and less to faculty, who always seem to have a different perspective. This shift happens even to academic administrators who move to their roles following long faculty careers (and might give credence to the longstanding jab that administrators move to "the dark side" when leaving the faculty) (Johnsrud, 2002).

In exploring this final area, I would like to use a specific example from my work as a dean to examine how and why I employed a faculty lens to address a decision with much broader implications. We can use this example to test Birnbaum's analysis, or perhaps even to bolster evidence for how administrators move to that dark side.

JOHN CARROLL'S FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR

The example I want to explore is the recent successful effort to reconfigure our first-year seminar at John Carroll University. When I arrived at John Carroll nearly five years ago, the impression I received about the first-year seminar (FYS) seemed very much at odds with what I would have expected. During my interview and my initial months at the university, I heard considerable sentiment that our core curriculum (where the first-year seminar is situated) likely needed revising; but I also heard unambiguous concern that far too much faculty angst had surrounded—and still lingered from—the last effort at such a revision. Knowing that curricular decisions are some of the dearest that faculty make, I was not surprised that some people still referred to “the blood left on the floor” from the core revision 12 years earlier. As I talked to people, I quickly discerned a lack of commitment for a full core curriculum revision, but wondered if changing the first-year seminar could be a smaller, but nonetheless effective, way to start.

FYS had become somewhat polarizing on campus, and it took me a while to figure out why. I heard about a program that seemed to me, as a professor of higher education, the “gold standard” that many institutions would hope to establish. John Carroll’s FYS was a three-credit academic course required of all first-year students, taught by full-time faculty who worked together to craft a unifying theme and then to choose three books that would organize the syllabi. Meetings to generate the theme and choose the books were open to all, followed by a faculty vote. Each department was expected to contribute two faculty members to teach the seminar for the two-year stretch of each theme.

In addition, considerable faculty development was available to support people whose expertise fell outside the novels, texts, or themes being offered; these included formal programs to help with curriculum planning, as well as informal gatherings where faculty could chat about teaching methods and techniques. Since all FYS sections occurred at the same hour, faculty could combine classes in small numbers, or could gather all 800 students to hear from guest speakers, even the authors of their texts. This all seemed to me very thoughtful, well-planned, and sensitive to faculty needs.

Yet many faculty members told me they absolutely hated the program or knew others who did. Some had never taught in it and resisted enticements to do so. Others had been conscripted by the departmental requirement to provide two professors every year. Many rejected the very essence of the seminar’s philosophy that faculty should be “co-learners” with students—that is, that students would see these experienced scholars model how to approach unfamiliar work and ideas. Some objected to having to put so much work into a course that lasted only for two years. Further, they argued, where was the reward (financially, or in student satisfaction) for working so hard on such a difficult class?

On the other side were faculty advocates who valued the chance to teach outside their discipline and to work with 40 colleagues whom they might not otherwise come to know as teachers. They found the faculty development gatherings stimulating, and they loved the challenge of introducing first-year students, in a seminar format, to critical thinking and class discussion. These faculty seemed almost offended that other colleagues resented the program, which, it turned out, had been passed with the “New Core” by only a slim margin.

Students, too, had shown mixed reactions to the first-year seminar. Some students loved it; some hated it; many were in the middle. But we knew two specific things about the student reaction. First, the biggest student complaint about FYS was lack of consistency across sections. As roommates and friends compared notes, they did not like realizing that Professor A’s section seemed a lot easier than Professor B’s: The writing tasks were shorter, the reading load was lighter, and the expectations were less rigorous. The second fact we knew was that students who might not have appreciated FYS immediately after taking it often became advocates of the course as they moved through their college experience. In other words, they supported our belief that some of the benefits of a liberal arts experience become more evident as students mature as learners.

With all of these pros and cons swirling around the course, what would be the best way to revise the first-year seminar?

As you listen to my description from your perspectives as higher education specialists, you might sensibly envision this as a case where attention to the students is the most necessary and useful element. In fact, we might argue that research on students would be the key to the solution (Braxton, 2008). For instance, our field is full of studies on the first-year experience that explore how to balance the developmental academic and social needs of young people (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000). One of my UMass Boston students wrote her dissertation specifically on first-year seminars, and I had ready access to her findings and her excellent literature review (Bortman, 2005).

We could also see this issue through the lens of retention, particularly retention in the first three to six weeks of college (Braxton, 2000, 2008; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004; St. John & Wilkerson, 2006; Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 1993). I can attest that one finding from the scholarship on retention has planted itself firmly in the minds of practitioners: that is, the importance of the first three to six weeks of college in connecting with and engaging students. My president, for instance, cites this point frequently in urging us to improve our work in academic advising, orientation, residence life, and the first-year seminar.

We could also identify the curriculum issues at stake here. FYS becomes the first step in helping students balance the general education curriculum

with the specificity they will develop in pursuing a major. Again, our colleagues have produced a large body of material that could help inform the decision from the perspective of students and the curriculum (Pascarella, 2005). Tied in with this approach could be a concern about student and parental expectations of college. Perhaps our real issue was convincing students and their parents of this program's positive developmental aspects, urging them to see it as a vital building block rather than a diversion from their march toward the major and eventual specialization.

All of these perspectives are useful in analyzing the first-year seminar situation, and I could turn to any number of scholars in our field for input on how to consider it. But, as I thought about how to improve satisfaction with the first-year seminar, I began to see it primarily as a faculty issue. I noticed that, in the data we had about student satisfaction, students seemed happiest in those sections with enthusiastic faculty. That is, it didn't seem to matter whether a faculty member felt insecure about the new material, as long as that professor was comfortable showing herself as a learner. It didn't much matter whether a professor usually taught upper-level classes, as long as he was comfortable thinking about the needs of first-year students. It also didn't matter what field the professor came from, as long as he or she found value in the shared learning community of FYS teachers.

Right or wrong, I decided that the best way to give students a good first-year seminar experience was to make sure that the faculty teaching it were engaged, enthusiastic, and rewarded. In crafting a plan to examine the seminar, I found myself turning to findings and analyses about faculty work life, faculty roles and rewards, perspectives on decision-making, and leadership. Let me outline some of the scholarship I considered and conclude by telling you how it is all turning out.

I have already discussed Robert Birnbaum's (1992) idea that an academic leader must keep faculty satisfied to be successful. That idea organized my approach to how we could review and reconfigure FYS. I planned a faculty-only committee to study the issue, ignoring the thought that perhaps the students—recipients of the class—or student affairs professionals—colleagues in the work with first-year students—might merit a place at the table.

Instead, I turned to the other book that I had used with my doctoral students in our capstone seminar: Ronald Heifetz's *Leadership without Easy Answers* (1994). Unlike Birnbaum, Heifetz does not write specifically about higher education. He is a musician and a professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government who often explores his ideas using both governmental examples and general leadership cases, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. or a local physician.

One of Heifetz's most potent ideas is that leaders must avoid the temptation—which constituents are usually quite happy to foster—that they can and must solve all problems themselves. He calls this tendency “a flight to

authority.” Heifetz admits that there are many problems (technical issues, he calls them) that leaders, indeed, should manage. These include situations where the problem is definable, the solution is clear, and the leader or manager is suited to implementing the solution. But Heifetz presents a second type of situation with more difficult issues that cannot, and should not, be decided or solved by one person alone. Those concerns—which Heifetz calls “adaptive” work—are cases that require learning in order to understand the problem and investigate solutions. In these adaptive situations, Heifetz argues that leaders must “give the work to the people” who are involved in both the problem and its solution.

Using the example of a father who learns he has cancer, Heifetz discusses the difference between the technical issues, where the physician should and must take control, and the adaptive questions, where the physician becomes a support to the patient and his family in their decisions about how to proceed with his care, weighing the risks and the resulting quality of life. Similarly, Heifetz examines the work of Martin Luther King, who could not solve America’s race issues no matter how prominent his persona; he could however, galvanize others, and he came to symbolize the need for people to take charge of changing their own thinking.

With our first-year seminar, I was certainly being urged to “do something,” to “exercise leadership.” What I chose to do was to create a task force of volunteers who would examine the issue from top to bottom.

At John Carroll University, committees usually are formed in two ways: solely by faculty governance, or by administrators who either appoint all the members or ask for a certain number of elected faculty representatives. I suggested that we create a group of volunteers who would like to look at FYS and its future. I opened the task force to anyone with an interest, regardless of their feelings about the course. Leaving the invitation open had the advantage of drawing in colleagues who were less well known across campus and, thus, less likely to be elected in campus-wide voting. Quite a few junior faculty offered their services. So, too, did opponents of FYS, who were courteous enough to call me first and ask whether I really intended this as an open invitation. I explained that, if the new approach had any chance to succeed, it had best pass muster with skeptics; why not learn early on what the objections would be?

In the end, 21 faculty members volunteered for the task force, representing all disciplines and ranks. They worked for over 18 months on this project, with no course releases and little tangible reward beyond a few good dinners. (I should mention that the task force chair brews beer as a hobby, so at least there were appealing accompaniments to some of the meals.)

I met with the task force initially, offering them a charge and responding to their questions. The group spent its first few meetings deciding whether we should keep FYS at all—that is, should they simply recommend its

elimination before spending months crafting a new approach. Although the elimination idea received a good airing, the group decided instead to keep and to “reinvigorate” the seminar, using a word I had suggested. Rather quickly, the committee broke into subgroups with different tasks: one would reexamine data we already had; one would gather new information by surveying students and faculty about the seminar; one would examine the seminar’s articulation with the core curriculum; and the last would study models from other institutions.

At this point in the work, I backed away, leaving the committee to its work and deliberations. But I also found myself frequently turning to ideas I had taught in higher education about different perspectives on decisions and leadership. Both William Bergquist in his work on cultures of the academy (Bergquist, 1992; Bergquist & Pawlak, 2008) and Lee Bolman and Terry Deal in *Reframing Organizations* (2008) have advanced the idea that situations can be viewed through different “frames” and that the dominant frames people use can determine how they read a situation and where they seek solutions. (I should note that, having had Bolman and Deal as professors, I generally tend to use their language in my analyses.)

These perspectives helped me understand that, for some people, a “structural frame” was the ideal way to solve FYS concerns. Just fix the seminar’s processes or timing or funding or staffing, and everything would be fine. Others were clearly more comfortable with a “political frame” and saw the issue as a battle between faculty factions who must convince others to vote their way. Still others were taking a “human resources” perspective where consensus could be built and people could adjust their roles in the process. For others, a “symbolic frame” might see this issue as one of faculty authority or even as a referendum on the new dean’s leadership.

As I considered these different ways of examining the issue, I also began to perceive concerns around faculty work life satisfaction within the discussion. I considered the scholarship of Judith Gappa, Ann Austin, and Andrea Trice (Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007), which helped me see that the faculty members who most enjoyed FYS valued the collegiality it generated and the professional growth that occurred through teaching the new material and the faculty community that built up around it. For these faculty, the most important task was to “reinvigorate” that earlier positive sense of the work and to convince more colleagues to give the experience a try.

The language of faculty “roles and rewards” began to appear more frequently in the committee’s discussions. That scholarship clearly represents another idea from our field that has widely permeated campus life (Boyer, 1990; Braxton, 2006; Rice, 2002). The task force members were comfortable with their “role” in leading curricular decisions, but were less sure that faculty were being “rewarded” for their work in FYS. Initially, I couldn’t understand this concern over rewards, since I was continuing the commitment begun by

my predecessor to award each person who taught FYS an (admittedly small) salary bonus during the year he or she taught. But the faculty meant something deeper in terms of “reward.” They observed that the university rarely highlighted FYS in presentations of its strengths; seldom was this rigorous course touted positively to new students; and rarely were new colleagues encouraged to teach FYS. Instead, some departments actively discouraged it as a drain on faculty energy. And, the task force observed, almost never did tenure and promotion committees, or the dean’s review, highlight FYS teaching as a special contribution to the university. If the course was so vital, why was it consistently ignored by campus leaders and why was it increasingly being treated as a chore?

Looking at the FYS task force from the outside and reviewing the findings from its surveys, I began to see all the leadership “frames” operating at once, alongside the issues of faculty work life and rewards. This became one of the first points where I consciously began to apply higher education research to my job. I recognized that, when dealing with the entire faculty, it was inevitable that the issue would be seen from all four perspectives. And I would need to be able to respond to each frame, and from each frame, as we worked through a possible solution. Likewise, ignoring the work life and reward issues could doom any recommendation by the task force or at least leave us with the same tepid level of support that the previous incarnation had won.

So, what happened? Interestingly, after more than a year’s work, the task force began to break down as the members tried to achieve consensus on what plan to advance to a faculty vote. Opponents continued to worry about the paucity of rewards and the lack of enthusiasm among colleagues. Proponents differed according to their “frame” of reference: Solutions that satisfied the structural analysts continued to bother the symbolists; the human resource solutions did not satisfy the political thinkers. Discussion stalled, and a consensus seemed unlikely.

However, one idea began to gather steam and eventually became the organizing principle for the new model of FYS. One professor had been offering the concept of “faculty learning communities” to organize the seminar, noting that faculty had eagerly supported such voluntary groups on campus quite recently. For instance, a year earlier, our Center for Teaching and Learning had provided small amounts of money to buy books and cater the occasional lunch for cross-disciplinary discussion groups. This professor wondered aloud whether creating smaller learning groups within the 40-person FYS staff could satisfy those who wanted to teach from their interest, while still connecting people across the program. Little by little, the “learning community” model was advanced and began to offer ways to satisfy various concerns. In the end, it was the model presented to and approved by faculty vote in the spring of 2007.

Instead of a new theme that changed every two years, we chose an overarching theme that resonated more specifically with the Jesuit character of John Carroll. "Social justice" became the umbrella theme that helped connect FYS more tightly to the university mission, thereby enhancing the role FYS could play in introducing students to this important university value. Faculty were invited to generate ideas for learning communities that would interpret the social justice theme. Any idea could be offered and circulated; then, if six or more faculty signed up to work within that theme, an FYS learning community could be born. This first time through, faculty generated five learning communities, each with its own take on the overall theme. For the current year (2008–2009), we have learning communities in "Human Rights and Social Justice," "Poverty and Social Justice," "Corporations and Social Justice," "Global Climate Change and Social Justice," and "Second Life' and Utopias: Exploring Social Justice."

By organizing these five groups, we have tackled several problems. First, by signing up for a specific learning community, faculty can work on a topic that interests them, yet it need not be a topic of their professional expertise. For instance, the climate change group includes several environmental scientists, but also draws people from business, political science, and the library. Both the poverty and human rights groups attract colleagues from across the university, including many who had been members of similar informal learning groups for years. These learning communities include people from religious studies, sociology, history, languages, business, and sciences, among others. By design, all five groups have membership from across the disciplines.

This plan also eased the conscription problem; that is, forcing unwilling faculty to teach FYS. By offering themes with wide appeal, we hoped to ensure a ready supply of volunteers who bring enthusiasm to the project. (Remember our survey finding that, irrespective of background, the most enthusiastic FYS teachers were the most successful with students.) Another result was to connect the seminar more tightly with the university mission, making it easier for both the Admissions Office and the president to highlight its contribution and the faculty's creativity.

Finally came the issue of rewards. In examining the new model, faculty argued that, just as in its earlier iterations, the new course required considerable work, probably more than preparing a course in one's own field. In fact, the new version required a full semester of planning sessions with fellow learning community members followed by ongoing gatherings once the course was up and running. My administrative colleagues agreed with this analysis of time and effort, and we created a fund that supports FYS faculty in choosing either an annual stipend or, for teaching the seminar three times, a course release. This was the model voted on, approved, and now implemented by the faculty over the past year.

I hope that, as higher education scholars, you can see the work of our peers operating in my example. We can distinguish how the issues of faculty work life and rewards emerged and were addressed; we can discern the focus on identifying faculty as leaders who can make change; and we can see how the four frames helped organize our work and recommendations. (In fact, the symbolic frame was such a sturdy part of the work that both the university president and the dean now teach in the first-year seminar, pushing the dean to learn how to create and use an avatar to guide students through the virtual computer world of Second Life.)

But what about the students, you might rightfully ask? I noted at the start of my example that scholars in this audience, or even other deans, might see this case from a student perspective. Perhaps it's just my own narrow framing that formulated this issue from a faculty perspective. I will leave that decision for your consideration, but I will say that we are now intentionally studying student satisfaction with the new seminar and trying to assess students' pre- and post-course understanding of social justice. The FYS is also an important focus in the questions we add to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), helping to determine students' campus involvement and their understanding of mission. I am confident that the expertise I have gained in the field of higher education, along with knowledge I share with my campus colleagues, will be brought to bear on those studies over time as we assess the outcome of our new approach.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude with a particular expression of thanks to the members of this audience and to other colleagues whose scholarship has provided me the background for understanding the work I do each day as a dean. In our 33rd year of ASHE, we can be proud of creating a body of research that continually stimulates new scholars to join us and that speaks to people like me whose daily work supports and sustains the education of young people. I hope that my story and my examples give you both the evidence and the encouragement you need to keep pursuing the provocation of your own scholarly questions.

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