

Academic Administration and Higher Education in India

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ABSTRACT

This introductory chapter begins with a personal journey in higher education and takes the pursuit of excellence in academic administration as a learning process. By recognizing administration as both an art and a science, multiple sources of knowledge as well as the creative and humanistic nature of administrative work are explored. The rationale for this book is discussed, and the need for academic administrators to actively pursue professional development and lifelong learning using an eclectic approach is highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of excellence in academic administration is always (or firstly but not solely) a personal story for anyone interested in this topic. And the story may go a long way. A journey of more than two decades in the academia across various boundaries preceded my undertaking of this writing. Having been an academic in another country, I completed my (post)graduate studies in the United States and landed in a faculty position (again) in the mid- 1990s. Like most on the tenure-track, I concentrated on teaching and research, with a service record that was adequate for my rank but with little “administrative” responsibility. The situation changed in 2001 when I became chairman of my department, at an institution where chairpersons were particularly important in the administrative structure (more instrumental than the deans in tenure and promotion reviews and decisions, for example). The election of the chair was tensely contested, as well as any departmental affairs at the time, in one of the largest yet most troubled subdivisions of the institution. After a sudden resignation/retirement of my respected predecessor, who passed away a few months later with unbelievable .lingering stress from the job, I assumed the mammoth responsibility as a newly tenured faculty member. Few had a clue how I would handle the issues that had left many feeling helpless. Subsequent changes turned out to be quite dramatic, and so positive that some of my colleagues (including the most senior faculty) called me an “administrative genius” (which I disagreed since I did rely on learned logical steps, instincts resulted from the experience of my whole life, and most importantly support from my team). They encouraged me to consider going further into administration. After time became overdue for my sabbatical, I figured that I could replicate my success at a higher level to significantly benefit the institution that might find my skills or talent helpful. Administrative job hunting through market competition was by no means an easy and effortless process, which itself could be eye-opening for countless applicants who wish to move up this way. I was lucky enough to land in a position at another university, where three colleges had been combined into one with the creation of that “super dean” job. Without sufficient buy-in from the campus, emotions were running high while no one was in charge of the schools and units when I arrived, just weeks before the start of a new academic year.

My prior experiences and insights were put to good use along with hard work in gathering and digesting information, meeting people, organizing teams, selecting and mentoring new leaders, and dealing with urgent course scheduling and staffing issues. The job became even more exciting after I set the schools in motion with the rebuilt teams and a new vision. The many tough challenges facing the institution required uncompromising commitment and leadership in resolving old issues and targeting fundamental and long-term needs, including recruitment of a large number of faculty, creation of unit plans for student enrollment and success, development of new academic programs, fostering community partnership and regional outreach, pursuit of quality assurance via accreditation, and building institutional capacity including instructional technology infrastructure. The changes were remarkable and results significant as they involved so many initiatives and so much team and personal effort which, according to some colleagues, would otherwise take many more years to accomplish. I took tremendous pride in my dedicated teams. And I did learn a great deal about academic administration, or “leading from the middle”. I also gained a good perspective on different institutional settings, though devoting myself to all the administrative work inexorably delayed the scholarly writing that I had desired. The end of my sabbatical/special leave was a time for fruition. With a mature team built into place, I had two choices: to return to my faculty tenure and wrap up the administrative “service learning”, or to continue the journey and further devote myself as an outstanding academic administrator. After weighing my interests and options, I chose the latter by accepting an offer to become the associate vice chancellor for academic affairs at my current

institution. Unlike my previous posts, here I was not greeted with unavoidable battles with knotty issues but invaluable professional development opportunities generously offered to staff and administrators at one of the Big Ten universities. I was immediately sent to attend a systemwide, year-long fiscal officer development series, which covered many of the topics I needed to know about the challenges and rigor of becoming a qualified institutional leader: financial policies, accounting processes, chart of accounts, tax, treasury management, state budget process, budget development, administration and revenue projecting, sponsored research and The Pursuit of Excellence in Academic Administration research administration, indirect cost recoveries, post-award contract and grant administration, foundation policies, public affairs and marketing—communicating institutional information, procurement, capital asset management, facilities organizations and operations, construction projects, technology systems and infrastructure, labor laws and university policies, payroll policies, benefits, travel management, legal issues, internal controls, ethics, and risk assessment and management. External development opportunities .

LEARNING ADMINISTRATIVE KNOWLEDGE

Administration is both an art and a science (Lepawsky, 1949). As art, it entails creativity; the administrator, like the artist, has to be a creative person, or “a person whose creative work shows sensitivity and imagination” (Cognitive Science Laboratory, 2006). As science, administration may be studied or learned like “systematized knowledge” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2009), which emphasizes logical and analytical thought. Creativity and knowledge are related but different. Knowledge is typically obtained through research and education, while some scholars believe that the conventional system of schooling may “stifle” creativity (Robinson, 2001). While the main interest of this book is in the administration of academic affairs, academic administration often refers to the administration of academic institutions in their entirety (e.g., schools, colleges, and universities), including the lines of responsibilities of all administrative units. The system of knowledge and learning usually falls under the rubric of educational administration (and leadership). There are programs specializing in higher education administration, designed for those students who wish to enter administrative roles in colleges and universities. Administrators of academic affairs, however, normally not only have their advanced degrees but also are established scholars in disciplines other than higher education administration. With some exceptions (e.g., those who have taught and/or researched higher education as their discipline), a degree in higher education administration is not a required or even preferred qualification for the administration of academic affairs, especially at four-year colleges and research universities. This seems quite ironic; the next chapter will provide a critical analysis of the situation in terms of both achievements and problems facing higher education administration as a discipline. The seeming issue of relevance to the administration of academic affairs, however, does not devalue or dismiss the importance of a related knowledge system. Administrators’ not seeking or using such knowledge (Keller, 1985) is not necessarily the fault of those who created it. Academics (including those already in administration) sometimes misunderstand the nature of administrative work; some thought anyone could do it without special learning.

When faculty suffer from perceived administrative missteps (even just a lack of professionalism at a higher level), some tend to blame on a misfortune with the administration as a given rather than considering the issues as a need for professional development. For the administrators, some may not realize it either until they get into some serious troubles. In real terms, entering academic administration is like gaining entry into a new profession (no matter how long one intends to stay), where a special set of skills, knowledge, and values as well as a code of ethics are among the basics for success. In pursuit of excellence in academic administration, academics-turned-administrators may discover such specialized knowledge to be exactly what is needed to help them successfully make the transition into major administrative roles. On the other hand, since higher education administration as a discipline is not developed specifically for the needs of academic affairs, those narrowly conceived “academic administrators” may also turn to other fields of administrative studies for help to build the knowledge base for their new area of expertise. Schools of business and public administration have led administrative studies with different emphases, including the administration of nonprofit organizations and social enterprises that are also shared interests at schools of social administration and services. A survey of the “state of the art” in some of those domains would help us to clarify our direction with a roadmap and, hopefully, lead to an eclectic, dialectic, and effective approach to related scholarship to help guide our practice.

Higher Education Administration

Let’s look at some real-world examples of how this is being studied as a discipline. The first case with high relevance identified in a random search is the Higher Education “While in the program, students learn to accomplish the following:

1. Conceptualize higher education from a perspective rich in theoretical depth and grounded in active professional practice, including an understanding of the system of higher education and the values, policies and practices that inform its operation .
2. Develop an understanding of the institutional context of professional practice and the intricate relationships among various contextual issues.

3. Develop research skills for analyzing the problems, threats and opportunities that coexist within and around higher education institutions and the capacity to translate the results of analysis to purposeful action.
4. Develop skills for engaging in productive dialogue and negotiation with multiple Stakeholder.s
5. Appreciate the importance of ongoing study related to their professional life and master the conceptual framework and skills necessary to engage in such study.”

In terms of course requirements, each track toward the master’s degree requires 15 units of credit, including core courses and electives, a master’s project and an internship field experience of at least one quarter (which may be waived if students have had significant work experience in a higher education setting). Core requirements include courses on social contexts of education, history and philosophy of higher education, higher education policy, law and ethics, budgeting and finance, higher education administration seminar, college student development, learning and teaching in higher and professional education, and research and analysis in teaching and learning.

Other Administrative/Managerial Studies

Other branches of administrative and managerial studies are also valuable sources of knowledge with both obvious and potential contributions to higher education. In real terms, administration or management is a common aspect for all modern bureaucracies. Although government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and business enterprises have different natures and features, they require certain shared knowledge (e.g., sociology, psychology, political science, economics, philosophy, and law) and understanding of fundamental administrative and managerial processes (e.g., organizational theory and decision-making models) (Bolman and Deal, 2008). The following are two major examples.

Public administration studies government and is sometimes referred to as government management. Increasingly, it also studies non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a primary purpose to contribute to public good (e.g., nonprofit organizations). Since education (both public and private) has a public purpose and has much to do with public funding, it has an important place in this branch of administrative and managerial studies. Particularly, administrators in state colleges and universities can benefit significantly from the knowledge of public administration. Take a look at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, which has one of the most regarded programs in public administration. A lot of the courses it offers in public administration are of potential interest to academic administrators, such as managerial leadership, ethics, public organizations and management, non-profit management and governance, policy analysis, political economy of policy reform, information management, financial management, public budgeting, managerial economics, human resources management, mediation and conflict resolution, environment and resource, science and technology, education, healthcare, international public and NGO management, program evaluation, and research methods.

Business administration as a course of studies offers instruction in general business principles and practices, particularly with regard to enterprises, markets, and the global economy. Since nonprofit organizations including higher education institutions involve similar business processes and activities (as denoted by the name of the publication of the knowledge of business administration is relevant and helpful to academic administrators in both public and private sectors. It is especially important to the management of an increasing number of for-profit colleges and universities. Take a look at one of the most established business schools, i.e., the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania which is the oldest of its kind. Leadership essentials consist of course work on ethics and responsibility, foundations of leadership and teamwork, the governmental and legal environment of business, management communication, and management of people at work.

Analytical foundations include decision models and uncertainty, managerial economics, and statistical analysis for management. Core business fundamentals contain several course sequences: strategy (competitive strategy, and global strategic management), finance (financial analysis, and macroeconomic analysis and public policy), accounting (financial accounting, and fundamentals of managerial accounting), operations (management of quality and productivity, and supply chain management), and marketing (marketing management strategy, and program design). While not particularly about higher education management, such areas of expertise may help academic administrators in many ways.

CONCLUSION

Few faculty and administrators have had the opportunity to systematically study higher education as their own profession. Graduate teaching and research assistantships as well as faculty development opportunities have now become a priority in many institutions to help existing and would-be professors to excel in instruction and research. Yet, few of them have received extensive training on university services, not to mention learning and practicing academic administration. There are now countless publications and workshops available, though not all faculty and administrators have had the luxury to spend a lot of time and other resources for this type of development. A concise guidebook would be a good starting point to help faculty going into administration and academic administrators

moving into greater leadership roles. Such a book should integrate practice wisdom, research, and theory with no nonsense. It should be thorough, comprehensive, yet simple. In view of an aging trend in this country, the book should help to rejuvenate our leadership by offering assistance to the newcomers to this special profession.

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