

Education Deans: Challenges and Stress

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Cover Page Footnote

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Background:

It is advised that transformative changes at research universities are best implemented within colleges or schools within such universities, while the colleges or schools remain connected to the larger collaborative processes and administrative structures (Watson & Watson, 2013). Academic college/school deans are considered crucial to the successful development and implementation of transformative change in that they have the means and opportunity to make major structural and/or transformative changes (English & Kramer, 2017). Indeed, effective academic deans advocate for both individual faculty and broader administrative goals and are able to gain sufficient trust of the faculty to enact sustainable, transformative change (Williams-June, 2014).

Challenges for Education Deans:

Colleges/schools of education produce the teachers who populate thousands of kindergartens through high school classrooms (K-12) across the country. Seismic shifts have occurred in this K-12 space during the past 20 years and colleges/schools of education have had to make rapid and continual adjustments to produce teachers who are prepared to teach in a radically altered public school teaching environment. Accountability “struck” K-12 about 20 years ago and colleges/schools of education have been adjusting to it ever since. Teacher licensure requirements have changed, high stakes assessments that figure into teacher and school quality ratings have become the norm, and sizable shifts in what is taught in public schools and how it is taught have occurred. All of these changes have had to be incorporated into teacher preparation programs during a period when funding for higher education has been under severe pressure and accountability for outcomes at the higher education level have never been higher nor more in the public eye.

Not surprisingly, recent professional articles indicate that education deanships have become much more complex, even as, or perhaps because the role has radically shifted from chief compliance officer to chief change agent (Williams-June, 2014). A recent Council of Academic Deans from Research Education Institutions survey indicated that most education deans are immersed in challenging issues such as incentivizing faculty to update curriculum and developing strategies for evaluating quality (CADREI, 2015).

What is not known is what specific issues are especially facing deans within higher education, how frequent, and what related stress are education deans experiencing. Toward addressing this, an in-depth literature review uncovered nine key challenges for today's education deans.

- 1) A New Vision for Teacher Education and Related Programs** Education deans are now urgently plunged into the position of facilitating meaningful connections between school district administrators and education faculty to enact wide-sweeping reform to produce proven-to-be better, committed teachers, often with lack of data and information about how to do so (DFI, 2017; Elliot-Johns, 2015).
- 2) Promoting Positive Change** The major accrediting body for education preparation programs, the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) (was formerly called National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, NCATE) is now requiring teacher education and related programs (e.g., school counseling, school principal training) to adopt a clinically dominated curriculum and show evidence of teacher effectiveness in classrooms after graduation, often without access to evaluation data (NCATE, 2010). This is considered the most dramatic shift in teacher education in the last 50 years (NCATE, 2010).
- 3) Dealing with Resistance and Conflict about Change** In the early 2000s, colleges/schools of education began to face calls for curriculum changes that incorporated a greater focus on individuals' differences due to racial and cultural

diversity (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). Although years later, virtually all agreed that the incorporation of this new curriculum to accommodate those with different backgrounds was necessary and positive, the changes were quite slow, difficult, painful, and certainly stressful (McFalls & Cobb-Roberts, 2001). In 2017, education deans are now facing new demands for change and can expect similar resistance and conflict.

- 4) Fundraising Pressure** The reality of the 21st century financial situation for education colleges/schools has quickly raised the expectations for education deans to seek operational funding via fundraising (Hearn, 2003). Indeed, some education deans report spending up to half their time fundraising, with 20-25% time allocation typical (Gmelch, 2002; Development Report, 2015).
- 5) Tensions of Change with Shared Governance** More than ever, university administrators rely on academic deans to push colleges to evolve (Williams-June, 2014). However, as Williams-June (2014) notes, in an academic environment, where shared governance is an integral part of the culture, the best leaders must be able to patiently forge relationships and weigh multiple perspectives when making decisions, and this may take months or years. Some higher education critics indicate that shared governance in its current form may be too slow for effective responses to needed change especially in curriculum evolution and delivery (Chronicle article, June 2018).
- 6) Balancing Financial Resources** Over the past decade, finances for higher education have changed at every level. With expenses rising, tuition is at an all-time high and pressure is palpable for college administrators to effectively manage current or diminishing resources and seek (more) revenue streams. Hearn (2003) observes that college of education deans are confronting “high quality and competitive standing in the face of menacing resource constraints” (p. 1). As national postsecondary enrollment shifts away from education and humanities and toward fields such as health sciences and engineering, education deans are more often facing cost cutting (English & Kramer,

2017; Hearn, 2003). In addition, national financial crises typically hit colleges/schools of education much harder than other disciplines because they typically do not bring in as much grant or fundraising dollars (English & Kramer, 2017; Howard, Hitz & Baker, 2000).

7) External Community and State Demands Most school districts are now focusing on a strategic hiring process that emphasizes high quality candidates in order to ultimately raise student achievement for the districts (Ziebarth-Bovill, Kritzer & Bovill, 2012). With this emphasis on quality, pressure is mounting for education deans to assure that teacher education and other school professional graduates demonstrate competence and are ready to immediately contribute. This demand for 'proof of quality' routinely rests squarely on education deans (Elliot-Johns, 2015). Also, teacher shortages in some disciplines (e.g., special education, science education) increase pressure to produce both more and higher quality teachers.

8) Personnel Matters Dealing with nettlesome personnel issues tends to cause much dissatisfaction for education deans (Gmelch, Hopkins & Damico, 2001). Gmelch and colleagues (2001) found that education deans must confront personnel problems often, dealing most frequently with jealousy between faculty members, petty personal feuds, and poor performance evaluations. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for new deans to enter an education school or college in which such unprofessional behaviors of harassment, bullying, and plagiarism are occurring and being ignored (Gmelch et al., 2001).

9) Administrative support from the Provost Office

One truism in higher education seems to be that if an academic dean and the provost have contradicting or competing goals, then this can be a significant stressor for the dean (Enrlich, 1997; Williams June, 2014).

Stress experienced by education deans is increasingly acknowledged (Ammons, 2017; Gmelch, 2002;). Dean's for Impact, the national teacher education reform group, recognizes such stress in the following statement: "[Education] deans confront, in virtual isolation and often with inadequate preparation, an array of challenges. The challenges multiply when deans attempt to move beyond the status quo and lead change efforts within their institutions to move from organizations focused on compliance to ones focused on outcomes. (Deans for Impact, 2015, p. 1). It is not clear which challenges produce the most stress, however.

What is clear is that education deans are expected to be trailblazers in the current tumultuous process of change and adaptation. They experience both internal and external stress related to change. Internal stressors come from the institution itself as budgets are squeezed, enrollments shift, and accountability demands mount. External stressors come from school districts that hire the teachers produced by the college, policymakers at all levels wanting improved or different K-12 student outcomes who think colleges of education need to produce the teachers that can do this, and think-tanks both those supportive of and those critical of teachers and public schooling. Moving beyond the status quo to lead change efforts is now typically an urgent expectation by provosts and external constituents (English & Kramer, 2017).

The window of opportunity may be small, however. Experienced education deans have reported being most successful in accomplishing their goals within the first five to six years of their deanships (CADREI, 2015; Gmelch, Hopkins, and Damico, 2001). And shorter stints for academic deans is increasingly common (WKU, 2018). Deans for Impact, for example, recognizes this by asserting that "With the high degree of turnover we are seeing among educator preparation leaders—Deans for Impact needs to consider its ability to identify and develop additional change-agents" to help transform teacher education (Deans for Impact, 2015, p. 1).

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study was to explore these two descriptive research questions: 1) What is the hierarchy of frequencies of responding to key challenges for education deans? 2) What combinations of type of challenge and frequency of challenge are associated with higher perceived stress?

Participants:

All participants included in the results of this study were chosen from (with permission) the Council of Academic Deans from Research Education Institutions (CADREI). CADREI is an assembly of deans of education from research institutions (typically doctoral granting) throughout North America. The purpose of CADREI is to enhance the preparation of education personnel in all phases through discussion to make the members more effective in their work (CADREI, 2018). The lead author's university Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study. A recruitment e-mail to CADREI deans was sent out to all current CADREI member deans (130). Of those recruited, 58 agreed to participate (45%). Demographics and means and standard deviations of key issues and pressures from school/college of education deans are reported. Of the 58 participants, 64% were men, 34% women and 2% indicated that they were transgender or intersex. The respondents indicated they were 85% Caucasian, 14% Black/African American and 1% Asian American. Average age was 56.9 with a range of 41-70. About a quarter of the participants (26%) were under the age of 52.

Method:

Participants completed a questionnaire that consisted of basic demographic questions (e.g. age, ethnicity) and more detailed demographic questions (e.g. time spent as a dean and Carnegie classification of current university). In a process approved by the lead author's institutional review board (IRB), a survey composed of the multiple parts addressed above was distributed via Qualtrics through e-mail recruitment. The survey consisted of demographic questions (e.g., gender, race, years of experience in the job, with opportunities for comments)

as well as ratings of the 9 challenge area in terms of 'how often you are dealing with this issue' (1-5 scale, with 1 being almost never and 5 being almost always, and 'to what degree is this issue stressful to me', using the same 1-5 scale.

Prior to participating in the study, those who chose to access the Qualtrics survey link from the recruitment e-mail were given a brief description of the main purpose of the research, assurances of confidentiality, and were asked to sign a document agreeing to participate. The survey took participants approximately 10 minutes to complete, after which they were thanked for their participation. The data collection period in total was approximately 30 days, allowing potential participants to access the link for that period of time.

Results:

Twenty-six percent had served as dean previously. The average tenure as dean at their current institution was 3.57 years, with 52% serving 3 years or less. Fifty-eight percent previously served as associate dean, with 62% of those indicating that this experience prepared them very well to extremely well for the dean's job. Sixty-nine percent previously served as department chair with only 25% of those indicating this experience prepared them very well to extremely well for the dean's role. Thirty-six percent (36%) of the participants had served as both an associate dean and department chair. Ninety-five percent of the deans indicated that their current institution's classification was a Doctoral Granting University.

As a comparator group for these participant demographics, a web search and analysis of American Association of Universities (AAU) College/Schools of Education was conducted (100% doctoral granting, n=59). AAU member universities—60 in the United States and two in Canada—are considered on the leading edge of innovation, and scholarship (AAU web-site, 2018). Results indicated similar percentages to the respondents of this study, with a slightly higher percentage of females (53% males; 47% females) and diverse ethnicity (24%) for the AAU education deans. Fifty three percent of the AAU education deans were also in their first 3

years of their deanship. Note, the overlap between CADREI and AAU membership is about 50%.

Major reasons indicated for the participant to become a dean included (in order of most commonly used words) 'to assume a leadership role', 'to promote positive change', and 'to serve'. The top reason for becoming associate dean differed slightly with 'I was asked' as the top reason, followed by opportunities 'to promote positive change'. Similar to associate dean reasons, those who served as department chairs indicated their overwhelming primary reason was 'I was asked'. Most dean participants were satisfied to extremely satisfied with their job ($m=1.93/5$, $Sc.D.=1.1$; 5 being least satisfied and 1 being most satisfied), with 77% indicating mostly satisfied to extremely satisfied.

For question 1, concerning frequency of current challenges/issues (1, low-5 high, scale), "promoting productive change" ($m=4.3/5$, $s.d=.72$) was rated the most prominent, followed by "balancing financial resources" ($m=4.2/5$, $s.d=.97$), "promoting a new vision for teacher education and related programs" ($m=4.1/5$, $s.d=.97$) and "fundraising pressures" ($m=3.9/5$, $s.d=.9$). The least prominent issue was "dealing with administrative support from the provost's office" ($m=3.2/5$, $s.d=1.4$).

Table 1: Type of Challenge by Rank Order of Frequency

Type of Challenge	Frequency of Dealing with Challenge											
	1=low frequency		2 =		3=		4=		5= high frequency		Mean	SD
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
3. New Vision for Teacher Education and Related Programs	0	0	4	7.4	11	20.4	16	29.6	23	42.6	4.1	.97
1. Promoting Productive Change	0	0	1	1.9	5	9.3	24	44.4	24	44.4	4.3	.72
Dealing with Resistance to and Conflicts about Change	2	3.7	9	16.7	13	24.1	17	31.5	13	24.1	3.6	1.1
4. Fundraising Pressure	0	0	4	7.4	13	24.1	19	35.2	18	33.3	3.9	.9
Tension of Change with Shared Governance	7	13.0	7	13.0	14	25.9	17	31.5	9	16.7	3.3	1.3
2. Balancing Financial Resources	2	3.7	0	0	9	16.7	19	35.2	24	44.4	4.2	.97
External Demands to the College/ School of Education	2	3.7	4	7.4	12	22.2	19	35.2	17	31.5	3.8	1.1
Personnel Matters	6	11.1	12	22.2	6	11.1	12	22.2	18	33.3	3.4	1.4
Administrative Support from the Provost's Office	9	16.7	9	16.7	12	22.2	11	20.4	13	24.1	3.2	1.4

In answering question 2, how stressful each challenge/issue is (1-low, -5, high), “balancing financial resources” was most stressful ($m=3.3/5$, $s.d$ 1.2), followed by “new vision for teacher education and related programs” ($m=3.1/5$, $s.d$ 1.1), “promoting productive change” ($m=2.9/5$, $s.d$ 1.2), “personnel matters” ($m=2.9/5$, $s.d$ 1.3) and “external demands” ($m=2.9/5$, $s.d$ 1.2). The least common stressful issue was ‘dealing with administrative support from the Provost’s office’ ($m=2.6/5$, $s.d$ 1.5).

Table 2: Perceived Stress by Rank Ordered Means

Rank	Type of Challenge (1=least stressful, 5= most stressful)	Median	Mean	SD
1	Balancing Financial Resources	3.50	3.28	1.20
2	New Vision for Teacher Education and Related Programs	3.00	3.11	1.13
3	Promoting Productive Change	3.00	2.93	1.24
3	External Demands to the College/School of Education	3.00	2.93	1.16
5	Dealing with Resistance to and Conflicts about Change	3.00	2.87	1.35
6	Personnel Matters	3.00	2.85	1.32
7	Fundraising Pressure	3.00	2.67	1.15
8	Tension of Change with Shared Governance	2.50	2.63	1.34
9	Administrative Support from the Provost's Office	2.00	2.59	1.45

Discussion:

The last extensive study of education deans indicated that about 35% of deans were women and 15% were of ethnic minority status (Gmelch, 2002). The call to action then was for more recruitment and retention of both. In this study, men still outnumbered women and the sample reflected a low level of ethnic diversity. The AAU results are more promising. Still, a reasonable conclusion is that more work needs to be done to promote recruitment of women and other traditionally marginalized groups.

Clearly deans in this study, and supported by the AAU deans result, are new to their deanships; with over half in their first 3 years. This result could in part be due to retiring baby-boomers, although the average age was 57. Stressors and changing norms for duration of deanships may also play a part. Whatever the case, receiving practical training and coaching while in the dean's chair is perhaps now more important than ever. Further, most participants report taking deanships for the leadership challenge and to make positive change, so ongoing training and coaching opportunities specifically in readiness-for-change assessment as well as

change models may be beneficial.

Most participants indicated that they were 'drafted' into previous associate deanships and department chair positions, and that they mostly perceived associate deanships as helpful for their current role as dean, but not necessarily their experiences as department chairs. This may be due to the fact that associate deans, unlike department chairs, are typically physically located in the deans' office suite and are often an integral part of the dean's activities, either in support of or substituting for the dean. Therefore, aspirant training and mentoring opportunities should be made readily available and targeted specifically to associate deans, since it can be assumed that many of them will accept dean positions in the future.

In terms of the major challenges for education deans, 'new vision of teacher education' and 'promoting positive change' are particularly relevant. To do both, education deans typically need evolved and extensive accountability systems because many colleges/schools of education are transforming from old systems to new CAEP requirements. Indeed, teacher education's national accreditation body, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) now requires such a shift. CAEP accreditation necessitates concrete evidence that education graduates are competent, with components such as multi-year retention rates, perceptions of graduates and their employers, as measured by valid and reliable survey instruments, and teacher performance tied to student learning outcomes (CAEP, 2018)

An exciting and emerging innovative national database, called the Common Indicator System (CIS), requires extensive evidence-based, outcome data based on four standardized evaluation tools, 1) an observational measure of candidate instructional competence, 2) an assessment of candidate teaching beliefs and mindsets, 3) a survey of program graduates, and 4) a survey of program graduates' employers (DFI, 2018). A number of colleges/schools of education are now participating in a national data collection process. CIS addresses a common problem in higher education accountability. Although institutions are oftentimes awash with data, they tend to rely on mostly homegrown indicators, thus greatly reducing ability to learn

from other institutions. This initiative clearly promotes positive change and a new vision for teacher education.

Deans surveyed are experiencing the most stress related to balancing financial resources, a new vision for teacher education, promoting productive change, personnel matters, and external demands.

Stress management recommendations

Sanaghan (2016) discusses two important characteristics for college administrators that can reduce /manage stress especially related to top stressors in this study related to balancing financial resources, a new vision for teacher education and related programs, promoting productive change, personnel matters and external demands. They are - acceptance of reality and having a clear sense of purpose and meaning. First, a resilient dean should have a “staunch acceptance of reality” (Sanaghan, 2016, p. 10). Deans must face grueling work and in order to do so, stress resistant deans often approach problems without sugarcoating the reality of the situation. Although this is an important stress protective factor, deans must also have a realistic faith that things will improve (Sanaghan, 2016). This faith creates a humble confidence that allows deans to progress while dealing with stressful circumstances (Sanaghan, 2016). In fact deans can be mentored, trained and/or influenced to understand and accept their current reality, stressors like balancing financial resources and responding to external demands can be dramatically blanketed.

Second, a resilient deans need a clear sense of purpose and meaning. According to Sanaghan (2016), good leaders often believe in a purpose that they are serving a greater good, above and beyond themselves as individuals. For deans, dealing with stressors like a new vision for teacher education are both learning opportunities and a necessary product of the nature of a dean position. What resilient deans are able to recognize is the important purposes behind their work (Sanaghan, 2016). Resilient education deans should cultivate the ability to see how the difficult aspects of the job, such as personnel matters, fit into the purpose and

meaning of their role as a leader. This kind of resiliency allows for decisive action in ambiguous or difficult situations. For example, letting go an unproductive faculty member, although perhaps painful, can send an important and strong longer-term message of vision and purpose for the college/school (Sanaghan, 2016).

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