

# **Developing Deans**

## **Transforming Academic Leadership**

Edited by

**L. Lynn Vidler, Ph.D**

*University of Colorado Colorado Springs*

Series in Education



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For Jayne



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# Acknowledgments

I thought I was done writing books. Then, after some years of experience as a dean, Vernon Press reached out to gauge my interest in editing a sequel to their excellent and helpful volume, *So You Want to Be a Dean?: Pathways to the Deanship*. That volume, and this one, had their genesis in an ongoing panel series at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association hosted by the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences. As it turned out, the afternoon after I signed the contract for this book, my Chancellor asked if I would serve as Interim Provost. As a result, I want to begin my acknowledgements by thanking both Vernon Press and the brilliant contributors to this book for their patience as I navigated this new role.

Now, as Provost, this book hits differently. My world depends on the quality of the deans at my university. They are outstanding, so I'd like to thank them next. As I read through the chapters of this volume, I see my deans in them and have hope for my university's future.

If I were to add a chapter to this book, it would be about the critical need that deans and other academic leaders have for family and home support. I know how lucky I am to have that in my wife, Jayne, to whom this book is dedicated. She has been there for me from the very beginning of my interest in this topic and has accompanied me on my leadership journey to all the places it has taken us. We are a crushing team, and I acknowledge her contributions here.



# Introduction

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## Abstract

This volume goes beyond simply how to be a dean. Rather, the authors aim to consider how higher education might intentionally and deliberately develop faculty toward the deanship, thereby expanding the leadership capacity needed to effectively administer our universities.

**Keywords:** leadership development, higher education leadership, fundamental leadership skills, university deans.

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As our campus's chief-of-staff cleaned out her office in preparation for retirement, she came by to show me an interesting document from her archives: a list of Academic Affairs goals from the 2012-2013 academic year. I could have crossed off the dates and written 2024-2025. They were nearly identical.

Certainly, there are good reasons for this. Some recent ones include declining state support for higher education, challenges to the ROI of a college education, the Great Recession, the COVID-19 pandemic, artificial intelligence and the drastic changes in higher education following the recent transition to a new federal administration. There will always be challenges. All universities, not just public ones, must learn to adjust more quickly than we are used to doing to new ways of doing things if we hope to continue our teaching and research missions. This book hopes to offer one answer to the question, "how?"

Leadership capacity is, in fact, the *sine qua non* of the survival and thriving of higher education. Without it, we will not be able to adapt to the changing political, scholarly and cultural landscapes impacting higher education. Effective deans engage others to facilitate the development and implementation of creative solutions to the important challenges that we face. Nevertheless, most campuses focus on the development of students, and sometimes of tenure-track faculty, ignoring the development of much-needed leadership capacity for the organization itself. We complain about the leaders we have, and run national searches for new ones, hoping that other campuses have developed the perfect dean for us.

Leadership is not defined by native charisma or by technical competence. It does not mean that someone is in a position of authority. Leadership is something one *does*, and it also happens to be a scholarly discipline that can be studied, analyzed and applied. This edited volume includes empirical research, case studies and first-person narratives aimed at highlighting methods and practices designed to develop university deans with the fundamental leadership skills to create inclusive, collaborative and cross-functional organizational cultures. In this book, practitioners, researchers, and scholars address questions such as: How do deans learn to lead effectively? Is this the optimal developmental path? How might we scale leadership development as a practice across higher education?

I was approached to compile this volume following my participation in a panel entitled “So You Want to Be a Dean” at the 2023 meeting of the Modern Language Association. This volume was intended to serve as a follow-up to Vernon Press’s previous book, *So You Want to Be a Dean?: Pathways to the Deanship*, published in 2023. That first volume focused on becoming a dean and shared narratives about the various pathways taken by *individuals* to the position. This follow-up volume focuses more on how to improve the *systems* in higher education so that we may expand our desperately needed organizational leadership capacity. The authors in this book ask: what are *we* doing to develop effective deans and how might we do this *intentionally and deliberately*?

The volume is divided into three sections, with several chapters per section. Section One features approaches that focus on the development of department chairs as a preparation for dean-level leadership. Section Two focuses on campus-level opportunities and experiences that strategically and intentionally develop future deans. Section Three supplements the first two sections with practical suggestions for individuals who must prepare themselves for a deanship due to a lack of institutional support.

Stokes opens the book with an overview of some of the systemic challenges to effective leadership development in academia. She highlights the importance of the development of inclusive deans to fill the traditional dean-provost-president pipeline. Jochum lays out the basics of why faculty do not automatically make good leaders, highlighting the need to begin developing the foundational leadership skillset of department chairs. Mayer highlights the skills needed by deans to become strategic leaders and stresses the need for deans to facilitate the development of department chairs. Elston and Woolard present a case study relating how a dean modeled the development of an empathetic, inclusive and relational culture to help faculty and department chairs understand their own potential for empathetic leadership.

Hodge and Salkin open the second section of the book, suggesting that the strategic placement of department chairs from outside the home department

can be an effective way to develop dean-like skills. Van As advocates for Responsible Leadership as a model for developing decanal skills. Mora and Christianakis remind us that deans would do well to heed the perspectives of the faculty. Jolicoeur and Jolicoeur's chapter highlights the issue of role conflict as a barrier to decanal success. Hornor suggests that participation in critical cross-campus planning efforts will assist deans with the integration of college strategic plans.

Opening the third section, Taylor and Roderick suggest the cultivation of collaborative leadership for decanal success. Wilson, Buller and Crouse-Dick apply aspects of the Slow Movement to the development of deans. Hanks and Pratte offer helpful suggestions for aspiring deans regarding various external leadership development programs that are currently available and highlight an effective program in their state university system. Gano-Phillips offers a structured, step-by-step approach to the development of your own leadership through assessment and reflection. The volume ends with the sage advice of a former provost and president, Barnett and Morris. They offer a means to self-assess whether to pursue the deanship and concrete ways to develop key skills.

Higher education generally privileges basic/theoretical research over applied work. In the case of leadership, however, I would argue that *applying* the concepts laid out in this book *well* is far more difficult than studying them. Rutgers University president Jonathan Holloway recently announced his upcoming resignation, stating, "It's a punishing job in normal times. But the standards we're being held to are impossible." (Paul) Yet academia persists in ignoring the development of its own leaders, even knowing that we will need them.

This challenge is a structural design flaw in the academic system. During the Ph.D., we train students to research. For those who become tenure-track faculty members, we then counsel them to focus on research (again) so that they will get tenure. By the time faculty members achieve tenure, they have never been taught to lead and may have, even if indirectly, been taught to disdain leadership. At the same time, faculty governance requires university leaders to be tenured (full professors for deans and provosts). I put this volume together as a small piece of a greater strategy: How might we mitigate the negative consequences of these structures and systems that undermine the development of future academic leaders?

Of course, there is no single way to do this. The fact that this is an edited volume with many authors, all suggesting different approaches, is evidence of that. Nevertheless, since leadership development in higher education is not a universal custom and practice, the development of future academic leaders has been left to interested individuals, groups and campuses. I am one of those interested individuals, participating in an interested group on an interested campus.

For many years now, I have facilitated workshops for new department chairs as well as offered stand-alone workshops for all chairs on topics such as preparing for and engaging in difficult conversations, giving and receiving feedback, distinguishing between technical and adaptive leadership challenges, clarifying one's values and identifying opportunities for leadership within one's scope of influence. Last year, I collaborated with HR colleagues Angela Bender, Chief of HR, and Jerilyn Taylor, Director of HR Operations, on the development of a campus-wide leadership development strategy at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. Our program is designed to promote the growth of fundamental leadership skills and an inclusive, collaborative, and cross-functional culture for the entire campus community.

We continue to expand our efforts in this area. We've begun with two cohort programs, one for academic chairs and directors and another for staff first-line managers. Additionally, HR created and implemented optional online training in leadership and management concepts for all employees. Furthermore, knowing that all academic leaders were once graduate students, my colleague Jennifer Poe, Director of the Center for Student Research, and I now run workshops introducing graduate students to the foundational concepts of leadership. Even if they never become higher-ed administrators, all will benefit from reflecting on their purpose and values, learning how to manage conflict and how to engage others to work together to solve difficult problems. They do not need to ever be in an academic administrative job to engage others to make progress on important challenges. That said, once graduate students embrace, rather than disdain, the value of leadership skills, more may find themselves less reluctant to chair their department once it is their turn to do so. This series of programs now forms my campus's Higher Learning Commission (HLC) Quality Initiative.

You don't have to create an entire leadership development program on your campus to make a difference. It is my hope that this volume inspires you to consider how you might contribute to this effort within your realm of influence, and to reflect on how you yourself might further develop your own leadership capacity.

### Works Cited

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**Notes**

Some of the authors in this volume used various LLMs to proofread, edit, and enhance the clarity of their chapters. However, the tools did not contribute to the conceptualization of arguments.

PAGES MISSING  
FROM THIS FREE SAMPLE

## About the Contributors

**Mary Christianakis, Ph.D.**, is a professor of language, literacy, and culture at Occidental College. She studies literacy development, language and discourse from a critical sociocritical perspective. Her work explores discourse practices related to the development of written language in schools, as it pertains to diverse immigrant/migrant children and youth.

**Christine E. Crouse-Dick, Ph.D.**, is Professor of Communication Arts and Faculty Dean of the Arts and Humanities at Bethel College (KS/US). Her research focuses on intersectional communication, exploring gender, race, class and media representations. Christine's current work examines reflective leadership and narrative interconnectedness in pedagogy. She is a co-founder of the Bethel College Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) Campus Center, which fosters narrative change and racial healing on campuses and in communities.

**Ken Elston, MFA**, is Professor of Theater and Dean of the Douglas S. Witcher School of Humanities and Behavioral Sciences at High Point University. Previously, he served as director of the School of Theater at George Mason University and as artistic director of the not-for-profit theater company, Footsteps In Time. Elston is a member of the professional actor unions, with stage, television and film credits. Among his written works, his short plays are still performed at the National Museum of the Marine Corps. He is active with the Wellbeing in Higher Education Network within the Wellbeing Project, Higher Education Leadership Management and the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences. Elston developed curricula in art as social action, leading to the founding of an interdisciplinary minor at Mason and has worked to build community through public service, academic leadership and the arts.

**Rachel Epp Buller, Ph.D., MFA**, is Professor of Visual Arts and Design, Assessment Coordinator and former Chair of the Faculty at Bethel College (KS/US). Many of her publications address maternal bodies and feminist care in contemporary art contexts, and her current research explores listening as an artistic method. She is a two-time Fulbright US Scholar and a board member of the national Women's Caucus for Art.

**Brooke Barnett** is the 16th President of Rollins College in Winter Park Florida. She took office in 2025, after serving as provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at Butler University. Barnett spent nearly two decades at Elon University, where she served as a faculty member and in several senior

leadership roles. Prior to that, she taught at Indiana University and worked as a journalist. She earned her undergraduate degree from Georgetown College and master's and doctoral degrees from Indiana University.

**Kathryn Morris** became the 19<sup>th</sup> President of St. Lawrence University, a nationally ranked liberal arts college in Canton, NY, in July 2021. She joined the St. Lawrence community after 25 years at Butler University, where she most recently served for over nine years as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. She earned her undergraduate degree in psychology from Gettysburg College and completed her master's and doctoral degrees in social psychology at the University of Texas at Austin. Since 2015, she has served on the Board of Trustees at Gettysburg College.

**Susan Gano-Phillips, Ph.D.**, is Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan – Flint, where she served as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for seven years. Her major decanal accomplishments included a \$39M science building addition, consolidation from eighteen to six multi-disciplinary departments and re-envisioning of advising to increase student retention and graduation success. Using strategic planning and shared governance, Gano-Phillips also greatly expanded professional development opportunities for faculty leaders and staff and research funding for faculty and students while eliminating a large operating deficit. She previously served as an associate dean, a department chairperson and a teaching and learning center director.

**Anne Case Hanks, Ph.D.**, currently serves as Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs at the University of Louisiana Monroe (ULM). She is responsible for the academic programs and faculty within the School of Sciences. She is a Professor in the Atmospheric Sciences program. Dr. Case Hanks is a passionate advocate for STEM education, training and teaching. She is committed to advancing innovation in STEM pedagogy within higher education and supporting faculty development in the sciences. She also works to promote STEM within K-12 to motivate and create the next generation of scientists. Her recent work includes developing a Natural Hazards and Disaster curriculum for high school, summer outreach for elementary and high school students interested in STEM and helping to establish a Louisiana Mesonet.

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**Jason Jolicoeur, Ph.D.**, is Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He has extensive experience in the higher education system, having served in both instructional and administrative capacities as an academic dean and academic program director. Dr. Jolicoeur's research focuses on the interaction of personal religious orientation and deviant forms of human behavior, law enforcement hiring and training practices and outcomes, and public sector agency management and leadership. Dr. Jolicoeur received his Ph.D. from the University of Missouri, St. Louis.

**Katie Jolicoeur, Ph.D.**, is the director of career services at Minnesota State University, Mankato. She has extensive experience in educational leadership and policy studies, having previously served in a variety of administrative roles. Her research focuses on leadership theory, leadership development within higher education and the impact of human personality traits (introversion and extroversion) on leadership styles and leader emergence. Dr. Jolicoeur received her Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Christopher Mayer, Ph.D.**, is a career U.S. Army officer and Director of Philosophy and Associate Professor in the Department of Law & Philosophy at the United States Military Academy (West Point). He has also served as Department Head of the Department of English and Philosophy and Associate Dean for Strategy and Initiatives. Chris completed his Ph.D. at the University of Virginia.

**Richard Mora, Ph.D.**, is a professor of sociology at Occidental College. His research areas include masculinities, youth, schooling and juvenile justice. A recipient of numerous teaching awards, he teaches courses on masculinities, youth cultures, immigrant youth, the sociology of violence and the sociology of education.

**John M. Pratte, Ph.D.**, serves as the Dean of the College of Arts, Education, and Sciences at the University of Louisiana, Monroe and is a Professor of Physics. He received his B.S. degree in Physics from the University of Texas and his Ph.D. in Physics from the University of Colorado, Boulder. Before ULM, Dr. Pratte served in administrative roles at Arkansas State University, Kennesaw State University and Clayton State University. His research has focused on STEM Education and the effect of Internet usage on student learning and attitudes.

**Ryan Roderick, Ph.D.**, Assistant Dean of Science and Humanities at Husson University, joined the faculty in 2018 after completing his Ph.D. in Rhetoric at Carnegie Mellon University. His teaching and research focus on developing effective communication skills, emphasizing collaborative and adaptive learning. He is committed to fostering interdisciplinary initiatives that empower students and faculty to push intellectual boundaries.

**Erica Salkin, Ph.D.**, is Dean of the College of Arts, Sciences & Education and Professor of Communication Studies at Whitworth University in Spokane, WA. Previously, she served as the College's Associate Dean for Curriculum and Innovation for Arts and Humanities and Interim Chair of the Department of Theatre and Dance. Salkin holds a Ph.D. in mass communication with a minor in educational leadership and policy analysis.

**Nicole Stokes, Ph.D.**, brings over 25 years of academic and administrative experience, along with a personal and professional commitment to equitable leadership, to her current role as Professor of Sociology at Pennsylvania State University at Abington. Nicole is a political sociologist, and her scholarship has focused on migration and identity with three distinct areas of research: citizenship studies and the nation-state; migration and settlement; and political systems, nationalism, and public policy. Nicole previously served as Division Head (Dean) for Social Sciences, Business and Education, Interim-Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and as Associate Provost/ Chief Diversity Officer responsible for strategic leadership to advance diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. As a passionate advocate for global education and increased access and belonging in higher education, Nicole serves on several boards and committees, including the American Council on Education Women's Executive Leadership Council, Forum on Education Abroad, Delaware Valley-Philadelphia Chapter of the Fulbright Alumni Association and the Council of Colleges of Arts

and Sciences (CCAS). Long before she was Dr. Stokes, Nicole was a proud woman of color and first-generation graduate and scholar.

**Phil Taylor III, Ph.D., MBA**, Vice President of Academic Affairs, University College at Southern New Hampshire University, is known for his student-centered, data-driven leadership. He combines academic and business expertise to optimize programs, support student success and build diverse teams. His prior roles, including as Dean of Science and Humanities at Husson University, highlight a commitment to partnerships that enhance learning and community engagement.

**Janus Van As, MBA**, is the Future of Learning Lead, where he drives innovation at the intersection of AI, virtual reality, learning design and skills intelligence. In this role, he guides the strategic direction of the Future of Learning stream, fostering collaboration and building the systems and capabilities needed for future-ready education. His work centers on creating integrated learning ecosystems that blend emerging technologies with evidence-based pedagogy to enhance learner engagement, access and success. As an educator and researcher, he specializes in Health Systems, curriculum development and blended learning. He is committed to advancing learning excellence through human-centered design, responsible leadership, and continuous innovation, and has led numerous curriculum development and learning-technology initiatives.

**L. Lynn Vidler, Ph.D. (they/them)**, is Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs and Professor of Spanish at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs (UCCS) and co-directs UCCS's Higher Learning Commission Quality Initiative on Leadership Development. Additionally, Vidler is the founder and CEO of Blooming Branch Group, a leadership and performance coaching firm. They have taught foundational leadership skills for the Pikes Peak United Way, the Women's Community Leadership Initiative, the Association for Hispanic Classical Theater and the Council of Colleges of Arts & Sciences. They have also provided leadership on various boards, including the Council of Colleges of Arts & Sciences, the Association for Hispanic Classical Theater, the Pikes Peak Workforce Development Board, the Bee Vradenburg Foundation and the Unity Project. Vidler was previously Interim Provost and Dean of the College of Letters, Arts & Sciences at UCCS; Professor, Program Director of Spanish, and Associate Dean at the United States Military Academy (West Point); and Chair and Associate Dean at the University of South Dakota.

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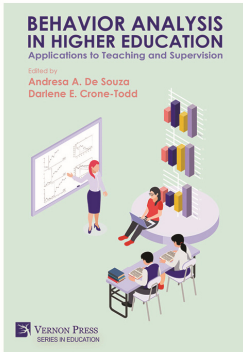
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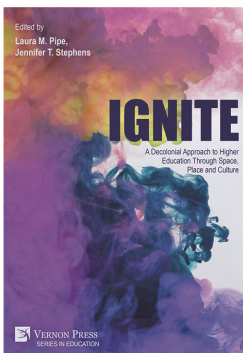
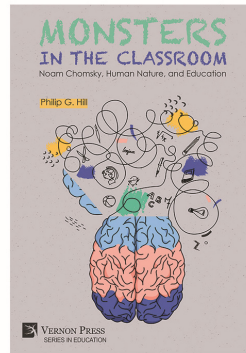
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