

## ACAD NEWSLETTER

### "Vocational Leadership"

**James L. Pence**, Provost and Dean of the College at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN, is the new Chair of the ACAD Board. Following is an edited version of his remarks, delivered on October 14, 2001, at the concluding plenary titled "Cultivating Faculty Leadership" at "Mission and Governance: Integrating a Shared Vision," the governance conference co-sponsored by ACAD, AAUP and the Howard University Faculty Senate.

Like preachers who stood in pulpits all around the country this morning, I begin with a reading of the text, in this case, the introduction to the AAUP Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities:

A college or university in which all of the components are aware of their interdependence, of the usefulness of communication among themselves, and of the force of joint action will enjoy increased capacity to solve educational problems.

In these days, increased capacity to solve problems sounds like a pretty good deal. If awareness of interdependence, useful communication, and forceful joint action do occur on a campus, problem-solving would present, well, no problem. Who among us, faculty, administrators, or Boards, would disagree with these sentiments? Governance, in some ways, is the system of policies and procedures used by colleges and universities to discover or affirm interdependencies, to describe or prescribe communication, and to plan or implement joint action. For many of us in this room, who in most cases have invested our lives in education on college campuses, the capacity to solve educational problems is always in need of increase, hence the relevance of the text, and the justification for this conference, and the value of faculty-administration dialogue. For this exegetical moment, the text requires little explication. The challenge, as always, is in the application, the hermeneutics. To declare my intentions at the outset, I will approach this text from the position of position, as a chief academic officer responsible for solving educational problems at a private church-related liberal arts college in the Upper Midwest.

Generally, I am sanguine about the possibilities for good government at colleges and universities; we know it when we see it: joint action to solve educational problems, made in good faith by interdependent actors engaged in meaningful communication about problems and solutions. We have not heard many examples of good government over the past two days, but that does not mean good government is not happening in the vast array of colleges and universities in America. Next year's joint conference sponsored by AAUP and ACAD, assuming we will continue the joint effort, might include a track for "good practices of good government." If nobody applies to make presentations, we will find ourselves perhaps less sanguine. If they come, we can take heart and learn.

Generally, I am more concerned about the necessity of good government at the dawn of the 21st century, a concern exacerbated by the events of September 11 and the unfolding concentric circles of political, social and financial consequences, not to mention the emotional and psychological ones. Human beings, we know, do not always see themselves as interdependent components; useful communication among them does not always result in good decisions or agreement; and joint action is not easy to define, implement, or evaluate. Hopeful as we are of the possibilities through governance to solve educational problems, we must be realistic about the changing nature of the problems themselves. And we must be honest with ourselves about our changing and changed world.

Here are some real-time examples of educational problems on my desk or the desks of colleague deans: (1) An increased number of bright high school juniors take on-line courses and demand credit as a condition of submitting applications to enroll. (2) 141 juniors and seniors enrolled in academic programs in international settings become the center of a debate about the competing claims for safety, academic integrity, parental influence, Board fiduciary responsibility, faculty educational policy, and human fear. (3) A high-quality science program struggles in the competition for tenure-track positions because 35-year old science facilities, projected to cost \$50-80 million to replace, continue to deteriorate. (4) A regional accrediting agency begins issuing public sanctions for lack of compliance with standards for assessment of student learning, not threatening non-accreditation but requiring follow-up visits with a special focus on measuring learning. (5) An academic department with three tenured faculty and half dozen majors cohabiting the same building with a department with six tenured faculty and 50 majors and squabbling with each other over general education reform. (6) An admissions officer expecting evidence of academic quality to help in the recruiting wars for the same declining pool of talented students being recruited by 15-20 colleges like us within a half-day's drive, most of whom with brochures claiming what ours now claims.

I am beginning to think that our educational problems are so serious, so complex, and so political, that they will finally rival financial problems for board attention; and I think that will be good for the academy. The connection between learning and money is not easy to discuss, but higher education is at the point of no return when it comes to money talk. My own assessment is that a "silver lining" surrounds the problem "package" if we can focus the attention of Boards and the public on educational problems being caused by financial problems and focus attention on the academic agenda required to lead us out of the funding wilderness. I also think that the primary responsibility for focusing attention and creating the academic agenda rests with the faculty and the academic dean, together, and, to refer to the session title a bit, finally, that is the reason to cultivate faculty leadership.

I originally intended to talk today about my experiences in cultivating faculty leadership through the careful and strategic appointment of tenured faculty to administrative posts for three-year rotating terms. Today, on my campus, senior professors are filling positions previously held by career administrators (associate deans, registrar, athletic director, directors of Institutional Research and Planning, Academic Research and Planning, International and Off-Campus Studies, and Government and Foundation Relations). After four years in operation, the system is being evaluated this year by an elected faculty committee, charged by vote of the faculty with my strong concurrence, to offer a thorough assessment based on the collection of evidence from faculty opinion surveys, my self-assessment, and the observations of faculty who are now or who have served in these positions. I hope we will make the results of the evaluation public, to share what we learned from our experiences.

After listening to sessions yesterday, and visiting with folks who were here Friday, I re-wrote the concluding remarks of this presentation last night to illustrate a different thesis: educational problems are more properly understood as educational paradoxes and we need a different perspective on shared governance, one that's geared to balancing paradoxes rather than solving problems. In a problem-solution environment, unworkable solutions can be explained by incorrect or imprecise analysis, faulty analysts, or impure intentions. In a paradox-balance environment, there are no solutions. Paradoxes cannot be solved; they must be lived through. If this thesis has validity, a corollary thesis emerges - cultivating faculty leadership in a paradox-balance environment has less to do with positional or political authority than with personal vocation. Before I discuss the leadership thesis, let me expand on the paradox thesis.

In the summer of 1996, I read British writer Charles Handy's 1993 book *The Age of Paradox*. I returned to it recently to refresh my memory. In it, he argues that "Paradoxes are like the weather, something to be lived with, not solved, the worst aspects mitigated, the best enjoyed,

and used as clues to the way forward. Paradox has to be accepted, and made sense of, in life in work, in the community, and among nations."

Here are three examples of pervasive educational paradoxes:

**(1) The Paradox of Time.** Education is based on the process of study, action, and reflection, and educators know that learning takes time for each of these activities. Paradoxically, time has become our most precious commodity - students without adequate time to study because they work too much or choose to engage in too many co-curricular activities; faculty who cannot balance teaching, scholarship and service, must less family, self and community; deans whose daily schedules are booked from morning to evening, without time to reflect on the big picture academic issues. How do we balance competing claims on our time, a finite resource? What kind of faculty leadership will be helpful in this balancing act?

**(2) The Paradox of Expertise.** Academic life is based on valuing faculty and administrative expertise in teaching, learning and citizenship. Disciplinary expertise seems well accepted and reasonably well understood; interdisciplinary expertise is coming into increasing acceptance. Paradoxically, decision-making expertise in areas of institutional effectiveness, such as planning and budgeting, one of the hallmarks of effective administration, is not a criterion for faculty selection to institutional committees. I cannot imagine having or wanting a system to elect people to ensure that we have only legitimate faculty expertise on institutional committees. We heard yesterday about concerns for undermining standing committees by task forces. I admit to the use of task forces populated by faculty experts. These task forces were charged to develop solutions or proposals for submission to faculty committees, as appropriate to the circumstances. Paradoxically, faculty experts face criticism from colleague non-experts for agreeing to participate in ad hoc groups, especially when the administration appoints them. So, I have stopped the practice. How do we balance the need for representative government and specialized expertise? How do we cultivate faculty leadership to resolve the paradox of expertise?

**(3) The Paradox of Community.** Academic culture thrives in community, and the quality of the debate, dialogue and discussion on almost every issue facing the academy is enhanced by a community characterized by respect, integrity and honesty. Paradoxically, academic communities are fractured and dysfunctional. Students watch their professors argue with the administration and each other; they observe administrative spin and image management; and they wonder why people would seek Ph.D's and careers in colleges and universities to spend their lives amidst dysfunctional, but interdependent, constituencies. How do we practice academic virtues in communities of discord? How can faculty leadership be expected to help and contribute to resolve the paradox of community?

Other educational paradoxes include: **change** (i.e., on the one hand educating for transformation, on the other resisting assessment of learning); **communication** (i.e., on the one hand, valuing the professing art, on the other knowing that poor communication among constituencies undermines professing); and **trust** (i.e., academic freedom for the pursuit of truth; violations of academic freedom in the name of protecting institutional vitality or even survival).

If I am correct that we need to think about the goals of good governance in terms of balancing paradoxes, then perhaps we should consider leadership development for faculty in terms of personal vocation, rather than positional or political authority.

"Vocational leadership," in contrast to positional and political, refers to a perspective that places high value on responsibility for *both* the personal *and* the professional, *both* the individual *and* the corporate, *both* the parts *and* the whole. Handy calls this "twin citizenship." "If there is no common cause, no agreement on the longer-term goal, the more pressing priority, or the most powerful party, will win out," he says. At the 2001 PKAL (Project Kaleidoscope) summer institute, science faculty identified similar traits as characteristics of faculty leaders: willingness to take intellectual and pedagogical risks; heightened self-awareness in both professional and personal lives; an understanding of an appreciation for differences; and ability to disseminate best practice in core academic activities, like bringing new pedagogies into the curriculum, engaging

students, infusing research into the educational experience, and providing leadership in higher education.

The term "vocational" also has the theological sense of "calling." Vocational leadership begins with the human story, the individual's struggle with self-identity and self-worth reflected in the identification of a personal mission. Vocation does not end with personal mission, however; it extends to institutional mission. People are called to *do* something and *be* someone. Vocation involves finding a match between one's personal mission (that is, one's defining purposes) and the institution's mission (the organization's defining purposes).

What is the relationship between mission and governance? What is the shared vision to be integrated and by whom? I don't know that this conference has helped us discover answers to these questions as much as it has helped us raise more questions -- about tension between faculty and administrative cultures; the irony of the corporatizing of the academy occurring along with the collegialization of the corporation; about the sad story of Bennington College and the corruption of Boards and the egos of Presidents; and so on and so on. Faculty and deans may not always agree, but neither do deans and presidents. One of the great challenges of the academy these days is learning to speak truth to power, for people with and without tenure.

I have some ideas about continuing investigation of these questions. I want to continue to think and write about the relationship between mission and governance and the role faculty leaders can and should play in balancing educational paradoxes. I want to explore the notion of vocational leadership, tapping the deeply held convictions faculty members hold about the value of education and the ways they contribution both to personal and institutional mission. At my college, I have learned to keep the centrality of the student-faculty relationship in mind when I deal with faculty workplace issues; governance is important, but student-faculty learning is essential. I want to test the hypothesis that the purpose of faculty self-governance is to make choices about the allocation of faculty resources in support of mission. I want to reconsider my administrative practices to assist in balancing paradoxes, so that I do not complicate the act of balancing by looking for solutions to insoluble problems.

Finally, I want to be a part of a movement, jointly led by faculty and administrators, to persuade Boards, and those Presidents who align themselves more with administrative than academic values, that a college or university in which all of the people act interdependently, communicate truthfully and openly, and collaborate intentionally will enjoy increased capacity to balance educational paradoxes and their own lives, seeking a deep understanding of personal and institutional mission. To do all that requires cultivation of political, positional and vocational faculty leadership. Such cultivation may become the most important agenda for academic deans and higher education itself.