

## *Book Reviews*

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Editor*

William G. Tierney, Ed., *The Responsive University* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). 182 pp. \$29.95.

This is a forward-looking volume. As Kent Keith points out in the concluding chapter, “this book is about getting out of the box. It is about rethinking fundamental assumptions of higher education—assumptions that worked in the late twentieth century but can trap and immobilize our institutions in the twenty-first century.”

The five main chapters are stimulating in different ways. They hold together amazingly well, thanks to careful bridgework by each of the eight authors, who sought to relate their chapters to the others. The aim is to be “deliberately provocative.” Generally they succeed, although occasionally the reader is left wanting more (for example, how horizontal communication really can be improved) or is told too much (e.g., excessive detail on Chicago university/school cooperation).

In “Listening to the People We Serve,” Ellen Chaffee clearly emphasizes the importance of customer focus and a serious commitment to professional development for both faculty and staff. Chaffee (an experienced and current president of two campuses) says, in effect, “Let’s roll up our sleeves and see what we can do now”—solicit feedback and act on the results. She doesn’t insist, as some other chapters suggest, that little can be done without reorganization first. Students are indeed customers, we are reminded, even though the state is the major purchaser of collective services in most public institutions.

Tierney’s chapter proposes that tenure as we have known it is soon to die. Various alternatives include contracts, different approaches to determining salary, and post-tenure review. Faculty members do need to be evaluated after they receive tenure, he affirms, and the evidence should be “formative as well as summative.” Stressing the importance of individual agreed-upon performance goals, Tierney suggests that such statements should be prepared annually, not just when writing sabbatical proposals. “The reason for post-tenure review is fiscal...” he observes. Might it not also be related to the improvement of instruction for the benefit of students?

Braskamp and Wergin’s chapter, “Forming New Social Relationships,” takes the reader deep into the real and often perplexing world of Chicago’s K-12 schools. Faculty from many departments of two University of Illinois campuses worked with local citizen school boards to address vital urban challenges: “external audiences are asking for a different kind of relevance from higher education,” which is usually a learning as well as a service experience for faculty.

All too often, the authors note, “the academy has turned inward for its character and sense of work and being. Its separation from society has been conscious, deliberate and defining.” A more desirable role would be when the university becomes “jointly

responsible for reform in partnership with local schools, civic leaders, and parents.... When universities become engaged in such goals as urban revitalization, the universities themselves can become socially transformed."

Benjamin and Carroll, both associated with RAND, emphasize that institutional governance (they deal largely with the internal) "must change." In the context of effective reallocation of scarce resources, they insist that "higher education does not have a good track record," and is not good with difficult decisions. Problems include a lack of agreed-upon criteria, insufficient pertinent and comparable data from different parts of the institution, and too many layers of governance. Reporting goes almost entirely up and down, they note, as divisions and departments "tend not to be connected horizontally to collateral collegiate or administrative units."

Suggestions are provided for criteria to apply at budget cutting time. Included are quality, centrality, demand and workload, and cost effectiveness.

This reviewer was fascinated by the observation that what is needed is "a flatter, better networked, decentralized governance structure above departments and below much of current central administration...." The authors predict that "layers of deans and associate vice presidents will probably be eliminated over the next decade. Networks of faculty and administrators will replace them." They provide two charts and a table, but leave a lot of questions unanswered.

Peter Ewell's chapter on "Achieving High Performance" succeeds in indicating how institutions must (and can!) become more effective both inside and outside. But-tressing the Chicago K-12 university lash-up approach, he states that it is time for us to "scrap the artificial boundaries" between universities and communities. Societal contexts must be more than just "settings" for the application of scholarship or discipline-based instruction. Concerning public attitude and financial support, Ewell reminds us that "academic and political leaders have been talking past one another for about a decade." This, he rightly opines, must change.

Do things have to get worse before they can get better? A huge irony? In Ewell's words, "the lack of a visible quality problem means that higher education is simply not seen as broken enough to demand increasing attention, compared to such massive challenges as reforming elementary/secondary education or restructuring the nation's health care and criminal justice system." Another thing to remember when seeking more support: It is not how hard the faculty work, but what results they get.

On balance, this short volume can be a real success in making those of us in the academy face up to things we mostly know but often ignore. It is not a "how-to" book. It leaves much unsaid. But it is indeed a stimulator. We must be connected with many publics. "Few people off campus believe that a university is self-justifying." Rather it is outcomes and value added that we can provide. The responsive university, we are told, "will be a different kind of university from what is common today." Various examples are included here. Others will be defined by thoughtful readers.

—E. K. Fretwell