

The Academic Relations Committee sponsored a leadership workshop on Friday, November 16, 2012, prior to the beginning of the Annual Meetings in Chicago. The workshop, "More Time, Less Budget: The Role of the Department Chair in the New Economic Context," focused on the increasing challenges faced by department leaders as they manage the reality of shrinking resources to maintain quality programs. Over thirty participants gathered to discuss the specific challenges at their own institutions and to listen to the experiences and ideas of others who have managed to do more with less.

Participants were asked to come to the workshop prepared to discuss three questions:

- What is a recent success of your department such as a task accomplished, a transition navigated, or a problem solved?
- What is a key challenge facing your department and what do you need to face it?
- What is one thing you hope to leave this workshop with to assist you with your work?

In addition, workshop participants were sent a copy of Andrew Delbanco's book, *College: What it Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton University Press, 2012), and were asked to come to the workshop prepared to discuss sections that spoke to their departmental context and/or the challenges facing higher education.

The workshop began with lunch, when participants discussed the preparatory questions as well as DelBanco's book. The conversation was lively as department chairs shared their successes and challenges with one another. As with past Leadership Workshops, one of the most valuable aspects of the gathering was the opportunity for chairs to listen and learn from one another. Sometimes an issue that seems so unique to one department recurs in other institutions. One chair commented that the workshop "made me feel that I had colleagues with whom I could count on for support."

After lunch, the keynote address was given by Kathleen Skerrett, dean of arts and sciences at the University of Richmond. Skerrett reminded participants that their work, while often seemingly about budgets, difficult personnel situations, or institutional intransigence, is first and foremost about student learning. She encouraged participants to remind themselves of why they decided to become teachers in the first place as a way to continue to ground their work as chairs. The student that surprises us by their insight and the joy that faculty take in witnessing

student engagement are the experiences that will sustain us even during challenging times.

The leadership challenge faced by chairs was taken up later in the workshop by a panel of seasoned chairs, who discussed successes and challenges at their own institutions. The panel was moderated by Joseph Favazza from Stonehill College and included Kathryn McClymond, Georgia State University; Edwin David Aponte, New York Theological Seminary; Courtney Bender, Columbia University; Ted Trost, University of Alabama; and Rosetta Ross, Spelman College. Their remarks sparked much discussion from participants who shared experiences in their own contexts.

The final session of the workshop allowed the members of the Academic Relations Committee to ask participants about future topics for Leadership Workshops. The mission of the Academic Relations Committee is to “promote attention to and develop resources for enhancing members’ professional development and the institutional forms within which the study of religion takes place. To fulfill its charge, the Academic Relations Committee generates programs, undertakes studies, articulates best practices, and develops electronic and other resources for the undergraduate and graduate study of religion.” As such, the Committee takes seriously feedback from department chairs. Some of the topics suggested for future workshops included:

- MOOC’s (Massive Online Courses?) and their possible impact on religious studies departments
- Strategies for the AAR to support departments or programs faced with closure or serious budget cuts
 - Issues related to hiring and supporting adjunct faculty
 - The status of independent scholars in the academy
 - Dealing with difficult persons within the department
 - How to move into other leadership roles, such as accreditation teams and leading program reviews
- How to move into different roles of academic leadership — deans, provosts, etc.
- A panel session with outside funders

The Academic Relations Committee regularly sponsors Leadership Workshops for department chairs and program directors as part of the Annual Meetings.

This report was written by Joe Favazza, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Stonehill College.

