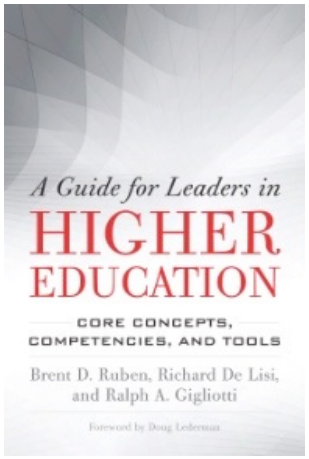


A Guide for Leaders in Higher Education: Core Concepts, Competencies, and Tools

Ruben, Brent D.; De Lisi, Richard; and Gigliotti, Ralph A
Stylus Publishing, Llc., 2017

Book Review

Tags: department chairs | higher education | leadership

Reviewed by: Joshua Patterson, *University of Georgia*
Date Reviewed: August 15, 2017

Brent Ruben, Richard De Lisi, and Ralph Gigliotti, all colleagues at Rutgers University, combine their teaching, research, and work expertise into a volume meant to be a “guide and a resource” (xviii) not only for current but also aspiring leaders, and those in less formal leadership roles on college campuses. Preceded by a pithy foreword by Doug Lederman, editor of *Inside Higher Ed*, the work is both frank and optimistic, a common characteristic of Brent Ruben, a practiced author in reference works for higher education leaders. The Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis that constitutes the foreword sets a tone that pervades this book: challenges abound in the current landscape of American higher education, but informed and prepared leaders can respond to these challenges and achieve excellence.

The text is divided into four parts. Part One is an overview of issues, opportunities, and challenges faced by institutions and their leaders such as institutional mission (50) and diverse stakeholders (56). Part Two presents theories and literature in response to topics related to leadership like cross-cultural communication (80), and a “comprehensive leadership megamodel” (109). Part Three adds practical tools and applied models to the theoretical discussions of common issues alternating between effectiveness on the part of individual leaders and organizational effectiveness, one example being a tool for organizational review and improvement (181). Part Four, the final chapter, concerns the development of leaders in higher education.

The authors’ prescience is on display from the outset of the work when they address the query, whither another book on leadership? Leadership, after all, is one of the more hackneyed subjects in recent decades, no less so in higher education where storied presidents, politicians,

journalists, prestigious faculty, and popular commentators have all offered perspectives on the state of higher education and prescriptions for a better way forward. While Ruben, De Lisi, and Gigliotti spend a notable portion of the text describing higher education as they see it, their aim is to provide practical resources to current and future leaders, and in this they were successful.

As such a resource, contingent upon the notions of developing competency- and communication-based leadership, *A Guide for Leaders in Higher Education* succeeds in providing accessible and useful resources to individuals across different leadership roles. While the authors took great care to ground their writing in case studies, hypotheticals, appendices, and applied models, at times it reads more like an introduction to a higher education textbook than an instrumental guide for those currently in leadership positions. As a midpoint between textbook and reference work, it is still successful at both and provides a clear and unbiased background to issues facing current leaders. For religion faculty in discrete or informal roles at their universities, the authors provide a distinctly helpful, perhaps overlong, review of leadership techniques, tools, and competencies. For current department heads and aspiring administrators, the text will assist in becoming conversant in the topics crisscrossing campuses and systems to better respond to today's challenges.

https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/a-guide-for-leaders-in-higher-education-core-concepts-competencies-and-tools-2/

Published by the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion
301 West Wabash Ave, Crawfordsville, IN 47933
(765) 361-6047 (800) 655-7177 fax (765) 361-6051
Fully Funded by Lilly Endowment Inc. and Located at Wabash College