



A Toolkit for College Professors

Cipriano, Robert E., and Buller, Jeffrey L.
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015

Book Review

Tags: active learning | critically reflective teaching | faculty development | learner centered teaching

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Date Reviewed: September 7, 2016

This book is pitched to college and university faculty at all career stages, and it stands out from other books in this category because of its research-based findings and its thoughtful case studies. The authors based their guidance on a year-long research study of 688 faculty from a wide range of institutions as well as on years of personal professional experience. The book covers the major aspects of an academic career: effective teaching and promoting student success, defining and facilitating collegiality and positive relationships within departments and with administration, conducting research, performing effective service to the institution or guild, and moving through the ranks to tenure and beyond. This book's strengths include the liberal use of longer case studies and shorter scenarios, each of which works through a series of questions and proposed resolutions (for case studies) and a challenge question and outcome (for scenarios). The initial warm-up questions are often quite broad (for example, "Is there any general advice you think might be helpful to your friend?" [6]) while later questions tend to be more specific and thoughtful, requiring the reader to consider multiple factors and angles within one scenario. These vignettes were well written and thoughtfully prepared, and on the whole they engage the reader quite effectively. That the scenarios are so clearly taken from actual experience makes them more valuable, especially to newer faculty members who haven't yet seen it all.

Two chapters of this guide focus specifically on teaching. The first, titled "Teaching Effectively in the Classroom," strongly promotes active learning over lecturing. The case studies in this section deal with common problems, such as how to respond to poor results in student evaluations and what to do when the entire class fails an exam. This chapter emphasizes the importance of learning how to teach large courses effectively, although the authors do include a section at the end of the chapter on "techniques" for teaching smaller courses. Many new

faculty and older faculty who are retooling will find this chapter a useful primer. The second chapter focuses on “Promoting Student Success and Engagement,” with a focus on developing friendly but not-too-familiar relationships with students. Using research and experience, the authors explain the pivotal importance of faculty in shaping students’ lives and ways of thinking well beyond the classroom.

Taken together, these two chapters address many issues of interest to readers of this journal, and the remainder of the book is equally valuable for those looking for guidance and food for thought. As a guide designed for all faculty, this book necessarily elides issues of race and gender, for instance, that significantly shape faculty experience. That said, the book accomplishes much in a short space, and each chapter of the book is short and well-structured. Above all, this book uses the very techniques it suggests for effective teaching, and new faculty members in particular will find themselves better prepared for everyday faculty life after thinking through these realistic case studies.

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