

Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development

Volume 13 | Number 13

Article 10

2014

Funding the Future: Preparing University Leaders to Navigate the Coming Change

Jeff Strietzel
Houston Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/acsd_growth



Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Strietzel, Jeff (2014) "Funding the Future: Preparing University Leaders to Navigate the Coming Change," *Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development*. Vol. 13 : No. 13 , Article 10. Available at: https://pillars.taylor.edu/acsd_growth/vol13/iss13/10

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Association of Christians in Student Development at Pillars at Taylor University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Growth: The Journal of the Association for Christians in Student Development by an authorized editor of Pillars at Taylor University. For more information, please contact pillars@taylor.edu.



Funding the Future: Preparing University Leaders to Navigate the Coming Change

Beers, S. T., Herrmann, T. W., & Blezien, P. (2012).
Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press.

Reviewed by Jeff Strietzel

62

When the going gets tough, the tough, are said to, get going. This text, edited by Stephen Beers, Timothy Herrmann, and Paul Blezien, was largely written in response to the double-edged circumstances of an economic downturn and rising costs of higher education. *Funding the future: Preparing university leaders to navigate the coming change*, is a resource intended to help leaders of private, Christian colleges and universities face current and future financial challenges, more effectively. In brief, this text is designed to help such leaders “get going” in needed financially wiser ways.

After an engaging overview and introduction, which highlights the editors' motives and goals, the book is organized in three progressively larger sections. The first includes a literature review of "leadership decision-making processes in the light of complex financial pressures" (pg. 15) and an original phenomenological study, which taps into the experience of seven seasoned cabinet-level administrators from faith-based institutions. Section two contains some nuts and bolts of college finances, including what it means to operate a balanced non-profit budget, identify and manage influences on the budget, and utilize meaningful measures in the budgeting process. The third and final section seeks to provide strategies to help university leaders collaborate with discernment, implement mission-derived change, make difficult decisions gracefully, and care for the institution's culture and people, all with a depth of insight and understanding that stabilizes a school during turbulent times.

The sub-title of this text serves as the statement of its goal and I believe the content does so, adequately. Many readers of this review are familiar with some of the authors and editors of this text, so it may go without saying that they are in an excellent position to offer some timely advice. This project was sponsored by the Association for Christian in Student Development, so it does not aim – nor pretend to aim – at the broadest reaches of academia. Though the principles would be generally applicable, this is an unapologetically Christian work for Christian institutions.

I thought the introduction and overview of the book provided a pellucid lens through which to view its purpose and scope. The book's structure is straightforward and the editors are right when they suggest that – "each section includes chapters that can be read in the context of the whole or as an individual thesis" (pg. 15). If used for reference, one chapter at a time, the format is not an issue at all. However, I found the authors' outlines and writing style were so distinct that it was a little distracting when reading several chapters at a time, but overall the format gave the sense that the reader was learning from a panel of experts.

The qualitative study in Section One extracted some helpful principles and recommendations in facing the broad and complex factors contributing to financial strain on private Christian universities. I appreciated that trust was a foundational issue in decision making and that “collaborative discernment” was the *modus operandi* for the leaders who were surveyed. I also whole-heartedly agreed with the idea that each decision should be sustainably anchored in the mission of the particular institution and that “the budget essentially is a financial statement about a school’s institutional priorities and mission” (pg. 33). Lastly, I thought it was amusing that the authors played on the quip “It’s about time!” meaning it was both past time that financial issues were addressed in this fashion and important to spend the necessary time grappling with institutional finances in such a time as this. Both are true.

Section Two of the text, “a practical yet critical primer on higher education’s budgeting nomenclature and processes” (pg. 16), was the hardest for me to read in terms of style and content but will be the section I reference in the future when grappling with real financial issues. The authors parsed complicated financial operations well and provided apt principles and illustrations. Both authors did a great job of balancing the challenge of teaching and informing readers, while not drowning them in minutia.

The most compelling part of the text, for me, comes in the third section of the book. The three sections are progressively weighted, with emphasis placed on the softer side of implementing change. Making valuable changes, day-to-day, ends up being less about what needs to happen and more about how you influence and prompt that needed change.

There were a couple themes in the book that felt more like redundancies. Virtually every chapter reiterated that each institution of higher education is a community with its own culture and cautiously suggested broadly applicable suggestions and claims. References to 2008 may also give readers the sense that it is less and less applicable with each passing year. In short, most chapters started with the recession and ended with a disclaimer that every institution is different. However, repetition is a learning tool, and I for one will never forget the impact of the recession and that application must be uniquely crafted for its environment and culture, emphasized in this book. I also think the repetition ties back to its thesis-for-every-chapter format.

The stated hopes for this text were that it would provide clarity regarding key financial issues that will continue to impact institutions and to instigate greater understanding and engagement of institutional leaders toward a “collaborative culture of discernment” (pg. 16) that helps them meet the unique needs of their campus context. I believe the editors of this book accomplished their hopes and goals. This is not intended as an exhaustive text regarding institutional finances. It does provide a distillation of wisdom from veteran leaders in the field, a primer on financial terms and operations, and guidebook for how to identify, articulate, and address change in a higher educational setting.

A couple general observations about the text: I found the individual authors covered their subjects in a thorough, succinct and balanced fashion. Some of the authors did

a better job of supporting their work with literature. I would have liked to see more consistent references; one chapter had dozens of endnotes and a couple did not have any, while another chapter had endnotes and a bibliography. Yet, the content as a whole was informative and compelling.

This worthwhile read brings together some of the leading voices at private Christian colleges and universities to encourage, inform, equip, and even inspire leaders at private, Christian institutions to adequately face the now and yet-future challenges regarding finances and institutional decision-making in higher education. The authors not only offer powerful ideas and useful information but often take a pastoral and passionate tone that connects with the heart of a like-minded reader. While catering to those at the upper levels of private institutions, professionals at all levels will benefit from the deeper understanding of contributing factors, useful tools, and leadership principles, provided in this book. *Funding the Future* is riddled with wisdom and insights, and I recommend it to any professional in the field. 

Jeff Strietzel is Assistant Director of Residence Life at Houston Baptist University, and holds an M.A. in Higher Education and Student Development from Taylor University.