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Getting Organized

By Jeffrey L. Buller, PhD

Although academic leaders have looked to the promise of a “paperless office” for many years, that future vision never seems to materialize. While it’s true that many forms of communication that appeared in hard copy now reach us in electronic versions, we still seem to be inundated by a never-ending stream of paper documents—policies, memoranda, petitions, appeals, and announcements—that often seem too important to throw away but too numerous to occupy the limited real estate of our desks. As a result, even the neatest office of an academic leader can, in a depressingly short amount of time, end up filled with stacks of paper. A disorderly workplace is not only unsightly; it can actually make us less effective at our jobs, causing crucial information to become harder to find and making our thoughts as cluttered as our desktops.

Many people want to get organized but don’t know where to begin. Or, they make a major effort to reduce the clutter in their offices but can’t *stay* organized, and their desks soon become as messy as they were before their last attempt to purge. So, how can academic leaders get organized, stay organized, and use this higher degree of organization to improve their work?

Step one: Choose a system

Academic leaders can choose from a number of organizational systems,

each of which claims to be the best or possibly the only approach that actually works. As a matter of fact, no one system works for everyone, so you need to find a system that suits your personality and operating style and then commit to that approach.

The two most important organizational systems are diametrically opposed to one another, so you can’t try to blend them. Just pick the one that you can stick with.

“The fact of the matter is, you don’t need most things in your office.”

- The KonMari Method, as presented in Marie Kondo’s *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*. For Kondo, getting organized should be a massive, one-time activity. It is like undergoing a lifestyle change in terms of what you eat and when, not going on a temporary diet. You block out the time you need to get your office in order, purge what you don’t need, store what you do need, and maintain that level of neatness from that point forward.
 - Marla Cilley’s “Five-Minute Room Rescue,” as popularized on FlyLady.net. Set a timer for five minutes. Neaten up your office until the timer goes off. Do the same thing every day.
- Which system is right for you? Consider the approach you use when you move. If you can’t relax in your new home until you’ve unpacked every

box and put everything away, you’ll probably be more successful with the KonMari Method. If you prefer to unpack one box a day even if it takes six months until you’re fully moved, you’d probably find the “Five-Minute Room Rescue” easier to sustain.

Step two: Purge ruthlessly

Regardless of whether you’re engaging in a week-long organizing marathon or stretching the process out over several months, the first thing you need to do is to get rid of the stuff you don’t need. The fact of the matter is, you don’t need most things in your office. Certainly, institutional policies govern how long we have to maintain certain records, but there’s no reason why those records have to be taking up room in your office. Archive them or scan them into electronic versions, if your institution

PAGE 2 ▶

In This Issue

3 The Department Chair: A Retrospective Perspective

4 The Art of Framing in Academic Settings

6 Understanding the *Fisher* Decision

8 *Evaluating Online Teaching: Implementing Best Practices* by Thomas J. Tobin, B. Jean Mandernach, and Ann H. Taylor

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COVER STORY

From Page 1

allows it. Practically everything exists somewhere in duplicate, triplicate, or quadruplicate. You'll be able to find another copy if you ever need it again someday (you won't). So, when in doubt, throw it out.

Start your purging with routine paperwork and other documents. Save sorting through mementos and personal items until everything else has been purged. If you start sorting through memorabilia too early, you'll find yourself reliving past events and getting distracted by the emotions these items invoke. If you sort through personal items later in the process, you're likely to treat them more objectively and to save only what's truly meaningful to you. For the same reason, always purge your office while standing up rather than sitting down. Sitting tends to put us into a nostalgic and reflective mood. Standing makes us focus on the task.

Step three: Find a home for what you keep

After you've purged extraneous items from your office, what remains should be only the items that are most important to you and your work. Important items deserve a home, and the most important rule for office storage should be that each thing belongs in one and only one place. If everything has its place, it becomes easy to recognize when that item is out of place. It also becomes easy to recognize when other unnecessary items start to accumulate in your workplace because they begin to intrude on other items' "homes."

There's no reason why you can't add other important items to your office space in the future. It just means that they, too, need one and only one home. Sometimes inserting a new possession may mean discarding an old one. A book or memento that was important to you several years ago may not seem as significant as a new

book or memento today. Or perhaps your office can indeed accommodate one additional item and still look well organized. As long as the newcomer can be given a suitable and permanent "home," it can stay.

Step four: Maintain your environment

Once you've established your new level of neatness and organization in your office, your next goal is to maintain it. Some of this maintenance will occur automatically; you'll sense when one of your permanent possessions is out of place or when an interloper is infringing on another object's space or an area that was intentionally left open. For the rest, a surprisingly short amount of time is needed to keep things organized once they've been assigned a proper home. Fifteen minutes at the end of each week is all that most people need. In the meantime, you'll probably find that your thoughts are more organized when you work, your ideas are more innovative, and your mood is more relaxed. It's a fallacy that creative people thrive in messy offices. Most academic leaders find that their thought processes are original in direct proportion to how well their desk and work areas are maintained.

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The Department Chair: A Retrospective Perspective

By Robert E. Cipriano, EdD

The department chair is a linchpin of a university. It has been estimated that 80 percent of the decisions made in higher education are made at the department level. The chair is a classic hybrid-in-the-middle position; not really an administrator but “more than” a faculty member. The roles and responsibilities of a chair can differ significantly from one university to another. A chair at one institution may develop and monitor a budget, hire and terminate individuals, evaluate faculty members and professional staff, and not teach any courses. Another chair at another university may only teach classes and provide a schedule of classes to be offered. In fact, most universities do not provide a job description for the chair.

Although it is universally acknowledged that the department chair is an important and valuable member of the university community, surprisingly little has been written regarding characteristics of people serving in this unique leadership position. In fact, we know very little about a myriad of factors that contribute to whether a chair is effective in his or her role. In an effort to address these issues, my colleague Richard Riccardi and I have been surveying chairs for the past ten years (i.e., from 2007 to 2016) to determine the challenges they face, the demonstrated competencies they indicate are needed for them to be effective, how satisfied they are, whether tasks they perform are pleasant or unpleasant, and their thoughts about collegiality and civility.

Over the ten years of this study, 5,303 surveys were mailed and 2,013 were returned, a 38 percent return rate. The average respondent

- had a doctoral degree,
- was employed at a public college or university,

- held the academic rank of full professor,
- was 46 years old when he or she first became chair,
- was currently 53 years old and was tenured,
- considered him or herself a member of the faculty rather than the administration,
- had no formal training in serving as a chair,
- will go back on faculty after serving as chair,
- was satisfied with being chair,
- and was very satisfied with his or her choice of career.

Selected data points

- Over 96 percent of the respondents had no formal education or training in being a chair.
- The top three reasons for remaining as chair were (1) to make a difference, (2) to shape the direction of the department, and (3) no one else will do it.
- The top two reasons have remained consistent throughout the 10 years of the study.
- In 2016, the third top reason for remaining as chair (no one else will do it) was listed this high in the rankings for the first time.
- The average number of years a person remained as chair was initially six years, and then it dropped to five years, and in three of the last four years people remained as chair for four years.
- The percentage of people serving as chair who were not tenured has risen from 13.8 percent to 18.5 percent over the 10 years of the study.
- The skills and competencies people stated were needed to be an effective chair were ranked in the following order: (1) ability to communicate effectively [this has remained consistent as number one for each year of the study], (2) ability to

manage conflict, (3) leadership skills, (4) character and integrity, and (5) interpersonal skills.

- The challenges in serving as chair are indicated as follows: (1) dealing with noncollegial faculty, (2) dealing with bureaucracy, (3) lack of time to devote to individual research, (4) excessive workload, and (5) excessive email.
- Respondents were asked if collegiality should be the fourth criterion for tenure decisions: 68.5 percent said yes, 9.9 percent said no, and 21 percent said they were not sure.
- Some 78 percent of the respondents stated that they currently have or have had a noncollegial faculty member in their department, and 22 percent indicated they did not.

Final thoughts

Presently, we are arguably experiencing one of the most challenging and tumultuous times in higher education. Student graduation rates are at an embarrassingly low point; 38 percent of our students graduate in four years and 55 percent graduate in six years. Students leave college owing an average of \$37,000 in student debt. We are witnessing the “adjunctification” of classes being taught by part-timers. Logically, the department chair is in an enviable and strategic position to effect positive change in this potentially parlous situation.

After analyzing the data over the ten years of this study, it appears that the following are true regarding the role and responsibilities of the department chair.

- Chairs are serving less willingly than ever before.
- Potential chairs do not want to serve as chair.
- Chairs are not adequately educated or trained in being an effective chair.
- The ability to communicate remains

The Art of Framing in Academic Settings

By N. Douglas Lees, PhD

Have you ever witnessed a keynote address in which a new university president shared such an inspiring and imaginative future strategy that you wished you were a part of that institution's implementation team? Innovative thinkers who transform their vision into eloquent language can have that effect on their audiences. Assuming no bad behavior, how would one explain that two years later that same institution has launched a presidential search? One could list several reasons for this, including personal or family illness or an attractive offer elsewhere. However, in some cases the failure is due to the inability to implement the plan to achieve the vision. This failure would not only disappoint the president but would also be a blow to the governing board, faculty, and students who brought this individual to campus.

If you have not personally seen an example like this, perhaps there are smaller versions that have taken place on your home campus. Perhaps a department sought to raise its research profile by bringing in a dean from a prominent institution, but the dean has failed to deliver; or a new chair arrives with the promise of enhancing the department's civic engagement profile but after three years has little to show for the effort. Both were carefully vetted prior to hiring, had been successful at their prior institutions, and were provided with the requisite resources to get the jobs done; they were expected to deliver.

So what may have happened in these cases? Why would capable people with great ideas and good initial support crash and burn? In cases like these, the leaders are agents of change. The prospect for change presents a challenge for everyone, although the tolerance for it varies immensely among individuals.

At one end of the spectrum, there are individuals who seem open to the consideration of almost any reasonable idea, while at the other end there are those who oppose, outright, anything new or different.

It also seems true that all change generates resistance. Resistance can be strong enough to derail the best of ideas. Thus, change agents need to anticipate and avoid or defuse it in order to be successful. Perhaps the above examples of failed reform can be traced to inattention to the preliminary work of finding pathways to success while taking into account the local variables.

“Why would capable people with great ideas and good initial support crash and burn?”

Making sense of complex organizations in order to lead within them (and higher education institutions are very complex organizations with many subcultures) is called framing. The concept of framing was developed for applications in business but is also applicable to higher education (Bolman and Gallos). Framing allows the leader or change agent to examine the impact of the initiative in the four frames of the organization before beginning the change process. Examining the change agenda through multiple lenses or frames allows the leader to identify structural obstacles, change directions, avoid alienating key people needed for support, avoid violating policies, amass support, avoid political missteps, and promote blending into local culture and tradition.

The **structural lens or frame** consists of policies, procedures, and practices;

the chain of command; how authority is distributed; and the like. This includes who approves new initiatives, an important thing to know if there is an agenda for change. An example might be the dean of engineering who fosters the development of a new course in software engineering to accompany a new research focus, only to learn, when the course goes through the approval process, the computer science department in another school on campus has a graduate course that covers this area. Because of the institution's ban on course duplication, the initiative fails. In many regards, this is an easy frame to deal with if the leader has good people around who know the rules and if the leader is not so brazen to think he or she can have his or her way in spite of standing policy.

The **people frame** is one that examines the impact of change on individuals. Changing the undergraduate or graduate curricula, adding graduate programs where previously only undergraduate programs existed, adding research expectations, and changing the student advising model all have implications for faculty workloads. Dealing with the frame takes soft skills on the part of the leader. Being open and transparent about why the change is being made will promote trust, and offering resources to help with the transition will go a long way to help relieve faculty and staff angst. In some cases, retraining and assurances of continued value will be part of the equation. Failure here can lead to several types of resistance that can scuttle the initiative.

Viewing the change agenda through a **political lens** requires significant insight, careful forethought, and planning on the part of the leader. Regardless of the level of the leader,

PAGE 5 ▶

LEADERSHIP From Page 4

there are immediate clusters of personnel who represent the first wave of those who must be brought into the fold of supporting the initiative. A president may have to take this approach with a cluster of deans who represent many diverse schools, each with a unique blend of missions, cultures, values, aspirations, and ways of conducting business. Similarly, a dean would have to gain the support of faculty chairs as the first steps to success. The true complexity of higher education is most evident when considering change through the political frame.

The political frame is marked not only by complexity but also by the fact that it constitutes the most treacherous terrain in implementing an agenda for change. Bolman and Gallos suggest a basic “political” approach for survival. After setting the goals for the initiative, the leader must carefully identify those who would be impacted, decide who would support and who would oppose, and estimate the influence of each of these players. Once done, the leader then begins to establish a support base by forming coalitions and cultivating those who are judged to be neutral or uncommitted while providing arguments for those who raise issues in opposition. There are even cases where bargaining (*quid pro quo*) can come into play if the initiative is critical. After all, we are talking about politics here. It is also important that the change agent stay in close contact with those who are opposed so that elements of strategy and patterns of behavior can be closely observed. Finally, the leader must learn from these experiences because a similar scenario is likely to recur, perhaps with supporter and antagonist roles reversed.

Bolman and Gallos suggest three “Ps” for successfully implementing a change agenda. The first is being persistent in using every opportunity to promote, to explain the necessity for, and to cite

the benefits of the initiative. This can be done in campus-wide addresses and even individual conversations in the hallway. Patience is the second virtue that the leader should have. These two behaviors tell the opposition that the leader remains serious about the agenda and that stalling is not going to be an effective mechanism of resistance. The final “P” is that of process: performing all the right steps in the right order according to local policy and tradition. Examples including the many nuances of navigating the political frame would require far too much space to describe here, so we challenge you to apply the principles listed here using a controversial issue or proposition on the home campus.

“Examining the change agenda through multiple lenses or frames allows the leader to identify structural obstacles, change directions, avoid alienating key people needed for support, avoid violating policies, amass support, avoid political missteps, and promote blending into local culture and tradition.”

The **symbolic frame** is the final lens through which the agenda for change is viewed. Included here are the institution’s traditions, history, values, and even specific rituals. If the leader is new to campus, it will be critical to learn about this aspect of the institution not only to move the agenda forward but also to avoid unnecessarily offending those who hold these things to be inviolable. Change can be

promoted through language that ties it to the glories of the past and local core values rather than presenting the agenda as one that changes the “personality” of the institution. This allows those who are closely invested in the institution to embrace change on an emotional level.

While everyone frames decisions to some extent (“Bill certainly wouldn’t like this decision” or “Chemistry would be pleased with this policy”), it is often not done systematically or thoroughly. An observer might say, “Why didn’t she see that coming?” Did the president, in his haste to implement change, fail to take the time to assess the positions of campus deans and work behind the scenes to gain sufficient support? Did the dean of engineering fail to consider that many senior faculty who had not conducted research in decades would need special assurances and support to participate in the new world? Did the engagement chair fail to assess the external partnerships already in existence on campus before contacting community organizations and individuals? Appropriate framing may have been able to prevent these failures. Framing is never perfect (there will always be some unexpected things that will happen), but it can significantly improve the odds of being successful.

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Understanding the Fisher Decision

By Scott D. Schneider, JD

Two months ago, in *Fisher v. University of Texas*, the United States Supreme Court gave a lukewarm endorsement of the University of Texas' affirmative action program geared to attracting more students of color. Suffice it to say that the Court's decision is limited to student admissions and the very specific facts of that case.

Of course, the country is in the midst of an intense national conversation on race and systemic discrimination, and as last year's turmoil at the University of Missouri made plain, higher education is certainly not immune from this discussion. Facing demands from students and faculty members to address the lack of racial minorities within their faculty ranks, university deans and department heads are struggling to address those concerns while not violating the law (which remains somewhat murky). This article outlines the law regarding the consideration of race in employment and provides straightforward, legally permissible suggestions to enhance diversity.

The Fisher decision in a nutshell

The issue in *Fisher* was whether the University of Texas' exceptionally limited use of race in selecting its undergraduate class was constitutional. The Court's majority ultimately sided with the university, determining that it had articulated a compelling state interest in enacting a race-conscious admissions plan and that the plan was narrowly tailored to achieve that interest. In reaching its conclusion, the Court relied on previous decisions in which colleges and universities were afforded considerable deference to decide who can be a student. As Justice Kennedy, who wrote the majority opinion, noted, "A university is in

large part defined by those intangible qualities which are incapable of objective measurement but which make for greatness. Considerable deference is owed to a university in defining those intangible characteristics, like student body diversity, that are central to its identity and educational mission."

"The more diverse an institution's search committees, the more likely they will produce diverse hires."

Of course, that deference has limits, namely, "the constitutional promise of equal treatment and dignity." However, the Court, after conducting a detailed review of Texas' plan, which it described as *sui generis*, concluded that the following case-specific facts allowed the plan to pass constitutional muster:

- In creating the admissions plan, "the University articulated concrete and precise goals," including the educational value of diversity in "the destruction of stereotypes, the promotion of cross-racial understanding, the preparation of a student body for an increasingly diverse workforce and society" The Court noted that all of these served as compelling state interests.
- The University only resorted to using race "as a factor of a factor of a factor" in making admissions decisions following an extensive study which concluded that race-neutral policies had not been successful in meeting the goals in the preceding bullet point. This study included "retreats, interviews, and review of data" and concluded that sufficient racial diversity to effectuate those goals had been achieved.

Use of race in the employment context

Fisher avoided any discussion regarding the extent to which race can be used in the employment context, so applying the *Fisher* ruling to the employment context is a perilous exercise. Suffice it to say that the circumstances justifying consideration of race in employment under federal law and the U.S. Constitution are exceptionally limited (a detailed discussion of those very limited circumstances is beyond the scope of this article). In addition to federal restrictions, it is worth noting that many states have enacted legislation that further restricts the ways in which employers can consider race.

Generally speaking, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 bars the consideration of race, ethnicity, gender, or other protected characteristics even as a "contributing factor" in any employment decision. Exceptions include limited circumstances when affirmative consideration of such characteristics is (1) necessary to remedy the present effect of (2) admitted past discrimination and (3) the plan does not "unnecessarily trammel" the rights of nonminority candidates. Such a plan must have a limited duration and must not impose a complete barrier to nonminority advancement.

For instance, in *Steelworkers v. Weber*, the Supreme Court considered a case involving an apprenticeship training that was provided to African American workers in greater numbers than to their white colleagues as an effort to remedy past intentional discrimination. Because half the apprentice population continued to be nonminority, the affirmative action in support of African Americans did not completely impede the advancement of nonminorities. Based on all of these facts, the Court

PAGE 7 ▶

LEGAL ISSUES

From Page 6

allowed this limited use of race.

Extrapolating considerations of race in a training program where there was a history of overt racial discrimination to faculty hiring decisions at your school is, however, laden with problems.

Some general points about faculty and staff diversity

So where does this legal landscape leave deans and department heads concerned about both institutional legal obligations and a paucity of diversity within their faculty? For starters, this is an area laden with landmines, and all efforts to improve diversity in the faculty ranks should be vetted through counsel. As a general rule, though, it is far easier to justify diversity efforts at the front end of the employment process (e.g., in outreach and recruitment) than at the final stages of individual hiring or promotion decisions.

With that information as backdrop, here are four straightforward suggestions:

- **Advertise positions inclusively:** Plans for recruitment should include advertising in publications that are likely to reach out to persons of color (e.g., *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, *The Hispanic Outlook*

in Higher Education), as well as newsletters or listservs of minority groups. A list of such resources should be available centrally so that each new search committee need not reinvent the wheel in this regard.

- **Be mindful of rush hires:** Many times universities have an immediate need to fill a position and cannot afford to go through a time-consuming, extensive search process. In those situations, departments tend to rely upon preexisting contacts and networks, which may disproportionately exclude racial minorities. Although having to rush a new hire may be unavoidable, care should be taken in those circumstances to ensure that the pool of professionals being considered is sufficiently diverse. If it is not, steps should be taken to talk to colleagues in the field who might have leads on promising candidates of color.
- **Create thoughtful search processes:** There is considerable research suggesting that search committees tend to have a “cloning effect”—in other words, they tend to choose candidates who look and think like themselves. Put simply, if institutions are seeking to diversify their faculty, they should give careful consideration to who serves as members of the search committee. The more diverse an institution’s search committees, the more likely they will produce

diverse hires. Training of search committees is also crucial, and this training should certainly include an overview of the law in this area.

- **Retain diverse hires:** Hiring a diverse faculty can become a Sisyphean task if the university does not retain its diverse hires. Several studies have suggested that mentors can be especially important for faculty of color, who face a variety of professional, social, and personal challenges in the academy. Obviously, adequate mentorship programs may prove critical in retention. Another factor that has been mentioned prominently for all new hires is the provision of support for trailing spouses or partners in identifying and interviewing for possible jobs. Finally, faculty of color may face unique social and professional challenges in taking positions at institutions (and in communities) where those groups have historically been underrepresented. Some personal attention can go a long way toward sending a welcoming signal and setting the stage for a hospitable environment.

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LEADERSHIP

From Page 3

the most important skill an effective chair can possess.

- Dealing with a noncollegial faculty member is becoming more of a challenge than ever before.
- Chairs should receive training in managing conflict.
- Future chairs will serve in larger departments than ever before.
- More nontenured people will serve in the role of chair.

- Chairs will continue to view themselves as members of the faculty rather than of the administration.
- More chairs will hold the rank of associate professor rather than full professor.
- Chairs will be less satisfied in being chair and more satisfied with their career choice.
- Chairs will be challenged by working with unmotivated faculty.

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Evaluating Online Teaching: Implementing Best Practices

by Thomas J. Tobin, B. Jean Mandernach, and Ann H. Taylor

Review by Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti, MS

More than a decade ago, Thomas Tobin, coauthor of the new book, *Evaluating Online Teaching: Implementing Best Practices*, was hired to teach a business English and communications class in a hybrid format. When the time came for evaluation, he received a very thorough evaluation based on the chair's observation of the face-to-face portion of his class, but the section of the evaluation instrument meant for the online component was left completely blank. "The department chair eventually confessed that because he had not himself taught using the institution's LMS, he didn't feel qualified to rate Tom's use of its tools," the book explains. Evaluation of the online component of the class was not something the administrator was equipped to do.

"The pendulum is now swinging back toward seeing 'teaching as teaching' regardless of the delivery medium," write the authors of *Evaluating Online Teaching*. Although colleges and universities are moving to an understanding that teaching online, in the hybrid classroom, or in the traditional classroom are all substantially equivalent, evaluation methods must necessarily vary by delivery method in order to capture and analyze the appropriate information without too much wasted effort on the part of administrators or faculty members. This is where a book like *Evaluating Online Teaching* comes in. It is filled with illustrative examples, detailed how-tos, and numerous examples of how to tailor and execute the best ideas in evaluating online teaching on your campus.

The problems inherent in evaluating online teaching arise understandably. "Deans, department chairs, faculty

members, and students rate and evaluate teaching at their institutions mostly through home-grown processes and forms," write the authors.

"Although these are often constructed to help observers and raters to provide meaningful information, it is often the case that even now [years after Tobin's experience], little training is provided for those using the evaluation instruments." Many institutions find that one size cannot fit all.

Divided into sections including planning, formative evaluation, summative evaluation, and sustaining a culture of evaluation, *Evaluating Online Teaching* draws on research to give the reader important concepts about how to develop and execute evaluation programs, and it clearly explains questions that institutions should address when building the system that will work best on their campus. Sometimes these systems take the form of complicated forms and checklists, but sometimes the perfect solution is easily planned and executed.

One element of successful evaluation of online teaching is understanding who is qualified to review what portions of a course. For example, student evaluations often cause a great deal of concern among faculty members and are often given a great deal of weight in overall instructor evaluation. Indeed, the book points out that, regardless of course delivery medium, students are typically asked to assess things like course organization and structure, instructor communication skills, teacher-student interactions, course difficulty and student workload, assessments and grading, and student learning. Other items might better be left to administrators.

Of course, administrators may find that they have difficulties assessing as well. Tobin points out that he

once received a question from an administrator preparing to do his first online "observation." The administrator asked, "Our observation form has an item on it: 'Instructor demonstrates enthusiasm.' How can instructors demonstrate enthusiasm in an online course?" A lengthy discussion ensued about how to deal with some of the nuances posed by a survey instrument and a context that were both designed to evaluate a traditional classroom.

Dealing with these issues is a challenge facing administrators as they prepare to evaluate online teaching. *Evaluating Online Teaching: Implementing Best Practices* provides the tools readers need to maximize their impact and evaluate with an eye to continuous improvement.

As author Ann Taylor notes, "Finding the right tool to support an institution's formal administrative review of online teaching can be challenging . . . Even when suitable tools are identified, rarely can they be used as-is. Adaptations need to be made so that the tools can be used for institution-specific context and needs." This book will help administrators identify the tools that can be adapted, develop new ones, and employ them all effectively.

Thomas J. Tobin, Jean B. Mandernach, and Ann H. Taylor, *Evaluating Online Teaching: Implementing Best Practices* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2015).

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