

Georgia Southern University

Georgia Southern Commons

Library Faculty Publications

University Libraries Faculty Research and
Publications

2008

Review of *What Ever Happened to the Faculty? Drift and Decision in Higher Education* by Mary Burgan

W. Bede Mitchell

Georgia Southern University, wbmitch3@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/lib-facpubs>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mitchell, W. Bede. 2008. "Review of *What Ever Happened to the Faculty? Drift and Decision in Higher Education* by Mary Burgan." *College and Research Libraries*, 69 (2): 188-189. doi: 10.5860/crl.69.2.188 <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/lib-facpubs/26>

This book review is brought to you for free and open access by the University Libraries Faculty Research and Publications at Georgia Southern Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Library Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Georgia Southern Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Book Reviews

Burgan, Mary. *What Ever Happened to the Faculty? Drift and Decision in Higher Education.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006. 264p. alk. paper, \$38 (ISBN 0801884616). LC 2006-9630.

Over the course of her lengthy career in higher education, Mary Burgan served as General Secretary of the American Association of University Professors and as English professor, department chair, and associate dean at Indiana University-Bloomington. Her extensive academic and administrative background informs this insightful examination of the declining faculty influence in campus affairs and, more broadly, higher education. In each chapter Burgan attempts to summarize evenhandedly the trends that have led to the current situation, and then proposes steps that could lead to solutions. Rather than simply blame administrators, legislators, and public opinion for the faculty's increasingly restricted role in academic governance, Burgan shows how the faculty have often contributed to their loss of influence in the act of responding to significant challenges.

Burgan begins her book with a celebration of the diversity and traditions of American higher education and concludes it with some case studies that exemplify how faculties have responded effectively to many of the problems dealt with in the previous chapters. In the intervening chapters, she discusses pedagogical and curricular debates, the challenges of intercollegiate athletics, the competition among higher education institutions for prestige and academic stars, online education, governance, tenure, and academic freedom. The overriding themes that recur in several chapters and are addressed again in the conclusion are:

a. how competition for research dollars, star faculty, and successful athletic programs overwhelm institutional identities and thus reduce diversity among

American colleges and universities;

b. how the managerial culture that is replacing traditional shared governance models is relying on contingent labor (that is, part-time non-tenure-track faculty members) to address growing enrollments and increase institutional flexibility, at the expense of institutional continuity;

c. how the academy is facing a relentless and concerted political effort to undermine traditional understandings of knowledge by elevating the status of theoretical challenges based on faith or dogma rather than scientific methods of inquiry;

d. why faculty are more unwilling to participate in universitywide communal activities (such as graduation ceremonies), review and reform curriculum, and take the trouble to understand the changing needs of undergraduate students.

According to Burgan, among the biggest impediments to faculty members re-engaging in productive governance is their exasperation with institutional complexity and their fear of wasting valuable time either addressing insoluble problems or trying to work with administrations that are not committed to collaboration. While she sympathizes with these faculty fears and frustrations, and goes to great lengths to explain why such views are often justifiable, Burgan also argues persuasively that the long-term interests of any institution are best served when tenured faculty members assert their positions firmly and civilly and reach out to administrators as colleagues. Even when such initiatives do not find receptive audiences at first, faculty regain and retain the moral high ground that usually yields dividends as both internal and external stakeholders come to accept the legitimacy and genuineness of the faculty outreach. This should not



be interpreted as saying Burgan naively believes major problems will simply melt away when faculty members assert themselves, but rather she cogently shows why students and the public interest are not well served when the faculty are not actively involved in governance.

Burgan is an effective advocate, an entertaining writer with a wry sense of humor, and an empathetic judge of the many players in today's higher education controversies. Her perspectives, criticisms, and conclusions are based on well-documented research, years of experience, and logical arguments that challenge and instruct. After reading this book, I felt as though I had spent a few hours in front of the fireplace of a faculty club, ruminating over today's academy with a valued colleague.—*W. Bede Mitchell, Georgia Southern University.*

College Libraries and the Teaching/Learning Process: Selections from the Writings of Evan Ira Farber. Ed. David Gansz, Richard Hume Werking, Lynn Scott Cochrane, and Pyke Jr. Johnson. Richmond, Ind.: Earlham College Press, 2007. 247p. \$29 (ISBN 9781117181).

When the definitive history of the instruction movement in libraries is written, there will be a chapter dedicated to the work of Evan Farber at Earlham College. Farber played a pivotal role in the development and expansion of instructional services programs in academic libraries during the 1970s and 1980s. Even today, almost forty years after its instruction program was introduced to a national audience at the 1969 annual meeting of the American Library Association, Earlham is routinely cited as an example of an institution where the contributions made by libraries and librarians to undergraduate education are understood and valued. Without the work of library leaders like Farber, we would not have the vibrant and multifaceted instructional services programs that we have today, and teaching would not be so widely recognized as a core professional responsibility for

librarians. For that reason alone, and putting aside for the moment the equally significant impact that Farber has had on the study and practice of college librarianship, the field would benefit from an exploration of the ongoing significance of his ideas. There is a word for this type of collection, *Festschrift*, and Farber and his ideas deserve one. Unfortunately, we will have to wait for Farber to get his due because the current collection is simply a compilation of Farber's writing. Interesting, no doubt, especially to those who know him, but not the volume that might have engaged a new generation of librarians in a discussion of the promise (and limits) of his ideas and of the Earlham College Library Instruction Program in which they are embodied.

While this volume collects almost thirty discrete articles, essays, and speeches (including several pieces never before published), the basic theme that runs through them all is found in the title—the library has a unique and valuable role to play in the teaching and learning process that is at the heart of undergraduate education. In exploring that theme, Farber makes a number of points—some of which may seem dated to today's audience, but the most significant of which remain germane to academic librarianship in the 21st century. Keeping in mind that this collection provides an overview of thirty years of work, one is struck by how many of Farber's ideas—almost all of which were implemented in a higher education environment yet to be touched by the World Wide Web—remain vital.

Chief among these, perhaps, is the idea of the "university-library syndrome," a problem that Farber defined in 1974 as "a pattern of attitudes which causes college faculty, administrators, and librarians to think of their libraries in terms of university libraries—and thus to imitate their practices, attitudes, and objectives" (a pattern noted more broadly in higher education as the problem of "institutional isomorphism"¹). While Farber might not have imagined the ways in which college