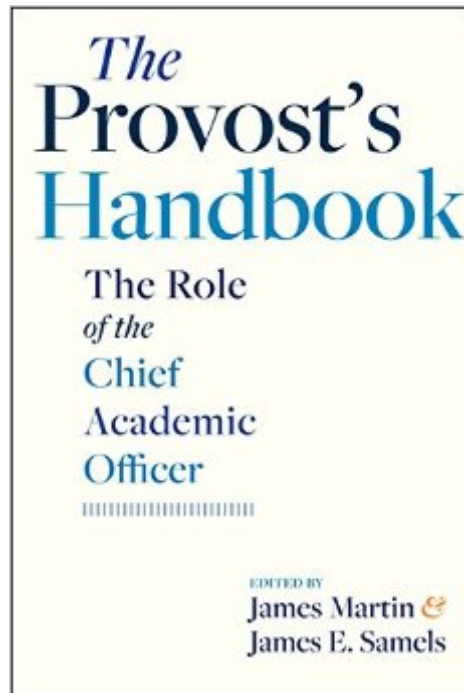


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The Provost's Handbook: The Role Of The Chief Academic Officer



Synopsis

As the chief academic officer, the provost plays the central role in the contemporary university or college. He or she leads the faculty and serves as their key representative to the administration while simultaneously acting as the administration's spokesperson to the academic faculty. How has this essential leadership position evolved over the past few decades, and what are the best practices to adopt for succeeding in specific operational areas? In seventeen essays written by some of the most successful chief academic officers in the United States, *The Provost's Handbook* outlines key topics related to the changing environment of higher education while explaining what constitutes effective leadership at the college and university level. How, for example, does the provost lead in a time of disruption and shifting needs? What skills should he or she nurture in new faculty? What role should data and institutional research play in decision making? How can a provost navigate the often stormy situations of shared governance? These questions—and many more challenges presented by this role—are addressed in this essential volume. Assembled by James Martin and James E. Samels, accomplished authors and scholars of leadership in higher education, *The Provost's Handbook* is destined to become the go-to resource for deans, presidents, trustees, and chief academic officers everywhere.

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Customer Reviews

In most North American Universities, the office of Provost is so established that a handbook devoted to describing its role might seem superfluous. However, at a time when many British Universities

have recently introduced, or are considering introducing the office, it is timely to be reminded that the role of the Provost in America is in flux. In pre-Reformation Britain, Provosts were commonly the chief subordinate of an Abbot, having responsibility for all those matters of a monastery's function outside the Dean's priestly jurisdiction. In the UK, a shadow of this tradition lingers in the title of the Head of colleges such as Worcester and the Queen's in Oxford, Kings in Cambridge, and University College London. In most major universities in the USA, the office of Provost in its current form is not as ancient as all that. With few exceptions, such as U Penn and Columbia, Provosts were only introduced in the middle of the 20th Century, and at Harvard the post has only been continuous since the mid-1990s. Even within the USA, the position of the Provost in the organization varies, but typically they are described as the Chief Academic Officer, and have management responsibility for the academic Deans who head the, typically, nine to twelve Schools or Faculties. Separately reporting to the President, most Universities have Vice-Presidents responsible for areas such as Finance, Estates, Development, Governance, and so on, sometimes arranged under a single Executive V-P. There are numerous variations on this structure, particularly concerning the whether offices for institutional analysis, planning, budgeting and staff development fall within the jurisdiction of the office of the Provost, the Executive vice-President or the President themselves. For readers unfamiliar with North American University administration, the Provost's Handbook's silence on this background might make it a little inaccessible at first, though Chapter 4 by R Michael Tanner, who was Provost at U Illinois, Chicago, entitled 'The Scope of Academic Leadership at the Top' touches on the main features of the role. Each chapter is an essay by one or more former Provost, President or other University Leader, that bring a colourful range of perspectives to bear on the challenges faced by Provosts today. The chapters are grouped into two sections; the former looking thematically at sources of pressure and opportunities for change, and the latter at how to build productive relations with key players, such as the administrative VPs. Inevitably, as a multi-author work, the quality of evidence, analysis and explanation is very variable, but there are many nuggets of information and advice that any aspiring University leader would find invaluable. Readers looking for tables of institutional data, formal analysis of organization structures, worked examples of different approaches to budgeting or examples of dashboards and balanced scorecards to monitor delivery of strategy will be disappointed. Their absence from a work described as a 'Handbook' does seem a surprising omission, and will limit its utility for budding provosts. However, as a more informal vade mecum, it provides plenty of useful hints. Repeating themes are the increasing complexity of University organizations, the danger of administrative bloat and faculty disengagement, the

challenge of diversifying income and restraining costs, and the heightened awareness of the requirements of fee-paying students. Particularly useful advice is to be found in the Chapter on *How to lead the Faculty as a first among equals*, by Linda McMillin, a successful Provost who has returned to mainstream teaching and research. She eloquently makes the case that building mutual trust, understanding and respect between academics, Deans and the Provost is an essential, effortful and daily task, and gives many useful illustrations of successful models. John D Simon, Provost and Professor Chemistry at U Virginia, writes a thoughtful chapter on *Strategic planning and the Office of Institutional Research*, which again highlights the need for consensus-building and a stepwise approach to achieving strategic change. When captaining your Faculty flotilla through the uncharted seas of learning, to have no agreed plan is to guarantee chaos and dissipation; but to stick rigidly to one compass bearing irrespective of the urgent calls from the crew is to risk loss of the whole convoy on the shores of an undiscovered continent.

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