

Goodbye, Professor Chips

What Ever Happened to the Faculty? Drift and Decision in Higher Education

by Mary Burgan

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REVIEWED BY: GARY RHOADES

There is much to like in Mary Burgan's, *What Ever Happened to the Faculty?* It is a call for faculty to become more involved in academic governance and for the faculty's voice and perspective to be more considered in higher education decision-making. Burgan is in many ways what a good faculty member, and storyteller, should be: thoughtful, engaging, funny, and deeply familiar with her subject. At the same time, she is sufficiently detached so that she conveys a sense of reasonable distance from and objectivity about her topic. She has perspective and a sense of humor about herself and her profession, even as she is passionately devoted to its possibilities and best ideals. Her writing makes you want to take a class with her. You wish that more of your professorial peers and administrative colleagues were more like her, in committee meetings and other policy fora.

Having served as a professor and academic administrator, and as general secretary of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Mary Burgan is well positioned to speak on the subject of faculty voice and higher education policy. The position she adopts and promotes fits quite well with the positions she has held, particularly her role in the AAUP. For, ultimately, Burgan's goal is a reinvigorated form of shared governance, of the kind championed by the AAUP, that entails "an emergence of faculty from classrooms and studies and labs into a newly conscious

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determination to participate in institutional decisions (xxiii).” This approach to faculty governance also posits “the belief that faculty must cooperate with their administrations whenever they can (xxiii).”

On issue after issue, Burgan offers a reasoned, middle ground call for compromise and cooperation between faculty and administration in shaping higher education’s future in a way that centers on the academic, indeed the instructional, part of the academic enterprise. Although she no longer speaks officially for the AAUP, her book provides an excellent example of a very able AAUP member’s view of what ails the academy and what the faculty and the academy need to do to remedy the situation. Burgan represents in some ways the best that it has to offer by way of articulating its thinking about campus governance.

Yet for all the book’s strengths, there are also shortcomings. Burgan’s choice of title, and her AAUP-like focus on shared governance by faculty and administrators, reflects one limitation. In asking, “What Ever Happened to the Faculty?” Burgan might well rethink her answer. For her book only addresses a minority of them, and not the fastest growing segments at that. The tradition and past in which she embeds her ideals is one of research universities, not liberal arts colleges, doctoral-and masters-granting state universities, or community colleges. The segment of the faculty she focuses on is the tenured faculty, not the rising numbers of contingent faculty, and not even really the tenure-eligible assistant professors. The fields that she sees as central—the traditional arts and sciences—have long been at best only co-equals with professional schools and professional fields of study in most four-year colleges and universities (not to mention, community colleges). Even within the humanities and social sciences, English has been eclipsed by composition, and sociology by communication. And in concentrating on the parties she sees as central to shared governance, tenured faculty and senior academic administrators, Burgan overlooks the contingent faculty and support/managerial professionals who are the growth areas of professional employment in the academy. Ultimately, Burgan’s story is not well adapted to even the research universities she foregrounds.

The book’s first substantive chapter maps the topography of “Bricks and Mortar,” but Burgan is really dealing with research universities and their traditional college towns. This perspective is reflected in her view of undergraduate education as well, an “initiation into maturity” for students living on campus, despite the fact that most students do not live on campus. So despite her reference to the nation’s “egalitarian system,” she really focuses on the selective, expensive, research universities, and the largely upper middle class students who live on those campuses. Despite the centrality of professional schools on those campuses, she centers on the traditional arts and science disciplines as the heart of the campus, referring to add-ons such as medical and business schools as peripheral.

In a humorous chapter on “The Myth of the Bloviating Professor,” Burgan continues her relatively restricted focus on research universities, where research and grants activity is taking faculty’s attention from instruction. No matter, Burgan’s

opening critique of the views of pedagogical reformers, and her ironic and understated lampooning of outsiders' views of students as "eager learners" is worth the price of admission. She speaks in a measured voice, in an easy, conversational tone, and is the voice of reason when she notes that "Colleges and universities need both lecture halls and seminar rooms with teachers in them. And so do students (48)." However, Burgan overlooks the very central role in the pedagogy discourse played by professionals in teaching and learning centers who are becoming an internal interest group laying claim to expertise about pedagogy, learning, and technology.

In the next chapter, "Getting the 'Liberal' out of Education," Burgan again offers some priceless stories, including one that elicited a belly laugh from me, about a students' rendering of Faulkner and a "toilet seat." However, by seeking again to be the voice of tolerance and reason in charting a middle ground, by seeking to depoliticize the debate, Burgan seems to miss the very significant and ongoing political dimensions of the struggles between some sectors of society and some sectors of the academy.

Similarly, in her chapter, "Distance Makes the Heart Grow Colder," Burgan provides wonderful details and a good storyline about the problems of distance education. Her theme about the academy reneging on its commitment to personal access is an important one. But her analysis of causes, and solutions, again in my view, misses the larger, powerful policy regime that supports such activity, not so much in the elites she is concerned with, but in the rest of higher education.

Burgan's discussion of academic competition that leads to pursuit of "Superstars and Rookies of the Year" is spot on in providing insight into the depth, costs, and toxic psychological effects of extreme competition for faculty, especially in research universities. Though the discussion is restricted to the world of the elites, it is a telling rendering of that world, and how we have internalized the rhetoric.

In a chapter that relates "The Case of the Firecracker Boys," Burgan again cuts to the heart of the academy's internal sickness, in this case the danger of "self-entrapment in funding networks (153)." Extensive networks of consulting and funded research call peer review into question, and indeed the very integrity of science oriented to the public good, in this compelling case. Yet she does not systematically address the AAUP's failure at the national level to support academic freedom in this high profile case in the early 1960s. And this omission undercuts her next chapter, which focuses on the centrality of tenure to academic freedom.

Interestingly, despite the effective national role she played with the AAUP, national politics and the labor movement are largely overlooked in the book, even in a chapter titled, "A More Perfect Union." Burgan's gaze stays focused on shared governance (and the mistaken view that this is incompatible with union representation), on academic presidential excess and abuse, and presidential salaries. This is not a view of governance that successfully captures ways of shifting the trajectory of colleges and universities. And this limitation defines her "exemplary cases" in the closing chapter, in which Burgan seems to vest our hopes in enlightened individual

leaders who enable faculty to “Stage[ing] a Comeback,” as if they are over the hill athletes who can recapture their old glory.

Burgan’s choice to stay largely at the level of the university campus, even in addressing various national issues, and in citing exemplary cases, weakens her argument. There are two major problems with this approach. First, she does not trace the policy makers and “pedagogical reformers” who help shape the policy discourse. Nor does she connect these forces either to any underlying structures of power in American higher education and society or to emergent professions on college campuses that are taking up causes such as technology-mediated instruction. Second, she does not offer insights or ideas into the role of and relations between the faculty organizations in Washington, D.C. Indeed, there are but a couple of references throughout the entire book to the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association.

It is this latter point that Burgan is particularly well situated to have addressed. Indeed, in opening her book, Burgan insightfully comments on the relative absence of not just faculty perspectives and voices in Washington, but even a consideration of faculty: “I began to observe that the faculty themselves were hardly ever present in the imaginations of the policy makers (xvi).” But this does not translate into a consideration of why the three major organizations that might be expected to insist on such a presence are apparently unable not only to effectively do so, but also to get beyond their rivalries as to who speaks for the (most, or most important) faculty. Suggesting that “all politics is local” (xvii), Burgan quickly moves to and remains at the campus level in her book.

For my taste, it would have been interesting to read Burgan’s insights about a question such as, “What is happening to the faculty organizations in Washington?” I suspect that she would have some revealing stories, and possibly some important and reasonable recommendations about how the AAUP, AFT, and NEA can more effectively articulate a faculty presence in national higher education policy.

But that is not the book that Burgan wrote. I, for one, hope that she does. Because, judging from the book that she did write, Burgan has a gift for telling stories and offering reasonable arguments in an engaging, compelling way. For all of what I see as its shortcomings, *What Ever Happened to the Faculty?* is a good read, and provides a thoughtful insight into and path toward what many of our research universities could become, from the perspective of a deeply committed faculty member who has represented the AAUP well. 