Chapter 5. From Racine's Phèdre to Common Core: One Woman's Journey through the Halls of Academe

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As half of another two-career family example, Carolyn Herrington accompanied her political scientist husband to his first position at a new university. She combined part-time teaching in French and French literature and administrative work. After they returned to Florida from Texas, she found the opportunity to establish a new career in the field of education. She taught, did research and published, worked with the state of Florida, edited one of the major journals in her new field, and served as a dean. New paths are indeed possible.

Academic lives can take unexpected turns. I entered graduate school in 1971, studying 17th century French literature with every expectation of being a professor of French literature—introducing students to and advancing understandings of Racine, Corneille, Molière, and their contemporaries. Looking back over five decades from when I entered the academy as an undergraduate to now, approaching 75 and retirement, I never spent a day teaching French literature.

I have, however, taught many students, supervised dissertations, advanced through the stages of academe from untenured research associate to professor. Along the way, I served as a department chair, an associate dean, and dean. I edited one of the most prestigious journals in my field.

This short essay reviews this trajectory, identifying key decision points and the mix of interests and opportunities that resulted in my professional career. This chapter identifies choices made along the way, how they interacted with preferences and opportunities in my personal life and my professional aspirations, and how one choice led to others.

My initial decision to major in literature was an expression of little more than pure love of reading. The decision to enter graduate school and switch from English literature to French literature was purely opportunistic: the French faculty offered me a teaching assistantship; the English department didn't.

Fast forward four years: I completed my course work and went on the job market. My intent to secure a university position teaching French literature to devotees of fine writing was stopped cold by a frozen labor market. I was heartbroken. My eventual work in non-academic sides of universities, in research institutes, and in other institutional models, including community colleges, eventually led to a professorship in a professional school (education).

What I initially thought to be a long way from the core of the academy—the arts and humanities—I first experienced as a compromise. This is the realm of education as itself an academic field. That was short-sighted on my part; it quickly proved to be an engaging career path every bit as interesting and compelling as studying 17th century French literature, if not as aesthetically enjoyable.

As I look back on my career, I worked in colleges of education both as a researcher and as an administrator, having followed the well-trodden steps from nontenured faculty to associate and full professor, from a yearly contract to the award of tenure, from a research associate to a department chair and deanship, and from editor of a tiny newsletter to editor of the top journal in my field. My trajectory is unusual if not, I suspect, unique.

In preparing to write this essay, I read a number of scholarly books about higher education in the West, some dating back to 11th century Italy and others to the post-World War II era. Both Axtell's (2016) and Mattingly's (2017) book-length studies outline the many paths that led to today's higher education system, documenting the remarkable endurance of some ideas and practices and their evolution, sometimes quite rapidly, in the face of different demands from society. Evidence of perhaps unjustified (or maybe just lazy) institutional isomorphism was frequent. But these same studies also noted considerable flux and flow as societies changed, economies prospered and faltered, scientific understandings were challenged and replaced, all leading to today's institutional organizations.

University of Florida: Undergraduate Studies 1967-1971

For me, going to college was always assumed. My father's college-going was interrupted by World War II. That made college even dearer to his family. My mother never attended college. From both my mother and my father, I received the same unspoken message: take advantage of the chance to go to college and spend time thinking and learning without any other responsibilities. Was the choice also probably gendered? Yes. My brothers all chose more career-oriented majors.

I think I benefited from a still present, although fast disappearing, ethos that college was about becoming educated, not primarily about preparing for a career.

I initially intended music (piano) as my major. I begged for piano lessons all my life and finally when I was 11, my parents bought an old run-down piano and told me if I practiced regularly, they would get a nicer one. They did that three years later. Any illusions about my piano skills crashed within days of arriving on campus, as I listened to other students play and realized I was out of my depth.

My major selections vacillated over the next year or so. I finally settled on English, my decision driven by nothing other than a love of reading. Possibilities for a career never occurred to me. Upon reflection, this was a great gift my parents gave me.

I had a very enjoyable undergraduate experience. I majored in English, took French literature courses—having studied French in high school—and also took

some German language courses. I spent my senior year of high school in Germany where my father was stationed for the U.S. military.

I once dabbled with becoming a physical therapist but quickly slid back to English. Not uncommonly at the time, I graduated four years later. I did spend a year at the University of Dijon, studying French literature, but mostly traveling around Europe. As my senior year approached, I briefly thought about teaching and took a couple education courses. I found them uninspiring and never thought about being a teacher again. Fortunately, graduate school came to the rescue.

University of Florida: Graduate Studies 1973-1975

At the last moment, I applied to the English department for my master's and was accepted but was not offered any support. I don't remember if someone suggested it to me or why, but I also applied to the French program. They offered a teaching assistantship, so I entered the master's program in French instead of English. I loved French literature, too, so in that sense I was fine. I was paid to read Racine and Proust. How bad could that be?

As I came to the end of my doctoral studies and was finishing my dissertation, I went on the job market in perhaps the worst time ever for someone seeking a position. I wrote hundreds of application letters and received virtually no indications of interest.

Looking back, I realize that many universities had too many French professors in the mid-1970s. That was because most high schools had too many French teachers. And that was because high school students were shifting from French as their preferred language to Spanish. I did secure some interviews at the Modern Language Association's annual conferences, but they led to nothing.

My husband was also on the job market in political science. He was in a more enviable position. He had strong quantitative skills at a time when political science was becoming more empirical, and he ended up accepting a position at the University of Texas at Dallas. We were both two years into writing our dissertations. At that time, it was not uncommon to accept a faculty position while still completing the dissertation. We decided to marry, and we moved to Dallas.

In Dallas, while I worked on my dissertation for the next two years, I faced a difficult time in some respects. I was lonely. I had no friends and no colleagues. I shed many tears. I feared that my career aspirations were dead. I was not sure if I would ever get a position in French. I didn't have a job and really didn't know anyone except my husband's colleagues.

However, there were two bright spots that only now I fully appreciate. One, my husband mostly hung out with his colleagues, and they were a fascinating group of people, all young academics starting their careers. While it stung quite a bit to know that they had all successfully found their first jobs out of graduate school while I had not, my husband and I also made lifelong friendships. I

learned a lot about other fields including the social sciences, such as economics, and other fields in the humanities, such as history, all with different academic norms and ways of valuing and documenting knowledge. I think those encounters helped to open me to other ways of knowing and other fields I might consider pursuing in an academic career.

Two, I had time to read broadly with only my interests to guide me. This was fortified by an opportunity, on and off for two years, to teach in the Dallas Community College system at two different campuses and two different subjects. I taught freshman English and a humanities survey course. In both cases, I ended up reading literature I had not read before, especially for the humanities survey course. While I had briefly taught some introductory humanities courses during graduate school, this opportunity to read widely in the humanities proved to be unimaginably valuable.

Teaching in a community college was invaluable in another way, too. I had the opportunity to teach and get to know students for whom higher education had been a difficult reach. It was the first time I thought about how our educational institutions are called upon to serve an amazingly diverse array of students and the challenges that arise—challenges for the students, for the institutions, and for society—from such an enterprise. At the time, this teaching was something I did just to keep my toes in higher education and to have somewhere to go in the morning. Looking back, I now see how it raised a host of questions that my future and current field of education is still trying to address.

I finished my dissertation during the first two years I was in Dallas. Both my husband and I mailed chapter after chapter to our advisors and committee members back in Florida. We both received our PhDs in the summer of 1977.

University of Texas at Dallas: Continuing Education Program Coordinator 1977-1980

Almost immediately after receiving my doctorate, I was offered a position at the University of Texas at Dallas as a continuing education program coordinator. My job was to develop noncredit offerings to serve those in the Dallas community who were interested in learning but not interested in or unable to commit to a degree program. As a new public university serving the rapidly growing metropolis of Dallas/Ft Worth, already served by private Southern Methodist University and by two other public institutions—the University of North Texas and the University of Texas at Arlington—UT-Dallas was trying to make a place for itself not just through its academic offerings but also as part of the community.

Specifically, I was asked to develop a more humanities-oriented set of noncredit courses that would be available to the Dallas community. In general, many people who enrolled in these fine arts, literature, and music courses were well-educated women who, for various reasons, were not employed or had chosen to stay

home or to raise a family. I was impressed with their appetite for learning and their desire to pursue education mainly to learn.

While I was happy to have a job, I never saw it as a replacement for what I assumed would be a traditional academic position in the future. In the two years I held this position, I enjoyed meeting the many people who taught these courses. I also interacted with the broader community. Some programming was co-sponsored by the Dallas Museum of Art. I was exposed to many people I otherwise would never have met.

Life intervened. I became pregnant with my first child. Then my father died unexpectedly. My husband and I decided to move back to Florida to be closer to my mother. We saw the move as temporary. I resigned my position. My husband took a leave of absence from UT-Dallas. However, we never returned to Dallas. We both took positions with the state of Florida, in the capitol, Tallahassee. We have lived in Tallahassee ever since.

Florida State Government: Education Policy Analyst 1982-1987

After a few months of looking, I was offered a policy analyst position with a recently created commission charged with reviewing the higher education landscape in the state of Florida and laying out a master plan for the upcoming ten years. The position was temporary at first but, within a year, made permanent.

As was the case around the country, higher education had expanded rapidly after World War II. There was a sense for some observers that the expansion happened too fast or at least too haphazardly. Before the commission was created, Florida lacked the capacity for centralized planning to guide decisions regarding the expansion of existing institutions, the need for any new institutions—and, if so, where they should be located, how they might compete with or add to existing institutional offerings, what programs should be supported, and how students could best be served. The commission functioned like a mini think-tank to make these decisions and respond effectively to the insistent demand for new institutions and new programs.

When the second year of my husband's leave of absence ended, we decided together that he would resign from his position at UT-Dallas, and we would live at least for a while in Tallahassee. I don't think we thought we'd be still living here 40 years later.

My work was interesting. It could not have been more different from studying and teaching French literature. It was clearly a research position but applied research. As a student of French, I was unfamiliar with this. There was a well-defined audience for the research and the clear assumption that many of the commission's ideas would be implemented according to clear deadlines. The reports we issued did not assign authorial ownership. There was intense

and immediate feedback both in-house and from affected parties. Sometimes, feedback came from policymakers who were eager to champion (or kill) some of the recommendations; other times, administrators of the state's colleges and universities weighed in with concerns that some of our ideas were threats to their institutional ambitions (which they could be).

In addition to the broad sweep of a master plan, the commission was also asked to study very specific issues that the state was facing. This included, for example, what was the role of community colleges in providing technical education and in providing the first two years of undergraduate education. And who should decide: the state or the market?

I produced a set of reports on health education, including medical education (Did Florida have enough medical schools or too few?), nursing education (Should the two-year degree or a four-year degree be required for state licensure?), and elderly care (Were the needs of Florida's elderly population reflected in the mix of medical and allied health programs?). I assisted in a study of the nascent film industry. There had been a long-standing ambition for Florida to compete with Los Angeles and New York City in the movie business, but unlike LA and New York, Florida did not have a film school. Ultimately, the study recommended that the state not authorize a film school, though one was established a few years later anyways.

Thus, I learned to be a policy analyst through on-the-job training. I became acquainted with policy mostly applied to higher education in a broad sense and to professional schools as opposed to the arts and sciences, the more traditional core of the university.

During the six years I worked for the state of Florida, I also had two more children. I was pregnant with my fourth when I returned to the academy.

Florida State University Associate Director, Education Policy Center 1988-1991

I was approached to consider a position as an associate director of a newly created educational policy center that the college of education at Florida State University in Tallahassee had established. The director, a senior faculty member, had studied at Stanford, which boasted an education program that had long recognized the need for students to be trained in educational policy.

I was in my new element. I had close ties with several senior members of the state education department and senior legislators on education committees. The position was temporary with an assurance of only two years with the expectation that the center would transition to be supported by external funds. Within a short period, the center secured grants in a number of areas, including one for $1.5 million to review Florida's early childhood sector. The larger grants, like this one, allowed for full-time support staff as well as independent research.

The timing was great, but the work was subject to specific parameters. For most of its existence in the United States, the education policy sector was dominated by professionals in the field and by academics in universities. In the 1980s, this was changing rapidly. There was an increased understanding that a nation's economic health and the quality of schooling were inextricably linked. Interest in the condition of national and state educational systems expanded discussions to include non-educators, such as other academics outside colleges of education, including economists and sociologists; faculty in schools of public policy; and government employees, though not necessarily professional staff with a background in education policy.

The education community writ large witnessed their influence on the public discussion eroding. Issues that had been left to educators such as curricula, assessments, and teacher quality spilled over into conversations with more diverse stakeholders and these were becoming more contentious. The FSU College of Education wisely, I would argue, wanted to have a greater presence in the field through hiring academics specializing in policy.

I remained in that position for two years. I drew on my earlier experience with master planning and the precedent set by the California Education Policy Center (Policy Analysis for California Education). During my tenure, the center published a report: "Condition of Education in Florida." However, as the end of my second year approached, I was told that the college would continue to fund my salary at 50 percent for another year, but after that the center was expected to be fully funded through external contracts and grants. Before I decided to stay or not, much to my delight, I was offered a tenure-track position as an Associate Professor at Learning Systems Institute (LSI), one of the largest research centers on campus. I remained with the Institute for about a decade, eventually receiving tenure and teaching educational policy in the college of education.

Learning Systems Institute, Associate Professor 1991-2001

The Institute had a large presence in international development education and had been the beneficiary of a number of substantial long-term contracts with the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID). Starting in the early 1970s, the Institute first worked with the South Korean government as it redesigned its educational system to keep pace with the meteoric rise in its economy. The eight-year contract proved consequential, and AID provided additional funds to expand the LSI model to a number of other countries over the next decade. The total amount of funds dispersed approached $60 million, counting many large grants as well as smaller spin-offs, and including countries as different as Indonesia, Haiti, and several African countries.

I entered the picture as the international efforts wound down in the late 1980s. LSI approached the U.S. Department of Education seeking support to apply a

similar model of education reform in the United States. Despite some initially promising discussions at the federal level, a similar program, although greatly scaled down, began at the state level, with initial funding from the Florida legislature. That effort, however, received funding for only two of the planned ten years and at only $2 million of the budgeted $10 million.

Simultaneously, the FSU policy center became part of a network of other university-based, state-focused educational policy centers that the Kellogg Foundation helped to fund along with support from the Education Commission of the States and the National Conference of State Legislatures. The forerunner for this network of universities was an earlier effort headquartered at the University of California-Berkeley. It involved a partnership with Stanford, UC-Berkeley, and UCLA. It worked specifically on policy issues confronting the state of California.

With considerable encouragement from Michael Kirst, professor of policy at Stanford University, and one of the founders of California's policy center, I worked to establish a Florida educational policy center. Like the California center, Florida's was to focus on one state, and the audience for the research was state policymakers. The center gained a toehold with state government policymakers and over the years has been called on repeatedly. The center's physical location in the state capital of Tallahassee was critical in developing and nourishing the center and in influencing state policy.

Meanwhile, I continued to teach in my academic home, FSU's department of educational leadership, which would soon add "policy" to its name. I was awarded tenure and promoted to full professor in due course. After about a decade, the chair position opened, and I was asked to apply. In turn, I served as department chair, associate dean, and dean over the next ten years.

Chair, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy 2001-2005

Both the name change and my being asked to serve as chair represented a growing focus within the college of education to better understand and play a larger part in the state's myriad educational policies, including those pertaining to K-12 governance, funding, curriculum, and teacher credentialing. Although it was more limited, this question of focus was also true for higher education.

Along with other colleges of education across the country, policy became a new emphasis for FSU. In addition to the department's new name, new policy-focused faculty lines were approved. For example, a faculty position that focused previously on vocational education was repurposed into an economics-of-education position. When a senior faculty member in educational administration retired, the line was redefined to focus on policy, and a faculty member graduating from a public policy school was hired.

Associate Dean, College of Education

I served as chair for a year and then was asked by the dean of the college to consider also serving simultaneously as the college's associate dean for academic affairs. I kept both roles for three years. At the same time, other universities and head-hunting companies approached me about applying for deanships.

In time, I accepted an offer from the University of Missouri to become the dean of the college of education. At that point, I had lived in Tallahassee for almost 25 years. Our family had grown to four children. My mother had died, but I had other family members who lived in Florida with whom I was very close. The decision was difficult. In the end, my husband and I decided that I would accept the position, and he would stay in Tallahassee until our youngest child finished high school.

University of Missouri College of Education, Dean, 2005-2008

Being dean at a flagship state university, a university that was a founding member of the American Association of Universities, and for a college of education with a strong presence in a number of core areas was a delight and a challenge. I was struck with the degree of institutional morphism inflected by the specific demographic and economic differences between Florida, a rapidly growing southern state, and Missouri, a more settled state.

In some ways, Missouri was very similar to FSU and in other ways not. First, the size and types of programs were similar with a few notable exceptions. There was an underdeveloped policy program and a very strong technology program. Both proved consequential as I attempted to understand a new organizational pattern and to draw on its assets. Second, serving on the Council of Deans was a learning experience and a challenge. The trick was to understand how my college could be served best while also respecting university-wide priorities and the relative strengths of the other colleges.

The previous dean had nurtured close relationships with leaders in the K-12 public school community. The college was well-known and appreciated across the state, something that I came to appreciate more and more. That is not easy to do and requires a lot of time and patience.

On the other hand, there was little precedent for involvement in Missouri state-level education policy. After initial forays into what I considered my strength, I realized that as a dean I could not be as outspoken as when I was faculty. As an academic, my presentation of self was as a policy analyst, but as a dean, I was seen by others as representing the institution. It was difficult to articulate policy preferences based on my analytical skills as a policy researcher because, I soon realized, these preferences were often interpreted as positions that might benefit my college of education or colleges of education in general.

I was on safer ground staying within K-12 policy analyses than in higher education policy analyses, but still it was a difficult path to tread. As a dean, I wanted to use my position and skills to recommend policies that might strengthen Missouri's public education system without encroaching on higher educational issues that might conflict with the university's leaders' priorities.

My three years as dean passed quickly. My decision to step down as dean and return to Florida State University was difficult. I faced a choice between administrative responsibilities and opportunities, and returning to live closer to my immediate and extended family. While my husband was willing to join me in Missouri and the university offered him a spousal hire, the position for him was less interesting and I missed my family daily. A precipitating event was the unexpected death of one of my brothers; he was 61 and, by all signs, in excellent health. I asked myself if the rewards, personal and professional, were worth being 1000 miles from my husband and children and my extended family. The answer was no.

Florida State University (Again)

Since I had been granted a leave-of-absence by Florida State University, returning was not too difficult. At the same time, education policy only increased in local and national debates about the role of education in society. Although my academic scholarship had suffered under the demands of administrative positions, the field had not only grown but had become academically more exciting, the research more rigorous, and the potential for positive impact stronger. I returned as a full professor, with a significant set of experiences—and a broader and more expansive view of colleges of education and their place within the larger research university space, particularly within a major public research university.

I've spent my last fifteen years since stepping down as dean engaged in various efforts to strengthen the professional associations that focus on education policy research and, more broadly, on enlarging the reach of policy-focused education research. While dean, I served as head of the American Educational Research Association division on policy and had overseen the drafting of the first code of ethics for the Association. After returning to Florida State University, I was elected President of the Association for Educational Finance and Policy. Perhaps the most consequential opportunity was serving as editor-in-chief of the *Educational Researcher*, the signature journal of the American Educational Research Association, publishing nine issues a year.

These days, my service contributions remain focused on improving the quality of research and its potential to speak to policymakers. My current research focuses on the continuing evolution of the role of the state in governing and funding K-12 education. The pandemic tested some long-standing assumptions and showed the system resilient and capable of change but also revealed some stress points which need attention. Again, much of my focus remains state-specific, in this case, the state of Florida and its recent emergence as a state that has

adopted a set of policies around school choice that present a significant chance of upending a more than 150-year consensus on how public education should be governed, controlled, and delivered.

Coda

In toto, my journey over 40 years in academe has been both unexpected and unusual. One clear example of how it has challenged academic and institutional norms has been that every ten years, as FSU undergoes its regional accreditation process, my position is flagged as filled by someone not qualified for the job; that is, why is someone with a degree in French literature on the faculty in a college of education?

The question is put to rest easily with evidence of my contributions. One could argue, and I would, that it is appropriate for the accrediting body to pose the question, and it is a tribute to the responsiveness and resiliency of the institution that a good answer is found and is found to be credible.

Another question worth posing: is there something particular about colleges of education that might make them more accommodating to practices or norms outside their professional past? As argued in Lagemann (2000), colleges of education were late to the academy, with teacher preparation handled mostly in self-standing training colleges (normal schools), and when brought in under the academic fold were slow to be granted the respect of the older professional schools (law, medicine, and others). Furthermore, the scholarship was often assessed as low quality.

Colleges of education have had a distinctive professional trajectory. As just one example, Teachers College, long affiliated with Columbia University, was a self-standing higher education institution with a broad array of departments representing many disciplines related in some way to the study of education. Similarly, within most universities, some teacher preparation programs (e.g., physical education, arts education) are found in other colleges and departments and not just in colleges of education. Even decades after he left the University of Chicago (to move to Columbia), John Dewey bemoaned the isolation of teacher training in colleges of education—isolated in two ways: isolated from the day-to-day practice of teachers in schools and isolated on campus from other departments and colleges (see Lagemann, 2000).

Education schools, some argue, have never attained the respect and therefore discretion to establish their own norms as have the older, more highly respected and better compensated professional schools such as law and medicine, each of which have successfully implanted unique pedagogical approaches. One could argue that the loose toehold education has had traditionally within the academy has made education's walls more permeable.

A similar argument is advanced by Ris (2022) in tracing the opening of higher education to broader segments of the American population around the middle

of the last century. He places colleges of education in the large middle strata of learning institutions precisely because they did not have set institutional norms and their practices were more amenable to reformers' suggestions for innovation, such as moving teacher training into universities. Much is written about the rigid, walled-off, and inward-looking nature of the modern American university with faculty siloed in their disciplines and in their colleges and departments. It has been characterized as slow to change, stuck in outdated paradigms, and impervious to external pressures. My experience does not bear that out.

While much is made, not without reason, about the tight hold the academic disciplines exert over faculty and their ways of thinking—both as scholars and as members of a professional community—I have found more flexibility than I would have thought and more room to innovate and more opportunities to digress from expected paths.

I think current scholarship bears this out. Most overviews of higher education in the West, whether histories beginning in the Middle Ages or more recent overviews covering the rise of the modern research university, have emphasized both custom and change; persistence and innovation, and insularity and willingness to try the new. One would be hard-pressed to find in my experience evidence to dispute the narrative of higher education's adaptability. Based on my trajectory, it would be difficult to say that institutional norms are fixed or their applications rigid; rather, my career path suggests that there is considerable room to roam.

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