

Relevant Research

Cook, W. Bruce and William F. Lasher. "Toward a Theory of Fund Raising in Higher Education," *The Review of Higher Education* 20 (Fall 1996): 33-51.

Although fundraising at public and private institutions has become critically important, it is still a relatively young profession and little has been done to explore its dynamics or systems in ways that would inform and improve practice. The value of the work reported in this research article is obvious when one considers that most of what is available to read on fundraising generally lacks much historical or theoretical perspective. The authors rightly point out that the majority of existing literature focuses on fundraising methods (how to), donor motivation, and the need for fundraising. Critical, rigorous scholarly inquiry into the dynamics of fundraising is generally not to be found.

This is not just another esoteric research issue; it is vitally important if higher education (and non-profit community-based organizations) are to be able to assess the outcome of their efforts, plan for improvements, understand the implications of their decisions and actions, and

develop innovative strategies that respond to dynamic conditions. Somehow we have developed the view that fundraising is like planning a party; there's nothing very scientific about it. However, with many institutions increasingly dependent on private support, growing competition for limited funds, and capital campaigns ranging up to a billion dollars, fundraising has become a serious and complex enterprise with high stakes.

These two Texans, an administrator and a faculty member, conducted a national qualitative study based on documents and interviews from 50 academic leaders. Their article reflects a theoretical framework that represents fundraising as a social exchange process that is affected by four types of forces. The result is certainly a basis for further research on this important topic, but it also provides some information that can inform and improve practice, especially for presidents.

Cook and Lasher begin with a probing historical review of the role of the presidential CEO in fundraising that succinctly presents the basis for their research questions. From their findings,

they offer 12 prerequisites for sustained fundraising, many of which are common sense (e.g., prestige, wealth of donor base), some of which are important points often overlooked, such as "public confidence in higher education and the non-profit sector generally." The authors found that not all institutions exhibited strengths in all the prerequisite areas, but that capacity to fundraise was a balance across the factors. In other words, weaknesses in some factors required greater strength in others.

The article draws a distinction between success and effectiveness in fundraising: success refers to achievement of dollar targets and effectiveness includes an assessment of capability and potential as well. Using the 12 factors for sustained fundraising, the authors could identify institutions that were able to be effective even though their presidents were not particularly fond of the fundraising role.

A social exchange model of fundraising is presented that focuses on the interdependence between the organization and the donor who want to make an exchange with each other. The key actors (presidents, volunteers, deans, fundraising staff) are subject to four intervening forces: environmental, institutional, personal, and role. The model shows how these forces influence the actions and reactions of the key institutional actors when donors make decisions about giving or not giving. The four intervening forces are shown to have a dy-

namic relationship. For example, they can shape the choice of an institution's new president. The expectations for a new president as fundraiser are shown to be a reflection of environmental and institutional conditions that define the role expected and therefore suggest the personal qualities that should be present. Institutional factors will tend to dominate at elite, prestigious institutions, and personal forces and skills will be more important as shapers of expectations for presidents at smaller institutions with less fundraising experience. The interaction of the forces changes over time. As presidents gain experience with the institution and the environment, the force of role becomes more and more dominant and they tend to spend more time on fundraising (a factor of growing confidence and competence).

The authors hope that knowing the prerequisites for sustained fundraising and the systematic model of fundraising will help presidents and development officers to improve institutional preparedness for fundraising and build effectiveness through increased capacity and potential. Their article is useful now, however, in helping practitioners to move beyond thinking of fundraising as a series of fragmented or discrete cultivation activities that are controlled by the institution. Instead, as Cook and Lasher show, fundraising is a dynamic process of enormous complexity that involves the negotiation of a social exchange that is as important to the donor as to the institution.