

## Book Review: *In the Corridors of Academic Leadership* by Gary Sayed (California State University Dominguez Hills, 2020)

<b>Title</b>	: In the Corridors of Academic Leadership
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### CONTEXT

Practical guides and scholarly contributions in Arabic on academic leadership are both conspicuously missing or rare at best and direly needed. Most up-coming young professionals not only must learn what works but also importantly avoid the failures of their predecessors. Serendipitously, however, there is some empirical evidence of change. “*In the Corridors of Academic Leadership*” is one of the timely and welcome signs of such change and attention drawn to the topic.

### AUTHOR

Mohammed Yahya AlShehri is a professor of surgery and president of the Northern Border University in Arar, Saudi Arabia. He is a regionally acclaimed academic leader, clinician, and researcher. His 30 year-long career spans the gamut of higher education leadership from department chair to dean of medicine to vice president of graduate studies, research, and health specialties at four major Saudi institutions of higher education – namely, the King Khalid, King Saud, Princess Nora Universities, and most recently, the Northern Border University. His reflective, caring, and down-to-earth professional mannerism shines through both his professional practice and leadership style.

### ASSESSMENT/ANALYSIS

In his book, *In the Corridors of Academic Leadership*, AlShehri enriches the health professions academic leadership field, particularly in the emerging academic landscape of the Gulf States, by establishing a pragmatic and powerful guide in the local language. It is a must-read for practicing and aspiring academic leaders of health professions-related higher education alike. AlShehri presents the distillation of his academic

leadership career for approaching professional life and work in 14 cogent, easy-to-read, and practical guides. The book is an indispensable *vade mecum*. It outlines the prerequisites of successful, effective, and progressive academic leadership from a chairman to a provost level. The primary focus, however, remains at the decanal role.

For his goal in writing this book, AlShehri identifies providing new deans, in specific, and other academic leaders, in general, with a resource that guides their progress in developing their visions and sustaining healthy succession planning through positive leadership. He provides a simple framework filled with practical ideas that aid in becoming a positive leader (p. 8). He successfully delivers on his goal. In doing so, AlShehri takes a novel approach and opens new avenues for further discourse in training health professionals for academic leadership in the Gulf region.

My wish would be to require new academic deans of medicine and other health professions, their assistants and associates, and others aspiring to ascend to these roles to read “*In the Corridors of Academic Leadership*” to align their depth of disciplinary knowledge with the requisite practical skills of academic leadership. I would recommend it to the seasoned academic leader as well. It is that good. Using discerning terms, AlShehri explains the essence of academic leadership by providing a framework for using participation in decision-making as the basis. He successfully does so in an interesting conversational style that is highly readable.

I maintain a dissenting view on the author’s argument about heightening teaching as the primary pursuit of a nascent university out of the traditional tripartite mission of teaching, research, and service. He basis his argument on the rationale that most Gulf region universities are obligated to meet the societal need for well-trained and competent local

healthcare workforce. I would argue that tilting the mission of a nascent university from the start will also develop a complacent culture that deems the other two aspects of mission as second class. Rectifying such as an adverse effect will prove difficult in the future as culture tend to resist change.

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## SUMMARY

Many Gulf States health professions academic leaders endeavor to position their colleges and/or departments to achieve greater good through increased productivity and accountability. New modes of practice, be it in regard to institutional and programmatic accreditation, outcomes assessment, or stakeholder engagement, are the concerns of the time. This book provides guidance on achieving those objectives effectively – and not a moment too soon. It goes well beyond the abstract concepts of leadership to the actual practice. Finally, the book is an excellent gateway to further training in academic leadership.

**Gary Sayed**

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