Unlike acclaimed Japanese author, Haruki Murakami (2014), who famously described his initial conviction that he could write a novel as something that fluttered down from the sky and that he caught in his hands, the idea of writing this book wasn’t at all like that for us. When we first became department chairs, we certainly didn’t think about writing a book. We were doing all we could to keep our heads above water, learn the job, and clean up messes that were left by our predecessors. We were surprised at how little training or resources were out there to help newly minted chairs. We did receive help from colleagues who were current and former chairs, and our Dean helped as he was able to, or as he thought we needed it. But for the most part, we were on our own to swim upstream, in category six rapids, without a paddle…or a boat…or a life preserver. But we did have each other, thankfully.

After a few years, and a learning curve the looked like a straight, vertical, line, we realized that we had actually learned some valuable lessons. Lessons that might be useful to other department chairs, and we joked about how we should write a book. Pretty soon, the jokes started turning into serious, reflective, conversations and we realized, that yes, we really should write a book. So when the opportunity to create this Research Insight came up, we jumped at the chance. Initially, we proposed writing a more general publication, directed at all department chairs (because there is precious little out there written for any of us). However, the editorial staff responded to our proposal and really liked one of our chapters in particular – Advice Especially for Female Department Chairs – and requested that we make our entire book about the uniqueness of being a woman department chair in higher
education. When we received the request, we realized that the editors were right. For as little as is written for department chairs in the academy overall, there really isn’t anything specifically designed for women. And indeed, the particularities (and peculiarities?) of being a female in higher education have their own special brand of subtlety, and sometimes, overt, challenges. Hopefully, we’ve written something that contains the special sauce to help navigate those adversities and at the very least, give other women department chairs something to relate to. As you read this, if we get at least one nod of the head, an “mmmmmmmm,” and an “I hear you sista,” then we know we’ve hit the nail on the head with this book. (Please email us if you say or do any of those things. A fist bump emoji would be appreciated too!)

REFERENCE