Message from the Director

I have a special message to all my colleagues with experience in academic leadership this issue: while I know how busy we all are, I strongly encourage the experienced ones among you to attend ALP events whenever you can. In my view, the real learning that takes place at these events is through peer sharing of experiences and information. The peer connections that can take place are among the most productive aspects of the ALP, and those really have very little to do with the formal structure of the program. So the generous contributions of those of you who have ‘been there and done that’ are extremely important, and, while I completely understand that you may not feel that you yourself have much to gain from a particular session, I want you to know that what you bring to the session is of great value to the rest of us.

Sheila Ager, Director, Academic Leadership Program

UW Academic Leader Profile: Jean Andrey, Dean, Faculty of Environment

Jean Andrey joined the University of Waterloo in 1989 as an assistant professor in the Department of Geography (now Geography and Environmental Management). She quickly established herself as one of Waterloo’s top-notch teachers, winning the Distinguished Teacher Award in 1995. Her contributions as a researcher in the field of weather and society (particularly weather hazards, the impacts of climate change, and weather-transport interactions) were recognized with her election as fellow of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society in 2011 and as Vice-President (2011-2012) and President (2012-2014) of the Association of Canadian Geographers. Yet alongside her professional achievements, Jean also began a career of service: while still a probationary faculty member in 1991, Jean took on the role of Associate Chair and Graduate Officer in the Department of Geography. “I was drawn to leadership while I was still a child in Girl Guides,” she says, “and at UW I started getting involved in service roles from an early stage.” Since that first stint as Graduate Chair (reprised in 1998-2002), Jean has gone on to...
Jean exemplifies the concept of ‘service leadership’, the model that prioritizes the needs and interests of the group over the career advancement of the individual in the position of academic leader. “When I was asked to step into the position of Interim Dean, I had to think long and carefully about whether I would take it on—I was afraid I might like it!” She goes on to say, “When you are asked to take on a significant and highly visible role, always ask yourself, ‘Do you want to have this job, or do you want to do this job?’” Jean characterizes her own administrative career as one in which she has been careful at each stage to determine whether she was suited to the role, and she stresses the necessity to understand oneself and one’s motivations. “Natural leaders can be reluctant administrators, and that can be the best combination.” The core mission of an academic, moreover, is teaching and research, and Jean adheres to the viewpoint that Deans must be academic leaders first, and administrators second.

Jean identifies the collegial component of academic leadership as one of its most personally rewarding aspects. “Working with others, whether at the Department, the Faculty, or the University level. Teamwork. Watching others blossom in roles such as Chair and Associate Dean, and helping them to blossom.” She also identifies the opportunities that academic leadership provides to uphold positive values and to embed them in the communal culture; sustainability is at the core of Environment’s mission, and Jean has found it very rewarding and exciting on a personal level to be part of it. She acknowledges that academic leadership positions can bring challenges, many of them on a personal front: work-life balance is perhaps top of that list. Earlier in her career, Jean was also confronted with the perception that women were not to be taken seriously in these roles, a perception that Jean believes is changing.

When asked what advice she might have for faculty members contemplating academic leadership roles, Jean emphasizes the need to be self-aware and to understand one’s reasons for taking on a position. She also reiterates the importance of remembering why we are here. “Be true to the profession of an academic—our core mission is teaching and research. Service is not a substitute.”

### Upcoming ALP Events (Winter 2019)

Even if you are not currently in a position of academic leadership, please contact the Director (Sheila Ager, x32943) if you find a topic of interest (we’ll accommodate you if we possibly can).

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Tips from the ALP: Personal Survival for Academic Leaders

Those of you who have attended the ALP Orientation sessions in the past couple of years will find these tips familiar: they are the distillation of much of the literature on academic leadership, and they are also coloured by my own and colleagues’ experience in administration. They aren’t just tips for personal survival (though that was my starting point in drawing up the list); they also represent the most basic advice from experienced academic leaders.

For an illustrated version, check out the entry on the ALP website.

- Accept that you are—at least temporarily—an authority figure.
- Accept that you now play a dual role (up and down).
- Grow a thick skin if you can.
- Find a confidant(e) (someone who will help you talk yourself down).
- Be aware of your own particular vulnerabilities.
- Question yourself regularly, but don’t second-guess all your own decisions and actions.
- Listen, listen, listen!
- Don’t be confrontational, but don’t avoid conflict when it has to happen.
- Pick your battles: not every disagreement is a call to arms.
- It’s okay to have negative feelings: what matters is how you act.
- Remember that the academy has a high tolerance for eccentricity (and it can reward behaviours that you may not like).
- There are some people you just cannot argue with.
- Don’t try to go it alone—ask for help.
- Be clear on expectations with everyone.
- Write it down!
- Don’t let yourself be pressured by unreasonable demands.
- On the other hand, don’t delay delivering difficult decisions, hard news, etc.
- Take responsibility— but sometimes you can blame the policies, the Dean, the University, the government, fate...
- It’s okay to make mistakes, provided you own them and try to correct them (and, um, make a reasonable effort not to make them in the first place).
- Best ways to avoid mistake-making:
  - Never assume.
  - Ask.
  - Listen.
- If a decision between conflicting interests or evidence seems impossible, err on the side of generosity.
- Cultivate a sense of humour—but it’s okay to cry (just try not to do it in meetings. Especially ones you are running.).

The Digest

“14 academic leadership myths.” The author opens this article with the following comment: “Some of the things that we assume will help us get ahead and be effective as academic leaders may in fact thwart our efforts, alienate colleagues, and lead to burnout.” Those mythical beliefs include: “always saying yes will make you popular”; “your position and formal authority are your most powerful tools”; “swift decisions are critical to
effective administration”; and “you need to be the smartest person in the room”. (Larry Edwards, Academic Briefing, 16 April 2018; reprinted from Academic Leader 26.4 [2010]).

“How to fail as an academic leader.” I always feel as though there’s a lot to learn from contemplating disaster (“if you can’t be a good example, you’ll just have to be a horrible warning”). Building on Stephen Trachtenberg’s Presidencies Derailed: Why University Leaders Fail and How to Prevent It (2013), the author of this article adds his own analysis of shortcomings, flawed strategies, and mistaken approaches to those identified by Trachtenberg (such as ethical lapses, poor interpersonal skills, and difficulty in adapting to a new environment). Among the additional errors he identifies are: assuming that data can be equated with information; hiring carbon copies of yourself; confusing decisiveness and inflexibility; mistaking aggressiveness for assertiveness; and avoiding giving credit to others. (Jeffrey L. Buller, Academic Leader, 1 June 2014).

“How to respond to disclosures of sexual violence.” This article provides a broad array of advice for responding to someone who discloses that they have experienced sexual violence. The tips are too numerous to summarize here (which is why taking a look at the article itself is worthwhile), but the author points to Ryerson’s acronym BRAVE: “begin by listening; respect confidentiality; ask what support should look like; avoid assumptions; validate the person disclosing; empathize.” The author also suggests preparing for the possibility ahead of time by familiarizing yourself with the institution’s policy on sexual violence (in UW’s case, Policy 42 and its attendant procedures), knowing what resources are available (such as UW’s Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, Amanda Cook), and understanding obligations both of confidentiality and of duty to act. (Natalie Samson, University Affairs, 29 August 2018).


Inspirational (?) Quote

Academics are trained to question and criticize, and many of us are apt to turn that critical eye upon ourselves. To some extent this is a very good thing—it behoves us all to examine our actions and motivations regularly and honestly—but it can be all too easy to obsess over perceived errors and goofs (how many of us shudder to recall something we said or did years ago that everyone else has long forgotten? Okay, maybe not that many, but I know I do). Certainly, the responsibilities of academic leadership positions are such that we should consistently question ourselves—but since none of us is perfect, we have to find a way to live with our mistakes as well. Ralph Waldo Emerson provided some trenchant advice on this:

Finish every day and be done with it. For manners and for wise living it is a vice to remember. You have done what you could; some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. To-morrow is a new day; you shall begin it well and serenely, and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense. This day for all that is good and fair. It is too dear, with its hopes and invitations, to waste a moment on the rotten yesterdays.

— A Letter to his Daughter (perhaps)