Academic Leadership at UW
Orientation:
Academic Chairs & Directors

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Orientation Themes

• Accountability.
• Responsibility in the larger framework of the University as a whole.
• Leadership/management.
• Policies, rules, and regulations.
• Helping you.
Note: most of this is not rocket science.
Academic leadership is simultaneously very challenging and very simple: it presents us with some of the hardest quandaries of our professional lives – yet the underlying principles we should follow are really the basic precepts of humanity and common sense (not in the Mike Harris sense).
Systemic Challenges of Academic Leadership

• Collegial governance.
  • Most of us have no formal training (like teaching).
• The pathways are dissimilar to the corporate world, or even to other public institutions.
  • Moving back ‘down’ the ladder is problematic for some.
  • The collegial model of ‘leadership’.
• Faculty members whom we attempt to lead/manage may be accustomed to extreme autonomy.
  • That same group may also have served in leadership roles.
• There may be times when some of your colleagues will make you feel like a lonely outsider...
Some days you may feel like this...
The Personal Upside of Academic Leadership

• The opportunity to contribute and effect change.
• Helping people.
• Learning about the institution.
• Meeting people and creating relationships across the institution.
• Personal growth and insight.
• Job satisfaction.
• The downside (?) and ways to mitigate it – wait for it...
Can we really ‘define’ leadership?

OED on ‘leader’: ‘one who leads’

Or is it better to think of it as a continuous process, based on a (non-exclusive) set of principles?

(This is what is known as a rhetorical question, as in, I already know what I want to say here.)
Creating Academic Leadership at UW

• Guiding and modeling rather than ordering and lecturing.
• Taking responsibility and being accountable.
• Working with others and creating relationships.
• Distinguishing between having a vision and having an agenda.
A little Latin: *cum-* and *co-* compounds

- Collegiality (*con-lega*, ‘a partner in office’).
- Communication (*com-municare*, ‘to share out, impart’).
- Consultation (*con-sulere*, ‘to reflect, consult, consider’).*
- Confidence (*con-fidere*, ‘to have trust in’).
- Consensus (*con-sentire*, ‘to feel together, agree’).
- Cooperation (*co-operari*, ‘to work together, unite’).
- Collaboration (*col-laborare*, ‘to work together’).
- Compromise (*com-promitto*, ‘to agree to refer to arbitration’).

*Roman consuls supposedly being individuals who would do this kind of thing.*
And yes, yes, I know that command, control, compel, combat, connive, compete, conceal, conceited, and corrupt all have the same derivation...
Aliens* (1986)

An example of the consequences of non-consultative leadership and an ignorance of the classical languages.

*Rated R for coarse language and some icky violence
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tF529mmjnM
Creating Academic Leadership at UW

• Guiding and modeling rather than ordering and lecturing.
• Taking responsibility and being accountable.
• Working with others and creating relationships.
• Distinguishing between having a vision and having an agenda.
• Getting people to want to support you and your ideas, not forcing them to (at the same time, don’t be derailed by persistent naysayers).
• Respecting, empowering, and being mindful of others.
• Giving recognition to the contributions of others.
Leadership or Management?
Visions or Nuts-and-Bolts?

John Everett Millais
Joan of Arc
1865

Nuts’n’Bolts mix

**Leadership**
- Personnel – guiding, mentoring, providing opportunities for growth.
- Resources – seeking out new resource pathways (where possible), creative restructuring, managing change anxiety.

**Management**
- Personnel – mechanics of hiring, evaluation, tenure, and discipline and grievance.
- Resources – understanding budgetary processes and space allocation, identifying gaps, maintaining balanced budget.
The Skill Sets of Academic Leaders

• A questioning and creative mind that seeks improvement and recognizes opportunity.
• Willingness to consult widely and listen with an open mind.
• Courage to make and defend difficult decisions.
• Ability to manage conflict and seek win-win solutions where possible.
• Ability to inspire, mentor, trust, and empower others, both faculty and staff.
The Skill Sets of Academic Managers

• Excellent communication skills (and regular utilisation).
  • Especially in assessments.
• Understanding of University, Faculty, and Department policies and procedures.
• Ability to meet deadlines and stay on top of paperwork.
• Familiarity with basic budget processes.
• Willingness to ask questions and consult others on a regular basis.
• Ability to delegate and resist micro-management.
Personal Survival
(or, “what I wish I had known going into this job...”)
Accept that you are an authority figure. At least temporarily.
Accept also that you will now have to play a dual role.

“Sometimes that means speaking truth to power, other times it means speaking truth to colleagues.”

Kevin Gannon
Grow a thick skin (if you can).
Find a confidant(e).

Sean Astin and Elijah Wood, *The Return of the King*, 2003
Be aware of your own particular vulnerabilities.
Question yourself regularly, but don’t second-guess everything.
Meaning, don’t go here...

“The job is hard because it’s hard, not because you’re defective.”
C.K. Gunsalus,
The College Administrator’s Survival Guide
If you have ever experienced the impostor phenomenon, take comfort from the fact that you are in the majority.

“Your fear of being publicly exposed as a fraud is a stress-related disorder called ‘Impostor Syndrome’. It’s common among people in high-profile authority positions, and, of course, in actual phonies, like you.”
Don’t be confrontational – but don’t avoid necessary conflict.

Ian Holm and Sigourney Weaver, Alien, 1979
It’s okay to have negative feelings...
... But pick your battles.
Remember that the academy has a high tolerance for eccentricity – and that it can reward behaviours you may not like.
There are some people you just cannot argue with.

Wilko Johnson as Ser Ilyn Payne, Game of Thrones
Don’t try to go it alone – reach out for help

David and Goliath
Shane Robinson
Be clear on expectations with everyone.
Write it down!
But be very careful about what you put in writing or put in a file.
“Poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on mine.”

Don’t let yourself be pressured by unreasonable demands.
Corollary: don’t answer anything right away, even if you like to be efficient.
Abraham Lincoln’s advice to Edwin Stanton, his Secretary of War:

‘Write a sharp letter.’

‘Then put it in the stove.’
On the other hand, don’t delay delivering hard news.
Take responsibility – but sometimes you can blame the policies, the Chair, the Dean, the University, or fate.
Try not to make mistakes, but it’s not the end of the world if you do (usually).

Richard Attenborough, Laura Dern, Sam Neill, and a baby velociraptor
Jurassic Park
1993
In impossible situations, err on the side of generosity.
Cultivate a sense of humour.
But it’s okay to cry.

Sean Astin
The Fellowship of the Ring
2001
Keep Tylenol and alcohol in your desk drawer.

And Kleenex.
And call me anytime!
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Some highly recommended reading