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FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

Respecting Generalist Faculty: Helping Teaching Faculty Support Our Students

Thomas M. O'Shea and Constance C. Relihan

Unless you are at an elite institution in a highly specialized department that has no general education or service course teaching responsibilities, you need generalist faculty. Most academic departments at non-elite universities have to cover an increasingly wide range of courses—especially at the undergraduate level—with a small number of faculty.

Although we get our doctorates in specialized research areas, most of us—if we are lucky enough to get a full-time faculty position—need to teach much more than our specialized research focus. Someone whose scholarship focuses on Shakespeare, for instance, may work in a small department in which they need to teach surveys courses on English literature to 1800, Chaucer, poetry, the English novel, intro to literary theory, the history of the English language, and the occasional American literature course—not to mention first-year composition and advanced writing courses. Probably they have a four-course per semester load as well. This combination of demands can lead to exhaustion, complacency, and dissatisfaction of all kinds.

Departments need generalists to teach courses that serve students from a wide range of programs as well as their own majors.

But generalists are what our students and our departments need. They teach courses for general education. Departments need generalists to teach courses that serve students from a wide range of programs as well as their own majors. We must give them what they need to not only teach effectively but also to ensure that long-range department goals—increasing the number of our majors, guaranteeing academic integrity, improving our majors' content—continue to be met.

So, in that spirit, here are 10 things that generalist undergraduate teaching

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Leadership Skills for New Academic Administrators

Sara Zeigler and Russell Carpenter

As new academic administrators begin and advance in their academic careers, they will need new skills and strategies for leading complex initiatives, programs, and tasks. New academic administrators will be expected to guide their higher education institutions through change and ensure continued focus on related vision, mission, and goals. They will also face unprecedented challenges as the higher education environment adopts new technologies and pedagogies, adapts to decreased state funding, and shifts offerings in response to changing demographics. New academic administrators will require

- strengthened skills in multiple academic roles and content areas;
- enhanced knowledge of academic committee and program-level leadership, including how differences in style, strategy, and approach affect collaborative work;
- an appropriate balance between action and consultation;
- improved skills for those leading academic programs and committees at the department, college, and university levels; and
- an enhanced ability to identify emerging leaders for committee work and future academic leadership roles.

Recent discussion in leadership development

> *"Institutions of higher education have the responsibility to invest in developing leadership programs that prepare young or early-stage faculty to become leaders, as well as to become more purposeful contributors to the broader university strategic goals."* (Coll, 2016)

As budgets tighten in the face of decreased enrollments, changing demographics, philanthropy fatigue, and student demands for nicer and more extensive facilities, it is tempting to reduce investment in leadership development at the same time that academic leaders need to be more skilled, thoughtful, adaptable, and astute than ever. There is ample evidence of the need for increased attention to the cultivation of aspiring leaders in higher education (Ashe & TenHuisen, 2018; Coll, 2016). Employees need tailored and individualized options that resonate with their experiences and provide tools that they can apply immediately (Wilks et al., 2018).

Not only do employees need focused professional development, they also need it delivered in a convenient, self-paced, accessible format that permits interaction with others but does not require expensive and time-consuming travel (Ruben et al., 2018). Virtual and asynchronous options also allow faculty to balance professional development with personal obligations, which potentially addresses class, race, ethnic, and gender disparities in access to leadership development opportunities. Excellent leadership programs will also ensure coverage of topical, timely content and reliable data to support leaders in creating budgets that reflect their values, focusing on increasing enrollment, and dealing with entirely unpredictable conditions such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Establishing leadership goals for new academic administrators

A key challenge for new administrators is understanding what they don't know, what they need to know, and how to transform knowledge into action. As faculty members, we learn to collect data, be attentive to nuance, provide deep and comprehensive analysis, and develop expertise in specific content areas. These academic skills are helpful in that they allow leaders to be thoughtful, thorough, and deliberate. They are also a liability in that they can slow decision making, allow leaders to seek information that does not necessarily assist in making a decision, and keep attention on a narrow issue when the problem is broad and overlaps multiple areas. Most faculty are accustomed to working alone, with almost complete control over their scholarly and pedagogical decisions. The perfectionism that we seek in our scholarship can be an obstacle to managing an administrative workload. Some work requires swift action, some must be delegated, and some must be done despite uncertainty that it will work or disagreement with the direction set at a higher level or necessitated by external pressures.

To make this critical transition, there are skills that new academic administrators must develop and access. New administrators will need to be able to

- reflect on their own leadership values;
- assess leadership strategies and skills in day-to-day scenarios;
- prioritize leadership decision-making;
- explore approaches for expanding leadership skills in different situations;
- discuss leadership scenarios and potential outcomes;
- explore valuable leadership resources and tools;
- develop a leadership action plan for use across a variety of academic contexts;
- empower those under their supervision to contribute and develop leadership skills of their own;
- manage meetings in an efficient, productive, and inclusive way;
- confront and navigate conflict without anxiety or self-doubt; and
- manage budgets, including reallocation of resources when necessary.

Strategies for new academic administrators

New academic administrators can prepare for their roles through deliberate and focused professional development. As early as possible upon assuming a leadership role, a new academic administrator should do the following:

- **Develop a leadership mission statement**. This exercise will help the new administrator in reflecting on values, developing a clear sense of purpose, and identifying a focus for initial work. It will also help the new administrator set and accomplish leadership goals and priorities beyond daily tasks.
  - ¤ A mission statement should be short (no more than a paragraph) and broadly framed to identify goals for leadership rather than strategies for task completion.
  - ¤ The mission statement can serve as a guide in determining which projects to undertake.
- **Create a support network.** A new administrator will need allies who are not under the administrator's immediate supervision. It is important to be able to process information, talk through problems, script difficult conversations, and check biases. The options below can help:
  - ¤ *Check-in sessions*: A regular, 30–60-minute weekly conversation with a trusted colleague will provide valuable support. The colleague could be a peer, a person from another institution, a personal friend, or anyone who is discreet and trustworthy.
  - ¤ *Professional networks:* Some professional organizations provide opportunities to interact with others facing similar challenges. The American Council on Education (ACE) Women's Network state chapters, the Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) Network, the Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network, discipline-based organizations for administrators (such as the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences), the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) Project Kaleidoscope (PKAL) STEM Leadership Institute, or major academic leadership meetings (such as the Leadership in Higher Education conference) can provide opportunities to meet other new and aspiring leaders.
- **Ensure good communication with "next level down" employees**. While managers can be helpful and spare the new administrator time and effort, it is important to know what employees who are secondary reports to you think.
  - ¤ Open office hours, held weekly, biweekly, or monthly, can be a way to encourage them to share information without undermining the authority of their direct supervisors.
- **Engage in intentional reflection**. New administrators should seek opportunities to secure timely feedback. As you transition to a leadership role, bear in mind that people will be more reluctant to speak frankly and directly because of your new authority. Options for securing feedback include
  - ¤ brief, anonymous surveys;
  - ¤ coaching sessions with trusted

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The Power of Reverse Faculty Mentoring Programs

Edna B. Chun and Alvin Evans

Reverse mentoring is a prominent example of intergenerational partnership in which students and faculty from recent generations share knowledge, perspectives, and expertise with more seasoned and veteran faculty. In essence, it reverses hierarchical relationships and creates a level playing field for the transmission of knowledge and skills. Although such mentoring programs are not widespread in higher education, a number of corporations—such as BNY Mellon, Dell, Estée Lauder, Procter & Gamble, and Time Warner—have realized its value in the retention of talent and in promoting diversity.

As Jennifer Jordan and Michael Sorell (2019) point out, reverse mentoring is not just about technology but often includes strategic issues, leadership, and the mindset of how to approach work. Such programs can result in the development of innovative ideas that inform workplace practices in general (Jordan & Sorell). Furthermore, reverse mentoring can shift the power dynamic between younger, more diverse generations and their senior White counterparts. And it can break down barriers that inhibit the advancement of minoritized individuals and promote a greater sense of belonging and inclusion for new entrants to academe. As Sharlene Gandhi (2019) explains, "Reverse mentoring programs . . . allow for the discussion and subsequent education to be extended beyond demographic silos and spread into the wider workplace culture."

Higher education has unique advantages in implementing such programs given the presence of talented junior faculty and both graduate and undergraduate students who can offer perspectives on issues and provide in-depth expertise, such as in pedagogical methods, new disciplinary approaches, social media, and other digital technology. Given the presence of both formal and informal hierarchical relationships in higher education, one challenge of reverse mentoring is to ensure that both mentors and mentees feel comfortable with the program, their mentor-mentee assignments, and the program's goals.

David Perlmutter, dean of Texas Tech University's College of Media & Communication, describes the medieval guild system of mentorship that occurs in promotion and tenure processes and its top-down orientation. But, he reminds us, "assistant professors know a lot." He describes a revealing experience he had teaching a course in social media with an assistant professor probably half his age and two doctoral student teaching assistants. Through that experience, he realized that he was far too dependent on what he describes as "Pleistocene PowerPoint habits." By contrast, the style, tone, and content of his junior colleagues' presentations evoked greater interest from the students and made him reconsider his own teaching style (Perlmutter, 2012). Nonetheless, Perlmutter recognizes that technology can create artificial divisions among faculty, despite the fact that many senior professors stay current in this area. In his view,

> There is a real danger of a technology gap becoming a wedge issue between faculty members in the same way standards of promotion and tenure, the job market, and salary compression have been divisive issues—at a time when professors need to be more united than ever in address the challenges of higher education. (Perlmutter, 2011)

> *Reverse mentoring can enrich both the mentor and mentee through a mutual exchange of ideas and expertise that strengthens cross-generational learning.*

Yet according to Oliver Dreon, director of the Center for Academic Excellence at Millersville University, the use of technology and innovative pedagogical approaches varies according to the risk-taking disposition of faculty and is not always a generational matter. As he explains,

> It's a mixture; it's almost like disposition. It's more about how they believe people learn and if they are risk-takers, and so that risk-taking disposition cuts across all generations, people who are willing to take pedagogical risks in support of their student learning. (as cited in Chun & Evans, 2021)

Nonetheless, Dreon recognizes that some faculty may be less familiar with the challenges arising when students bring multiple internet devices into the classroom:

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Because this connecting generation, the non-traditional students who are coming into our classrooms with three to five internet devises, that's a little foreign to some of our experienced faculty, and they see that to a degree to be a nuisance, a distraction in the classroom, and they don't always know how to use it to their advantage. But I would say that's true of some of our younger faculty too.

As we describe in our new book, *Leveraging Multigenerational Workforce Strategies in Higher Education*, reverse mentoring can enrich both the mentor and mentee through a mutual exchange of ideas and expertise that strengthens cross-generational learning. A powerful example of reverse mentoring is the program Dr. Susan Finelli-Genovese developed in the College of Education at Baldwin Wallace University in Berea, Ohio. As adviser to the BW Tech Club of undergraduate studies, Finelli-Genovese saw the importance of ensuring technological integration across the education curriculum to prepare teachers for K–12 classrooms. She created the tech coaching program using the formalized model of tech consulting used in the master of education program. In piloting the program, she first worked with a group of pre-teachers and students to hone their technological expertise in the Google suite used in K–12 schools. The program was then offered to the faculty and was quickly viewed as a win-win for both faculty and students.

After a one-year pilot of the program, Dr. Finelli-Genovese began to more systematically train the tech coaches through a modular series of courses. The program has become a leadership opportunity for students who receive badges and an informal certificate as they complete each module. It also prepares students to become official tech coaches in K–12 settings, a feature of the master of education program that follows the coaching standards of the International Society for Technology in Education. Maureen Loudin, an associate professor of literacy who has worked in the field for 40 years, found the program helped her keep current since she realized that students would be less responsive to learning when professors do not keep up with technology. As she states, "I think it is vital that we work as hard as the students do and keep up with the new knowledge." Loudin also sees the program as valuable in helping students gain confidence in their teaching ability.

Some practical tips in the development of such programs arise from the research literature and the Baldwin Wallace example. While these programs typically relate to technology, they can be expanded to include other areas, such as innovative teaching models:

- Conduct a mentoring needs assessment among faculty and students to ensure support for the program's goals and identify desired programmatic outcomes.
- Pilot the program to ascertain the level of faculty interest across the generations and potential of junior faculty and students to serve as mentees.
- Associate the program with programmatic and learning outcomes and the potential for enriching diverse interactions and enhancing cross-generational communication.
- Ensure that a means is offered for pairing of mentors and mentees that ensures psychological safety and a comfortable relationship. Provide ongoing, in-depth training for mentors that addresses specific areas of expertise and their application in classroom settings.

Reverse mentoring programs can serve as a source of innovation and creativity with mutual benefits for both mentors and mentees. The bridging of generational divides will provide valuable perspectives that expand pedagogical repertoires, enhance classroom experiences, and strengthen student learning outcomes.

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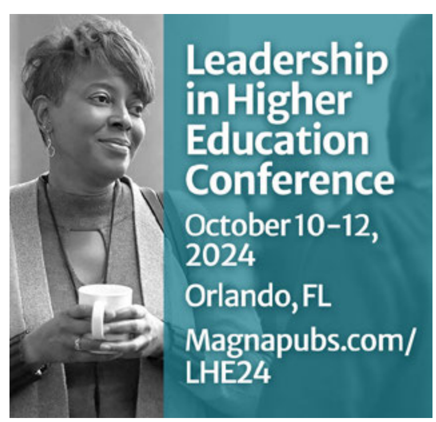

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faculty require to be the committed and thoughtful faculty our students and our academic communities need them to be.

1. **Respect for the expansiveness of their preparation.** Generalists know a heck of a lot. To teach well, they keep current in the large-scale trends in the discipline, and they are keeping fresh all the broad areas of knowledge they learned in grad school and which specialized researchers may allow to sink to the back recesses of their memory. A generalist English professor, in other words, needs to remember enough about the Great Vowel Shift, the American transcendentalists, and William Blake; a research specialist can let much of that slide to focus on Shakespeare and early modern England.
2. **A full participatory role in department meetings and in developing departmental and curricular policies.** In a department that combines specialist and generalist faculty, generalist faculty are often undervalued in departmental governance. Perhaps that is linked to class and elitism. Odds are good that in such a department the generalist faculty are least likely to have tenure and most likely to have the lowest salaries, and that can translate—either through articulated policies or implicit biases—into the exclusion of generalist voices in the decision-making process. This is especially unfortunate since the generalist faculty are likely to be the most connected to students and in the best position to understand how they will respond to departmental actions—especially surrounding curriculum.
3. **A full participatory role in shared governance.** As the faculty who work with the largest number of students, from first-year general ed students to advanced seniors in directed studies courses, generalist faculty see the implications of policy and other structural institutional and departmental decisions. They will know most easily whether a change to a tutoring program results in improved classroom performance; they will hear student concerns about disjunctions between the major curriculum and students' career goals; they will hear first about scheduling bottlenecks.
4. **Access to professional development funding and opportunities.** Generalist faculty need funds to attend conferences, present on the work they are doing in the classroom, and **participate in professional development opportunities** both on and off campus. This need often gets neglected for two reasons: money and time. Funding to travel (when budgets can accommodate it and the pandemic doesn't prevent it) is often limited to faculty who are presenting research papers, which may exclude faculty whose teaching commitments make it unlikely that they have the time to prepare such presentations. Nonetheless, they need the opportunities to hear the work of their fellow faculty and to meet their colleagues. Such experiences are themselves rejuvenating.
5. **Varied (but not too varied) teaching assignments.** When a faculty member has a heavy and repetitive teaching load, as most generalists do, **burnout is always a possibility**. Giving faculty members the opportunity to teach a different class periodically helps keep teaching fresh by permitting the faculty member to focus on different material and, perhaps, a different degree of student preparation. It can give faculty members a rejuvenating change of perspective. At the same time, repeatedly asking the faculty member to teach a different set of four courses semester after semester prevents them from having the time to reflect on what they are teaching and, more significantly, how their students are learning.
6. **Continuous curriculum development.** Varying teaching assignments, while important, isn't always practical, given personnel limitations. Some faculty members simply can't or won't teach certain courses, which restricts the possibilities for switching up course assignments. But ongoing curriculum development can make a change of habit more likely and more effective in achieving professorial and departmental goals. Devising new courses, perhaps interdisciplinary ones, can create inspirational opportunities for faculty and attractive course options for students while still fulfilling the department's general education responsibilities.
7. **Reasonable class sizes.** What counts as reasonable is going to vary by discipline and institution, of course, but students learn best when they have opportunities to receive frequent feedback from their professors and when faculty can observe how students are learning and adjust course structures and practices accordingly. Most institutions and departments won't be able to provide graduate assistants who can lead breakout sessions or monitor online discussion boards.
8. **Job stability.** Most colleges and universities employ a mix of tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty, and in most cases, the latter are on short-term appointments. This lack of stability may undermine the eagerness of these faculty to address difficult, politically sensitive issues in the classroom (for instance, anti-Black racism in the US), and it can dilute a faculty member's ability to focus on the students in their classes as they are forced into a perpetual job-seeking frame of mind. Without the

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stability created by tenure or at least multiyear renewable contracts, such faculty may be unwilling to mentor students in multi-term (or multiyear) research or creative projects.

9. **Encouragement to stay informed about national conversations about higher education.** Between the **looming demographic cliff**, **fallout from the pandemic**, the movement toward **racial equity**, politically motivated attempts to **restrict class content**, national conversations about the **value of higher education**, and garden-variety **financial concerns**, there is a lot going on in the world that affects our campuses and, in many cases, can constrain what we are able to do. The more that all of our faculty are aware of the issues our campuses are and will be facing, the better able they will be able to participate in forging solutions appropriate to our specific campus contexts. The more all faculty understand the larger contexts that campus administrators must consider when making decisions, the more likely it is that productive, collaborative conversations about future planning will occur. Institutions can help faculty, including those with heavy teaching responsibilities, to stay informed by providing campus-wide access to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and similar publications.
10. **An office that is appropriate for having FERPA-protected conversations with individual students.** Faculty who teach a lot are likely to need to meet with a lot of students for conferences about misunderstood assignment directions, reasons for absences, and grades. Many of these conversations are going to need the privacy required by FERPA, which gives students control over who has access to their academic records. A shared bullpen office that we may remember nostalgically from our graduate school days is not appropriate, even though campuses are **using shared offices more frequently**, especially for adjunct faculty. There are ways we can be efficient about space that don't require us to dislodge the senior scholar from their office but still provide appropriate, private space for those faculty who are, especially during the pandemic, spending more time on campus teaching than the senior scholar who can spend more time engaging in remote work.

We know that individual institutional circumstances are vastly different and that those differences require different solutions. In addition to the items enumerated above and, of course, regular access to merit raises, an occasional institutional thank-you to the generalist faculty who work intensely and exhaustingly with our students can be a welcome gesture that helps them continue their dedicated work to support our students and our campuses.

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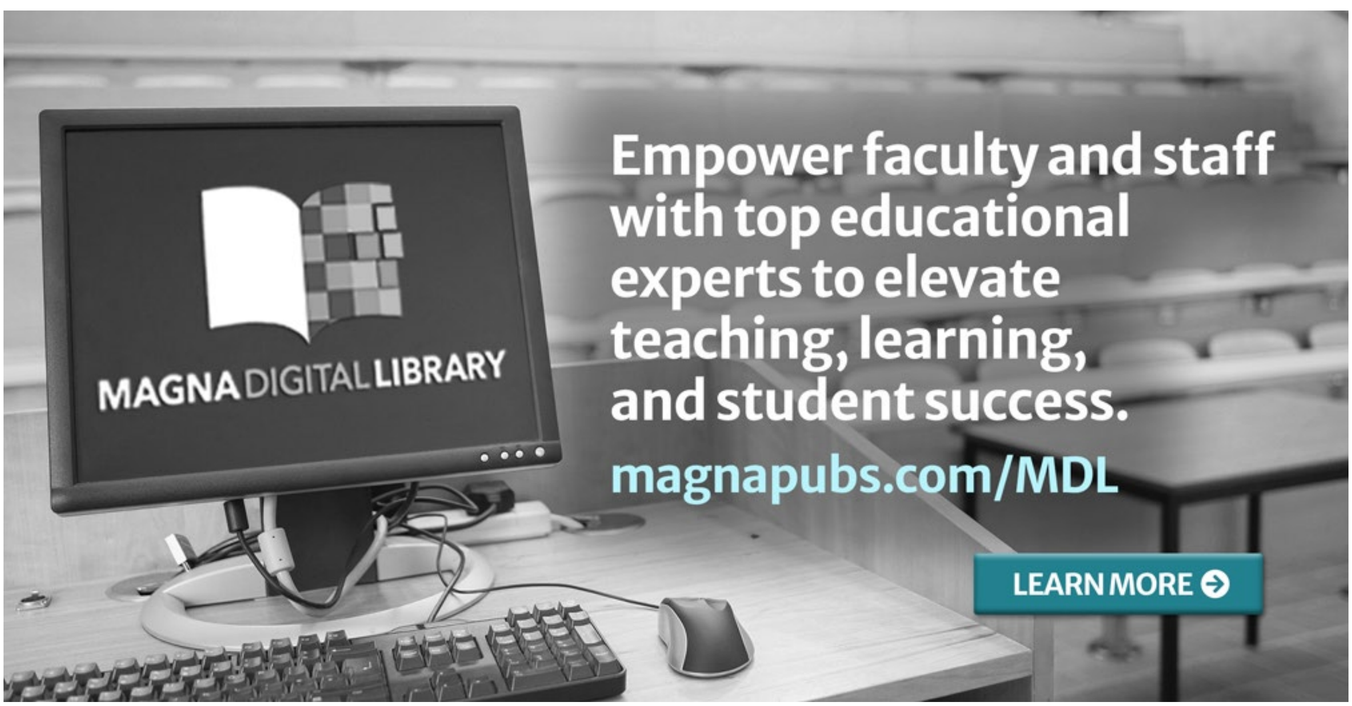

Professional Growth through Faculty Learning Communities:

Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Vehicles for Faculty Development and Student Success

David P. Pursell, Judy Awong-Taylor, Clay Runck, Allison R. D'Costa, Tirza Leader, Chantelle Anfuso, Cindy Achat-Mendes, and Nathan Moon

This article highlights how academic leaders may inspire faculty professional growth, student success, and enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) opportunities through a broad operating framework for faculty learning communities (FLCs). While our focus was STEM, this approach is applicable to all liberal arts programs. Our college is primarily a teaching institution and faculty overwhelmingly indicate they are overcommitted, so there was much skepticism that FLCs could meet our two goals: result in productive faculty development and student success and enhance DEI initiatives.

Goal 1: Faculty professional growth

In coordination with the dean, we presented the broad operating framework of FLCs to the faculty: yearlong communities; faculty driven topic development ranging teaching, scholarship, and service; faculty determining community members; faculty establishing objectives and timelines; face-to-face, hybrid, and virtual formats; and sharing of progress and products with the larger academic community. After presenting the framework, we launched a minigrant program funding 13 FLCs comprised of 75 STEM faculty (maximum $3,000 per FLC split among five to eight members). The work of these FLCs has been positive for student success, affecting 37 courses and 4,245 students thus far. FLC topics developed by the members were wide-ranging in scope, noting just a few to highlight the breadth of topics:

- Studying DFW rates in introductory chemistry courses and mitigation approaches implementing flipped learning
- Designing and implementing specifications grading
- STEM study abroad programs
- Alignment of goals and STEM skills of pre-nursing science courses
- Environmental science teaching and research working group

The FLC "products" are aimed at positive improvement and change and include sharing work with campus colleagues and with external parties via blog sites, workshops, conference presentations, and peer reviewed publications. Some FLCs, such as the analytical instrumentation FLC, publish local standard operating and maintenance manuals for instrumentation shared on campus by faculty from multiple disciplines while others result in peer-reviewed publications. Sample publications include

- specifications grading (Tsoi et al., 2019);
- flipped learning (Onodipe et al., 2020; Robbins et al., 2020);
- STEM study abroad (Gyurov & Schlueter, 2018); and
- environmental science (Park et al., 2019; Khan et al., 2021).

To further advance the FLC initiative, we conducted a four-day Mobile Summer Institute (MoSI) on Scientific Teaching in May 2019 (face-to-face), May 2020 (cancelled), and May 2021 (virtual). Faculty teams proposed "teaching modules" on hard-to-understand concepts, developing and tweaking the modules during the MoSI, with the teams then forming yearlong, post-MoSI FLCs to continue development. MoSI 2019 was led by an external team. For MoSI 2021, previous MoSI participants led the 2021 FLCs through the MoSI and then mentor the faculty teams through their yearlong, follow-on FLC. For the 2021 MoSI, we required each team to include DEI activities or products in their follow-on FLC work, contributing to the larger campus initiative.

Goal 2: Diverse, equitable, and inclusive faculty opportunities

To assess our second aim of providing diverse, inclusive, and equitable faculty development opportunities through FLCs, we surveyed participants. Per National Science Foundation demographic categories, we are a diverse STEM school, as shown in Table 1. Examining the demographics, faculty participants (FLCs/MoSIs) mirror the diversity of the campus community (faculty, staff, students) in categories of gender, race, and ethnicity as well as by academic rank. This representation is important as faculty involved in FLCs are not from niche groups but rather broadly mirror the campus community, indicating that the program provided equitable and inclusive faculty development opportunities.

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Table 1. STEM student, faculty, and staff demographics (spring 2021)

	Total Number	Percent of SST faculty and staff (%)												
		Female	Male	White	Black/African American	Hispanic	Asian	Other	Staff	Instructor	Lecturer	Assistant Professor	Associate Professor	Professor
*Faculty/staff	217	54	46	47	23	7	19	4	4	10	5	27	40	14
Students	3,640	46	54	25	33	22	14	6						
FLC members	75	63	37	51	17	4	28	0	4	10	0	32	41	13
MoSI 2019	35	60	40	51	17	6	26	0	0	0	6	31	46	17
MoSI 2021	42	69	31	48	12	7	33	0	0	5	0	29	40	26
*Full time	Note: MoSI 2020 canceled due to the pandemic													

To briefly summarize survey findings, many FLC members (73 percent) did not know what an FLC was prior to our launching the FLC program. FLCs typically met in person or virtually once per month but completed most of the FLC's work outside of the meetings. The meetings were used to shape the agenda, manage the timeline, and report on progress. FLC members (72 percent) reported that the FLC's workload was equally shared, and they (90 percent) agreed that decision-making was collaborative. Most FLC members (90 percent) felt the FLC was a valuable use of time, and most (86 percent) would participate in another FLC.

Practical takeaways for a successful FLC program

The broadly structured FLC program provided diverse, equitable, and inclusive faculty development and community building opportunities. The areas of the FLCs' positive impact are on teaching, research, student engagement, mentoring, service, and collaborating with colleagues. It is noteworthy that each of these areas is evaluated in our faculty promotion criteria, so the broadly structured FLC program seems to be a vehicle to help faculty develop knowledge, skills, and abilities in areas that contribute to promotion in academic rank. The faculty-driven FLCs ranged a broad spectrum of issues in higher education. FLC progress and products were shared with colleagues through publication and participants realized professional development in essential domains contributing to academic promotion. Most participants felt the FLCs were valuable and would participate again. The structure of the MoSIs with faculty mentors leading participants in their follow-on, yearlong FLC helps develop and perpetuate a cadre and culture of change agents in the larger campus community. For developing a similar FLC program at your institution, consider the following points:

- A broad framework enables faculty to drive their development.
- Competitive mini-grant solicitation lends credibility to program.
- Faculty driven topics and member self-selection ensure buy-in.
- Face-to-face, hybrid, and virtual structure provides flexibility, enabling faculty to manage many competing time demands.
- Sharing of FLC work among faculty motivates teamwork, progress, and products.
- Faculty-driven community encourages collegiality.
- Leveraging group rather than individual work enables progress and products that contribute to student success and faculty development.

Acknowledgements: The National Science Foundation and the University System of Georgia provided funding support for our FLC/MoSI program.

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How To Handle Student Complaints Against Faculty

By Eric Lyerly, Esq.

Student complaints are no doubt one of the most challenging (and discouraging) parts of being a professor or instructor. Faculty are in their roles to support students, help them develop intellectually, and assist them in identifying career paths. However, the reality is that students and faculty can experience conflict in and outside of the classroom. Sometimes that conflict can result in a student submitting a complaint against a faculty member.

There is evidence to suggest that students may be filing more complaints against faculty and/or their universities than ever before. In 2022, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights received over 18,800 civil rights complaints against institutions receiving federal funding, the **highest number of complaints in the agency's history**.

When appropriate, faculty leaders can help colleagues navigate and respond to a student complaint. This article discusses what faculty leaders can do to assist faculty in responding to complaints from students.

1. Help your colleague identify the allegations in the complaint

The first step in properly handling a student complaint is to identify what it's about. Faculty leaders may be able to help colleagues with this process. Student complaints generally fall into two categories: (1) grades and (2) conduct. Grades are presumably the most common type of student complaints against faculty. These complaints may involve informal or formal complaint procedures, including a grade appeal to a dean or another faculty administrator.

Complaints about faculty conduct are often more technical, especially when they involve allegations of unlawful behavior. Whereas traditional grade grievances typically stay within the relevant faculty department, conduct-related complaints might be processed by various offices on campus.

For example, the following offices may be involved in investigating or processing a faculty misconduct complaint:

- Faculty departments—for complaints related to professionalism and classroom management;
- Title IX Office—for complaints of sex-based discrimination or harassment;
- Disability Services Office—for complaints related to disability discrimination or harassment;
- Equal Opportunity Office—for complaints concerning discrimination or harassment based on race, color, national origin, and other protected characteristics; and
- Human Resources—for various types of complaints.

Faculty are generally entitled to notice of a complaint. This notice should provide faculty with a complete statement of their alleged misconduct and enable them to identify the behavior(s) or interaction(s) that prompted the complaint.

2. Encourage faculty to pursue an informal resolution process if possible

Most college and university grievance processes encourage students to informally resolve a complaint before resorting to the formal process. An informal resolution to a student's complaint can preserve the faculty-student relationship and spare faculty the frustration of defending themselves against a formal grievance.

Faculty should be open and responsive to a student's attempts to meet and discuss their concerns about the faculty's behavior, no matter how superficial a student's complaint may seem. Faculty leaders should encourage informal resolution and may even mediate the issues between faculty and students.

Faculty leaders can offer the following tips to colleagues who participate in an informal meeting to resolve a student's complaint:

- **Prepare for the meeting beforehand**. Encourage your colleague to recall the event or behavior about which the student is complaining. They can even make notes about the sequence of events and why they acted the way they did. It may be prudent to help your colleague review your institution's faculty handbook or code of conduct and evaluate the appropriateness of their conduct.
- **Reflect on talking points before the meeting**. It can be helpful for faculty to practice talking to the student about the events/actions in question before the meeting. This exercise can help them remain calm and professional in what could be an emotionally charged student meeting.
- **Be prepared to offer an apology for hurtful conduct**. Professors and instructors are human. They can lose their cool and strike a harsh tone with students just like anyone else. If your colleague regrets their conduct toward a student or feels that it may have been unintentionally

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harmful, encourage them to offer a sincere apology. Although it may feel awkward, it can repair their relationship with the student and save the parties from the headache of a formal grievance.

- **Be prepared to defend appropriate conduct.** If your colleague believes their conduct toward the student was appropriate, encourage them to articulate their position calmly and firmly. They should explain why they acted the way they did and cite the reasons the student's conduct was inappropriate (e.g., the student disrupted the learning environment, did not meet course expectations, etc.).

It is a win for everyone, including faculty leaders, when a student's grievance can be resolved informally. However, not all complaints have such a neat ending.

3. Help faculty understand the grievance process

If a student's complaint against faculty has turned formal, faculty leaders may be able to help colleagues review the applicable grievance process and identify their rights during any related investigations and hearings. The grievance process may differ depending on the student's allegations (i.e., whether they are accused of sex-based discrimination, disability discrimination, race, or national origin discrimination, etc.).

As mentioned previously, faculty are entitled to notice of the complaint against them. This notice should inform faculty of the student's allegations and present them with enough information to respond. Faculty may also be entitled to have a representative/advocate present during meetings with investigators and complaint hearings. Often, faculty will request that a colleague or department supervisor be their representative—but not always.

Faculty may need a lawyer if a student is accusing them of criminal or unlawful behavior (such as assault or sexual assault) that could later result in legal proceedings. A lawyer can help faculty protect their rights during the internal grievance process and help them avoid saying or doing things that could later be used against them in a court of law. Faculty may also choose to hire a lawyer if the conduct they are accused of could result in termination.

4. Encourage faculty to cooperate during any investigations and hearings

If faculty believes they acted appropriately toward a complaining student, they should welcome an investigation into the conduct or event in question. A properly conducted investigation can clear your colleague of wrongdoing and provide a final resolution to an unwarranted grievance. Even if your colleague is unsure of whether they acted properly, you should still encourage them to cooperate during investigations and hearings.

Cooperation—rather than reticence or antagonism—can signal to departmental and institutional administrators that the faculty (1) takes the complaint seriously, (2) is willing to learn from their experience with the student, and (3) trusts the institution to resolve the matter fairly.

5. Remind faculty to avoid retaliation (intentional or inadvertent) against the complaining student

Faculty must avoid retaliation—or the appearance of retaliation—after a student submits a complaint against them, especially if the complaint alleges a civil rights violation. Federal civil rights laws such as Title VI, Title IX, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 prohibit discrimination against students based on certain protected characteristics. These laws also prohibit retaliation against students who engage in activities protected by the laws. Retaliation is any act that would discourage an average student from engaging in a protected activity (e.g., making a complaint against a professor or instructor).

Not surprisingly, complaints alleging discrimination based on sex, race, color, national origin, or disability are protected activities under the law. If a student has accused faculty of discrimination, they cannot retaliate against them. Faculty leaders should remind colleagues to avoid retaliation against a student who has filed a complaint against them.

We often think of retaliation as overt actions. In faculty's case, it may be giving a student a poor grade on an assignment or exam or denying them educational opportunities available to the rest of the class. To be sure, these actions could be retaliatory. However, retaliation can also be more subtle. Merely attempting to talk to a student about complained-of conduct could be considered retaliation, especially if the formal grievance process has been initiated. Additionally, talking to the complaining student's classmates about the incident could be considered retaliation. Such conduct could be interpreted as "intimidation" and may well discourage the student (or other students) from engaging in protected activity.

Incidentally, faculty could be found responsible for retaliation even if they are not found responsible for an underlying allegation of discrimination. To avoid intentional or inadvertent retaliation, faculty should avoid taking any action that could be interpreted as trying to influence the outcome of a student's complaint. Faculty should wait for a student to initiate an informal resolution attempt before speaking to them about conduct that may result in a formal complaint. Once the student initiates a formal complaint, faculty should not speak about the event except to the relevant investigators and possibly faculty administrators.

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Leadership Strategies to Enhance Faculty and Staff Buy-In

Charles P. Ruch and Cathleen B. Ruch

Often academic leaders' responsibilities focus on mobilizing faculty and staff to respond to current and forthcoming institutional challenges. The impact of two years of COVID-19 institutional disruption has created an environment where old, familiar ways of operating are no longer viable. Significant changes are called for—changes that require broad support and involvement. Building, maintaining, and enhancing faculty and staff buy-in for needed changes are now at the very center of academic leadership.

Acknowledging that there is no one way to build faculty and staff buy-in, we have found many of the following strategies to be effective. Institutional characteristics and circumstances coupled with individual skills and style will dictate leader behavior. Building buy-in demands that all are involved so the effort is viewed as "ours"—not a forced response to the leader's singularly articulated plan.

When we have been most successful, leadership is akin to conducting an orchestra, directing a theater troupe, or coaching a team; it is not about demanding a specific response or strategy. Checking one's ego at the door is a critical prerequisite.

Six steps in building buy-in

Building faculty and staff buy-in for needed change usually requires elements of the following six steps. Success depends on the leader understanding the importance of each step and using intentional leadership strategies to achieve necessary outcomes.

Step one: Understand and appreciate the institutional culture

Institutional change does not occur in a vacuum but at a specific point in the life of the institution. It is critical that the leader understands the current concerns of faculty and staff and is knowledgeable of institutional history and current processes, procedures, and priorities.

Leadership strategies: Interacting with faculty and staff in both formal and informal settings provides insights into their perspective the current state of affairs. Individual meetings and unit meetings in their space are useful strategies. Listening is a powerful tool. Allowing faculty and staff express their concerns, issues, and "grievances" without the need to immediately respond or rebut is a necessary beginning. Making sure you understand how matters are currently conducted is foundational to building the need for and commitment to change.

Step two: Build a shared understanding of the problem

Absent a common understanding of the institutional problem to be addressed, building an effective solution becomes problematic. The leader needs to implement a process whereby all involved have an opportunity to study the issues and arrive at a common understanding of the situation.

Leadership strategies: How problem-defining data is presented and analyzed will frame any plan forward. Several strategies have been found to be helpful. A packet of problem-defining data including (a) status data (where we are today), (b) trend data (where we have been and might be going absent any change), and (c) comparative data (what we look like compared to significant others) needs to be created. Experience suggests that the absence of any of the data sets will become the topic of concern, avoiding the larger issue of problem definition. Additional items that the data packet might include are articulated institutional goals and anecdotal examples.

Strategies for the presentation and analysis of the data packet are important. All stakeholders should receive the same information at the same time. Opportunities to discuss, reject, or add additional information should be encouraged. The leader needs to set the tone that this is a problem to be identified; not a time to assign blame. Each stakeholder should be encouraged to comment and reflect on how they feel the data will affect them. This opportunity is best conducted prior to any process to build a common definition of the problem under review. It is helpful for the leader to summarize, seeking consensus across the unit.

Step three: Build a set of possible solutions

It is not unusual for several potential solutions to emerge. By developing a unit-wide set of solutions, a sense of ownership to solve the problem can emerge.

Leadership strategies: Buy-in is the result of shared understanding and commitment to solve the problem at hand. While the leader will have their own thoughts and plans, it is critical that all the stakeholders be invited to offer solutions and needed actions. The leader can include their ideas with the balance of the ideas presented.

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Step four: Select a preferred plan

All key individuals involved need to develop and agree on a focus and plan. A common direction will undergo broad buy-in and action.

Leadership strategies: The leader will need to facilitate a review of each of the proposed strategies with all the key players participating. The leader may select familiar tools—such as a SWOT analysis, scenario creation, or simple pluses versus minuses—to guide the conversation. Consideration can be given to choosing parts of several proposed strategies, creating a plan that includes the best of several strategies.

The leader will need to develop a consensus for the preferred strategy. Sometimes it will occur naturally. In other cases, some form of ranking will be needed. One method that appears to strengthen consensus is to list all alternatives and invite each member to select three preferred options. This approach will provide the group with an analysis of concurrence without the creation of winners or losers. Once developed, a second round of analysis may be needed to arrive at a strategy the enjoys broad support.

Step five: Build an action plan

Once all key individuals agree on a strategy, it is time to develop and announce a plan for implementation.

Leadership strategies: The leader will need to facilitate the creation of the work plan. Again, involving all the key individuals to complete the plan in the same forum reinforces the shared nature of the undertaking. To the extent possible, all involved should have an assigned task with appropriate expectations, time frames, and deliverables. Identification of needed tools and resources should be part of the action plan, as should needed approvals.

The leader should make the plan available to all for prompt review and comment before announcing it.

Step six: Constantly review and revise

Periodic review of project progress should be part of the action plan.

Leadership strategies: The leader needs to periodically visit each participant and get their assessment of progress. They should encourage needed modifications and communicate these to the rest of the team. Obtaining agreed-upon needed resources and approvals is a priority for the leader.

The leader should celebrate progress to solve the problem and communicate it to the larger institution.

Additional observations

Two issues frequently texture buy-in efforts: dealing with faculty and staff who cannot or will not agree that there is a problem worthy of their attention and constant communication with senior administration. These matters require the explicit attention of academic leadership.

Dealing with faculty and staff who do not agree with the need for problem identification or solution

Broad-based and effective faculty and staff buy-in to tackle an important institutional challenge does not require total participation. In some cases, individual faculty and staff or a cluster of them may resist the initiative with varying levels of objection. Their efforts to derail or stop the initiative can be both an annoyance and a challenge to the academic leader.

Several strategies are available to the leader. If the leader is aware of dissenters' concerns and issues, they can develop a thoughtful response. Showing respect for and understanding of their position (without agreeing with it) is a critical beginning strategy. Always including the dissenters in the conversations and data review and inviting alternative solutions and group critiques of their position are available responses. Generally speaking, defensive responses or administrative edicts are not helpful—though totally understandable. Keeping the process public and data-based and the solutions stakeholder created should guide the academic leader's strategy.

Communication with senior leadership

Unit initiatives to solve problems occur within the overall institutional environment. College and university leadership is critical to the success of the effort. A clear responsibility of the academic leader is to fully brief central administration on the problem and strategy to address its solution. As part of their "institutional scan," the leader needs to understand the mission and current priorities. They need to discuss with central administrators any non-negotiables or other concerns that would texture a solution. Matters that would require prior approval must be identified.

The role of institutional leadership in the process needs to be discussed at the outset. How institutional concerns, non-negotiables, and other worries are to be introduced need to be discussed. A useful strategy is to include them in the data packet.

The academic leader needs to confirm a mode of communication with central administration. A "no surprises" ethic should guide the process.

Summary

Building faculty and staff buy-in doesn't just happen. It requires an academic leader to understand the process, be flexible in its implementation, and show patience with those involved. When successfully implemented, the results are viewed as a collective triumph—a hallmark of successful academic leadership.

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them on notice that you're truly going to be on vacation, not merely working from a remote site.

5. View delegation as a growth opportunity, not an imposition. Sometimes we're hesitant to hand off a responsibility to someone else because we think it's inappropriate to give more work to someone who's already busy just so we can have an opportunity to relax. But the people to whom we delegate that responsibility may view the situation differently. They may be future academic leaders who want to get a taste of what it's like to be the chair, dean, provost, or president. They may be looking for responsibilities they can use to document their own leadership experience in order to pursue future opportunities. We may be thinking we're being kind by trying to do everything ourselves, but we may have plenty of people who are eager for the chance to relieve us of some of our duties for reasons of their own.

Academic leaders who are workaholics may get a lot done, but they may also accomplish just as much—at a far higher level of quality—if they attain more balance between their working and nonworking lives. The best advice we can give that frenzied, overburdened academic leader we all know (and who may even be the person we see in the mirror) is "take a vacation—please!"

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The bottom line

Student complaints about faculty can feel personal. However, faculty should do their best to remain calm and professional when they have become the subject of a complaint. In many cases. faculty leaders can play an important part in helping colleagues navigate and respond to a complaint in a positive manner.

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The Information, Research, and Fellowship You Need

The field of faculty development studies draws on theories and research from a broad range of disciplines and benefits from the exchange of information. The *Journal of Faculty Development*, founded in 1983, publishes three times each year and covers important topics relevant to educational developers, deans, department chairs, executives, and faculty.

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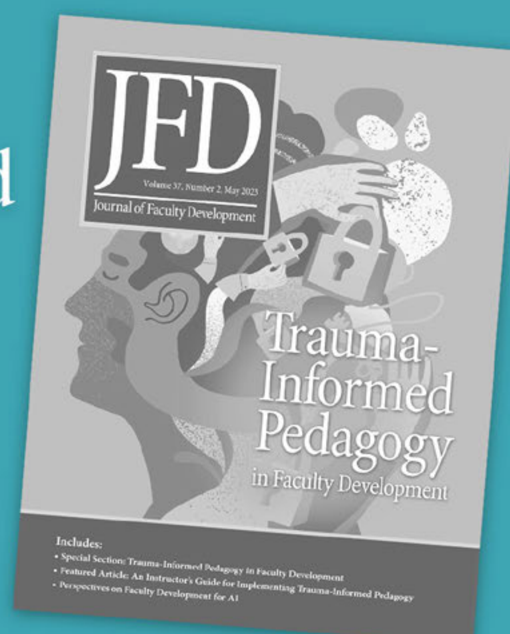

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peers and mentors who have observed meetings or projects managed by the new administrator; and

- debriefs after challenging conversations or meetings, with questions as to what went well and badly to steer the debrief to the outcomes rather than the performance.

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Take a Vacation—Please!

Jeffrey L. Buller

Although workshops on academic leadership frequently devote sessions to the topic of "work-life balance," that phrase is really misleading. It seems to imply that we're either working or living but never doing both at the same time. However, this is a false dichotomy for most administrators. We're obviously living while we're working (despite a few long-past-their-prime presidents or provosts we may have encountered over the years). And due to the ubiquity of email, we're often working while we should be resting, spending time with our families, and generally enjoying ourselves. In other words, life is work and work is life for most academic leaders, and therein lies the problem.

We may think we're being efficient by putting long hours into our work. We may even regard our inability to stop working as essential if we are to have any hope of getting through the mountain of responsibilities that seems to grow each day. But we're actually fooling ourselves and doing a disservice to others. We're fooling ourselves because extended work without a break has diminishing returns. In many cases, we'd actually get more done if we left the office at a reasonable hour, resisted answering any email from home unless it was an emergency, and resumed our tasks more efficiently the next day. We're doing a disservice to others by failing to delegate certain responsibilities, because we're depriving someone else of a valuable learning opportunity, and by giving the impression that one person can do it all, we're making the job all the more difficult for our successors.

Solving the problem of overworking ourselves and making our positions more and more unsustainable for the future isn't as easy as simply deciding to restrict our professional lives to more humane hours. But there are several things we can do to bring our lives into better balance.

1. Make sure the people who report to us take genuine vacations and restrict the amount they work outside of standard office hours. We may be setting a horrible example for the people who report to us when we don't take as much time off as we're entitled to and routinely take our work home with us. By encouraging (at times even compelling) others to make full use of their annual leave and nonworking hours, we may find ourselves feeling freer to do the same. We may also learn the lesson that all the work still gets done, even when people aren't burning themselves out from constant activity.

2. Have a serious conversation with our supervisors about realistic expectations for our work commitments. Just as we want the people who work for us to know that we don't expect them to be on duty 24/7/365, so should we have conversations with our own supervisors about their expectations from us and the degree to which those expectations are reasonable. We may be surprised to find that the people we report to aren't expecting—and really don't want—us to be working night and day. In those rare situations where supervisors are in fact over-demanding, true leadership means speaking up for our own needs and advocating for a schedule that helps us be not merely administrators, but fully developed and rounded human beings as well.

3. Set firewalls around how many nights and weekends we'll be engaged in campus activities. Almost all academic leaders will have a certain number of evening and weekend commitments. There will be guest speakers to introduce, open houses for prospective students to attend, artistic and cultural events to participate in, and a host of other activities where our presence will be expected. If we're not careful, these events multiply to the point where there are no free evenings or weekends left. It's important, therefore, to create some boundaries and protect an amount of genuine leisure time that's appropriate for you and your position. A university president, for example, might be able to erect a firewall around only one or two evenings a week. A chair may be able to protect four evenings during the week and all weekends except for a few each term. Regardless of the amount, having at least some time that we can call our own is vital to preserving our positive attitude and energy.

4. Develop alternative ways of being contacted for actual emergencies. Genuine crises do occur from time to time. One way of preserving balance while taking time off is to disconnect: refrain from checking your email except perhaps once a day at a set time. Doing so, however, leads to the problem of being cut off from people who may have a legitimate need to reach you during an actual emergency. It can be useful, therefore, to make arrangements for how you should be contacted if a serious situation does arise. Letting your supervisor, direct reports, and administrative assistant know you'll check your email while away once a day at about 7:00 p.m., but you'll be reachable by phone or text at other times if it's absolutely necessary, accomplishes several things simultaneously. It gives people a way to contact you when they really need to, and it puts

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