MARCH 2024 | VOL. 2, NO. 3

SUPPORTING FACULTY

AN ACADEMIC LEADER PUBLICATION

LEADING FACULTY WITH PURPOSE AND VISION

LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

How to Lead through Budget Cuts

By James Goodrich

As declining enrollment and decreases in funding impact university plans and budgets, many of us in positions of leadership are called upon to make significant budget cuts. Not the slow, incremental kind, but significant cutbacks that will affect everyone. Often these are not efforts to cut excess with surgical precision but cuts made across the board, hitting the healthy and the weak in equal measure. The trend is to push responsibility for making these cutbacks down to lower levels—from the provost to the deans, program directors, and department chairs. The message: “Work with your numbers, and come back to us with a budget that is xx percent less.”

These cuts often seem unfair and unsustainable. They may even cut into the organization’s muscle and bone. Deans and other middle managers cringe at the thought of presenting these cuts to their people, especially knowing that personnel costs are such a big part of the university budget allocations. Those of us in positions of responsibility really have little choice but to try and work within these constraints. In fact, some say that now is when we really earn our administrative salaries.

So how to proceed? Step one is to be *realistic*. Do not exaggerate or minimize the impact that cuts may have on your unit. Go too far in one direction—“these will cause so much damage I don’t see how we will survive”—and you basically doom your efforts while generating resistance that will spread ill will among faculty, staff, and especially students. Go in the other direction—“I think we may be able to move some money around in order to handle this”—and it may be hard to create a sense of urgency.

Figure out a realistic range of possibilities to meet the new funding goals. Don’t be afraid to lean *in to these cuts. Carefully evaluate everything.*

It is vital to work through the cuts in granular detail first, with a little help from a budget officer or university CFO. Figure out a realistic range of possibilities to meet the new funding goals. Don’t be afraid to *lean in* to these cuts. Carefully evaluate everything. There may be some programs that

PAGE 4 ➡

IN THIS ISSUE

COMING NEXT MONTH:

Understanding Obligations to Unionizing Grad Students

Three New Meetings Worth Having

Foundations for Effective Recruiting: A Chair’s Perspective

Dos and Don’ts for Prospective Department Chairs

Ten Ways to Support Your Immigrant Colleagues

Well-Being and Well-Thinking: How to Stay Healthy in Academia

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Supporting Faculty (ISSN 2993-1851) is published monthly by Magna Publications Inc., 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704. Phone 800-433-0499; Fax: 608-246-3597.
Email: **support@magnapubs.com**.
Website: **www.magnapubs.com**.

One-year subscription: $149.

POSTMASTER: Send change of address to *Supporting Faculty*, 2718 Dryden Drive, Madison, WI 53704.

Adaptive Learning for Faculty Development: Technology Considerations

By Corrinne Stull, Jackie Compton, and Anchalee Ngampornchai

One challenge of faculty development and training for online teaching is satisfying instructors with different levels of knowledge, skills, and experience. At our institution, we discovered that this challenge can be overcome by employing an adaptive learning strategy in our faculty development courses. Adaptive learning technologies assess an individual learner's current knowledge so that they can "test out" of or skip past content and topics that they have already mastered and focus on areas they may not yet be familiar with.

As we considered using adaptive learning modules in our faculty development courses, we identified some potential benefits. For example, we often have faculty members that come from other institutions or positions where they may have prior knowledge or experience. Some of these individuals may be familiar with online teaching tools but need assistance with pedagogical strategies, while others may have extensive teaching experience but lack technology skills. Some instructors have previously taught online and are well-versed in most of the topics we cover, whereas others are completely new to teaching online. Ultimately, adaptive learning allowed us to meet our faculty members at their current level of knowledge so that they can focus on learning topics and areas beyond that level.

Assessment and comparison of adaptive technologies

After we determined that adaptive learning would be the right solution for our faculty development courses, we had to decide which tool would be best. We evaluated three available adaptive learning systems: one built into our primary learning management system (LMS), one developed in-house within our institution, and one a third-party system.

To evaluate each adaptive system, we developed a rubric containing the following seven categories, each with their own subset of features or criteria.

1. **Adaptive capabilities.** Ideally, we wanted the system to provide a personalized learning experience to our faculty members. To assess this, we compared systems' functionality for customized learning paths and their ability to lock and unlock content according to the outcomes of pre- or post-assessment. We also compared assessment item types (e.g., multiple choice, fill in the blank) and feedback capability (e.g., immediate feedback).
2. **Content authoring and editing.** We frequently update our faculty development courses, so we needed a system that allowed us to do so. On top of basics such as content editor features and multimedia integration, we needed a platform that

PAGE 3 ➡

ADAPTIVE LEARNING FROM PAGE 2

was quick and easy to use without requiring extensive time to make simple edits. Additionally, multiple designers must have access to collaborate on content development, so we were looking for a system that allowed multiple content authors to contribute without having to traverse tedious sharing permissions.

3. **Learner usability.** We wanted the adaptive system to be learner friendly, especially for our new-to-online faculty members. This meant that we were looking for a system that was easy for learners to navigate, especially through content and assessment. Additionally, we wanted the chosen system to meet accessibility needs, work on mobile devices, work with our institution's single sign-on (SSO), and have a welcoming look and feel.
4. **Integration and maintenance.** We needed the system to integrate well with our current LMS. We wanted to provide a seamless learning experience for our faculty learners and have automatic grade exchange as well. We also needed the system to allow for shareable learning objects as well as easy maintenance and setup from semester to semester.
5. **Available support**. While we try to support any system we use as much as we can, we simply can't solve every problem. Thus, we needed the selected adaptive system to have dedicated support staff available to assist with issues or questions. We also considered whether the platform comes with readily available software documentation and guides, which could help us troubleshoot certain issues on our own.
6. **Cost.** Because we usually have at least 40 faculty members going through our primary training course each semester, we wanted the adaptive learning system to be cost-effective for our institution. Therefore, we compared the overall cost across the systems.
7. **Data and analytics.** A large part of adaptive technologies is their ability to produce robust real-time data and analytics. This includes (1) data to assess learner progress, performance, and engagement (e.g., an instructor or facilitator dashboard); (2) data to evaluate assessment items (e.g., how frequently certain items are missed); and (3) data for the learner to assess their own learning and progress. Ideally, an adaptive platform would have all three, but we scored each as its own criteria.

We conducted the assessment and comparison of the adaptive technologies on the basis of available information of the systems and the experience of the instructional designers who have used them. We used a rating scale of 1–3 to evaluate each criterion objectively and systematically; 1 equaled "does not meet needs," 2 "partially meets needs," and 3 "meets or exceeds needs." Along with the numerical scoring, we made notes in the "characteristics" column for each system, noting what the systems did or didn't achieve for each criterion. For some criteria, we found it helpful to label "pros" and "cons" in this area.

Further application

We hope that the rubric and criteria we created can help others in their evaluation of adaptive technologies. Ultimately, how an institution chooses to assess adaptive systems for faculty development will depend on their needs. With this more systematic evaluation, we were able to provide our leadership with clearer and more in-depth reasoning for why we opted for one system over the others. After our evaluation of systems, we considered introducing score weighting to denote an individual criterion's level of significance depending on our need or application. Additionally, we met as a group and discussed each of the rubric criteria for each system and then rated together in one rubric. If they desire, several individuals could evaluate the systems and then aggregate their scores to find the average or median.

Click here to download a Word version of the rubric.

This article first appeared in *Academic Leader* on November 15, 2021.

BUDGET CUTS FROM PAGE 1

frankly should be cut. A good and creative activity is to ask, "How would we set up this part of the organization if we were starting over or just beginning to hire faculty and staff?"

The next step is to *take responsibility* as a decision maker. Some leaders try to be "transparent" as a way of passing the problem further down the line to their faculty and staff. Doing so may give them a false sense of participation or the idea that they can decide for themselves which cuts if any are justified or necessary. It is best not to be merely a messenger about the cuts ("they told me to tell you") as this undercuts your credibility. Better to be seen as a leader and problem solver rather than a victim of circumstances. During this step it may be useful to mentally prepare by rehearsing with a coach or trusted colleague to figure out the best way to present these budget cuts to others in the unit.

Step three is to *engage people*. Figure out the best way to build a budget presentation and to spread the word about the cuts. Be aware of the anxieties of faculty and staff, and try to work through their concerns without being dismissive. Form a working group if it seems this will be better than a "committee of the whole," and task its members with figuring out a different cost structure or a new model for delivering services. It is good to include key staff as well as some relatively new faculty in the working group. At this stage it is particularly helpful to keep a focus on what is best for students rather than simply preserving all existing courses and tracks in the academic program. Now is the time to carefully consider and weigh all possible alternatives—including some seemingly radical changes—since the operation in its present form may not be sustainable.

In the end it is likely there will be a budget presentation based on at least three alternatives, with different levels of resources and activities at each level of revenues and expenditures. It may be helpful to extend the spreadsheet into a multiyear budget to show the full effects of each alternative (and also to use as a base for building next year's budget). It is important to do this to make some space for cuts that are bound to happen at some level—and also so participants can be thinking in terms of scenarios and planning more strategically.

Another option: *Leading up with higher administration*.

If all this feels impossible and the message is truly that these cuts may be too deep, resulting in too few faculty or staff to carry out the mission of the unit, there is always another option. If we are convinced that these reductions cannot be sustained, it is important to let higher administration know this. But don't just join the complainers; come in with solutions—taking money from another pot, using donor or reserve funds, even considering reorganization or other structural changes. Typically a provost or VP of finance will appreciate your bringing thoughtful answers to budget issues.

Remember that leading up is an important part of decision making. Yet it is fraught with uncertainty. The university has to make cuts and balance the budget. Even a dean or head of a large unit is still basically a middle manager in a complex organization. But individuals in higher administration are not omnipotent, and those further down often have more influence than shown in the organization chart. For example, information is power. Budgetary decisions can be framed in ways that are clear (e.g., to show how cuts may actually hurt revenues) and impactful (e.g., "if we cut adjuncts, we'd be cutting access to real-world knowledge that they bring to our students").

Ultimately, all these efforts may not accomplish much in warding off budget cuts, especially when revenues are dropping and operations cannot be maintained at existing levels. What is most important here is to show some leadership and keep the unit working together in the face of adversity. This will help now and in the budget rounds yet to come.

This article has been updated from its original version which first appeared in *Academic Leader* on November 16, 2020.

Fundraising for Academic Leaders: Five Practical Strategies for Deans and Department Chairs

By Craig Hlavac

As traditional revenue streams continue to wane, academic leaders at colleges and universities are increasingly expected to acquire new sources of support. While fundraising is nothing new for colleges and universities, those tasked with these responsibilities are expanding to include not only professional fundraisers but also those on the academic side of the house. Deans, associate deans, department chairs, and even faculty are requested (or required) to aid in fundraising efforts. Most academics, however, feel ill-equipped for these activities. In fact, some are unsure—or anxious—about what fundraising even looks like for academic leaders. Potential donors look for ways to make an impact, and they want to know that the institution will effectively use the financial support they provide to further a shared vision.

If you're an academic leader, determining how and where to start can seem like a daunting task. Below are a few suggestions.

1. Start with your unit's mission, vision, and needs assessment

Fundraising is often less about asking for money and more about building relationships and telling a compelling story. This is particularly true when raising funds for academic units; as prospective donors are likely already connected with the institution, providing an accurate, updated vision and mission are great first steps in building relationships with them. Next, the leader must have a clear and concise message regarding the needs of the unit. Why is financial support needed? What specifically would these funds do for the unit? For the students? These points must be well-considered and communicated in a simple, cogent manner. Next, collaboratively determine how the prospective donor might make a difference. If the donor knows what is needed and has the interest and ability to address this need, the conversation will feel less like an ask for support and more like a dialogue about how they might help.

Fundraising is often less about asking for money and more about building relationships and telling a compelling story.

2. Meet with institutional advancement

Once you can effectively communicate your unit's mission and vision, it is time to consult with your institutional advancement or development office. Ideally, your college or unit will have one or more embedded development officers. These fundraising professionals will be a great source of prospective donor research, can provide the names of engaged alumni who may be interested in becoming more connected, and will provide both advice and assistance as you reach out to potential donors. Additionally, development officers will know not only the institution's various fundraising strategies but also—and more importantly—which large prospects are already assigned to others at the institution. While excitement and enthusiasm are welcome in this line of work, collaboration and open communication are critical; without clear communication, donor contacts can easily be mismanaged, leading to confusion. To avoid this potentially devastating circumstance, keep an open line of communication with your development professionals.

3. Engage your alumni

For most academic units, the vast majority of prospective donors will have an obvious connection: as former students who can point to positive institutional experiences as the foundations for their vocational success. Capturing this sentiment while reengaging your alumni is a great way to build relationships with them. Academic leaders can contribute to this effort by first considering ways to get alumni involved with campus events that allow them to interact with current students. Some ideas include:

- lectures by faculty or other disciplinary experts
- meetings of student organizations connected to the disciplines in your unit
- alumni gatherings outside the

PAGE 6 ➡

FUNDRAISING FROM PAGE 5

immediate vicinity of campus (major cities are common)
- opportunities for networking (segmented by age, subdiscipline, or interests)
- regional gatherings that allow for alumni segments to meet and network

These types of events should cater to the attendees' specific needs—needs that will inevitably change over time. For instance, recent alumni are generally more interested in networking with peers and industry leaders who may be able to help them advance in their careers. Alumni who are established in their careers (or even approaching retirement) may be interested in events that provide opportunities for enrichment (e.g., lectures, performances, exhibitions) in addition to connections with current students—always a source of energy. When planning a gathering for alumni, it is always best to seek advice from your development office. The people there can advise on how best to segment your prospective donors and craft the event in a way that is most meaningful to attendees.

4. Develop an advisory board

Academic units frequently use advisory boards to inform curricular initiatives and ensure close ties with corporations, industry, and the community. These boards, however, can also aid in the fundraising efforts of colleges, schools, and departments. Assess the makeup of your advisory board and consider including the following stakeholders:

- successful alumni with connections to important businesses or community organizations
- respected experts in the unit's discipline (or related field) who can help build relationships with your alumni
- a current student
- a recent graduate
- a current donor to the unit
- a marketing expert
- others as advised by your development office

This combination of members, coupled with your current board membership, may allow you the opportunity to effectively discuss fundraising efforts and have the appropriate connections and experience necessary to make positive progress.

5. Build a culture of philanthropy

While it is crucial to engage alumni and other interested parties in an academic unit's fundraising efforts, building a culture of philanthropy before students graduate is also important. Much fundraising support goes directly to students in the form of merit- or need-based scholarships. Students who benefit from these gifts are grateful for this aid and, while not in position to financially support the school or department while enrolled, are very often willing to help raise funds if asked. Their assistance may include thanking current donors and their families, attending prospective donor gatherings to directly articulate how they benefit from scholarship aid, and even giving modest sums of money in support of specific initiatives that involve fellow students. Although the moneys students raise may be small, the relationships they help to develop, along with their appreciation for philanthropy, are critical in building a culture of philanthropic support within the academic unit.

Final thoughts

When I've discussed fundraising with faculty members, many have expressed to me that these efforts are somehow demeaning to them and not welcomed by prospective donors. In my experience, donors who have trusting relationships with the institution and understand the needs of the academic unit will see their gifts' impact and do not feel awkward when included in fundraising efforts. Rather, when their passion for an initiative is cultivated, donors will seek out ways to provide financial support. Including them in the process and being receptive to their interests helps to fulfill your financial need while satisfying their philanthropic preferences.

This article first appeared in Academic Leader on February 3, 2020.

How Diversity Can Drive Innovation

By Dame Madeleine Atkins

Diversity and inclusion have risen to the top of the agenda for colleges and universities in recent years, following high-profile protests and a demand for representation based on protected characteristics and income level. While many institutions of higher education have made great strides in reviewing curricula and increasing the head count of underrepresented faculty, some are still considering how best to weave diversity, equity, and inclusion fairly into the fabric of their student body. It's happening, but it needs to happen more quickly and as part of a concerted strategy.

To truly diversify, universities across the world must work together to attract and nurture overlooked talent, reaching out to students from marginalized rural and urban communities. When we step back and note that tomorrow's leaders can be discovered outside recruiters' traditional criteria, we find that this is the smartest investment that we can make to solve some of the most critical problems facing our world. These young people represent human talent that cannot be disregarded, and these students will pay dividends to society far in excess of the cost of their education.

Because of their background, these students often possess a special sensitivity, sensibility, and passion to make a difference. Typically, these students are highly motivated and have a strong desire to take on the social, environmental, and health-related challenges facing humankind using creative perspectives drawn from life experiences directly linked to the circumstances and communities in which they have been raised.

The US, through its size and diversity, is in a leading position to unearth this bountiful raw talent and bring these students' gritty determination and innovative insights to bear on many global problems whose solutions might otherwise elude us. And as so many of today's challenges cross traditional geographic boundaries, this is especially important. We need a plurality of perspectives drawn from many different socioeconomic contexts if we are to find, test, and implement the enduring solutions we need.

Throughout its history, as a constituent of the University of Cambridge, Lucy Cavendish College has been dedicated to attracting and then unlocking the potential of exceptional students from underserved communities. There are many universities and colleges in the US from which we are gratefully learning and with whom we are keen to share experiences.

Ensuring success

At Lucy Cavendish College, we take a bold stance when it comes to admissions. We admit a majority of our undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and our priority is now also to increase our number of international students from underrepresented communities and countries. Our doors are open wide to students who exhibit leadership traits, determination, and an enterprising mindset and who are eager to contribute to the future of the organizations of which they will become a part. We do not lower grade requirements for those applicants coming from disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds, nor do we think it beneficial to do so solely to increase diversity. We think it is important that all students know they are accepted based on their high level of academic potential and that no one is given a less demanding, "backdoor" entry. We find this helps to dispel anxieties about imposter syndrome.

At the college, however, we do go the extra mile to help potential students succeed. For instance, we make available online programs to promising students in the last two years of high school to help raise their academic attainment so they can meet the high, standard-entry requirements of Cambridge University.

Once they arrive, all our students participate in three support programs: an academic skills program, a careers and enterprise program, and a well-being program. These are designed to ensure that they reach their full academic potential, graduate into the jobs to which they rightly aspire, and lead a well-balanced and fulfilled life on campus during their studies. Philanthropic funding also supports a detailed, online, onboarding program and the provision of the essential books on summer reading lists before their first term starts.

A completely free in-person "bridging week" is also offered before the first week of their first term to ensure that first-year students and new graduate students have the best possible start to their time in college and thrive in the university from the get-go. Bridging weeks help new students to orient themselves in their new context, and to socialize so they can start forming their friendship and support groups. But the primary aim is to introduce them to the academic rigors of study at Cambridge.

So they meet their directors of studies, who will oversee their academic program, and their tutor, who will support their well-being. They visit their departments, where they're going to be having their main lectures, and the labs and specialist libraries they will need to use. We demystify some of the processes and language used in Cambridge so that it doesn't feel alien: *matriculation, general admission, formal hall, bops,* and *bumps*.

PAGE 8 ➡

DIVERSITY FROM PAGE 7

That way, before the term starts and the academic work is underway at an intense pace, they have an opportunity really to get to know the campus, the people that are in their cohort and with whom they'll be living, and the team of people in the college who can support them in whether to set up a bank account or buy a secondhand bicycle or indeed answer any queries they may have. We try to make the initial experience as practical and fun as it is academic.

When we started it, we were the only college to do a bridging week, and now other colleges are realizing this is a good thing to do and have started implementing the same. It's a positive trend that means students will have a solid start to success.

Extending interdisciplinary learning

Many colleges and universities are today intent on providing an interdisciplinary education to ensure that their graduates meet the needs of employers and can address the tough, important issues facing humankind and the planet. But it is important to help students make the connections between the different disciplines to which they are exposed. In our integrative model, the knowledge and pedagogies from multiple disciplines are brought together within the context of a "living-and-learning" environment. The college puts undergraduate students into "households" that consist of students taking different courses. This is an informal arrangement that encourages the development of friendships, a better understanding of different areas of study, and professional networking across disciplines.

Students who are studying at the master's or doctoral level understand that we particularly welcome graduates who are taking interdisciplinary courses focused on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The college uses interdisciplinary achievement as a criterion in selecting its postdoctoral members and its research fellows. Here, we look for ethical decision making, critical thinking, and the ability to apply knowledge in complex, multidimensional, and multidisciplinary settings.

Learning doesn't stop after graduation

After graduation, we believe it is very important to keep in touch with these alumni. Alumni engagement encourages the free flow of information about college news and acts to expand volunteer leadership positions. Alumni are then better able to fulfil critical roles as mentors and can be the source of internships and work-shadowing opportunities for current students from similar backgrounds. It is important to build these relationships and partnerships as they help students to identify the pathways they too might take upon graduation.

Our alumni also support fundraising programs for students in need. They contribute to ensure that students make the most of their time at Cambridge while keeping avenues to professional networks up to date.

For more than five decades, our global alumni have returned to their home countries to serve in business, health, the public sector, and not-for-profits where they have earned well-deserved accolades for innovative leadership. Others have risen to prominence in international organisations such as the UN or have become successful entrepreneurs.

Why it matters

All institutions of higher education must look beyond those who simply meet the traditional academic and financial requirements of acceptance. It is not enough to hope that these students alone will find the answers to the increasingly daunting problems facing humankind. We have an obligation to help highly motivated, academically qualified young people from low-income, often marginalized communities to acquire the theoretical knowledge and the practical and problem-solving skills they need to make meaningful contributions to society. And exchanging ideas and experiences on how best to identify and support such students, whether they study in the US or the UK, enriches the formal and informal curricula for all students.

This article first appeared in *Academic Leader* on July 5, 2022.

Fostering a Culture of Wellbeing to Prevent Faculty Burnout

By Nancy Mann Jackson

In 2018, Rebecca Pope-Ruark, PhD, was an English professor at Elon University. Although she'd authored a book about faculty productivity, she found herself unable to concentrate on anything and unable to shake feelings of fatigue—with no explanation. The job she'd always loved had begun to feel exhausting and overwhelming. When she finally saw a therapist, she was surprised by the diagnosis: a severe case of burnout.

The World Health Organization classifies burnout as a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed. It is characterized by three dimensions:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job
- reduced professional efficacy

As Pope-Ruark worked to recover, she took a medical leave and later, a new job. Along the way, she spent time researching burnout and engaging in conversations about the topic with others across higher education.

Clearly, Pope-Ruark realized she was not alone. Faculty burnout was a widespread problem, and it has become increasingly prevalent through the pandemic and its aftermath. As institutions begin recognizing this problem, growing numbers are interested in learning what they can do to better support faculty wellbeing and help prevent burnout.

Higher ed culture can drive burnout

Today, as director of the Office of Faculty Professional Development at Georgia Institute of Technology and author of *Unraveling Faculty Burnout: Pathways to Reckoning and Renewal* (JHU Press, 2022), Pope-Ruark works to help leaders in higher education recognize and transform the cultural constructs that contribute to stress for many faculty members.

"The pandemic pushed a lot of us over the edge for various reasons, but higher education, especially in the past 20 to 30 years, is a high-stress environment," says Pope-Ruark, who now says that "there are fewer tenure-track positions than ever before, expectations are high, and there's distrust from government and the public. It's an environment of stress and constant judgment, and if faculty members take a step back, they fall behind in their competitive environment."

Not only is higher education a highly competitive environment, but in recent years, faculty members have seen their roles change, says Gretchen Oltman, JD, PhD, associate professor and director, Master of Science in Organizational Leadership, at Creighton University, who researches and publishes on leadership and wellbeing with Vicki Bautista, EdD, NBC-HWC, assistant professor of Family and Community Medicine at the Creighton University School of Medicine.

For example, faculty members have become the first points of contact for students, which has not traditionally been the case.

In addition, faculty members are increasingly asked to take on additional tasks after co-workers leave or in response to changing procedures and policies. This "job creep" means that in an effort to support students, over time, faculty members sometimes forfeit their own mental health, Bautista says.

Burnout affects faculty, students, and institutions

Clearly, suffering from burnout negatively affects the individual faculty member on both a personal and professional level. However, plenty of anecdotal evidence suggests burnout also negatively affects students and institutions.

"When faculty are too exhausted to give their best, they become cynical and just can't function well in that environment and can't always offer students what they need in that environment," Pope-Ruark says. "It's really difficult to do your best for your students and do the best research you can do. When you're burned out, you're not being as supportive as you could be for students and colleagues, and it can cause physical and mental health problems."

Symptoms of burnout include apathy and disconnection from your job, Oltman adds. When a faculty member is disconnected, their communications become "less thoughtful, more pointed and direct," she says. "And your relationships with colleagues suffer, as you're less able to support each other."

Over time, burnout can lead to financial strain on the institution, as students become dissatisfied with their experiences and employee turnover increases, as faculty members grow weary of taking up slack for those who are unable to perform at their best.

Voluntary turnover for higher education staff has increased significantly over the past five years, according to a recent study by the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR). CUPA-HR's survey

PAGE 10 ➡

FOSTERING FROM PAGE 9

showed that the reasons for increasing turnover in higher education included being overworked, getting underpaid, and failing to receive the remote work opportunities they wanted.

Institutions can make a difference

In the past, mental health and wellbeing has been an individual issue, and organizations have expected individuals to figure out how to deal with issues on their own. However, the WHO definition of burnout is focused on the climate of the workplace.

Research by Bautista, Oltman, and Pope-Ruark shows that higher education institutions and their leaders can take actions to improve faculty wellbeing and reduce stress leading to burnout. “People are leaving for lack of pay, lack of time, more flexible opportunities elsewhere,” Bautista says. “But we can create a robust, flexible work environment if we realize that people need recognition, clarity, flexibility, and feedback.”

Institutions can start by taking six important steps toward better supporting faculty wellbeing.

1. Provide training for leaders.

Deans and administrators often earn their positions through subject matter expertise without any leadership experience or training. One department chair Bautista and Oltman interviewed said he got his position because he was the only one who answered the phone when the dean called around to find someone to take the role.

“Someone might take the job because they love the department, but if they’re not trained in leading, they’ll have difficulty leading,” Bautista says. “It’s important to provide training and support for leaders.”

In her current role at Georgia Tech, Pope-Ruark provides training for department chairs and associate deans to help them recognize faculty who may need extra support and learn about mental health resources to which they can refer faculty. “Leaders can go a long way toward recognizing that faculty members are going through something,” she says. “We’ve all experienced this collective trauma in recent years, and the best leaders are looking for ways to support professional development and give people a safe place to talk about their wellbeing and stress management. It should go beyond the EAP newsletter.”

2. Clarify job expectations.

Because new strategic plans or programs are frequently introduced, it’s common to expect change in higher education, Oltman says. But there’s often little clarity about what is expected from that change.

“We need to protect job clarity,” she says. “Know who’s doing what tasks and set realistic expectations about what can be done. Leaders need to be involved in setting expectations, by explaining, ‘This is where we’re headed, now how do we get there together.’”

3. Establish performance standards.

The expectation of always being the best is a hallmark of higher education culture. “We don’t give people a standard of what’s good enough,” Pope-Ruark says.

Feeling constantly pushed to be the best, with no real recovery time, is a recipe for burnout. Rather than adding stress by leaving expectations unclear, Pope-Ruark recommends that faculty leaders establish clear standards of acceptable performance—and communicate them to faculty.

4. Create a pattern of communication.

Strong leaders set a pattern to regularly communicate important, relevant information to their teams, Oltman says. It could be a weekly email or a weekly meeting, for example, it just needs to be a pattern that people can expect.

And if it’s not going to happen one week, communicate that as well so people won’t feel like they’re in the dark, Bautista adds.

5. Pursue regular, one-on-one conversations with faculty members.

When there’s a problem on campus or in the higher education industry, the typical response is often to roll out a big program to address it. But the most effective approach to tackle burnout and faculty wellbeing is not a subscription-based program or a big event. “Over the long term, those big programs don’t have a lot of impact,” Bautista says. “What makes a difference is institutional leaders having conversations, listening, and being willing to do what they can for their people.”

Faculty leaders should set up regular, one-on-one meetings with each team member to ask questions and try to really understand the employee’s perspective, Bautista says. Ask: What’s your typical day like? What is your current workload like? How is work going? How are you feeling?

Building trust for long-term success

“The #1 priority should be building relationships of trust, establishing clear communications, and setting reasonable expectations,” Bautista says.

One of the key reasons for burnout in higher education is a lack of trust in leadership, Oltman says. “We’re seeing more leaders asking how they can improve and build back trust,” she says. “Being open and honest seems to help with buy-in. Trust can alleviate a lot of stress.”

One of the key reasons for burnout in higher education is a lack of trust in leadership, Oltman says. “We’re seeing more leaders asking how they can improve and build back trust,” she says. “Being open and honest seems to help with buy-in. Trust can alleviate a lot of stress.”

Reflections on Becoming a Department Chair

By Yuma Iannotti Tomes

Michelle Obama's best-selling book, *Becoming*, offers a glimpse into her life becoming not only the first lady of the United States but also, and more importantly, a strong African American woman. The former first lady offered a heroine's account of leadership, divided into three sections: becoming me, becoming us, and becoming more (Obama, 2018). Much like Michelle Obama, a department chair evolves in stages from individualism to collectivism as they transition from being faculty to pseudo-administration. It would be nice if someone had shared with me a book on "becoming" a department chair. Whether becoming a first-time chair or a slightly seasoned department leader, you are armed with only peripheral leadership experience to address a variety of constituents and audiences, who believe you are the panacea.

In a recent meeting with academic chairs at my university, the president shared that department chairs and the provost have the most challenging positions on a university campus. I believe it. Here are a few nuggets of information I wished someone would have shared with me on becoming a new department chair.

Fundamentally, it is important for the chair to establish a collegial environment in which all department members feel valued, respected, and invested in the shared governance of the department. There are skill sets that one refines when evolving from a first-year chair into a well-respected leader. Starting slowly as a new chair, especially when coming from a different university, is critical. Any experienced chair would likely share it's important to understand the landscape (faculty, department, etc.) before trying to change it (or slightly improve it). Closely aligned with starting slow is to walk around the department several times per week so that you are visible, accessible, and able to connect with faculty, students, and janitors. Not only does this assist in taking the pulse of the department, but it helps to demystify the hierarchy of a chair's position. Further, I found that when I met with faculty in their offices instead of in mine, they were more relaxed and eager to share information.

Managing

Department chairs are frontline managers serving more than one constituency, a fact that requires chairs to assume multiple roles (Hecht et al., 1999). Additionally, being the primary spokespersons for their departments, chairs must carry out campus policies, build trust between faculty and administration, interpret and present information from central administration, manage a budget, and teach classes, among other duties. Faculty in a department look to the chair to set the tone. During a pandemic, when faculty are isolated from students, relegated to home offices, and conduct learning experiences virtually, department morale may dip. Creating and setting an upbeat tone helps to minimize gloom and misery. Emphasizing the positive when available and managing negative dialogues establishes a good example. Even with all these leadership responsibilities, the chair's paradoxical role seldom is given the scepter of undisputed authority since they are always answering to superiors or subordinates. Further, department chairs are the sole managers living with their decisions daily. A chair must be organized and present a cohesive message through their managing style. Although everything is new in your first year, afterward you face the same tasks and deadlines every year (minus a pandemic). Important matters, such as approving time sheets, completing faculty evaluations, working through tenure and promotion issues, cannot wait. Simply explained, the chair is a manager who is managed, a leader who is led, and a boss who continually strives to keep peace for the sake of mutual benefit and progress.

Administration talks a lot about transparency, but followers at times struggle to see where they are going. It is critical for the success of a chair that they inform faculty about the decision-making process if not illustrate it. Most faculty members do not manage surprises well, especially when they are dropped at a department meeting unexpectedly. Clearly presenting challenges, the department faces opportunities for faculty to chime in minimizes their anxieties and hopefully encourages buy-in to future decisions. Moreover, asking faculty to participate in the governing process by soliciting agenda items for department meetings underscores that their issues will be addressed in a meaningful way. A chair should do everything in their power to help new faculty members. Over and above these details, and the obvious role of being the first resource for the vast array of questions any new person has, the most important thing you can do for the new person is to make them feel welcome as an integral member of the department and to convey to them that you want

PAGE 12 ➡

BECOMING FROM PAGE 12

very much for them to succeed. Further, I strongly suggest you keep this welcoming attitude in mind when setting up the course schedule for a person's first year, which will happen before they arrive on campus. Help ensure their success by giving them, as much as possible, courses they'll feel comfortable with. Perhaps there's a popular introductory course that can be offered twice in the year to cut back on new preparations. If there's something they need to teach that will be a huge stretch for them, see if it can be held off until the second year.

Becoming vulnerable

Being vulnerable is not easy; however, it is necessary in becoming a department chair. Whether you are leading a department of 10 or 60, followers will want to know their leader is being as reasonable as possible. This does not mean tossing your laurels aside but embracing the courage to open up to another human and share what's pressing from the inside. In doing so, you as a chair become open to experiences, people, and uncertainty. Yes, it may be terrifying at times, but it's always brave. One of the first steps I learned about being vulnerable was to accept that "I'm worthy." More specifically, if I'm vulnerable, I believe I'm worthy to receive respect.

Celebrating successes

Amid the current pandemics of COVID-19 and racial injustice, a chair's mind may understandably be elsewhere than acknowledging faculty accomplishments. But it is during these stressful times that faculty should be celebrated. For chairs, juggling public health issues, academic concerns, and national unrest is demanding; however, faculty are having to engage students with their own vulnerabilities and concerns on a daily basis. The mental health of faculty has become a national issue in the academe. Despite these challenges, faculty have persevered and earned tenure, secured promotion, published scholarship, or even celebrated a family member's graduation, which should be spotlighted in the department (Whitaker, 2020). The ability to manage life's difficulties during this time while performing at exceptional levels deserves every accolade. Right now, more than ever, we must be grateful for one another.

Working through difficult conversations

The "difficult" in difficult conversations is an understatement when having to engage in a difficult conversation. Avoiding tough conversations won't make problems go away but may actually make them worse. For chairs, it is important to evaluate the scope of the problem and then investigate the facts. This initial process helps to determine whether there are outside or mitigating factors. In delivering news that others may not receive well, it is important to plan your conversation carefully considering time and place and address behavioral or performance issues in a private setting. To remain focused on the issues and not the emotions, jot down notes about what you want to say (or possibly

PAGE 13 ➡

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BECOMING FROM PAGE 13

consult with human resources). During the meeting, be specific and factual with evidence of the behavior or performance issue. Using "I" phrases to deliver information may positively change how the message is received. Always end the meeting by agreeing to work together to create a resolution.

Saying no

Understanding the power of "no," whether you are saying it or hearing it, is a constant with becoming a chair. While college campuses are idea factories, not every idea is practical or worth pursuing. Faculty will bring you excellent proposals that you as chair would like to support, but unfortunately the timing is not conducive in the current department climate, and you begrudgingly have to say no. (For instance, a faculty member might want to start a new major based on repeated student interests, but the plan would require several new faculty lines, which would be extremely difficulty for the dean to sign off on.) Likewise, when you champion initiatives to the dean on behalf of your department(s), they will sometimes say no to you. While most chairs move into leadership responsibilities to solve problems for aggregates, being turned down for something you care about can deflate your ego and erode your spirit. In defeat as in victory, tone and manner matter (Perlmutter, 2020).

Demonstrating loyalty

Shifting from loyalty to one's discipline to loyalty to a college and university requires effort. As a chair, you represent the university's perspective and interest. It is important to recognize that you will make some difficult, if not downright uncomfortable decisions, such as sacrificing a degree program for institutional solvency. In situations like these, the chair may quickly become unpopular or seen as an elitist by some department faculty, especially if the discipline removed is not their own. Inaccurate judgments and falsehoods from the eliminated program's faculty may be made about the chair. Individuals who attempt to remain loyal to the discipline may become liabilities to the institution and undermine their department's standing on campus. It is important that the chair remains transparent in the decision-making and attempts to engage faculty at each step to prevent department mutiny.

Conclusion

A chair's role is complex and requires skills to serve and coordinate multiple constituencies. As universities and colleges are forced to respond to external pressures for productivity and accountability, they will rely heavily on department chairs to manage faculty and lead change. "Despite the anomalous quality of the position, chairs have immense potential to affect the future of their institutions and higher education in general" (Hecht et al., 1999, p. 15). While being in a management position is always challenging, fulfilling the position requirements during a pandemic is truly daunting. Balancing the work demands of the institution with the human needs for compassion and self-care is a juggling act that at times will seem impossible and unfair. But for those interested in affecting the future of their colleagues in a meaningful way, there may be no more important position that that of department chair. As Michelle Obama emphasizes in her book, becoming is not about arriving somewhere or just achieving a certain aim; instead it is defined by forward motion in an effort to better one's self. Likewise, a department chair evolves from being a faculty member to a leader of faculty, which is done through managing and using the collective intelligence of the department to solve problems. Your actions as a new chair or experienced one, is not about the final destination, but the journey of your leadership to continuously move toward creating the master plan for the department.

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This article first appeared in *Academic Leader* on November 2, 2020.