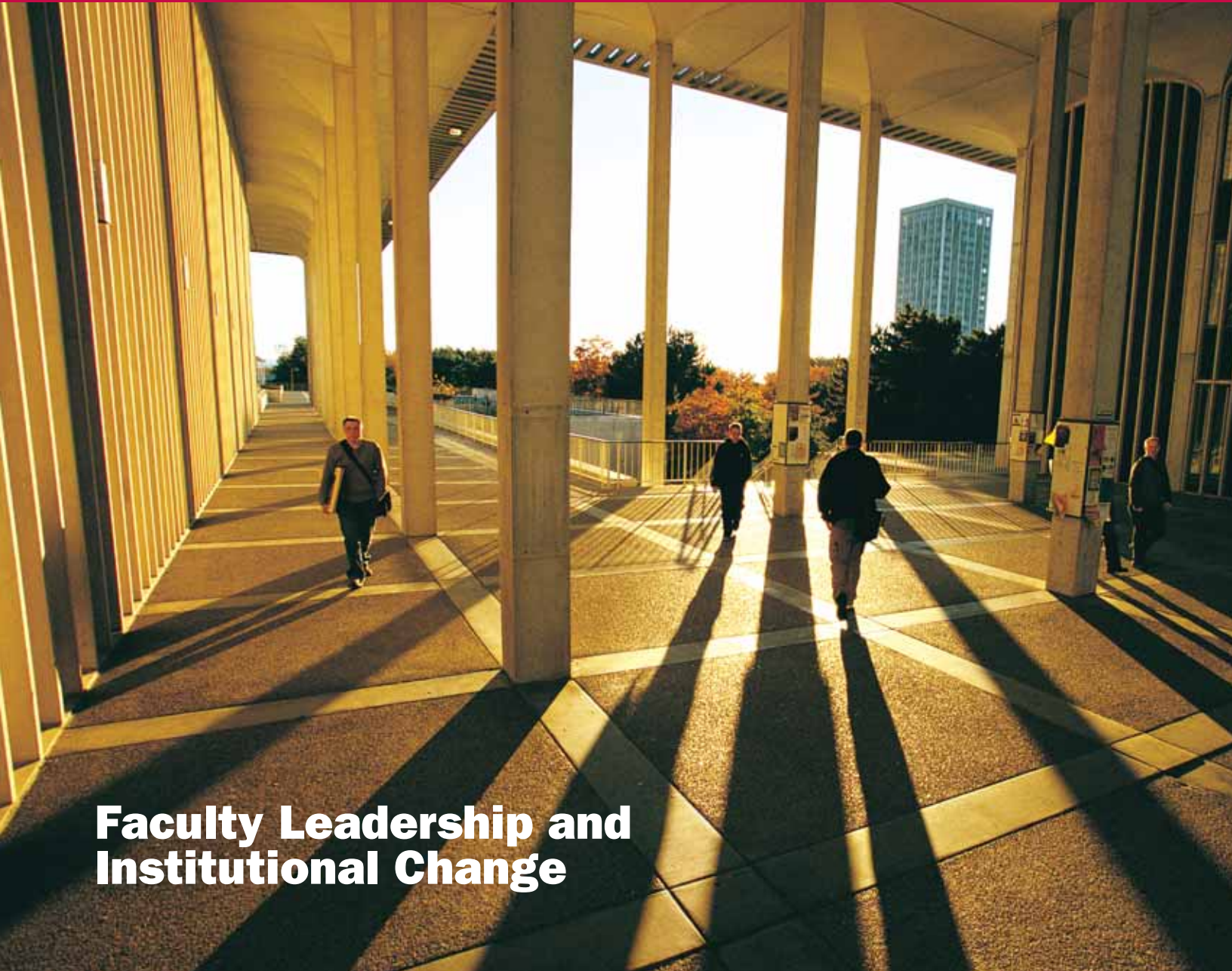


# Liberal Education

ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES



## Faculty Leadership and Institutional Change

**Faculty Responsibility for the Educational Program** page 6

**Where Are the Faculty Leaders?** page 14

**The Dynamics of Organization in Higher Education** page 22

**ALSO INSIDE:**

**Public Health and the Future of Undergraduate Education** page 32

**Why Teacher-Scholars Matter** page 40

**Death to the Syllabus!** page 52



ADRIANNA KEZAR, JAIME LESTER,  
ROZANA CARDUCCI, TRICIA BERTRAM GALLANT,  
AND MELISSA CONTRERAS MCGAVIN

# Where Are the Faculty Leaders?

FEATURED TOPIC

**The challenges to faculty leadership are significant, but they are not insurmountable**

FACULTY MEMBERS who work directly to advance the institutional mission of teaching, learning, and at some institutions, research, represent the core human resource of higher education. They are the stewards of campus leadership and decision making. While the faculty role has changed over time, leadership has remained critical to innovation in teaching, advances in knowledge, and alteration to many campus policies and practices. But as several recent publications attest, this leadership role is threatened by a number of current trends. Most notably, Schuster and Finklestein (2006) decry the rise in part-time and non-tenure-track appointments, increasing standards for tenure and promotion, the rise of academic capitalism, and heavy service roles for women and people of color. Wergin (2007) argues that these new factors further hinder faculty leadership by adding to the challenges posed by the faculty socialization process and the tenure system.

“Academic capitalism” refers to the growing trend whereby individual faculty members derive supplementary income from grants and outside contracts. This trend increases faculty autonomy and leads to the partial privatization

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of faculty work and research (Fairweather 1996; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). While it is more prevalent in the sciences and in research universities, this trend is present in various disciplines and across all institutional sectors. Increasingly, new faculty members are being socialized to view involvement in external activities as more important than campus involvement.

At most institutions—excepting community colleges and some liberal arts institutions—far greater weight is placed on publication than on virtually any other criteria used to make tenure and promotion decisions. The current publication standards for tenure are more than triple what they were in the 1970s (Schuster and Finkelstein 2006). Service and leadership are being given short shrift, and assistant and associate level faculty members are being encouraged to focus exclusively on publication.

The sharp rise in the number of part-time and non-tenure-track appointments also negatively affects faculty leadership. Faculty in these non-traditional appointments often have other full-time jobs, may work at several different universities, are generally not compensated for service or governance—and, indeed, are often actively excluded from these processes (Schuster and Finkelstein 2006). For these reasons, it is difficult for these faculty members to become invested and involved in campus-specific issues and organizational leadership. Less than half of today’s faculty hold tenure-track appointments, and the majority are not expected to undertake leadership roles; the long-term impact on higher education is certain to be dramatic.

The tenure system itself negatively affects faculty leadership in the early years. Tenure-track faculty may exercise leadership before they are awarded tenure, but they do so at great



# Strategies and Advice for Reversing Current Trends



peril. They are often afraid to discuss their work, and they have to create partnerships with senior faculty in order to evade resistance and create protection. The lack of participation in leadership activities during the pre-tenure years may inhibit faculty participation later, as these faculty members will not have formed the habits or developed the skills. Faculty socialization also tends not to facilitate leadership development. In graduate school, students work independently in the library or the laboratory. After years of training and working independently and autonomously, faculty may find it difficult to engage in the types of activities that are required of grassroots leaders, such as creating a vision, developing networks, and organizing multiple people.

The challenges to faculty leadership posed by these trends are significant, but they are not insurmountable. Recently, we conducted a study of bottom-up faculty leadership across all sectors of higher education. We interviewed approximately seventy-five faculty members at institutions that do not have national reputations for faculty activism, but where faculty members play significant leadership roles. The

### The value of role models and mentors cannot be underestimated

purpose was to learn about the kinds of environments that foster faculty leadership, especially in the face of the often daunting threats to bottom-up or grassroots leadership. The results demonstrate that certain campus practices and policies can reverse or slow the trends impeding faculty leadership.

#### Supportive individuals

Almost every successful faculty leader who participated in our study mentioned a supportive department chair, senior faculty member, or administrator who had worked with them to understand their scholarly interests as well as their leadership potential. This supportive individual is more than a mentor; he or she is someone who can actually change working conditions to support faculty leadership. These supporters meet with faculty on an annual basis to help them think about and plan their future careers, and they also occasionally meet informally to check in and offer support. A host of practices is available to the department chair who seeks to help faculty play a leadership role. These practices include legitimizing activities through public acknowledgement; providing resources, including course releases or credit for service; and acting as an institutional advocate.

Supportive department chairs are uncommon, however. Chairs are often overwhelmed by bureaucracy, untrained for the role, apathetically waiting out their rotations, lacking in sensitivity, or have forgotten what it was like to be an early career faculty member. Thus, faculty must look to other supportive figures if their department chairs cannot, or choose not to, play this role. Institutions need to examine the structures that inhibit department chairs from playing a role in fostering faculty members as organizational citizens, and to consider the guidance and priorities provided to chairs.

#### Leadership as service

One of the key strategies for assisting faculty in pursuing leadership opportunities is to find ways for leadership to count as institutional service. In the pre-tenure years, it would be extremely difficult to both exercise leadership for organizational change and meet service requirements by serving on assigned committees. In the course of our study, we repeatedly heard stories of department chairs or deans who



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found ways to count leadership toward tenure and promotion requirements. While substituting leadership for service seems intuitive, department chairs often went further; some substituted leadership for teaching. In the end, such creative solutions for fostering faculty leadership help the institution as well as the individual faculty member and address some of the challenges posed by the tenure system.

### **Collegiality and campus networks**

Another way administrators can help foster faculty leadership is by creating connections among people. Some centers for teaching and learning offer symposia and workshops, and some colleges provide money for faculty to organize events and bring in outside speakers. The faculty professional development center at one of the institutions in our study, for example, sponsors faculty learning communities to cultivate faculty networks and promote collaboration on different themes each year (e.g., teaching and learning with technology, civic engagement, or creating a learning-centered campus). Faculty selected for participation in the program meet several times throughout the academic year to discuss the topic and to identify relevant individual and collaborative projects. They receive funding to travel to conferences related to the learning community theme, and they present their projects to the campus community at an end-of-the-year forum.

Administrators tend to rely on the same few faculty members within a small network, however. This is a convenient strategy, but it burdens a particular set of individuals. Instead, network building needs to be ongoing and involve new people. Another way to create connections is by building faculty offices near each other and creating common spaces on campus where people can meet.

### **Dysfunctional departments**

A sense of community within departments can lead to innovation and ongoing change, but some departments are dysfunctional. One faculty member in chemistry described the creation of a series of new courses to help women and people of color succeed in introductory courses. Because many students were not succeeding well enough in math to major in science, mathematics faculty also joined the effort. Establishing these types of curricular changes is not easy; a similar effort in biology and physics

had failed because of personal and territorial issues. Too often, administrators (and other faculty members) hesitate to address dysfunctional interpersonal dynamics within departments. In such cases, collective leadership to improve the teaching and learning environment is unlikely to develop.

Faculty members are more likely to undertake leadership roles if they feel they can be effective. Since time is limited by the pressures to publish, secure grants, and so on, faculty appreciate administrators who help address dysfunctional dynamics rather than ignore them. This can be accomplished by bringing in mediators, moving faculty to different departments, splitting or restructuring departments, setting up systems of accountability for the department, and reassigning people in positions of authority.

### **Role models and mentors**

Because faculty are generally not socialized to be effective leaders of institutional change, role models and mentors can serve a pivotal role in helping foster leadership. On campuses with a great deal of faculty leadership, senior faculty provide informal mentoring to new faculty, teaching them political skills as well as strategies and tactics that are effective on their particular campus. They also teach or model ways to overcome resistance and obstacles.

Some campuses establish formal networks that include a mentoring function—groups for women faculty in the sciences, for example, or groups for faculty of color, gay and lesbian faculty, faculty committed to sustainability, etc. In addition, by ensuring that professional development opportunities include both senior and junior faculty, campuses can maximize opportunities for cross-generational mentoring and contact.

The value of role models and mentors cannot be underestimated. Mentoring often emerges organically, but there must already be significant faculty leadership on campus for this to happen. On campuses where there is little faculty leadership, it may be helpful to bring in leadership training coaches. This strategy is especially important when faculty have not been socialized to learn leadership skills.

### **Openness to questioning**

Many faculty members fear being labeled as troublemakers, which can affect their tenure and promotion—or, for contract faculty, their

continued employment. For this reason, faculty leadership is much more likely on campuses where questioning is encouraged. To determine whether their campuses are truly open to questioning, faculty look for indicators such as the way administrators respond to student requests and community concerns.

In order to create an environment where questioning is regarded as healthy, administrators should positively acknowledge activist efforts that occur both inside and outside the institution. They should view activism as engagement in leadership, be open to addressing concerns, and ask for input and feedback on an ongoing basis.

#### **Autonomy and flexibility**

Faculty leadership is unlikely to occur on campuses where faculty roles are tightly prescribed and where there is little freedom. While this might be more typical in a unionized environment, we did find unionized campuses with the autonomy and flexibility that allow faculty leadership to flourish. On campuses where faculty are expected to serve on a certain number of committees, bring in a certain number of grants, teach a heavy load of courses, or participate in specific meetings, the ability of faculty members to pursue leadership in an area they care about is limited.

#### **Inclusion of non-tenure-track faculty**

Contracts for non-tenure-track faculty usually address teaching only. When service is mentioned at all, very little detail is provided. As a result, faculty are unclear about how to meet the service requirement and whether leadership will count. Typically, non-tenure-track faculty receive little mentoring, little substantive feedback, and no annual reviews (Baldwin and Chronister 2002). Capitalizing on the leadership potential of this very large and growing population requires more specific guidelines, policies, and amended practices for their inclusion.

First, faculty contracts need to be altered to include specific information about service and leadership. Second, non-tenure-track faculty should be included in faculty senates, on committees, in department meetings, and on other governing bodies. While some institutions may choose not to grant them equal voting rights—a choice we strongly discourage—it is important to ensure some form of meaningful

participation for non-tenure-track faculty. Non-tenure-track faculty members are often excluded from professional development opportunities where leadership is developed. This practice should be changed so that full faculty participation in professional development is actively encouraged.

#### **Advice from successful faculty leaders**

In addition to campus-level changes that facilitate faculty leadership, there are strategies individual faculty members can employ to help them succeed as leaders. Based on specific advice from the experienced faculty leaders in our study, we offer the following recommendations.

***Build a foundation of success and legitimacy.*** Assistant professors at research-oriented colleges and universities should build a publication record and become known as scholars before investing too much in institutional leadership efforts. At teaching-oriented institutions, faculty should focus on developing courses and obtaining strong student evaluations before branching out to pursue other issues they care about.

***Never lose your vision, and stay focused on your purpose.*** After building a foundation, faculty can and should pursue organizational change. Plenty of faculty come to an institution with hopes and dreams, but then lose sight of their vision while busily working on publications or teaching. We recommend that faculty write down the issues they care about and, every six months, remind themselves of their purpose.

***Create networks of support early on.*** One of the most important facilitators of faculty leadership is a network of like-minded people. Not only does the group help remind faculty of their purpose, but it also becomes a source of support and resiliency over the course of a career. If it involves senior faculty, this same network can also help individual members get tenure. There are many types of faculty networks, and successful faculty identify which types meet their specific leadership needs. Some join formal networks such as unions, faculty affinity groups, structured professional development opportunities, or learning communities; others joined informal, self-initiated networks that offer support and feedback during tough times.

***Seek out mentors and role models.*** Mentors can help newer faculty understand the culture of the campus and learn how change happens—through students, through shared governance,

through key influential people, etc. Successful change strategies vary by campus, so learning the ropes from experienced individuals who have already created change helps faculty avoid failure, running into roadblocks, and becoming paralyzed by obstacles.

**Build leadership skills off campus.** Trying to exercise leadership on campus can be extremely dangerous, particularly for pre-tenure faculty. A failed leadership effort might make people question your competence and abilities. Successful faculty leaders often test their wings first in environments where the stakes are lower, and then try to lead an effort on campus once they are more confident.

**Non-tenure-track faculty should be included in faculty senates, on committees, in department meetings, and on other governing bodies**

One effective strategy is to develop leadership skills through participation in community organizations, and then to apply these skills on campus.

**Get students involved.**

Connecting leadership to teaching and work with students is not only meaningful, but it also expands faculty networks. Students are a great source of energy and enthusiasm and can often provide support for a leadership initiative. Also, because students are a key constituency, raising awareness among students is a key strategy for creating change.

At one campus we studied, for example, students in a course on environmentalism and sustainability examined ways their institution



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could become more green and sustainable. The student recommendations were forwarded to the provost and president and used to develop a new campus policy. Many faculty members discuss issues of concern with students in their courses, and some offer extra credit assignments to attend relevant campus events or forums that provide a means to foster student support and engagement. Some encourage students to write their doctoral dissertations or master's theses on topics related to campus change.

**Try to reach the ideal of bottom-up/top-down leadership.** Faculty leaders are far more successful when their efforts are supported or adopted by the administration. This ideal combination of bottom-up and top-down leadership does not happen very often, but when it does, it is powerful. It can be difficult to predict, however, so faculty need to be open to opportunities as they arise. A new board of trustees might champion environmentalism, for example; a new president might make diversity the top agenda item, or new faculty hires might create opportunities for greater interdisciplinary work in grant-funded areas that the administration is interested in fostering. While some faculty may be

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offended when the administration “steals their ideas,” successful faculty leaders view this as a compliment rather than a threat. It is possible that the administration may co-opt an idea and temper or change its intent, but faculty should be open to top-down

support for their grassroots leadership.

In addition, many faculty members try to influence top-down leadership efforts. At one campus that had an ongoing diversity effort, for example, several faculty members felt that the efforts to recruit faculty of color were unsuccessful. This group of faculty worked to get leaders from their group onto relevant committees so that they could influence the process and change the administration's strategy. Bottom-up leaders created a place for themselves among the top-down leaders, and in the end, this strategy helped actually meet the goal of increasing faculty diversity.

**Don't fear the work, and don't make it a second job.** For many faculty members, the fear of losing their jobs hampers them from undertaking leadership roles. If they follow the advice given in this article, however, they have little to fear. In addition, faculty leaders need to integrate their leadership efforts into their jobs rather than adding activism as a second job. Savvy and experienced activists find ways to integrate activism into their teaching, service, or research so that there is a natural synergy and it does not become another job.

**Be willing to work behind the scenes.** Leadership efforts cannot always be out in the open. Many faculty members work behind the scenes with students who protest or take direct action. Faculty members might also tip off the newspaper, work informally with a community agency, or participate in an undisclosed network. Often, faculty feel called to participate in leadership efforts for which they cannot receive formal credit and of which most people are not aware. Leadership on controversial issues needs to be thought through carefully in the pre-tenure years. While some faculty members choose to participate less in “invisible” leadership until after tenure so that their pre-tenure efforts are credited, others make the opposite argument: participation behind the scenes protects faculty during the pre-tenure years.



Old Dominion  
University



**Avoid situations where administrators can or must pull rank.** For grassroots faculty leaders to survive, it is critical that they learn political skills and monitor the environment for resistance. Some faculty members simply cannot be bothered to understand the political environment. Some operate unprofessionally by going immediately outside institutional channels without ever trying to push issues through the shared governance process. These faculty are almost always unsuccessful at creating change, and they often suffer intimidation from administrators. So not only do they fail to meet their goals, but they also encounter a great deal of stress and sometimes even lose their jobs.

When faculty act in uncivil ways and ignore institutional processes, they jeopardize the issues they care about. The more successful faculty leaders act professionally and begin with formal channels. Administrators understand that faculty will seek other avenues if going through the formal channels does not work. But when these channels are not tried first, administrators regard it as a sign that a faculty member is unwilling to work with others who do not share his or her perspective.

**Discover what makes you resilient.** One of the most important pieces of advice offered by successful faculty leaders is to identify what helps make you resilient in the face of obstacles and resistance. Not all faculty leaders find themselves frustrated or impatient with the pace of change, but others have been working for many years on institutional change processes or have encountered great resistance. In these instances, faculty need to rely on coping mechanisms. There are a variety of activities that can help maintain resiliency, such as ensuring off-campus support (from family or community groups), attending conferences and getting time away from campus, establishing networks of like-minded people, maintaining enriching personal relationships, seeing the positive impact on students, or focusing on the underlying passion.

**Develop personal relationships as part of the leadership journey.** The most important lesson longtime faculty leaders learn concerns the significance of developing personal relationships. Although it takes a long time to develop and foster them, personal relationships ultimately make the most difference to change.

## Conclusion

On some campuses, the demise of faculty leadership may be greeted with a measure of relief. Administrators are now free to make decisions unhampered by pesky faculty questions and critique. The conditions that are coalescing right now provide more power for administrators and broaden their influence. So why would any college administrator try to facilitate and foster faculty leadership? That is the sixty-four-million-dollar question. The answer that emerges from our study is that faculty leadership is necessary for high-quality teaching, innovative curriculum, cutting-edge research, intellectual enrichment, student engagement, improved student outcomes, greater faculty citizenship, a more democratic environment, a campus more responsive to community needs, and other important outcomes.

It is easy to stereotype faculty leadership as merely a thorn in the side of administrators, but faculty leadership has a rich tradition that has helped create innovative and intellectually challenging environments. We are convinced that campuses, students, and learning environments will suffer if the current trends affecting faculty leadership are not addressed. We hope that courageous administrators will attempt to reverse these trends rather than take the convenient path of allowing current conditions to snuff out faculty voice and participation. □

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