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ADMINISTRATION

How to Cultivate Faculty Leaders

By Audrey Williams June | JANUARY 15, 2017

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Mark Abramson for The Chronicle

Brent Ruben (center), of Rutgers U.: "We have to start seeing academic leadership as part of the career trajectory for some people and not just a side venture."

As a junior faculty member, Ingrid S. Fulmer followed an age-old piece of career advice passed on by professors up the food chain: Steer clear of taking on the kinds of tasks that won't count toward tenure.

Ms. Fulmer served sparingly on departmental and institutional committees. She didn't take on part-time, but still labor-intensive, administrative roles, such as program or unit director or assistant department chair. Instead, she focused on producing research, publishing her work, and honing her teaching skills.

But what Ms. Fulmer realized later — after she did, in fact, earn tenure — was that those roles she had been warned against could be building blocks for another phase of her career.

How to Cultivate Faculty Leaders

To build pools of potential leaders, colleges are trying to change the negative ways administrative roles are viewed, and give faculty structured opportunities to learn behind the scenes.

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"After I got tenure, I knew I could kick back a little bit and think about, What do I want to do going forward?" says Ms. Fulmer, now an associate professor of human-resources management at Rutgers University at New Brunswick. "I was open to getting into administration. I really began warming up to preparing myself to take on leadership roles."

Ms. Fulmer, who has been at Rutgers since 2012, is now learning what it means to pursue a career path that is divergent from that of many professors. She's one of more than two dozen fellows in the Rutgers Leadership Academy, a two-year program for midcareer faculty and staff that began in the fall of 2015.

The participants, all identified as potential leaders for their department or college, or across the university as a whole, were nominated for the training mostly by deans and senior administrators, who then agree to be mentors for the people they put forward. During 18 classes — some in-person, some online, and

others a hybrid of the two — presenters cover topics that include navigating the challenges facing higher education, decision making, formal and informal leadership roles, accreditation, and answering to multiple stakeholders.

"It's been such an interesting opportunity to see how complex this place is to manage," says Ms. Fulmer, who thinks a stint as a department chair could be in her future. "And hearing leaders talk about how they got to where they are now, it shows you that you could do it too."



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Ingrid Fulmer is among 35 midcareer academics chosen for the Rutgers Leadership Academy.

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Rutgers joins a growing number of colleges that have created programs in recent years to cultivate institutional leaders, in most cases from among the faculty ranks. Ideally, such programs help demystify the path to becoming an academic leader while expanding the pipeline of future administrative talent that many institutions need. Growing their own leaders is one way for colleges to curb the frequency which with they must hire outsiders to fill openings for department chairs, deans, provosts, and other senior positions. Hires from within are already familiar with the culture of the institution and its mission and goals, which diminishes the learning curve often associated with such positions.

But encouraging professors to consider becoming administrators is often a tough sell.

Faculty members are used to working independently and pursuing their own priorities, and it can be hard to persuade them to shift to jobs focused on

managing other people's problems and working for the good of many. The reluctance to move into an administrative role is so entrenched in the faculty mind-set that it is often referred to as "going over to the dark side."

As more institutions look to build pools of potential leaders, experts say it's important to focus on changing the culture of leadership on campus to highlight the positive aspects of such roles. Faculty members also need early opportunities to gain behind-the-scenes information about institutional leadership, and the more structured that learning experience, the better.

At Rutgers and elsewhere, college leaders are well aware of the barriers they face.

"In other sectors, people look up to and aspire to leadership roles because they recognize that it's an incredible opportunity to influence decisions and develop certain skills," says Brent D. Ruben, executive director of the Rutgers Center for Organizational Development and Leadership and director of the leadership academy. "We have to start seeing academic leadership as part of the career trajectory for some people and not just a side venture that will delay their career advancement."

So how do colleges do that? First, they have to change the narrative about leadership and negative perceptions of administrative roles.

Making professors' first foray into leadership a better experience, including by preparing them better for those positions, would help. For many faculty members, their first leadership experience comes when they're tapped to be a department chair. It's a demanding role that some professors take on unwillingly and often with little or no training. It quickly becomes evident that the skills faculty members have used throughout their careers aren't the ones they need to run a department.

"The presumption is that people will learn on the job," Mr. Ruben says. "The learning curve is steep, and it's painful not only for the person learning the job but for their colleagues."

That kind of introduction to leadership, so common in academic circles, has fueled the perception among the faculty that administrative work should be shunned at all costs.

The way leadership development is framed can make the difference between professors brushing it off or buying in, says David Kiel, formerly a senior leadership consultant at the Center for Faculty Excellence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

"I tell faculty they have a unique perspective that needs to be represented wherever people are making decisions about the university," says Mr. Kiel, who has created multiple faculty leadership-development programs at Chapel Hill. "We want you to be leaders so you can promote core academic values."

That kind of appeal worked for Paula M. Lutz when she was a mid-career faculty member at what is now known as the Missouri University of Science and Technology. Ms. Lutz, who had served on and chaired many committees, was asked by her dean to be an associate dean and, at first, turned down the opportunity. She thought it would be too difficult to manage alongside her research as a biologist. But her department head at the time urged her to reconsider, arguing that she could help their department from her new post.

"He said, You'll be on the inside, and you'll be able to figure out how to get things done," says Ms. Lutz, now dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Wyoming. "And actually that turned out to be true. I saw how the more politically savvy departments managed things, and I was able to take that advice back to my department."

Ms. Lutz later became a department head — a position that gave her access to a new leadership-development program at her university in Missouri. Through that program Ms. Lutz saw that she had good ideas. "It gave me the encouragement to think maybe I could continue up the line," says Lutz, who also became a dean at the Missouri institution. "It was probably a turning point."

The type of universitywide leadership-development experience that Ms. Lutz was exposed to can help tip the scales for aspiring leaders — or put the possibility of senior administrative work on the radar for others. To be effective at widening a university's pipeline of leaders, those leadership programs must be seen as prestigious and selective. And they must have the clear backing of senior leaders, like the president and provost, who can make sure that the programs get enough money and that their participants get enough time off from other duties to immerse themselves in the training.

Both factors signal that cultivating the next generation of talent is a priority for campus officials and that it's a path worth exploring.

At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Mr. Kiel calls the Academic Leadership Program a "Cadillac program" to convey its status on campus. Participants meet with senior leaders at Chapel Hill, they get to travel offsite for a week of leadership training with senior executives in various industries, and they attend a separate, overnight retreat. They're also given a stipend of \$5,000 and a course release to make sure they have enough time to fully immerse themselves in the program's offerings.

"This shows that we're committed to preparing leaders," says Mr. Kiel of the program that selects eight fellows each year and now has 120 alumni. "We have a visible leadership pool here at the university."

Some former fellows of the program have been named to leadership positions on campus. Kia Caldwell, an associate professor of African, African-American, and diaspora studies, became director of faculty diversity initiatives in the College of Arts and Sciences at Chapel Hill in 2015. Karen M. Gil, a professor of psychology and a former department chair, became dean of the College of Arts and Sciences in 2009; she stepped down from that post in 2015 and returned to the faculty. And Terry Rhodes, a professor and a former chair of the department of music, became senior associate dean for fine arts and humanities in 2012. Although the university can't accommodate all of the program's alumni in a senior administrative role, even if they all wanted one, Mr. Kiel says he makes it clear to professors that leadership opportunities come in many forms. That makes it easier for people to find, or aspire to, a role that works for them.

"You don't have to be a leader of the department. You could lead a universitywide task force or maybe you could reform the faculty council," Mr. Kiel says. "There are lots of ways to use leadership skills on campus."

One way to do that is to be part of collegewide leadership, as Karine Moe was at Macalester College even before she received tenure. She was elected to be a member of the faculty advisory council and, not long after, the head of the council urged her to sign up to be among the first cohort of a yearlong academic-leadership seminar, in the 2004-5 academic year. The seminar, now held every other year, fed her thirst for as much knowledge as she could gather about how the college works.

Ms. Moe learned how decisions are made at the institutional level, how various units prioritized their resources, and about the challenges facing higher education, liberal-arts colleges, and Macalester in particular. As part of the seminar, Ms. Moe also developed recommendations for a more-formal mentoring program for tenure-track faculty members and then established that program the following year.

Today, Ms. Moe is provost and dean of the faculty at Macalester, where her academic career began two decades ago.

"It was not my intention to become provost, but when this position came open I was at the point where I was thinking seriously about whether or not I would like to take an administrative role," says Ms. Moe, an endowed professor of economics, who has also been a department chair. "I felt like I was in a holding pattern and I really needed to reinvigorate myself."

In her new role, Ms. Moe says she's on "a steep learning curve," even after a year and a half. "I feel like I'm challenged everyday."



Mark Abramson for The Chronicle

While he "wouldn't be afraid" to be a dean, Dunbar Birnie, a professor of ceramic engineering at Rutgers, has been pondering other leadership options, like running his own research center.

Back at Rutgers, one leadership-academy fellow, Dunbar P. Birnie III, a onetime former chair of the materials science and engineering department and an endowed professor, said he "wouldn't be afraid to be a dean" if he had to.

He's confident he could do the job, since he has been exposed to the inner workings of the university. But the program has him pondering a different way to use what he's learned about leadership, while

filling an administrative role the university wants more people to take on.

Starting his own research center, where he would manage budgets and people, is something he's been thinking about.

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