

The Leadership Role of Faculty

“Universities, it seems to me, should model something for students besides individual excellence ... They should model social excellence as well as personal achievement ... If institutions that purport to educate young people don’t embody society’s cherished ideals – community, cooperation, harmony, love – then what young people will learn will be the standards institutions do embody: competition, hierarchy, busyness, and isolation.”

—JANE THOMPSON, DUKE UNIVERSITY

College and university faculty are in a position to provide the kind of leadership that could transform their institutions toward greater “community, cooperation, and harmony.” To set the context for discussing the leadership role that faculty might play in institutional transformation.

The Work of the Faculty Member

Many faculty prefer to characterize their choice of the academic profession as a calling, a sense of mission and purpose that not only generates a feeling of self-worth and satisfaction in their daily lives, but also nurtures their desire to be associated with an institution that is rooted in idealism and hope. Faculty are indeed the stewards of our institutions of higher learning, in part because they tend to have the greatest longevity: the average faculty member spends between 30 and 40 years as a member of the academic profession.

The academic profession is a profession more of choice than of chance. When asked to report their reasons for choosing an academic career, about three-fourths of faculty members indicate that they were attracted by the opportunity to work with ideas, the freedom to pursue their intellectual interests, and the opportunity to teach others. The fact that the academic profession also provides for great autonomy, freedom, and flexibility is an added attraction to people who choose academic careers.

College teaching is a time-honored profession that includes sharing part of one’s self with students. It allows faculty the opportunity to mentor and contribute to the development of students in their roles as learners. As teachers, faculty believe that they can facilitate the learning process by instilling in students a thirst for continuous learning and a quest for answers to complex problems. They see themselves as encouraging students to create their futures by preparing them for a range of unforeseen challenges that lie ahead. That the faculty can indeed

be a powerful force in the development of young people is attested to by the fact that so many former students identify faculty members as their primary mentors and guides.

The faculty calling is also predicated on the opportunity to be a member of a community of scholars, a community in which the intellectual talents and creativity of its different members are combined in the pursuit of knowledge. This search for knowledge through collegiality is a key aspect of the profession that continues to attract new generations of scholars to the academy. In particular, it is that desire to collaborate with other like-minded people, coupled with a great deal of autonomy to pursue one's specific scholarly or creative interests, that proves to be such an inviting aspect of a faculty career.

Faculty are also called to serve society as agents of societal transformation.

The environment in which we live is in a constant state of transition and it is the scholarly work of faculty and their intellectual expertise that provide much of the information and the human resources for helping to guide these transitions. Thus, another critical part of the faculty's work is to serve the larger community through their consultative expertise and the new knowledge they create.

In summary, college and university faculty are called upon in their work to provide leadership as teachers, scholars, and servants to the larger society, and it is these many challenging roles and responsibilities that not only make the academic profession so appealing, but also create so many opportunities for faculty to play a key role in institutional and societal transformation.

Faculty as Leaders

Faculty are called to lead in ways that readily bring to mind the "core" individual and group values and principles. We believe that academic work can be enriched if faculty can model the individual personal qualities – *self-awareness, authenticity, empathy, commitment, and competence* – in their daily interactions with both students and colleagues. At the same time, the exercise of transformative leadership on the part of faculty can also be enhanced through the application of group qualities such as *collaboration, common purpose, division of labor, and respectful dis - agreement*. In particular, these qualities can facilitate the varied forms of collective work that faculty engage in: committees and other administrative responsibilities, team teaching, departmental meetings, and so forth.

Faculty also participate with each other and with the administration in shaping the culture of the institution through the many decisions they make: defining admissions standards; deciding what to teach and how to teach it; setting requirements and performance standards for students; evaluating, advising, and mentoring students; choosing topics and methods for their research and scholarship; relating to colleagues; participating in shared governance; setting criteria for hiring new colleagues; and reviewing the performance of colleagues. In short, faculty decision making spans the gamut of roles and responsibilities: teacher, mentor, rolemodel, scholar, colleague, fund raiser and entrepreneur, administrator, servant to the community, and consultant. Let us

now examine how faculty can apply and model the principles of transformative leadership in fulfilling their various roles.

Teacher

Faculty are drawn to become professors first and foremost because they want to teach. For many faculty members, teaching is a way of sharing the information and knowledge that they find exciting and challenging. They welcome the chance to share what they have learned and to see it reflected in their students as they encounter the joy of discovery and understanding. It is the love of learning and of the discipline that compels faculty to share knowledge with others, in this case students. Faculty also love to teach because it allows them to mentor students; help them develop as scholars and professionals; and through them, to shape the future of our society. For many faculty, it is these exchanges with students that draws them out of their laboratories and offices and into the classroom.

However, this relationship between teacher and student is not always a simple one; on the contrary, it is often complex and can be fraught with tension and frustration for both the professor and the student. A professor comes to the classroom with positional power and much more expertise than most students have. How faculty view this power and how they use their expertise will largely determine the kind of leadership they exercise in the classroom.

Applying the leadership principle of *self-knowledge*, for example, would lead faculty to raise questions such as the following: Am I teaching to impart my knowledge to passive, receptive students? Or am I there instead to share my expertise, recognizing that students whose life experiences have differed from mine will determine how they hear, understand, and receive whatever knowledge I have to offer? How in my work with students can I build upon their previous life experiences, connecting my teaching to those experiences in ways that create new knowledge for them as well as for me? Do I buy into the unspoken assumption – so common to undergraduate students – that the professor has all the answers? How important is this image of omniscience to me; to what extent do I find it a burden? How willing am I to say, “I don’t know. Let’s find out, together.”

Another source of tension for professors is their dual role in the classroom: they are expected not only to help students learn but also to judge them. When students are constantly aware that their professors are evaluating and grading them, they may be less open and less willing to take risks, to explore unknown territories, and to become self-directed learners. And then there is the special dilemma presented by the underprepared student: most faculty are ambivalent about teaching such students, not only because they have not been trained to teach them, but also because the faculty culture may regard teaching underprepared students as a low level activity or perhaps even degrading. And even when faculty see less well-prepared students respond to their instruction and make substantial progress but still fail to meet “standards” or “make the curve” in a competitive grading system, they may find themselves facing the dilemma of “educating” vs. “selecting.”

We believe that the faculty's ability to deal creatively and effectively with these dilemmas and contradictions can be substantially strengthened by incorporating the principles of transformative leadership in their work with students. Let us now move to consider each of these principles in terms of a series of questions.

Shared purpose

Do our students share with us a common understanding of expected learning outcomes and of class norms and expectations for interaction and how responsibility will be shared and accountability be determined?

If not, how should we go about developing a common purpose for the class?

Do students share these norms simply because they have been imposed, or because they have had a part in formulating them?

To create *shared purpose*, professors and students alike must bring their *self-knowledge* and their *empathy* to the discussion.

Do I understand my students' goals and motivations, learning styles, and limitations (i.e., *their* level of *competence*), not to mention *my* own beliefs, values, goals, skills, and limitations (i.e., *self-knowledge*)? Am I clear with myself, and have I been clear and truthful with my students about how and why I intend to present the class material, choose assignments, and provide evaluative feedback to the student?

Self-knowledge on the part of the faculty member – which facilitates the group process by developing trust and helping to shape the common purpose – requires that one first explore questions such as: What are my values? What kinds of institutional or societal change do I care about?

What are my skills, strengths, talents, and limitations? Do I have a clear sense about class purposes, objectives, and expectations for students?

Authenticity calls for faculty to align their actions with their most deeply felt values and beliefs: Would I be inclined to compromise my standards, lower my expectations, or inflate student grades because I worry about student evaluations that could be damaging to my chances for promotion or merit increases? If I expect assignments to be submitted in a timely fashion, do I reciprocate by returning graded assignments promptly, regardless of the pressure of grant deadlines and committee meetings? Do I limit my teaching effectiveness by spending less time with students and with class-related activities in order to be rewarded for research and writing? Am I willing to tell students that I've made a mistake or that I don't know something?

Disagreement with respect.

When students disagree or raise questions, do I always show *respect* for them, or do I sometimes get defensive or try to diminish their ideas and act in superior/more knowledgeable ways? Do I likewise encourage students to treat disagreements among themselves with respect?

Collaboration

A key to the practice of transformative leadership, is directed toward some *common purpose* that transcends individual goals. *Collaboration* is not merely coming together around a predetermined vision or approach. It is also about how people value and relate to each other across differences in beliefs, ideas, visions, and identities (e.g. gender, culture, religion, class, etc.). When faculty can practice and model leadership that is framed in individual qualities such as *self-knowledge* and *authenticity*, their work with students is more likely to be *collaborative* and characterized by mutual accountability and respect.

Collaboration in the classroom can extend beyond faculty-student interactions. Faculty can model *collaboration* for students by engaging in team teaching or by developing interdisciplinary courses. How do I go about doing collaborative work? Do I demonstrate through my words and actions that I understand and value my colleagues' special qualities and expertise (i.e., *empathy*)?

Do I model shared responsibility, shared authority, and accountability in designing an interdisciplinary course or in team teaching a course? When I encounter disagreements or differences in opinion with a colleague, do I recognize and respect the different viewpoint (i.e., *disagree with respect*), or do I diminish or belittle the other's ideas?

Scholar

A major core activity of most faculty members is that of a scholar. However, the meaning of scholarship varies by where one works, and especially by the type of institution with which one is affiliated.

Scholarship has for many become synonymous with research and the discovery of new knowledge. Universities have led the way in defining what we can expect and value from the scholarly work of faculty, and publications have become the principal measure of academic scholarship.

The way faculty personally or collectively view scholarship has implications for how they deal with each other, how collaborative or competitive they are, and how *authentic* they are able to be in their interactions with others, especially colleagues and students.

While research can often be viewed as an individual endeavor, there are many ways in which it can be seen as an interpersonal process. A great deal of research work in the sciences, for example, is necessarily done by the faculty member's research group: other faculty, postdoctoral fellows, graduate students, and sometimes even undergraduate students. Participating in such a research group once again provides an opportunity for the faculty member to practice transformative leadership: Do I listen to and appreciate the ideas offered by all members of the team, including graduate and undergraduate students (i.e., *empathy*)?

Are decisions made *collaboratively*, or do I unilaterally decide what needs to be done, by whom, and by when? Do I believe that each member of the team has plenty to contribute to these decisions, or do I feel that I am the sole expert and that others are pretty much supposed to do as I say? Do I delegate responsibility and trust others to do the work competently (*division of labor*)?

Disagreements are a part of any group effort, including the research team. Conflicts do arise. Differences of opinion are inevitable. What matters most is how faculty deal with these differences and disagreements. *Disagreement with respect* means being willing, ready, and committed to understanding the sources of disagreement (*empathy, competence*) and to work toward common solutions. It means engaging in open dialogue (*authenticity*) that can be satisfying and beneficial to all members of the group. But to be able to engage in this teamwork collaboratively and with respect for each other's talents and contributions, faculty need to remain open to themselves, to reflect on their own beliefs and values (*self-knowledge*), and to be *authentic*, which means not saying one thing and doing something else, but "walking the talk." In short, collaborative research work, like almost any other group activity, prospers when there is trust, and trust can be built and maintained when the participants are *self-aware* and *authentic*, and when the team leader is *empathic* and understands others – their fears, aspirations, and hopes.

Service to the Institution

The prototypic service work of the faculty is to serve as members of institutional committees. A great deal of conceptual work of colleges and universities is done through committees: decisions about student admissions, the setting of curriculum requirements, reviews of faculty performance, and planning and budgeting are just a few of the many ways in which faculty participate in shared governance through committee membership. This group work, in turn, provides many opportunities to model and practice the principles of effective leadership.

When faculty are involved in campus decisions, do their first thoughts turn to the interests of the student, to the long-term benefit of the institution, or to their narrow departmental or personal interests? Do faculty respect and value the opinions of their non-faculty committee colleagues in student affairs, career services, and administrative services who also interact closely with students and teach them valuable life lessons (*empathy/understanding of others*)?

Unfortunately, some faculty members have developed a mistrust of leadership – the concept as well as the individuals who hold positional leadership in the university. Adversarial camps have developed where an "us-them" mentality separates the faculty from the administration, and sometimes also from student affairs, other staff, or even students. Such feelings and beliefs are dysfunctional to transformative leadership and to establishing a truly shared approach to governance, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

The faculty don't trust the administration. Students find faculty distracted and not well attuned to their learning needs, administrators are wary of both trustees and faculty. Staff see themselves as disenfranchised victims of the administration's need to save money and the faculty's penchant for protecting their own. Frequently, schools, departments, and even individual faculty act as if they are each other's targets.

Transformative change requires that we find ways to restore trust. We believe that by cultivating the leadership values and principles, we can begin to build trust through *collaboration*. Trust, in turn, enables colleagues to effect a *shared purpose* and a meaningful *division of labor*.

While many faculty believe that they are the “center” of the institution and that the institution could not survive without them, they often believe that there are fundamental contradictions in their institutional lives. Thus, in small institutions they may feel under-valued and exploited as they compete for limited resources with other areas of the campus. Or, in the larger institutions, they may feel conflict between their own values and those of their institutions.

Although faculty work long hours performing difficult and complex tasks, they also often feel that “our work is never done,” a dilemma which causes enormous stress in the lives of many faculty. Their inability to trust other groups on the campus sometimes results in a proliferation of faculty committees which duplicate work that would – in a more trusting environment – be done by others.

The faculty’s strengths are also often seen as giving rise to weaknesses. For example, while enjoying a good deal of status and autonomy and being perceived as the “core” of the institution can strengthen one’s *commitment* to the institution, it can also undermine *collaboration* through the misuse of power. Similarly, having a lot of technical or scholarly expertise can be of substantial value to the individual faculty member’s career, but an expert mindset – and the critical thinking skills that often come with it – can also undermine *collaboration*.

In addition to these constraining (disempowering) beliefs, there are two cultural traditions that can also prevent faculty from practicing transformative leadership: their excessive need for *autonomy* and their strong allegiance to the *discipline*. As we have already said, the appeal of autonomy is one of the strongest motivators/reasons for pursuing an academic career. Except for scheduled class time, office hours, and scheduled committee work – which usually consume less than half of a normal work day – the rest of the faculty member’s time can be scheduled according to each faculty member’s idiosyncratic needs and preferences. Such autonomy, however, has one paradoxical drawback: by not having one’s work clearly scheduled during normal working hours, most faculty tend to create a great deal of stress for themselves by taking on too many open-ended responsibilities that have no clearly defined limits.

Excessive autonomy can also be antithetical to a sense of community, since it militates against feeling connected and interdependent. Autonomy can thus serve as a barrier to *collaborative* work, since it makes it difficult for faculty to get to know and trust each other and prevents them from developing a *shared purpose*.

The second value – disciplinary allegiance – is reflected in the strong departmental structures and the resulting institutional fragmentation and division that we find on many campus. It also tends to create intense competition for resources, together with status hierarchies among the disciplines. Obviously, these structural divisions and subcultures can act as strong barriers to creating community, interdependence, and collective learning and action.

While personal autonomy and disciplinary specialization can serve as barriers to implementing the principles of transformative leadership, the process can also work in reverse: that is, the

principles themselves can also be powerful tools for counteracting the negative effects of autonomy and specialization. In fact, one of the key principles to follow here is *self knowledge*, which means being aware of one's own prejudices and vulnerabilities and being alert to situations where efforts to practice transformative leadership are being undermined either by blind defense of personal autonomy or by excessive disciplinary loyalty.

Practicing Transformative Leadership

Notwithstanding the limiting beliefs just discussed, any faculty member who seeks to become a change agent can begin by practicing transformative leadership *right now*. Of course, if faculty persist in believing that it is only the people at the top of the administrative hierarchy who are in a position to initiate change, then they are effectively disempowering themselves.

This is precisely the attitude that transformative leadership tries to combat, on the premise that everyone has the ability to live by the leadership principles and therefore to work for change in his or her sphere of influence. When faculty decide to model and practice the principles of transformative leadership, their constraining beliefs are replaced by a set of empowering beliefs that can lead to actions that not only strengthen the institution and model leadership for students, but that also improve and enrich the individual faculty member's working life.

Most faculty members are already in a position to begin the change agenda in their classrooms and in their governance activities. Within the classroom, faculty autonomy is actually a potential *facilitator* of change, since each professor has the power to model the principles and to make whatever other changes he/she believes will benefit the students and the learning environment. Since professors are generally free to experiment with and incorporate new ways of teaching and leading, one very simple and direct approach would be to choose just one of the principles of transformative leadership each semester or quarter and experiment with ways to integrate and model it in classes. One could focus, for example, on *shared purpose*, spending some time during the first day of class discussing students' expectations. The professor's expectations could be presented at the next class session, after which both sets of expectations could be discussed jointly to create a *shared purpose* of what can happen in that particular class.

This development of such a *shared purpose* could, of course, be carried out within whatever constraints – e.g., certain required course content – the professor would choose to present during the first class session. The point is that, no matter how many such constraints there might be, there are always many areas – teaching techniques, assignments, conduct of classes, etc. – where joint planning is possible.

Committees offer almost limitless possibilities for modeling the principles. Thus, despite the fact that an individual's power to effect change through committee work is often constrained by other people's behavior or by long-standing traditions and possibly even handbook rules, one can still experiment with new ways of working within almost any kind of committee.

For example, at the beginning of most committee work each member is usually free to raise procedural questions: Are there student participants who also have the privilege to vote? If not, why not? Does the search committee reflect the total community of the institution? What is the

purpose of the committee, and what is to happen to its reports or other products? How are the deliberations to be conducted, and why? Does the group need a facilitator in addition to the chair to practice more democratic, learning behaviors? What is expected of each individual member?

Are the decision-making modes clearly understood by everyone? By raising such questions in the early meetings, we greatly increase the likelihood that the committee will develop a *shared purpose*, effect a meaningful *division of labor*, and operate *collaboratively*. And just as it happens in classes, personal behavior can become a model for others: by practicing *disagree - ment with respect* and demonstrating *empathy and understanding of others*, an individual faculty member's behavior can become the norm for others.

Another approach is to be alert for creative, collaborative ways to solve problems. For example, if the institution is considering an academic reorganization, any faculty member can proactively organize a group that represents the interests of all affected. Such a group can collaboratively develop new approaches that can be suggested to the administration.

Another very direct approach is simply to ask: What can I as a faculty member do to exercise transformative leadership? The initial answer is that you have already taken the first step by reading this chapter and by reflecting on the culture of your institution. A possible next step would be to make a list of your own personal beliefs about yourself, about your institutional colleagues, and about the institution in general, and to reflect on the extent to which each belief either facilitates or constrains your capacity to model the leadership principles. You could also make a list of the many questions posed in this chapter and think of how you would answer them: Are you satisfied with your own behavior and that of your colleagues? Does your institution provide a model for other institutions?

Then, as you reflect on these beliefs and their implications for the next week, month, or year, you can practice the enhancement of *self-knowledge* by paying special attention to the interactions between yourself and members of your academic community: Are you teaching and modeling the qualities of transformative leadership traits for your students? Do you promote *collaboration* or competition? Are you *authentic* and *empathic* in your interactions with students? When you interact with other faculty, how important is it to impress them, to appear "smart"?

When interacting with other staff members, do you treat them on an equal basis? Do you respect and honor your support staff? Do you seek the opinions of student affairs staff? What is your attitude toward administrators? Can you practice *empathy*: are you open and willing to see the complexities administrators face in their roles?

Making a conscious effort to be more mindful and *self-aware* – to observe and reflect on your own beliefs and behaviors – puts you in an excellent position to initiate a dialogue with your colleagues. The important thing is to devise a simple way to get together with your colleagues so you can collectively examine the systems and structures that delimit your actions. Genuine

discussions over lunch, in committee or department meetings, or in learning circles that you arrange, are the first step to change. These dialogues can help to define common values and a common mission – standards against which current policies, practices, and individual behaviors can be assessed. Recognizing discrepancies between values or mission, on the one hand, and practice or behavior, on the other, is another essential stage in the process of transformative change.

Faculty members are in a powerful position to initiate this kind of transformative change on the campus. In particular, the autonomy that they enjoy in the classroom puts them in a position to begin a change process immediately. Further, the respect and influence that faculty enjoy among other staff members and students makes it easy for them to convene meetings or to form task forces to begin the sorts of grassroots changes that are essential to transformation.

While reading this, you have discovered ideas that intrigue or excite you, and if you are not happy with your answers to some of the questions that have been asked, then you have the opportunity to become a change agent by observing your community, thinking carefully about the systems and structures in place, engaging in dialogue with colleagues, and taking the actions that are available to you. The fact is that ***you have the power to bring about change***. You can become a student – a student of your department and of your institution. By modeling some of the leadership principles in your teaching and committee work, you can open yourself to learning and to seeing from a different perspective. You can begin the process of relationship building by initiating dialogues that span boundaries and rebuild relationships. You can make the decision to take the initiative without having to wait for “the administration.” Instead of waiting to be empowered by others, you can empower yourself. Transformative leadership is empowering leadership because it is predicated on being *self-aware*, *authentic*, and *empathic*, and because it develops trust through listening, *collaborating*, and shaping a *common purpose*.

Our college and universities have the unique opportunity to shape our future society by giving our students an opportunity to live and practice the future on our campuses. As long as we simply mirror the behaviors that have created our current problems, we will not move beyond those problems. But by practicing the principles of transformative leadership, we can begin the process of creating an institution that models the just, civil society in which we all want to live.

CONCLUDED
