

Developing Academic Leaders

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What are Academic Leaders?

- Encompass a range of individuals, from outspoken faculty to university presidents.
- Overlap with, but are distinct from, university office holders.
- Have varying responsibilities, both within and across institutions.
- Hold traditional positions with archaic titles (e.g., fellow, dean, provost, rector, regent, chancellor) that are often confusing to non-academics.
- Operate within the unique framework of “shared governance.”

Leadership Development in Institutional Context

Institutional Priorities

- Mission and core values
- Strategic plan
- Immediate needs
- Untapped opportunities
- Potential flexibility of roles and priorities

Individual Potential

- How did they come to their current role?
- Where do they hope to be in five or ten years?
- What are their chief capabilities and limitations?
- With appropriate support and guidance, how well could they meet the needs of the institution?

Guiding Questions

- What makes for a good academic leader?
- Where do we find such individuals?
- How do we help them discern a path to leadership?
- How do we help them flourish?
- How can we help struggling leaders?

Defining Effective Academic Leadership

- Share an anecdote about effective academic leadership.
 - What specific actions or qualities made this person effective in that moment?
 - What can we learn from this example?
- Share an anecdote about ineffective academic leadership.
 - What factors contributed to this failure?
 - Could the failure have been avoided?
- Based on the discussion, what are some key traits/abilities to cultivate in academic leaders? What are some of the biggest red flags to watch out for?

Origins of Academic Leaders

- Share your story of entering academic leadership.
- What are the typical pathways into academic leadership at your institution? Have they reliably produced good leaders?
- Are these traditional pathways adequate for current university challenges (e.g., demographic shifts, generative AI, political polarization)?
- Are there potential sources of good leaders your institution might be overlooking?

Discerning a Career in Leadership

- What challenges, incentives, and advice influenced your own choice to enter a leadership position?
- Considering the many barriers to leadership roles, what strategies can we use to help emerging leaders overcome initial obstacles and doubt?

Helping Academic Leaders Flourish

- What factors were most essential to your early success in academic leadership?
- What factors most often undermined your success?
- How might this inform how you mentor newer leaders?

Difficult Conversations

- When a leader is struggling to perform, what are the most effective ways to intervene?

Wrapping Up

- What remaining questions do you have about cultivating effective academic leaders?
- What are 2-3 takeaways from this conversation that you hope to apply at your home institution?

Thank you!

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