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Building Leadership Legitimacy and Trust: Staff Experiences of Faculty Leadership in Associate Dean Roles

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the experiences of non-faculty staff who report to faculty in associate dean roles at public, R1 universities. It focuses on perceived leadership effectiveness through the lens of Path-Goal Theory and draws from interviews with nine senior staff in Big Ten institutions. Findings reveal that staff value collaborative and communicative leadership, but frequently encounter challenges related to faculty-centered decision-making, lack of administrative preparedness, and frequent leadership transitions. The study highlights the importance of including staff in strategic planning and increasing leadership development for faculty entering administrative roles. Recommendations for practice and future research are also included.

Keywords: higher education administration, faculty leadership, associate deans, middle leadership, path-goal theory, staff perceptions

Introduction

Higher education institutions (HEIs) have transformed over the last few centuries from small centers of learning that serve an exclusive portion of the population to larger, more complex organizations that educate a greater portion of the population and are held responsible for much of society's research, economic, and civic development. These shifts have led to an expansion of the higher education workforce to include professionals responsible for the day-to-day administration of the finance, human resource, student support, and legal affairs work characterized by the massification and globalization of the field (Altbach, 2014). Simultaneously, it has been well-documented that public universities in the United States have faced continuously decreasing funding from state and federal governments throughout the last several decades (Sav, 2016; Toutkoushian & Paulsen, 2016; Lichy & McLeay, 2021). This public divestment in higher education has further contributed to heightened contemporary pressures on HEIs by adding the need for universities to compete in the higher education marketplace, sometimes referred to as "academic capitalism" (Fredricks-Lowman & Smith-Isabell, 2020; Yeung et al., 2019; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2009). Institutions competing in such a dynamic, high-pressure higher education market have demonstrated an increased tendency to view institutional leaders as critical human resources who need to bring increasingly complex skill sets and experiences to their roles as administrators of an organization, including strategic planning, managing complexity, navigating volatility and

uncertainty in the higher education marketplace, and innovation (Yeung et al., 2019). These conditions of the public higher education academic labor market indicate that universities, perhaps, are no longer expecting to promote excellent researchers with promising leadership attributes; rather, they are looking for business leaders with impressive academic backgrounds.

The above-described *corporatization* of higher education has only further complicated the tasks of governing an HEI (Toutkoushian & Paulsen, 2016; Mang, 2019; Yeung et al., 2019). Leaders now must navigate fluctuating revenue streams, education market disruptions, demographic changes, and government regulation more than ever before. The institutions they lead also serve a more diverse student population that demands a return on educational investment in an increasingly volatile employment landscape. Simon (2017) quoted scholars and practitioners who cite increased administrative workload due to growing federal reporting requirements and the administrative support required for a more diverse student body as compounding factors in the increased demand for specialized administrators in higher education. In addition to these skills, it should be noted that academic leaders often supervise non-academic professionals with specialized skills of their own and who may have more experience in administrative and management functions than the faculty who lead them. As the higher education landscape becomes increasingly market-oriented, many have questioned whether faculty are prepared to lead effectively (Goodall, 2009; Morris & Laipple, 2015)

While both the effectiveness of academic leaders in HEIs and academic leaders' perceptions of their own experience in leadership have been studied at the senior executive level (Heck et al., 2022; Nickel, 2022; Pearce, 2016), there is little research on the experience of staff who report to faculty-turned-managers. The research on faculty as leaders is even more sparse for mid-level institutional leadership positions, such as deans and associate deans. This study aims to begin addressing this gap by exploring how staff perceive faculty as supervisors; more specifically, how non-faculty staff who report to associate deans perceive their supervisor's ability to lead their unit toward achieving unit outcomes. Associate deans are a relatively understudied group of administrators in the higher education leadership landscape, but they represent an important middle-management function, often serving as the direct administrative bridge between deans, who are traditionally tenured faculty, and administrative professional staff (Preston & Floyd, 2016).

Using path-goal theory (House, 1971) as a theoretical framework for this study on perceived leadership effectiveness, the authors analyzed the described working experiences of nine staff who report to associate deans at public R1 universities. Fabac et al. (2022, p. 349) described Path-Goal Theory as "the most significant leadership theory" for studying contingent and situational approaches to leadership. This theoretical approach provides a well-developed framework through which to assess several research questions:

1. How do staff with a non-faculty background describe their experiences of reporting to a faculty member in an associate dean role?
2. What leadership behaviors do staff wish to see demonstrated by faculty leaders to promote organizational effectiveness and job satisfaction?
3. What barriers and challenges do staff encounter in their work, and how do their supervisors' leadership behaviors impact staff members' abilities to overcome them to achieve individual and organizational goals?

Studying the experiences of non-faculty, administrative staff who report directly to these positions could provide an important picture of the supervisor-supervisee dynamic that is central to the administrative functions of a school or college within a large, research university.

Literature Review

Pitman (2000) acknowledged more than two decades ago that there was little research on the administrative staff experience in higher education, and not much more research has been conducted on this population since then. Pitman's findings indicated that some administrative staff view faculty as intimidating colleagues who hold greater power in the organization. Some staff reported that they think of academic staff as customers to be served rather than colleagues. These findings highlight a power differential that is often seen and felt in many structural and procedural practices. Senior faculty commonly hold terminal degrees, which imbues them with status that is valued in the world of academia. Compounding this perception of higher knowledge and accomplishment is the tangible structure of shared governance. In this structure, faculty share in decision-making about the governance and administrative direction of an institution with senior leaders, which leaves middle management and front-line staff outside of the formal governance and institutional decision-making process (Kezar & Eckel, 2004). Additionally, curriculum and academic evaluation decisions have historically rested exclusively with faculty.

Competition for Talent Resources

In recent years, as the concepts of academic capitalism and the corporatization of higher education—especially public HEIs—have evolved, greater attention has been paid to both the costs of personnel and the skills and attributes that are required for the administrative success of HEIs (Yeung et al., 2019). Even more recently, the corporate human resources concept of the “Talent War” has come to higher education (Khalid, 2019). This concept argues that organizations need highly skilled talent to position an organization for success in a competitive landscape. Erasmus et al. (2015) found that a staff member's perception of their manager and their salary were the two factors with the most impact on whether a staff member intended to stay at their place of employment. Khalid and Nawab's (2018) research reinforces this notion and expands on it by noting that there is typically a large differential between faculty and staff compensation packages. Compensation packages tend to favor senior, tenured faculty who are more likely to be in supervisory roles.

Faculty Preparation for Management

Morris & Laipple (2015) highlighted another consideration that can impact how staff perceive their faculty supervisors: faculty members typically do not receive much, if any, training on the skills or functions that contribute to successful management and leadership practice. As administrative positions increasingly require specialized skills and knowledge, staff may bring more administrative experience and business acumen to their roles than their faculty supervisors. Effective management has a significant impact on organizational performance (Altbach, 2014), so the lack of training for faculty ascending to leadership and management roles could have a negative impact on organizational performance. Khalid (2019) shared a list of the competencies and skills viewed as

most important to academic administration. These skills included team leadership, strategic planning, financial management, emotional intelligence, change management, employee motivation, and conflict resolution. An important distinction, and perhaps, a point of future study would be to understand what these skills and competencies look like in different contexts. Do the way faculty develop these skills as researchers translate to a normative business environment?

Staff Experience Implications

Spreitzer et al.'s (2005) research on employee thriving in the workplace indicated that employees who experience positive energy, as well as growth in their knowledge and skills at work, have higher job satisfaction, better job performance, and less desire to leave their jobs (Rahaman et al., 2021). Krasman (2014) noted that staff who trust their supervisors demonstrate these same positive outcomes. Atwater et al. (1998) conducted research on the importance of *self-other agreement* in performance assessment of leaders and found that the perception of others, including a leader's direct reports, was a key component in predicting leadership effectiveness. Interestingly, leaders who perceived their own performance to be high and received a high rating from others had the highest effectiveness scores. Leaders who rated themselves high but received low ratings from others demonstrated low effectiveness. Leaders who rated themselves low and received low ratings from others showed the lowest effectiveness scores. While this study included both peers and direct reports in the "other" category, these findings support the argument that perception of staff is an important consideration when evaluating leadership.

Methods

This study used a qualitative methodological design with thematic analysis to understand the experiences of staff who report to associate deans at Public R1 universities in the Big Ten athletic conference. Public universities in the Big Ten were chosen as a research delimitation to provide similarity in role size, scope, budget, and institutional mission. This methodology enabled the translation of the descriptions staff shared about their experiences reporting directly to faculty administrators into meaningful insights that can be used to inform future research and leadership practice.

Theoretical Framework

Interview questions were designed using House's (1971) Path-Goal Theory of Leadership Effectiveness as a framework for the collection and analysis of data. House set forth the theory to serve as both a motivational and leadership theory that considers how individuals perceive their work within the context of organizational goals and how leaders influence individual and organizational goal achievement through their behaviors. House (1996) then revised his initial path-goal theory 25 years after its initial publication to incorporate empirical findings from roughly 50 additional path-goal studies that had been conducted in the intervening years. His reformulated theory included 26 propositions that describe the conditions, staff characteristics, and leadership behaviors that are likely to improve unit and individual work performance as well as job satisfaction.

Path-Goal Theory was selected as the theoretical framework among other key leadership theories, including Leader-Member Exchange Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory, for its focus on the behaviors of the supervisor as the locus of leadership rather than the relational dynamics between leader and follower. It also provides a clear framework through which to analyze the impact of these behaviors on staff motivation and organizational outcomes rather than just the relationship itself (Hernandez et al., 2011).

Path-goal theory outlines two types of organizational contingencies that should be considered when identifying which of the four types of leadership behavior from the path-goal theory are most appropriate (Bess & Dee, 2012). The first contingency consists of five individual characteristics:

1. Authoritarianism or acceptance of authority
2. An individual's perception of their own locus of control
3. Confidence in personal ability
4. Need for achievement
5. Need for belonging

The second of the two contingencies considered is rooted in the organizational characteristics of the work being performed. The three considerations in this contingency are:

1. The nature of task- routine or novel
2. Formal authority strength in the organization- hierarchy or flat
3. Primary work group normative strength

Path-goal theory then provides the following four leadership types to be deployed in alignment with the individual and organizational characteristics identified. These four leadership types are:

1. Supportive- displaying concern for a direct report's well-being and fostering a positive environment.
2. Participative- two-way exchange of information, influence, and decision-making power
3. Instrumental- top-down, control of work
4. Achievement-Oriented- ambitious goal setting for direct reports with an expectation that a high degree of performance will be displayed and goals will be met or exceeded

Research Participants

A non-random sampling method was used to recruit participants for this study. We created a list of potential research participants by reviewing the websites of the largest school or college at each Big Ten university to identify non-academic staff who reported directly to associate deans with faculty appointments. That list of prospective participants was emailed an invitation to participate in the study, and nine of the staff contacted agreed to participate. This sample size aligned with numerical recommendations for qualitative data collection (Johnson & Christensen, 2020) and saturation was confirmed conceptually through data analysis

The nine research participants represented five different Big Ten universities. Six participants held assistant dean positions and the remaining three participants held director positions. Functional

areas of work included curriculum, career services, research administration, and student affairs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Four of the nine participants held Ph.D. degrees.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants completed a 60-minute, semi-structured Zoom interview, during which they shared their experience reporting to a faculty member as a supervisor. Participants' responses to the interview questions were examined for recurring themes using In Vivo coding for the first cycle and then Pattern coding for the second cycle (Saldaña, 2021). Themes were further analyzed using Path-Goal Theory (House, 1971; House, 1996) as a mechanism for understanding the potential impact of the leadership behaviors described by participants on organizational goal attainment, job effectiveness, and job satisfaction. Finally, Bess and Dee's (2012) "Contingencies in Path-Goal Leadership Theory" table was used as to determine how the path-goal leadership behaviors reported align with Bess and Dee's leadership style recommendations.

Ethical Considerations and Ensuring Trustworthiness

Institutional Review Board approval was secured for this study before engaging participants in the process. We obtained informed consent from each participant prior to the initial interviews and anonymized the data gathered in the reporting of findings to maintain participant confidentiality. Themes were identified using two cycles of coding. The first cycle of coding used the In Vivo coding approach which uses a participant's own words to develop the codes which allows for an authentic representation of participant's voices in the research findings (Saldaña, 2021). A second cycle of Pattern coding was then completed to identify themes from participants' responses. A researcher journal was also kept, tracking researcher perceptions and reflections on reflexivity throughout the data collection and analysis process. This journal also serves as an audit trail for the interview data collection and analysis phases.

Findings

Institutional Hierarchy and the Faculty vs. Staff Dynamic

A clear theme of this study is the strong impact faculty have on the staff work experience, and consequently, the relationships between staff who report to associate deans with faculty appointments. Nearly every participant mentioned faculty either as a formal or informal stakeholder of their work, with many noting the belief that their supervisor prioritizes faculty goals, viewpoints, and voices when deciding on a course of action or setting goals for the staff members' unit. One participant described the divide between faculty and staff experiences as "institutional classism" and noted that the positionality differences between faculty and staff extended beyond internal decision-making rights and perceptions of leadership. These differences also affected the ability to afford housing near the university, contributed to longer commute times, and made it more difficult to a strong affiliation with the university community.

The experience of institutional classism, while only explicitly named by one participant, was alluded to in each participant interview. This concept of institutional classism has clear parallels to Doeringer and Piore's (1970) Dual Labor Market Theory which posited that labor market is

bifurcated into a primary and secondary market. They argued that the primary market offered higher wages, better working conditions, more job security, and greater career advancement opportunities while the secondary labor market tended to have lower wages, higher labor turnover, fewer opportunities for career advancement, inconsistent supervision. Table 1 provides a summary of participant perceptions about faculty and staff using the Dual Labor Market framework.

Table 1:
Perceptions of Faculty-Staff Stratification from Senior Staff Perspectives

Organizational Context	Faculty (Primary)	Staff (Secondary)
Promotion and Career Progression	Documented tenure and promotion pathways; clear expectations	Lack of career progression opportunities after the director or assistant dean level; unclear promotion standards and HR decision-making
Work Coordination	Faculty respond better to work coordination from other faculty	Work coordination can be successful regardless of the coordinator's role (i.e. staff or faculty)
Job Security	Tenure is equated to job security	Job security is a concern when budgets are constrained
Leadership Appointments and Preparation	"Rewarded" for successes in research rather than prior leadership or management experience; leadership learned from supervising graduate students	"Work their way up"; deep experience in their functional area; demonstrated ability to perform successfully in administrative work
Student Affairs	Focus is on challenging students; can be adversarial	Supportive; Focus on student advocacy and retention
Recognition	Faculty awards, promotions, and ideas are centered at the institution	Faculty "do not care" about staff work; staff recognition is limited
Resource Allocation	Work is well-supported by staffing resources	Staffing resources are negatively impacted by budget constraints and unclear HR decision-making processes

Research studies have examined the organizational implications of an internal dual labor market or stratified workforce. Documented impacts on the organization include higher rates of absenteeism and employee turnover (Doeringer & Piore, 1970) and diminished collaborative engagement in the secondary market (Pfeffer & Langton, 1993). The University of California's (1999) report from their Taskforce on Faculty/Staff Partnership stands as a real-world example of the challenges that can arise from an internal dual labor market. Challenges the taskforce sought to address were perceptions of incivility and lack of respect experienced by staff from faculty and a lack of leadership and supervision training for faculty who were appointed to leadership roles based on

their academic background rather than leadership or management achievements. It is notable that nearly 20 years after the release of the University of California report, similar staff concerns about workplace experiences with faculty across institutions were identified in this study.

Alignment of Goals and Priorities

Staff valued when supervisors shared their fundamental workplace goals and values, especially student success. Overwhelmingly, staff reported being very mission-driven and appreciated when faculty centered the mission of their shared work. This was juxtaposed against the frustration many participants shared that even when there was a mutuality around mission and goals with their supervisor, faculty voices that diverged from the shared vision or approach between the associate dean and their direct report were still prioritized. One participant stated, “the faculty perspective blinds them” when discussing their supervisor’s response to a student’s concern about a faculty decision.

Participants recognized that, in addition to serving multiple stakeholders in their role—including university leadership, the dean, faculty in their school, staff, and students—their associate deans also juggled multiple priorities beyond their leadership or role-specific tasks (i.e., continuing research supervision and additional projects from the dean). Staff recognized the difficult position associate deans were often in while lamenting the challenges that resulted when their associate deans were not able to prioritize leadership work and communication with their staff.

Autonomy vs. Micromanagement

Eight of the nine participants highlighted that they enjoyed autonomy from their current supervisors, but examples where participants felt they had been micromanaged either by a current or previous associate dean were also shared. Micromanaging was one of the most common examples of ineffective leadership behaviors raised by participants. One participant shared that when their supervisor micromanages them it “feels very controlling which also feels very devaluing like you don’t know what you’re doing.” Micromanagement typically was reported when deans or faculty outside of the supervisor-direct report dyad expressed strong opinions about the staff unit’s work or when there was perceived external scrutiny about budget or diversity, equity, and inclusion practices.

Leadership Formation and Frequent Transition

Four participants highlighted the point that associate deans ascended into their roles from a faculty background rather than an administrative background which they believed shaped the formation of their leadership style, behaviors, and priorities. They noted that prior to leading senior staff, most of the formal supervisory experience for associate deans consisted of supervising graduate students and that their staff interactions were limited to clerical staff who had very different levels of responsibility and expertise than senior staff who report to associate deans. Multiple participants noted that associate deans who came exclusively from faculty backgrounds often lacked experience mentoring staff on career development and navigating staff human resource policies and processes. One participant contrasted their experience reporting to their current associate dean with their previous associate deans, noting that their current supervisor recognized the importance of staff

development and nurturing staff members' longer-term career progression. They noted that this leadership approach differed significantly from the type of development faculty were likely used to providing for graduate students, saying "Grad students have a very defined pathway: come in, take classes, finish your research, leave. Your goal is to get them to go and then take another job." That participant also shared that they had previously had a revolving door of faculty supervisors whose terms in the associate dean role were only two years, saying "you can't even get to know someone in two years to know if you want to promote them, much less what their longer-term career goals might be."

The experience of frequent turnover in the associate dean role relative to their staff direct reports was another common challenge shared by participants. While the length of a term for the associate dean position varied by participant, most participants explicitly called out the term limits of their supervisors as a factor that directly impacted the leader-follower relationship between an associate dean and their staff direct report. Respondents generally felt that their supervisors took one to two years to fully understand the functional work in the unit they were leading, the responsibilities of the associate dean position, and the organizational bureaucracy that impacts nearly all aspects of administrative work. Multiple participants noted that frequent turnover in the associate dean position was normal, and that onboarding new supervisors was a recurring part of their work.

Participants also noted that leadership transitions don't just impact staff when they are internal. Many participants noted that external changes in federal and state policy as well as changing social landscapes often threw their work into question. Recent examples primarily centered on legislation that changed the way universities could promote diversity, equity, and inclusion through curricular and co-curricular programming. In those types of instances, staff appreciated clear direction and communication on how shifting policies would impact their unit's work.

Communication, Collaboration, and Advocacy

Nearly every participant described communicating openly and directly as a valuable leadership behavior. Many also quickly cited this type of communication as the leadership behavior displayed by their associate dean that they appreciated or respected most. Transparency in decision-making and the ability to communicate regularly or easily get a hold of their supervisor were specifically cited as examples of what makes the open, direct communication style effective. Staff also reported appreciating when their supervisors championed the staff unit's work or advocated for more resources to faculty and senior leadership. This seemed especially important given that a commonly shared sentiment was feeling like faculty and school leadership often didn't see or understand the work of staff and held unrealistic expectations of staff output. As one participant shared, it felt like staff goals were set from on high with the expectation that "thou shalt find a 25th and 26th hour in the day" to achieve them. Overall, staff valued feeling empowered to lead and move their unit's work forward while being supported by their supervisor.

Conversely, bottlenecks in decision-making or approval were noted particularly in the early years of an associate dean's work. When work progress for the staff was delayed due to a bottleneck at the associate dean level, it caused significant frustration. One respondent was looking for other positions and reported being at the most frustrated point in their career because of this type of work delay. Additional frustrations included feeling unable to deliver on unit goals due to lack of

staff empowerment or resources, which staff noted were outside their span of control, as well as being left out of early conversations about initiatives that they would be tasked with implementing or that were related to expertise held by staff.

Staff consistently reported value in being included in early conversations about strategy, new initiatives, or anything that related to their unit's work. Feeling that their supervisor viewed them as a collaborator as opposed to a subordinate was viewed as having a positive impact on staff work output and job satisfaction. A few participants reported that a lack of supervisor collaboration, leadership inclusion, and decision-making empowerment had led to their decision to leave previous positions or to look for new positions. Further complaints about the impact of not being included in early strategic decision making or initiative planning conversations included having to redo work or "fix" decisions that staff felt should never have been made. This led to time spent managing complaints, which reduced time that could have been spent on productive work, staff turnover, and lower morale.

Discussion and Recommendations for Practice

Path-Goal Leadership Styles

Bess and Dee (2012) outline multiple contingencies for when each of the four leadership styles of the Path-Goal Theory would be the most advantageous approach to motivating direct reports. The key to successful leadership is understanding which situations call for which leadership style.

Supportive

Bess and Dee (2012, p.858) note that supportive leadership is appropriate when staff work is "frustrating or dissatisfying." Staff in this study reported feeling particularly frustrated when decisions about the direction of their work or new initiatives in their functional area were made without including them, when work couldn't progress because a decision was bottlenecked with leadership, and when staffing resources were limited. In these situations, supervisors can best deploy supportive leadership by understanding the needs of their direct reports and working to meet them.

Participative

Every participant in this study described their motivation to do good work in terms of serving or helping others. The majority of participants worked in student affairs units and noted that students and student success were the primary driving forces behind their work motivation. Other participants working in research or academic positions noted that they sought to make the lives of staff and faculty around them easier through their job knowledge and work effort. Deploying a participative leadership style with staff who share this profile falls in line with what participants themselves noted was a desirable type of leadership. Collaboration, shared decision-making, and frequent communication were all elements of participative leadership (Bess & Dee, 2012) that staff reported as being effective leadership behaviors in their work context.

Instrumental

Bess and Dee (2012) describe instrumental leadership as a top-down approach to directing work and note that instrumental leadership can be beneficial when staff have low self-efficacy or desire specific direction on work approach. This style of leadership is also known as “directive” and involves the communication of how to complete work, defining performance expectations, and overall attempting to control work performance (Neider & Schriesheim, 2023). While this contingency largely doesn’t align with characteristics of the staff participants in this study, Bess and Dee go on to note that this leadership approach can also be beneficial when organizational policies are “unclear or conflicting” (p. 858). Associate deans may successfully implement instrumental leadership by planning their unit’s response to external and organizational changes in policy or directing their staff to lead a key initiative.

Achievement-Oriented

All staff participants in this study were either in supervisory positions themselves or in positions that require significant collaboration to achieve outcomes. House (1996) notes that the achievement-oriented leadership style can be demotivating for individuals if their goal attainment relies on delegation or cooperation across teams. For this reason, associate deans should deploy this leadership approach thoughtfully and sparingly with senior staff who lead teams or cross-team projects.

Relational Implications and Recommendations

Every participant in this study held either a director or assistant dean title at the time of their participation, and many reported having held their positions and worked in their functional area longer than their supervisors. House’s (1996) reformulated Path-Goal Theory asserted that staff with high levels of experience and expertise in doing their work will be more accepting of decisions when they are included in decision-making process. Participants’ belief that unit performance would benefit from staff leader inclusion in early initiative planning and strategic decision-making alongside faculty leaders is consistent with research on leader legitimacy (Johnson et al., 2023; Lund, 2016; Tost, 2011; Tyler, 1997) which Tyler (1997, p. 323) defined as “the belief that authorities are entitled to be obeyed.” Leaders with perceived legitimacy are more likely to enjoy compliance and engagement from their team, which contributes to positive organizational outcomes (Johnson et al., 2023; Tost, 2011). The results of this study demonstrate that there may be a tendency among staff to question their leader’s legitimacy as participants often had more experience and functional knowledge of their administrative unit than their supervisors.

Lund (2016) recommends legitimizing behaviors for leaders who supervise staff with more functional expertise. These legitimizing behaviors focus on creating the conditions in which their staff can do their work effectively, including building trusting relationships with their direct reports through listening and empowerment, recognizing the need for autonomy from staff leaders, maintaining consistent communication with staff, and acting as a buffer when stakeholders external to the team create additional work output demands. In the context of this study, the external stakeholders may be administrators more senior to the associate dean or faculty with an interest but no formal responsibility for the functional work area of the staff direct report. Associate deans

can also delegate boundary-spanning communication, initiative decision-making, and project management to their direct reports to mitigate work-progress bottlenecks reported by participants. The key to determine the best approach, delegation or buffering, should include open dialogue and active listening between the associate dean and their staff direct reports.

Organizational Implications and Recommendations

Multiple studies have recommended increased leadership development opportunities for faculty stepping into leadership and managerial positions (Altbach, 2014; Davis-Salazar, 2023; Madufo et al., 2024; Nickel, 2022) with recommendations for content that range across a variety of leadership competencies including administrative decision-making, team development, interpersonal skills, and strategic planning. The findings from this article support these calls for leadership specific training and development for faculty ascending into leadership and managerial positions. Madufo et al. (2024) specifically highlight the need for in-house leadership development that is bespoke to the leadership needs and organizational contexts of the institution. The findings of this study suggest that learning from senior level staff about their work and work experiences would be a beneficial addition to the curriculum.

In addition to faculty leadership development programming, preparation for leadership roles can be improved by incorporating additional tactics in the hiring, onboarding, and performance evaluation of associate deans. Organizations would benefit from developing faculty leader selection and evaluation criteria that are clear and tied to the job roles that faculty will perform in the associate dean role. This selection criteria could be mapped to real-world projects assigned to faculty for early assessment and development, as well as used for leadership development curriculum design. Feedback from staff on faculty involved in administrative work may also be helpful to assess faculty candidates for more senior leadership roles. Additionally, strong faculty onboarding of the associate dean role is also warranted. For example, deans can support the onboarding of their associate deans by providing clear expectations and proactively articulating decision-making authority lines to associate deans and their teams.

Limitations

While this study does not seek to generalize the experiences of staff reporting to faculty beyond this participant population, a potential limitation of the study is that individuals with primarily negative experiences may have chosen not to volunteer out of fear or concern when speaking critically about a supervisor, leading to their perspectives being underrepresented. Furthermore, because participation was voluntary, self-selection bias could be present in this study's participant sample.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Future Research

This exploratory study broadens existing research on faculty in administrative leadership roles by centering the perspectives and experiences of their staff direct reports, and while we believe that the study begins to address the gap in research on midlevel academic leadership, there is still opportunity to build on this line of inquiry. The findings highlight the complexity of staff–faculty dynamics and the ways in which perceptions of leadership competence and legitimacy shape

workplace relationships and organizational effectiveness. Future studies could examine how newly appointed associate deans define their leadership priorities and what internal or external pressures shape their understanding of success. Questions about whether they feel compelled to know or lead all details of the team's work beyond vision setting and work coordination to be perceived as capable or how they personally define "good leadership" could deepen our understanding of how faculty construct their leadership identities.

Several participants also referenced prior experiences with ineffective faculty supervisors or awareness of faculty leaders who struggled in administrative roles. These observations suggest a potential connection between ineffective leadership behaviors and the relatively short tenure of some associate deans which could be an area for further investigation. Future research might explore whether and how staff perceived leadership effectiveness influences the longevity or stability of faculty administrative appointments.

Building on this study's framework, a future study could focus more specifically on the staff experience during change management initiatives led by faculty administrators. Such work would provide insight into how varying leadership approaches affect staff engagement and organizational outcomes. Ultimately, research in this area should aim to foster more positive staff perceptions of faculty leaders, increase faculty awareness of staff experiences, and inform the design of leadership development programs that integrate staff perspectives into faculty development training and leadership practice.

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Appendix

Interview Questionnaire

- Tell me about your role and describe your primary responsibilities? (situational factor- task)
- How long have you reported to your supervisor? (background/context)
- What decisions are you able to make autonomously and which require additional layers of approval before finalizing a course of action? (situational factor- system hierarchy)
- Describe a situation when you received a directive from your supervisor? (behavioral characteristic- authoritarianism)
- What motivates you to do good work? (behavioral characteristic- locus of control and need for achievement)
- Tell me how your work community affects your job satisfaction. (behavioral characteristic- need for affiliation)
- How prescriptive is the work that your work team executes? (situational factor- work group)
- In as much detail as possible, describe a project or initiative in which your supervisor demonstrated effective leadership behaviors? (leader behaviors)
- Describe a project or initiative when your supervisor demonstrated ineffective leadership behaviors? (leader behaviors)
- How does your supervisor adapt their leadership depending on the situation? (leader behaviors)
- Describe the leadership behaviors that your supervisor demonstrates? (leader behaviors)
- Which leadership qualities do you most admire or respect most in your supervisor, and why?
- What leadership behaviors or skills do you wish your supervisor would strengthen or acquire and why?
- What do you perceive being the priorities for your supervisor?
- Do you have any last thoughts you'd like to share or questions you'd like to revisit?

The Humble Leadership Paradigm: A Reflective Instrument for Leadership Professional Development

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Abstract

Effective leaders understand the value of applying humility to the everyday tasks of leadership. Leaders should be aware of the dimensions of humility and benefit from the ability to self-assess their associated competencies. Understanding one's own strengths and areas of opportunity to engage in humble leadership can lead to better decisions, team innovation, adaptability, and situational awareness. This manuscript provides an overview of humble leadership and describes a novel Humble Leadership Paradigm postulated by the authors with questions to guide individual reflection and self-assessment as a means to evaluate eight facets of leader humility (personal, cultural, moral/ethical, strengths, intergenerational, awe-inspired, empathetic, and open-mindset).

Keywords: Humble leadership, humility, leadership paradigm, leadership

Introduction

It is critical for leaders in higher education and other settings to understand the value of applying humility to the everyday tasks of leadership. Humility and its antithesis, arrogance, are well known for substantially influencing the perception of leaders and their effectiveness as well as for influencing the experience of their followers. Humility promotes mutual respect and trust between the leader and followers, fosters a perception among followers that the leader is teachable, and engenders increased job engagement and motivation to work among followers (Owens and Hekman, 2012; Sousa and van Dierendonck, 2015). Conversely, arrogance, defined as a misplaced sense of superiority, and close-mindedness in leaders are associated with counterproductive work behaviors among followers, diminished business performance outcomes, and a negative effect on organizational culture (Mitchell, 2024). The principles of humble leadership encompass more than avoiding arrogance and close-minded stances (Cable, 2018; Chandler et al., 2023; Chandra, 2022; Kelemen et al., 2023). Applying dimensions of humility and assessing personal, cultural, ethical, intellectual, and intergenerational preconceptions including those that are based on suffering, wonder, and skill are critical for inspirational, transformational, and enduring leadership (Cable, 2018; Chandler et al., 2023; Chandra, 2022; Kelemen et al., 2023).

The article defines 8 (personal, cultural, moral/ethical, strengths, intergenerational, awe-inspired, empathetic, and open-mindset) facets of humility and offers them as anchors for individuals at any organizational level in professional institutions to self-assess their application in leadership actions. A series of questions associated with the facets has been created to guide reflection. The reflection exercise is intended to inform leaders about their personal competence and growth opportunities related to a range of humility dimensions. The authors found Borkan's 'HUMBLE' acronym to be a useful tool for consultation and reflection while engaged in answering the questions (Borkan, 2008):

- H:** Humble perspectives inform the assumptions you make
- U:** Understand your own background and culture
- M:** Motivate yourself to learn more about the other person's background
- B:** Begin to incorporate this knowledge into your work
- L:** Life-long learning permeates your attitude
- E:** Emphasize respect and negotiate service plans

Once personal understanding is achieved, humility in leadership can be applied to making better decisions, team innovation, adaptability and change, situational awareness (derived from social and self-awareness), and enhancing an open-mindset (Kelemen et al., 2023). Leaders who demonstrate humility and vulnerability foster a sense of psychological safety and trust that build stronger connections and leader-follower relationships with others, particularly on teams that they report through as well as with teams that report to them (Kelemen et al., 2023).

Background Academic Literature and Trade Journals

Publications related to humble leadership have grown over the past several decades and have been recently summarized in several thorough reviews. For example, Kelemen et al. (2023) reviewed 115 articles related to humble leadership. Also in 2023, Chandler et al. published a narrative review and conducted a meta-analysis of 212 related studies, finding that humble leadership has its strongest association with follower satisfaction and the leader's degree of participative decision making. Both reviews evidence that humble leadership is most accurately viewed as a distinct phenomenon instead of a subset of another leadership theory, such as servant leadership.

An area of growth in the humble leadership literature has been development of validated tools to assess humble leadership outcomes. Owens et al. (2013) created and validated a 9-item Expressed Humility Scale with three dimensions (willingness to view oneself accurately, a displayed appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and teachability) that has subsequently been used in multiple studies as a tool to measure humble leadership. This scale was expanded upon by Ou et al. (2013) with additional items and three facets (low self-focus, self-transcendent pursuit, and transcendent self-concept) resulting in an additional validated scale available to researchers wanting to assess humble leadership using quantitative methods. These scales by Owens (2013) and Ou et al. (2014) have become the most common tools used in publications that empirically measure humble leadership. Both scales are other-rated scales (where peers evaluate the humility of leaders), a design that may help alleviate inaccuracy associated with non-humble leaders using a self-rated scale because of a lack of self-awareness.

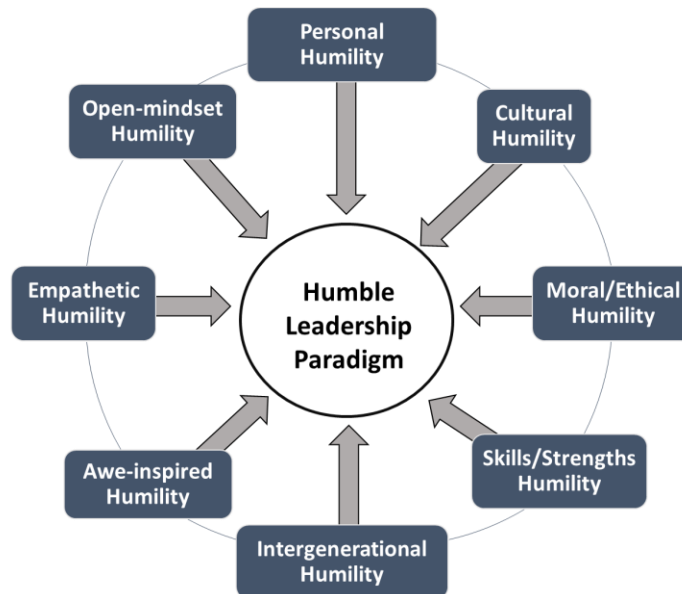
Multiple positive behavioral outcomes arising from humble leadership practices are documented in the literature, such as enhanced personal initiative and other proactive behaviors amongst followers (Keleman, 2023). Humble leadership has also been found to promote positive attitudinal outcomes in followers, including engagement, empathy, and resilience, and to promote positive productivity outcomes in both followers and teams, such as team humility, innovation, and corporate responsibility (Keleman, 2023).

Outside of discipline specific journals and trade publications, humble leadership is a topic of popular business publications, online blogs and articles, and online videos. For example, the *Harvard Business Review* described how humble leadership works in a 2018 publication by Cable, and *Forbes* has published on characteristics of a humble leadership (Kurter, 2021). Similarly, MasterClass (2022) provided a brief summary of how to practice humble leadership. In addition, humble leadership is the topic of several YouTube videos such as Gunawan's 2024 explanation of humble leadership and a 2016 Talks at Google interview with Edgar Schein, a researcher of organizational culture whose work includes humble leadership.

Conceptual Framework

The Humble Leadership Paradigm postulated by the authors (**Figure 1**) was primarily developed from two sources: 1) published literature related to humble leadership concepts and 2) the authors' collective experiences as faculty members and administrative leaders in higher education. The authors began by reflecting upon Borkan's six-faceted HUMBLE acronym (Borkan, 2008), and these reflections led to additional research and conversations about the multiple facets of humility. The authors identified trade and peer-reviewed literature for various subtypes of humility and identified eight facets of humility to form the Humble Leadership Paradigm.

Figure 1: *Humble Leadership Paradigm*



Following completion of the Humble Leadership Paradigm, the authors used literature to develop a set of self-assessment questions specific to each of the eight facets of the Humble Leadership Paradigm designed to provide a self-reflection experience for readers (**Appendix A**). Appendix A presents the eight identified facets of humility in the far-left column. The middle column presents questions designed to promote self-reflection and awareness, and the far-right column provides literature resources for the user to explore information related to each facet. Appendix A was refined through an iterative process, beginning with the authors identifying self-reflective questions for each facet of the Humble Leadership Paradigm. The authors engaged in rounds of brainstorming to improve questions, and each took the self-assessment. The tool continued to be refined to provide a manageable number of reflection questions for each facet.

Types of Humility

Personal humility is the dimension of humility that most people think of when they hear the word humble (Davis, 2011). Individuals who exhibit high personal humility often let others tout their accomplishments versus directly sharing their accomplishments with others. Those who lack personal humility may come across as braggadocious or snobby and can be perceived by others as pompous.

Green-Moton and Minkler (2020) explained **cultural humility** as the understanding that learning about and interacting with other cultures is a lifelong process and that this facet does not have a set competency threshold. Cultural humility is described as a spectrum that starts with cultural awareness (an understanding of differences between cultures), builds into cultural sensitivity (a willingness to change the way one interacts or responds to another culture), and may grow to some level of cultural competence (the ability to function effectively with another culture) (Greene-Motion & Minkler, 2020; Robinson et al., 2021).

Moral/Ethical humility recognizes that one's own sense of what is right and wrong is based on our own experiences and upbringing and that there is the potential for fallibility in these types of judgements (Owens, 2019). Additionally, moral/ethical humility also recognizes that the evaluations and decisions one makes in a calm state may shift under stress or when facing various pressures. Moral/ethical humility recognizes the challenges of being overly self-assured in one's moral convictions and giving others (and oneself) grace for actions under stress while recognizing that circumstances can influence our behaviors (Owens 2013; Owens, 2019; Beasley 2021).

Strengths humility recognizes that various skills and strengths have value and importance, and that one's own strengths are not any better or worse than those of others (Chandra, 2022). Many highlight the value of strengths such as being a quick thinker, well-read/well-versed, well-spoken, mathematically inclined, having grace, charisma, or rhythm; however, strengths humility recognizes each of these abilities as independently valuable and that no one is better or worse than any other. Circumstantial and situational differences, commonly encountered by leaders, can highlight the value of various strengths when trying to achieve a particular outcome.

Open-mindset humility is the idea of being open to an alternative solution or a different way of thinking (Hong et al. 2023). The Arbinger Institute (2016) describes the concept of an open or closed mindset, where an open mindset is open to multiple other possible solutions to a problem and to

different ways of thinking. In essence, open-mindset humility is the concept of understanding that you may not be correct in your perspective (way of thinking) and others may have a better approach or a better solution to the problem. As individuals move up in an organization, they are less likely to receive honest feedback from subordinates and may inadvertently surround themselves with “yes” people, who redundantly echo the perspective of the person with positional authority. This tendency has the potential to dampen the intellectual humility of individuals whose managerial or leadership responsibilities increase within an organization (Gottfredson, 2020).

Those exercising **intergenerational humility** recognize that people from various age groups have valuable contributions and that different perspectives and experiences strengthen teams and organizations (Pulcini et al., 2021). Readers may also find intergenerational humility referred to as “familial humility,” “generational humility,” or “generational empathy” in related literature (Bracken et al., 2023). Individuals exuding a good deal of intergenerational humility appreciate that people are unique and can operate outside of the stereotypes associated with their age. For example, senior citizens can be technology experts while Gen Z individuals can be independent, self-motivated, and on time.

Awe-inspired humility diminishes sense of self while recognizing and respecting that one is part of the larger world, and that one is but a cog in the operations of a larger organization. Individuals who exemplify awe-inspired humility “still feel small when they stand beside the ocean” (Sillers & Sanders, 2000). Studies have demonstrated that awe promotes humility, and awe-prone individuals are considered by their acquaintances to have greater humility than those who are not awe-prone (Stellar et al., 2018). Awe-inspired humility is also associated with systems-thinking, or big picture thinking, and the recognition that multiple other factors are involved in success. Additionally, awe-inspired humility recognizes that the health of any one part of an organization may be impacted by something that happens in another part of the organization. Awe-inspired humility also recognizes that current activities may not be the end-all-be-all. Simon Sinek (2019) refers to the “infinite game,” or the realization that successful long-term outcomes involve lots of ups and downs and a cumulative trajectory of multiple small successes.

Empathetic humility embodies the ability to relate to the feelings of others. Different from sympathy, empathetic humility embodies an appreciation for others’ suffering and for their humanity, while also embracing feelings of compassion, and at appropriate times, humor in the face of suffering (Stellar et al., 2020). Empathetic humility recognizes that appreciating the perspective of others involves being gracious and putting self in the shoes of others. An individual’s empathetic humility can be indicative of how they persevere during times of suffering. Empathetic humility also recognizes that experiencing suffering beyond the scope of our current capacity is part of the human experience and that it keeps us open, ready, appreciative, honest, and alive (Shen, 2024). Leaders encounter individuals who have diverse experiences and who are currently experiencing suffering that may seem unrelatable, highlighting the importance of developing competency related to empathetic humility. The literature is relatively sparse regarding the-relationship between empathetic humility and leadership, providing an opportunity for future research in this area.

Reflective Questions for Self-Assessment

It is recommended that Appendix A be read in its entirety. Then the reader should go back and focus on one particular facet (try focusing on the one that you think you might have the biggest gap in or any facet that has been suggested to you by feedback processes as an area of improvement). Read the questions for that facet and articulate answers, whether by writing them down, making notes, or clearly articulating them in your head. Take a day to reflect on that specific facet. At the end of the day (or the following day), try to evaluate if this is an area that you need focused growth in and create an action plan for growth using the suggested resources as a starting point.

- Reflect on which facets of humility you are strong in and which are opportunities for future growth. Explore the Resources column of **Appendix A** to learn more about each aspect of humility. Reading and reflection result in metacognitive development, increasing the likelihood of applying such humility in future leadership situations.
- If you are currently working with a mentor, consider sharing your reflection and action plan with them for additional perspective.
- Reflect upon the definitions of humility and ask if you are able to list more facets now than you were before using this reflection tool.
- Think about how this self-reflection activity aligns with any results you have received from feedback processes in your organization (e.g., a 360 review you were the subject of)? Consider prioritizing growth in areas of humility that both you and others have identified as an area for development.

Insights on Author Experiences with the Reflective Tool for the Humble Leadership Paradigm

Overall, we found the tool to be validating of our personal and professional growth across multiple facets of humility. If we were to complete this tool as 25-year-olds instead of now, decades later, the narrative would suggest the need for substantial personal development. This conjecture assumes that our 25-year-old versions would be brave enough to be honest in the answers to the reflective questions. This thinking makes sense to the authors as very few individuals in their 20s are tasked with responsibilities in academic leadership. The tool was helpful to us in an affirming manner. One theme that emerged from the authors' reflective experiences using the Humble Leadership Paradigm is acknowledgement of the contributions of others (personal humility) has become more frequent and natural to us with our increasing years in leadership positions, perhaps partially because of the dynamic of performing less of the actual work ourselves with increasing leadership rank.

That said, some of the questions are challenging for us to honestly answer or even confront. One example surrounds intellectual humility and the correlating dynamic that the culture of academia promotes low open-minded humility in those who have achieved traditional definitions of success. In both settings there is a fallacy that faculty and health care providers have the "right" answers and others should defer to their expertise. Similarly, the concept of science and scientific findings being the "final word" on a controversy or question has been ingrained in us as academic professionals (and if we are honest, we have at times welcomed that thinking, as it brings us comfort and can be an easy way to avoid addressing challenging social issues for which science is only part of the

equation). One example is the anti-vaccination movement. As health care educators, we believe in the science supporting mass immunization to limit disease but have grown in intellectual humility by learning how to engage individuals with anti-vaccination beliefs in an open-minded manner.

Our experience using the Humble Leadership Paradigm also highlighted our struggles with moral humility in our higher education positions. While academia generally helps promote moral and cultural humility with regard to societal issues, such as political extremism, it can also erode moral humility in our professional areas of expertise, given the competitive spirit that permeates higher education. For example, when in a more competitive mindset, several authors reflected upon being more close-minded than appropriate while working with colleagues simply because of the emphasis placed on being “right” within academia.

When reflecting upon strengths humility, the authors noted that growth in this area seemed most efficient when being in a “Big L” leadership position, meaning a position with a formal leadership title. Development of strengths humility has been a somewhat natural byproduct of learning how to effectively assemble, manage, and support teams of people with a variety of strengths and talents. However, we do credit the various leadership and management development activities we have been privileged to experience for helping us become more aware of a key leadership and management practices related to strengths humility.

The reflective activities of the authors also brought to light several general observations related to personal humility and careers in academia. One author noted that the “humble brag” (false humility) is prevalent and perhaps encouraged by the dichotomous nature of humility in academia. On the one hand, humility is valued as an aspect of professionalism; on the other hand, acknowledgement of research and publications is the coin of the realm for promotion and tenure. Another observation involved the myth that a quiet demeanor equates to humility. On the contrary, occasional passive aggressive behaviors may arise from a lack of humility and manifest as a quiet and unengaged manner.

Discussion

Professionals in higher education often serve in multiple positional and appointed leadership/management roles throughout the course of their careers. Academic professionals often hold expertise in high regard, where faculty and administrators can be considered the source of authority, effectively cultivating an *Expert Mentality* that always seeks to be right (Hong et al., 2023). The ability for these professionals to self-assess humility is important in understanding that institutional expertise relies on the talents of the masses rather than any one individual and is critical for sustained inclusive leadership.

Conclusion

As administrative leaders in higher education, we have found value in reflecting on the various facets of humility and arranging them into the Humble Leadership Paradigm presented in this article. We found great value in deep exploration of the facets of humility, beyond the commonly accepted definition of humility being personal humility. While our reflective exercises using the Humble Leadership Paradigm confirmed our personal and professional growth in some facets of

humility, our practice with the paradigm also uncovered facets of humility that are still uncomfortable for us to address, highlighting and reminding us of our need for lifelong learning and development.

Our hope is that readers will uncover facets of humility that they may not have given much thought to prior to working with the Humble Leadership Paradigm and utilize our suggested resources to experience personal and professional growth. Our goals include future publications with methodology to validate the reflective questions as found in Appendix A (seek content validity) as well as to poll academic leaders on their responses to the various facets of humble leadership. Given that this work presents a new paradigm arising from the collective thoughts and experiences of the authors, we need discussion and feedback. We appreciate and thank our reviewers for their feedback which resulted in a stronger manuscript, and we now hope for feedback from our readers and colleagues to further inform our work. Did we miss a facet of humility that is important to you? Is there a facet of humility presented in this work that deserves better explanation? We welcome feedback as individuals and groups implement and use the Humble Leadership Paradigm within the context of their leadership and management settings.

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Appendix A

Reflection and Resources Associated with Facets of HUMBLE Leadership

Facet	Self-reflection Questions & Considerations	Resources
Personal Humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often do you highlight team member accomplishments in relation to your own? • Do you always think you are the most capable/competent/interesting person in the room? • Are you always the first person to share ideas, or do you solicit input from others first? • When was the last time you acknowledged a mentor? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Davis DE, Hook JN, Worthington Jr EL, Van Tongeren DR, Gartner AL, Jennings DJ, Emmons RA. Relational humility: Conceptualizing and measuring humility as a personality judgment. <i>Journal of personality assessment</i>. 2011 Apr 20;93(3):225-34. • Epstein M. Why humility matters in leadership. TEDx. Published November 2021. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://www.ted.com/talks/marvin_epstein_why_humility_matters_in_leadership
Cultural Humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you believe that some styles of dress, language, hair, or body adornments (tattoos and piercings) are more acceptable than others? • How often are most of the people in the room of your same background? (ethnic, religious, socio-economic, educational, etc.) • When was the last time you... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • went to a celebration (or holiday) that you weren't brought up with? • scheduled events to avoid holidays or religious celebrations of a group other than your own? • used the term "Winter Break" instead of referring to a religious holiday? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greene-Moton, E., & Minkler, M. (2020). Cultural competence or cultural humility? Moving beyond the debate. <i>Health Promotion Practice</i>, 21(1), 142–145. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524839919884912 • Robinson D, Masters C, Ansari A. The 5 Rs of cultural humility: A conceptual model for health care leaders. <i>The American journal of medicine</i>. 2021 Feb 1;134(2):161-3. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2020.09.029 • Wade R. Cultural humility: A lens for seeing each other, a path toward healing. Published 2018. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://slideplayer.com/slide/12169304/

Moral/ Ethical Humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When was the last time you? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choose a moral/ethical belief or value that you feel strongly about and develop an argument from the opposite perspective. • listened to Fox News/CNN, Republican/Democrat Talk Radio? • <i>Think of a time in the recent past when one of your moral beliefs was challenged.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did this make you feel? • How did you respond? • When was the last time you expressed the following sentiment, “Thank you for offering your opinion. You have provided me with a new way to think about the topic?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sabini J. Simplifying humility and integrity. TEDx. Published November 2020. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://www.ted.com/talks/joe_sabini_simplifying_humility_and_integrity?language=en • Owens B. The Owens 11-point rating scale. <i>Psychol Assess.</i> 2019;31(3):357-369. <u>The impact of leader moral humility on follower moral self-efficacy and behavior.</u> • Beasley B. Admit, acknowledge, adapt: Three steps to morally humble leadership. <i>Notre Dame Institute for Ethical Leadership.</i> Published April 14, 2021. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://ethicalleadership.nd.edu/news/leader-moral-humility-ethical-leaders-should-be-humbleespecially-about-their-own-ethics/
Humility of Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies have you employed to identify your strengths and weaknesses? • How have you enabled individuals on your team and in your community to identify their own strengths and weaknesses? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>List 3 examples of how another team member's strengths support your weaknesses or how you incorporate the skills of self and your team members into your current work?</i> • When was the last time you (and your team) participated in a group team-building exercise i.e.- Strengthsfinder, MBTI, TrueColors? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wolf N. DISC assessment to Myers-Briggs: 5 top personality assessments. <i>Gloo Blog.</i> Published June 9, 2017. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://blog.gloo.com/disc-assessment-to-myers-briggs-5-top-personality-assessments • Le Gentil H. Identifying your self-limitations. <i>Thrive Global.</i> Published May 24, 2021. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://community.thriveglobal.com/identifying-your-self-limitations/#:~:text=Growing%20up%20in%20a%20family,want%20to%20get%20better%20at

Intellectual Humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When was a time that you realized you were wrong about something? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you learn from the situation/ experience? • What do you want to do about that now?" • When was the last time you changed your mind about something based on someone else's perspective? • When problem solving, do you try to identify the best solution or look for a variety of options that will satisfy the need? • Can you listen without judgement or indifferent to emotional attachment? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nasser F. The power of intellectual humility. TEDx. Published February 2019. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://www.ted.com/talks/farah_nasser_the_power_of_intellectual_humility • Hong LT, Gavaza P, Koch J, de la Peña I. An explorative study on intellectual humility differences among health professional students: implications for interprofessional education and collaboration. Journal of Interprofessional Education & Practice. 2023 Dec 1;33:100674.
Generational Humility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When was the last time you... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • asked someone older for technology help? • made sweeping statements about Millennials, Boomers, etc.? • assumed workers with longer tenure may be averse to change? • had a mentor who is younger than you? • Can you describe a characteristic of a generation other than your own? • How do you leverage various generations to advance the mission of your organization? • Do you value equally, input from members of the community with different rank, tenure, experience? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mix Q. Choosing humility in a self-centered age. TEDx. Published February 2018. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://www.ted.com/talks/quincy_mix_choosing_humility_in_a_self_centered_age • Bracken RC, Fredrickson ME, Fredrickson LA, Appleman M. Generational situatedness: challenging generational stereotypes in health professions education. Medical Teacher. 2023 Apr 3;45(4):380-7. • Pulcini CD, Turner TL, First LR. Generational empathy: an approach for addressing generational differences. Pediatrics. 2021 Mar 1;147(3). • How Millennial Are You? - The Holderness Family?
Humility of wonder or "Awe"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • felt small standing next to the ocean, an ancient tree, or another natural wonder? • recognized that your job replacement ad will be posted before your obituary? • considered that you are the only one that can do your job? • Reflected on your impact on other units of the organization 10 years down the road? Will it matter in 100 years? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keltner D. What is awe and the 8 wonders of life. YouTube. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fy4rAQT9rxM • Sinek S. What is the infinite game? TEDx. Published November 2019. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_what_is_the_infinite_game • Justice A. Systems thinking 101. TEDxFurmanU. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://www.ted.com/tedx

<p>Humility of Suffering</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When was the last time you... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • considered that the way you respond to a challenge or crisis may be different from someone else, and reflected that neither way was right or wrong? • passed judgement about the way someone dealt with a child moving out, a family loss, etc. (have you ever thought that someone was overreacting to a circumstance?) • Do you have a process to ask people what they need when responding to a challenge/crisis? • Are you conscious about not having preconceived notions about how individual community members will react to tragedy or suffering? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stellar JE, Anderson CL, Gatchpazian A. Profiles in empathy: Different empathic responses to emotional and physical suffering. J Exp Psychol Gen. 2020;149(7):1398-1416. doi:10.1037/xge0000718. Epub December 5, 2019. PMID: 31804122. • Shen M. The overlooked payoff to suffering is compassion. Psychology Today. Published January 18, 2024. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://www.psychologytoday.com/article/s/the-overlooked-payoff-to-suffering-is-compassion • Eva AL. How to stay empathic without suffering so much. Greater Good Science Center. Published May 4, 2017. Accessed March 9, 2025. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_stay_empathic_without_suffering_so_much
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Shared Governance in Higher Education: What It Is, What It Is Not, and How to Make It Work

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Abstract

Shared governance is one of higher education's most distinctive and enduring values, yet it remains among the most misunderstood and contentious aspects of institutional life. This article provides a practitioner-oriented analysis of shared governance: its origins, structure, and purpose; the common misconceptions that distort its practice; the conditions under which it acts as either a barrier to or catalyst for innovation; and what executives and faculty must do to make it function as a valuable component of the academic enterprise. Drawing on contemporary scholarship, case studies, and recent institutional crises - including the surge of no-confidence votes and fiscal emergencies at American universities - this article argues that shared governance is neither a faculty veto mechanism nor an administrative formality. When grounded in trust, transparency, and clearly defined roles, shared governance strengthens institutional decision-making and positions colleges and universities for sustainable innovation. When those conditions are absent, it becomes a site of conflict, delay, and mutual recrimination. The article concludes with a set of actionable recommendations for both administrators and faculty leaders seeking to revitalize shared governance at their institutions.

Keywords: shared governance, higher education, innovation, faculty governance, institutional leadership, trust, decision-making

Author Note

This article is structured for higher education practitioners including university presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, faculty senate leaders, and governing board members. It synthesizes current scholarship and contemporary case evidence to provide an actionable framework for understanding and strengthening shared governance in the modern academy.

Introduction

Higher education in the United States and around the world is facing a convergence of pressures - demographic decline, political interference, fiscal constraint, technological disruption, and an erosion of public trust - that demand institutions respond with both urgency and wisdom. At the center of nearly every institutional response sits the question of governance: who decides, how they decide, and whether the people most affected by those decisions have a meaningful voice in shaping them. Shared governance, the principle that governing boards, administrators, and faculty each hold distinct but overlapping responsibilities for institutional direction, is the mechanism through which that voice is meant to be heard. Yet shared governance is simultaneously celebrated

as higher education's defining democratic tradition and criticized as its most intractable impediment to change.

The tensions are real and growing. In November 2025, the University of Nebraska - Lincoln Faculty Senate passed a historic no-confidence resolution against its chancellor by a vote of 60 to 14, the first such vote in the institution's nearly 157-year history, citing a lack of transparency and exclusion from budget decisions that would eliminate academic programs (Nebraska Examiner, 2025). In July 2025, the University of Virginia Faculty Senate voted no confidence in its Board of Visitors, an extraordinary action directed not at a president but at the governing board itself (Cavalier Daily, 2025). These events are not isolated. The Chronicle of Higher Education has documented a surge of no-confidence votes across American higher education, describing them as last-resort expressions of faculty dissatisfaction that have festered for months or years, most commonly triggered by financial mismanagement, failures of transparency, or a president's refusal to participate in shared governance (Zahneis, 2023).

For practitioners - presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, faculty senate leaders, and board members - these developments present an urgent question: Is shared governance broken, or are we simply doing it badly? This article argues that the answer is largely the latter. Shared governance is neither inherently dysfunctional nor inherently virtuous. Its effectiveness depends on the conditions under which it operates: the clarity of roles, the quality of communication, the presence or absence of trust, and the willingness of all parties to engage with the process honestly and in good faith. When those conditions are met, shared governance acts as a catalyst for thoughtful innovation. When they are absent, it becomes a barrier - not because of its design, but because of its misuse.

This article proceeds in seven sections. First, it defines shared governance and traces its historical development. Second, it clarifies what shared governance is not, addressing the misconceptions that most commonly distort its practice. Third, it examines the role of trust as the essential infrastructure of effective governance. Fourth, it analyzes the conditions under which shared governance functions as a barrier to innovation. Fifth, it presents evidence of shared governance as a catalyst for innovation. Sixth, it offers a set of practitioner-oriented recommendations for both administrators and faculty. Finally, it concludes with reflections on the future of shared governance in an era of accelerating change.

Defining Shared Governance: Origins, Structure, and Purpose

Shared governance is both a principle and a mechanism. As a principle, it holds that the complexity of higher education requires the expertise and participation of multiple constituencies - governing boards, administrators, faculty, and in many contexts, staff and students - in institutional decision-making. As a mechanism, it refers to the formal and informal structures through which that participation is organized: faculty senates, academic councils, committee systems, consultative processes, and the policies that define their scope and authority (Levin et al., 2020). The foundational document of American shared governance is the 1966 Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities, jointly issued by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). This statement established the principle that the varied tasks of

higher education produce an inescapable interdependence among governing boards, administration, faculty, students, and others (AAUP, 1966; McNaughtan et al., 2025).

The 1966 Statement delineated a division of primary responsibility. Faculty were recognized as holding primary authority over curriculum, methods of instruction, research, faculty status (including appointments, promotions, and tenure), and aspects of student life relating to the educational process (Riffe, 2026). Administrators were recognized as responsible for operational management, financial planning, and external relations. Governing boards held final legal authority but were expected to exercise that authority in consultation with, and with due regard for, the expertise of faculty and administrators. This tripartite model was not intended to give any single constituency a veto over the others; rather, it established a framework of differentiated authority in which each group's influence was proportional to its competence and responsibility in the matter at hand (Levin et al., 2020).

Historically, the roots of shared governance extend further back than the 1966 Statement. The AAUP's Committee on College and University Governance wrote its first statement on the topic in 1920, recognizing the need for faculty involvement in personnel decisions, administrator selection, budget preparation, and educational policy (McNaughtan et al., 2025). However, the concept did not take its modern form until the social and political upheavals of the 1960s, when universities across the Western world experienced what scholars have called a democratic revolution in governance, opening institutional decision-making to broader participation by faculty, students, and staff (Stensaker & Vabø, 2013). In some systems, this process led to the formation of representative democratic governance structures with elected councils holding substantial power.

Across national contexts, the specifics of shared governance vary enormously. In the United States, the degree of formalization ranges from legislatively mandated systems, such as California's, where the University of California Academic Senate has operated under Regental authority since 1920, to informal traditions sustained by institutional culture rather than codified policy (Levin et al., 2020). In the United Kingdom, governance has historically been structured through bicameral systems of councils and senates, though post-1992 universities adopted more corporate governance models (Taylor, 2013). In Nordic countries, universities have increasingly emphasized leadership and strategic management, sometimes at the expense of traditional academic participation in governance (Stensaker & Vabø, 2013). What unites these diverse arrangements is the underlying recognition that universities are fundamentally different from corporations or government agencies: their core productive work - teaching and research - depends on the professional expertise, creativity, and autonomy of faculty, which cannot be effectively directed through top-down command structures alone.

What Shared Governance Is Not: Correcting Common Misconceptions

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to effective shared governance is the pervasive misunderstanding of what it actually entails. Both administrators and faculty frequently operate under assumptions about shared governance that are inaccurate, and these misconceptions generate conflict, resentment, and dysfunction. Addressing them directly is essential for practitioners seeking to improve governance at their institutions.

Misconception 1: Shared Governance Means Shared Decision-Making

The most common and most damaging misconception is the belief that shared governance means all stakeholders have equal decision-making authority on all matters. As one faculty senate president observed in a study of governance during fiscal crisis, faculty often believe that shared governance means shared decision-making and shared authority, when in most instances it is not; it is also a misconception that the university should act by majority rule (Enright, 2026). Shared governance is a system of differentiated authority, not democratic co-management. Faculty have primary responsibility for academic matters; administrators have primary responsibility for operational and financial matters; governing boards hold final legal authority. The system works not because everyone decides everything together, but because each constituency's expertise is brought to bear on the decisions where that expertise is most relevant.

This conflation of shared governance with shared decision-making is not merely a semantic problem; it is the root cause of many of the most destructive governance conflicts in contemporary higher education. Birnbaum (2004) identified two fundamentally different forms of authority operating within the governance system: legal authority, vested in governing boards and delegated to administrators, and professional authority, rooted in faculty expertise over academic matters. Shared governance functions through the interaction of these two forms of authority, not through their merger. When either party treats governance as a single, undifferentiated pool of decision-making power to be divided or contested, the system collapses into zero-sum competition. Levin et al. (2020) reinforced this point, observing that shared governance in practice refers to shared decision-making authority in which the level of influence in a decision is determined by the level of responsibility a stakeholder has in the matter at hand. This weighted approach allows contributions from interested parties but rests final authority in the stakeholders with the most direct accountability for the decision. The distinction between "shared authority proportional to expertise" and "equal authority on all matters" is precisely where most institutions lose the thread.

The consequences of this confusion are playing out in dramatic fashion. In June 2026, Auburn University's Board of Trustees voted to dissolve the Faculty Senate entirely and replace it with a board-appointed advisory body, while simultaneously claiming "ultimate authority" over curriculum, course offerings, and degree requirements - domains the 1966 Statement explicitly assigned to faculty as areas of primary responsibility (Inside Higher Ed, 2026). The AAUP called the move "the end of shared governance" at the institution. At the other end of the spectrum, a September 2025 letter from UCLA's Executive Vice Chancellor to the Academic Senate pushed back against faculty claims that shared governance entitled the Senate to authority over budget, operations, and space planning, noting that under UC Regents Bylaw 40.1, the Senate's authority extends to admissions, curriculum, degrees, and educational policy, while its role in other areas is advisory (UCLA EVCP, 2025). Both cases illustrate the same underlying problem: absent a shared understanding of where professional authority ends and legal authority begins, governance becomes a battleground rather than a partnership. The definitional work is not optional; it is the precondition for everything else.

Misconception 2: Shared Governance Is a Faculty Veto

A related misconception, more commonly held among administrators, is that shared governance functions primarily as a check on administrative action - a mechanism through which faculty can block decisions they dislike. One university president captured this perception candidly: "I think people view shared governance as a way to prevent change from happening... they are a check on the administration" (Enright, 2026). While faculty governance does serve an important consultative and deliberative function, its purpose is not obstruction. When administrators experience faculty governance as purely reactive or obstructionist, it is often because consultation has been initiated too late in the decision-making process, leaving faculty with no constructive role to play other than resistance (McNaughtan et al., 2025).

The perception of faculty governance as an obstruction mechanism has become deeply embedded in the administrative worldview and is now being used to justify legislative intervention. The Chronicle of Higher Education's 2025 investigation of faculty-administrator relations found that while 81 percent of administrators agreed or strongly agreed that faculty members respected their jobs, only slightly more than half of professors said the same about administrators - a trust asymmetry that feeds the veto narrative on both sides (Gardner, 2025). Gary Rhoades, a professor of higher education at the University of Arizona, captured the administrative logic succinctly: universities operating more like large businesses are encouraged to generate revenue, move quickly, and pursue initiatives without time for consultation. Yet Rhoades himself noted the paradox: bringing faculty into the process may slow it down, but when you do not consult, you end up making poor decisions (Gardner, 2025). The University of Arizona's own experience bears this out. Former President Robert Robbins authorized the acquisition of the for-profit Ashford University over faculty objections, a decision that contributed to a \$177 million budget deficit, a no-confidence vote, and Robbins's eventual resignation (Gardner, 2025; Inside Higher Ed, 2026). The faculty governance process that Robbins experienced as obstruction would, had he engaged with it, have functioned as a quality check that might have averted institutional crisis.

The political consequences of the veto misconception extend well beyond individual campuses. In Texas, Senate Bill 1489 proposed in 2025 would require faculty senates at public universities to obtain permission from their governing board merely to exist and would relegate any authorized senate to a purely advisory role, explicitly prohibiting senates from having any final decision-making authority or taking any action on behalf of the institution, including approving personnel actions or conducting investigations (PEN America, 2026). The bill would also transfer sole and exclusive authority over curriculum, hiring, and guest speakers to deans appointed by a nine-member committee on which only one member may be a university employee. At Auburn, as discussed earlier, the Board of Trustees enacted similar measures voluntarily even though the Alabama legislature had not required them. Pierce (2014) contextualized this trend, noting that some trustees, presidents, and elected officials have embraced the theory that the traditional model of higher education is no longer sustainable, and that this belief, combined with growing skepticism among elected officials about the value of higher education, has led governing boards to seek influence over matters that previously had been the province of faculty. The veto misconception, in other words, is no longer simply an internal source of governance friction; it has become the intellectual justification for dismantling shared governance altogether.

Misconception 3: Shared Governance Is Obsolete in a Fast-Moving Environment

Critics of shared governance frequently argue that it is an anachronistic holdover from a more leisurely era, too slow and cumbersome for the rapid decision-making that contemporary higher education demands. Stensaker and Vabø (2013) documented this argument in their analysis of Nordic university strategic plans, finding that most institutions emphasized leadership development and entrepreneurial management as the primary vehicles for building governance capacity, while paying relatively little attention to the cultural and symbolic dimensions of governance. The problem with this argument is not that speed is unimportant, but that it conflates efficiency with effectiveness. As Stensaker and Vabø (2013) cautioned, speed is hardly admirable if decisions are poor and lack support. The traditional deliberative processes of shared governance, while slower, have significant value precisely in situations characterized by high uncertainty and high risk, where the consequences of poor decisions are severe and the need for broad institutional buy-in is greatest.

The empirical evidence directly contradicts the obsolescence claim. Eckel (2000), in a detailed comparative study of four American universities that faced the difficult decision of shutting down academic programs, found that the governance arrangements and decision-making processes varied considerably across the institutions in terms of timeframes, the number of people involved, and the types of actors included - yet all four were shared governance processes able to reach hard decisions. Neither board size, allocation of power, union status, centralization, nor other structural factors appeared to have a particular influence on the quality of outcomes, although they did affect the speed of decisions (Eckel, 2000, as cited in Stensaker & Vabø, 2013; Kezar, 2004). Kenny et al. (2025) deepened this analysis by drawing on systems research to argue that the distinction between efficiency and effectiveness in higher education governance is highly significant but underexplored. An efficient organization functions well and minimizes its use of resources; an effective organization does what it is meant to do and aims to do so efficiently. Universities, as complex adaptive systems, are not well served by the command-and-control change processes that prioritize speed and predictability, because the outcomes of reform in such systems are inherently unpredictable. Effective reform instead relies on incremental, action-based learning and feedback across all levels of the system - precisely the kind of deliberative, consultative process that shared governance provides (Kenny et al., 2025). The obsolescence argument, in other words, mistakes the nature of the institution: universities are not assembly lines where faster necessarily means better.

Faculty leaders themselves recognize the need for greater responsiveness within governance, and the most effective among them are actively working to achieve it. McNaughtan et al. (2025) found that faculty senate presidents spoke candidly about the need to reform their own internal governance processes so they could function as more nimble collaborators. One faculty leader described how their senate had significant autonomy to structure committees, which enabled faster action on emerging issues - but acknowledged that this same autonomy could lead to redundancy and inefficiency if not managed carefully. Another described the embarrassment of learning that a faculty committee's civility policy had been shared with the provost before the senate president had even seen it - a failure of internal coordination that undermined the senate's credibility as a governance partner. The point is not that shared governance needs to match the speed of executive decision-making; it cannot and should not. The point is that governance bodies must be organized efficiently enough to contribute meaningfully within the timeframes that institutional decisions

actually require. The solution to slow governance is faster governance, not no governance - and the faculty leaders in McNaughtan et al.'s (2025) study understood this distinction clearly.

Misconception 4: Shared Governance Is Only About Faculty Senates

Shared governance is frequently reduced, in practice and in public discourse, to the formal workings of the faculty senate. While faculty senates are important structural components, they represent only one dimension of a much broader governance ecosystem. Riffe (2026) argued persuasively that academic departments function as the microfoundations of institutional governance, noting that much of the faculty's role in governance is enacted at the departmental level through relationships, patterns of interaction, and formal and informal communications. Kezar and Sam (2014) similarly emphasized that there is a conceptual ethos of shared governance that transcends formal structures and mechanisms, encompassing the cultural norms, relational practices, and informal consultative habits that shape how decisions are actually made across all levels of the institution.

The departmental dimension of governance deserves particular attention because it is where the day-to-day work of the academy is actually organized. Zan et al. (2025) found that department chairs serve as pivotal middle leaders who translate institutional visions into actionable plans while managing the dynamics of their academic units. Their study identified 26 distinct components of departmental leadership in learning and teaching, including monitoring, supporting, and developing the organizational culture necessary for effective governance. Critically, the chairs in this study recognized that shared governance and collegial relationships are of particular importance to their sustainable leadership - yet they consistently reported being under-resourced, under-trained, and undervalued in this role. The governance work of departments - hiring, curriculum design, tenure and promotion, enrollment management, accreditation maintenance, and resource allocation - constitutes much of the substantive decision-making that determines whether an institution fulfills its mission. When this work is done poorly, the consequences register not at the senate level but in failed searches, curricular stagnation, faculty burnout, and declining student outcomes. Strengthening shared governance, therefore, requires attending not only to the senate chamber but to the dozens or hundreds of department meetings where governance is practiced every week.

The inverse case is equally revealing. Ghamrawi et al. (2025) studied destructive middle leadership in Arab higher education institutions and identified three patterns that systematically undermined governance at the departmental and program level: the weaponization of authority by middle leaders who used their positional power to control rather than facilitate; hierarchical entrenchment and institutional inertia that prevented innovation despite reform mandates; and the silencing of dissent and erasure of voice through which faculty who challenged departmental leaders were marginalized or excluded from decision-making. These patterns operated beneath the level of the faculty senate entirely, embedded in the daily interactions between chairs and faculty. Ghamrawi et al. (2025) concluded that destructive leadership at the middle level is not merely interpersonal but structurally embedded, sustained by performative reform discourse and the routinization of exclusion. For practitioners, the implication is sobering: an institution can have an exemplary faculty senate and still experience a collapse of governance at the departmental level if it fails to invest in the selection, development, and accountability of its academic middle leaders.

Trust: The Essential Infrastructure of Shared Governance

If shared governance is the vehicle, trust is the fuel. Without it, even the most carefully designed governance structures will stall. The research on trust in higher education, while still developing, is unequivocal on this point: trust between faculty and administrators is the foundation upon which effective governance rests (Gratz & Looney, 2025; Tierney, 2006).

Gratz and Looney (2025) examined interpersonal and institutional trust among faculty at six private universities, finding significant positive relationships between faculty trust in colleagues and trust in deans, and between both forms of interpersonal trust and institutional trust. Notably, their study revealed that trust was inversely related to faculty rank: assistant professors and adjunct faculty reported higher levels of trust than associate and full professors, suggesting that trust may erode as faculty members gain more experience with governance processes and institutional decision-making. This finding carries important implications for practitioners: the faculty members who are most deeply engaged in governance are often those whose trust has been most depleted.

The mechanisms through which trust is built and broken are well documented. Trust develops over time through repeated interactions characterized by consistency, integrity, transparency, and follow-through (Gratz & Looney, 2025; Hoppes & Holley, 2014; Tierney, 2006). Each decision is an opportunity either to build and nurture trust or to break it down, depending on the degree of communication, transparency, and community input involved (Hoppes & Holley, 2014). Trust can also be broken with devastating speed, as illustrated by the case of a struggling state university where faculty senate leaders reported that their confidence in shared governance collapsed almost overnight when the full extent of a hidden fiscal crisis was revealed. Faculty leaders described the news of the structural deficit as having dropped from outer space with no real warning, despite years of mounting problems that the administration had minimized or concealed (Enright, 2026).

The consequences of broken trust extend far beyond governance processes. McNaughtan et al. (2025) found that faculty senate presidents who experienced trust breakdowns with administrators reported feelings of isolation and disengagement, describing themselves as bridges between two constituencies to which they no longer fully belonged. Low trust creates an us-versus-them dynamic that becomes self-reinforcing: faculty vilify administrators, administrators vilify faculty, and both suffer deep emotional costs and toxic working conditions (Santos & Filner, 2022). At the institutional level, low trust is associated with increased cynicism toward organizational change, reduced faculty engagement, and diminished organizational commitment (Gratz & Looney, 2025; Qian & Daniels, 2008).

For practitioners, the message is clear but challenging: trust cannot be mandated or manufactured through structural reform alone. It must be cultivated through consistent behavior over time. Senior administrators must be intentional about incorporating the faculty viewpoint into initiatives and decisions, not as an afterthought or a box to check, but as a genuine commitment to the principle that institutional decisions are stronger when they reflect the perspectives of the people responsible for carrying them out (Gratz & Looney, 2025).

When Shared Governance Acts as a Barrier to Innovation

It would be dishonest to deny that shared governance can and does function as a barrier to innovation under certain conditions. Critics are not entirely wrong when they point to instances where governance processes have delayed necessary action, protected the status quo, or enabled a small number of faculty to derail initiatives that would have served the broader institutional interest. The question for practitioners is not whether these problems exist, but what causes them and how they can be addressed.

Structural Sclerosis and Process Capture

Large research universities frequently maintain governance structures of extraordinary complexity, with multiple layers of committees, subcommittees, and review processes through which any significant proposal must pass. When these structures accumulate over decades without periodic review and simplification, they can produce what might be called structural sclerosis: a condition in which the governance apparatus has become so elaborate that it impedes rather than facilitates decision-making. The problem is compounded when a small number of faculty members who have invested heavily in mastering the governance process use their procedural expertise to exert disproportionate influence over outcomes - a form of process capture that can frustrate both administrators and the majority of faculty who do not participate actively in governance.

The phenomenon is well documented across institutional types and national contexts. In the United Kingdom, the Lambert Review of Business-University Collaboration, commissioned by the Treasury, explicitly identified the committee structure of many universities' internal governance as detrimental to good governance, associating governance by committee with a sector that can be slow-moving, bureaucratic, and risk-averse (HM Treasury, 2003, as cited in Taylor, 2013). Pierce (2014) documented the American version of this dynamic: when confronted with governance structures that impede the rapid development of new programs, a number of presidents have simply created alternative structures - new graduate schools, schools of professional studies, or satellite programs - staffed by contingent faculty with no role in governance and overseen by deans who bypass the existing committee system entirely. These workarounds may solve an immediate operational problem, but they create a two-track institution in which some academic programs are subject to rigorous faculty governance and others are not, eroding the legitimacy of the governance system as a whole. The Brown University case, discussed earlier, offers a more constructive response: when the Faculty Executive Committee found that governance structures designed for a smaller institution had not kept pace with growth, the university's president endorsed a governance review rather than a governance bypass, acknowledging that structural adaptation is preferable to structural avoidance (Brown Daily Herald, 2025).

Santos and Filner (2022) documented a particularly instructive example at a public metropolitan university (PMU) where a shared governance task force struggled to develop a workable decision-making model. The task force created a typology of decisions, ranging from routine and procedural decisions that could be handled by individual departments to crisis and mitigating decisions that required rapid administrative action. The fundamental problem was that in a context of ongoing fiscal crisis, administrators could plausibly argue that most decisions fell into the crisis category,

effectively circumventing shared governance entirely. Meanwhile, faculty lacked confidence that administrators would categorize decisions fairly. The resulting impasse left both parties frustrated and the governance system largely non-functional.

Risk Aversion and the Status Quo Bias

Faculty governance bodies, like any deliberative assembly, can exhibit a conservatism born of their structure. Proposals for change must typically secure majority support from a body whose members have diverse disciplinary perspectives, competing priorities, and varying degrees of engagement. The default outcome of this process is often inaction, particularly when the proposed change involves significant risk or uncertainty. Department chairs in a Canadian university study reported that resistance to change remained a persistent barrier to motivating faculty members to revise courses or improve teaching quality, with one chair noting that it is simply human nature to resist course revision (Zan et al., 2025). This is not a failure of governance per se; it is a feature of any democratic deliberative process. But it can become a significant obstacle when institutions face competitive pressures that demand rapid adaptation.

Riffe (2026) offered a vivid illustration of this dynamic at the departmental level. In a vignette drawn from governance practice, a department chair attempted to conduct a faculty search to fill one of three open lines. The deliberation devolved into procedural chaos: the search committee chair was unfamiliar with expectations surrounding reference checks and candidate ranking, faculty members disputed who were permitted to call for votes under parliamentary rules that no one could locate, and the meeting ended without resolution. The underlying cause was not obstruction in any malicious sense but rather the accumulated weight of undocumented procedures, unexamined norms, and a faculty too overextended by prior retirements to invest in updating the governance infrastructure that their work depended on. This is status quo bias operating at the most granular level - not as a conscious choice to resist change, but as the default outcome of a system in which no one has the bandwidth or the institutional memory to do things differently. Multiplied across dozens of departments, this pattern can produce an institution that appears resistant to change when it is, more accurately, unable to organize change through the governance structures available to it.

The problem intensifies when governance bodies face proposals that cross disciplinary or departmental boundaries. At Syracuse University, Arts and Sciences and Maxwell School deans in 2024 overrode a faculty vote approving a Liberal Arts Core curriculum revision that included a foreign language requirement, citing financial and enrollment concerns - only to trigger a faculty backlash and a 185-to-51 resolution reasserting faculty authority over curricular decisions (Daily Orange, 2026). At Brown University, a Faculty Executive Committee review in 2024-2025 found that faculty governance had not kept pace with the institution's growth, with faculty reporting that their decision-making power was not as strong as it should be, particularly concerning resource allocation and program development. Brown's president publicly agreed that governance structures designed for 400 faculty and one professional school may not work for 1,400 faculty and multiple schools (Brown Daily Herald, 2025). In both cases, the issue was not that faculty were ideologically opposed to change but that the governance structures through which change was supposed to flow had calcified around assumptions that no longer reflected institutional reality. Risk aversion, in this light,

is often less a faculty disposition than an institutional design problem - and one that can be addressed through the kind of periodic governance audit recommended later in this article.

Information Asymmetry and the Timing Problem

Perhaps the most common way shared governance becomes a barrier is through what might be called the timing problem. Administrators, who control the flow of institutional information, frequently involve faculty in decision-making only after the key parameters of a decision have already been established - after the budget has been set, after the strategic priorities have been determined, after the crisis has matured to the point where options are severely constrained. Faculty who are brought into the process at this late stage have no meaningful opportunity to contribute constructively; their only available response is to approve what has already been decided or to resist. Unsurprisingly, they often resist. McNaughtan et al. (2025) found that faculty senate presidents consistently emphasized the importance of being consulted early in the decision-making process, before positions had hardened and before the range of possible options had been narrowed. When administrators failed to do so, faculty leaders experienced it as a fundamental violation of the shared governance principle - not because they expected to make the decision, but because they expected to be part of the conversation.

The Enright (2026) case study of Struggling State University provides the most fully documented illustration of how the timing problem unfolds in practice. Some financial administrators at SSU began anticipating a structural deficit in late fall 2022 and early winter 2023, but most senior administrators and other key stakeholders, including the faculty senate leadership, remained unaware of the looming crisis through spring 2023. Faculty senate leaders reported that the news of the extent of the deficit dropped from outer space with no real warning. The faculty senate leadership noted that they would have responded very differently had they understood the rationale behind earlier requests for program cuts and redesigns, but because the administration concealed the severity of the situation, faculty treated those requests as routine suggestions to be addressed incrementally rather than urgent responses to an existential threat. By the time the president called an emergency meeting to disclose the crisis, the window for collaborative problem-solving had closed. Within weeks, the administration proposed eliminating more than two dozen academic programs and potential faculty layoffs, triggering student protests, alumni backlash, legislative hearings, and ultimately a vote of no confidence in the president. As Enright (2026) concluded, the lack of transparency led to the complete undermining of shared governance and actively prevented the faculty from making strategic decisions had they known the state of the university. Faculty cannot be expected to make sound fiscal and planning decisions when administrators create significant gaps in knowledge about the fiscal state of the university.

Santos and Filner (2022) documented a strikingly similar dynamic at their public metropolitan university, where faculty consistently reported being brought into decisions only after administrators had already determined the outcome. One adjunct faculty leader described the pattern directly: administrators always raised issues to the faculty late in the process, after they had already settled on how they wanted things to happen, and only then would they involve faculty. A dean in the same study acknowledged that the faculty and administration talked amongst themselves on their respective sides and did not come together until the formal Meet and Confer process - and that by that point, it was already too late for meaningful input. The pattern is

remarkably consistent across institutional types: the timing problem is not a failure of a particular leader or a particular institution but a structural tendency embedded in the asymmetric distribution of information between administrators who control institutional data and faculty who are asked to make decisions without access to it. For practitioners, the implication is direct: if shared governance consistently breaks down at your institution, the first question to ask is not whether the governance structures are adequate but whether faculty are receiving the information they need, when they need it, to participate meaningfully.

The Weaponization of Governance

In the most dysfunctional cases, governance structures are weaponized by one or more parties. Faculty may use governance processes to relitigate personnel grievances, advance political agendas unrelated to institutional welfare, or punish administrators for decisions they disagree with. Administrators may use the rhetoric of shared governance to create an illusion of consultation while making decisions unilaterally, or they may starve governance bodies of the information and resources they need to function effectively. In either case, the result is a governance system that serves the interests of individual actors rather than the institution as a whole. At Lesley University, faculty cast three separate votes of no confidence in the president over three consecutive years, citing financial mismanagement and an erosion of shared governance (Inside Higher Ed, 2024). Whether these votes represented legitimate expressions of institutional concern or had devolved into a ritualized form of opposition is a question that reflects the complexity of distinguishing productive governance from its weaponized cousin.

The most extreme form of administrative weaponization is the preemptive dissolution of faculty governance to prevent a specific vote. At Spartanburg Community College in South Carolina, the chief academic officer dissolved the faculty senate by email on April 10, 2023 - hours before senators were scheduled to vote on a policy requiring faculty to be present on campus for nearly forty hours per week. The administration's message announcing the dissolution stated bluntly that there is no shared governance at the institution outside of curricular and instructional matters and that all other decision-making rests solely with the president and governing board. The administration then replaced the senate with an academic council of its own design, which included thirteen administrators among its thirty-three members and whose bylaws restricted deliberations to academic policy (AAUP, 2023). The AAUP's investigating committee concluded that the dissolution was a preemptive effort to silence faculty opposition and that it contravened the foundational requirement of the 1966 Statement: that agencies for faculty governance should be designed and implemented by joint action of the faculty, administration, and governing board. The AAUP subsequently voted to sanction Spartanburg alongside New College of Florida, where a politically motivated board takeover had resulted in what the AAUP described as one of the most egregious and extensive violations of governance principles at a single institution in recent memory (AAUP, 2024). These are not governance disputes; they are governance abolitions - and they represent the endpoint of the weaponization trajectory.

The University of Kansas offers an instructive contrast - a case where governance was initially bypassed but ultimately vindicated. In October 2020, the provost's office began evaluating programs deemed under-enrolled without announcing the process to the campus community. Faculty and students learned of the initiative through press coverage. In February 2021, the provost

informed the Kansas Board of Regents that 42 programs would be discontinued - before delivering those requests to governance. The University Senate subsequently passed a formal resolution to restore shared governance, documenting a pattern of decisions made for the university community and not with it, including unilateral restructuring, mandated return-to-campus policies without faculty input, and a centralized online curriculum initiative announced without stakeholder consultation (University of Kansas Senate, 2022). Yet when the Academic Policies and Procedures Committee finally received the 42 discontinuation proposals and conducted public hearings with extensive written and oral testimony, it recommended retaining 14 of the 42 programs, finding insufficient evidence that discontinuation served the university's academic interests in those cases (Inside Higher Ed, 2022). The Kansas case illustrates both the damage that weaponization inflicts on institutional trust and the corrective value that governance provides when it is actually allowed to function: the faculty process did not obstruct necessary cuts, but it prevented unnecessary ones.

When Shared Governance Acts as a Catalyst for Innovation

The narrative of shared governance as an obstacle to progress, while containing elements of truth, obscures an equally important reality: some of the most significant and sustainable innovations in higher education have been achieved through, rather than in spite of, shared governance processes. Understanding the conditions under which governance catalyzes innovation is essential for practitioners who want to harness its potential rather than circumvent its machinery.

Quality Assurance and Curricular Innovation

The domain where shared governance has historically been most productive is curriculum development and academic program design. Faculty, by virtue of their disciplinary expertise and their direct engagement with students, are uniquely positioned to identify curricular needs, design effective learning experiences, and evaluate academic quality. When governance processes channel this expertise effectively, the results can be transformative. McClellan et al. (2023) documented how department chairs in the United States served as pivotal figures in undergraduate curriculum changes, primarily through course sequencing adjustments and the introduction of new courses or tracks. While the pace of change was slower than top-down mandates might achieve, the resulting innovations were more carefully designed, more widely supported by the faculty who would implement them, and more likely to be sustained over time.

The Association of Governing Boards has argued that effective shared governance strengthens institutions by serving as a vehicle for necessary change and that a governing board's commitment to shared governance bears fruit in the form of mutual trust in challenging times, support for innovation, and shared commitment to building a stronger future (AGB, 2025). This is not merely aspirational language. The evidence from high-performing institutions supports the claim that inclusive governance processes produce better academic outcomes. Ehrenberg (2002) and Rosovsky (1990) documented how shared governance was an integral feature of world-class research universities such as Cornell and Harvard, contributing to their sustained excellence in both research and teaching (as cited in Taylor, 2013).

The AAUP's 2024 Community College Shared Governance Survey provides further evidence of this dynamic across institutional types. The survey, conducted in partnership with the Center for the

Study of Community Colleges, examined governance practices at institutions that educate nearly 40 percent of all undergraduates in the United States. Its findings confirmed that faculty authority over curriculum, academic standards, and degree requirements remained the strongest area of shared governance across both unionized and nonunionized community colleges, suggesting that the principle of faculty primacy over academic matters retains broad institutional support even in contexts where governance is otherwise contested (AAUP, 2025). This finding is significant for practitioners because it demonstrates that the curricular domain is not merely where governance is most theoretically justified but where it is most practically resilient - the area where faculty expertise is least likely to be disputed and most likely to produce measurable institutional value. For institutions seeking to build or rebuild confidence in shared governance, curriculum may therefore represent the most productive starting point: a domain where the case for faculty authority is strong, the precedent is deep, and the results - program quality, accreditation success, student learning outcomes - are visible and measurable.

Crisis Navigation and Institutional Resilience

Counterintuitively, shared governance can be most valuable precisely in the moments when administrators are most tempted to bypass it: during institutional crises. The COVID-19 pandemic provided a natural experiment in governance under extreme time pressure. At the University of Minnesota - which the University Senate Office has described as having one of the strongest and most active shared governance systems among large research universities (University of Minnesota Senate, 2024) - the Faculty Consultative Committee adjusted its meeting schedule to support accelerated decision-making while maintaining consultative processes. The university president established working groups with student, staff, and faculty representatives for both academic and financial decisions. Faculty leaders reported that despite the urgency, shared governance had not been abandoned, even when the process required adaptation (Minnesota Daily, 2020). The institutional trust that had been built through years of collaborative governance provided the social capital necessary to navigate unprecedented disruption.

By contrast, institutions that bypassed shared governance during the pandemic often paid a steep price in subsequent years. The post-pandemic period saw an acceleration of no-confidence votes, labor actions, and governance breakdowns at institutions where faculty felt they had been excluded from consequential decisions. The pattern suggests that short-term efficiency gains from bypassing governance create long-term costs in institutional trust and faculty engagement. Ramaley et al. (2023) argued that building the capacity to contend with complex internal challenges in the wake of the pandemic may require adjustments to the usual allocation of responsibilities and approaches to decision-making in order to include more people at the leadership table - not fewer.

The Minnesota case merits closer examination because it illustrates specifically how governance infrastructure, built over decades of routine practice, can be mobilized under extreme conditions. In a Spring 2020 update to the faculty, the Faculty Consultative Committee chair reported that the FCC chair and vice chair had been invited to serve on the president's Emergency Management team alongside the senior leadership team, meeting daily to address the rapidly evolving situation. They were subsequently asked to serve on multiple planning work groups - Academic and Research Planning, Finance and Operations Planning, and Academic and Student Affairs - providing faculty representation not at the periphery of crisis decision-making but at its center (Pittenger, 2020). This

level of integration was possible not because the pandemic demanded it but because the governance infrastructure was already in place: the consultative committee system, the established relationships between faculty leaders and the president, and the institutional norm of including faculty in consequential decisions. The crisis did not create that infrastructure; it merely tested it, and the infrastructure held.

The inverse pattern is equally well documented. The AAUP's 2021 investigation of governance during the COVID-19 pandemic examined eight institutions - including Canisius College, the University of Akron, and Illinois Wesleyan University, among others - where administrators used the pandemic as justification for bypassing shared governance to eliminate programs, furlough faculty, and restructure academic units without meaningful faculty consultation (AAUP, 2021). More recently, at the University of Arizona, shared governance played a critical role in uncovering administrative mismanagement that led to a \$177 million budget shortfall under former President Robert Robbins. The faculty senate chair described shared governance as a feature, not a bug of higher education management - noting that governance processes were the mechanism through which the financial crisis was brought to light (Inside Higher Ed, 2026). Yet when the Board of Regents selected a new president in a process that excluded elected faculty representatives, the new president declined to sign the university's shared governance memorandum of understanding, the first president to do so. The contrast is instructive: at the very institution where shared governance had demonstrated its value by detecting a crisis that administrative channels had concealed, the incoming leadership moved to weaken the governance structures that made that detection possible.

Shared Governance as a Recruitment and Retention Advantage

In the competitive market for academic talent, institutions with strong shared governance traditions hold a significant advantage. Colleges and universities with meaningful systems of shared governance and clear commitments to protecting academic freedom through a strong tenure code are the ones most likely to attract the best scholars (Minnesota Daily, 1996). This is not an abstract claim. Faculty members evaluate prospective employers not only on salary and research support but also on the quality of the governance environment - the degree to which they will have a voice in the decisions that affect their professional lives. In an era when faculty recruitment and retention are increasingly challenging, institutions that can credibly demonstrate a commitment to shared governance possess a competitive advantage that no amount of strategic planning can replicate.

The empirical evidence supporting this claim has strengthened considerably in recent years. The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) survey, administered by the Harvard Graduate School of Education and completed by faculty at over 250 colleges and universities, explicitly measures faculty satisfaction with governance alongside satisfaction with teaching, research, service, and work-life balance (COACHE, 2025). In 2024, Babson College publicly presented its use of COACHE data to improve its shared governance structures, identifying governance satisfaction as a lever for broader institutional climate improvement (COACHE, 2024). Penn State's 2025 COACHE administration included both shared governance and recruitment and retention as linked survey domains, reflecting an emerging institutional recognition that governance quality directly affects the talent pipeline (Penn State, 2025). These are not isolated efforts. Institutions as diverse as Purdue, Virginia Tech, Baylor, and Indiana University have made the

COACHE governance module a centerpiece of their faculty retention strategies, treating governance not as an abstract principle but as a measurable dimension of the employment experience that faculty evaluate when deciding whether to stay or leave.

The inverse case is equally instructive. When governance protections are visibly eroded, the recruitment consequences can be immediate. In June 2026, Auburn University's Board of Trustees unanimously dissolved the Faculty Senate and claimed board-level authority over curriculum - and observers immediately noted that the restructuring would likely influence recruitment and retention of faculty who value traditional models of shared governance, with early-career academics expected to scrutinize how the new advisory council functions in practice before accepting positions (Academic Jobs, 2026). The OECD's (2024) comprehensive review of academic careers across member nations warned that the deteriorating working conditions in higher education, including the erosion of faculty autonomy and participation in governance, have reached the point where the sustainability of the academic profession is at risk and increasingly unattractive to younger academics. Kenny et al. (2025) framed the problem even more starkly, documenting a global process of de-professionalization through casualization of academic labor and loss of tenure, academic freedom, and autonomy. In this context, institutions that can offer meaningful shared governance are not simply upholding a tradition - they are offering a tangible professional benefit that distinguishes them in an increasingly competitive and precarious academic labor market.

Innovation Through Partnership Models

Recent scholarship has documented innovative applications of shared governance principles beyond the traditional campus context. Reinhardt and Shaikh (2025) studied a school-university residency partnership at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, a Hispanic-Serving Institution, where shared governance structures were used to strengthen collaboration between university faculty and K-12 school partners in a pre-service teacher education program. Quarterly governance meetings provided structured platforms for inclusive decision-making, reducing hierarchical barriers and supporting program sustainability. The study found that governance meetings facilitated collaborative problem-solving, increased transparency, and improved communication between partners - demonstrating that shared governance principles can be productively applied to inter-institutional partnerships as well as internal university operations.

The TAMU-CC case is not an isolated example. Green et al. (2020) identified four essential features of effective school-university partnerships that depend on governance structures: conceptual clarity, clearly defined roles, jointly agreed operational strategies, and effective mechanisms for evaluation and accountability. These features map directly onto the principles of shared governance as practiced within universities themselves, suggesting that institutions with strong internal governance cultures may be better positioned to build productive external partnerships. Reinhardt and Shaikh (2025) reached a similar conclusion, finding that shared governance in their residency partnership functioned not only as a structural arrangement but also as a cultural framework for building trust, fostering co-leadership, and enabling sustained collaboration across institutional boundaries. The implication for practitioners is significant: shared governance is not merely an internal institutional process but a transferable competency that strengthens an institution's capacity to collaborate effectively with external partners, school districts, community organizations, and industry stakeholders.

Strikingly, the principles of shared governance have also demonstrated their value in sectors beyond higher education, reinforcing the argument that the model is neither anachronistic nor limited to the academy. In healthcare, the implementation of interprofessional shared governance structures has become a standard for agencies seeking Magnet or Pathway to Excellence designation, with research demonstrating associations between shared governance and workplace empowerment, staff satisfaction, and increased engagement in quality improvement initiatives (Kutney-Lee et al., 2016; Schulz & DeZolt, 2025). Within higher education itself, National Louis University, a private institution in Chicago that was near closure twelve years ago, credits its turnaround to a combination of bold programmatic innovation and a reimagined approach to shared governance that engaged faculty in redesigning the institution's academic portfolio rather than defending the status quo (McNaughton, 2023). These cross-sector and turnaround examples underscore a broader point: shared governance, when properly designed and genuinely practiced, is not a brake on innovation but a framework through which innovation can be collaboratively developed, legitimized, and sustained.

Making Shared Governance Work: Recommendations for Practitioners

The evidence reviewed in this article points toward a clear conclusion: shared governance is neither inherently effective nor inherently dysfunctional. Its value depends on the conditions under which it operates. The following recommendations, drawn from the scholarly literature and contemporary case evidence, are designed to help both administrators and faculty leaders create those conditions.

Recommendations for Administrators

Invest in Transparency as a Default Operating Principle

The single most common trigger for governance breakdowns is information asymmetry - the perception, often justified, that administrators are withholding critical information from faculty. Administrators who adopt radical transparency as a default operating principle - sharing financial data, enrollment projections, and strategic options early and openly - build the trust necessary for productive governance. As one interim provost noted, if you tell people over and over again you want to raise their salaries but you never do it, you are not trustworthy, because you are not following through with what you have said (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2025). Transparency is not merely a communication strategy; it is the behavioral foundation of institutional trust.

Engage Faculty Early, Not Late

The timing of faculty engagement is at least as important as the fact of engagement. Consulting faculty after decisions have been effectively made is worse than not consulting them at all, because it generates the perception of manipulation - the sense that consultation is performative rather than genuine. McNaughtan et al. (2025) recommended that administrators embed the principles and structures of shared governance into the design of strategic plans from the outset, ensuring that faculty are involved in defining problems and generating options, not merely reacting to proposals that have already been formulated.

Schedule Standing Meetings with Faculty Leaders

One practical recommendation that emerges consistently from the literature is the establishment of regular, standing meetings between senior administrators and faculty senate leaders. These meetings serve multiple purposes: they create a reliable channel for two-way communication; they allow administrators to triage issues that need immediate attention from those that can wait for formal governance processes; they build personal relationships that sustain trust through periods of disagreement; and they signal to the broader faculty that the administration values governance as an ongoing partnership rather than an occasional obligation (McNaughtan et al., 2025).

Distinguish Between Domains of Authority

Much governance conflict arises from ambiguity about which decisions belong primarily to faculty, which to administrators, and which require genuine collaboration. Administrators should work with faculty leaders to develop clear, mutually agreed-upon frameworks that map the types of decisions the institution regularly faces to the governance processes appropriate for each. Santos and Filner's (2022) typology - distinguishing routine and procedural decisions, collaborative decisions, innovative and exploratory decisions, and crisis decisions - provides a useful starting point, though any such framework must include provisions for reclassification as circumstances change and for resolving disagreements about categorization.

Recommendations for Faculty Leaders

Take Ownership of Governance Quality

Faculty senates and governance bodies are only as effective as the faculty members who participate in them. Too often, governance positions are filled by a small number of dedicated individuals while the majority of the faculty remains disengaged. Faculty leaders must actively recruit colleagues into governance, provide mentorship and training for new participants, and work to ensure that governance service is recognized and rewarded in promotion and tenure decisions. As Gratz and Looney (2025) documented, there is a sizable body of research indicating widespread frustration among faculty regarding their colleagues' lack of engagement in shared governance, and addressing this disengagement is a prerequisite for strengthening the faculty voice.

Adopt a Proactive, Not Reactive, Orientation

The most effective faculty leaders do not wait for administrators to bring issues to them; they identify emerging challenges and opportunities independently and propose responses. McNaughtan et al. (2025) found that faculty senate presidents who adopted a proactive orientation - sharing their top goals and objectives with administrators, identifying available resources, and proposing collaborative approaches to institutional challenges - were significantly more effective than those who operated primarily in a reactive mode. Proactive engagement shifts the dynamic from adversarial to collaborative and demonstrates that faculty governance adds value to institutional decision-making rather than merely constraining it.

Build Empathy for Administrative Constraints

Faculty leaders who are effective in shared governance understand that administrators often operate under constraints that are not visible to the faculty: political pressures from governing boards and state legislatures, confidentiality requirements surrounding personnel and legal

matters, and the weight of fiduciary responsibility for institutional solvency. McNaughtan et al. (2025) found that faculty senate presidents expressed compassion for the difficult decisions administrators must make, often with imperfect information and pressing deadlines. This empathy did not require faculty leaders to abandon their advocacy for faculty interests; rather, it enabled them to frame that advocacy in terms that acknowledged the full complexity of the decisions at hand.

Streamline Governance Processes

Faculty governance bodies should conduct regular audits of their own structures and processes, asking whether each committee, each review stage, and each reporting requirement serves a clear purpose. Governance processes that have accumulated over decades without review are prime candidates for simplification. Streamlining does not mean weakening governance; it means ensuring that governance resources are concentrated on the decisions that matter most, rather than dispersed across procedural requirements that consume time and energy without adding value.

Recommendations for Both Parties

Develop a Shared Definition of Shared Governance

Olson (2009) famously described shared governance as an empty term whose definition shifts depending on the speaker. As long as administrators and faculty operate under different definitions of shared governance, conflict is inevitable. Institutions should invest in developing a mutually agreed-upon definition - one that specifies the scope of faculty authority, the nature of administrative consultation obligations, and the mechanisms for resolving disagreements. This definition should be codified in institutional policy, regularly reviewed, and explicitly referenced when governance questions arise. The Higher Learning Commission's accreditation standard requires institutions to engage internal constituencies through shared governance in planning, policies, and procedures, but as Santos and Filner (2022) observed, this requirement does not clarify what shared governance is, leaving the definition as a contested space. Institutions that fill this definitional vacuum proactively will be far better positioned than those that allow it to become a perpetual source of conflict.

Invest in Governance Education and Onboarding

Many participants in shared governance - both administrators and faculty - arrive in their roles with little formal preparation for the governance responsibilities they will assume. New department chairs, deans, and provosts often receive extensive onboarding in budgeting, human resources, and strategic planning but minimal preparation for the consultative and deliberative dimensions of their roles. New faculty senators may understand their disciplinary expertise but have little knowledge of institutional governance structures, parliamentary procedure, or the history and culture of governance at their institution. Both administrators and faculty would benefit from structured governance education programs that build shared understanding of roles, responsibilities, and processes (Zan et al., 2025; Riffe, 2026).

Create Mechanisms for Governance Assessment

What gets measured gets managed. Institutions should develop instruments for regularly assessing the health of their governance systems, drawing on validated tools such as the Higher Education

Faculty Trust Inventory (Shoho & Smith, 2004) and the AAUP's shared governance survey instruments. Regular assessment allows institutions to identify trust deficits, communication breakdowns, and participation gaps before they escalate into crises, and it provides an evidence base for governance reform initiatives. The 2024 AAUP Community College Shared Governance Survey, which provided insights into areas of faculty authority and administrative collaboration across institutions that educate nearly 40 percent of all undergraduates, demonstrates the value of systematic governance assessment at scale (AAUP, 2025).

Conclusion: The Future of Shared Governance in an Era of Accelerating Change

Shared governance is not a luxury that higher education can afford in good times and discard when conditions deteriorate. It is a structural feature of institutions whose core productive activities depend on the expertise, creativity, and professional autonomy of their faculty. The argument that contemporary pressures require more hierarchical, more centralized, more efficient governance models misunderstands both the nature of the pressures and the nature of the institutions. As Stensaker and Vabø (2013) cautioned, attempts to make universities too efficient risk transforming them into something other than academic institutions entirely.

The contemporary crisis of shared governance is real, but it is a crisis of practice, not of principle. The principle - that institutional decisions are stronger when they reflect the expertise of the people most affected by them - remains as valid as ever. The practice, however, requires significant renovation. Governance structures designed for an era of relative stability and resource abundance must be adapted for an era of rapid change, demographic decline, and political interference. Trust, which was once sustained by stable leadership and predictable institutional environments, must now be actively and intentionally cultivated in a climate of uncertainty and anxiety.

For administrators, this means embracing transparency not as a concession but as a competitive advantage; engaging faculty early and genuinely in decision-making processes; and understanding that the short-term efficiency costs of consultation are vastly outweighed by the long-term benefits of institutional trust and faculty buy-in. For faculty, it means taking ownership of governance quality; adopting proactive rather than reactive orientations; building empathy for administrative constraints without surrendering advocacy for academic values; and investing in the continuous improvement of governance structures and processes.

The institutions that will thrive in the coming decades will not be those that abandon shared governance in pursuit of speed, nor those that cling to its most rigid forms in resistance to change. They will be the institutions that do the hard, ongoing work of making shared governance work - not as a ritual to be observed or an obstacle to be overcome, but as a genuine source of institutional intelligence, resilience, and innovation. In the words of the Association of Governing Boards, shared governance brings stakeholders together around passion for the institution and ensures the inclusion of a range of voices and ideas in the formulation of goals, priorities, and strategies (AGB, 2025). That is not a relic of a slower time. It is the essential infrastructure of an institution capable of navigating the challenges ahead.

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The Role of Faculty Advocates in Creating a Just Non-Union University Workplace

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Abstract

This paper explores the use of a faculty advocate as an approach in creating and supporting a just workplace. The advantages of having a faculty advocate to assist faculty members particularly with navigating adverse employment situations at non-union institutions are addressed. Drawing on the research literature about faculty employment, workplace justice, alternative dispute resolution, as well as personal experience, this paper considers the impact of adverse employment circumstances on both faculty members and the educational institution before demonstrating how a faculty advocate can bolster confidence in a just employment environment. Other potential benefits include improved faculty morale and strengthened relationships of faculty to and within the institution.

Keywords: Workplace Justice, Adverse Employment Situation, Advocate, Grievance

Introduction

Building a healthy employment culture in a university setting requires prioritizing workplace justice, which can be viewed as both an ethical imperative as well as a sound operational decision (Currie et al., 2017, McCabe 2002, Zwank 2023). This paper presents an extensive literature review on the topic of workplace justice and the nature of a faculty advocate within that context. Workplace justice in this paper refers to an environment of perceived fairness and respect which is grounded in institutional mission, systems, and processes that are lawful, ethical, values-driven, and equitable in application. The lack of workplace justice has been demonstrated to take both a physical and mental toll on employees as well as exert a negative impact on overall morale and job satisfaction, with even greater influence on professional employees as opposed to blue-collar workers (Cachón-Alonso & Elovainio 2022, Nicholls et al., 2022). These factors have a direct correlation to employee productivity, retention, and the quality of work, and thus ultimately to the effective functioning of the employer (Corpuz 2023, Kinman & Johnson 2019).

For faculty members in institutions of higher education, facing an adverse employment situation proves an important test of workplace justice for both the individual and the larger community (Hogler et al., 2009, Pignata et al., 2016, Wolfinger 2025). Whether it be a denial of reappointment, tenure or promotion, the investigation of a complaint, a disciplinary action, a salary dispute, or another job-related issue, the manner in which an institution navigates its own policies and processes has a profound influence on its faculty members (Pinho & Colston 2025). The situation in a non-union academic environment is often exacerbated by the lack of clearly understood employment rights and structured processes (Dutt-Ballerstadt & Bhattacharya 2021, Mercer 2025).

Faculty members—and many administrators—typically have little or no experience sorting through a morass of relevant policies and processes to determine what rules apply (Cross 2024, Guard & Jacobsen 2024, Gravett & Anderson 2020).

A number of disruptions that can damage the workplace environment can thus follow: faculty members can feel isolated and without support (Alleman et al., 2019, Buchanan 2025); rumors about a case or competing narratives circulating internally or externally add a further complication for both the reputation of a faculty member as well as the university (Downs et al., 2021, Zahneis 2020); and in non-union environments, final decisions and appeals are in the hands of an administrative apparatus that, in many instances, already made the precipitating decision and thus the whole process feel inherently biased against the faculty member's case (Adler & Adler 2025, Colvin 2016, S. Porter 2025). The accumulated uncertainty, when coupled with unnecessarily confusing, time-consuming, and frequently adversarial interactions, can ratchet up anxiety regarding the threat to a career years in the making (Kilborn 2025, Poole 2025, Zahneis 2022). The resultant mental and physical effects can result in changed relationships with colleagues and students, diminished work performance or departures, not to mention lowered morale for other faculty members (Das Acevedo 2025, Alleman et al., 2019, Ragland-Sullivan & Barglow 1981, Scholnick 2025, Viren 2020, Zahneis 2022).

While no one-size fits all solution exists, utilizing a faculty advocate empowered to assist faculty members with proactive approaches to resolving difficult situations as well as to advance the best case for fair consideration if there is a formal process, can be a useful strategy, especially in non-union, university environments (Avgar 2021, Katz et al., 2018, Mancuso & Felicetti 2024). To explore such an option, this paper draws on literature about faculty employment, workplace justice, alternative dispute resolution, and the author's more than 25 years of work with faculty members in adverse employment situations to consider what workplace justice for faculty members entails in a university setting. In doing so, the impact of adverse employment circumstances on individuals, as well as the institution, will be considered in order to argue that a faculty advocate can bolster the confidence of all employees in a just employment environment, which can, in turn, improve overall faculty morale and strengthen relationships of faculty to, as well as within, the institution.

Workplace Justice

Ideally, workplace justice should emerge from a shared and stable ethical foundation as well as promote a more functional workplace (Colquitt 2012). Advancing normative principles, it should be noted, requires more than policies and processes that fulfill legal mandates. Such norms must be predicated on the clear identification of values and the grounds for people within the system to embrace them (Brown & Treviño 2006, Zwank et al., 2023). Typically, in an academic environment, they might include the commitment of the institution to fairness, respect, shared governance, transparency, and accountability (Calder 2014, O'Meara 2016). These items are generally communicated in a university's statements regarding its mission and core values as well as in documents that discuss the nature of academic freedom and professional ethics. Ultimately, a just workplace thus relies on employee perceptions of fairness and equity across a range of circumstances and it is routinely described by theorists in terms of three components: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice (Baldwin 2006, Greenberg 1990).

In developing and carrying out policies and processes in the university context, it is helpful to begin by thinking about the ways constituent types of justice work in that environment. Distributive justice, for example, denotes fair allocation of an organization's resources (Greenberg 1990). For university faculty members, distributive justice might center on items such as remuneration, workload assignments, office space, leave, travel funding, or equipment purchases in comparison to other faculty similarly situated (Misra et al., 2021). While some types of employment require equality among employees by position type, in academia that standard rarely exists for faculty positions. Distinctions in duties required by academic discipline or field, different tenure and promotion requirements determined by area of expertise, and pay variations based on factors such as marketplace demand almost always shape the specific terms and conditions of faculty employment (Houston et al., 2006). Nonetheless, most faculty members expect any variations to be fairly determined and maintained in accordance with clearly understood factors like job title, rank, merit, years of service, or comparisons to faculty at peer institutions (O'Meara et al., 2022). Likewise, even with those distinctions in mind, faculty members demand that core employment provisions, such as protection against arbitrary dismissal or the right to grieve working conditions, be consistent for all faculty members (AAUP 2020).

As a result, procedural justice relies on an organization clearly communicating fair and neutral policies governing the workplace as well as ensuring their consistent, uniform, and transparent application in ways that make evident the logical reasoning of the decision makers (Röhl 2018, Yale n.d.). Faculty members must know how to locate the relevant policies with regard to items as diverse as promotion and tenure, research misconduct, investigation of claims regarding discrimination or workplace violence, as well as the ways in which those policies are enacted and by whom (ACE et al., 2000, O'Meara & Templeton 2022). In this regard, procedural justice also demands giving employees a voice—typically meaning the opportunity to present qualifications for a position or rank, or to provide evidence with regard to a circumstance or events, or to pose questions of other involved parties particularly in matters necessitating due process or consideration for redress (Röhl 2018, Yale n.d.). Knowing when and where those opportunities will exist proves essential. Notably, however, because the law classifies faculty positions as requiring professional expertise, judgment, and discretion, procedural justice also means giving faculty members a role in the shaping and carrying out many of those policies whether at the department or unit, college, or university levels (Gerber 2015). For example, faculty members typically set criteria that provide a basis for faculty hiring as well as making reappointment, promotion, or tenure recommendations, while also serving on the bodies that advance those recommendations. (AAUP 1989) Likewise, cases involving research misconduct or other disciplinary matters necessitate participation by faculty members on hearing panels whether because of the specifics relevant to the academic area or simply understanding as “insiders” potential violations of professional standards and conduct (Euben 2004, Euben & Lee 2005).

Interactional justice considers employee perceptions of treatment by colleagues and supervisors as well as the quality of communication in the work environment (Bies 2015, Farmer & Meisel 2010). Because of the centrality of departments or units in faculty employment, the even-handedness and clarity of the department chair when it comes to workload assignments, annual performance evaluations, considerations for salary increases, as well as in navigating difficulties with colleagues or students, frequently emerge as primary in these assessments (Anderson et al., 2023, Gravett & Anderson 2020, O'Meara et al., 2019). Likewise, the heightened sense of the importance of a hiring,

reappointment, promotion, or tenure decision, as well as with any concerns regarding peer observations or post-tenure reviews, requires that both decision makers and colleagues make clear how they applied the prevailing policies (Alleman et al., 2025, Cate et al., 2022). Soft justice options such as mediation or open-door access to decision makers can be important here as well, given they are specifically designed to embrace a commitment—when possible—to find common ground and resolve situations before more formal procedures ensue (Mahony et al., 2004, Watson et al., 2019). Less adversarial approaches often prove useful in faculty environments because they bolster a sense of shared professional respect and courtesy among peers and colleagues rather than underscoring a power differential between administration as management and faculty as employees (Avgar 2021, Shared Governance 2023). Even more, they can improve employee perceptions of justice within an organization. (Colvin 2016, Wharton et al., 2004)

Significantly, research demonstrates that employee assessments of the legitimacy of policies and procedures and the behaviors of those persons in decision making roles often rank the treatment of the employee or a colleague more highly than the outcome of any employment dispute (Brockner & Wiesenfeld 2002, Kees 2005). In fact, employees demonstrate a willingness to accept a negative job outcome so long as the perception of fairness in the process resulting in that decision exists. In short, effectively enacting workplace justice measures promotes a better employment experience even in adverse conditions (Adamovic 2022, Haraway 2005). A lack of workplace justice, however, produces different outcomes; employee engagement, performance, and satisfaction all suffer in environments where the employer is deemed to be unfair (Conlon et al., 2005, Haraway 2005).

The Impact of Adverse Employment Actions and Circumstances

While the factors that produce job satisfaction for any one individual prove difficult to quantify, some of the basic features include a match between a person's interests and the position, the ability and self-confidence to do the work, meeting a person's psychological needs for affiliation or belonging, time structure, social status, a sense of purpose, and the ability to demonstrate competence (Chen 2023, Hoff et al., 2020, Spector 2022). Significantly, the sense of employees being a good "fit" with an employer also comes from shared values as articulated in an organization's mission or vision and a clear connection between what an organization claims it advances and the policies and processes it enacts to do that work (Culver et al., 2025, Spector 2022).

Employment as a faculty member ticks many of these boxes (Boden et al., 2024, Culver et al., 2025). Faculty work, after all, typically demands years of rigorous training in a field or discipline as well as features a highly competitive process for hiring and lengthy probationary period prior to advancement (Alleman et al., 2025, Culver et al., 2025). As a result, such positions almost certainly align with a person's professed interests and abilities (Culver et al., 2025, Spector 2022). Further, most faculty members are located within a department—not to mention within an institution—which also helps connect people to a network of external colleagues. These features offer faculty members a clear professional identity, as well as a structured pathway for earning status (Bourlag et al., 2023, Fagan et al., 2018). Moreover, faculty positions can generate an external respect that affirms one's work as important and valued culturally (Gerber 2010, Watkins 2021).

However, given this strong alignment between professional identity formation, the workplace, and a faculty member's psychological sense of self, adverse employment situations or decisions can become particularly fraught (Alleman et al., 2019, Kraus 2023). Both academic studies and anecdotal evidence demonstrate that trauma associated with job-related difficulties frequently results in both physical and psychological distress (Alleman et al., 2025, Catellini et al., 2023). These impacts include sleep loss, cardiovascular disease, depression and anxiety, PTSD, as well as social withdrawal, substance abuse, and trouble in the family (Buchanan 2025, Kearney et al., 2022, Keller et al., 2024). Concern about stigmatization both within and outside of the workplace can also lead to self-blame and shame (Alleman et al., 2019, Brand 2015). The potential of adverse employment situations and decisions to have an impact on the workplace—ranging from tension in the unit to a greater likelihood of retaliatory behaviors—underscores the importance of workplace justice (Colquitt & Zipay 2015, Skarlicki & Folger 1997). In fact, research demonstrates that when employees feel they cannot depend on formal channels for fair or just treatment, negative responses can ensue particularly in cases of serious allegations where their position is in jeopardy (Colquitt & Zipay 2015, Wiseman & Stillwell 2022).

A Just Response: The Faculty Advocate

Particularly in non-union environments where faculty members have fewer sources of support in difficult employment circumstances, identifying a faculty advocate can be a strategy that signals an institutional commitment to workplace justice and thus to advancing a healthier environment (Avgar 2021, Farmer & Miller 2013). At the most basic level, creating such a role can alleviate a common problem in such institutions: when confronted with an adverse employment situation or decision, faculty members typically do not know where to turn causing tension and anxiety to multiply quickly (Adler & Adler 2025, Buchanan 2025, Gravett & Anderson 2020, Kilborn 2025, Scholnick 2025). The multi-layered structure of a University as well as frequent changes in organizational structure and personnel can make it difficult for a faculty member even to determine what opportunities exist to resolve an employment issue, report a problem, respond to an allegation, or file for a hearing, much less to understand the way in which these varied processes will move forward (Adler & Adler 2025, Gravett & Anderson 2020, Kilborn 2025, McNaughtan et al., 2025). Compounding the issue, typical sources of guidance such as a colleague, a chair, an attorney, or even personnel in the appropriate administrative office, frequently do not have an updated grasp on the relevant—and sometimes conflicting—internal policies and processes, not to mention that in some instances, faculty members may be instructed not to engage with a chair or colleagues (Adler & Adler 2025, Kilborn 2025, Wiley 2025). A recognized “first point of contact,” such as a faculty advocate, can resolve this gap and provide an array of conflict management services, including listening confidentially to employment-related issues, identifying and explaining the various available options available, seeking out informal routes for possible resolution, and helping faculty members to prepare for and even participating in any formal procedures (Bemmels 1991, California Faculty Association, 2025, Farmer & Miller 2013, Mahony & Klass 2008, McCabe 1998, Prosten 2020).

Some institutional leaders may feel as if a faculty advocate is not useful for informal resolutions when they already have soft justice options in place, such as an open-door policy or an ombuds. The use of a faculty advocate, however, can add value by helping faculty members, when appropriate, to utilize these resources effectively (Avgar 2016, Bemmels 1994, Blair et al., 2024, Gravett &

Anderson 2020). Because an advocate is not constrained by neutrality, the person in that role can shape the available facts and evidence to help faculty members communicate clearly their contentions to the relevant administrator in light of the prevailing policies and in accord with what solutions might be available, thereby working within an existing paradigm to negotiate a resolution on behalf of the faculty member before a formal process is initiated (Avgar 2016, Bemmels et al., 1991, Bemmels 1994, Prosten 2020).

Administrators might also hesitate fearing that an advocate ratchets up the formality and may even deny the faculty member voice (Farmer & Miller 2013, Wissler 2010). When it comes to formal procedures, however, the role of faculty advocate should be seen as offering a way to address significant concerns from faculty members that employment dispute resolution policies and procedures are not fair to all parties, while simultaneously helping the processes themselves to proceed more smoothly (Committee & Petty 2025, Gravett & Anderson 2020, Guess 2008). Instead of leaving faculty members on their own to work through and digest unfamiliar policies and procedures as well as to fill out forms and gather the associated documentation which can date back for years, the faculty advocate removes some of the burden by providing specifics such as what policies are relevant, what evidence would be helpful to produce, when various steps in the process will happen and what they will entail (Adler & Adler 2025, Frodeman 2025, Jussim & Honeycutt 2025, S. Porter 2025). This function is particularly vital when faculty members must marshal knowledge and resources quickly because there is a time clock to initiate action or a given situation is evolving rapidly (Adler & Adler 2025, Kilborn 2025, S. Porter 2025). Moreover, having a faculty advocate available for meetings related to an investigation or in navigating meetings with university officials addresses the widespread perceptions among faculty members that they must confront an array of officials with significant authority in the workplace (Gravett & Anderson 2020, Kilborn 2025, S. Porter 2025, Scholnick 2025, Ullman 2025).

Further, none of the functions of a faculty advocate preclude a faculty member from representing their own interests, hiring an attorney, or seeking external support from organizations like AAUP (American Association of University Professors), FIRE (the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression), or a disciplinary professional group (S. Porter 2025, Scholnick 2025, Weiss 2025). Establishing a faculty advocate, however, attempts to address constructively the fact that non-union universities most often utilize legal proceedings as a model for their processes and that approach not only requires some expertise to navigate successfully, but also forces faculty members to seek such resources—often at personal expense—as an option to level the playing field (Stipanowich & Lemare 2014, Wissler 2010).

Perhaps, then, it helps to recognize the primary function of a faculty advocate is to be an accountability checkpoint for the institution, ensuring a commitment to workplace justice by supporting its faculty members in understanding their employment rights in a timely manner and by promoting a fair process through helping the institution ensure that all parties operate within the bounds of what policy and process allow (Bemmels 1994, Gouws 2025, D. Porter 2025, Kilborn 2025, Prosten 2020). When seen in that way, a faculty advocate should also be an educator, thoroughly integrated into training opportunities for hearing panel members, and administrators such as chairs, directors, and deans charged with upholding policies as well as administrators and staff who will be engaged in policy enforcement (Gravett & Anderson 2020, Prosten 2020). To

accomplish that work, the choice of an advocate—or maybe even advocates in a larger institution—is important.

The way the faculty advocate role works clearly depends on the individual institution, but the qualities listed in this consideration are distilled from the literature on alternative dispute resolution and workplace justice as well as personal experience (Bemmels et al., 1991, Bemmels 1994, Butler & Tregaskis 2015, Gravett & Anderson 2020, Prosten 2020, Susman 2019). The selection process for a faculty advocate should begin and end with the governance body of the faculty in order to allow faculty members to trust in the choice. Membership on the faculty without any current administrative appointment or emeritus faculty status represents a good foundational requirement—although considerations such as reassigned time for faculty still working and a stipend should be allocated for this work. This profile allows not only for a more peer-to-peer interaction, but also for the advocate to have immediate familiarity from a faculty member’s perspective with the types of challenges that often lead to adverse faculty employment situations, such as the mechanics and politics of personnel considerations, the manner in which interactions with students and colleagues are negotiated, and the ethical expectations of the faculty position. The individual should also have experience with policy and process around employment disputes either by academic training or by work in policy formation and dispute resolution on or off campus, as well as be willing to undergo additional training in mediation and in areas such as Title IX resolution or equal opportunity law to remain current in those areas. Additionally, either having tenure or being on a long-term contract is helpful in sometimes difficult interactions with administrators. Finally, experience within the institution, and a strong commitment to that institution’s success, can be crucial. An advocate, in fact, often has a longer history with dispute resolution than various shorter-lived administrative personnel and thus provides first-hand knowledge of what the various processes allow as well as institutional memory of various solution possibilities.

Conclusion: A Commitment to Workplace Justice

From an organizational perspective, traditional adversarial models for resolving disputes often fall short when it comes to advancing justice in the workplace. While there is no doubt that exploring the creation of a faculty advocate role represents a different approach to adverse employment situations, the effort to build an organizational culture around more effective conflict management and fair dispute resolution can strengthen both employee morale and commitment. Creating a faculty advocate role can signal that employment disputes are not automatically characterized in adversarial terms, but rather there is a genuine desire on the part of the institution to address and resolve situations and, when more formal proceedings do result, to ensure fairness by making certain everyone both understands and adheres to the rules. There is in this framework a clear understanding of the importance of the opportunity for a faculty member in an adverse circumstance to have voice and be heard. Even more, it upholds traditional ideas of shared governance, acknowledging the role of the professional expertise of faculty members when it comes to understanding and applying policy in personnel matters. But, mostly, by underscoring values shared by most universities—fairness, respect, shared governance, transparency, and accountability—an effective faculty advocate can also signify the hallmarks of a healthy faculty employment environment where people want to work.

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Exploration Of Characteristics Impacting Administrative Leaders in Higher Education Health Sciences: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Healthcare education programs face challenges including workforce demands, evolving educational standards, and increasing vacancies in academic leadership. Longevity in leadership roles has become a priority, warranting examination of administrative positions and the attributes leaders bring to their institutions. This systematic review mapped existing literature on academic program director characteristics, organizational contexts in healthcare education, and identified gaps to guide future research on leadership effectiveness and development. Following PRISMA-ScR and the Population–Concept–Context framework, 20 studies were synthesized. Findings reveal substantial gaps regarding factors influencing program directors’ performance, longevity, underscoring the need for targeted support for academic healthcare leaders.

Key Words: program director, systematic review, longevity, higher education, leadership characteristics

Background and Purpose

The influence of the “graying of faculty” with unprecedented higher education retirements contributes to the known faculty shortages being experienced across the United States (Lane, 1982; McChesney & Bischel, 2020). To make this an even more challenging issue, studies have suggested that there is an additional shortage of graduates needed to support new public health and academic health center-based professional programs and to replace aging faculty (Koblinsky et al., 2015; Rosenstock et al., 2008; Moskowitz, 2007). This shortage spans across multiple healthcare disciplines and is particularly evident in fields requiring doctoral-trained professionals. In addition, some health professions have documented specific challenges related to both increased retirements and program expansion (Jensen et al., 2018; Jumper et al., 2024; Nardi & Gyurko, 2013; DeYoung et al., 2022; Gordon et al., 2014). The severity of this issue is underscored by the critical role doctoral-trained professionals play in maintaining the health infrastructure (Koblinsky, et al. 2015; Rosenstock et al., 2008). To emphasize the downstream impact of faculty shortages, Moskowitz’s (2007) study of academic health center members found that 50% of CEOs must cut or merge programs and limit enrollment, ultimately reducing the healthcare workforce. As such, it is

crucial to study and address the factors contributing to faculty shortages, as these may have broader downstream impacts within our communities.

Open key positions in academy leadership are accelerating growing concerns in health professions higher education (Lane, 1982; Koblinsky et al., 2015). Some contend that the turnover of leadership positions in health care is unprecedented (Gordon et al., 2014; Zimmerman et al., 2020). The College and University Professional Association (CUPA) reports the retention issue of health care academic leaders is significant, as a 2023 survey found leaders were 33% more likely to look for employment within the next 12 months (Bichsel et al., 2023). Predictors of leaders' likelihood of searching for another position included the amount of power to advocate for their team, resources, support, and training. Hinman, Peel and Price (2014) found similar results when studying physical therapist (PT) and physical therapist assistant (PTA) program directors.

While turnover is a concern in higher education leadership, longevity has emerged as a focus area, compelling a closer examination of both administrative positions and the unique qualities leaders bring to their institutions (Ahmed et al., 2022; Lizier et al., 2024). Hinman, Peel and Price (2014) studied PT and PTA program directors and found that these higher education leaders remained in their position longer if they had at least 5 years of prior academic experience.¹² Whereas, Leudtke-Hoffman et al. (2010) found the lack of training and feelings of unpreparedness prevailed in a majority of PT program directors. Together these studies suggest experience and training influence longevity in physical therapy academic leadership positions.

Hence, an examination of health-related academic leadership positions would provide valuable insight into the impact of organizational vision, longevity and associated training. By focusing on the characteristics of effective leaders and managers, we can better define the roles, responsibilities, skills, and attributes that align best with these essential positions. This approach would not only increase our understanding of what contributes to longevity in leadership roles but also inform strategies to improve retention and reduce turnover in higher education leadership.

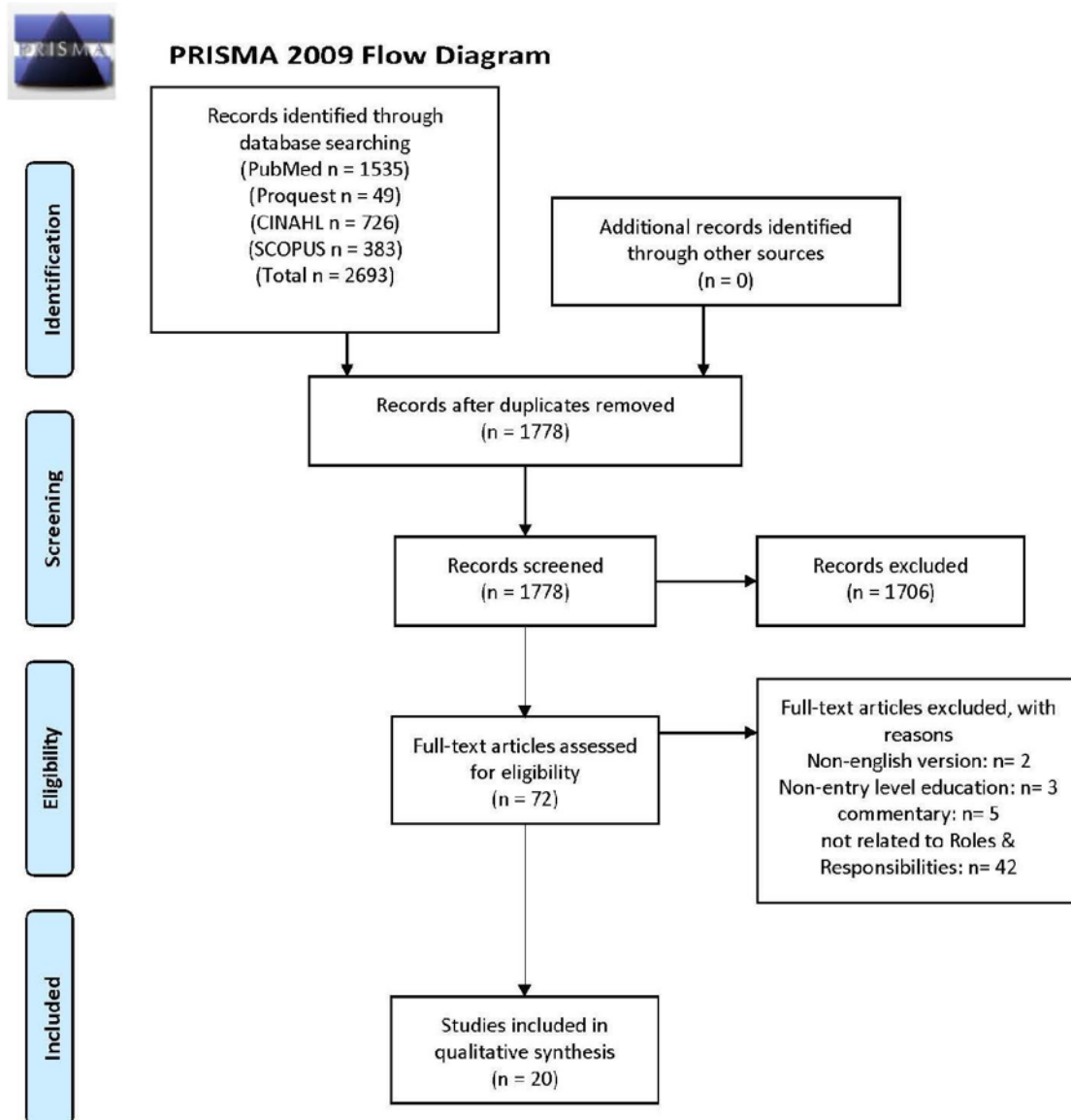
Therefore, a systematic review was performed to respond to this emergent issue by answering the question, "What key characteristics influence the ability of healthcare academic program directors to fulfill their roles and responsibilities?" Accordingly, this systematic review purpose was twofold: 1) examine impactful characteristics of program directors or organizational practices within healthcare education, and 2) assess the sufficiency of the evidence to support practice recommendations for healthcare academic program directors.

Methods

Study Design

A systematic review was conducted in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram



From: Moher D, Liberati A, Tetzlaff J, Altman DG. The PRISMA Group (2009). Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses: The PRISMA Statement. PLoS Med 6(6): e1000097. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed1000097

For more information, visit www.prisma-statement.org.

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

Articles were eligible for the systematic review if they met the following inclusion criteria: publication in peer-reviewed scholarly journals; pertained to either individual or organization roles;

and responsibilities of a program director or dean and the position was situated within a healthcare-related academic organization that was considered entry level-based education.

An a priori decision required to exclude newspaper articles, non-English publications, dissertations and residency-related articles. Residency studies were excluded specifically due to residency director positions being more clinic-based and traditionally, not based within an academic institution.

Information Sources/Search Strategy

The electronic databases of CINAHL, ProQuest, PubMed, and Scopus, were searched for articles published from January 2000 to March 2026. MeSH terms and keywords were organized under three leading concepts. The first concept was “program director” with MeSH terms and keywords including program director, leader, administrator, program administrator, program chair, supervisor, and administrative personnel. The second concept was “roles and responsibilities” with MeSH and keywords including roles, responsibilities, job description, duties, tasks, group processes, efficiency, and organizational. The last concept was “entry-level healthcare education programs” with MeSH and keywords including physical therapy education, entry-level education, professional education, healthcare education, and “education, graduate.” A second search of the databases included additional MeSH terms and keywords of academic administration, program directors, educational leadership, leadership development, physical therapist education, task analysis, and education, medical, graduate, and education, health sciences. Articles were searched through March 2026. Refer to Appendix 1 for a detailed guide of this systematic review search.

Selection

After removing duplicate articles, two reviewers independently screened titles and abstracts against predetermined eligibility criteria. Disagreements were resolved through consensus. The remaining articles underwent full-text review by the two reviewers using the same process. Additional relevant articles were identified by hand-searching reference lists of selected articles and through grey literature searches in Google Scholar. Inter-rater agreement for title/abstract and full-text screening was quantified using an online Cohen's kappa calculator (Lowry, 2024). An agreement strength scale was used to categorize search outcomes as: <0.00 = poor, 0.00-0.20 = slight, 0.21-0.40 = fair, 0.41-0.60 = moderate, 0.61-0.80 = substantial, and 0.81-1.00 = almost perfect to assess inter-rater reliability between reviewers, as this metric accounts for the possibility of agreement occurring by chance, making it more robust than simple percent agreement (McHugh, 2012).

Data extraction

One researcher (CE) extracted relevant data from the selected articles. To verify accuracy, the extracted data was cross-checked by the other researchers (CM, LM). The information extracted comprised of: (1) journal, country of origin, year of study, and educational discipline; (2) study characteristics such as subject population and main characteristics and (3) study elements including purpose, interventions, instrumentation, and outcomes.

Research design and methodological quality assessment

The included studies were evaluated on three parameters related to research design and methodological quality: 1) Research type was categorized using the education research scale from the Institute of Education Sciences (2013). 2) Research design was classified as quantitative,

qualitative, or mixed methods. 3) Methodological rigor and quality were assessed using a 14-item modified McMaster Critical Appraisal tool previously used in systematic reviews (Law et al., 2020). Whereas each study was scored out of 14, based on whether it demonstrated adequate rigor across 14 categories (1 point per category). The McMaster Critical Appraisal Scale (CAS) scores were distributed into tertiles to categorize overall methodological quality. Two researchers (CM, CE) independently assessed each study's methodological quality. Where ratings differed, disagreements were first discussed between the two reviewers; any unresolved discrepancies were adjudicated by a third reviewer.

Data analysis and synthesis

Given the heterogeneity in research designs, outcome measures, and analytical approaches across the included studies, quantitative data pooling for meta-analysis was not suitable. Hence, a systematic qualitative content analysis following established methodological frameworks was utilized (Fingeld-Connett, 2014).

The analysis involved a rigorous, sequential process. First, one researcher extracted relevant data from the selected articles then the other researchers verified the accuracy of the extracted data as noted in the above section using a standardized data extraction form to document key methodological characteristics and findings. Next, all researchers performed open coding of each article's content, maintaining analytical memos and systematically compiling data into an evidence table for review.

Once the table was populated, through an inductive approach, the research team identified recurring patterns and conceptual relationships across the dataset. Initial themes were refined through team discussions until consensus was reached on the final thematic framework which yielded five themes. To ensure qualitative dependability to where the stability and consistency of the data over time existed, two researchers (CE, LM) independently mapped articles to the identified themes, with any discrepancies resolved through discussion with a third reviewer (Fingeld-Connett, 2014). Ultimately, each selected article was mapped to one of the five main themes. Therefore, the thematic synthesis addressed the research questions by integrating findings across studies while acknowledging the breadth and limitations of the available literature.

Results

Selection of Studies

The initial search yielded 2693 citations. After screening titles and abstracts, 72 articles underwent full-text review, resulting in 20 articles being selected. All articles originated from the United States (n=20). Five health care disciplines are represented: dentistry (n=1), medicine (n=7), nursing (n=10), pharmacy (n=1) and physical therapy (n=1). By publication date, 12 articles were published between 2000-2010 and eight between 2011-2020. Details are provided in Appendix 2.

Quality Assessment-Interrater Reliability

Table 1 provides Cohen's kappa statistics for the three phases of study selection and quality assessment of methodological agreement between the two reviewers. Cohen kappa values for study selection after title/abstract review was categorized as "Almost Perfect" with a value of 0.86 (95% CI, 0.83 – 0.90) and .90 (95% CI, 0.84 – 0.96) respectively (McHugh, 2012); full text agreement

was considered “Moderate” with scoring 0.58 (95%CI, 0.39-0.78). Quality assessment of methodological quality scored “Almost Perfect” with a score of 0.87 (95% CI, 0.81-0.93). These results indicate a sound search strategy and assessment of risk of bias analysis about the methodological quality of articles selected.

Table 1: Interrater Reliability Assessment: Kappa Statistics for Agreement Between Reviewers

Level of Review	Kappa	Categorization Strength	Standard Error	Confidence Interval
Article Titles	0.8639	Almost Perfect	0.0174	0.8298 - 0.8980
Article Abstracts	0.9028	Almost Perfect	0.0301	0.8438 - 0.9618
Full texts articles	0.5816	Moderate	0.0996	0.3865 - 0.7767
Methodological Quality Assessment	0.8699	Almost Perfect	0.0297	0.8117 - 0.9281

Quality Assessment-Design and Rigor of Studies

The included studies utilized various research paradigms: three (15.0%) were mixed methods, one (0.5%) was a qualitative modified Delphi study, three (15.0%) were quantitative, and 13 (65%) were qualitative. The research types also varied. Ten studies (50.0%) were early stage/exploratory, seven (35.0%) were design/developmental, two (10%) were effectiveness research studies, and one (.5%) was foundational. See Table 2.

Table 2: Study Design and Type, and Critical Appraisal Score Sorted by Theme and Author

Study	Study Design (Ref)	Type of Research (ref)	CAS
Leaders and Managers (3)			
Azad et al (2017)	Qualitative-literature search	Early Stage/Exploratory	4
Certosimo (2020)	Qualitative-literature search	Early Stage/Exploratory	7
Jennings et al (2007)	Qualitative-scientific literature search	Early Stage/Exploratory	13
Longevity in position (3)			
Bolton, Roy (2004)	Qualitative-literature search	Early Stage/Exploratory	4
Horton, Gerbasi & Lovell (2008)	Qualitative- interviews	Design and Development	13
Mintz-Binde & Ronda (2013)	Quantitative-exploratory descriptive with correlational design	Design and Development	14

Skills and Attributes (7)			
Bordage, Foley & Goldyn (2000)	Qualitative-survey	Design and Development	9
Duda (2004)	Qualitative--literature search	Early Stage/Exploratory	3
Green & Ridenour (2004)	Qualitative-literature search	Early Stage/Exploratory	4
Kane-Urrabazo (2006)	Qualitative-literature search	Early Stage/Exploratory	9
Page (2001)	Quantitative-survey	Design and Development	14
Thompson (2011)	Qualitative-literature search	Early Stage/Exploratory	4
Van Diggle et al (2020)	Qualitative-literature search	Early Stage/Exploratory	5
Roles and responsibilities (3)			
Brownfield et al (2012)	Mixed methods-survey	Design and Development	14
Bushy, Dunkin & Stover (2005)	Mixed methods-modified delphi	Design and Development	14
Greenberg (2012)	Qualitative-Narrative of personal experience	Foundational	2
Training (4)			
Christner, Smith & Appelbaum (2010)	Quantitative-survey	Effectiveness Research	12
Crosby & Shields (2010)	Mixed method-survey	Effectiveness Research	7
Gabel (2012)	Qualitative-literature search	Early Stage/Exploratory	3
Menix (2000)	Qualitative-delphi	Design and Development	14

The CAS scores among the selected studies ranged from 2-14. Risk of bias for methodological quality was categorized using a scaled approach defined as “high quality, low risk of bias,” “moderate quality, moderate risk of bias,” or “low quality, high risk of bias.” The top studies (n=7/35%) earned 13-14 points, the mid-range studies (n=5/25%) earned 7-12 points, and the lower studies (n=8/40%) garnered 0-6 points. This categorization has been used in previous systematic reviews and is able to define the studies that are low or high risk of bias in terms of methodological design quality (Portney& Watkins, 2000; Baldry Currens & Bithell, 2003; McCallum, et al., 2013). Table 2 for CAS score and Appendix 3 for itemized CAS per article.

Summary of thematic findings

Five themes emerged from the content thematic analysis. The themes explore the complexities and nuances impacting an academic leader's time in higher education health sciences. The themes include leaders and managers, skills and attributes, roles and responsibilities, training and longevity in the position. Each theme is defined and further explained through a descriptive synthesis of the literature. See Figure 2 for a visual representation of the relationship between the themes and the contextual factors impacting academic leader success.

Figure 2: *Interrelationship of Identified Themes and Contextual Factors Impacting the Academic Leader Success*



Leaders and Managers. *This theme explores leadership and management perceptions, with variable viewpoints ranging from treating these two words as interchangeable constructs to others recognize distinct competencies and approaches.*

Three articles (15%) were categorized within the *Leaders and Manager* theme. The range of methodological quality assessment was 4-14. All three of the article's research designs were qualitative studies. All three were categorized as early stage/exploratory, with two being correlational studies describing the relationship between the positions/titles of manager and leader whereas the remaining article based on the competencies of leaders versus managers (Azad et al., 2017; Certosimo, 2010; Jennings et al., 2007).

Azad et al. (2017) presented leadership and management concepts to be essentially the same and that their definitions depend upon the person who is using them. However, Certosimo (2010) and Jennings et al. (2007) believed that leadership and management are indeed separate concepts. Certosimo (2010) maintained that leaders seek more outward facing changes whereas managers tend to focus more on short term issues and seek changes within the organization. Jennings et al. (2007) took these concepts further in comparing and contrasting leadership and management competencies respectively. Jennings et al. (2007) cited common competencies for both leadership and management but were ranked differently with personal qualities, interpersonal skills, and thinking skills being in the top three leadership competencies respectively, however management competencies had interpersonal skills first then personal qualities and thinking skills. Unique leadership competencies were setting the vision and developing people whereas unique managing competencies were human resource management and information management. Through a more

in-depth consideration of these articles, Jennings et al. (2007) provides the most scientifically rigorous evidence through performance of a systematic review that underscored the distinction between leadership and management. While Azad et al. (2017) offers valuable contrasting viewpoints and Certosimo (2010) contributes important perspectives, their methodological approaches lend to less robust conclusions compared to Jennings et al.'s (2007) scientific literature search. Therefore, depending upon what level of evidence is being used, leadership and management could conceptually be considered the same or uniquely different.

Skills and Attributes. *This theme encompasses both the preparatory aspects of leadership development inclusive of mentorship and career planning, and the specific skills requisite for successful leadership roles such as interpersonal skills, communication, strategic planning, and field-specific expertise.*

Seven articles (35%) were categorized within the *Skills and Attributes* theme. The range of methodological quality assessment was 3 -14. Six of the seven articles were qualitative with the remaining article being quantitative in methodology (C. Page, 2001). Four of the qualitative articles scored low quality with high risk of bias (Duda, 2004; Green & Ridenour, 2004; Thompson, 2011; van Diggele et al., 2020). Two of the qualitative articles scored in the moderate category (Bordage, et al., 2000; Kane-Urrbazo, 2006) and the remaining, only quantitative article scored high quality, low risk of bias (C. Page, 2001). The research type included two articles being design and development while the remaining articles were early-stage exploratory research (C. Page, 2001; Bordage, et al., 2000). Within this group of articles, the majority were focused on administration roles in higher education.

Two primary subthemes arose from the articles under the *Skills and Attributes* theme. One subtheme focused on how to plan for or transition to a leadership role in higher education. A variety of attributes were highlighted as part of this subtheme. Seeking mentorship, intentionally planning a career path, development of leadership skills, continually assessing and receiving feedback, and developing as a leader versus a manager were the specific attributes noted (Duda, 2004; Green & Ridenour, 2004; Thompson, 2011; van Diggele, et al., 2020). The second subtheme was focused on specific skills and attributes that are necessary to obtain a leadership position or currently being utilized in existing leadership roles in academia including program directors and deans. As with other themes, the methodological quality varied. However, the following common successful leadership characteristics were presented: strong interpersonal skills; ability to mentor, team build, facilitate, and develop others; competency in the leader's field; experience in educational design; sound communication and delegation skills; fiscal, research, and business skills; and strategic planning, problem-solving, and decision-making (C. Page, 2001; van Diggele et al., 2020; Bordage et al., 2000; Kane-Urrbazo, 2006).

Roles and responsibilities. *This theme explores the core responsibilities of directors and leadership roles as it relates to educational expertise, resource management, faculty development, research support, program compliance, and organizational visibility.*

Three articles (15%) were categorized within *Roles and Responsibilities*. The range of methodological quality assessment was 2-14. Two were mixed method studies (Bushy et al., 2005; Brownfield et al., 2012) and one was a qualitative opinion piece (Greenberg, 2012). One was

foundational research describing core knowledge (Greenberg, 2012) and two are categorized as design and development research (Bushy et al., 2005; Brownfield et al., 2012) which explored the roles and responsibilities related to the position of directors of medicine or nursing.

A core set of roles and responsibilities of program directors were identified from these articles. These included: possessing educational expertise; responsibility for accreditation reporting and/or compliance; procuring and managing resources, including budgets, recruitment, development, and management of faculty; supporting and conducting one's own and other faculty scholarly research agendas; and increasing the visibility of the program. Brownfield, et al. (2012) reported the vice chair for medical director level responsibilities are often vaguely communicated, and job descriptions and professional development are lacking, which can both cause a degree of uncertainty. Bushy, Dunkin and Stover (2005) reported a discrepancy in rank order of priorities of an endowed chair, however both dean and chairholders highly value recognition/reputation, funding sources and faculty growth and mentoring. Greenburg (2012) stated physician assistant medical program director essential duties often are unrealized at the organizational level and at times lead to inadequate development of a program director. All three researchers highlighted the multi-dimensional role and responsibilities of a director in the respective peer reviewed articles.

Training. *This theme examines orientation programs, training principles, delivery methods, and the essential knowledge areas needed to develop effective healthcare and educational leaders.*

Four articles (20%) were categorized within the *Training* theme. The range of methodological quality assessment was 3-14. Three studies were qualitative design (Christner et al., 2020; Gabel, 2012; Menix, 2001) and one was a mixed method needs assessment (Crosby & Shields, 2010). The research types included one design and development (Crosby & Shields, 2010) one was early-stage exploratory research (Gabel, 2012) and two were effectiveness studies (Christner et al., 2020; Crosby & Shields, 2010).

Synthesis of the data revealed two distinct concepts related to training needs of health education-based program leaders: the content (or the what) and the method of delivery (the how). Christner et al. (2020) created a two-day educational leadership orientation with 13 modules at their home institution that reviewed the scope of an educational leader's role, functional responsibilities, and accessible resources. This orientation program was part of a holistic and longitudinal onboarding approach to those new in medical education leadership. Crosby (2010) identified facilitating factors needed for interdisciplinary leadership development including ideal communication strategies and techniques and shared governance structures. Training was offered in a full day workshop followed by three 90-minute breakfast sessions to guide the development of essential skills. Menix (2001) outlined training principles compiled through a Delphi study process involving nurse educator leaders that was founded on a change management perspective adapted from business, higher education, and healthcare literature. These principles highlighted the nonlinear, dynamic process of change, the relevance of chaos and cybernetics is essential to managing in the workplace. Menix (2001) also suggested training is essential for professional development triangulated through group workshops, self-paced continuing education, and on-the-job training can be effective mechanisms for leaders. Finally, Gabel (2012) suggested that effective physician leader training programs should include concepts of training, leadership, and professionalism, including the application of various power types through the lens of personal characteristics and interpersonal competencies.

Collectively, these four studies demonstrate that intentional and purposeful orientation and ongoing training could assist in the development of expert health care education leaders.

Longevity in Position. *This theme addresses succession planning, the reasons leaders remain in their positions, necessary environmental supports, personal rewards, work-life balance, and the critical elements that contribute to long term leadership effectiveness.*

Three articles (15%) were categorized within the *Longevity in Position* theme. The range of methodological quality assessments was 4 -14. All three of the articles' research design was qualitative with one being considered early stage/exploratory (Bolton & Roy, 2004) and the remaining two being design and development (Horton, et al., 2008; Mintz-Binder & Ronda, 2013). Bolton and Roy's (2004) article delved into how imperative succession planning is and proposed a five-component model. This model's components included: identify key positions/responsibilities; identify potential candidates for succession; develop potential candidates; appoint successors; and commit resources for their success. These researchers link succession planning to success and longevity in position through the implementation of their model. Hence, succession planning is done well when the candidate possesses the previously stated characteristics and has the opportunity to experience the process as outlined in the model. Bolton and Roy (2004) suggest this approach leads both the candidate and the organization to successful outcomes. Through face to face and phone interviews, Horton, et al. (2008) considered what factors influence nursing program directors staying in their positions including why they originally took the position and what environmental factors existed that supported them staying in their position. The six factors centered on taking the position because they were asked, experiencing the reward of seeing students learn, managing workload and job demands, changing responsibilities over time, links to longevity when the work was personally rewarding and had firm support systems and mentoring by peers who were longer in the position. In the Mintz and Ronda (2013) study, they were able to determine statistically significant correlations between job satisfaction, work/family life balance, role concerns, social support, and recognition. Therefore, each of these three articles promote the importance of understanding the life cycle of a leadership career including job satisfaction influencers, understanding what contributes to longevity in position, and lastly, succession planning.

Discussion

The purpose of this systematic review was to identify characteristics associated with effective academic leadership, more specifically at the program director level, within health professions education. Although the review initially focused on program directors in physical therapy education, the limited discipline-specific literature required an expansion to the broader health sciences. Five major themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: *Leaders and Managers, Skills and Attributes, Roles and Responsibilities, Training, and Longevity in Position*. Collectively, these themes highlight the interconnected dimensions of academic leadership that may influence leader effectiveness, role expectations, retention, and turnover.

Despite the relevance of academic leadership to the success and sustainability of health profession programs, the literature on this topic remains limited. The identified themes may provide a useful framework to allow institutions to begin to define more explicitly the program director roles and

expectations, identify and prepare individuals for leadership positions, as well as support current leaders. Improved alignment among leadership competencies, responsibilities, institutional expectations, and professional development may ultimately contribute to more effective leadership and improved retention of academic program directors.

Academic institutions occupy a unique position as developers of the healthcare workforce and have responsibility for sustaining business functions necessary to fulfill their educational missions (Crosby & Shields, 2010). Within this environment, program directors must navigate responsibilities that require both leadership and management competencies. The findings of this systematic review demonstrate that the distinction between these competencies remains variable within the literature. Some authors conceptualize leadership and management as overlapping or interchangeable, whereas others identify distinct competencies associated with each (Azad et al, 2017; Certosimo, 2010; Jennings et al., 2007). Notably, leadership has been associated with establishing vision and developing people, while management has been more closely associated with human resources and information management. These findings suggest that effectiveness in a program director role may not depend on functioning exclusively as either a leader or manager, but rather on possessing and applying competencies associated with both in response to the needs of the program and institution.

The multidimensional nature of the program director role further emphasizes the importance of clearly defining institutional expectations when recruiting and supporting individuals for these positions. The roles and responsibilities identified in this review extend well beyond disciplinary or clinical expertise and include educational leadership, accreditation and compliance, resource and budget management, faculty recruitment and development, support of scholarly activity, and promotion of program visibility. Importantly, the literature also suggests that these responsibilities may be inadequately defined or communicated at the organization level, potentially contributing to uncertainty among individuals assuming leadership positions. Therefore, institutions may benefit from clearly articulating the scope, authority, available resources, and expectations associated with program director positions rather than assuming a common understanding of the role across institutions or healthcare disciplines.

The Skills and Attributes' theme complements these findings by demonstrating that successful academic leadership requires competencies extending beyond expertise within one's healthcare profession. Characteristics identified across the literature included strong interpersonal and communication skills; the ability to mentor, facilitate, delegate, build teams, and develop others; and competencies in strategic planning, problem-solving, decision-making, fiscal management, research, and business operations. The literature also identified mentorship, intentional career planning, leadership development, and ongoing feedback and self-assessment as potentially important components of preparation for academic leadership. Collectively, these findings suggest that preparation for a program director position should be viewed as a development process rather than an advancement based primarily on clinical expertise, teaching experience, or academic seniority.

This distinction is particularly relevant to the Training theme. Previous experience as a clinician, educator, or academician may provide important foundational knowledge but may not adequately prepare an individual for the breadth and depth of responsibilities associated with academic

leadership. The studies included in this review emphasized both the content of leadership development – the “what” – and the methods through which that development occurs – the “how”. Training content included understanding the scope of the leadership role, institutional functions and resources, communication, shared governance, change management, professionalism, and interpersonal leadership competencies. Delivery approaches included formal orientation programs, workshops, continuing education, longitudinal development, and on-the-job learning. These findings support an intentional approach to leadership development that combines profession-specific opportunities with institution-specific orientation and ongoing development. Professional organizations may provide broader preparation for academic leadership, while institutions are uniquely positioned to prepare program directors to understand organizational structures, resources, expectations, and processes within their specific environment.

The interconnectedness of these themes becomes particularly important when considering Longevity in Position. Retention of program directors appears to be influenced not simply by characteristics of the individual leader, but also by the environment in which leadership occurs. The literature identified succession planning, workload and job demands, changing responsibilities, job satisfaction, work-life balance, social support, recognition, mentoring, and the personal rewards associated with the position as factors related to longevity. These findings suggest that recruiting a qualified program director represents only one component of sustaining effective academic leadership. Institutions may also need to consider how organizational structures, resources, mentoring, recognition, and professional development support leaders after they assume their positions.

Taken together, the five themes identified in this review – *Leaders and Managers, Skills and Attributes, Roles and Responsibilities, Training, and Longevity in Position* – suggest that successful academic leadership is best understood as a dynamic interaction between individual competencies and the institutional environment. Program directors must navigate leadership and managerial functions while simultaneously addressing complex educational, operational, personnel, and organizational responsibilities. Preparation for these roles therefore may require intentional career development, clearly defined expectations, structured orientation and ongoing training, mentorship, and institutional support throughout the leadership life cycle. Similarly, succession planning should extend beyond identifying the next individual to fill a position and include purposeful development of potential leaders and organizational commitment to their subsequent success.

Limitations

It is recognized that limitations exist for this systematic review. These findings should be interpreted in the context of the limited evidence identified in this review. The small number of studies, variation in methodological quality, predominance of qualitative and exploratory research, and inclusion of leadership positions across multiple healthcare disciplines limit the strength of definitive practice recommendations specifically for program directors. Rather than establishing a prescriptive model of academic leadership, the five themes provide a framework for considering how healthcare education programs might recruit, prepare, develop, and retain program directors. Future research should examine these themes specifically within program director populations, explore how institutional and professional contexts influence leadership effectiveness and

longevity, and evaluate whether structured leadership development and succession-planning strategies improve outcomes for leaders, programs, faculty, and students.

Conclusion

This systematic review identified five themes within the literature on academic leadership in healthcare education: *Leaders and Managers, Skills and Attributes, Roles and Responsibilities, Training, and Longevity in Position*. Together, these themes describe the multidimensional nature of academic leadership and identify individual, professional, and organizational factors associated with preparation for and experiences within these roles. However, the limited evidence demonstrated that few were published in recent years, and methodological quality varied. This limits the ability to draw definitive conclusions or develop specific practice recommendations for healthcare program directors.

Important gaps remain in understanding academic leadership within healthcare education, particularly at the program director level. The relationships among leadership competencies, preparation and training, institutional support, role expectations, job satisfaction, succession planning, and longevity have not been sufficiently examined. Future research focused specifically on healthcare program directors within disciplines is needed to better understand these relationships and to determine which factors contribute to effective leadership, successful preparation and development, and longevity in academic leadership positions.

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Appendix 1

Systematic Review Search Terms

Concept 1	Concept 2	Concept 3
Program director	Roles	Entry-level education
Leader	Responsibilities	Professional education
Administrator	Job description	Healthcare education
Program administrator	Duties	Education, Graduate
Program Chair	Tasks	Entry-level education
Supervisor	Group processes	Professional education
Administrative personnel	Efficiency, organizational	
Academic administration	Educational leadership	
	Leadership development	

Appendix 2

Outcome display of study characteristics, organized by theme

Appendix 2: Outcome display of study characteristics, organized by theme.

Author (s)/ year	Title	Discipline	Aim/Purpose of Study	What was Studied	Outcome/Results
Leaders and Managers (3)					
Azad et al (2017)	Leadership and Management Are One and the Same	Pharmacy	Debate the idea that managing and leading could be the same.	Each individual author constructed primary claims in favor of the assigned position of the debate then chose the 3 most compelling claims supporting the position. They then utilized evidence-based refutations for the opposing debate claims	Leading and managing are arbitrary and similarly defined; the concepts of leadership and management are transposable in high-performing organizations; in academic settings and any high-performing organization, leading and managing definitions are dependent on the individual using them. The authors relate leadership and management thoughts to the academy to guide high performance and success.
Certosimo (2020)	Leaders or managers: who will define a new vision for dental education?	Dentistry	Highlight the role of leadership in dental education.	Compare and contrast characteristics commonly found in leaders who seek long-term, outward-looking organizational changes and managers who work with short-term, inward-looking changes.	Qualities needed for dental education leaders include -- effective communication, role model, synthesizer, designer, systematic thinker, designer and servant
Jennings et al (2007)	Differentiating nursing leadership and management competencies	Nursing	Evaluation of nursing content for leadership and administration competencies	Similarities and differences among leadership and administration competencies for nursing leadership and administration courses as found in the literature	A large intersection of common competencies was discovered, indicating a lack of discrimination between leadership and management competencies. Arguably, this fusion ignores the different purposes served by leadership and management. Alternately, the convergence of leadership and management competencies might reflect that traditional distinctions have narrowed.

					Nevertheless, ambiguity persists regarding essential leadership and management competencies and the way they are reflected in nursing curricula. If concerns about the work environment are to be remedied for patients and staff, nurse educators are urged to act quickly to identify requisite competencies and better align course content with them
Longevity in position (3)					
Bolton & Roy (2004)	Succession planning: securing the future	Nursing	Describes the critical elements of a succession plan and suggests ways to implement them through modeling	A model approach is proposed for successful succession planning using 5 primary components.	Succession planning identifies projected critical human resource needs, develops potential candidates, promotes staff ownership of professional development, commits time and financial resources to formal training and developmental assignments, and ensures an adequate pool of qualified internal candidates when key vacancies occur. Succession planning is a sound business strategy and a good investment in the future. It may make the difference between organizations that thrive and those that simply survive.
Horton, Gerbasi & Lovell (2008)	What keeps some program directors in their positions so long? An examination of job longevity among anesthesia program directors	Nursing	Examines the high turnover rate of nurse anesthesia faculty	Factors influencing why program directors choose to stay in their positions was studied, including why they took the position and the work conditions that support staying where they are.	Six themes emerged from the interviews, including reasons for becoming an educator, positive and negative aspects of the job, changes over time, reasons for longevity in the job, and advice to new educators. Theme 1. CRNAs became educators because someone asked them to, they had prior experiences in education, or it was a job expectation. Theme 2. The highest reward for being an educator, above any other

					personal reward, was seeing students learn and develop manual skills. Theme 3. The workload and multiple job demands were the least desirable aspects of an educator's job. Theme 4. The responsibilities of program directors have changed over time. Theme 5. Program directors stayed in their positions for a long time when the work was personally rewarding and they had effective support systems. Theme 6. Mentoring was highly valued, and experienced program directors were generous in giving advice to less experienced program directors.
Mintz-Binde, Ronda (2013)	From frontline nurse managers to academic program directors: research, strategies, and commonalities	Nursing	Explore factors in the psychosocial work environment of academic program directors	Explored level of job satisfaction and factors influencing it	Academic administrators (N = 242; response rate: 41.2 percent) validated concerns of increasing position turnover; 59 percent indicated that they were in their current positions for less than five years. Statistically significant correlations were found between job satisfaction, work/family life, role concerns, social support, and recognition. Proactive interventions are needed to ensure manageable workloads for those in PD positions
Skills and attributes (7)					
Bordage, Foley & Goldyn (2000)	Skills and attributes of directors of educational programs	Medicine	Obtain a list of desirable skills and attributes of prospective educational program directors as judged by potential employers of future directors.	Examined individual perspectives of what education, leadership skills, capabilities a potential new program director should possess to be hired.	A total of 139 respondents completed the questionnaire (22.3% response rate). Responses were remarkably similar across health professions. The nine leading skills were: oral communication skills, interpersonal skills, competent practitioner, educational goal-definition

					skills, educational design skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills, team worker and building skills, written communication skills and fiscal manager and budgeting skills. The three leading personal attributes were: visionary, flexible and open-minded and trustworthy and value-driven individual.
Duda (2004)	Physician and scientist leadership in academic medicine: strategic planning for a successful academic leadership career	Medicine	Identify basic principles for strategic planning for a successful and effective leadership career in academic medicine	Determined lack of leadership education in medicine. Referred to 5 articles in stating the 5 principles for academic medicine leadership skill development	Strategic planning principles for academic medicine leadership include (1) develop a vision, (2) cultivate a plan, (3) focus, (4) seek counsel, (5) periodically reassess, and (6) enjoy the journey.
Green & Ridenour (2004)	Shaping a career trajectory in academic administration: leadership development for the deanship	Nursing	Addresses insufficient number of aspiring leaders in nursing education	Transitioning to a Dean role and the skills it takes to be successful	To be successful in a Dean position, a candidate must understand the challenges of being a dean, determine if they truly want to become a Dean, develop dean-level leadership skills, get onto a career trajectory that leads to a deanship, and be able to take the steps to have a successful transition to becoming a dean.
Kane-Urrbazo (2006)	Management's role in shaping organizational culture	Nursing	Addresses the importance of the manager's role in the development and maintenance of organizational culture.	Describes the types of cultures that exist and manager characteristics that are essential to facilitating a healthy workplace.	There are four primary cultural components that are interdependent in organizational culture -- trust/trustworthiness, empowerment/delegation, consistency and mentorship

Page (2001)	Characteristics, perceptions, and factors influencing the decision making of physical therapy chairpersons in 2000	Physical Therapy	Exploration of characteristics of current PT chairpersons, such as time spent on responsibilities, influences on decision making, perceptions of working relationships, and satisfaction with decision making, as well as information about their supervisors and the faculty they managed	Program director (PD) characteristics of decision making, perceptions of working relationships, and satisfaction with decision making, as well as information about supervisors and the faculty managed.	PDs had been in their positions for a mean of 6.04 years; 63 (57.8%) held doctoral degrees. They had a mean of 25.6 years of experience in PT practice and 17.5 years in academic positions. Their levels of satisfaction and the power and influence they had in their positions were high. However, the time spent on faculty recruitment and mentoring, given the lack of seniority of their faculty, and the small percentage of time they devoted to their own professional development may be concerns. Long-range planning and accreditation duties take up most of the time of PT chairpersons.
Thompson (2011)	Challenges of transitioning from a faculty to an administrative role: part 2, moving from individual contributor to group leader	Nursing	Purpose is to address the transition from faculty to administrative role	Address common issues, challenges, and opportunities that face academic executive teams, such as negotiating an executive contract, obtaining faculty lines, building effective work teams, managing difficult employees, and creating nimble organizational structure to respond to changing consumer, healthcare delivery, and community needs	It is important for those already in or aspiring to serve in academic leadership roles to consider the possible ramifications of their decisions, then decide on a course of action. For example, chairpersons who are elected by faculty may be in a more vulnerable position than appointed chairpersons or deans with respect to making decisions that may not appear to be meeting the immediate needs/wants of faculty and staff. However, the chairperson may be willing to take that risk to advance the mission and vision of the academic unit. The need to balance the manager/transactional perspective with the leader/transformational perspective is essential to succeed and thrive in leadership roles. Although "sacrifice of self" for the good of the organization is a noble goal, it is neither a

					realistic nor a reasonable solution to apply in all cases. The key to academic leadership is to develop the skills and expertise that will enable the leader to exercise good judgment in deciding which approach will be of most benefit in advancing the vision for the academic unit
Van Diggle et al (2020)	Leadership in healthcare education	Medicine	Considers the current theories of leadership and explores leadership skills and roles within the context of healthcare education	Types of leadership, language of leadership, challenges, development of leadership skills; leadership competencies; Issues/challenges being faced	Areas of leadership competencies were determined to include -- motivation, mentor, facilitator, communicator, setting direction, change leader, leadership presence, team building, health ed research skills, business skills, self-management, and ability to develop others. Issues/challenges facing leaders include -- personal issues, organizational and cultural issues, balancing competing agendas and understanding the wider healthcare agenda. Summary of outcomes --- Titles are not always linked to leadership roles. The role of today's leader requires stepping forward, collaborating and contributing. A good leader is a good team player who values and seeks the opinions of others. Leadership requires clear, respectful communication that acknowledges the input and achievements of others. Leadership competencies and the incorporation of leadership development as part of curricula are important across all health professions. interprofessional teams and collaboration serve to lead to more effective outcomes.

Roles and Responsibilities (3)					
Brownfield et al (2012)	The activities and responsibilities of the vice chair for education in U.S. and Canadian departments of medicine	Medicine	A profile of the activities and responsibilities of vice chairs for education is notably absent from the medical education literature. The authors sought to determine the demographics, roles and responsibilities, and major priorities and challenges faced by vice chairs for education.	Researchers inquired about demographics, roles, expectations of and for their position, opinions on the responsibilities outlined for their position, metrics used to evaluate their success, top priorities, and job descriptions.	Fifty-nine vice chairs for education (72%) responded. At the time of appointment, only 6 (10%) were given a job description, and only 17 (28%) had a defined job description and metrics used to evaluate their success. Only 20 (33%) had any formal budget management training, and 23 (38%) controlled an education budget. Five themes emerged regarding the responsibilities and goals of the vice chair for education; oversee educational programs; possess educational expertise; promote educational scholarship; serve in leadership activities and respondents found expectations to be vague and ill-defined.
Bushy, Dunkin & Stover (2005)	Roles, responsibilities, and outcome expectations of endowed chairs in nursing	Nursing	Study endowed chairs so that job descriptions can be developed around findings and evaluate impact of endowments in a nursing program	Examines the purpose, roles, responsibilities, and outcomes of endowed chairholders in nursing.	Roles and responsibilities include scholarship, grant writing, funding research, publications, and mentoring faculty and students in scholarship/research. Excellence in scholarship was identified as an important role/responsibility. Endowed chairholders ranked serve as a role model as second, followed by increased visibility of the institution, while deans ranked increased visibility of the institution as second, followed by serve as a role model. The outcome having the greatest level agreement for deans was to increase the visibility of the program, while chairholders listed funded research projects (ranked third by deans). There also was agreement on the outcome publications,

					ranked fourth by both groups, while excellence in teaching was ranked third by chairholders and ninth by deans.
Greenberg (2012)	The elusive role of the physician assistant program medical director	Medicine	Better understand the role of an effective Physician Assistant Medical Program Director	Effectiveness of the physician assistant (PA) PD.	An effective PA PD must -- be an essential member of the PA faculty and participate in all phases of PA education, be accessible to students, credible, recognize superior clinicians who are good teachers, identify/recruit clinical training sites, assist with employment for program graduates, visible role in institution, participate in ceremonies and events, active participation in national organizations and accreditation.
Training (4)					
Christner, Smith & Appelbaum (2010)	A Medical School Dean's Guide to Orienting Educational Leaders on Roles, Responsibilities, and Resources	Medicine	Outline the structure and content of an orientation program designed for medical education leaders and share post evaluation data to identify which sessions were most used in practice.	The effectiveness of an orientation program was assessed to better understand what aspects of it were used in the participants work life going forward	Response rates ranged across the six surveys between 30 to 82%. All respondents perceived 11 of 14 sessions to be well-organized, while 10 of 14 sessions were perceived to be valuable by all respondents. The greatest amount of knowledge gained immediately after the program was with financial aid (89% increase) and the two student service sessions covering career counseling, wellness resources, and disability (80% increase). Overall, 13 of the 14 sessions were found to have a large effect size for knowledge gain, suggesting a large magnitude of improvement after participation in the program. Utility of session information persisted through 12 months after orientation. On average, session content was used at least once or twice over the year. The dean's Introduction

					and Conclusion sessions were anticipated to be most frequently used by the educational leadership team, which was found to sustain 12 months after orientation. The most frequently used information was regarding student affairs and UME curriculum, with an average weekly use. Student services (career counseling, wellness resources) information was used.
Crosby & Shields (2010)	Preparing the next generation of nurse leaders: an educational needs assessment	Nursing	Purpose is to address how to prepare the next generation of nurse leaders and identifying what conditions need to exist to develop nurse leaders as well as how to educate them	Understand participants recommendations for how to develop leaders --- recommended topics, greatest facilitators in work setting that develop nurse leaders and the greatest barriers are	Development of the next generation of nurse leaders is critical for health care delivery. Educational strategies support nurse leadership development. Key concepts are recommended for nurse leadership education. Three primary themes were communication skills, conflict resolution and the multigenerational nature of the nursing work force. Continuing education offerings need to support leadership development of nurses. Other important findings include education on interprofessional work, problem solving, and critiquing versus criticizing
Gabel (2012)	Perspective: physician leaders and their bases of power: common and disparate elements	Medicine	Discusses the types of leadership roles that physicians play and the power types they must apply in these roles.	Types of power and leadership roles explored.	Leadership training that includes practice in cultivating personal characteristics and interpersonal competencies should be an essential component of medical and graduate medical education. Types of power include - legitimate or positional, expert, informational, reward, coercive and referent power. Competencies of successful leaders include -- vision, goals, communicator, integrity, recognition of

					others, decisiveness, listener, address conflicts, assertive, delegates, team builder, advocate, provides feedback, lifelong learner, coach, mediator, and technical competency
Menix (2000)	Educating to manage the accelerated change environment effectively: Part 2	Nursing	Provide the results of a Delphi study whereby baccalaureate-prepared nurse manager experts and nurse educator experts in baccalaureate nursing programs validated what linear and nonlinear change management concepts they believed were relevant in managing change in today's dynamic environment.	Linear and non-linear change management concepts were studied, which included relevant and non-relevant concepts in managing change.	Staff development educators and administrators, as organizational change agents, can use the validated concepts to develop educational offerings to promote effective change management.

Appendix 3

Critical Appraisal Scores-Methodological Quality; Alphabetized by Author (Using Oxford Centre for Evidence Based Medicine and McMaster University Occupational Therapy Evidence-Based Practice Research Group, Law et al 2020)

Author (year)	CRITICAL APPRAISAL SCORES*														TOTAL Score***
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	
Azad et al (2017)		x	x							x				x	4
Bolton & Roy (2004)	x	x										x		x	4
Bordage, Foley & Goldyn (2000)	x	x	x	x		x			x			x	x	x	9
Brownfield et al (2012)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14
Bushy, Dunkin & Stover (2005)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14
Christner, Smith & Appelbaum (2010)	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	12
Certosimo (2020)	x	x	x					x	x			x		x	7
Crosby & Shields (2010)	x	x		x					x		x	x		x	7
Duda (2004)	x	x												x	3
Gabel (2012)	x	x												x	3
Green & Ridenour (2004)	x	x										x		x	4
Greenberg (2012)	x													x	2
Horton, Gerbasi & Lovell (2008)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	13
Jennings et al (2007)	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	13
Kane-Urrabazo (2006)	x	x	x	x					x		x	x	x	x	9
Menix (2000)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14
Mintz-Binde & Ronda (2013)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14
Page (2001)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	14
Thompson (2011)	x	x										x		x	4
Van Diggie et al (2020)	x	x	x									x		x	5

Critical Appraisal Category Scoring Key (Quantitative & Qualitative)

1 = Study purposes stated clearly

2 = Relevant Literature reviewed (Quantitative & Qualitative)

3 = Sample described in detail (Quantitative) / Theoretical perspective identified (Qualitative)

4 = Sample size justified (Quantitative) / Purposeful sample selection described (Qualitative)

- 5 = Outcome measures reliable (Quantitative) / Sampling until redundancy in data reached (Qualitative)
 - 6 = Outcome measures valid (Quantitative) / Informed consent obtained (Qualitative)
 - 7 = Intervention described in detail (Quantitative) / Procedural rigor used in data collection (Qualitative)
 - 8 = Contamination avoided (Quantitative) / Analytical preciseness (Qualitative)
 - 9 = Co-intervention avoided (Quantitative) / Findings consistent with and reflective of data (Qualitative)
 - 10 = Results reported in terms of statistical significance (Quantitative) / Auditability (decision trail developed and rules reported) (Qualitative)
 - 11 = Analysis methods appropriate (Quantitative) / Transformation of data described (Qualitative)
 - 12 = Educational importance reported (Quantitative) / Theoretical connections described (Qualitative)
 - 13 = Drop-outs reported (Quantitative) / Trustworthiness (triangulation reported for methods) (Qualitative)
 - 14 = Conclusions appropriate (Quantitative & Qualitative)
- ***Total Score Key
- 13-14 = High quality, low risk of bias
 - 10-12 = moderate quality, moderate risk of bias
 - <10 = low quality, high risk of bias

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND HIGHER EDUCATION STAFF JOB SATISFACTION

Tanya L. Pearson

Abstract

This study examined whether supervisors perceived as demonstrating transformational leadership are associated with higher levels of staff job satisfaction. A quantitative survey design used validated instruments to measure transformational leadership competencies and job satisfaction among staff, with analyses including comparisons to national Job Descriptive Index norms and ordinal pattern analysis. Findings suggest that staff who rated their supervisors as “medium” or “total” transformational leaders reported higher satisfaction levels. While broader results did not show statistical significance, subgroup trends suggest that transformational leadership may positively influence job satisfaction for certain employees.

Keywords: Leadership, Job Satisfaction, Higher Education Staff

Introduction

Prior research has centered on faculty job satisfaction, leaving higher education staff underrepresented in the literature. The problem this study addressed is the critical need for effective leadership in Higher Education Institutions (HEI). This study focused directly on transformational leadership, examining its impact on job satisfaction and organizational outcomes within higher education.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of transformational leadership on higher education staff job satisfaction. The study examined the five factors of transformational leadership as well as the five characteristics of job satisfaction. The goal of the study was to determine if transformational leadership is a suitable and positive leadership approach to implement while working in higher education. If the results proved to be true, this study could be used in HEIs to increase employee job satisfaction among staff, boosting morale among workers. The research question for this study was: To what extent does an employee's perception of their supervisor's transformational leadership style impact their job satisfaction?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study involved the foundation of transformational leadership and how it is related to job satisfaction. As transformational leadership is focused on supporting employees (Lindert et al., 2023), it was anticipated that this approach would have a positive impact on job satisfaction. Job satisfaction has a positive impact on employee retention (Xuecheng et al., 2022), and therefore, identifying leadership approaches that promote this outcome is vital. This study aimed to examine five factors of transformational leadership and five characteristics of job satisfaction.

Transformational leadership examines and identifies behaviors that reinforce employees' understanding of task outcomes' significance and values (Lindert et al., 2023). It involves articulating a future vision, creating realistic action plans to achieve goals, and providing individualized support to employees, seeking to satisfy higher needs, and engaging the full person of the follower (Lindert et al., 2023). The conceptual framework was developed using existing literature that discussed the impact of transformational leadership on job satisfaction (Bayram & Dinç, 2015; Braun et al., 2013; Hanaysha et al., 2012; Kebede & Demeke, 2017; Ramos, 2014). According to Batista-Foguet et al. (2021), transformational leadership consists of five components known as the five I's, which correspond to the subscales of the Job Descriptive Index (JDI): idealized influence attributes (IIA), idealized influence behaviors (IIB), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS), and individualized consideration (IC).

Job satisfaction was also an integral part of the conceptual framework. Employees who are happy and satisfied with their jobs tend to put more effort into their work and support the organization's goals (Kebede & Demeke, 2017). Companies that create environments fostering high levels of job satisfaction are more successful in attracting and keeping talented employees (Kebede & Demeke, 2017). The degree to which employees feel satisfied with their jobs plays a crucial role in the overall success of an organization. Research has demonstrated that employees who are content with their jobs tend to be more productive, which in turn boosts the overall productivity of the organization (Khan et al., 2021). According to the JDI, job satisfaction is made up of five components: satisfaction with supervisors (SUP), satisfaction with co-workers (CO), satisfaction with pay (PAY), satisfaction with promotion (PRO), and satisfaction with the work itself (WORK; van Saane et al., 2003).

This research framework examined the link between various aspects of job satisfaction and leadership behaviors, aiming to offer practical insights for addressing employee turnover. By understanding how different leadership styles and job satisfaction factors interact, organizations can develop more effective strategies to enhance employee retention and reduce turnover rates. Figure 1 illustrates the connection between transformational leadership and job satisfaction.

Figure 1: *The Dimensions of Transformational Leadership and Job Satisfaction*



Note. Figure created by the author. Figure 1 depicts the flow of influence from the components associated with transformational leadership to various dimensions of job satisfaction as measured by the JDI.

Literature Review

Transformational Leadership

Bass and Riggio (2006) defined transformational leaders as “persons who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity” (p. 3). Transformational leaders influence their followers by elevating traditional goals and fostering greater self-confidence in the workplace (Burns, 1978). There are four components to transformational leadership, though the first can be split into two components that were developed by analytic studies by Bass (1985), Howell and Avolio (1993), Bycio et al. (1995), and Avolio et al. (1997). The components consist of idealized influence (II) – attributes and behaviors, inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS), and individualized consideration (IC). Each of these components contributes to the essence of a transformational leader. Idealized influence involves the leader acting as a role model. Transformational leaders use inspirational motivation to articulate a compelling vision for their employees. They encourage creative thinking through intellectual stimulation, and they address the individual needs of their employees through individualized consideration.

Job Descriptive Index. Smith et al. (1969) created the Job Descriptive Index (JDI), which is a widely used questionnaire specific to job satisfaction. Containing 72 items, the JDI measures an individual's satisfaction with their job using five facets: supervision, coworkers, pay, promotions and promotion opportunities, and the work itself (Mishra, 2013). The scoring method for the adjective-like items in these scales operates as follows: Positive items that receive an agreement (yes) response and negative items that receive a disagreement (no) response are awarded 3 points. Conversely, positive items that receive a disagreement (no) response and negative items that receive an agreement (yes) response are given 0 points. Responses marked as "?" are assigned 1 point (Smith et al., 1969).

The JDI is widely regarded as the most popular and extensively used tool for measuring job satisfaction (Buckley et al., 1992; JDI Research Group, 2020).

Method

Study Design

This study aimed to explore the role of transformational leadership in shaping job satisfaction among full-time higher education staff. To answer the research question, "To what extent does an employee's perception of their supervisor's transformational leadership style impact their job satisfaction?" a quantitative approach was necessary. Surveying allowed anonymous data to be collected, and by using two quantitatively validated instruments, survey methodology was an ideal approach (Krosnick & Presser, 2010).

Setting and Population

The participant population included higher education staff members working under one of the six different divisions on the Sulphur River State University – a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the institution where the study took place. The university is a public institution serving nearly 13,000 students through more than 140 academic degree programs. The institution is a Carnegie-classified R2 research university and part of the NCAA Division I.

The divisions were Research and Economic Development, Finance and Administration, Student Affairs, Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs and Provost, and Philanthropy and Engagement. Participants in the study were asked to evaluate their satisfaction with their current position and share their perceptions of their leader's behaviors. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, and participants were informed that they could withdraw at any time.

Instruments

This study employed two validated instruments to measure transformational leadership and job satisfaction among participants. The first instrument, designed to assess transformational leadership, was based on a set of competencies identified by Burkin et al. (2024) in their research on transformational leadership within public health organizations. Participants were to use this instrument to evaluate the leadership style of their supervisors, allowing the researcher to identify how they perceived that transformational leadership behavior was exhibited.

The second instrument, the JDI, originally developed by Smith et al. (1969), was used to assess multiple dimensions of job satisfaction. By pairing the transformational leadership data with the job satisfaction data, the study aimed to explore whether and how employees' perceptions of their supervisors as transformational leaders influence their overall job satisfaction. This approach provided a structured means to analyze the potential link between leadership style and workplace contentment within higher education settings.

Data Collection

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited by receiving a pre-notification to their university-issued employee email address. The pre-notification included an introduction from the researcher as well as information on the study and a request for completing the questionnaire (Dillman et al., 2014). Then, participants were surveyed using a Qualtrics questionnaire, which was also sent to their university-issued employee email address. The researcher expected to survey approximately 630 participants: 8 from Research and Economic Development, 180 from Finance and Administration, 148 from Student Affairs, 85 from Enrollment Management, 192 from Academic Affairs and Provost, and 17 from Philanthropy and Engagement. Participants were asked to take the questionnaire with their direct supervisor/report in mind. The participants were selected using convenience sampling. All staff members on the campus received an email invitation and were given the opportunity to participate voluntarily in the study.

Within these groups, some participants were supervisors whose direct reports completed the questionnaire based on their perceptions of those supervisors. Likewise, these supervisors could complete the questionnaire with their own supervisor in mind. Table 1 below displays a breakdown of each of the divisions on campus, the number of expected participants in each division, and the number of supervisors, who are also included in the number of expected participants. For easy access and participation, participants were sent the questionnaire using a link via Qualtrics. Data were collected over a 3-week period, and reminders were sent each week to those who had not yet completed the survey.

Of the approximately 630 staff members invited to participate, 69 completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of approximately 11%. While the response rate was lower than desired, the length of the survey may have contributed to lower participation, as respondents were asked to complete multiple items and scales. The findings should be interpreted with some caution to the extent to which the results reflect the perspectives of the majority of staff members at the institution.

Table 1: *Divisions, Expected Participants, & Supervisors*

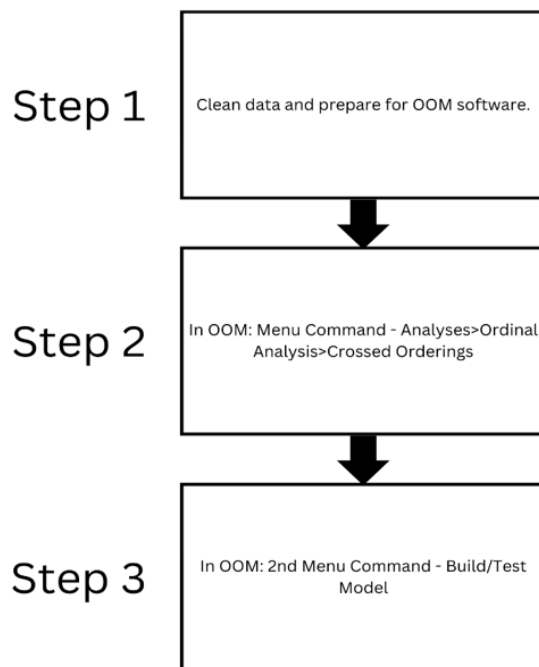
Division	# of Expected Participants	# of Supervisors
Research & Economic Development	8	1
Finance & Administration	180	41

Division	# of Expected Participants	# of Supervisors
Student Affairs	148	26
Enrollment Management	85	17
Academic Affairs & Provost	192	60
Philanthropy & Engagement	17	6

Note. Table created by the author.

After the data were successfully collected, they were imported into Observation Oriented Modeling (OOM) (Grice, 2011) for analysis. Utilizing OOM enables researchers to evaluate different cases through constructing refined and precise models by analyzing ordinal patterns and conducting pairwise comparisons of ordered observations (Nix et al., 2024). Nix et al. (2024) explained that variables are replaced by ordered observations when utilizing OOM: target observations (expected) and conforming observations (matched expectations). The researcher first determined the percentage of observations that aligned with expectations after identifying all classifiable pairs, which resulted from ordering each observation in relation to the others. Figure 2 is reflective of the steps that were utilized to clean and prepare data and run analyses tools.

Figure 2: *Analytical Flowchart*



Note. Figure created by the author.

Findings

To gain a clearer picture of how employees on the campus where this study took place felt about their jobs, the data analyses took a two-part approach. First, it compared the most common JDI scores from participants to the national normative. This helped to highlight whether staff satisfaction levels on campus were in line with what is typically seen across the country or if they differ in certain areas. Then, the analysis looked at whether perceptions of transformational leadership, and how staff view their supervisors' leadership style, might influence those satisfaction levels. While the overall connection was not statistically strong, some interesting trends emerged when looking at specific groups that supported the hypothesis of the study.

Comparison to JDI Normative Scores

National comparison norms the author obtained by Bowling Green State University on June 17, 2025, were used as the benchmark for this analysis. These norms represented the most current national comparative data available to the researchers at the time of the questionnaire. This comparison provided insight into how staff satisfaction levels on this study's campus aligned with broader trends. Table 2 outlines the researcher's frequent score findings along with the corresponding national normative percentiles.

Table 2: *JDI Categories, Researcher's Score Findings, and Corresponding Norms*

JDI Category	Most Frequent Score	Corresponding Normative Percentile
Satisfaction with Supervision	28	24th percentile
Satisfaction with Co-Workers	26	19th percentile
Satisfaction with Pay	14	22nd percentile
Satisfaction with Promotion	13	45th percentile
Satisfaction with the Work Itself	30	28th percentile

Note. Table created by the author.

These results suggest that across most job satisfaction domains, participants in this study reported lower satisfaction levels compared to national norms. For instance, satisfaction with supervision and co-workers fell into the 24th and 19th percentiles, respectively, indicating that the commonly selected scores in these categories were lower than approximately 75–80% of the national reference. Satisfaction with pay and work also reflected similar below-average rankings. Interestingly, satisfaction with promotion was the only category nearing the midpoint, falling in the 45th percentile. This suggests that while overall job satisfaction was generally low compared to the normative scores, perceptions of promotional opportunities were somewhat more favorable in comparison to other aspects of the job.

The below-average percentile rankings across four of the five JDI dimensions suggest that respondents at this institution may experience workplace conditions differently than national

samples. Particularly noteworthy are the pay, supervision, and co-worker dimensions, which fell below the 25th percentile. These findings also suggest that respondents may be experiencing challenges across multiple areas of their work environment rather than within a single aspect of their employment. Because job satisfaction served as a primary outcome variable in this study, these comparatively low levels of satisfaction provide important context for interpreting the relationship between transformational leadership and employee perceptions.

Employee Job Satisfaction and Transformational Leadership

An ordinal pattern analysis was conducted to answer the following research question, “To what extent does an employee’s perception of their supervisor’s transformational leadership style impact their job satisfaction?” Among the 69 observations analyzed, the overall relationship between perceived transformational leadership and job satisfaction was not statistically significant. This may be due in part to the variation in how participants perceived their supervisors’ leadership. To explore further, the researcher examined each category of the JDI in relation to perceived transformational leadership. These results, presented in Table 3, revealed marginal relationships across the satisfaction categories, with no statistically significant associations.

For a relationship to be considered statistically significant in this context, the Percent Correct Classification (PCC) should be 50% or higher, and the c-value should be less than 0.10. About 35% of participants said they were satisfied overall. When examining how satisfaction changed based on how they rated their supervisor, the result indicated a 48.18% match; thus, it appears that overall satisfaction increased to some extent with better supervision ratings.

Table 3: JDI Categories, Percent Correct Classification, and c-value in OOM

JDI Category	Percent Correct Classification (PCC)	c-Value
Satisfaction with Supervision	35.24%	0.79
Satisfaction with Co-Workers	28.48%	0.98
Satisfaction with Pay	42.69%	0.39
Satisfaction with Promotion	43.10%	0.53
Satisfaction with the Work Itself	40.23%	0.65

Note. Table created by the author.

Transformational leadership scores were binned into six categories: Low, Moderately Low, Medium, Moderately High, High, and Total Transformational Leader. A crossed orderings analysis was then performed to explore the hypothesized relationship, that higher perceived transformational leadership would align with higher levels of job satisfaction. The overall PCC was 48.18%, with a c-value of 0.08, indicating the overall model lacked statistical significance.

Despite the lack of significance in the full model, further group comparisons revealed an important trend. Specifically, comparisons among participants who rated their supervisors as Low, Medium,

and Total transformational leaders yielded more meaningful results. Because this study aimed to determine whether staff who perceived their supervisors as transformational experienced greater job satisfaction, the subgroup results offered meaningful support for that connection. For those who rated their supervisors as Low in transformational leadership, the relationship with job satisfaction was statistically significant (PCC = 68.75%; c-value = 0.10). Similarly, those ratings of supervisors as Medium (showing some traits) transformational leaders also illustrated a statistically significant relationship to job satisfaction (PCC = 68.75%; c-value = 0.06). Finally, participants who rated their supervisors as Total transformational leaders reported higher levels of job satisfaction (PCC = 65.63%; c-value = 0.02). Therefore, while the overall pattern was not statistically significant, there were meaningful subgroup trends worth noting.

Conceptual Framework and Integrated Model

The conceptual framework introduced earlier in this study, Figure 1, attempted to visually connect components of transformational leadership with aspects of job satisfaction. However, it ultimately fell short in supporting the research. The greatest limitation lies in its oversimplification of the dynamic relationships between leadership behavior and job satisfaction. Figure 1 had each of the components of transformational leadership (IIA, IIB, IC, IM, & IS) paired with a specific job satisfaction factor. This one-to-one mapping implies a fixed relationship that may not accurately reflect the multifaceted ways these variables interact in real workplace contexts.

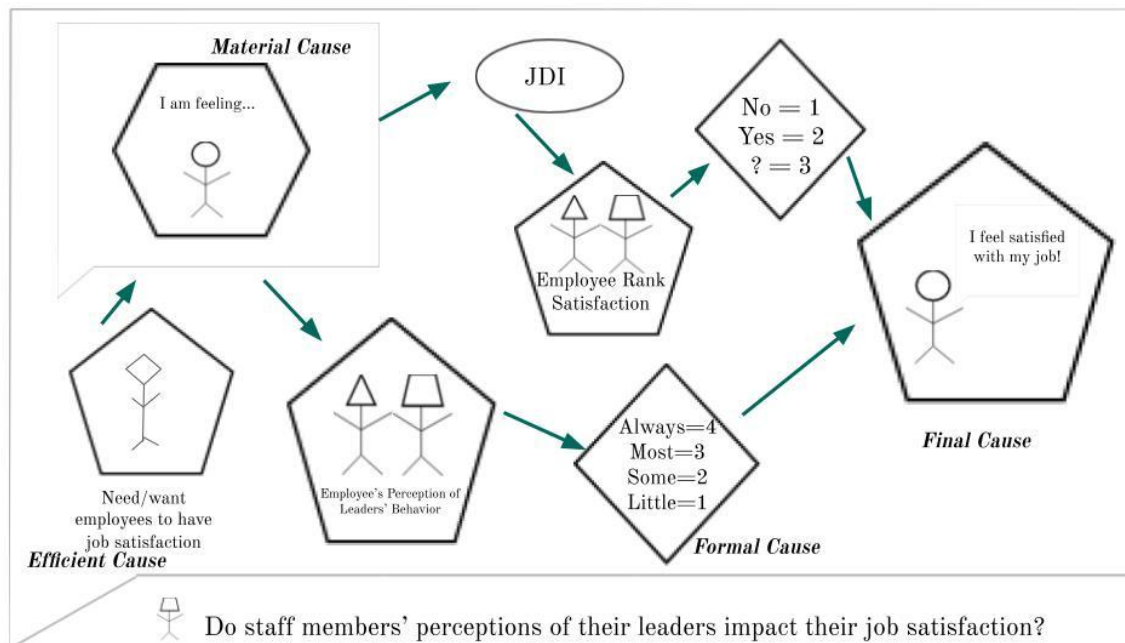
Grice (2011) described a key principle in observation-oriented modeling as thinking using an integrated model: a framework that clearly outlines how parts of a system work together. This approach helps to explain the underlying reasons behind natural patterns and behaviors. Drawing from Aristotle's philosophy, gaining solid knowledge involves identifying different types of causes: the material cause (what something is made of), the formal cause (how it is structured), the efficient cause (what brings it about), and the final cause (its purpose or function) (Grice, 2011). Using these types of causes in a model allowed the researcher to organize their thinking and gain deeper insights into how systems operate.

The integrated model shown in Figure 3 below is particularly helpful in applying Aristotle's four causes to better understand the relationship between transformational leadership and staff job satisfaction. The model begins with the efficient cause, which identifies the driving force or reason behind the research. In this case, the efficient cause is the desire for staff members to experience job satisfaction. From there, the model moves into the material cause, which captures the emotional experiences of employees. This includes how individuals feel in response to their work environment and leadership interactions.

The formal cause then addresses how those internal states are structured and measured. This includes the tools and instruments used in the study, such as the JDI and transformational leadership assessment. Staff members were asked to evaluate their leaders using specific criteria and response scales (e.g., "Always," "Most," "Some," "Little"), and to express their level of agreement with satisfaction statements (e.g., "Yes," "No," or "?"). This part of the model clarifies how perceptions are translated into observable and analyzable data. Finally, the final cause reflects the ultimate goal of the research: for there to be job satisfaction among staff members who report

to a transformational leader. It addresses the central research question, whether and how employees' perceptions of their leaders affect their satisfaction at work.

Figure 3: Integrated Model Using Aristotle's Four Causes to Explain Findings of this Study



Note. Figure created by the author.

Discussion

This study explored whether the perception of higher education staff members' leadership as a transformational leader had an impact on their overall job satisfaction. The study reviewed existing literature connecting transformational leadership to job satisfaction but found it came up short in areas specific to higher education staff members. Therefore, this study's population was focused on staff members working for a higher education institution. The data analyses revealed some interesting results, which found some links to job satisfaction based on how employees perceived their supervisor.

RQ. To what extent does an employee's perception of their supervisor's transformational leadership style impact their job satisfaction? **Hypothesis:** An employee's perception of their supervisor's transformational leadership style will have a positive impact on overall job satisfaction.

The data collection process directly addressed this research question by gathering participants' perceptions of both their supervisors' leadership behaviors and their own job satisfaction levels using structured, validated instruments. Although the overall model did not yield statistically significant relationships, meaningful patterns emerged within several participant subgroups. Further, statistically significant patterns emerged in the data among subgroups. Staff members who perceived their supervisors as consistently demonstrating transformational leadership tendencies tended to report higher satisfaction scores, supporting the researcher's hypothesis. On the other hand, staff members who perceived their supervisors as medium or low transformational leaders

also yielded higher satisfaction scores, indicating that transformational leadership is not a solve-all for leadership practice in higher education.

The findings of this study partially aligned with existing literature that emphasized the positive impact of transformational leadership on staff member satisfaction. Scholars such as Bass and Riggio (2006) and Burns (1978) described transformational leaders as those who inspire, motivate, and engage employees in ways that improve workplace outcomes, including job satisfaction. In this study, staff who rated their supervisors as “totally transformational” also reported higher job satisfaction, consistent with those theories. However, an unexpected result emerged: participants who rated their supervisors as demonstrating “low” levels of transformational leadership also reported relatively high satisfaction. This divergence suggests that while transformational leadership may be one influential factor, it may not be the only, or even the primary, driver of job satisfaction on this campus. Other factors may take precedence over leadership style; another leadership style altogether may be more influential in job satisfaction, or something else entirely.

The low normative rankings may also help explain why transformational leadership demonstrated only limited effects in the overall model. Leadership behaviors can influence employee attitudes; however, other organizational factors such as understaffing, workload demands, sense of belonging, and low salaries may exert a stronger influence on overall satisfaction (Mather & Bam, 2025). If employees are experiencing challenges across multiple dimensions simultaneously, positive leadership behavior alone may be insufficient to overcome those challenges.

The findings offered some valuable insight into employee job satisfaction and the potential influence of leadership style on workplace perceptions at this institution. By comparing the most frequently selected JDI scores from this study to national norms, it became clear that job satisfaction among participants tended to fall below national averages, particularly in areas like supervision, co-worker relationships, and pay. This could suggest that staff at this campus may be experiencing lower workplace satisfaction compared to broader trends.

Participants who viewed their supervisors as either strongly transformational or moderately (medium) transformational reported higher levels of job satisfaction. These subgroup findings suggest a relationship between leadership style and job satisfaction among certain groups of participants. The findings could suggest that leadership with transformational qualities may positively influence how staff perceive their work experience, which in turn could be a meaningful step toward improving overall job satisfaction. These results can help spark broader discussions about leadership development.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This study contributes to a body of research examining the link between transformational leadership and job satisfaction. Although the overall model did not yield statistically significant results the findings may be of practical use. Subgroup analyses revealed statistically meaningful patterns, particularly among those who perceived their supervisors as either low, medium, or total transformational leaders. These results suggest that the influence of transformational leadership may vary across employee groups and aspects of job satisfaction. Those who rated their supervisor as Low transformational leaders may report to a leader who exhibits another leadership behaviors

not typically associated with transformational leaders that is suitable for increasing job satisfaction among staff in higher education.

From a practical perspective, the findings point to the potential value of leadership development efforts that are responsive to employee needs and organizational context. In areas such as pay and promotion, where perceptions of transformational leadership appeared more closely associated with satisfaction, institutions might consider equipping supervisors with tools to communicate advancement opportunities, provide developmental feedback, and support staff growth. These efforts could lead to measurable improvements in satisfaction, even if broader structural issues like compensation policy remain unchanged.

Limitations

This research study was limited in scope, as it was conducted on a single campus and surveyed only the staff members at that location. The questionnaire was distributed to 630 campus staff members and achieved a response rate of approximately 11%. Based on the stated sampling assumptions, the resulting sample has an estimated margin of error of $\pm 9.202\%$. However, this estimate does not account for potential nonresponse bias, which may occur if individuals who chose not to participate were systematically different from those who did respond. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent the views of the broader campus staff population and should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

Although participants were drawn from six staff divisions across the university, demographic information identifying respondents' divisions was not collected to preserve anonymity. As a result, analyses comparing job satisfaction and perceptions of leadership across divisions could not be conducted. Future research may consider collecting division-level information while maintaining participant confidentiality to explore whether meaningful differences exist among functional areas of the institution.

This narrow geographic and organizational context may limit the generalizability of the findings to other institutional settings, particularly urban or suburban campuses, larger organizations, or those with more diverse staff compositions. The unique cultural, economic, and leadership dynamics present in this higher education environment may have influenced how employees perceive their supervisors and how they interpret job satisfaction, potentially making the findings less applicable to broader populations. Including additional leadership styles for participants to evaluate and compare with their job satisfaction may help identify which styles are more effective in promoting employee satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction among higher education staff members. The findings contribute to the limited body of research on higher education staff and provide insight into leadership and staff satisfaction within a university setting. Continued research in this area may help institutions better understand how leadership practices influence staff experiences.

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Compelled Missions: How State Laws May Change Colleges and Universities and How Colleges and Universities Can Adapt

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ABSTRACT

Higher education in the United States is facing increased state-driven legislation aimed at institutional regulation. Situated within broader political and societal changes, especially given perceived ideological imbalances within academia, institutions of higher education (IHE) will need to adapt to external mandates and navigate different normative ideas about academic integrity. This paper focuses on one such nascent mandate—that of institutional mission and the extent to which political forces influence the fundamental purposes of colleges and universities. We selected the mission statements of public universities, public university branch campuses, and community colleges (n=52) prior to the adoption of Ohio’s Senate Bill 1 (SB1) and analyzed their thematic intentions. Finally, we offer a point of departure for institutional discussion and deliberation aimed at constructing mission statements that are aspirational, authentic, and grounded in context.

Keywords: Mission statements, content analysis, Ohio Senate Bill 1(SB1), Institutions of Higher Education (IHE)

Introduction to the Problem

Higher education in the United States is facing increased state-driven legislation aimed at reshaping institutional practices. Broader societal and political changes (Harris, 2023) are contributing to this phenomenon, especially given perceived (or real) ideological imbalances within academia. Within this educational policy milieu, questions about academic freedom and autonomy of the institution itself are quite salient. Although institutions of higher education (IHEs) are normatively the marketplaces for discussion and deliberation on differing worldviews, some states are introducing measures to regulate what topics can be taught, discussed, and explored (Meyer, 2023). One such recent piece of legislation that is gaining significant attention is Ohio’s Senate Bill 1.

Educational reform and the connection of politics and education have long withstood or experienced pressure from shared governance (Rosenzweig, 1998). In public universities, this shared governance comes from the intersection of academic autonomy and state mandates that fund and regulate the university. Yet, we now inhabit a new paradigmatic space as state legislatures and governance boards alike have also imposed new governance restrictions. For example, Iowa’s Board of Regents has proposed barring universities from requiring courses with content related to

diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), critical race theory, or gender theory—drastically altering what faculty can teach. Similarly, almost half of U.S. states are advancing similar measures to restrict how equity and inclusion is part of campus governance, thereby altering the traditional role of governance structures in academia. In short, legislatures and politically appointed trustees are exercising governance authority over all matters, including curriculum, hiring, and instruction (Evans, 2025).

The list of challenges higher education faces related to governance issues is seemingly endless. Bloom and McClellan (2016) noted that funding shortages, accountability, competition for students, demands on faculty, corporatization of the academy, changes in the student body, increased demands for expensive engagement, and other trends have “significantly impacted and destabilized the system of higher education” (p. 195). Bloom and McClellan (2016) go on to note that administrators are left to solve the problems of the glacial pace of change, the highly political nature of administration, and fragmentation.

Innovative strategies are urgently needed to support decision-makers in safeguarding the institutional mission amid recent political threats (Rall et al., 2025). To wit, by prioritizing strategic and inclusive governance, IHE governance boards can “protect and uphold mission-centric values within their institutions for themselves and other leaders, regardless of the political environment” (Rall et al., 2025, p. 1376). Most IHE strategic plans have similar goals, such as a commitment to student success; preparing students for their futures; fostering diversity, inclusion, and equity; and conducting impactful research. Ultimately, the similarities ensure “that IHEs do not drift from the status quo, which is what many need to do” (Mayer, 2023, p. 33). Further, IHE presidents and other leaders can build coalitions, develop and defend clear value-based messaging (including mission statements), engage the governing board, protect academic freedom and shared governance, lean on governmental relations personnel, and develop some sense of *savoir faire* for when to act and when to wait in response to new mandates.

Taking effect June 27, 2025, Senate Bill 1 (hereafter referred to as SB 1), titled the “Enact Advance Ohio Higher Education Act,” mandates a multifaceted reform of Ohio’s public institutions of higher education (IHEs). Among its mandates, Sec. 3345.0216 requires IHEs to incorporate prescribed language in their statements of commitment, emphasizing free inquiry, critical thinking, equal treatment, and ideological neutrality (Ohio Senate Bill 1, 2025). Given the mandated proximity of the “statements of commitment” with mission statements, we established a historical record of what institutional missions were before the passage of SB 1. This record provides a baseline for future studies to examine how future university mission statements in Ohio will adapt, devolve, or evolve.

SB 1 amplifies state oversight by mandating public access to institutional processes and content, ostensibly to ensure accountability. Starting in the 2026-2027 academic year, professors will be required to post public-facing syllabi. This mandate allows for increased criticism of the value of specific topics for instruction and inquiry. Transparency, as part and parcel of an open society, is axiomatically positive, though there may be unintended consequences of external pressures upon disciplinary learning. Whereas the discipline may find inherent value in some topics (e.g., structural racism within education), the public may view the discipline’s values quite differently (e.g.,

ideological bias). Although a populist reaction to non-canonical topics might in fact be needed, it may severely narrow the academic breadth and very nature of the university itself.

SB 1 also requires Ohio IHEs to adopt policies ensuring intellectual diversity, including seeking speakers with differing ideological or political views and ensuring diverse viewpoints in course offerings. The bill introduces annual reviews, post-tenure reviews, and discipline risks for tenured faculty based on new student evaluations gauging political, racial, gender, and religious bias in the classroom. Although the intention is to ensure that students encounter a broad spectrum of viewpoints, avoid ideological echo-chambers, and be better prepared graduates for life in a diverse society, it could make Ohio IHEs less attractive, reduce competitiveness, and have unknown consequences for Ohio's ability to attract and retain faculty, staff, and students.

SB 1 mandates a civics literacy course (focused on U.S. Constitution, free-market economics, etc.) for bachelor-degree students in the future. This feature serves to limit student choice and university offerings with a three-credit class that is ostensibly civic in nature, but in reality focuses on seminal documents from history and political science with no mandated connection to democratic citizenship education. Likewise, the state intrudes upon the macrocurriculum of the IHE by requiring the elimination of programs that have fewer than five students over three years. Although this would seem to be a prudent way to minimize waste, it could very well lead to the elimination of programs that may not have many majors anymore (e.g., philosophy) but are critical to the liberal arts mission of a university.

Finally, SB 1 prohibits institutions from endorsing or opposing any "controversial belief or policy" (defined broadly: climate policies, electoral politics, immigration policy, marriage, abortion, etc.). The law requires that students "reach their own conclusions" about such beliefs or policies, and that institutions/teachers must avoid "indoctrinating" students. This law may lead to self-censorship on the part of faculty, but in reality, it is quite reasonable. Faculty should be free to challenge/invite students to ask questions, engage in inquiry, and arrive at informed conclusions and decisions of their own making.

The net effect of the transferring power from the IHE to state oversight, including universities' mission, programs, governance, and funding, represents a potentially partisan paradigm shift that will irrevocably change the nature of higher education in Ohio. The authors of this paper do not view these changes as purely positive or negative, but rather contend that university structures, decision making, course and major offerings will change in irrevocable ways. Of this list of changes, the overall mission of the university is our primary focus.

The requirement to integrate specific language into mission statements, prominently displayed on websites and in admissions materials, subjects IHEs to heightened scrutiny. This transparency invites external pressure on academic content and priorities, potentially aligning institutional missions with politicized values. Such oversight mirrors national efforts, such as Florida's HB 7, which empowers state review of university programs (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2023), signaling a shift toward centralized control over academic governance.

Although these axioms appear aligned with academic ideals, their mandatory adoption enforces a standardized narrative that may suppress diverse institutional voices. By prohibiting specific

commitments in admissions and institutional policies, SB 1 aligns with a broader political movement as seen in Texas's SB 17 (Texas Legislature Online, 2023). This conformity risks homogenizing IHEs and could erode institutional autonomy by dictating mission statement content, traditionally a reflection of an IHE's self-defined purpose. This erosion of autonomy echoes national trends, where state legislatures increasingly shape academic priorities. Pre-SB 1 mission statements of Ohio's IHEs, such as those of Kent State University or Bowling Green State University, highlight research, civic engagement, and student success, tailored to institutional contexts. SB 1's uniform language threatens to dilute these distinctions, imposing a state-sanctioned vision that may clash with existing priorities. IHE mission statements have long reflected tensions between values and external demands. Historically grounded in religious and civic ideals, they evolved alongside national priorities, from the Morrill Acts' emphasis on practical education to the late 20th century's career-oriented models (Scott, 2006; Davis et al., 2007). Today, this evolution is evident in the blending of democratic and financial imperatives that inform institutional identities.

Ohio's Political and Educational Landscape: A Snapshot

Ohio's higher education system is rooted in an entanglement of politics, economics, and social ideology. Ohio's political climate has swung between conservative and progressive policy, recently focused on reducing public funding for universities and prioritizing career-driven approaches. In doing so, tensions between traditional missions of universities that were to serve the public good and the increased demand for economic self-sufficiency, especially with respect to Ohio's post-industrial economy, have become more pronounced.

Two Ohio examples help demonstrate the trajectory of mission change. Ohio University, founded in 1804, introduced its mission statement in 1977, which was a 12-paragraph statement consisting of categories relating to undergraduate education, graduate education, research, and extensions into the community (Ohio University Board of Trustees, 1978, p. 92). In 1974, the Board of Trustees approved Miami University's mission statement, which, similar to Ohio University's, was multiple paragraphs in length, suggesting that comprehensive mission statements allow for a more streamlined communication of university aims and goals (Cortes et al., 2022, p. 6). Miami University's mission was to "preserve, add to, evaluate, and transmit the accumulated knowledge of the centuries; to develop critical thinking, extend frontiers of knowledge, and serve society; and to provide an environment conducive to effective and inspired teaching and learning, promote professional development of faculty, and encourage scholarly research and creativity of faculty and students" (Miami University Board of Trustees, 1974, p. 35).

Miami University changed its mission statement in 2005 after the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools recommended revision. Responsible for the accreditation of IHEs, the commission began providing guidance for IHE mission statements in 1992, noting that they should be "clear and articulated publicly" and guide "the institution's operations" (HLC, 2023, n.p.) The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) found that Miami's mission statement was created for the purpose of appeasing the public, when instead it should represent the core values of the university (Miami University Board of Trustees, 2008).

Missional Aims and Goals

Based on our review of the literature (Ayers & Palmadessa, 2015; Kelly, 2015; Knight Abowitz, 2016; Kumar & Acharya, 2021; Labaree, 1996; Lagemann & Lewis, 2012; Nixon, 2011; Perisic, 2021; Tyack & Cuban, 1995), we suggest the normative missional aims and goals of IHEs generally fit within five categories:

- 1) Individual Advancement: The idea that education equips people with the skills, credentials, and knowledge they need for personal success and upward mobility.
- 2) Globalization and Internationalization: The aspiration to prepare people to function effectively in a globally interconnected world through understanding and engaging with diverse cultures, systems, peoples, and issues.
- 3) Public Good: The idea that IHEs should serve the collective welfare of society by advancing social goals like democracy, justice, and responsibility.
- 4) Civic Skills and Values: The emphasis placed on preparing students as active, responsible citizens who can and do contribute to a democratic society in a meaningful way.
- 5) Social Justice: The commitment to equity and inclusivity in order to address social inequalities and oppressions and provide students with opportunities for success, particularly those from underrepresented groups.

Each of these aims and goals can be found within the literature tacitly and sometimes explicitly, and their operationalization can be noticed in both intrinsic and extrinsic ways. This list of normative aims and goals served as our heuristic for analyzing pre-SB 1 Ohio IHE mission statements.

Ohio Higher Education Sector

Within Ohio's higher education system, individual institutions possess a degree of autonomy in developing and articulating their unique missions. Although the Ohio Department of Higher Education provides guidance and sets out broad policy frameworks, the specific articulation of an institution's mission often reflects its unique character, strengths, and the aspirations of its student body. For example, the mission of The Ohio State University, a large, research-intensive university, emphasizes its role as a "global leader in creating, disseminating, and applying knowledge" (The Ohio State University, n.d.). This emphasis on research and global impact aligns with the university's strengths in research and its aspirations to be a leading IHE nationally and internationally. The mission of Ohio University, with its strong emphasis on student engagement and experiential learning, also focuses on "transforming lives through education" and "preparing students for lives of purpose and leadership" (Ohio University, n.d.). This focus reflects the university's commitment to providing a high-quality undergraduate education and preparing students for success in a diverse range of careers and life paths.

Furthermore, the mission statements of branch campuses may reflect the specific needs and aspirations of the communities they serve. For instance, the mission of the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College, a branch campus of the University of Cincinnati, emphasizes its commitment to serving the educational needs of the Greater Cincinnati region by providing "high-quality, accessible, and affordable education" to a diverse student population (University of Cincinnati Blue

Ash College, n.d.). This focus on accessibility and affordability reflects the specific needs of the local community and the college's role in providing educational opportunities for a diverse range of students.

The development of mission statements within the Ohio higher education system is a dynamic and multifaceted process that is influenced by a variety of factors. Institutional missions are living documents that evolve over time in response to changing internal and external factors (Stark & Lattuca, 2013). These factors may include the following:

- Institutional history and tradition: The historical development and unique character of each institution can significantly influence its mission statement.
- Academic strengths and priorities: The specific academic programs and research areas of an institution will inevitably shape its mission and priorities. For example, a university with a renowned medical school may emphasize its commitment to advancing healthcare and improving public health outcomes.
- Student demographics and aspirations: The needs and aspirations of the student body, including their academic interests, career goals, and socio-economic backgrounds, will also influence the development of institutional missions.
- Regional context and community needs: The specific needs and priorities of the surrounding community, including economic development, workforce needs, and social issues, can also play a significant role in shaping institutional missions. For example, a university located in a region with a growing healthcare industry may emphasize its commitment to educating and training healthcare professionals.

Considering these factors, this study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse range of missions articulated by Ohio's IHEs and the potential factors that contribute to this variability.

Content Analysis

Although Ohio's IHEs embody divergent goals and purposes, all would be subject to the convergent provisions of SB1. We first disaggregated IHEs by subgroup: universities, university branch campuses, and community colleges. We then independently analyzed and categorized each IHE within the subgroups utilizing the five aims we inductively arrived at from our review of literature. We then added two more categories for IHE missions that were classified as "multiple aims" (three or more in number) or "nebulous aims" (overly ambiguous). Our final analytical themes therefore were seven in number (i.e., individual advancement, globalization and internationalization, public good, civic skills and values, social justice, multiple aims, and nebulous aims).

The research team of this current study (three members) reviewed each mission statement independently and compared results for every mission, using a numerical rating system to ensure reliability (Rapport, 2010). Our initial pilot test of this method revealed consensus among the research group that some statements did not fit comfortably into any of the five categories and that there appeared to be a need for both the multiple and nebulous categories (Misco et al., 2023). Qualitative content analysis of this kind allows for data reduction as well as meaning-making from a wide range of textual data. It is useful for identifying both conscious and unconscious messages

inductively, beginning with deep and independent reading of text and attempting to uncover the contextual and latent content therein (Given, 2008).

We tested interrater reliability among the three raters tasked with categorizing IHEs into seven possible categories using Fleiss' Kappa, a reliable measure for such multi-rater scenarios. its formula for fixed-marginal Kappa is as follows (Fleiss, 1971; Randolph, 2005):

$$\text{kappa}(K) = \frac{p_o - p_e}{1 - p_e}$$

where K represents Fleiss' Kappa, P_o stands for the observed proportion of agreement and P_e is the expected proportion of agreement under the assumption of fixed marginal distributions.

Table 2 indicates the delineation of each category for the IHE's mission statements which were used in the Fleiss' Kappa analysis among the three raters. The difference of possible values ranges from 0.00-1.00, scaling from poor agreement to perfect agreement respectively. Our analysis revealed a Fleiss' Kappa score of 0.76 for the total assessments, indicating a substantial level of agreement among the three raters. Furthermore, we examined the reliability of categorizations for specific IHE types: public universities, branch campuses, and community colleges. For public universities, Fleiss' Kappa was determined to be 0.72, for branch campuses it was 0.80, and for community colleges, it was 0.77. These individual Kappa scores emphasize the strong consensus in categorization. Of note is that the 95% Confidence Interval (CI) [0.65, 0.88] pertains to the total Kappa score of 0.76, providing a range within which we can be 95% confident that the true Kappa value falls between the given range. Collectively, these Kappa scores and the narrow CI underscore the elevated level of interrater reliability in our study, which bolstered the reliability of our findings and the consistency of categorization across distinct types of IHEs (Fleiss, 1971).

We analyzed the results of each IHE type in conjunction with the categorization of their mission: public universities (n = 14), branch campuses (n = 15), and community colleges (n = 23). Finally, we conducted a composite analysis of all Ohio IHE mission statements (n = 52) in aggregate format. In the subsequent tables (Table 1, Table 2, Table 3), the value of 'n' denotes the number of votes received in that category, not the number of IHEs. This is designed purposefully to not dismiss outliers or force an IHE into a specific category in the event of a split rating between the multiple raters. Therefore, each rater's vote is accounted for in the analysis of the missions.

Content analysis always involves interpretation, and although the use of Fleiss' Kappa (.76) showed strong agreement among raters, the act of categorizing language depends on human judgment and shared perspectives. The decision to include the "multiple" and "nebulous" groupings allowed the researchers to account for statements that mixed several ideas or relied on vague phrasing, yet these categories also made clear distinctions harder to maintain. Such flexibility kept the data's complexity intact but added uncertainty when comparing across different institutional types.

Consistency among coders does not automatically confirm accuracy, since agreement can arise from similar academic backgrounds or assumptions. The analysis was also limited to the text of mission statements, without investigating how those statements are used in practice or shaped by administrative decision-making. Future research could pair textual coding with interviews,

document analysis, or institutional case studies to connect the language of mission statements to organizational behavior.

Public Universities

Public universities (n = 14) in Ohio have mission statements that represent three main categories: individual achievement, the public good, and multiple aims:

Table 1: *Public Universities by Mission Category*

	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Individual Advancement	12	26.7
Global Internationalization	0	0.0
Public Good	21	46.7
Civic Values	0	0.0
Social Justice	0	0.0
Multiple Aims	2	4.4
Nebulous Aims	10	22.2

Three universities fell squarely into the individual achievement category, including Ohio University (2007), whose mission statement reads,

Ohio University holds as its central purpose the intellectual and personal development of its students. Distinguished by its rich history, diverse campus, international community, and beautiful Appalachian setting, Ohio University is known as well for its outstanding faculty of accomplished teachers whose research and creative activity advance knowledge across many disciplines (*Ohio Mission and Vision*, para. 2).

Mission statements of this ilk raise normative questions about the purpose of the university. Namely, should public universities be primarily focused on the advancement of student careers and enrichment of their individual lives? Or should the mission be more broad, inclusive of the public good, civic skills and values, or internationalization?

Three universities did focus on the public good, including Central State University, whose mission reads: “Central State University, a proud HBCU, fosters academic excellence within a nurturing living-learning environment and graduates a diverse population prepared for leadership, research, and service in Ohio and beyond” (Central State University, n.d., para. 2). Here the university’s focus on leadership, research and service *for* Ohio (and beyond), rather than a focus on students, speaks to a potentially qualitatively different direction for university resources, activities, and hiring decisions. Again, the normative questions arising from a mission of this kind include: Should a university be driven toward the consumer or client (student) or toward social and/or civic skills and values?

Finally, we located another kind of university mission- that which included multiple aims (three or more of the five aforementioned categories). For example, Bowling Green State University’s mission statement reads,

Bowling Green State University provides holistic and comprehensive educational experiences that enhance the lives of our students, stakeholders and the many publics we serve. Our graduates are prepared for lifelong personal and career growth and for engaged citizenship and leadership in a global society. Through our excellence in teaching, research and outreach, BGSU builds a collaborative, diverse and inclusive community where creative ideas, new knowledge and entrepreneurial achievements can benefit others in our region, the state of Ohio, the nation and the world (*University Vision and Mission*, n.d., para. 2).

Of note here is the simultaneous focus on student achievement and advancement, attention to the public good (and the many publics served), and production of benefits for the nation and the world. The data reflected in Table 1 and the missions quoted above show how missions may continue to move from public good (38.1% of missions) to “Multiple Aims” at 38.1% as a means of acknowledging increased legislative oversight while trying to preserve space for institutional identity. Normative questions related to this kind of mission might include the following: Is the university trying to do too much? Is it able to accomplish all these goals? Or is this the ideal mission statement for a large public university, with multiple interests, stakeholders, and simultaneous goals that are attainable? Will the shared governance of the individual work with or against legislative oversight as it may threaten their autonomous decision making?

Branch Campuses

Ohio public university branch campuses (n = 15) are similar in their mission statements to the main campuses, with the exception of fewer IHE indicating multiple mission statement aims. Whereas 38.1% of the main campuses focused on multiple aims, 4.4% of branch campuses fit within this category.

Table 2: Public University Branch Campuses by Mission Category

	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Individual Advancement	12	26.7
Global Internationalization	0	0.0
Public Good	21	46.7
Civic Values	0	0.0
Social Justice	0	0.0
Multiple Aims	2	4.4
Nebulous Aims	10	22.2

A focus on individual achievement was slightly higher among branch campuses (26.7% compared to 21.4% at main campuses) as was the focus on the public good (46.7% compared to 35.7% at main campuses). The category of “nebulous aims” was far more represented at branch campuses (22.2% versus 4.8% at main campuses), including three branch campuses unanimously rated as nebulous. For example, Ohio University Southern’s mission statement reads, “To educate, empower and inspire.” Normative questions here would naturally ask: to educate whom? And empower and inspire to what end? Likewise, Miami University Hamilton and Middletown share the same mission statement: “Empowering minds, strengthening communities” (Miami University Regionals Strategic

Plan, n.d., para. 1). This shared mission statement raises numerous questions concerning whose minds, empowered to what end, and with what processes? Moreover, which communities are to be strengthened and in which ways? Many of the nebulous aims mission statements did not provide aims, but rather the tools that would bring about typical mission statement aims (e.g., empowering minds, community engagement, creating knowledge, shaping our world). When considered in connection with SB 1, these statements indicate that these campuses are navigating similar pressures as their main-campus counterparts. However, their increased connection to the public good (46.7%) demonstrates an effort to retain commitments to local communities in responding to legislation over institutional priorities. If branch campuses aim to engage with a regional service, which is consistent with the frequency in Table 2, should they be drawn into the same legislative pressures to alter their goals and autonomy that now shapes the expectations of Ohio’s main campuses?

Community Colleges

Finally, we analyzed the mission statements among Ohio’s community colleges (n = 23). These missions in many ways mirrored the branch campus missions in terms of a heavy focus on individual advancement (39.1%), the public good (42%), and nebulous aims (18.8%), with none advancing multiple aims.

Table 3: *Community College by Mission Category*

	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Individual Advancement	27	39.1
Global/International	0	0.0
Public Good	29	42.0
Civic Values	0	0.0
Social Justice	0	0.0
Multiple Aims	0	0.0
Nebulous Aims	13	18.8

Individual advancement, public good, and nebulous aims do differ somewhat among IHE types (see Appendix B). For example, Belmont Technical College’s mission statement reads, “Belmont College will provide affordable, achievable, and meaningful academic degrees and technical training to all who seek them” (*Mission, Vision & Values*, 2023, para. 1). Additionally, Southern State Community College’s mission statement reads, “To provide accessible, affordable and high-quality education to people in southern Ohio” (*Mission & Strategic Plan*, n.d. para. 1). Thus, while both these mission statements were categorized differently, with Belmont College as individual advancement and Southern State as the public good, unlike the other IHE types, the missional focus on affordability was explicit. Together, these statements highlight how community colleges define their purpose through a combination of education, preparation, and regional engagement. They also demonstrate that, prior to SB 1, the mission statements of community colleges were tightly connected to local needs rather than statewide directives.

This distribution provides a baseline for understanding community colleges and their role within Ohio’s higher education landscape. Concentration in the individual advancement and public good categories reflects a commitment to access, workforce preparation, and regional service. The

presence of the nebulous aims at 18.8% suggests that some institutions relied on broad language that left their priorities open, not defined by themselves and in threat of being defined by state pressures.

Finally, we analyzed all Ohio IHEs by mission category:

Table 4: Aggregated IHE by Mission Category

	<u><i>n</i></u>	<u><i>%</i></u>
Individual Advancement	48	30.8
Global/International	0	0.0
Public Good	65	41.7
Civic Values	0	0.0
Social Justice	0	0.0
Multiple Aims	18	11.5
Nebulous Aims	25	16.0

Overall, Ohio IHEs have congruence in the fundamental areas of individual advancement and the public good. Areas of incongruence (multiple aims) speak to IHE type, but nebulous aims, found predominantly at branch campuses, are perhaps in specific need of revision. Also, of particular note is that no Ohio IHE has a mission statement that clearly focuses on civic skills and values, globalization and internationalization, or social justice. Based on the literature of missions within higher education, we had expected these three categories to be present within some missions.

Guidance on the Mission of IHEs

Regardless of whether or not the Ohio legislature *should be* influencing public IHE mission statements, there is little doubt that many IHE mission statements need revision as they often lack any substantive aim or goal—indeed, many missions read as perfunctory and banal. Although each IHE type has a distinctly different missional focus, there is tremendous variability within each IHE category. Yet the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) has specific guidance for IHE missions (three core criteria).

Criterion 1.A. simply notes “mission” and stipulates that each IHE mission is “clear and articulated publicly; it guides the institution’s operations” (HLC, 2023, n.p.). When we sought out all the IHE mission statements, many of the branch campus mission statements were difficult to locate and thus not articulated publicly (*n* = 6) (e.g., not clearly stated on IHE website, online materials, student newspapers, alumni newsletters). The extent to which IHE mission statements guide actual operations is for another study.

Criterion 1.B. notes that the IHE mission statements demonstrate “commitment to the public good” (HLC, 2023, n.p.). If we remove IHE with an exclusive focus on the public good as well as those with multiple aims within their mission statements, then based on our analysis, 20 of 52 Ohio IHE (public university = 3, branch campus = 6, and community colleges = 11) lack any sense of missional aim that includes the public good (see Appendix A).

Criterion 1.C. stipulates institutional mission must include opportunities for “civic engagement in a diverse, multicultural society and globally connected world, as appropriate within its mission and for the constituencies it serves” (HLC, 2023, n.p.). Although some mission statements may add some perfunctory language congruent with this criterion, we found that none of these existed as the primary IHE mission. However, this criterion would be located within those mission statements that the IHE labeled as “multiple aims” (n = 7). Preserving institutional autonomy in the face of SB 1 demands proactive efforts to institutionalize deliberative processes and defend shared governance. IHEs should establish mission review committees that reflect diverse campus constituencies and align mission statements with operational practices, such as hiring and curriculum decisions, to ensure the mission is lived, not just stated. Collaborative advocacy, including partnerships with organizations like the Ohio Conference American Association of University Professors, can amplify institutional voices and resist further legislative encroachment.

Although the HLC criteria include broad standards for clarity, public purpose, and civic engagement, institutions must also establish internal processes that ensure their missions shape decision making rather than remain symbolic statements. One principle is the creation of regularly structured reviews of the mission that involve faculty, staff, students, and community members who understand the needs of the region and the institution. Such reviews can help campuses determine whether current practices in advising, academic programming, hiring, and resource allocation reflect the aims outlined in the mission. A second principle concerns transparency in communication with the public. Institutions that publish accessible mission statements and clearly describe how the mission informs planning and assessment demonstrate stronger alignment with both internal standards and external accountability measures. A third principle involves documenting how mission statements guide institutional priorities, including mapping program goals to mission language, reporting on community partnerships that advance institutional commitments, and evaluating whether student outcomes reflect the aims stated in the mission. By adopting these practices, institutions create a clearer relationship between mission and operations while also preparing to communicate effectively with state policymakers and accrediting bodies. Ultimately, navigating SB 1 requires a balanced approach that upholds core institutional values while responding pragmatically to external mandates.

Additionally, practical implications for higher education leaders include self-identification of where the university is and where it wants to be, as reflected in the current or future mission. Using the findings of this study as a framework, IHE leaders can locate their institution as individual advancement, globalization and internationalization, public good, civic skills and values, social justice, multiple aims, and nebulous aims (with nebulous being the least ideal). Why does the IHE exist and why should it exist? With IHEs closing nationally and students no longer majoring in liberal arts with regularity, have IHEs irrevocably changed to be for individual advancement? Does the IHE have an express mission, or does it seek to be all things to all people and groups? Do states still fund IHEs with enough money to still serve the public good? Because this most important consideration has so many cascading effects on strategic planning, curriculum, hiring, and governance, it must be addressed in deliberative, collegial ways that ultimately enable IHEs to define their own missions and strengthen the institutional ability to respond to the interference of external forces inconsistent with its mission.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our content analysis of 52 Ohio IHE mission statements revealed a predominant focus on individual advancement (30.8%) and the public good (41.7%), with notable absences in civic skills, globalization, and social justice. SB 1's emphasis on transparency and oversight, requiring public display of mission statements, amplifies external scrutiny, echoing demands for accountability. Our analysis provides a historical record of pre-SB 1 IHE mission statements in Ohio to act as a baseline for future studies.

When compared with institutions of higher education in other states, it is evident that Ohio's experience is neither unique nor temporary. Similar legislative and political pressures have emerged elsewhere, particularly in Florida and Texas, where sustained scrutiny from conservative policymakers has sought to reshape the purposes and priorities of public universities to reflect prevailing ideological agendas. In both states, governors have appointed boards of regents and trustees who share aligned political commitments, resulting in shifts to governance structures and institutional missions. These developments underscore the importance of reexamining Ohio's own landscape, as the passage of SB 1 reflects a parallel movement toward greater state influence over institutional identity and mission articulation. Over time, such legislative interventions risk narrowing the intellectual diversity that has traditionally defined public higher education, as institutions recalibrate their stated purposes to maintain political favor and funding stability. The long-term consequence may be a gradual homogenization of institutional missions, diminishing the capacity of universities to serve as autonomous centers of inquiry responsive to local, national, and global needs.

Mission statements drive guiding strategic planning, curricular alignment, hiring decisions, and governance, but IHEs also perpetuate their identity by maintaining fidelity to mission. A variety of pathways and caveats exist for IHEs that seek to revisit and potentially revise their mission statement. Stakeholders need to first recognize the importance of a mission and how it not only normatively drives teaching, research, and service, but also the ways in which it loudly communicates a message to those external to the IHE. By collectively articulating the purpose of education and taking stock of their mission, IHEs might then compare their mission to other institutions that share their aspirations. Finally, using the mission statement to guide hiring, curriculum revisions, teaching, research, and all other activities will help make the mission a reflection of the IHEs commitments and aspirations, consistently referenced and cited as the rationale for why decisions are made. The following practical considerations can help generate deliberate discussions among IHE governance bodies:

- What is the institutional mission statement and why?
- In what ways has the mission evolved over time and why?
- When was the institutional mission statement last updated?
- To what extent does the mission guide hiring, retention, and curricular decision making?
- What forces are at work that influence modification to the mission statement?
- To what extent do institutional forces thwart attempted modifications?
- How much deviation for context is permissible?

- Finally, whose IHE is it? Should stakeholders (e.g., trustees, administrators, students, parents, politicians, taxpayers, state legislatures, professors (Karabell, 1998) be weighted? If so, to what extent?

Although mission statements may be “merely words on a page or website” (Bazemore-Bertrand & Porcher, 2020, p. 73) for some IHEs, for others they are finely tuned, deliberately crafted, and highly intentional for directing hiring, retention, and curricular decisions. In short, they *are* the theoretical framework for the college or university. Clearly for the HLC they have mattered a great deal and from a political and governmental perspective, they are *the* entry point for ensuring institutional change as all missions should shape and influence all decisions within the IHE. As such, this study provides a point of departure for administrators to initiate deliberation on this topic and to proactively advance the true goals and aspirations of their IHE.

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Appendix A

Mission Statements of Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) in Ohio

Institution of Higher Education	Mission Statement
Public Universities	
Bowling Green State University	Bowling Green State University provides holistic and comprehensive educational experiences that enhance the lives of our students, stakeholders and the many publics we serve. Our graduates are prepared for lifelong personal and career growth and for engaged citizenship and leadership in a global society. Through our excellence in teaching, research and outreach, BGSU builds a collaborative, diverse and inclusive community where creative ideas, new knowledge and entrepreneurial achievements can benefit others in our region, the state of Ohio, the nation and the world.
Central State University	Central State University, a proud HBCU, fosters academic excellence within a nurturing living-learning environment and graduates a diverse population prepared for leadership, research, and service in Ohio and beyond.
Cleveland State University	Empowering Students. Creating Knowledge. Engaging Communities. Shaping Our World.
Kent State University	To transform lives by providing access and opportunity, fostering diverse and inclusive communities, and advancing the power of discovery, learning and creative expression.
Miami University	It is deeply committed to student success, builds great student and alumni loyalty, and empowers its students, faculty, and staff to become engaged citizens who use their knowledge and skills with integrity and compassion to improve the future of our global society.
The Ohio State University	The university is dedicated to: Creating and discovering knowledge to improve the well-being of our local, state, regional, national and global communities; Educating students through a comprehensive array of distinguished academic programs; Preparing a diverse student body to be leaders and engaged citizens; Fostering a culture of engagement and service. We understand that diversity and inclusion are essential components of our excellence.
Ohio University	Ohio University holds as its central purpose the intellectual and personal development of its students. Distinguished by its rich history, diverse campus, international community, and beautiful Appalachian setting, Ohio University is known as well for its outstanding faculty of accomplished teachers whose research and creative activity advance knowledge across many disciplines.
Shawnee State University	We prepare today's students to succeed in tomorrow's world.
University of Akron	The University of Akron, a publicly assisted metropolitan institution, strives to develop enlightened members of society. It offers comprehensive

	<p>programs of instruction from associate through doctoral levels; pursues a vigorous agenda of research in the arts, sciences, and professions; and provides service to the community. The university pursues excellence in undergraduate education and distinction in selected areas of graduate instruction, inquiry, and creative activity.</p>
University of Cincinnati	<p>The University of Cincinnati serves the people of Ohio, the nation, and the world as a premier, public, urban research university dedicated to undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, experience-based learning, and research. We are committed to excellence and diversity in our students, faculty, staff, and all of our activities. We provide an inclusive environment where innovation and freedom of intellectual inquiry flourish. Through scholarship, service, partnerships, and leadership, we create opportunity, develop educated and engaged citizens, enhance the economy and enrich our university, city, state and global community.</p>
University of Toledo	<p>The University of Toledo improves the human condition as a public research university and academic medical center whose mission is to educate students to become future-ready graduates, cultivate leaders, create and advance knowledge, care for patients and engage our local, national and global communities.</p>
Wright State University	<p>We empower all students to excel in their lives and chosen careers through integrated learning, research, innovation, and experience.</p>
Northeast Ohio Medical University	<p>The College of Medicine at NEOMED, through education, research and public service inspires medical students to become exemplary patient care centered physicians. We seek to improve the health and quality of life of the communities of Ohio and beyond, including those both diverse and underserved.</p>
Youngstown State University	<p>An Institution of Opportunity: YSU inspires individuals, enhances futures, and enriches lives.</p> <p>As a student-centered university, Youngstown State University's mission is to provide innovative lifelong learning opportunities that will inspire individuals, enhance futures and enrich lives. YSU inspires individuals by cultivating a curiosity for life-long learning; enhances the futures of our students by empowering them to discover, disseminate and apply their knowledge; and enriches the region by fostering collaboration and the advancement of civic, scientific, and technological development. YSU's culture of enrichment flourishes in our diverse, accessible, and quality education.</p>

Public University Branch Campuses	
Bowling Green State University, Firelands Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -to provide general education and pre-professional curricula designed to facilitate transfer to four-year institutions; -to grant technical and paraprofessional associate degrees which prepare students for work settings; -to offer continuing education opportunities to serve the personal and professional development needs of the region; and -to provide place-bound students in the Firelands community with access to selective BGSU bachelor's degree and master's degree completion programs at the BGSU Firelands campus.
Miami University, Hamilton Campus	EMPOWERING MINDS, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES
Miami University, Middletown Campus	EMPOWERING MINDS, STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES
Ohio State University, Agricultural Technical Institute	<p>The Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute provides educational programs leading to associate degrees in agriculture, horticulture, environmental sciences, business, and engineering technology. With a high value placed on lifelong learning, we provide accessible, high-quality, applied educational experiences. Our goal is to prepare individuals to be technically competent, self-reliant, and productive citizens in a global society.</p> <p>The purposes of the Institute are to offer: 1) associate of science and associate of applied science degrees and certificates that include general and technical courses; 2) credit and non-credit continuing education and workforce development opportunities; and 3) transfer programs leading to higher levels of education.</p> <p>Emphasis is placed on: 1) preparing technically proficient individuals for various careers; 2) developing skills and abilities in problem solving, critical thinking, leadership, and communication; and 3) fostering an environment where diversity is valued and integrated throughout the institute.</p>
Ohio State University, Lima Campus	The Ohio State University at Lima builds the future of western Ohio by developing leaders and providing access to the resources and strength of the state's top university.
Ohio State University, Mansfield Campus	<p>The Ohio State University is the model 21st-century public, land grant, research, urban, community engaged institution. The University is dedicated to: Creating and discovering knowledge to improve the well-being of our state, regional, national and global communities;</p> <p>Educating students through a comprehensive array of distinguished academic programs; Preparing a diverse student body to be leaders and engaged citizens; Fostering a culture of engagement and service. We understand that diversity and inclusion are essential components of our excellence.</p>

Ohio State University, Marion Campus	We provide an affordable education combining the rigor and opportunities of a leading research university with the support of a small campus to prepare our graduates for their professions within a global society.
Ohio State University, Newark Campus	The Ohio State University at Newark provides access to the university by extending Ohio State courses, programs, research and service to many Ohio communities.
Ohio University, Eastern Campus	The mission of Ohio University Eastern is to provide access to affordable and high-quality educational opportunities to residents of the Upper Ohio Valley. As a regional campus of Ohio University, our students benefit from the resources of an internationally recognized university with the advantages of a small college environment. The campus offers associate and bachelor degrees and opportunities for continuing education taught by dedicated and accomplished faculty in small classes. Ohio University Eastern is dedicated to enriching the cultural, physical, and professional well-being of the community.
Ohio University, Lancaster Campus	The mission of Ohio University Lancaster, a regional campus of Ohio University, is to create a learning environment that encourages critical thinking and intellectual growth by providing access to affordable academic opportunities. The campus seeks to enhance the educational and professional prospects available to residents of central Ohio by providing access to a variety of associate, bachelor and master degrees, as well as opportunities for lifelong learning. Ohio University Lancaster is dedicated to promoting research, creative work, and other scholarly activity and to strengthening the economic and cultural vitality of our communities through diverse partnerships and programs.
Ohio University, Southern Campus	To educate, empower and inspire.
University of Akron, Wayne Campus	The University of Akron Wayne College Campus is an educational and cultural hub for Wayne County and the surrounding region. Student success is achieved through excellent teaching with an emphasis on individualized attention. We prepare our students for further educational pursuits, career success and lifelong learning.
University of Cincinnati, Clermont Campus	UC Clermont College provides student-centered undergraduate education and life-long learning in an open-access, regional college environment. We foster diversity as well as intellectual, cultural and social development in our community.
University of Cincinnati, Blue Ash	The University of Cincinnati Blue Ash College provides an excellent and accessible education for students from a wide array of educational and cultural backgrounds. Our student-centered approach to teaching and comprehensive services engage students so that they can acquire the knowledge and skills needed to succeed academically, personally, and professionally. We promote innovative scholarship and creative works, free inquiry, lifelong learning, and service beyond the classroom.

Wright State University, Lake Campus	As part of Wright State University, we will be the focal point for the educational and cultural advancement of the residents of West Central Ohio, providing opportunities for advanced scholarship and continuing education, economic and technological development, and community service.
Community Colleges	
Belmont Technical College	Belmont College will provide affordable, achievable, and meaningful academic degrees and technical training to all who seek them.
Central Ohio Technical College	The mission of Central Ohio Technical College is to meet the technical education and training needs of students and employers in the area.
Cincinnati State Technical & Community College	Cincinnati State provides access, opportunity, and support in achieving success for individuals seeking exceptional technical, transfer and experiential/cooperative education and workforce training.
Clark State Community College	To engage and empower diverse learners by providing high-quality educational programs and services that emphasize student and community success.
Columbus State Community College	To educate and inspire, providing our students with the opportunity to achieve their goals.
Cuyahoga Community College	To provide high-quality, accessible and affordable educational opportunities and services — including university transfer, technical and lifelong learning programs — that promote individual development and improve the overall quality of life in a multicultural community.
Eastern Gateway Community College	Eastern Gateway Community College provides quality, flexible, innovative and affordable educational opportunities to serve our communities through helping students achieve success.
Edison State Community College	Edison State Community College provides the learning opportunities, support services and commitment that enable students to complete their educational goals and realize their dreams.
Hocking Technical College	We serve as a pathway to prosperity, teaching and inspiring all who seek to learn, growing careers and changing lives
James A. Rhodes State College	Rhodes State College changes lives, builds futures and improves communities through life-long learning.
Lakeland Community College	To provide quality learning opportunities to meet the social and economic needs of the community.
Lorain County Community College	Provide opportunities for... Individuals to succeed through quality education. Economies to grow through innovation. Communities to thrive through rich cultural experiences.
Marion Technical College	To provide the region's most accessible, supportive, and personal pathway to career success.
North Central State College	Providing individuals with the knowledge, skills and inspiration to succeed in their chosen path.

Northwest State Community College	To serve by providing access to excellent and affordable education, training, and services that will improve the lives of individuals and strengthen communities
Rio Grande Community College	The School of Education at URG/RGCC holds a shared vision for its program, candidates and community. The URG/RGCC Bunce School of Education provides a challenging environment in which teacher candidates develop into professional individuals and are sensitive to Appalachian values. Our institution offers access to a professional career through a unique community college/private university configuration. An example of Rio Grande's unique nature is that through a particular program alignment, teacher candidates at URG/RGCC may opt for some combination of a two, plus two, plus two program which will take them almost seamlessly from a two-year Associate's Degree to a four year Bachelor's Degree and into a two year Master's program. This allows the University of Rio Grande/Rio Grande Community College to open "Windows to the Future" for our candidates at all degree and licensure levels.
Sinclair Community College	Find the need and endeavor to meet it by providing high quality, accessible learning as a college of and for the community.
Southern State Community College	To provide accessible, affordable and high quality education to people in southern Ohio
Stark State College of Technology	Stark State College positively impacts the life of each student and our communities by providing access to high-quality, relevant, and affordable education.
Terra State Community College	To provide the highest quality education and training to our students, faculty, staff and community.
Washington State Community College	Washington State Community College responds to the education and workforce needs of our community by providing dynamic and affordable degree and certificate programs in an atmosphere that promotes student success.
Zane State College	Empowering people through education

Appendix B
Categorization of Mission by Rater

Institution of Higher Education	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Bowling Green State University	6	6	6
Central State University	3	3	3
Cleveland State University	6	6	6
Kent State University	7	3	3
Miami University	6	6	6
The Ohio State University	6	6	6
Ohio University	1	1	1
Shawnee State University	1	1	1
University of Akron	3	3	7
University of Cincinnati	6	3	6
University of Toledo	6	3	6
Wright State University	1	1	1
NE Ohio Medical University	3	3	3
Youngstown State University	3	3	3
Branch Campuses	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
BGSU Firelands	1	1	1

Miami University Hamilton	7	7	7
Miami University Middletown	7	7	7
OSU A&T Institute	6	6	1
OSU Lima	6	6	1
OSU Mansfield	3	3	3
OSU Marion	1	1	1
OSU Newark	3	7	3
OU Eastern	3	3	3
OU Lancaster	3	3	3
OU Southern	7	7	7
Akron Wayne Campus	1	1	1
UC Clermont	3	3	3
UC Blue Ash	1	3	1
Wright State Lake Campus	3	3	3
Community Colleges			
	Rater 1	Rater 2	Rater 3
Belmont Technical College	1	1	1

Central Ohio Technical College	3	1	3
Cincinnati State Technical College	1	1	1
Clark State Technical College	3	3	7
Columbus State Community College	1	7	1
Cuyahoga Community College	1	3	7
Eastern Gateway Community College	3	3	3
Edison State Community College	1	1	1
Hocking Technical College	1	1	1
James Rhodes State College	3	7	3
Lakeland Community College	3	3	3
Lorain County Community College	3	3	3
Marion Technical College	1	1	1
North Central State Community College	1	1	1
Northwest State Community College	3	3	3
Owen State Community College	3	3	3
Rio Grande Community College	1	1	1
Sinclair Community College	3	3	3

Southern State Community College	7	7	7
Stark State Community College	3	3	3
Terra State Community College	7	7	7
Washington State Community College	1	3	1
Zane State College	7	7	7

AAUA's Annual Conference
The Higher Education Value Proposition
October 19–20, 2026 at Cleveland State University, Ohio

Presentations & Presenter Directory

AAUA shares with you the list of speakers, affiliations, and presentations from its recent conference entitled, *The Higher Education Value Proposition*. We hope this information will encourage you to examine the abstracts on the AAUA website and possibly contact the presenters to explore their ideas and action plans. Please consider attending the AAUA Conference in 2027 to network with colleagues, expand your knowledge of practical success initiatives, and contribute to the future growth and relevance of higher education.

Look for an announcement about AAUA 2027 Conference.
AAUA.org

Keynote & Plenary Speakers

Are We the Problem? Transforming Student Outcomes through Improving Administrative Structures. Timothy N. Renick, Georgia State University

Leading Through Change: How Otterbein University Is Redefining What's Possible. John Comerford, Otterbein University

Presidents Panel. Laura Bloomberg, Cleveland State University; Lee Fisher, Baldwin Wallace University; & Sharale Mathis, Campus President: CT State Capital and CT State Tunxis
Connecticut State Community College

President Presents. C. Scott Green. University of Idaho

Break-Out Sessions

The Value Proposition of Leadership Development Through an Equity-Centers Lens. Gloria Thomas, HERS, Higher Education Resource Services

Better Than Ready. Paul Lavoie, University of New Haven

You Know How to Lead. Now Learn How to Last. Al Mueller, Stockton University

SCRUM Strategies to Raise Organizational Goal Resilience. Jeremy Hughes, University of Washington School of Pharmacy, & David Fuentes, University of Montana

College Athletics and Educational Mission in the Transfer Portal Era: Evidence from Division I Men's Basketball. Kendall Cole, Stanford University

The Expertise Intuitions Can't Afford to Ignore: Professional Staff and Shared Governance in Higher Education. Kate Legnetti, New York University Steinhardt

Aspire Auburn: Creating Institutional Value Through Leadership Development. Col. Chris Richie, Auburn University

Leading the Value Proposition: How University Leaders Articulate Purpose and Public Value. Kat Novak, University of Illinois, Springfield, & Sister Ann Heath, Immaculata University

Financially Strong Employees Build Stronger Universities. Kevin Fringer, Collegiate Financial Group

The NASH Executive Fellow Program: Adaptive Leadership for American College and University Systems. James R. Johnsen, NASH, National Association of Higher Education Systems

Strategic Student Success Initiatives and Their Impact on Retention Outcomes. Jeffrey Bodmier, Post University

Unlocking Opportunity: How Universities Can Remove the Cost of Credentials. Brittany Wampler, Kaplan, Inc, & John Nelson-Hronek, Cleveland State University

Badges, Belonging and Big Wins: Rethinking Student Engagement for the Future. Anthony Altieri, Lynn University

The AI Frontiers. Brad Fuster, San Francisco Bay University

The Value Proposition for Senior leaders: Inclusive Executive Advising for University Administrators and College Presidents. Heather Moore Roberson, Allegheny College, & JoeJoe McManus, Cuyahoga Community College

Recruiting Musicians and Artists Like Athletes. Eytan Wurman, CommonTime Education

From Reacting to Organization: A Practical Framework for Leadership Progression in Higher Education. Jeffrey T. Fairbrother, Auburn University

From Voucher to Victory: Maximizing Education and training Voucher Funding as a Strategic Tool for Foster Youth College Success. Jarrett G.A. Pratt, Cleveland State, & Colleen Wright, Cleveland State

Directions for Contributors

The Journal of Higher Education Management is published by the American Association of University Administrators. The Journal's purpose is to promote and strengthen the profession of college and university administration. The Journal provides a forum for: (a) a discussion of the current issues, problems, and challenges facing higher education; (b) an exchange of practical wisdom and techniques in the areas of higher education leadership, policy analysis and development, and institutional management; and (c) the identification and explication of the principles and standards of college and university administration.

Manuscripts should be written for the college or university administrator who has the general responsibilities of educational leadership, policy analysis, staff development, and/or institutional management. Research-informed, practical and scholarly-oriented submissions are welcome.

Authors should be guided by the following submission requirements:

1. Manuscripts must be submitted as MSWord documents, using the following layout specifications.
2. Page Layout: (a) Set paper size to 8.5 x 11" paper; (b) Set all margins to 1 inch; (c) Avoid special layout options—do not use headers or footers; do not insert page or section breaks, do not include page numbers.
3. Font: Times New Roman (size 12, regular).
4. Paragraph Layout: (a) Do not include any special spacing either before or after paragraphs (set before and after spacing at 0 pt.); (b) Use double line spacing; (c) Begin each paragraph with a .25" indentation, (d) Indent extended quotations .5" (do not indent anything else). Single space between sentences.
5. Tables, Figures, Graphs, Photos: (a) Must fit on one page (can be no larger than 6.5 x 9"); (b) Must be arranged to appear vertically on the page; (c) Font size must be the same as the body of the paper; (d) Must be in black and white (no color permitted). For all tables, figures, graphs and images used from previously published materials, authors must provide the Editor documentation of permission to reprint in JHEM (i.e., used with permission; see APA samples).
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All manuscripts should be submitted electronically to editor@jhem.online.

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