

MINI-REVIEW | *Institute on Teaching and Learning*

Educational leadership: benefits of stepping outside the classroom

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Pressley TA. Educational leadership: benefits of stepping outside the classroom. *Adv Physiol Educ* 41: 454–456, 2017; doi:10.1152/advan.00083.2017.—Although most educators have their greatest impact in the classroom, the increased need for diverse learning activities has created new opportunities for leadership. Moreover, many Tenure and Promotion Committees are finding that it is no longer sufficient to consider only lecture hours when evaluating a faculty member's contributions to the teaching mission of an institution. Accordingly, the career path for an educator in a college or professional school is evolving. A newly recruited faculty member may start out with traditional classroom responsibilities, but activities other than lecture, such as flipped classrooms, online resources, and peer-to-peer teaching, may be quickly added to the mix. As faculty members gain experience, they often progress to positions of curriculum design or program review within an institution. Similarly, there is a need for administrators who have participated in a variety of learning activities, and schools frequently recruit for these positions from faculty with such exposure. Many senior faculty members leverage this expertise to regional or national levels by authoring textbooks and online materials or serving on advisory boards, review committees, and governance in professional societies and funding agencies. Excelling in these leadership opportunities can have a profound effect on the success of promotion and tenure applications, and they reward a skill set that extends beyond the teaching and organization needed in the classroom.

scholarship; career planning; academic promotion; tenure

IN THE COLD OPENING TO THE movie *Patton* (1), the Academy Award-winning actor, George C. Scott, provides an in-character vision of leadership that could charitably be called aggressive and might be more accurately described as autocratic. Chances are that you have seen this iconic scene or one of the many parodies that it has inspired. Although such a hard-nosed form of leadership might have worked for General George S. Patton during World War II, it is unlikely that it would be tolerated in an academic environment. Nevertheless, acting as a leader and role model is part of the job as educators. In this essay from a presentation at the 2016 APS Institute for Teaching and Learning (2), I will offer some advice on both the benefits of becoming a leader and the opportunities that are available to develop those leadership skills.

In the interests of full disclosure, I should admit that I have a dog in this fight. I am the current chair of the Career Opportunities in Physiology Committee at the American Phys-

iological Society (APS), and I've served on more Tenure and Promotion Committees and evaluation committees than is probably healthy. Few things are more depressing in academics than a talented individual who fails to advance in his or her career. It is frustrating and disappointing to recommend against a promotion or the granting of tenure, and anything that I can do to minimize that possibility is a worthwhile effort. Fortunately, much of the advice that I will offer is more common sense than deep insight, but it bears repeating.

It should also be emphasized that institutions with far more experience fostering leadership are struggling with the best ways to define and develop it. One might think that the military academies, for example, have the development of leaders down to a fine art. As it turns out, leadership remains a source of study and optimization for them as well. Indeed, the US Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs has just put the finishing touches on a new building for its Center for Character and Leadership Development. This expansion reflects the recognition by the US Air Force that there is still much to learn about developing leaders. That being said, every cadet at the Academy strives to adhere to the core values taught to every Air Force member: "Integrity First, Service Before Self, Excellence In All We Do" (8). These would be inspiring goals for any of us, but in our roles as scholars and educators, we might be looking for something a bit more pragmatic. For our purposes, let's define leadership as the ability to accomplish a goal, to model that ability, and to inspire, help, and direct others in achieving that goal. This often involves pursuing a path of academic citizenship and diplomacy that would have been quite foreign to the likes of General Patton.

Becoming such a thoughtful leader is a lot of work. You could certainly be forgiven for thinking, "I just want to do my job with a minimum of hassle." So why strive to be a good leader? The best reason for leadership is that it is the right thing to do. We need to listen to Abraham Lincoln's "better angels of our nature" (6). Professionalism demands that we contribute to the best of our abilities, and that includes providing leadership and mentoring. Of course, if I'm being honest, the career advancement and perks that result from good leadership skills are also an incentive. Who among us wouldn't welcome a better salary, travel, and more respect? So how do we go about developing the skills of leadership and demonstrating our talents as a leader?

Most of us would argue that an essential first step is the identification of role models and mentors who can offer sage advice. Many institutions have established mechanisms (and often administered by a faculty development office) for pairing junior faculty members with more experienced scholars. If

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offered, you will certainly want to take advantage of these programs, but you need not be limited to them. Indeed, you should cultivate a group of informal mentors throughout your career. I have found that these individuals often provide the essential “reality check” that I needed when making decisions or undertaking new projects. Why do you think that networking is such a hot topic in career development seminars?

At first glance, it makes sense that you would exhibit your leadership in the classroom or lecture hall, at least in the beginning stages of your career. This was certainly a tried-and-true strategy in the past, and it still plays a role today. However, accreditation committees and current best practice encourage a mix of teaching strategies that promote self-directed, lifelong learning. For example, the Liaison Committee for Medical Education provides a list of standards and elements that includes specific requirements for student-centered activities (4). Many institutions have interpreted this as a mandate to emphasize more interactive activities that minimize the use of large-group lecture. It follows that the traditional entry into teaching via lecture is becoming less dependable. Moreover, hours of lecture time are becoming an increasingly unreliable measure of teaching effort for Tenure and Promotion Committees.

While we’re strolling down memory lane, we should probably consider a second, long-standing strategy for demonstrating leadership that has also become less useful. For many years, authoring a well-respected textbook was a dependable way of demonstrating leadership. Several of our colleagues have become household names because of the popularity of their textbooks in physiology. Their efforts have provided a valuable resource to the community, but, at the end of the day, we only need so many textbooks. There really isn’t much room for a bunch of new ones. It follows that this pathway to recognition as a leader is becoming more and more limited.

Of course, attendance at nearly any scientific meeting will reveal that we have many education leaders—far more than would be expected if lecture prowess and textbook authorship were the less-effective paths that I have argued. What alternatives have these leaders pursued, and how have they achieved recognition?

Becoming a leader in the world of bench research requires establishing a record of scholarship, typically measured by publications. Indeed, the guidelines of my school’s Tenure and Promotion Committee (7) ask explicitly for “documentation of scholarly productivity.” Relevant to demonstrating leadership in education, this documentation can include the “development of educational materials,” as well as “new educational methods, courses, clerkships, or residency programs.” These guidelines are similar to those seen in most institutions. It follows that the creation and implementation of successful student-centered, self-directed learning experiences provides grist for the tenure and promotion mill. Like most institutions, the committee at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center also requires “documentation of scholarly productivity” and “a national reputation” as part of its scholarship mission, especially for promotion to higher ranks.

In compiling this documentation, paperwork is your friend. You wouldn’t conduct experiments without taking careful notes. Neither should you be creating and running learning activities without careful records. Just as a fashion model or actor will have a portfolio of representative work, educators

need teaching portfolios that highlight their accomplishments. It is common to submit published manuscripts to the Tenure and Promotions Committee, but you should also include learning activities that you have developed. It is also a good idea to keep a record of your time commitments and the time required to develop and troubleshoot activities. This will make it easier for your departmental chair or administrator when he or she is asked to account for departmental responsibilities.

Along those lines, your departmental chair, division chief, or team leader can be one of your strongest advocates, but he or she will need to be kept informed. You can bet that I’m not shy about informing my chair (and dean and other administrators) so that they are aware of the variety of learning activities that I develop for students. For example, about 3 yr ago, my dean expressed a fondness for the Khan Academy, a popular non-profit organization that produces a wide variety of educational videos that are available online (3). Why couldn’t our medical school create comparable learning resources? After a couple of days of research, I was producing similar videos explaining basic concepts in cardiovascular physiology using the whiteboard-style format popularized by the Khan Academy. The posting of these videos online for study by the students has allowed us to eliminate multiple face-to-face lectures. Not surprisingly, I was soon the local expert on video production, at least among the School of Medicine faculty. Just as importantly, I made sure that the dean received some sample videos to examine.

I mention this example because physiology education is still establishing “best practices” for many student-centered learning activities, and there are many opportunities to leverage your efforts in developing educational activities into abstracts, papers, and presentations. These include traditional outlets, such as professional meetings and publications such as *Advances in Physiology Education*, but the internet has introduced more avant-garde possibilities. Online publication in repositories such as MedEdPORTAL is a reasonable option for some of your efforts. Similarly, online forums such as the Physiology Educators Community of Practice (PECOP) are becoming more and more influential in academics (5). Unfortunately, the members of Tenure and Promotion Committees are often unfamiliar with these online resources, and you should be prepared to emphasize to your evaluators that these contributions are usually peer reviewed. Similarly, you may need to point out that blog posts are often by invitation, and that you are sharing the forum with recognized leaders in the field. Don’t turn down invitations to give seminars and presentations, and don’t forget to list them in your curriculum vitae. A record of examples such as these provides evidence of that “national reputation” required by Tenure and Promotion Committees.

If you do your job well and receive appropriate recognition, it won’t be long before additional opportunities for service and leadership are offered more and more often. Remember the old adage that “nothing succeeds like success.” Often one of the first leadership positions for an academic is serving as director of a course, and having that experience is often the entry into more involved curricular development. Fortunately, there are many resources that can provide advice on running a course, including many that we have already discussed.

Additional evidence of national recognition can often be provided by service on the committees of a professional soci-

ety. These positions are highly visible and influential and clearly reflect the confidence in you exhibited by your peers outside the institution. Because they are competitive, you will want to pick your targets and make the best case you can for selection. If you are hoping to be a member of the Education Committee of the APS, for example, you will want to pony up explicitly the activities and experiences that will allow you to contribute effectively to the committee's mission. Within the APS, the various sections also provide committee opportunities. These are nearly as influential and prestigious, but they may be less intimidating to the first-timer. Moreover, the pool of applicants may be slightly smaller. Regardless of the committee assignment that you are seeking, don't give up if you aren't selected on the first try. Persistence is one of the criteria used when selecting new committee members.

In your efforts to demonstrate leadership, it will be necessary at first to apply or volunteer for various positions, especially those outside your institution. With success, however, you will find that applications become less and less necessary. Indeed, you will find that more and more often, you are approached by others to take on these responsibilities. This provides a welcome validation of your career advancement. Of course, you will want to guard against overextending yourself, and mastering a tactful way of turning down an offer when you have insufficient time is a crucial skill. On the other hand, there are organizations to which you should never say "no." These include your institution's accreditation organizations and your funding sources. Remember that "you don't bite the hand that feeds you."

If you are so inclined, take advantage of opportunities to serve in administration. Even short service as an interim chair or dean can provide tremendous experience. It is always valuable to see what life is like on the other side of the table. Should you take on such a (sometimes thankless) leadership responsibility, you will probably need to remind yourself often that it is the right thing to do (remember those "better angels"). There may also be occasional opportunities that reach beyond traditional academics, such as contributing to local school boards or government. As a community, we are in desperate

need of educated, knowledgeable individuals to serve in these organizations.

In short, leadership is a natural part of being a professional. Clearly, practicing leadership provides personal satisfaction, but it is also an essential component of your Tenure and Promotion package. If you do your job well, it is just a matter of time before you will become a role model, mentor, and leader.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

T.A.P. conceived and designed research, drafted manuscript, edited and revised manuscript, approved final version of manuscript.

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