

Identifying and Developing Academic Leaders

Angela Laird Brenton, dean, College of Professional Studies, University of Arkansas at Little Rock. "Identifying and Developing Academic Leaders." Written specifically for the ACE Department Chair Online Resource Center, 2004.

In the fall of 2002, the College of Professional Studies at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) launched a Leadership Academy. Its purpose was to identify faculty members with potential for departmental and university leadership and to nurture their leadership talents.

The program was not a training academy for department chairs. We clearly articulated at the start that completion of the program did not guarantee any formal position, nor did it commit the participants to assume any specific role. We did say that the program would expose participants to the demands, challenges, and rewards of leadership, and would prepare them for a broad range of leadership opportunities, from formal positions to faculty senate leadership roles to positions of leadership in professional organizations.

The College of Professional Studies is a diverse college at UALR, containing the School of Social Work, the School of Mass Communication, the Institute of Government (including research and outreach units as well as a master's program in public administration), and the departments of audiology/speech pathology, speech communication, criminal justice, and health services administration. The college also includes KUAR/KLRE, the UALR public radio stations. A secondary purpose of the Leadership Academy was to build bridges across departments by creating strong interpersonal linkages among future leaders within the college.

The program, led by the dean of the college, is a two-year commitment. Each chair or director in the college has an opportunity to nominate a faculty member or professional staff member. The dean's cabinet serves as the selection committee. We intended the program to be small—five to six members.

In the first year, the academy consisted of four two-hour seminars. The first was a panel of university leaders talking about their roles and how they came to university leadership. The second and third seminars engaged the participants in human resource and budgeting cases. The last session involved one-on-one mentoring with the dean regarding goals and aspirations.

In the second year, participants sat in on university-wide leadership groups, identified issues from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* for discussion in groups, and researched a conference we could attend as a group. Particularly in the latter activity, the participants discovered many organizations and conferences focused on university-wide issues. In the end, the group decided on the American Council on Education's Charing the Academic Department workshop as the conference we would

attend together. The choice was based partly on scheduling, but the workshop also appealed to them because of the practical topics covered and the in-depth nature of the sessions (three hours each). The group also liked the fact that everyone would attend the same sessions together, unlike other conferences with a variety of concurrent sessions.

We traveled together to San Diego (the dean and associate dean of the college and four members of the Leadership Academy). All expenses for the workshop were paid by the dean's office. Over the next four days, we attended many sessions, interacted with colleagues from across the country, and spent much time as a group discussing over dinners what we had heard and learned. It is fair to say that we found some sessions more helpful than others, but even the least-helpful sessions provoked great discussion among the group about what we disagreed with or what we found missing.

The workshop produced a number of benefits for our group:

1. We really bonded as a group during the intensive time spent together. We had time to get to know one another, hear about each other's programs, and get past superficial issues. During the four days of travel and conference, each of the Leadership Academy participants also found time for one-on-one chats with the dean on topics of interest.
2. We came to appreciate our own college and university by talking to colleagues from around the country and finding how different their situations were from ours in terms of university funding, interpersonal relations, and program quality.
3. The faculty without experience in administrative or leadership positions learned an incredible amount about budget management, planning, conflict management, governmental relations, and other topics that will broaden their perspectives and make them more effective as faculty members or leaders.
4. We had a chance to talk about issues in an in-depth way that we never would have had on our own campus.
5. We broke down walls in our college between administrators and faculty.

We have finished with our first two-year pilot group. One participant has been appointed as department chair. Another is a program director of a large undergraduate program. All have a better understanding of how universities work and why their department chairs make decisions they do.

Our next group, beginning the program next fall, will be quite different in composition—two recently tenured associate professors, two non-tenure-track instructors, and two professional staff members in charge of leading large outreach programs for the university. The activities we did with the

first group will need to be modified, but we see great utility in each member learning perspectives from one another and learning how each contributes to the success of our college.