

UC Leveraging Leadership Initiative: Faculty Leadership Skills Assessment

Executive Summary

The University of California is facing a looming challenge as it nears its 150th anniversary. The system has an increasing number of faculty leaders who will retire within the next five to ten years. Compounding this challenge, there is a culture among current mid-career faculty that suggests many are reluctant to fill leadership positions, or even participate in leadership training, that would take them away from their research. Finding a solution to the lack of a leadership pipeline will be critical for the institution as it moves into the next 150 years.

The 2017 UC CORO Southern California Cohort selected the faculty leadership and development project proposed by Sharon Walker, Interim Dean of the UC Riverside Marlan and Rosemary Bourns College of Engineering, and Ron Coley, UC Riverside Vice Chancellor of Business and Administrative Services.

Problem/Opportunity Statement

University of California faculty fill multiple and various leadership roles across our university system. Whether leading research teams, serving as department chairs, serving their professional society, or working in high-level central administrative capacities, very few UC faculty receive any formal leadership training or guidance and, instead, learn on the job. Building a campus and faculty culture that understands and appreciates the advantages that leadership mastery would have for the many leadership roles faculty take on throughout their careers in research, service, and teaching would benefit the entire UC system.

Approach

We began with the assumption that faculty careers consist of transition points where faculty members are asked to take on leadership positions for which they may have little training. These transition points often require last minute guidance and support, as well as various forms of advanced training, to successfully navigate new roles or situations. As such, our cohort chose to identify key moments of transition along faculty career trajectories where specific skill acquisition would be the most beneficial for success.

Findings and Recommendations

By analyzing results from faculty career trajectories, surveys, and research on existing programs, we find:

1. Faculty serve in multiple leadership roles, often concurrently, throughout their careers.
2. Faculty view leadership as a complex combination of people management, communication, vision, and subject matter knowledge, all of which faculty believe are required for success in leadership roles. Many faculty have learned these skills on the job and did not receive any formal training.
3. Faculty acknowledge they need job-related and leadership skills training; however, their stated desire to participate in such trainings is significantly lower than the stated need.
4. Federal program officers deem leadership skills and experience as important when making award decisions for large center grants.
5. Despite findings that leadership training exists, many faculty reported that little to no training is available.

6. Faculty state they would participate in training if the following incentives were offered:
 - Time via course release or compensation via stipends or research funding;
 - Relevance to current or future roles; and/or
 - Opportunity to learn something new.

From these findings, our recommendations represent action items that will help catalyze a cultural shift towards integrated and valued faculty leadership training:

1. UC should ensure faculty understand the value of leadership skills for research and creative activities, academic and professional service, and administrative roles.
2. UC should enhance awareness of existing leadership skill development programs organized by individual campuses, the UC system, and external organizations in one central location so that it is accessible.
3. UC should review successful skill development programs already in use, and develop a model that can be shared systemwide. Once programs are developed, systemwide requirements should be in place to ensure faculty participation in these programs.
4. UC should make available the skills progression (see Appendix E) which outlines the reported skills necessary to be successful at each milestone in a faculty member's career.
5. UC administrators (e.g., Deans and Chairs) should individually identify faculty with leadership potential, recognize them personally for this potential, and specifically invite these faculty to participate in faculty leadership development programs.
6. When encouraging faculty to participate in leadership development programs, UC should provide testimonials from past participants that highlight the usefulness of these trainings.
7. Existing campus and systemwide leadership training programs should review faculty-identified skills gaps and incorporate or develop relevant modules to meet those identified needs. Specific topics include university budgeting, managing grant funds, grant proposal writing, fundraising/donor relations, advocacy, and university funding models.
8. Lynda.com and UC Learning Center (UCLC) courses that are already available should be promoted directly to UC faculty. In addition, UC Learning Center should be re-branded to make it more accessible to faculty, who may not realize the relevance of these trainings since UCLC is currently housed under Human Resources.
9. UC locations should ensure faculty have time to participate in these trainings whether through providing course release or other financial incentives.

This report articulates a framework for addressing key aspects of sustainable academic excellence. It is our intent this framework will serve as actionable guidelines that will help the UC system better understand where and how it can develop a culture that prioritizes a more holistic view of faculty leadership training.