

Making Yourself Useful:

What Future Faculty Need to Know About Administrative Culture

Not sure exactly *what* the folks in the administrative offices are talking about and doing all day? Chances are, it has something to do with visioning, branding, capacity building or accountability. Understanding what is important to university administrators – and positioning yourself and your work as relevant to their goals – could be critical to your career as a future faculty member.

Mission and Vision

Mission is the simplest of the administrative buzzwords you should learn. A school's mission is what is most important to it: teaching, research or some combination of the two. Usually, mission is easy enough to figure out from a school's Web site, view books, even its name. But sometimes it's more complicated. Piedmont College in Georgia and the University of North Carolina Asheville, for example, promote themselves as a "liberal arts college" and a "liberal arts university," respectively. Neither is a true liberal arts institution – which wouldn't offer anything other than traditional majors or graduate degrees – but they use the label to differentiate themselves from regional, comprehensive colleges and to create an image attractive to students. Creating such an image – or **branding** – is another concern of college administrators.

Universities are nearly always striving to improve in some way. Administrators develop specific goals to that effect. The University of Georgia, for example, is considered one of the top 20 public universities in the nation; administrators are working toward the top 10. An institution's **vision** is what it wants to be; **visioning** is the process of determining what that goal is. Efforts made to achieve the vision – including public relations, communications, alumni relations, etc. – are called **institutional advancement**. **Capacity building** is the process of creating the administrative system necessary to run the type of institution a school wants to become.

Getting the Job and Getting Tenure

It's worth your time to learn these buzzwords and an institution's particular aspirations if you are applying for a position or starting out as a new faculty member. Administrators will create opportunities and incentives for

faculty to do things that advance institutional goals. The administration may reward departments doing things to further the university's mission or vision – for example, by offering opportunities for students to study abroad, performing funded research, etc. – with funds for new or replacement faculty positions or endowed chairs.

When you consider a job offer, try to get a handle on where the institution stands in relation to its current goals. A school close to its target is a nice place to work, because, as a faculty member, you will receive clear, consistent messages about what you need to do in order to be successful. At an institution without a clear plan for achieving its vision, on the other hand, it may be difficult to figure out what you should do to achieve promotions and tenure.

Once you get the job, you will have opportunities to take on tasks – such as advising a student organization, teaching distance-education courses or joining committees to study or implement new ideas – related to administrative goals. As a new faculty member, your decisions whether to accept such roles should be determined by two things: the activities for which you will likely be rewarded and the activities you want to make up your professional life. This is where understanding your institution's strategic direction is critical to your career. As a junior faculty member, you should focus on the roles and activities central to the mission of your institution, whether it's research, publishing or teaching. If you can volunteer for "extra stuff," such as advising a club, and still accomplish the things you need to gain tenure, go ahead. Otherwise, focus on mission-critical activities early in your career; be an advisor or the program coordinator after you get tenure.

Occasionally, it may be difficult to determine whether an administrative initiative is something that will advance your career or just a passing fad. Distance education, for example, is a hot topic now. It may or may not turn out, in the long run, to be something that faculty are rewarded for embracing. If you're faced with the opportunity to take on a new role or engage in a new activity, and you're not sure whether it will be a fad or a lasting administrative strategy, look to recently promoted or tenured faculty members as

examples. What roles and activities have they embraced? Peruse their curriculum vitae for guidelines.

Funding and Accountability

There was a time when state university and college budgets were supplied primarily by state governments. Today, state funding is declining, which means that institutions must repeatedly convince legislatures of the importance of their continued existence and simultaneously seek other sources of funding. As a result, institutions face more stringent demands for **accountability**. Legislators are likely to see teaching as the most valuable activity of universities and colleges; other funders want to be convinced of the importance or applicability of the research being done at an institution.

Faculty members must be able to frame their research projects as relevant to the people who fund the university. When you are writing, conducting research or designing projects, make it clear in your funding requests and other communications how your efforts further the mission and strategic directions of the university or the funding source. Once again, understanding the administrative goals and culture of your institution may be critical to your career. ■

Based on the Graduate School seminar "Understanding Administrative Culture" by Christopher Morphew and Doug Toma, Institute of Higher Education. To view this seminar in full, visit <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.

Getting to Know the Administration

Like many universities, UGA is organized in three branches, each representing one of the institution's main functions: **academics, finance and administration**, and **external affairs** (largely, activities related to fundraising).

The highest-ranking vice president, in charge of academics, is called a **provost**. UGA has **vice presidents** (or **associate provosts**) for instruction, student affairs, research and public service/outreach. Many universities also have vice presidents for finance and fundraising (or "development"). At smaller schools, these roles may be filled by administrators with titles such as "Dean of Student Affairs."

At large universities, **deans** are the heads of schools or colleges, while **department heads** lead individual departments. The **university president** is largely responsible for external affairs. The head of the entire University System of Georgia, of which all state universities and colleges are a part, is the **chancellor**. (In other states, university heads are sometimes called chancellors, while the system head holds the title president.)

For more on university organization, see the Graduate School Professional Development Series video "How Universities are Organized, Governed and Managed: Implications for New Faculty" or the Five-Minute Mentor, Vol. 3, No. 3, both on <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.

Schools and Their Missions

Research universities, including UGA, produce a large number of doctorates in a broad range of academic fields. The title "research university" is not a quality indicator: there are elite and not-so-elite research universities. Teaching is important, but research is job No. 1.

Doctoral and comprehensive universities bring in less money for research and offer fewer doctorate programs. Faculty members are usually expected to produce some research, but teaching will be most important. These are also the institutions most likely to have aspirations for growing, adding programs, improving or increasing their prestige, making it more difficult to determine what is expected of you professionally.

Baccalaureate colleges confer only bachelor's degrees. They include colleges that offer career-oriented programs, as well as liberal arts colleges, which do not offer professional, applied majors. Teaching talent is highly valued, as is a faculty member's ability to "fit" into the often-unique cultures of small colleges.

For more on different types of universities, see the Graduate School Professional Development Series video "Institutional Diversity: A Typology of Universities and Colleges for Aspiring Faculty" or the Five-Minute Mentor, Vol. 3, No. 6, both on <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.