

SCHOLARSHIP, ADMINISTRATION, TEACHING AND THE JUNIOR FACULTY ADMINISTRATOR

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The following narrative addresses the author's struggles as a junior faculty administrator to balance scholarship, administration, and student services. She addresses the crises faced when determining which domain to prioritize during periods of her emerging career. The opportunities and dangers associated with these choices as well as the techniques utilized to navigate the process are presented.

What happens when the beleaguered junior faculty member becomes a partner in establishing a new department with the prerequisite focus on programmatic structure, student services, and a primary focus on accreditation? For me, this status as a new junior faculty member and administrator faced with the co-responsibility of successful accreditation presented a situation of both opportunity and danger. This article describes my experience in meeting this crisis.

Spring 2001

Two senior faculty members sat with me as we outlined the work plan for the rest of the spring and summer. It was clear that much needed to be done to get the program up and running and accepted by several layers of university committees. Not only were we engaging in an intellectual and academic exercise, but the process also proved to be extremely political. Many in the University were hostile to a new program, especially one that was both applied in nature and expensive. So in addition to increasing my workload, I also had to become a political strategist. I also had to develop at least 40 field placement opportunities for our first class of students, start the benchmark process, develop policies and procedures, a student handbook and a field manual. As if this were not enough, I also had to write a proposal for Title IV-E funding for the school. And I had to do all this, while

teaching and preparing for my second-year tenure review.

These activities extended through the summer and required that I take on the role of Director of Fieldwork. Because I had prior experience, this did not seem a hardship. However, once into it, I recognized that it was a significant time commitment. In addition, the writing of our policies, our syllabi and our manuals took the entire summer.

The opportunities associated with developing a new program were numerous. I was able to work closely with senior faculty in advisory board, academic senate, community outreach and curriculum development meetings. Our joint efforts made the launching of the new MSW program possible. In this type of environment, key senior faculty were able to recognize administrative and clinical strengths that I possessed. These working relationships have persisted over time and I can request support as needed.

The dangers associated with this intense up-front effort were significant. In presenting the department before university committee members who were hostile towards approving the program, I established myself as a potential competitor and enemy to individuals who might one day sit on my promotion, tenure and retention committee. In affiliating myself closely with the founding chair, I became associated with an infamously political personality on campus. Those who

liked him might provide support, those who saw him as an enemy might target me because he, having tenure, was untouchable. I was concerned about serving as a surrogate target for Dr. T.

One major danger was the choosing of an administrative priority over a research/writing priority at the beginning of my career as a professor. My focus was on syllabi, benchmarks, policies, manuals and memorandums of understanding. This time-consuming process shadowed the quest for funding, buying out time for writing, and establishing a solid writing/research schedule.

Finally, the department had to grow and it did. We had a full professor returning from sabbatical as well as a new assistant professor during the first year of our program. I had accepted and been given administrative authority by my chair. In many ways this administrative status/power conflicted seriously with my junior faculty status/power. This caused conflict that continued through the third year of the program. Ultimately, I had to make space for others to enter the program, while serving as a back-up or unofficial assistant director of the program. It was and continues to be the most difficult portion of my job in the department.

Summer 2004

Our program is established and we are into the second year of the summer block program for MSW students at our Concord Campus. This was even a greater time commitment which required Friday and Saturday day-long seminars, field site visits, as well as individual student advising. The program is run and administered by myself and another junior faculty member and three field faculty members with some clerical assistance.

In addition, the student handbook and the field manual for the 2005-2006 program needed to be rewritten, and the field placements selected and completed for 50

second year students in the non-summer block placement. While I have junior status in the university, I have 25 years of experience in the social work profession, so during this process I actively participated as de facto program coordinator. This also proved to be a very costly time commitment.

As if this were not enough, I also had a book contract, a memorandum of understanding to complete a book chapter and a journal article that had been submitted and needed a re-write. In addition, a grant to support a research project had been awarded to me in Spring 2004.

During the summer, I completed the book chapter, arranged for the book contract to be extended, completed the journal article and postponed my research study. Overall, I achieved some success towards my scholarship goals. It was an incredibly busy summer and was satisfying on many levels, but frightening when I stop to think about the work. Administrative goals were met; but my scholarship goals were not all met. The tenure clock ticked on. I and my junior faculty colleague were good university citizens, involved in governance and curricular development, but we struggled to accomplish our research goals.

The opportunities related to developing and administering the summer block placement programs were great. We really enjoyed the autonomous functioning possible within this summer environment. My colleague and I modified the curriculum to ensure that it met the needs of the year-round model and taught classes seminar-style. We met the requisite hours required for courses, but had day-long seminars rather than 3.5 hour classes. We gained lots of experience; learned from our mistakes; and developed a special rapport with this cohort of approximately 35 students. In addition, we were able to forge a much closer relationship with our field faculty.

The dangers were significant. The passion that we poured into making the summer program work had to be diverted from somewhere. Whereas many faculty use their summer as the time to begin, continue and complete their work, I was not able to attain all of my writing goals. I made progress on a journal article and a book chapter and completed them both. I failed to complete the work necessary for a social policy book contract and needed the extension. Also, as I administered the summer program, the issue related to actual power and attributed power reached a crisis point. In fall of 2004, the addition of a new associate professor was quite contentious. Questions related to the temerity of an "assistant professor" serving as an administrative type were raised and had to be addressed. The crisis precipitated by this contention and my increased sense of danger resulted in some changes in how I conducted business and the assignments that I was willing to accept. This led to conflicts between the Chair and myself that we have happily resolved. I started addressing other domains, student service and scholarship at this juncture.

Winter Quarter 2006

This quarter, I have extricated myself from some of the responsibilities associated with my role as unofficial associate department chair and chief trouble-shooter. However, as a founding member of the Social Work Program, there are responsibilities that I cannot drop. As the institutional memory of the department, I am asked questions, invited to meetings and continually asked to provide feedback on issues too numerous to mention. We have added two tenured faculty members and an associate professor, yet the workload has not eased. In the hustle and bustle of too much work and too few rewards, we lost my partner-in-administration and scholarship, the other assistant professor, to another university.

The dilemma this quarter is that I am an integral part of the accreditation preparation committee and I am also trying to find time to complete my fifth year retention document. As instructed by a mentor in my Ph.D. program, I was prepared to put that document together over a weekend and place it in the office awaiting the review of the committee. At the same time, it became clear that there were some fundamental flaws in the Social Work Program self-study document that needed to be addressed before it was sent out for review. This development created a crisis in the department that called for all hands to be on deck.

Again, I was eyeball deep in the time consuming process of reviewing, editing, consulting and getting the CSWE self-study in good order. I believe my efforts have been successful, but not without a cost! Achieving both objectives—completion of the self-study and the tenure review dossier—created a personal crisis for me. As a founding member of the department, my heart and soul remain committed to the department and the need to successfully complete the accreditation process. On the other hand, my academic survival depended on completing the work for the dossier. In this case, I spent the weekend working on the CSWE Self-study, and during the week I spent one 15-hour period working on the dossier (into the wee hours of the night).

As an active junior faculty member, I am supported and rewarded in many ways for my willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty to support the goals of the department. On the other hand, this behavior, I believe, impedes my ability to complete the necessary work on my research and scholarship.

The opportunities during this period included the ability to work on the completion of the self-study process, to establish a stronger relationship with new faculty because the issues related to actual and attributed

power are resolved, and to work closely with the Chair as the department's "institutional memory" for the purpose of infusing that memory into the last of the accreditation process. Some of the weight of the accreditation process has been taken on by other faculty in the department. The Chair of our department has worked to spread the workload to other tenure and non-tenure track faculty. This has really been successful. As such, rather than being constantly overwhelmed by the process, I can accept a portion of the responsibility and depend on others to also take up their part. I can bring to bear my memory and involvement in the process to ensure that we are consistent in our approach and in our write-ups. This shift has allowed me to place more emphasis on student service, curricular development and scholarship which is what I need to do at this juncture. I would say that it hasn't freed me to do as much work as I would like, but I am definitely able to go in the right direction.

There are still a few challenges as we move down the path towards accreditation. As much as I have been able to pull back, the demands are still high and exceed my capacity from time to time. For example, completing my dossier and essential portions of the CSWE Self-Study both demanded my attention at exactly the same time. I chose the CSWE Self-Study first (without the program, I have no academic future at my university) and then basically used a student technique (the all-nighter) to complete my dossier. This type of work or these types of choices result in feelings of high anxiety and exhaustion. One can only work like this for so long. I look forward to the completion of the accreditation process because the need to attend to the domain of administration will subside considerably.

Scholarship versus Administration

On the one hand, as a junior faculty member my path is pre-ordained. The

University has its requirements; they expect and support me in being productive and making progress toward tenure. On the other hand, there are other prizes that can hold the attention of those of us who have worked in the corporate or nonprofit world prior to becoming a professor. Chief among these are professional pride, creativity, and the satisfaction that comes from building a program from the ground to the ceiling.

One of my dear friends in a first-year Ph.D. class said, "I haven't birthed any children, but I've birthed, with great pride, several programs." Helping to shepherd a program through the accreditation process, writing self-studies, developing curriculum in concert with other faculty is important work. This work keeps the university scholarship alive and functioning and infuses it with new ideas and opportunities. Developing protocols, managing schedules, advising students, planning graduations and graduation banquets, directing field programs and creating summer programs, all of these administrative tasks merge with scholarly tasks. It is not as simple as black or white. One has to balance many demands and use many of the skills that we advise our social work clients to utilize.

The Third Domain: Student Service

There is a third factor. To this point, I have presented the crisis of balancing scholarship (as defined by research and publications) and administration. The third factor is student service: the teaching and mentoring of students. It sometimes gets lost in the maze of "publish or perish" and administrative work. Teaching is, in fact, my passion; it is the reason for my choosing a teaching university rather than a research institution.

I stay in social work education because I love to teach. I love having the time to prepare and deliver an effective lecture. I want to ensure that the next generation of social workers receives culturally competent and

effective training. As a faculty member of color, I feel responsible for providing some of this training. The payoff is wonderful and the result is competent students. I hope at some point to have more time to think about and write about the work that I do with them.

Having the time and energy to focus on students is essential. Being able to come to campus and prepare for the day; being able to use office hours effectively; having time to really review the work of the students and to give them honest and helpful feedback, is important work that competes with writing an article, conducting research, and revising a self-study. There is no question, the student takes priority. The following is an example of student feedback that confirms to me the need to incorporate services to students in the overall balancing act that is essential in our work.

This student graduated after two years of struggling with her writing abilities. She utilized the student writing center and worked diligently to produce professional quality papers. She told me the following during a drop-in office hour:

“Professor Woods, I know that you do not remember this. However, when I first attended your class, I handed in a paper. You read it and gave it back to me without a grade. You said, ‘I know that you can do better than this. This is what I want you to do. Take the extra time and make the corrections.’ You do not know what a difference this made to me. No one had ever stopped and taken the time and said, ‘I know that you can do better than that.’ Not only did you take the time, but also you told me what and how.”

We can create a more meaningful environment for students from lower social

economic backgrounds and first generation college attendees, but it takes time and focus. The battle between administration, scholarship and finding time for review of student work and meaningful interaction with students is a no-brainer.

I’ll end with a few techniques that I believe allow me to do the work I do with pride and conviction.

Partialize

Identify your goals specifically as they relate to the three spheres described above. What are your professional goals for the first to sixth year of the tenure track process? Tie things into tenure, but remember that isn’t the only goal. What do you want to do to elevate the status of your students, the communities affiliated with the University, you and your family? Take all of these things under consideration. Attempt to do something on a daily basis that assists you in supporting the academy, your professional growth and development, and that of your students.

Social work is a value driven profession. Keep your values intact through this onerous process and be willing to draw a line in the sand when it truly feels as though you are being forced to short-change your students, your tenure-goals or your university assignments. When we feel that our activities are in balance with our basic values it takes us a step closer to satisfaction in our work and the career path we have chosen.

Manage Time Well

Even if you are not an organized person, identify techniques that help to save time. Utilize Blackboard, minimize meetings, electronically score exams, utilize discussion boards. Stick to your schedules and work with people who will assist you in doing so.

Do Not Personalize the Political

I think that I have had one of the greatest mentors in the world in my Chair, Dr. T.

Relatively thin-skinned, I am more like a Rodney King “Can’t We All Just Get Along?” than Dr. T., who accomplishes his goals “By Any Means Necessary.” During our work together in the department, I have known him to work with and fight with many of the powers that be in the University. He keeps his eye on the prize and pushes for results. Not soft-spoken, he is nevertheless caring and concerned about the university, faculty governance, racism and sexism in the academy, student progress, accreditation and many other issues. Above all, he is a political person. His intention is to drive his agenda home and he does not often fail. In all of this, he does not go out of his way to create enemies. The lesson in this for me is to keep my eye on the prize, know that I am going to lose some battles, fight passionately for what I believe, remain a realist, and stay in the battle.

Get Mad, Get Over It, and Proceed

When we were initiating the program, members of other departments felt that we were encroaching on their territory. During one meeting, we heard the chair of a department state that an MSW program was not needed on our campus because graduates of other departments were being hired in those positions and could do that work. I saw red. I noted that two of my esteemed senior social work faculty members listened politely, then proceeded to present chapter and verse the need for a new social work program. At no time did they blow up or tip their hand. I learned or have tried to learn this talent. I have to admit that I’m still working on it. I am, however, able to move on.

Non-Academics can Lead to Greater Academic Opportunity

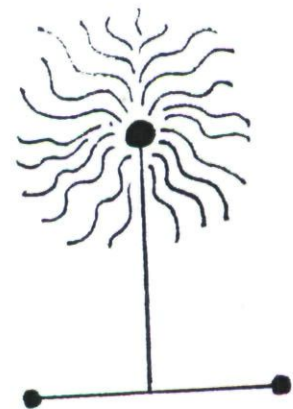
At the least, I have been a good soldier in the battle to create a solid, multicultural, urban social work program during fiscally challenging times. It is essential to develop

strong working relationships with your chair, dean, fellow faculty members in the department and the larger community. A willingness to dig in and engage in the good, the bad, and the ugly of administrative work is appreciated by those who work with you, and I have found that often if you are helpful, help will be returned to you. Those who work very hard and who bear many burdens are often rewarded. While burdensome, the effort of founding a program, developing curricula, and creating a field-university connection, can pay off.

There are other questions to be asked and answered. How do race and racism play out in the life of a junior faculty member of color? When should you dig in your heels and prepare to fight, versus when to “let it ride” and live to fight another day? How do we best protect ourselves?

I ask these questions often. I’m pleased to be a junior faculty member in a University where I can ask questions openly and share my concerns and challenges with colleagues about the three spheres of scholarship, administration, and student services.

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