

Kansas State University Libraries

New Prairie Press

Academic Chairpersons Conference
Proceedings

33rd Academic Chairpersons Conference,
Charleston, SC

Distributed Leadership: An Effective Practice when Practiced Effectively

Loretta A. Rieser-Danner Ph.D.

West Chester University of Pennsylvania, lrieser-danner@wcupa.edu

Jen Bacon Ph.D.

West Chester University of PA, jbacon@wcupa.edu

Lori Vermeulen Ph.D.

West Chester University of Pennsylvania, lvermeulen@wcupa.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://newprairiepress.org/accp>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

Rieser-Danner, Loretta A. Ph.D.; Bacon, Jen Ph.D.; and Vermeulen, Lori Ph.D. (2016). "Distributed Leadership: An Effective Practice when Practiced Effectively," *Academic Chairpersons Conference Proceedings*. <https://newprairiepress.org/accp/2016/Leadership/3>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at New Prairie Press. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Chairpersons Conference Proceedings by an authorized administrator of New Prairie Press. For more information, please contact cads@k-state.edu.

Distributed Leadership: An Effective Practice when Practiced Effectively

Buzz words like “distributed leadership” can have very little meaning to the average chairperson, given the all-too-frequent practice of distributing resources at the college level, but not beyond, and given the tendency for the distribution to feel like a one-directional flow from the President’s office down. Trickle-down-funding might be a more apt metaphor for what is experienced on many campuses.

At our mid-Atlantic regional comprehensive university, however, the principle of distributed leadership, that leadership is empowered at all levels in an organization so that decision-making occurs at the most relevant place, has been demonstrated as an effective and enduring principle. Under this paradigm, we have seen ideas and processes invented at the department level taken up by an entire college, and ideas and processes invented at the college level taken up by the entire university. Even when certain resources were drastically reduced across the university, the principle of distributed leadership was largely maintained, allowing individual colleges to determine the best approach to dealing with that reduction. Within our College of Arts & Sciences, individual departments were also provided with a set of parameters that allowed some flexibility in the implementation of reductions across programs, allowing departments to make decisions about how and where to make cuts.

In this “best practices” session, our presenters will describe the process of building transparent models for the distribution of resources, getting buy-in on those models from constituents, and implementing those models in different ways in departments that vary tremendously in terms of faculty size, student size, number of programs, and fiscal priorities.

The session will include a brief history of the situation that preceded this distributed approach, a discussion of the “roll out” and an update on changes to the models over time, but the majority of time will be spent discussing, with participants in the session, strategies for sharing data, strategies for building consensus on budget priorities, and strategies for turning budget priorities into working models that make budget decisions more transparent. The session will also allow time for participants to discuss their own ideas for developing analytic tools that help departments understand the allocation of resources at a college or university.

Chairs who are interested in data-driven policies, true shared governance where the values of a unit can be imprinted on resource distribution models, and effective reciprocal communication strategies will be particularly interested in this session. The perspective of a College of Arts & Sciences Dean and two department chairpersons who have used these models in fundamentally different ways in their respective departments will be shared.