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Proceedings

40th Academic Chairpersons Conference

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# Embracing the Change: Personal Experience in Academic Unit Transformation

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### Recommended Citation

Said, Hazem (2023). "Embracing the Change: Personal Experience in Academic Unit Transformation," *Academic Chairpersons Conference Proceedings*. <https://newprairiepress.org/accp/2023/operations/1>

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Society's expectation from higher education continues to shift imposing pressure on university administration, which in turns to transforms that pressure to the unit head. With limited resources and authority, the unit head is on the front lines with mounting pressure and expectations. In this presentation, I will share personal experience and case study of taking control of the situation and transforming an academic unit in a research one university from obscurity to prominence. I will share how my role evolved during the process from operation to leadership to executive and how it impacted the unit's ability to reposition itself over the years.

The presentation will cover embracing change, articulating the identity of the unit and discipline, understanding the bureaucracy, taking control of the budget levers, implementing a strategic plan, leading the faculty and staff, forming internal and external partnership, evolving the unit culture, innovating the unit's functional structure to allow scalability and growth, and following an iterative process that allows for maturation and evolution.

Over ten years, the unit transformed from a teaching unit to a teaching and research unit increasing the number of faculty and staff almost 6 times, growing the budget revenues more than 7 times, reaching a top ten in national ranking, increasing external funding from 0 to more than \$4m annually, and becoming home to some of the largest undergraduate and graduate programs on campus. When the pandemic hit, the strength of the unit enabled it to accelerate its growth and maturation.

At the end of this presentation, the participants would have explored the development of strategic plan, how to implement the strategic plan consistently, how to embrace change, how to use their "soft power", how to take control of the budget, how to find the right functional structure for their unit, how to evolve their role, and how to delegate responsibilities. Examples of strategic plan evolution, and unit functional structures will be provided. The presentation will take the form of a case study presentation and discussion starting with a quick overview of the various dimensions of change followed by presentation of challenges we faced along the way with discussion on how we addressed and overcome the challenges. Mistakes along the way will be discussed and how we learned from it and continued the journey.

The session will cover topics such as:

- Setting Goals: aligning with societal changes, generational changes, and digital transformation - developing strategic plan, identifying what matters, and incorporating training.
- Managing vertically and horizontally - managing upper administration, managing the staff, and managing the faculty.
- Financial Health: Taking ownership of the unit's financial health- handling salary issues - finding path to hire, rewarding your team within collective bargaining,
- Personal Development: giving oneself permission to change - personal priorities - personal efficiency.
- Forming a team: the unit's functional structure - the role of the staff - a one team - enabling the team to scale.
- Raising the bar: hiring, annual reviews, RPT for faculty, promotion for staff - rewards - training - instruction quality - student success