

Our Academic Journeys as New Female University Administrators

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One fundamental challenge facing higher education today is the development, attraction, and retention of extraordinary leaders (Rubin, 2004). Faculty leadership in academia is necessary to ensure “high-quality teaching, innovative curriculum, cutting-edge research, intellectual enrichment, student engagement, improved student outcomes, greater faculty citizenship, a more democratic environment, a campus more responsive to community needs, and other important outcomes” (Kezar et al., 2007, p. 21). However, there is little published research on the journeys of female academics who acquire leadership positions (Kleihauer, Stephens, & Hart, 2012). It is important for female leaders to share their challenges and tribulations since it can be “therapeutic, healing, and affirming” (Kawalilak & Groen, 2010, p. 6), especially for other women in pursuit of leadership roles in academia. We are two mid-career female academics who chose to take on new leadership roles and the purpose of this study is to explore our personal and professional journeys in these roles.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

An academic leader or administrator is an academic who has taken on a management role such as chair, head, assistant/associate/vice dean or dean of an academic unit (Franken, Penny, & Branson, 2015; Peterson, 2015). Academic managers are traditionally elected by members of the faculty (Winter, 2009) and the positions are often rotating and temporary (Peterson, 2015). Because academic administrators tend to re-enter their previous faculty roles at some point, there is often an accompanying expectation that they continue their programs of research (Peterson, 2015). The workload of today's academic administrators is considerable and has been associated with a significant amount of stress (Peterson, 2015).

Women are less likely to be in prominent academic leadership roles (Thanacoody et al., 2006) and the under-representation of women in decision-making positions has been highlighted as an area of specific importance in the higher education sector (European Commission, 2004). Understanding the experiences of successful female leaders in their journeys provides for effective learning, growth, and development for both the leaders

themselves and aspiring female academic administrators (Kleihauer, Stephens, & Hart, 2012; Madsen, 2010). Common factors that appear to contribute to successful female leaders include a strong family upbringing, spousal support, and excellent mentoring (Kleihauer, Stephens, & Hart, 2012). Using a resiliency framework (making positive adaptations in spite of serious threats or significant adversity to adaptation or development; Masten, 2001), we asked ourselves what factors in our lives made it possible for us to navigate our journeys into academic leadership.

Methodology

In this study we used a modified version of duoethnography (Sawyer & Norris, 2013) to explore our journeys as post-tenure females in university faculty administrative positions. Duoethnography draws from autoethnography (Ellis, 1999), and currere (Pinar, 1994), and is a reflective, conversational approach to conducting qualitative research (Ceglowski & Makovsky, 2012). Similar to autoethnography which legitimatizes the researcher's use of her own experience and emphasizes subjectivity (Ellis, 1999), the purpose of duoethnography is to understand how different people experience a phenomenon differently given their own past experiences (Sawyer & Norris, 2009). Like autoethnography where the goal is "to tell a story that readers can enter and feel a part of" (Ellis, 1999, p. 674), the collegial conversation between the researcher-participants allows for the integration of the individual stories (Sawyer & Norris, 2009). Although duoethnographies are typically written in script-form where the participant-researchers are the characters (Sawyer & Norris, 2009), we chose to use a set of guiding questions to stimulate our conversation and provide structure to our dialogic exchange. Following convention we used italics (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012) to present personal researcher-participant voice.

Context of Our Study

Historian and philosopher R. G. Collingwood (1939, 1994) argued that past action can only be understood when we utilize all of our knowledge about the situation in which the actions took place. Hence, we must understand the historical context within which our stories unfolded. Lynn began her term as Assistant Dean, Undergraduate Programs and Research on 1 July 2008 and her term ended on 30 June 2013. Laurie began her term as Associate Dean, Graduate Studies & Research on 1 July 2011 and continues in this role until at least until 30 June 2016. However, our overlapping journeys into our roles as university administrators began prior to our appointments and are related to unfolding of events within our College and the larger university.

Institutional Context

Our stories are set within a time of transition at the University of Saskatchewan and in the College of Education in particular. Beginning in 2003 and continuing into the present, the University of Saskatchewan set out to engage fully in integrated planning. Each College on campus was required to develop a 'College Plan' that meshed with the University Plan and strategic directions. This began a time of heightened emphasis on research, while

retaining the Teacher–Scholar model in which faculty are expected to employ their research and scholarly work in their teaching of undergraduate and graduate students. This research emphasis became even more intense in 2011 when the University of Saskatchewan became a member of the group of research-intensive universities known now as the U15 (see <http://u15.ca/>). Along with the emphasis on research, the institutional planning process promoted heightened emphases on Aboriginal Education and engagement, enhancing the student experience through innovative undergraduate and graduate programming, and community engagement and outreach.

College of Education Context

This time period also represented a time of transition(s) in the College of Education. A new Dean was brought into the College on July 1, 2003 with the directive to submit a College plan in the Fall of 2003.

A Systematic Program Review [SPR] of the undergraduate teacher education program was conducted in 2002 and the results were shared with faculty in February 2003. Some College Departments had also undergone graduate program reviews in 2003. Not only were programs examined during this time, resource deployment (human and financial) was also scrutinized. Results included a reduction in faculty teaching load from 6 to 5 one half course equivalents, rationalization of staff workloads, by examining what work needed doing and how, what work was done that was no longer required, and what work will need to be done in the future. [Note that similar examinations of graduate programs and campus wide human and financial resources were conducted in 2012 to 2013 in a process labeled ‘TransformUS’.]

Between 2002 and 2009, the demographics of the College of Education Faculty also changed dramatically. In 2002-2003, approximately 80% of the faculty in the College of Education were senior members (i.e., had served as a member of the College from 20 to 30 years), while 20% of the faculty were ‘newcomers’. By 2008/09 we had experienced a large number of faculty retirements, while many new faculty members had been hired. At that point in time, approximately 80% of faculty were ‘newcomers’, while 20% were senior members. With the campus wide TransformUs process, another demographic shift occurred with retirement packages offered to long serving faculty members. The College lost seven senior faculty members to this initiative in 2013-2014.

Between 2002 and 2011, the leadership team in the College also changed structure and complexion. At the beginning of this time period, the four person team was primarily composed of male leaders, including the Dean and two Assistant Deans, with a female in the role of Associate Dean, Graduate Studies. By 2011 the all-female leadership team was reduced to three: the Dean, the Associate Dean, Graduate Studies and Research and one Assistant Dean (this position was in process of transitioning to Associate Dean) related to undergraduate programming.

Impact of Larger Institutional Innovations

Based on the recommendations of the external reviewers who participated in the 2002 - 2003 appraisal of our undergraduate program, we began to work on a redesign of this program. As we worked toward innovation in our undergraduate programming, there were significant changes to planning processes undertaken by the University of Saskatchewan at large. Integrated planning processes were perceived in some quarters as one aspect of the 'corporatization' of the university and something of an intrusion into academic freedom. While these issues were not of major concern to the administrative team in the College of Education, it is possible that some faculty resistance to the efforts toward internal program innovation was related to their reactions to the new planning processes introduced by central administration of the university. Similarly, our College efforts to deepen our research culture including efforts to encourage inter-departmental collaborations involved a reorganization of staff which may have been seen by some faculty as a threat to the departmental structures desired by some faculty members.

It was also difficult to develop program coherence across disciplines in a departmentalized College. One of the innovative features of our undergrad program renewal efforts was the attempt to develop a cohesive and coherent program rather than a 'collection of courses'. However, to achieve coherence we needed to develop our program using an interdisciplinary rather than a multidisciplinary approach, which proved to be a difficult task in our departmentalized College. Asking our four departments, Educational Administration, Educational Foundations, Educational Psychology and Special Education, and Curriculum Studies (each holding particular perspectives and expertise) to develop an integrated coherent undergraduate program can be likened to asking the Departments of Economics, Political Science, Philosophy, and Psychology to collaboratively develop a single, integrated and coherent undergraduate program. Likewise, and in conjunction with broader institutional initiatives, efforts in the College toward development of interdepartmental research teams and efforts to collaborate across departments in offering Master's programs and the design of an interdepartmental PhD were met with some suspicion and anxiety.

Our Dialogic Exchange

Where were you in your academic career when you made the jump into academic administration?

Lynn. A year and a half after I was hired, the results of the SPR were shared with faculty and as a departmental representative on the Undergraduate Program Committee (UPC), I became intensely engaged in discussions around our response to the program review. When UPC decided to embark on a deep revision of the program, I became Chair of the Undergraduate Program Renewal Sub-Committee and over several years I worked alongside the Assistant Dean and other committee members to develop a series of actions plans that would take us toward a renewed undergraduate program. As part of our second College Plan, it was decided that a faculty member should be appointed to a position that would be responsible for

enhancing relationships and experiences of teacher candidates and alumni. A colleague was appointed as the first Director of Teacher Candidate & Alumni Affairs in 2006-2007 and when she took up an appointment at another university, I became the new Director, serving in this role until I became Assistant Dean in July 2008. While doing this work, I was, of course, also working toward tenure – which I received in 2008 - and promotion to Associate Professor, which I received in 2009. Unfortunately, with the way in which undergraduate program renewal was unfolding, I did not feel able to take time away for a sabbatical, which I could have applied for in 2008-2009.

Laurie. In my case, my first foray into academic administration came within four years of being hired (and prior to tenure) when I agreed to become the Graduate Chair of my Department. The opportunity to move into an Associate Dean's position came about for me during 2009-2010, two years after receiving tenure and the year after I received promotion to Associate Professor. I actually applied for the position and received it only to go on sabbatical for a year. I think it was helpful to have that sabbatical year immediately preceding my start as a new Associate Dean because it allowed me to set myself up for administration in a way: I tried to complete the supervision of a couple of students; I tried to set myself up with research studies that could carry me through my term without requiring me to seek additional external funding as a PI; and I developed a few manuscript ideas that I hoped to follow through on during my administrative term. So I felt like I was able to do both some house cleaning as well as house renovations prior to beginning my role. I officially started my administrative role as Associate Dean, Graduate Studies and Research in my College in 2011-2012.

How did you decide to go down this path?

Lynn. Although I had never envisioned myself as an administrator and I vocally resisted this idea - my commitment to undergraduate program renewal and graduate program invigoration prompted me to apply for the position when the incumbent indicated he was going to retire. I saw myself as an educator of educators. Based on my evolving understanding of 'best practices' in teacher education, I became deeply committed to the undergraduate program renewal which was unfolding in our College since release of the SPR data in 2003. I thought that in the role of Assistant Dean (Undergraduate Programs and Research) I would have the opportunity to work closely with the Undergraduate Program Committee, the Assistant Dean (Student Affairs, Partnerships and Research) and all other interested stakeholders toward achieving the goals for undergraduate program renewal as laid out in our College Plan. I knew that achieving our program renewal goals would involve collaborative work with undergraduate teacher candidates, College of Education faculty, administrators and staff, ATEP Directors, partner teachers and school divisions, other university colleges and units, as well as provincial stakeholders, including members of the Board of Teacher Education Certification. I believed that my capacities to work in collaborative relationships was a strength I could bring to the role.

Laurie. I too never had a strong ambition to become an academic administrator. I had been a fairly successful Graduate Chair in my department and had really enjoyed working with (supporting and mentoring) graduate students in my department for a period of about three years prior. In that role, I had the opportunity to help direct new graduate program development, I was involved in some scholarship envisioning, and had developed a working group to support graduate students applying for external funding. To me, the opportunity to move to Associate Dean (Graduate Studies and Research) came at a crossroads in my career, in that my term as graduate chair was ending. I thought that it would be fascinating to do what I had already been doing at a College level and to expand what I considered to be a fairly successful personal research journey thus far (including success as a PI/co-PI of both SSHRC and CIHR) to something greater. I looked forward to opportunities to mentor others on their academic research journeys. In hindsight, although I never wanted to be an academic administrator explicitly, I had a record of taking on leadership roles.

What skills and abilities did you think you were bringing to the position?

Lynn. I figured my work experience especially as Chair of the Undergraduate Program Renewal Sub-Committee, as member of the Undergraduate Program Committee, and as an instructor who worked collaboratively with faculty and teachers on a variety of integrated course/field experience teaching and research projects had helped me hone skills and capacities which enhanced my ability to be of service as Assistant Dean. These skills and capacities include: listening, negotiating, relationship building, risk-taking, conceptualizing, actualizing, budgeting, perseverance and enthusiasm.

Laurie. I thought that I had developed (perhaps inadvertently) a set of skills and experiences that would serve me well in the role including: being a former graduate chair, experience with the College of Graduate Studies and Research, membership on a variety of College and University committees, experience adjudicating post-doctoral fellow awards for SSHRC, my research interests in best practices in Graduate Education, my experiences applying for external research funding from a variety of sources, and experience teaching the graduate research classes that I would ultimately be responsible for coordinating...

Unlike teaching (no required teaching duties associated with either of the roles), there was an expectation that personal programs of research continue. How did you envision the administrative role would affect your personal program of research?

Lynn. I figured that in the role of Assistant Dean (Undergraduate Programs and Research) I would have the opportunity to further develop and enlarge my research investigations into the efficacy of various approaches in teacher education. With the expectation that the Assistant Dean (Undergraduate Programs and Research) be involved in “systematic data collection” and the “fostering of research projects”, I figured that I could enrich my research program and that I could further contribute

to scholarly understandings about the shape and direction of undergraduate program renewal specifically, and teacher education, in general.

Laurie. As I said earlier, I figured that there would be a negative impact on my personal research in that I didn't think I would have the time or energy to be the PI of any large externally funded grants while in this role. I tried to be proactive and became involved in a number of research opportunities at the co-applicant level instead and continued to seek those opportunities throughout my role. However, on more than one occasion, my passion for research has gotten the best of me and I have applied for a couple of externally funded research grants as the PI during my time as Associate Dean. Unfortunately (or fortunately?), I have been close but not successful... One piece I didn't expect was that I frequently became very involved in the development of funding applications as a co-applicant and I ended up much more involved than many other co-applicants – and some of these applications have been successful. Because of my experiences leading such projects as a PI, I think it was natural for me to become really involved in the application but I am beginning to feel a bit burnt out.

As a new administrator, what would you have liked to know prior to entering the role of Assistant or Associate Dean?

Lynn. In my life before the academy I had some experience with budgeting and 'people' management, so I knew something about these aspects of my role. I would have liked to have known more about university governance structures. How does central administration work and where are the supports for our role (and where are they not?)? I also would have liked to know more about strategies for dealing with difficult people – conflict resolution approaches. While I figured I was a pretty good 'negotiator', I really didn't know enough about how to work with people who were resistant to change.

Laurie. I would have liked to know more about working effectively with an administrative support person. As a faculty member I was not used to having direct support and I found it difficult to determine how best to work with someone in that way... I hadn't been trained in supervising employees and it took me some time to figure that all out (I am probably still trying to figure that out)! I also wish that someone would have told me how much of my life would be spent in meetings. Well – actually, I think someone did tell me but I didn't really believe the volume or how the meetings would dictate every inch of your life. Four years in and I still have difficulty finding the time to do the work required of the meetings and have not yet found the perfect way to extricate myself from meetings where my presence is requested but not entirely mandatory. The work needs to get done regardless and although I learn something from every meeting I attend, I find myself sometimes wishing I could just be at my desk working instead and feeling resentful that it isn't the case.

What was your biggest surprise as you began your new role?

Lynn. Having witnessed the difficulties experienced by the incumbent in the role of Assistant Dean, I wasn't naïve enough to believe that I would be able to successfully achieve the program renewal goals we had laid out without solid support. I knew that the majority of faculty would need to be in favour of whatever new program we designed. I remember promising, during my public presentation (part of the application process for the job of Assistant Dean) that I would work my 'butt off' over the next five years in hope of bringing in a renewed program, but that it would take the commitment of an entire team to achieve this goal. What surprised me, though was how some faculty used academic bully techniques to get what they want rather than reasoned discussion – some willing to be the loudest talker, insisting that certain process or procedures be using despite these not being required – their ignoring of reasoned arguments put forward by others – asking for evidence, but not providing any themselves – those who are willing to say or do almost anything – be rude, yell, insist on something being true without evidence – and who get their way because others do not want to be confrontational.

Laurie. Probably my degree of naiveté up to this point. I too was struck by how differently some colleagues would treat individuals in “upper administration”. But I think I was most surprised by how political the position was. As a faculty member, I was able to pick and choose what drama I would allow myself to be drawn into whereas in my role of Associate Dean I was quickly “baptized” into this new world I hadn't even realized existed – it was like a whole other level – with leaders and opposition leaders, vocal minorities, pawns, alliances... for the first few months in my role, I felt like I was on some academic survivor game show. As I near the end of my term as Associate Dean, I have realized that the ability an administrator has to see the forest rather than just the trees that most faculty see in their roles is a huge advantage; however, much like the movie *The Matrix*, once you have been in this administrative role, you can't go back to being ignorant about the politics that surrounds you.

How did you navigate your position? What were/are some of your challenges?

Lynn. In teacher education there is a long history of deeply held, and deeply varying beliefs about what educators need to know and be able to do - these different beliefs lead to deep divisions regarding what teacher education should look like at our institution. I found it challenging to engage all faculty in the decision-making process and difficult to identify multiple pathways for engagement. Rather than engaging in conversations to express beliefs and try to work through differences, some faculty did not respond to the repeated invitations to participate in the ongoing discussions and negotiations and then criticised ideas that were co-constructed by colleagues, arguing that decisions were coming from the top down. Other people were apathetic or were too ready to say – ‘been there, tried that’ – some are engaged, but become disengaged when resistance increases. I was also challenged by individuals who were unwilling to live by the democratic

decisions made by the majority of faculty. Instead, these individuals created the alliances Laurie spoke of earlier, and strategized a way to keep chipping away at and undermine the work of the administrators.

Laurie. I think one of my biggest challenges has been the turn-over in the administrative team I have experienced during my term as Associate Dean. To date, I have experienced three different Deans and three different Assistant/Associate Deans Undergraduate. It has been challenging to figure out how to work best with each of these different individuals. With each change there has been a shifting of priorities accompanied by changes in how the administrative team operates. For example, sometimes the team aspect has had particular emphasis while other times I have worked quite independently... And who is considered a member of the team also changes. I wonder sometimes how much more I would have liked my position had there been more consistency in those I worked for and with.

Lynn. There also appears to be a fairly strong ‘Us versus Them’ culture at our institution. What I mean is, the ‘us’ equals faculty members and unionized staff members while ‘them’ equals anyone in administration above the level of Department Head. I specifically recall a colleague indicating that she was giving much thought to become Assistant Dean, Student Affairs and Partnerships, because she didn’t want to become one of ‘them’. Furthermore, in hindsight, there were several organizational structures (including policies and procedures) that impeded or encumbered collaboration and collegiality. It is surprising to think of the power these structures possess and to realize that the structures can actually shape ways of thinking. For example, the departmental structures can shape faculty identities and loyalties to the point where individuals see themselves as members of a particular department rather than as a member of the larger educational/research community. The structures can contribute to or deepen divisions that already exist, arising out of differences in beliefs about what educators need to know and be able to do.

Laurie. Another challenge I have experienced is that my accountabilities mostly involve helping others to get things done – I have found it difficult at times to directly determine how effective I have been in my role. As a faculty member you can always look at your teaching evaluations or the number of grants received or manuscripts submitted for some evidence of your productivity and success. Now part of my role is enhancing the research culture of my College – how do I determine how effective I have been at that? I delegate a lot of work, and as a team, a lot has been accomplished. But who can take credit for that? Yes, these things happened under my watch but does that mean I can take credit for that?

How did you navigate your position? What contributed to your success (and how did you define success in your role)?

Lynn. In my role I defined success as: development of a revised program and garnering the associated approvals – team building – deepening of good relationships with partners and staff – building a culture of collaboration –

enhancing research in teacher education. When the team and I were successful, I think it was for some of the following reasons: First, I had a terrific administrative mentor and an administrative partner (Dean & Associate Dean) with whom I could share issues and concerns, could bounce ideas around with, and do some prediction testing and planning. Second, I made it a priority and thus made numerous attempts over time to engage as many faculty members, teacher candidates, and multiple partners in discussions, planning and design of a renewed program. Third, I demonstrated respect for the knowledge and skills that everyone brings to the table – from faculty to Programs Office and School Division personnel, to teacher candidates, to in-service teachers and seconded teachers and the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation. My leadership style involved openness and responsiveness in communication – including face-to-face meetings, telephone conversations, newsletters, email, etc. I also tried to keep the end (the big goal/ big picture) in mind – that is, enhancing the teacher candidate learning experience, and in our case, ultimately, enhancing the learning experiences of the students (children, youth and/or adults) with whom our teacher candidates will work. Lastly, I networked and engaged with others who do research in teacher education from across our College but also nationally and internationally.

Laurie. I think I was very lucky in that I too experienced a very strong mentor and early on I was also to identify other individuals from other Colleges in similar positions with whom I felt comfortable sharing some of my challenges. I was able to share ideas and get some feedback when things felt in danger of going off the rails. I think I was also fortunate that in the end I am a very good fit for the position I have been doing. For example, my job really has revolved around helping others, whether it is faculty research or graduate students, which ties nicely to my leadership style, which is very service oriented. I have avoided, for the most part, a large target on my back, but instead worked to develop supports and resources for my colleagues – opportunities for internal research funding with transparent and fair adjudication processes, supports for faculty manuscript writing while at the same time supporting graduate students through developing funding opportunities. For the most part, I have been able to develop a shared collaborative vision and utilize a team approach in this role.

What advice would you give to other faculty members who are considering taking on an administrative role?

Lynn. I think you need to learn how to take the broad view and to see the big picture. As Laurie said earlier, it is difficult as a faculty member to have the broad view but it is really necessary as an administrator. I also think it is important to understand how finances influence possibilities. The best ideas in the world may not be possible because they cost too much and not everything can be done on a shoestring budget. It is important to maintain a program of research because one day you may not be in the administrative role anymore. I found it helpful to plan research that is connected to the administrative work you are doing. And be

respectful of everyone's knowledge and skills. Communicate, communicate, communicate. And if at all possible, build or join a team.

Laurie. I think it is important to know and then to consider whom you will be working with. For me the personal and professional relationships are key. I truly enjoy being part of a team and the creative energy that comes from working together and creating something bigger than oneself; but to be an effective team, to come up with innovative ideas, you need to be able to trust your teammates and feel respected and know that you play an important role. I also think you need to be sure you are comfortable with the accountabilities in the position. You have to be willing to work hard to get those things done and if you personally see the accountabilities as being important, it will be easier to put in the efforts required to be successful. I think a role in academic administration takes a lot out of a person – you give up a lot – work more hours, lose out on family time, forced to manage increased stress – it has to be worth it in the end and if you end up on a team or even all alone, you will need to ask yourself are all the things you gave up worth it?

What lessons did you learn that would help others in similar circumstances? Would you “do it” again?

Lynn. You need to be able to let go because in the end, you cannot control anyone or anything but yourself or how you will act react in different situations. You also need to define success for yourself and to resist letting others define it for you. You also have to realize that you cannot lead if no one is willing to follow. It was important for me to be part of a team and I quickly realized that making change in an institution requires a team.

Laurie. I am still unsure if I want to seek renewal of my term for another 5 years; although my indecision is also fed by personal circumstances. I think time will tell though of the impact my decision to go into academic administration has had – I do believe that taking on this role has held me back a bit with respect to my personal program of research – on the other hand, I know I have gained a lot from these experiences as well.

Lynn. I also realized that there are some things that you can do, but that other things lie in the hands of others, so do not sweat that which does not lie between your hands – as the old saying goes: “May the universe grant you the serenity to accept the things you cannot change, the courage to change the things you can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Discussion

As new academic administrators, we could be considered akin to second-career academics (Barrett & Brown, 2014) because academic administration and leadership was not our original professional goal. Similar to the second-career academics described in a study by the Memorial University Faculty Writing Group (Young et al., n.d.), our career

path to academic administration was “somewhat accidental” (p. 2) and “definitely unexpected” (p. 3). We were also comparable to the academic managers described by Peterson (2015) in that we too had “never aspired to become a manager” (p. 8). Like the female participants in the Memorial University Faculty Writing Group (Young et al., n.d.) who entered academia because of a passion for their subject area, we ventured into academic administration because of a passion for teacher education and curriculum (Lynn) or a passion for research and mentorship of new faculty and graduate students (Laurie).

Like previous research (Kleihauer, Stephens, & Hart, 2012; Young et al., n.d.), supportive colleagues and mentors also recognized our gifts and talents and encouraged us to pursue academic leadership. The support and encouragement made it easier to embark on the leadership journey. Although we may have obtained and then survived our respective administrative terms, without the support of colleagues and mentors we certainly would not have thrived without their support. We believe mentorship is essential at all levels of the academy and is especially important for female academics. As stated by Kezar et al. (2007), “the value of role models and mentors cannot be underestimated” (p. 17).

Neither of us received any formal preparation or training prior to stepping into our roles as academic leaders but rather we relied on our previous related experiences. However, not all faculty will have developed a portfolio of leadership experiences because taking on leadership roles prior to being awarded tenure could be at “great peril” (Kezar et al., 2007). Lack of formal training for academic administration is not uncommon. Research suggests universities tend to offer few effective formal opportunities for middle leaders (Franken, Penny, & Branson, 2015), causing new middle leaders in higher education to feel unprepared for their positions (Inman, 2009). Although our institution held some internal professional development events, once ensconced in our roles, we also found it very helpful to participate in a week long university higher administration course put on by the Center for Higher Education Research and Development of the University of Manitoba (<http://umanitoba.ca/centres/cherd/programs/annual/umc.html>).

For us, the role of academic administrator and leader has been both challenging and rewarding. Establishing curricular change is not easy - department structures can lead change and innovation but can also be dysfunctional due to personal and territorial issues (Kezar et al., 2007). The leadership roles we have played have provided us with a view or perspective of the academy that is inaccessible to those outside management and which we believe will prove invaluable over the course of our careers wherever we journey. In the words of a new academic administrator, upon entering academic leadership your “world just completely expands... it shifts you into a completely different perspective” (Franken, Penny, & Branson, 2015, p. 10). Furthermore, the personal relationships we have developed and fostered as part of our leadership journeys will ultimately “make the most difference to change” (Kezar et al., 2007, p.21).

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