

LEARNING TO LEAD



Hugh Scott

Some of OU's top professors listen to master executive coach Leo Presley at the first Faculty Leadership Academy.

Being a university professor might lend itself to the idea that leaders are in every classroom, but that's not necessarily the case.

Professors are experts in their specific academic fields, but being a leader means more than performing research, giving lectures or preparing lessons, says Kelvin Droegemeier, OU vice president for research and a Regent's Professor of Meteorology. Rather, it's about understanding challenges, working with others to craft solutions when obvious pathways do not exist, and empowering others to drive positive change.

To help faculty cultivate those skills, Droegemeier initiated OU's Faculty Leadership Academy, which kicked off in September and concludes this May.

Forty-five faculty members were chosen from a university-wide pool for the inaugural class of Academy Fellows. The group represents a wide range of disciplines, perspectives and positions that have been exposed to leadership concepts, relationship building and problem solving when there is no apparent solution.

to submit three leadership challenges from their professional or personal lives. Their submissions fell into nine general categories, including concern for other people, concern about self and skills, changes in authority, personnel, roles and responsibilities, and family and personal concerns.

In a general sense, the academy teaches OU faculty to see and think about the bigger picture. And in creating the academy, Droegemeier was careful to avoid the misconception that developing one's leadership skills is motivated mostly by the desire for advancement. He noted that although the academy would certainly be useful in that regard, its fundamental purpose is to help people understand the deeper tenets of how to lead.

"I believe some of our faculty tend to be overly cautious about doing bold, creative and big things because they don't feel equipped to address the challenges they know they will confront," Droegemeier says.

That might include casting a vision, bringing clarity to an issue that involves competing views and knowing how to empower others to work together toward a common goal, he says. Due to faculty members' wide variety of public and personal

OU faculty are going back to school to master a special skill set with applications far beyond the classroom.

PHOTOS BY HUGH SCOTT

BY TIM FARLEY

"Faculty members have enormous intellectual capabilities, but not always sufficient leadership skills to undertake activities that involve people with very different views, or to develop relationships and partnerships with different kinds of institutions and in different situations," Droegemeier says.

He used 9/11 and the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor as extreme leadership challenges. "All of a sudden you are called upon to deal with issues that have no obvious technical solution or quick fix."

In all likelihood, OU faculty members won't be confronted with such extreme situations, but they still require the ability to lead in a variety of contexts, from small groups to larger special projects at the university or elsewhere.

"Some of the typical leadership challenges aren't really leadership challenges at all, but involve the effective use of management principles. One of the important contributions of the academy is that it's helping faculty see the difference between leadership and management," Droegemeier says.

Prior to the start of the academy, each professor was asked

interests, leadership outside the university environment can be just as important as the work performed on campus.

"Our faculty feels passionate about a lot of issues, ranging from education and taxation to clean water, energy and public safety," Droegemeier says. "The academy is helping them see themselves and any possible role they might play, rather than someone simply jumping in without first looking at their capabilities. The academy is teaching faculty about themselves, first and foremost, about how to lead with their specific strengths, and how to leverage their influence and knowledge of others."

The Faculty Leadership Academy requires professors to spend six hours one Saturday each month developing and honing skills they can use at the university or in community-related affairs.

Leo Presley, a certified master executive coach and principal at Presley & Associates, serves as the primary facilitator for the leadership course. He emphasizes that leadership is

not synonymous with an official title such as dean, provost or university president.

“You don’t have to be up on the hierarchy to have an impact. We call it ‘leading with an issue,’ an issue you are passionate about. Oftentimes, an individual will sit back and allow leaders to make decisions. Instead, those same individuals can grab hold of that issue and run with it. They should have the awareness that they can run with their passion, but also understand the dynamics of the power and people involved,” he says.

In addition to Presley, those facilitating sessions include Cindy Rosenthal, mayor of Norman and OU professor of political science; Kyle Harper, OU senior vice president and provost; Ken Parker, president and CEO of NextThought; Mike Stice, dean of the OU College of Earth and Energy; Dr. Tom Boyd, OU professor emeritus of philosophy; and Ruth Okediji, former OU law professor now at the University of Minnesota.

Dröegemeier referenced problems that might occur within an academic department that often are left to the chairperson or director to solve.



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OU Assistant Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry Adam Duerfeldt and Sarah Tracy, director of OU’s Medical Humanities Program, were among 45 faculty members who spent eight months learning the deeper tenets of leadership.

Mother Teresa, led to tremendous and sustained change.”

OU Associate Professor Kit Johnson is participating in the academy because of potential leadership roles at the College of Law.

“We rotate through leadership positions and even though I’m years from that, it’s something I see as coming down the pike. I thought I would go through this training and be ready when the time comes,” she says.

“This is much more than learning personal leadership skills. This is an opportunity to understand who we are as a university.”

“Now, I believe our faculty sees that leading with informal authority can be quite powerful and effective,” he says. “Sometimes, titles help, but I can cite many cases in society where a lofty title occupied by a horrible leader ended in disaster. Likewise, one can cite lots of cases where someone with no title or authority at all, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and

Meanwhile, Justin Reedy, an assistant professor of communications and research associate at the OU Center for Risk and Crisis Management, believes a “big part” of the teaching process is to be a mentor or leader to undergraduate and graduate students.

“We’re learning more about ways to do that better, whether



Helping to create OU's inaugural Faculty Leadership Academy were Kelvin Droegemeier, vice president for research and Regents Professor of Meteorology, and Alicia Knoedler, executive associate vice president for research.

it's in the classroom, running research projects or contributing to the governance of the university," he says.

Most faculty members in the leadership academy are learning through self-assessment, which causes them to think about themselves in different ways, Reedy says.

"You reflect on yourself and how you're perceived by others," he adds. "When you go into a meeting or a classroom now, you are more aware of what you're doing. This academy makes you think about what makes a good leader. What are your guiding principles? What are leadership ethics?"

Sarah Tracy, director of OU's Medical Humanities Program and associate professor in the Honors College, says she has never had formal leadership training. She is searching for strategies that will allow her to grow professionally and personally.

"I didn't come into this with specific goals, although I did want to receive some formal instruction in mentoring students and colleagues," she says. "I'm learning how to lead with formal and informal authority."

Cameron Siler, assistant professor of biology and curator of herpetology at the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History, says the academy is an opportunity to become exposed to different leadership skill sets and "think in an organizational manner," while Katerina Tsetsura, associate professor and director

of graduate studies in the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communications, is particularly interested in receiving practical advice in dealing with tricky situations.

"I want to bring questions I'm dealing with and get input as to how to solve them," she says. "This is much more than learning personal leadership skills. This is an opportunity to understand who we are as a university."

Cultivating leadership skills university-wide is the academy's primary mission, Droegemeier says. He is unaware of a similar activity at another university, and has been contacted by many institutions who wish to adopt the OU model. He also notes that the OU academy is more than a program; it's a framework to facilitate multiple activities involving leadership, such as external speakers and leadership programs for graduate and undergraduate students.

"I hope the faculty fellows will understand themselves better, be willing to take on bigger projects and think bigger, be able and willing to lead in the university and also in their community," he says.

The academy is funded at no cost to the taxpayers of Oklahoma, and more information can be found at <http://www.ou.edu/fla>.

Tim Farley is a freelance writer living in Oklahoma City.