

AC 2009-505: LIFE AFTER TENURE: LEADERSHIP ROLES IN ACADEMIA

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Dr. Priscilla Nelson. Dr. Nelson is Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering and International Program Director, and former Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. Before NJIT, she held senior staff and executive appointments at the National Science Foundation for 11 years, and was Professor at The University of Texas at Austin for 13 years. She may be reached via e-mail at pnelson@njit.edu.

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Cheryl B. Schrader is Dean of the College of Engineering and Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Boise State University. Dean Schrader has an extensive record of publications and sponsored research in the systems, control and engineering education fields. Recent recognition related to this work includes the 2005 Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Engineering and Mathematics Mentoring from the White House and the 2008 IEEE Education Society Hewlett-Packard/Harriett B. Rigas Award. Dean Schrader received her B.S. in Electrical Engineering from Valparaiso University, and her M.S. in Electrical Engineering and Ph.D. in Systems and Control, both from University of Notre Dame.

Patricia Davies, Purdue University

Dr. Patricia Davies. Dr. Davies currently serves as a professor in the School of Mechanical Engineering at Purdue University and director of the Ray W. Herrick Laboratories. She joined the faculty at Purdue in 1987. She may be reached at daviesp@ecn.purdue.edu.

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Life After Tenure: Leadership Roles in Academia

Abstract

This is a panel presentation and is part of the joint ASEE-WIED coordination with the Women in Engineering ProActive Network (WEPAN) in making Wednesday of the ASEE general meeting overlap with the first day of the WEPAN annual conference. The leadership of WEPAN and ASEE-WIED have coordinated to plan a day of activities that will benefit members of both organizations and help to introduce members of each organization to each other and to both organizations. Following the panelist's presentations, there will be time for questions from the audience to the panel.

Introduction

Although the appointment of women as deans and academic leaders in engineering is becoming more commonplace, women are still underrepresented in academic leadership positions. A panel of women who have successfully moved into leadership positions has been assembled to share their experiences in moving into leadership roles in academia. They hope to provide guidance to other women faculty on how to successfully prepare themselves for leadership positions, move into these positions, and then be successful once they have.

Panelist Introductions

Dr. Priscilla Nelson is currently serving as director of international programs, having stepped down from her position as provost and senior vice president for academic affairs at the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) at the end of 2008. Priscilla has degrees in geology and structural engineering and a PhD in geotechnical engineering. She began her faculty career at the University of Texas at Austin where she advanced through the ranks from assistant to full professor. Priscilla spent 11 years at NSF serving in many roles before assuming her current tenured faculty position at NJIT.

Dr. Cheryl Schrader is currently dean of engineering at Boise State University where she has been since 2003. Cheryl's undergraduate degree is in electrical engineering with an MS and PhD in control systems. She has held positions at McDonnell Douglas Astronautics Company, Valparaiso University, Rice University and Chimera Research. She served as associate dean for graduate studies and research at the University of Texas at San Antonio before moving to Boise State to become dean. Two awards of which Cheryl is most proud are the 2005 Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring and the 2008 IEEE Education Society Hewlett-Packard/Harriett B. Rigas Award.

Dr. Patricia Davies currently serves as a professor in the School of Mechanical Engineering at Purdue University and director of the Ray W. Herrick Laboratories. Patricia received her BS degree in mathematics and MS and PhD degrees from the Institute of Sound and Vibration Research at Southampton, U.K. She came to Purdue in 1987 as a visiting professor after

completing a post doc at Southampton. She was promoted to the rank of Full Professor in 2002 and became Director of the Ray W. Herrick Laboratories in the spring of 2005.

Dr. Kim Roddis is currently a professor and chair of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at George Washington University. She has BS, MS and PhD degrees in civil engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After several years in industry, Kim entered academia at the University of Kansas where she was the first woman to achieve tenure in the school of engineering. She moved to George Washington in 2004 to assume her current position.

How Panelists Got Their Leadership Positions

Whether the panelists planned to enter leadership positions at some point in their career or they were nominated for a position that they had not considered, several items are common to all of the panelists. All had taken advantage of opportunities within their departments or research centers to assume informal leadership positions. Many also cited the opportunities within their professional societies that helped them to develop and demonstrate leadership skills. The other important benefit cited by panelists in assuming these professional roles was the important networks that they developed inside and outside of these societies. Often the nationwide contacts that were developed in service to their professional society led to positions that they had not considered and would not have known about had they not participated in these activities. Some additional comments from each panelist are included below.

Priscilla: A key for advancement is connections made through a growing network – people are always being asked to identify someone who might be good for a certain position or opportunity. My connections sometimes give out my name, and that is generally good. There is nothing like being nominated, and that's how I moved into several of my positions. I am often asked for ideas by a friend, colleague, or a headhunter organization and I always follow through with names and ideas for them. They are then more likely to call on me for other positions that I might be interested in myself. So – I am a contributor and I keep in touch.

Cheryl: The key in my career progression was providing leadership for professional societies in a number of ways such as organizing conferences, chairing committees, serving on editorial and governing boards, and eventually being elected as president of a 9,000 member international organization. This was a path open to me where I could demonstrate my leadership abilities, and which then opened other doors for me in more traditional leadership roles at my own institution and elsewhere.

Patricia: I have been a faculty member doing research at the laboratories for many years. The laboratory director has always been selected from the faculty working at the laboratory. When the position became available, I was one of the candidates having had enough experience at the laboratories to be considered.

Kim: I began by "leading from the ranks", that is to say, I did not hold administrative position, but was frequently put in important service roles and often influenced decision making. It became clear that, due to circumstances beyond my control, no advancement path was open to

me at my home institution. I began looking outside and quickly found a suitable department chair position, where I am thriving.

How Faculty Can Position Themselves for Moves into Leadership

In addition to the development of their leadership skills and networking with others in their professional societies, the panelists also shared some advice for faculty wishing to move into academic leadership positions. First, the panelists recommend that faculty find an opportunity to develop their leadership skills. This can be through professional development activities or through seeking out opportunities such as leading large multi-disciplinary research projects or chairing institutional committees. In all of these opportunities, the panelists recommended that faculty do their homework and build a reputation of being reliable and fair. Faculty should express their own opinions but be open to others' opinions as well. In most leadership positions in academia there will be some level of responsibility for fund raising and money management. The panelists recommended that faculty could make themselves attractive candidates for these positions by learning about the financial policies and procedures at their institutions. Faculty should not be shy about making their successes known to others in their organizations so that when leadership opportunities become available they are thought about for these positions.

Priscilla: Don't complain. Be known as a positive person. Get known as someone who is a self-starter, easy to work with, that people like to work with (and that doesn't mean someone who doesn't have opinions and priorities).

Cheryl: To climb to the position of college dean requires seeking out opportunities for experiences that will not only help make you a viable candidate but will also allow you to juggle myriad responsibilities and enjoy the deanship when you attain it. Do not expect that such experiences will be provided to you, but rather you may need to initiate them. These may require volunteering for leadership positions inside or outside of the university, attending leadership or skills workshops, and working with a mentor who will share her or his own experience and provide you with advice and encouragement.

Patricia: Take on leadership roles when the opportunity occurs. Serve on committees so that other faculty can see how you think, that you have ideas and have some creativity, that you are hard working and you do your homework, that you contribute, that you try to be fair, that you do not let personal likes and dislikes affect your decisions, that you are not afraid to express an opinion even when that opinion may not be welcome to people perceived as being more powerful than you are, that you are willing to compromise and work through problems to come up with solutions.

Kim: Invest in yourself by participating in leadership development activities. The coin of such investment is more often time than money. Develop your professional network beyond your department and institution.

How Faculty Can Be Successful in Leadership Positions

The panelists had many recommendations for being successful in leadership positions. One recommendation that all panelists made revolved around taking time for yourself and maintaining your own physical and mental health. They also commented on the importance of getting to know the faculty and staff in the organization and being able to effectively build a team. An administrator's job is to bring success to their entire unit so administrators should take great pride in the accomplishments of all members of their team. Take time to praise the successes of others and let others know their contributions are valued. Learn the policies and procedures of the institution, particularly the financial and personnel policies.

Priscilla: Figure out where you get your energy from. Leadership positions often are leadership drains as people look to you for energy and ideas. You have to figure out how you restore your energies and creativity and make sure that you visit that restorative place often enough. A key for me is my sense of humor – when I lose that or feel thin-skinned – I am always low on energy and need to recharge.

Cheryl: Appreciate that you are part of a larger leadership team and work together with other leaders in the university and community for the common good. Know about the institution and help make connections for others. Always represent your university in a favorable light.

Patricia: Get to know the people in power. Observe their management styles, what you perceive are their strengths and their weaknesses. Take opportunities to work with them so you can see what is going on behind the scenes.

Kim: Manage money. Serve as treasurer or president for an organization. Fund raise for your alma mater. Chair a conference.

Conclusions

The panel will discuss each of these areas in more detail in the panel presentation as well as other suggestions that they have for successfully obtaining leadership positions and being successful in these positions once they have been obtained. In addition, there will be an opportunity for the audience to ask questions of the panelists.