



## Movin' on Up: Strategies for Career Development

Beth Wuest, Texas State University, San Marcos, TX, USA  
Sharon Welkey, University of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, TX, USA

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Some faculty make the leap into administration for the reasons their colleagues would most respect. Just as they were prompted to become educators to make a difference for the better, so they applied for administrative positions thinking they could make a difference (Mahon, R. 2008). In reality, few academics get a Ph.D. looking to go into administration (Munger, 2010). Beginning textile, apparel and merchandising faculty members embarking on careers in higher education strive to meet teaching, research and service expectations for promotion and tenure while working to achieve personal goals. Mid-career faculty members continue to excel in teaching, research and service activities to realize personal and professional accomplishments, that include promotion and awards, and to possibly gain entrée into administrative roles. At some point, many faculty members ask themselves whether they want to continue as faculty in their department or move to an administrative role (Barrett & Cullinan, 2013). However, universities are not intentional or coherent in training administrators (Munger, 2010). This concept presentation by seasoned administrators encourages textile, apparel and merchandising faculty members to consider administrative positions in higher education by addressing strategies to meet personal and professional goals, exploring administrative career options, and excelling in administrative roles.

Whether the ultimate goal is tenure and promotion as a faculty member, or an advanced administration position, career development starts with thoughtful planning. First steps include consideration of short and long-term goals, and other career milestones. The goals, milestones, and timing of the desired career path must be clearly outlined, yet retain sufficient flexibility to accommodate changes in focus, possible mishaps, and allow for new opportunities that arise. Subsequent steps include frequent assessment of the accomplishments and shortcomings, and modification of the overall plan. For example, attainment of milestones may commence at a faster or slower rate than expected which suggests an adjustment to the timeline; a need for additional preparation, study, or experience; and a desired change in goals/direction.

Enlisting a team of mentors is also an important step in career development. Mentors provide invaluable insight to the career path by offering suggestions in career plan development, provide candid feedback on the progress in attaining goals, and make insights to the strengths and shortcomings of the faculty member. Multiple mentors should be considered because they represent various aspects of the career, field of study, and types of organizational structure as well as a range of perspectives.

Through thoughtful self-assessment of accomplishments and feedback from mentors, faculty members gain a better understanding of their strengths and can more aptly refine their career paths. Inherent strengths and talents are vital to career satisfaction whereas knowledge, skills and experience, also critical to career success, can more readily be developed (Rath, 2007).

Likewise, administrators also need an awareness of their strengths and the strengths of those around them to provide effective leadership (Rath & Conchie, 2008).

Literature frequently describes the need for students to graduate with “transferrable skills” to begin their careers and to adapt to the changing workplace. However, little is noted regarding the “transferrable skills” of faculty members. By taking inventory of “transferrable skills,” the faculty member can parlay these assets to excel in administrative positions. For example, critical thinking is desirable when examining issues from multiple perspectives; quantitative and qualitative analysis is useful in making informed decisions; creative problem solving is necessary for generating new policies and procedures; oral and written communication are essential for relaying expectations and accomplishments; and teamwork and leadership are needed when inspiring colleagues. Other skills and knowledge such as the ability to organize projects, provide constructive feedback, manage budgets, and evaluate processes contribute to the faculty member’s qualifications and potential success in administrative roles.

Some considerations to make when assessing administrative options include: Is the timing right for a move into administration? Is a lateral job change needed to eventually make a vertical job change? Can the desired role be achieved at the existing institution or is a change in location better? What additional experience or knowledge will be needed before qualifying for the desired position? How will this change affect other personal goals? How will this move impact the work/life balance?

A variety of administrative roles exists in higher education, and each require a different skill set. Career potential and satisfaction can be realized through thoughtful career planning, assessment of strengths, and an analysis of opportunities. Mentoring from experienced administrators helps to guide the transition to advanced career opportunities. A thorough assessment of strengths and skills enables a faculty member to consider new career options.

A greater representation of textile, apparel and merchandising faculty members in administrative positions enhances the field as a whole. The skills developed, knowledge acquired and experience gained by many of these faculty can easily transition into a variety of administrative levels and positions. Some may recognize their greatest fulfillment as a continuing faculty member, while others may determine that their strengths align with new administrative opportunities.

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