

## Provost Fellow Reflection

When I heard about the Provost Fellowship program this academic year, I immediately thought it might be a good opportunity for me. I do not have any intention to leave the classroom for an administrative office, but I do want to learn more about how the larger ecosystem of the university functions beyond my own department. I have been focused on preparing to apply for tenure, meeting my teaching, scholarship, and service requirements. Over the years I have built proficiency in the day-to-day tasks of an assistant professor, and I finally feel like I have the time and energy to dip my toes into the waters of shared governance, policy-making, and understanding the administrative side of Southern Utah University. This fellowship program was a timely opportunity to do just that.

I was privileged to work with Dean Camille Thomas from the College of Health Sciences. She gave me a copy of *Positive Academic Leadership* by Jeffrey L. Buller, and we met several times to discuss what I was reading. Buller describes several models of leadership and discusses how they can be best applied in an academic environment. Positive leadership means focusing on strengths, facilitating collaboration, and seeking out bold new opportunities. It is contrasted with an attitude that focuses on weaknesses, spends its energy putting out fires, and is too risk-averse to try anything new.

My discussions with Dean Thomas also covered the structure of university administration, and the role of a Dean within that structure. I had assumed that the dean mainly served as a liaison between administration and faculty. I learned that a dean is also heavily involved in outreach beyond the campus boundaries. Deans will meet with community leaders, industry leaders, parents, alumni, and any other stakeholders in the university ecosystem. They oversee efforts in marketing the college programs, placing graduates in good industry jobs, and fundraising for the university. I had thought that a dean was primarily concerned with academics, so this was a surprise to me.

Dean Thomas was a great example of leadership for me. She was knowledgeable, confident, and decisive in our interactions. This helped me in turn to feel empowered and confident as I spoke with her about what I was learning and what my plans were for the future. She was also kind, personal, and understanding in a way that helped me feel comfortable sharing my concerns and struggles from the perspective of a faculty member. She was forgiving when I sometimes didn't follow through on her assignments as well as I should have. Dean Thomas spoke well of all her colleagues, and made me proud to be a part of Southern Utah University. I think her example alone was a great lesson in positive leadership.

I also met a few times with my own dean, Frank Hall. These were discussions in a group with other provost fellows in my college and were a little less formal. Dean Hall shared a few articles about servant leadership which have shaped his perspective as a dean. We were also given plenty of opportunities to share how the experience was for us as provost fellows and what our needs were as faculty. As a faculty member in Dean Hall's college, I can definitely say that I feel his concern for our well-being, mental health, and satisfaction in the workplace. It was not surprising to learn in these meetings that he intentionally follows a model of servant leadership in his role as dean.

This last week I had an experience that illustrates positive leadership, and the impact that administrative decisions can have on the learning experience at Southern Utah University. I was at the Thunderworks makerspace in engineering, working on a project for my research. I noticed Dr. Ali Siahpush working on something of his own and started chatting with him about his project. He was making an apparatus for a lab where students explore the behavior of gasses under different pressures. Our students run an almost identical experiment as part of our physical chemistry lab, but our apparatus is not very well designed and the data students collect is sometimes not very good. When Ali showed me his project, his expertise as an engineer was evident. The lab apparatus he was building was both simpler and more reliable than ours! Ali enthusiastically offered to meet over the summer and help me to build a few for us to use in our physical chemistry lab. This type of collaboration was facilitated by the existence of Thunderworks. Not only does it provide the physical support to build projects like this, but it is a central space for meeting and sharing ideas. I wouldn't have even known about Ali's project if we were both working alone in our private offices. Thunderworks leverages the strengths of our university, encourages collaboration, and facilitates the pursuit of bold new ideas. It also would not be possible without the positive leadership in the College of Engineering and Computational Sciences and robust administrative support.

I really enjoyed working with people outside of my department and even college as a part of this provost fellowship. I still want to remain in my position focused on teaching and student-centered research, but it was very interesting to learn about administration at the college and university level. Hopefully I can use this learning to become a better citizen of the university community from now on.