SPECIAL SECTION
Faculty Leadership Development

Enhancing Agency Through Leadership Development Programs for Faculty

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The ADVANCE Leadership Fellows Program at the University of Maryland is a yearlong professional development program for faculty aspiring to or recently engaged in leadership roles. Data shows an increase in participants' sense of agency to become academic leaders following the program. We use a comprehensive data set, including program evaluations, participant observations, and tracking of future leadership positions from 59 participants across three cohorts, to understand how and why the program enhances agency. Findings suggest that the program enhances knowledge and networks, provides theory to practice applications, and increases access to local leaders, all elements that positively impact faculty agency as academic leaders.

"Developing agency requires time and effort. It requires thought, reflection, learning through trial and error, creativity, continuing assessment, and no doubt, persistence and courage" (Neumann, Terosky, & Schell, 2006, p. 115).

IN THIS QUOTE BY SCHOLARS who study the faculty career, an observation is made about the challenges of developing and asserting agency in everyday faculty life. Despite the fact that most faculty were trained and socialized over many years for the faculty role, they still find it requires them to summon agency to continue growing throughout their careers. Imagine then the agency required of life-long scholars who wish to move into leadership positions. Many have spent their career in research and teaching, and not had opportunities to learn the skills expected of academic leaders. Transitioning to an area where they lack expertise could be daunting, even prohibitive. Yet with a desire to diversify the academy and cultivate more faculty leaders (DeZure, Shaw, & Rojewski, 2014; Johnson, 2016), it is critical that some faculty assume agency to develop new skills and take on important leadership roles.

There are a number of national leadership development programs for senior faculty that provide training, skills, and shadowing experience to emerging leaders, but often they are concentrated programs held at remote locations that can be time, geographically, or cost prohibitive (Chibucos & Green, 1989; McDade, 1987; White, 2012). Campus-based programs that provide local context and networks over a longer duration are also effective methods of faculty leadership development, yet less research has examined such programs (see for exceptions Hornsby, Morrow-Jones, & Ballam, 2012; Kiel, 2015). In this paper, we examine a campus-based leadership development program for mid-career and senior faculty and analyze the programmatic elements that enhance agency for participants.

Guiding Perspectives

Our examination was guided by theories of agency in the social sciences (Alkire, 2005; Archer, 2003; Bourdieu, 1985; Marshall, 2000) as applied to faculty careers and collective leadership experiences (Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012; Neumann et al., 2006; O'Meara, Terosky, & Neumann, 2008; Terosky, O'Meara, & Campbell, 2014). Agency refers to taking strategic actions, or assuming perspectives, or ways of thinking, to accomplish goals (O'Meara, 2015; Terosky et al., 2014). Agency is specific to and can differ across areas of work and life (Archer, 2003; Marshall, 2000). For example, one might feel significant agency as a scholar based on disciplinary training and success in writing, yet feel little agency as an academic leader due to lack of experience with and knowledge of budgets and supervision. For purposes of this paper, we refer to faculty agency as academic leaders.

Agency emerges from inside individuals but can be constrained by structural and cultural aspects of their respective environment (Marshall, 2000; O'Meara, 2015). In their work on faculty grassroots leadership, Kezar and Lester (2011) highlight variables that inhibit faculty agency as leaders, including lack of prior involvement in shared governance, socialization to the faculty role as opposed to administrator, a desire to avoid group conflict, constrained professional development resources, and a general feeling of being "overburdened" and not having time to learn new skills (p. 122). Research suggests the ability to garner and activate agency depends on resources available (Marshall, 2000). Thus providing faculty resources, training, and networks may help mid-career and senior faculty enhance agency to become academic leaders, despite these barriers (Kezar & Lester, 2011; McDade, Richman, Jackson, & Morahan, 2004; O'Meara & Stromquist, 2015; White, 2012).

The ADVANCE Leadership Fellows Program (ALFP) at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) is a yearlong professional development program for mid-career and senior faculty aspiring to or recently engaged in leadership roles. Descriptive analysis of program evaluation data show a pre to post increase in participant sense of agency about assuming academic leadership positions. For example, the percent of participants who agree they have the knowledge and skills required to become an effective leader on campus increased as a result of the program, particularly in the third cohort, with an increase from 20% to 60% of Fellows. While it is still too early to assess transition into leadership positions for this most recent cohort, over 75% of participants from the first two cohorts are now serving in leadership positions on campus, such as assistant dean and associate provost. As such, our examination in this paper is not whether the program enhances agency for participants, but rather how and why the program accomplishes this outcome.

ADVANCE Leadership Fellows Program

Initiated as part of a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant, supported by the Office of Diversity & Inclusion, Office of Faculty Affairs, and ADVANCE Program, the ALFP has been implemented three times (Table 1 provides details for each cohort). Following a nomination process, prospective Fellows apply to the program. Selection from the applicant pool takes into consideration college representation, with hopes of having a diverse cohort from across campus. This cohort of 15-25 individuals participates in a series of monthly, two-hour long sessions on a variety of higher education and leadership related topics (see Table 2).

An academic leader with executive-level experience on campus serves as program facilitator and begins each monthly session with a discussion of pre-assigned readings and activities (i.e., case studies and negotiation simulations) that allow Fellows to apply concepts to real leadership examples. The second hour of the session includes a panel dialogue facilitated by campus experts. In addition to these sessions, Fellows are invited to attend small group sessions on other leadership issues (see Table 2). In these 75-minute sessions, campus leaders facilitate discussions with groups of three to seven Fellows, allowing for a more personalized experience.

Research Design

In order to understand how and why the ALFP enhances faculty agency toward leadership, we examined pre and post evaluations for 59 participants over three cohorts, directed focus groups with participants, and conducted participant observations of the monthly and small group sessions (data collection by cohort is detailed in Table 1). For participant observations, we relied on Creswell's (2007) observation protocol by taking notes based on themes highlighted in our literature review on agency. Qualitative data from observations, focus groups, and post-evaluation open-ended responses were coded iteratively and 'thematic memoing' was used to identify themes related to enhanced agency (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Triangulating data across all three sources, and having multiple researchers observe and participate in data analysis, ensured trustworthiness (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

As with all research designs, limitations to this study exist. We examined only one ALFP at a research-intensive institution, included faculty who expressed interest in pursuing leadership (and thus may have had some agency to begin with), and observed only interactions conducted within the structured program environment.

Findings

For purposes of this paper, our findings do not focus on the enhanced agency of participants, but rather reveal how and why three programmatic elements of the ALFP worked synergistically to positively impact faculty agency as academic leaders.

Opportunities to Gain and Apply Knowledge to Real-Life Scenarios

Each session contributed to participant sense of agency by providing information on topics not widely understood and making Fellows feel more prepared. During each session, the facilitator would lead discussion on a national higher education or leadership issue, then assist Fellows with application to a local context. One Fellow noted in relation to a session on student affairs, "This is an area of which I was pretty ignorant so I found this [session] extremely enlightening." Several Fellows appreciated the session on managing conflict, and one Fellow shared, "This one got me thinking very productively in terms of what questions I might need to ask when dealing with conflict." The structure and content of the monthly and small group sessions enhanced participant agency by providing resources and demystifying how leadership works, both nationally and locally. As a result of increased knowledge about potential issues, faculty felt more prepared and ready to assume leadership roles.

Case study activities provided participants with concrete examples of the challenging situations leaders face. One participant shared that these activities made them "really able to think through how to handle a situation." During these activities, we observed participants troubleshooting different scenarios and participating in lively discussion. One Fellow shared, "I do feel able to step in, in a future leadership role, if the situation arises." Skill building provided through this element of the ALFP enhanced agency as academic leaders by providing experience and a forum where multiple ways to address challenges were discussed and accepted.

Simulation activities and hands-on applications allowed Fellows the opportunity to gain experience with new or unfamiliar topics. Another Fellow, who found the session on conflict resolution "extremely useful" noted, "conflict is something we are not trained to deal with in career – except [in] real-time." The ALFP provided a safe way for leaders to practice dealing effectively with conflict through concrete exercises. In reflecting on the negotiation session and simulation, another Fellow stated, "I have never had any training in negotiation and learned some great tips and insights." Hearing that there were many possible ways to handle a particular leadership challenge, not only one way, enhanced participant sense of agency as leaders. It meant they were less likely to choose the wrong way, and fail. Instead, they learned there were many possible strategies to accomplish their goals.

Enhanced Participant Networks

The ALFP expanded participant networks by connecting Fellows to peers across campus. Several Fellows highlighted the opportunity to "network/create friendships with like-minded faculty who [they] would never have met had it not been for the program." Similarly, one Fellow shared that the most useful part of the program was "the collegiality developed and the sense of connectedness." This spirit of collegiality was also apparent through observations, as most Fellows engaged in casual conversation at the beginning of each monthly session, asking about research projects, family, or opinions on the readings. The cohort model allowed for a welcoming environment where candid discussions could occur, and provided Fellows with a sense of community across campus when the sessions ended.

The ALFP expanded local networks and provided a leadership development opportunity within a local context. Many Fellows discussed the benefits of this local network, especially "the small cohort that cuts across colleges [and] really helps networking and expands insight." They believed they "learned an incredible amount from [the other Fellows'] questions, perspectives, and experiences." One Fellow commented on the program benefits, "To sum it up in one word, 'perspective.' As a regular faculty member, it's hard to see past the edges of the department, and the administration really feels like 'them' instead of 'us.' The [ALFP] provided an incredible opportunity to overcome this narrowness." In the ALFP environment, participants could experience different perspectives and learn other ways to approach leadership locally, thus enhancing agency by expanding perspective within a particular social context.

Access to and Authenticity of Local Leaders

Fellows also had access to a number of campus leaders, including the program facilitator and the campus experts that served on panels or facilitated small group sessions. These senior leaders shared their paths to leadership, which enhanced participants' agentic perspective. Many Fellows commented on the discussions of career paths, "I especially enjoy hearing people's personal experiences describing how they got to where they are now. I appreciated hearing them describe how they resolved the tension between a research career and an administrative career." These personal examples about leadership challenges and career trajectories provided participants with different narratives about academic leadership. "This was a very rare opportunity to understand these leaders and what led them to seek leadership positions. It is easier to aspire to leadership if you understand what has led others to these roles." Additionally, we observed Fellows often came to sessions prepared to ask visiting panelists specific questions, and frequently stayed afterwards to continue discussion.

The ALFP not only offered access to senior leaders on campus, but also provided a space where candid and transparent conversation was encouraged. One Fellow shared, "I also appreciated meeting the campus leaders – hearing their stories and approaches to their work in this casual setting." Whether in the monthly sessions or as a small group facilitator, senior leaders shared their path to leadership and experience handling challenges. As a result, participants expressed the importance of this programmatic element, "The speakers have been exceptionally candid. I think without such honesty and willingness to address difficult issues, the effectiveness would wash away." Another Fellow commented, "It is as if we are allowed to enter the minds of people that have served and been successful in leadership roles. Unbelievable!" One participant shared, "I feel empowered, in the sense that if I (or my department) has a goal…I feel I can achieve that goal. I also feel much more confident about taking future leadership roles." The access to leaders paired with a space where open dialogue was encouraged contributed to Fellows' enhanced sense of agency to pursue leadership positions on their own.

Discussion and Implications

An important role that campus-based leadership development programs play is helping to diagnose local barriers to assuming leadership positions and identifying ways to help faculty overcome these barriers. In Table 3 we summarize the barriers identified by the ALFP and the programmatic elements created to address them through the lens of agency.

First and foremost, faculty are socialized to be experts and are accustomed to leading efforts where they have skills, knowledge, and context. If faculty are not socialized to learn leadership skills (Kezar & Lester, 2011), good potential leaders might shy away from the job because they lack confidence and comfort in the context of leadership. The information and knowledge provided to participants in the ALFP through articles and discussion on national higher education issues and unfamiliar topics helped faculty overcome this barrier and feel prepared to assume leadership positions. Second, faculty also felt a lack of experience with how to handle leadership challenges – such as those related to conflict resolution or diversity. Without a sense of confidence in how to address such issues, faculty feared that there was a right and wrong way to handle each issue and they could mishandle important matters. The opportunity to practice problem solving through case study activities helped Fellows become comfortable improvising multiple strategies and solutions.

Third, and perhaps important for a program based at a single institution, faculty are also less likely to feel agency as leaders if they are isolated without a peer support network and role models (Kezar & Lester, 2011). The ALFP provided participants with a cohort of colleagues in similar professional roles from different areas of campus. The sense of connectedness provided through a campus network enhanced agency, as faculty could "phone a friend" or reach out on campus if they needed help.

Finally, faculty in our study commented frequently on the "rare" opportunity they had for "candid" conversation and "unusual access" to local leaders. There was a strong sense that a lack of transparency related to decision-making, and a distancing or inaccessibility, constrained their sense of agency before participation in the ALFP. Fellows craved access to the process of leadership, and mentoring conversations, and when provided both

by the ALFP felt more agentic in their own ability to become leaders.

As we seek to address these barriers in efforts to fill gaps from impending retirements (Selingo, Chheng, & Clark, 2017) and diversify senior leadership (Gagliardi, Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017), there is a unique opportunity for faculty leadership development programs to enhance the agency of qualified individuals to pursue academic leadership. Our study of the ADVANCE Leadership Fellows Program provides support for programmatic elements that contribute to this enhanced sense of agency, including opportunities to gain knowledge and apply theory to practice, strengthened campus networks, and access to local leaders. We believe more intentional inclusion of these programmatic elements in campus-based leadership development programs will enhance faculty agency toward academic leadership.

Future research examining changes in agency with inclusion of these and other programmatic elements may further support these results, and allow for enhanced and sustainable leadership development programs moving forward. By creating more campus-based programs that enhance faculty agency, we form individual and organizational social capital. In doing so, the benefits outlast the individuals and the program, thus influencing academic leadership well into the future.

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Appendix A

Table 1. Leadership Fellows Data Collection

Cohort	Number of Partici- pants	Number of Monthly Observations	Number of Small Group Observations	Program Evalua- tions	Number of Focus Groups
2012-2013	19	9/10	N/A	Pre, Mid, and Post	1
2013-2014	15	8/10	6/6	Pre and Post	1
2016-2017	25	10/10	6/6	Pre and Post	1

Table 2. Sample Curriculum from 2016-17 Leadership Fellows Program

Monthly Session Topics	Small Group Session Topics
Leadership Challenges & Strengths	Inside the Dean's Calendar
Key Issues in Undergraduate/Graduate Education	Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion
Leadership in Student Affairs	How the Senate Works
Motivating, Retaining, and Supporting Staff	Managing Difficult Conversations and Conflict
Creating Inclusive Departments	Advancing in Leadership – Why, When, How
Maximizing Resources	
Budgets and Financial Processes	
Negotiation and Conflict Management	

Table 3. Leadership Fellows Programmatic Elements that Enhanced Agency

Barrier to Faculty Agency in Leadership	Leadership Fellows Program Element	How Leadership Agency was Enhanced
Perceived lack of knowledge to be effective leader	*Knowledge:* Resources and content on leadership and higher education topics (budgeting, negotiation, etc.)	Faculty feel prepared and that they have knowledge to guide their leadership practice
Lack of application to real world contexts	*Application:* Case study activities and experimental learning with emphasis on multiple ways to solve problems	Faculty learn options and skills for addressing leadership challenges and gain confidence in solving problems
Lack of community or peer support on campus	*Networks:* Cohort model and intentional development of on-campus relationships with peers	Faculty gain perspective from others in different units and feel they have a network and community on campus
Lack of access to local leaders and transparency around leadership decisions	*Access:* Candid conversations with and access to current campus leaders	Faculty gain access to mentoring, conversation, and role-modeling that they feel they can emulate