

International Perspectives on Social Policy,  
Administration, and Practice

Honggang Yang  
Wenying Xu *Editors*

# The Rise of Chinese American Leaders in U.S. Higher Education: Stories and Roadmaps

 Springer

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Honggang Yang • Wenyong Xu  
Editors

# The Rise of Chinese American Leaders in U.S. Higher Education: Stories and Roadmaps

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*<sup>1</sup>“The stories are compelling, moving, and inspiring. The book is a timely publication that enhances the visibility of an important aspect of Chinese American contributions to the US society despite hardships and systemic racism.”*

*– Min Zhou, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of Sociology & Asian American Studies, UCLA*

*“These Chinese Americans are role models of present and future generations of leaders. They have brought a unique leadership perspective from their cultural backgrounds and are dedicated to the success of students. I have personally benefited from their wisdom and advice at the crucial moments of my own career.”*

*– Ming-Tung “Mike” Lee, Ph.D., President, Sonoma State University, 2016 Recipient of Chang-Lin Tien Leadership in Education Award*

*“The ‘bamboo ceiling’ is pervasive but not impenetrable. The authors’ personal reflections and professional insights will inspire Chinese American readers, as well as members of diverse communities everywhere. This book is a groundbreaking contribution to the fields of cross-cultural leadership development and ethnic studies.”*

*– Jenny J. Lee, Ph.D., Interim Vice President of Arizona International and Dean of International Education, Professor of Higher Education, University of Arizona*

# Foreword

The estimated 24 million Asian Americans living in the United States in 2023 represent the fastest-growing, highest-earning, and best-educated racial group in the nation. Yet, while 54% of Asian Americans have earned at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 33% of Americans overall, members of this group comprise only 1% of college and university presidents. The misalignment between the success of Asian Americans in academia and their underrepresentation in higher education's top leadership roles is influenced by a variety of factors, including persistent biases, rooted in the legacies of racism and White supremacy.

As a matter of fact, from the time immigrants of Asian descent began arriving in the United States more than 160 years ago, they have been subjected to acts of bigotry, violence, and discrimination, often sanctioned by the legal system. For instance, when Chinese workers came to America in the 1850s to support westward expansion by undertaking high-risk, low-wage jobs in mining and construction and were subsequently accused of “stealing White jobs,” a variety of xenophobic legislation was enacted. These laws ranged from taxing Chinese workers at higher rates and preventing them from owning land to forbidding Asians from marrying outside their race. One of the most egregious examples of racial discrimination in the legal system can be found in the 1854 California Supreme Court decision *People v. Hall*, which resulted in George Hall escaping a murder conviction in the shooting death of Chinese immigrant Ling Sing when the justices ruled that individuals of Asian descent, including the three witnesses in this case, could not testify against a White person in court.<sup>1</sup>

This precedent created a new permission structure for open violence by Whites against Asian Americans. The anti-Asian sentiment underlying the Court's decision in *People v. Hall* served as a prelude to one of the largest mass lynchings in the US history, which took place in Los Angeles in 1871 when 19 Chinese Americans were killed by a mob of 500 White and Hispanic rioters. The incident unfolded after a White rancher was shot while coming to the aid of a police officer who was trying

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<sup>1</sup> Brockell (2021).



to break up a gun battle between rival Chinese factions. Chinese homes and businesses were ransacked and 15 people were lynched, with their corpses left hanging across the downtown business district. Only 10 individuals were tried for the massacre, and while 8 were convicted of manslaughter, the California Supreme Court overturned their convictions.<sup>2</sup>

A similar attack, spurred by racist accusations that White miners were losing their jobs to Asian immigrants, occurred in 1885 in Rock Springs, Wyoming Territory, where more than 100 White vigilantes attacked Chinese mineworkers. Though 28 innocent people were brutally murdered—some burned alive—and 79 homes were destroyed, a grand jury refused to indict a single White person involved, claiming there was insufficient evidence. The lack of accountability under the law for these horrific acts catalyzed further violence against Chinese miners and railroad workers in the Washington and Oregon territories over the next few years.<sup>3</sup>

The racist ideology of a “Yellow Peril,” as posing an existential threat to the Western world, had already begun to emerge, leading to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which remained in effect through 1943, and the 1917 and 1924 Immigration Acts that prevented the immigration of laborers from Asia through 1965. Alongside the internment of 120,000 Japanese American citizens during World War II, these policies and practices, entailing the suppression of individual and group constitutional rights, reinforced the notion of Asian Americans as outsiders.

They simultaneously demonstrate how racism has shaped the Asian American experience and how the stories of Asian Americans’ triumphs, trials, and tribulations are frequently left untold. The erasure of Asian American history as central to the American story has contributed to the continued “othering” and scapegoating of individuals of Asian descent in times of crisis and economic scarcity, starkly illustrated over the past half century by the high-profile bludgeoning death of Chinese American Vincent Chin at the hands of two Detroit auto workers who blamed the Japanese for taking their jobs and by targeting of Vietnamese American shrimp boat operators by the Ku Klux Klan in Texas in the 1980s; the destruction of Korean owned businesses during the LA riots in the aftermath of the acquittal of police officers whose beating of African American Rodney King was captured on video camera in the 1990s; the surge in hate crimes against members of the South and East Asian communities following the terrorist attacks on 9/11 in 2001; and the recent 150% spike in anti-Asian violence since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, fueled by a president who consistently referred to the illness as “the China virus” and “Kung Flu.”<sup>4</sup>

It is against this backdrop of structural racism and systemic discrimination that barriers to Asian American leadership in higher education must be assessed and understood. The stereotype of Asian Americans as the model minority—intelligent, hardworking, quiet, humble, and deferential to authority—belies the fact that rather

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

than being a monolith, those in the United States with ethnic ties to Asia are from over 57 distinct groups.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the trope of the model minority ignores the racism and prejudice Asian Americans have endured. As a result, diversity initiatives in academia often fail to countenance and prioritize the need for greater representation among Asian Americans in higher education leadership. Yet, while denying them status as people of color, Asian Americans are nevertheless positioned as perpetual foreigners.

Evidence of hidden biases that both create and fortify the “bamboo ceiling,” preventing Asian American advancement in higher education administration, is showcased in research conducted by Thomas Sy and his colleagues. Their studies detail the hidden biases of participants asked to rate the credentials of prospective employees. Differing only in the ethnicity assigned to the individual, the leadership qualifications and potential of those identified as Asian American were rated lower across all occupations than those with the exact same credentials assigned a Caucasian identity.<sup>6</sup> However, one of the key findings emerging from this research is that leadership perceptions of Asian Americans are higher when race-occupation, such as engineering, is perceived as a good fit, rather than when race-occupation is regarded as a poor fit, as with leadership in academic administration.

The agentic qualities of confidence, control, assertiveness, emotional toughness, and achievement-oriented aggressiveness posited as necessary for effective leadership are considered incompatible with Asian American styles of leadership. And in a Catch-22, even when individuals act counter to stereotypical expectations and conform to dominant norms, they are seen to be less effective as leaders because of the incongruity between group stereotypes and the social roles in which members of the group are engaged. This results in Asian American leaders being judged more harshly.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the perception of Asian Americans as less vocal, less assertive, and lacking in social skills and leadership potential works against those seeking leadership roles, inside and outside of the academy, and fosters the exclusion of Asian Americans from informal power networks tied to promotion into the leadership ranks. Further, the prospect of being negatively stereotyped and being judged or treated stereotypically, as well as fear of conforming to racist stereotypes, can lead to reluctance to take on leadership roles in the first place. The dearth of Asian American role models in the highest ranks of academia exacerbates this challenge, making it even more difficult to redress.

To celebrate and sustain diversity, equity, and inclusion on and off campus, academic leadership must strive to be a mirror of student demographics. However, if progress is to be made toward greater Asian American representation in higher education leadership, persistent biases must be unveiled, and White masculinist norms of what it means to be a strong leader must be upended. This is particularly crucial at a time when increasingly partisan views of higher education have led to rising

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<sup>5</sup>The U.S. Census Bureau (2022).

<sup>6</sup>Sy et al. (2010).

<sup>7</sup>Hoyt and Blascovich (2007).

anti-intellectualism, anti-elitism, and mistrust of the academy. In response to these trends, political philosopher Michael Sandel has argued in his book *The Tyranny of Merit* that humility is the civic virtue most needed right now. Indeed, humility is an essential leadership characteristic, especially in academia, where no one can be an expert in every discipline or field of study, and where shared governance is a necessary condition for institutional success. Asian Americans' socialization is often embedded within a deep-rooted cultural expectation to exercise humility, and adopting an equity-minded approach to reimagining what it means to be an effective leader would reposition a leadership style valuing humility as a strength rather than a weakness.

Creating pathways for Asian American college and university presidents is imperative for all institutions of higher education committed to a future in which racial justice is fully realized and in which students are prepared to thrive in a globally interconnected world. The authors in this volume provide a roadmap for doing so by employing a strength-based approach that examines their innate strengths and motivations as leaders in an adverse environment. Through their stories of resilience, resourcefulness, and moral courage, they provide models of excellence while offering a foundation for the next generation of Asian leaders who will shape higher education in profound and lasting ways.

Bio: Dr. Lynn Pasquerella was appointed President of the American Association of Colleges and Universities in 2016, after serving as the 18th President of Mount Holyoke College. She has held positions as Provost at the University of Hartford and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Rhode Island, where she taught for more than two decades. A philosopher whose work has combined teaching and scholarship with local and global engagement, Pasquerella has written extensively on medical ethics, metaphysics, public policy, and the philosophy of law. Her most recent book, *What We Value: Public Health, Social Justice, and Educating for Democracy*, examines the role of higher education in addressing some of the most pressing contemporary issues at the intersection of ethics, law, and public policy. Pasquerella is the immediate past President of the Phi Beta Kappa Society and the host of Northeast Public Radio's *The Academic Minute*. She is a graduate of Quinebaug Valley Community College, Mount Holyoke College, and Brown University. Her awards and honors include receiving the William Rogers Alumni Award and the Horace Mann Medal from Brown University; the STAR Scholars Network North Star Lifetime Achievement Award; Mary Baldwin University's Algernon Sydney Sullivan Service to Humanity Award; Quinebaug Valley Community College Champions Award; and the Mount Holyoke Alumni Association Elizabeth Tophan Kennan Award. Pasquerella holds honorary degrees from Elizabethtown College, Bishop's University, the University of South Florida, the University of Hartford, the University of Rhode Island, Concordia College, Mount Holyoke College, and Bay Path University and was named by *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* as one of America's top 35 women

leaders. She serves on the boards of the Lingnan Foundation, the National Trust for the Humanities, the Olin College of Engineering, and Handshake.

Lynn Pasquerella  
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# Preface

The Pacific Ocean serves as an apt symbol for the fluid intercontinental ties between East Asia and North America. For centuries, it has provided a reliable route connecting people to people, business to business, and nations to nations. Millions of Chinese travelers braved the Pacific Ocean to pursue a better life, opportunity, and freedom, determined to overcome the challenges ahead.

Yung Wing, the first Chinese student to graduate from an American university (Yale 1850-1854), traveled across the Pacific Ocean. “At Yale, Yung Wing was a member of the choir, played football, was a member of the Boat Club, and won academic prizes for English competition” (“Yung Wing”). As a Chinese American diplomat, educator, and businessman, he contributed to developing bilateral relations at the time.

Since the mid-1800s, Chinese students and scholars have continued to arrive in the United States, even during the Chinese Exclusion era (1882–1965). Many of them have become US citizens and have been instrumental in advancing their adopted country’s economy, education, art, scholarship, science, technology, and infrastructure. There are many books devoted to academic leadership. However, none has centered on subjects most relevant to Chinese Americans. The history of Chinese Americans in higher education is both inspiring and complex. On the one hand, Chinese Americans have made significant contributions to the development of US higher education, and on the other, they have faced numerous challenges and barriers, including discrimination, prejudice, and the “bamboo ceiling.” From humble beginnings, Chinese Americans have risen to the highest ranks of academia, serving as presidents, provosts, deans, chairs/directors, and faculty members at colleges and universities across the United States. Their stories are a testament to the transformative power of education and the enduring value of perseverance and determination.

We live at a time that not only witnesses an increase in Chinese American leaders on US campuses but also mounting incidents of discriminatory treatment of this group. In the past few years, a significant number of Chinese American scholars, scientists, and academic leaders have become victims of racist attacks, racial profiling, stereotyping, harassment, bigotry, hatred, demonization, Sinophobia,

scapegoating, and accusations of espionage and intellectual theft. We believe this is the right moment to assemble a collection of writings to represent leaders of this targeted group and their tortuous journeys in US higher education.

In the past years, these challenges have been compounded by an intensifying widespread xenophobia, amid which the government's "China Initiative" has targeted scientists, scholars, and students of Chinese descent in the name of national security. Beginning in late 2018, "the U.S. National Institutes of Health sent emails to 100 institutions to investigate allegations that one or more of their faculty had violated NIH policies designed to ensure federal funds were being spent properly" (Mervis, 2023, p. 1180). "103 of those scientists—some 42% of the 246 targeted in the letters, most of them tenured faculty members—had lost their jobs" (Mervis, 2023, p. 1180). These developments have further complicated the landscape for Chinese Americans in higher education, raising questions about academic freedom, justice, diversity, and inclusion.

Against this backdrop, *The Rise of Chinese American Leaders in US Higher Education: Stories and Roadmaps* seeks to provide a multi-dimensional perspective on the experiences and achievements of Chinese Americans in higher education. The book includes personal narratives, reflections on leadership and innovation, and critical analyses of the political and socioeconomic contexts in which these narratives unfold. These stories represent leaders holding different ideological values in various academic fields, positions, stages of careers, professional trajectories, Chinese ethnic groups, generations, and geographical locations, making a timely contribution to the body of literature that has assisted countless academic leaders in navigating their careers, bringing to the forefront a distinct group of academic leaders who have been underrepresented.

This collection consists of 36 stories and reflections from past, present, and future leaders, including 5 historical narratives published earlier. Among the contributors and editors, 17 are or were chancellors and presidents, 3 provosts, 10 deans, 5 assistant/associate vice presidents/chancellors or assistant/associate provosts, 1 director, and 1 vice president. Among them, 15 are in STEM-related fields while the rest are in business administration, education, humanities, law, library, and social sciences. This book celebrates these remarkable individuals and their contributions to higher education and showcases their personal experiences and insights into leadership, innovation, and social justice in higher education.

The chapters in this book cover a wide range of topics, from building community partnerships to navigating tradition and transformation, from enhancing research capacity to internationalizing campuses, and from leading with passion and purpose to advocating for civic outreach. Each chapter offers a unique perspective on leadership and its challenges, drawing on the author's own experiences and the lessons he/she has gained along the way.

As editors, we are indebted to the contributors who have generously shared their journeys and wisdom. We also want to thank Dr. Lynn Pasquerella, President of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, for her thoughtful "Foreword." We hope that this book will inspire and inform current and future leaders in higher education, particularly those who are underrepresented or marginalized. We also

hope that it will encourage more conversations and collaborations among different communities of scholars, students, and practitioners, leading to greater understanding, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

Honggang Yang

Wenyong Xu

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## About the Editors



**Honggang Yang** served in 1999–2020 as Dean for the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences and the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at Nova Southeastern University. Earlier in the 1990s, he was on the McGregor School of Antioch University faculty, chairing the individualized graduate program in conflict resolution. He also had the honor serving as Research Associate and Internship Coordinator for the Conflict Resolution Program at the Carter Presidential Center of Emory University. He is on the Editorial Boards of *American Review of China Studies* and Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield Book Series for Conflict Resolution and Peace Building in Asia. Dr. Yang is a Senior Advisory Editor of *Peace and Conflict Studies*, past President and Co-founder of the Council of Chinese American Deans and Presidents, and Co-founder of NSU’s Council for Inclusion and Diversity. He received the 1997 Distinguished Alumnus Award from the Department of Anthropology at USF, the 1998 SOCHE Faculty Award for Teaching Excellence from the Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education (SOCHE), the 2002 NSU Academic Dean of the Year in Student Life Achievement, and the 2021 Innovative Leadership in Higher Education Award from the Florida Distance Learning Association. He co-edited with Dr. A. Wolfe *Anthropological Contributions to Conflict Resolution*. He was bestowed Dean and Professor Emeritus in 2021.



**Wenying Xu** is a Professor of English at Jacksonville University in Florida. She received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Pittsburgh specializing in nineteenth-century American literature. She has taught American Literature, Multiethnic Literature of the United States, World Literature, and Literary Theory at Truman State University, Sichuan University in China, Florida Atlantic University, Xiamen University in China, Chatham University, and Jacksonville University. She is the author of numerous journal articles, book chapters, fiction, poetry, and scholarly books including *Ethics and Aesthetics of Freedom in American and Chinese Realism* (2003), *Eating Identities: Reading Food in Asian American Literature* (2008), and *Historical Dictionary of Asian American Literature and Theater* (2012 & 2022), whose 2nd edition was chosen by the *Library Journal* as the Best Reference Book of 2022. She has served in such leadership roles as Department Chair, Ph.D. program Director, Associate Dean, Vice President for Academic Affairs, Provost, and President of the Society for the Study of Multiethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS). Additionally, she is the recipient of many honors, including a senior Fulbright Lectureship to China, the MELUS Award for Lifetime Achievement, Arthur Vining Davis Fellow for Aspen Ideas Festival, Readers' Choice Award for fiction from *Prairie Schooner*, and Andrew Mellon Predoctoral Fellowship.

# Building Community Partnerships and Strengthening Business Education



**Sulin Ba**

The hallways were full of excited kids running around on this balmy April evening. It was school concert night. The orchestra and the jazz band consisting of fifth- and sixth-grade musicians were performing. Proud parents had gathered early to get prime seats in the auditorium. I ran into a mom who worked at UConn Health Center but whom I hadn't seen for a while. After some chitchat to catch up, she asked:

“Who is the right person to contact in the business school? I run this summer intern program at UConn’s TIP (Technology Incubation Program) and would like to partner with the business school. But my emails to multiple people there have gone unanswered.”

“Oh? Tell me more about this.”

“Well, as you know, TIP hosts startups pursuing R&D in STEM areas including biotechnology, engineering, chemistry, and computer sciences. Over the summer, we partner with various UConn schools/colleges to place student interns at these startup companies to learn firsthand entrepreneurial skills for a career in biosciences and STEM. The startups and the schools/colleges jointly fund these internships. I would like to attract more business students to the program as they offer unique perspectives students from a STEM background might not have. Who do I need to talk to in the business school to get some traction for this?”

“Well, I think you are talking to the right person right now!” A month earlier, I had become the first Associate Dean of Academic and Research Support at the University of Connecticut School of Business. In addition to faculty and research-related issues, my portfolio of responsibilities also included external partnerships and collaborations. In the short amount of time since I assumed the role, I had heard from multiple sources that the business school liked to “go it alone,” was not a

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“team player,” was not interested in collaborating with others, etc. To be honest, I had been quite surprised by these “complaints” and the external reputation of our school, and I wanted to change that because I believed strongly in collaboration and partnerships. This TIP summer intern program sounded like such an opportunity with an obvious and a strong value proposition: It would help our business students learn valuable entrepreneurial skills and develop an entrepreneurial mindset that would benefit them long term, whether they wanted to be a business founder or not; it would enhance collaborations between industry and academia at UConn, and it would help grow Connecticut’s skilled technology workforce.

Externally, similar “complaints” were also voiced by companies I met with. On a tour of the downtown Hartford neighborhood with business executives and community leaders to understand innovation development opportunities, I chatted with a senior vice president of a big insurance company. When I mentioned I was from UConn, she let out a sigh that was mixed with exasperation and urgency: “Which door do I need to knock on to make some headways for collaboration opportunities with UConn?!”

Having had earlier experiences with people feeling frustrated about the business school, I was no longer surprised. Instead, I calmly offered assurance that with the new leadership at UConn, both at the university level and at the school level, collaboration was a key focus going forward, and I could facilitate a conversation to explore opportunities. Subsequently, I brought together university leaders from the research side, experiential learning side, and other schools within UConn to discuss a broad range of possible collaboration areas. As a result of those discussions, a master partnership agreement was signed between UConn and this insurance company, encompassing multiple areas of collaboration.

These were some of the early experiences in my role as the Associate Dean, experiences that were personally satisfying and professionally rewarding. It was also a leap of faith. I had no prior administrative experience. However, as I progressed in my professional career, I started looking beyond my own classroom and my research area, wanting to do more and make a bigger impact. When the school sent out a call for nominations for the newly created role of Associate Dean of Academic and Research Support, with responsibilities covering a wide range of areas such as faculty and research, centers and institutes, international partnerships, experiential learning, career services, and external collaborations, I was excited about the opportunity to expand my horizons. The two terms I served as an associate dean reaffirmed my desire to make a difference as an academic leader. Today, I am the dean of the Driehaus College of Business at DePaul University, leading a business school with over 5200 students and 200 full-time faculty and staff. What a ride it has been!

## 1 Changing Educational Landscape

When I took on the associate dean role in 2013, the UConn School of Business had just gone through some turmoil. I joined UConn in 2002. In those 11 years, the school had seven deans/interim deans. The constant turnover not only damaged faculty/staff morale at the school but also led to many missed opportunities, such as those collaboration opportunities I mentioned earlier. It felt like the school lacked direction and focus and was barely keeping the ship from sinking (in fact, this was what one of the interim deans said about his job). A new leadership team, with a new dean who joined UConn a year before, set out to change that rudderless drifting.

Among the many areas of responsibility in my job portfolio was external collaboration, which I saw as an opportunity to strengthen the educational experience we provide to our students and to contribute to the economic development of the communities around us. Higher education is undergoing some dramatic changes. Not only are more and more parents and students questioning the value of a college education, but competition from nontraditional entities has also heated up significantly. New entrants into the education realm, such as ed-tech companies, have provided alternative educational models that offer a different set of value propositions, focusing on specific skillset development, instead of “educating the whole person” as most universities claim to do in their mission statements. These alternative models typically offer programs that are shorter and cheaper than a degree-oriented college education, making them attractive to parents and students alike.

Another shift that has been happening in the last decade is the role of higher education in our society. In the past, universities operated as “ivory towers,” relatively insulated from the communities around them and focused on intellectual pursuits instead of economic development. Fortunately, that has been changing. Many universities now aspire to be the engines of innovation for society, which requires close collaboration with the business community and civic community around us.

With that backdrop, I embarked on my leadership roles that so far have been extremely gratifying and rewarding. In the next few pages, I will focus on my effort of building community partnerships and how those partnerships have strengthened our students’ educational experiences.

## 2 Experiential Learning

“Hey! What’s up?” A couple of weeks into my first semester as an international graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, fresh off the boat (well, the plane actually) from China, I was finding it rather difficult to carry on a conversation with my American classmates. Even though I had been learning English for over 10 years and had top grades in my English classes throughout those years, it seemed what I learned was not helping me much, even for simple conversations like this



greeting from a classmate in the hallway. “Um, the ceiling?” I wasn’t sure what he meant and offered the only answer I could think of.

After an awkward semester like this and realizing my English was not improving (because I mostly kept to myself and focused on studying in the library for 10 h a day by myself), I decided that I needed to find occasions to immerse myself in an English-speaking environment by actually speaking English with native English speakers. The problem was there were hardly any English-speaking students to hang out with in my program. The overwhelming majority of the students in my graduate program were working professionals who came to class and left right after to return to work. After asking around, I discovered that a group of American students from the program would meet up on Friday afternoons for Happy Hour after work in a bar near campus. I decided to join them. I went every Friday afternoon. Over a can of Sprite, I sat there and first listened to their conversations about football, baseball, and Texas politics (Ann Richards was running for governor of Texas), things I knew nothing about, then initiated conversations with them about topics I did know a thing or two about, such as my hometown in China. After a whole semester of “Happy Hour,” my ability to speak English far exceeded more than 10 years of studious effort in learning English in a classroom! Even today, I would still often tell people I learned English in a bar!

That experience, aside from improving my English, also cemented a lesson from Confucius that I had heard ever since I was a child: “I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” I didn’t know it was called experiential learning, but it was through this experiential learning that I finally learned English. As a result, in my professorial career, the first time I had a chance to put experiential learning into practice, I took it. I was assigned to teach a capstone class for the Management Information Systems undergraduate major, whose purpose was to have the students apply all they had learned through their required and elective courses, such as programming languages, website design, database management, and network design, and analyze a business problem and design an information system that would address the problem. Instead of textbook business problems that were neat and clear, I went to companies to source real business problems that could be addressed by an information systems solution. Companies understood that by working with my class, they were engaged with students who were still in college and learning important skills, not consultants who had years of real-world experience. They may not always get a finished product that could be directly implemented. However, they would always get a different perspective and some kind of prototype that they could further develop. In addition, the experience also gave them a chance to observe our students in action through the course of a whole semester, which could be an effective talent acquisition channel for them.

After a couple of semesters, my capstone course developed a reputation in the Hartford business community. I no longer needed to call my former students to beg for projects. Companies were coming to us. We had repeat “clients” also, such as Sikorsky and GE Capital. When we worked on a Sikorsky project at the end of the semester, our Sikorsky project manager invited the whole class to their assembly

floor to see how the Black Hawk helicopters were assembled and how information systems were used to aid the planning and production process. (That definitely was the highlight of the semester, cooler than anything I could have taught the students!).

Without exception, every semester my students would tell me that capstone class was the one where they learned the most in their entire UConn career. That was why when I took the leadership role of associate dean, I charged ahead to establish an Experiential Learning Collaborative (ELC) so that we could scale up experiential learning and make the opportunities available to more students. Led by a faculty member who had years of academic experience and industrial experience, the Experiential Learning Collaborative (ELC) partnered with various types of clients such as fledgling startups, mid-market companies, and large multinational corporations. It served as a nexus of interests of UConn students and the business community, facilitating cross-disciplinary experiential learning, providing a qualified help to business clients, and introducing students to real-world business practices.

In many of the projects the ELC embarked on, our students essentially performed the role of an external R&D unit, helping our client partners with forward-looking projects that might include market research and analysis, product/service innovation, business planning, management of organizations, web design, analytics, and much more. Oftentimes, the partner companies asked our students to sign a nondisclosure agreement (NDA), so they could share sensitive and proprietary information with our students and faculty mentors. With the NDAs in place, each project resulted in a tight collaboration between the client partner and student teams guided by faculty or industry mentors with expertise in the project topic.

“We want fresh eyes, fresh minds,” said the CEO of one client partner, adding that he chose UConn for the project because of its strong reputation. Under the guidance of an experienced project mentor, students analyzed the competitive business environment, built financial models, identified profit centers, and devised marketing strategies. This multiphase year-long project culminated in the development of a comprehensive business plan that was presented to the whole leadership team of the client partner.

The breadth and depth of those projects exposed our students to a wide variety of industries, business issues, and possible solutions. For example, the student participants developed strategic marketing plans to launch eco-friendly consumer products, analyzed financial models to determine and increase the profitability of operations, and identified financial risks related to the hiring and job search process. Fresh vision demonstrated by the students, particularly by the graduate students with substantial industry experience and advanced knowledge of various business disciplines, immensely benefits product and service innovation planned by the ELC client partners. Competition of motivated student teams working on a project toward the same business objectives deepens the level of student engagement and increases the value of the project outcomes for a client partner. A win-win solution!

### 3 Social Mobility

I grew up in China as an ethnic minority. There are over 50 ethnic groups in China. Over 93% of the 1.3 billion Chinese belong to one majority group called Han. The rest is spread among 50 different minority groups, and I am from one of those. My father grew up in a rural village whose entire residents were from one ethnic minority. He was the first person to ever go to high school and college in his entire village. However, there was no high school in his village. He had to walk four and a half miles each way to school. (When I was growing up, he often told my sisters and me how he had to walk four and a half miles to school each way, in the rain and in the snow. We were so tired of hearing this, and we would respond by saying, “Yeah, we know, uphill both ways, right?”) However, he persisted and opened the door not only for himself but also for his children. When he went to college, his family couldn’t even afford to buy him a pillow (in the countryside, they just tied hay together and put a rag on top to make a pillow). He used a brick as a pillow.

With just the shirt on his back and one quilt that served as both the mattress and the comforter, he went to college on a government scholarship. At several points throughout his college career, he was on the brink of having to drop out because both of my grandparents got sick and passed away. With the help of some of his professors and classmates, he got through and graduated and became a teacher in the city. Because of my father’s persistence in getting an education, my sisters and I were able to live a better life, to come to America to pursue our American Dream. Today, my eldest sister is an international leader in the cancer research field. When Joe Biden was vice president and started the Cancer Moonshot initiative, my sister was on one of the scientific advisory committees. I am the dean of a major business school with over 5200 students. That is the power of education in just one generation. And that is why I am passionate about amplifying higher education as an engine for social mobility to broaden access and provide an opportunity for upward mobility to underprivileged and underserved students.

Research has shown that children from the poorest families are substantially less likely than their peers from richer backgrounds to reach the top of the income distribution (Chetty et al., 2017). However, comparing students at the same college, students from low- and high-income families have very similar earnings in adulthood, despite large differences in their backgrounds. What does this tell us? It tells us that education is a potent pathway to success, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Improving low-income students’ access to higher education could be a powerful way to expand opportunities. Higher education institutions have a responsibility to make that happen.

At the University of Connecticut, I worked closely with a UConn alumnus (Joe LaBrosse ’85) and the Office of Diversity Initiatives to establish a mentorship program for Hartford high school students. The public school district of Hartford, the state capital of Connecticut, has one of the highest percentages of minority students

(>80%)<sup>1</sup> and one of the lowest high school graduation rates in Connecticut (just over 70% in 2021).<sup>2</sup> 62.8% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Upward social mobility is extremely low for these kids. The mentorship program we launched aims to provide a pathway to college for these underprivileged and underserved kids in Hartford and the neighboring East Hartford. Since the program's inception in the fall of 2019, with a cohort of 30 tenth graders, the number of participants in the program has grown to about 50 students each year. There are three key components to the program. First, every participant takes a financial literacy class. Research after research has demonstrated the importance of financial literacy to the success of the high school and college students (e.g., Kezar & Yang, 2010; Potrich et al., 2016). The lack of financial literacy has often been cited as a major obstacle to student success in college. In this program, students travel by bus to UConn's Storrs campus on Saturdays to learn the basics of personal finance, including topics such as how to open a bank account and manage personal spending and ways to fund a college education. A second component of the program is mentorship. UConn's undergraduate business students serve as mentors and help them apply for college, including finding financial aid and applying for student loans. Many of the high school students in the program do not have a person who has graduated college in their life as a role model. Therefore, we built campus visits into the program as the third component to give the participants a chance to see the college up close and learn from a group of UConn students who reflect the diversity of their communities.

"One of the biggest problems holding back the United States is the disparities in the inner cities," LaBrosse says. "To me, education is the best answer to solve this problem. Since UConn is the preeminent, public educational institution in Connecticut, I felt that the University had a responsibility to help address this issue. A UConn business education is one of the best ways to help solve the economic problems faced by many of these high school students."<sup>3</sup> Students who complete the program and are accepted to UConn are eligible for a scholarship designed to bridge any gap students face after applying for other financial aid. Besides helping to lift students out of poverty, LaBrosse hopes the program eventually will cultivate a more diverse workforce for businesses in Connecticut.

At DePaul, we host a program with similar purposes—the nonprofit The Greenwood Project. Envisioned and developed in 2015 at DePaul's Coleman Entrepreneurship Center by a DePaul alumnus Bevon Joseph and his partner Elois Joseph, through their participation in the Coleman Center's pitch competition program, the organization's mission is to create career pathways in the financial services industry for Black and Latinx students. The organization partners with companies to offer intensive, paid summer training and internship programs aimed

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/connecticut/districts/hartford-school-district-101334>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.courant.com/community/hartford/hc-news-hartford-public-schools-town-hall-20220601-mfiwu2rnrh45pbfe2g6htfee-story.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://today.uconn.edu/2022/05/at-risk-high-schoolers-learning-personal-finance-basics-at-uconn/>

at underserved, diverse, high-achieving students. The financial services companies that partner with Greenwood are introduced to highly qualified young adults who power a diverse talent pipeline for them. DePaul hosts high schoolers and college students from around the country over the summer, with DePaul faculty delivering the educational components of the program. With a humble start of five students in the program in 2016, the Greenwood Project has served over 500 students today. More than 75% of the program's alumni now work in finance. They count major financial services companies such as Citadel, Charles Schwab, UBS, and Bloomberg as their partners among dozens of others. On August 3, 2022, the Greenwood Project students, alumni, and staff were invited to ring the closing bell of the New York Stock Exchange alongside employees of Citadel and Citadel Securities.

## 4 Economic Development and Innovation

A few years ago, the Connecticut legislature appropriated US\$30 million designed to stimulate entrepreneurial activities in the state, an initiative jointly funded by the State of Connecticut and other public and private sectors to catalyze technological innovation. The grant money for the initiative, dubbed "Innovation Places," was distributed through a competitive process in which different regions/cities in Connecticut submitted their program proposals. I represented UConn on a 30-plus member task force that successfully competed against other Connecticut cities/regions to bring an "Innovation Place" grant to the City of Hartford. I then served as the Presidential Designee from the University of Connecticut on the Board of Directors for Launc[H]artford, the "Innovation Places" program for Hartford. Therefore, I was involved with this effort from the very beginning and witnessed the tremendous progress of Launc[H]artford in particular and the enormous impact the Innovation Places initiative has made on the State of Connecticut in general.

As a major business school with almost 2000 talented graduate students studying at UConn's Graduate Business Learning Center in downtown Hartford, making Hartford a vibrant and innovative place where students want to come and study and where graduates want to stay and work is extremely important. Over the last few years, Launc[H]artford has significantly contributed to that effort. UConn business students have attended many of the events organized through Launc[H]artford, getting a firsthand experience of what the city has to offer. These positive experiences motivate students to seek career opportunities in Hartford and the surrounding regions.

One particular program that has benefitted UConn students tremendously is the InsurTech Accelerator. UConn School of Business MBA and MS students were placed with the startups in the Accelerator as interns and worked alongside the entrepreneurs to learn how to navigate the challenges of starting a business, how to design a business model that responds to the market demand, and how to work with investors to raise funding. They also got mentored by senior executives from the major insurance companies that are partners of Launc[H]artford. These experiential

learning opportunities allow them to apply what they learn in the classroom to real-world business problems and extend their knowledge beyond what they learn from their classes. Responses from the participating students have been extremely positive. Many of them mention that the experience has inspired them to become entrepreneurs themselves. Undoubtedly, these students will be tomorrow's innovators in Hartford and beyond.

Another program funded by Launch Hartford that has had a big impact is a joint program among UConn, Trinity College, and Goodwin University. Led by UConn's Connecticut Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, the program (called "Ignite Hartford") aims to bring together entrepreneurs from UConn, Goodwin University, and Trinity College to learn more about and engage in entrepreneurship and innovation opportunities, to network and share ideas, and to pitch to receive seed funding, feedback, and next-step resources. With the scale of the program involving several universities, the program undoubtedly contributes to building a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in Hartford. Both programs are embraced not only by the students at these universities but also by major insurance companies in Hartford.

At DePaul University where I am currently the dean of the Driehaus College of Business, entrepreneurship and innovation remain a key component of our strategic priorities. Among the many programs offered by the Coleman Entrepreneurship Center is the Social Impact Incubator, which challenges DePaul alumni, students, and community entrepreneurs to scale and grow business ventures that have a strong social impact mission. Through a generous donation by the late DePaul alumnus Errol Halperin, we recently launched the Halperin Emerging Company Fund to support ventures started by DePaul students, alumni, faculty, and staff. These ventures undoubtedly will stimulate the economic development of the broader Chicago communities around us.

## 5 Closing Thoughts

Having served in various leadership capacities in the last 10 years, I have come to deeply appreciate a quote from Warren Bennis, a pioneer of the contemporary field of leadership studies and a former colleague at the University of Southern California, "Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality." Visions are great. But to make those visions a reality, we must be willing to think outside of the box (e.g., go to Happy Hour in a bar to learn English!), get out of our comfort zone, and challenge the way things were always done in the past. The capacity to do so determines whether one is a leader or a follower.

Reflecting upon my professional journey and my leadership journey in the United States, I am incredibly grateful for the opportunities I have had. Two months after I arrived in the United States, as a graduate student in the master's program in Library and Information Science, I could not answer a question on a midterm because I did not know what Nebraska was (not just that I didn't know *where* it was, I simply had

never heard of Nebraska and didn't know it was one of the 50 states in the United States). Today, I am the leader of a major business school, having worked with many Fortune 500 companies and advocating for our students every single day. I consider myself incredibly lucky.

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During her tenure at UConn, she successfully championed multiple cross-campus collaborations, worked with state and local governments and the corporate community, and represented the University of Connecticut in statewide initiatives focusing on entrepreneurship and innovation. She was a founding member of the Board of Directors for Innovation Places Hartford, an initiative jointly funded by the State of Connecticut and other public and private sectors to catalyze technological innovation.

An award-winning researcher who publishes frequently in leading academic journals, Dr. Ba started her academic career at the University of Southern California. She is an honorary distinguished professor at the School of Management at Fudan University in Shanghai, China. She also has previously served as a distinguished visiting professor at the University of Mannheim in Germany. She served as a Senior Editor for *MIS Quarterly* from 2013 to 2017. She is currently a Senior Editor for Production and Operations Management and Decision Support Systems.

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# Leading Universities from a Social Justice Perspective



Kenyon S. Chan

Like all institutions, universities<sup>1</sup> are constantly evolving. Historically, US universities have been designed for the elite, preparing a few for leadership roles, and preserving and transmitting knowledge and culture that reflect the privileged class. More recently, higher education has become more egalitarian in preparing youth for careers and civic life by increasing college access and opportunities for underrepresented groups, especially people of color, women, and the poor. This shift away from the exclusive domain of the elite has not been without resistance. University leaders can view their roles as protectors of the status quo or as change agents for equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Within any organization or social group, a leader can have a profound effect on its direction and mission. As leaders seek to leave their mark, there are different ways to be responsive to the societal climate. In some cases, a leader can work to maintain or enhance the status quo in service of the privileged or one can be an advocate to improve the lives and prospects of the marginalized, underrepresented, and less powerful. I refer to the latter model as a social justice leader. A leader with a firm commitment to social justice principles can make a major difference within our universities and the US society.

Fundamental to the effectiveness of a leader is understanding one's core values and applying them to the issues encountered. It also involves collaboration and support from allies to advance shared goals. Strong and effective educational leadership from a social justice perspective can greatly influence the lives of students of

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<sup>1</sup>Note: I would like to thank Shirley Hune for her suggestions and review of this chapter. I use the term "universities" to include both universities and colleges.

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color and other underrepresented groups. This was evident in the formation of Asian American, ethnic, women's, and gender studies. When applied to major challenges facing Asian American faculty, students, and staff in the twenty-first century, it can be transformative.

A social justice perspective in higher education is a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. It means vigorously defending the rights of and opening up opportunities for low-income, first-generation, women, LGBTQ+, nontraditional, and underrepresented communities within the largely white and male-dominated university environment. It demands that decisions be scrutinized for their impact on the success of students, faculty, and staff, particularly those new to higher education. It is a commitment to open and broaden access to campus resources and to ensure that the university incorporates different teaching, learning, and cultural styles and research approaches in its educational methods and campus climate.

Attending and working in a university is both a privilege and a challenge. For me as a first-generation college-going student, completing university was a family-wide celebration. Going to graduate school, finishing advanced degrees, and landing a faculty job were all satisfying and a relief. Being paid to study and teach a subject matter that I had devoted my career to was most gratifying. The road forward from there, however, was fraught with pitfalls both predictable and unpredictable. Still more daring was to divert from a faculty career to leadership positions within the academy. All these challenges are enhanced for people of color, first-generation, LGBTQ+, and women academics.

Over the past 50 years, I have taken this journey as an Asian American male. I was born in Oakland, California's Chinatown, and initially grew up in a multigenerational household of 13 people in a two-bedroom duplex. In early childhood, my Chinese American father and mother, both born in the San Francisco area, moved us 15 miles north of Oakland to an all-white working-class town where they ran a very small grocery. We lived above the store, and my siblings and I worked in the store from the time we could walk and count money. Working daily in the store convinced my siblings and me that studying and going to college was our only route out. I have never attributed our drive for education as an "Asian" thing but rather the necessity of survival.

I didn't begin my academic journey knowing that I would earn a PhD and become a faculty member and then a higher education administrator. In fact, my high school counselor thought that I would be lucky to graduate from high school and suggested that I go to community college and then work in my father's store. It was a surprise to many that I was admitted to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in 1966.

I was fortunate to attend university in a time of struggle for social change. I became a student activist fighting for ethnic studies and increased enrollment of students of color. After completing my BA, MA, and PhD at UCLA, I became a faculty member at UCLA, the founding chair of the Asian American Studies (AAS) Department at California State University, Northridge (CSUN), dean of the Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts at Loyola Marymount University (LMU), dean of the College and academic vice president at Occidental College, interim president

at Occidental College, and chancellor at the University of Washington Bothell (UWB). In this chapter, I briefly describe my leadership journey grounded in struggles for ethnic studies, diversity, and students' rights, with the hope that some of my experiences can guide other faculty and students who hold strong a commitment to social justice and equity and seek to affect change within higher education. Academic leadership is a "road less traveled" by most Asian American faculty, yet I would argue a road that more Asian Americans should pursue if they believe that education is an effective mechanism of social change and justice.<sup>2</sup>

I have argued elsewhere that colleges and universities are as important sites for social change as any community location.<sup>3</sup> Over the past 50 years, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have fought for a greater access to universities with a more inclusive curriculum, welcoming spaces, more diverse faculty and staff, and access to the levers of power and decision-making within institutions. Effective change in higher education requires faculty participation, a willingness to lead, and student and community allies. It requires individuals willing to not just talk the talk, but walk the walk as social justice change agents.

## 1 Faculty Participation Matters

While all universities have presidents/chancellors, chief academic officers/provosts, and other major administrative leadership, the strength of American higher education is faculty authority over curriculum and academic matters. Historically, collaborative governance between the administration and faculty on almost all campus matters has supported academic freedom, curriculum development, research, and scholarship that is the envy of the world but is under continuous threat. To maintain the values of collaborative governance, faculty must take their role in leadership and decision-making seriously.

On many campuses, getting faculty to participate in governance is very difficult. Most faculty are heavily involved in their teaching and scholarship/creative work. Serving on governance committees or in leadership roles is often seen as a punishment or, at least, a distraction from "real" work. When promotion and tenure decisions are made, credit for university service is small or nonexistent. Rarely are faculty with strong research and teaching records denied tenure or promotion because of poor service. Why, then, should faculty participate?

For me, it is all about grassroots activism and asserting political power that I learned as a young student and is even more important today. Faculty can influence

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<sup>2</sup>In 2017, only 2.3% of all university presidents were Asian American. Henry Gee & Audrey Yamagata-Noji MIA: *Missing in Administration: Asian Pacific Islander Americans and the Bamboo Ceiling*. Los Angeles: Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education and Leadership Education for Asian Pacifics (2018).

<sup>3</sup>For example, Kenyon S. Chan, "Rethinking the Asian American Studies Project: Bridging the Divide Between Campus and Community." *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 3:1 (2000), 17–37.

the institution in several ways. First, and quite commonly, faculty can just complain. They can complain about the curriculum committee that seems to protect the status quo and doesn't accept or appreciate the new scholarships and perspectives offered by fields like Asian American Studies. They can complain about promotion/tenure committees that seem biased against minority and women faculty and that discount the value of nontraditional scholarship and the extra hidden duties of nurturing minority and women students. They can complain about the bias demonstrated in hiring committees for never appreciating the difficult and less traditional paths taken by minority and women candidates, and so on.

Complaining sometimes works. Maybe, the generally white male and female administrators will be sympathetic to the complaints of minority voices and act to make curriculum, admissions, promotion, and other matters more transparent. However, even when there are administrative allies, they do not control faculty committees. Rather, there are conservative faculty and administrators nationwide who control faculty committees and appoint those who will uphold the "standards" of the university and Western civilization. Think about faculty who seem to have lifetime appointments on these key committees or senior faculty who block any progressive agenda including new faculty hires, and you will begin to understand the power of faculty participation.

Faculty with a social justice perspective who would like to see more equality and inclusion on university campuses should participate willingly and purposefully in faculty governance. They can volunteer to serve on the department or university curriculum committee. They can ask to serve on hiring and promotion committees. They can ask the provost and dean how they can become more involved in university affairs. They can take their turn being department chairs.

I recognized early on that taking faculty leadership roles and greater responsibilities within the university meant that I would be sacrificing my own research and teaching. I watched with envy as my friends working hard and long in Asian American communities started or worked in social service agencies, civil rights organizations, K-12 education, legal aid centers, and local government sites. Then, I realized that my commitment to activism and social justice could be fulfilled on campus and decided to try to do what I could in the university with as much purpose as I would in any community site.<sup>4</sup>

Serving on and, better yet, chairing faculty committees provide opportunities for one to influence the decisions being made on behalf of the university. As an example, in the mid-1990s, CSUN decided to completely overhaul its general education (GE) requirements, namely to reduce the units and options required of students to facilitate their degree completion in a timely manner. At the time, I was chair of Asian American Studies (AAS) Department<sup>5</sup>, whose entire curriculum and enrollment were based on courses approved for GE credits. It was rumored that changes

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<sup>4</sup>Chan, "Rethinking."

<sup>5</sup>In 1990, I was appointed the founding department chair and only faculty member of the new Asian American Studies Department at California State University, Northridge. Now, this department has over 20 faculty and offers a BA degree and minor in Asian American Studies.

in GE requirements would eliminate AAS and other ethnic studies courses from the approved list of GE courses. This would devastate our enrollment. At a time when many of us sought a more inclusive curriculum, eliminating Asian American and other ethnic studies courses from general education would make it more difficult for students to learn about the history, struggles, and contributions of Asians in America and other communities. So, I worked with my dean and provost to get appointed the chair of the GE review committee. It wasn't hard to convince them since few people wanted this difficult position.

This was one of the most challenging administrative tasks that I have encountered. I had to pull together every part of the university to bring vision and clarity to the GE program. Turf wars were reopened. Redefining a requirement could enhance the enrollment of some departments and shrink the enrollment of others. At the same time, I knew that as the chair of the review committee, I could protect my department and other critical areas of diversity and inclusion. I used persuasion and a strong collaborative process to accomplish a very successful result for the campus. Most importantly, I was able to ensure that my department would be safe and thrive and that ethnic studies was respected. Of course, participation in shared governance is also frustrating because conservative forces still have lots of levers in their control, particularly if progressive faculty fail to participate.

## 2 Leadership Matters

Being willing to take on top leadership roles in higher education matters. I am often asked why I decided to become a department chair, dean, vice president, and eventually chancellor/president well beyond active faculty participation. For me, it was a matter of how I could affect the greatest change for underrepresented and first-generation students, faculty, and staff, including Asian Americans. Teaching and mentoring students offer lifetime rewards and fulfillment. Exploring new ideas or research to solve a social issue is exciting and valuable. Administrative work, however, allowed me opportunities to change the institution from within.

As department chair, I decided who served on curriculum and promotion committees. I sat with other chairs to discuss the allocation of faculty and fiscal resources. I was also positioned to advocate for the value of new fields such as Asian American, ethnic, and women's studies and other new disciplines as significant parts of a modern university curriculum. As dean, I had significant control of financial budgets and faculty allocations. I influenced faculty and staff hiring, admissions policies, and special funds for student and faculty projects. In support of equity and inclusion, I also made the final decision on faculty hiring and tenure that were forwarded to the president. For example, I was given two finalists for a position in one of the social science departments. One candidate was a white male rated by the department as a perfect fit. The other was an African American woman who was also rated as highly gifted and well qualified. The department recommended that I hire the white male and find the funds to hire the African American woman too. So, both were

acceptable to the department. Much to the department's initial distress, I only hired the African American woman, and she became a leader in the department. The deanship is a powerful location for social justice.

As the vice president and chancellor/president, I could shape the university at all levels. I appointed social justice allies to major positions and committees; diverted funds to projects that opened the university to underrepresented students, new curriculum, and new scholarship; ensured that student affairs, student life, clubs, and cocurricular activities were inclusive and welcoming for all the students; provided resources for targeted student recruitment and scholarships; and supported and encouraged staff of color to be hired and seek promotions.

Most importantly, chancellors/presidents have ultimate authority over faculty hiring, tenure, and promotion. When I served as interim president and chancellor, I changed faculty hiring and tenure/promotion practices to ensure that hiring committees diversified the criteria for their searches and their finalist pools. I required that both hiring and tenure/promotion review committees take into account the positive value of new scholarship areas, community participation research, and nontraditional career pathways. With these changes in place and guided by social justice values, it was ultimately my decision of whom to hire, tenure, and promote.

### **3 Students and Campus Allies Matter**

The idea that students matter is obvious. In the case of Asian American Studies, students are central to its survival and renewal. Asian American Studies was born out of student activism in the 1960s–1970s and continues because of student concerns. Many small Asian American Studies programs across the country would disappear if it weren't for student vigilance on those campuses. Students continue to fight for curriculum inclusion, equality in admissions, support for Asian American and Pacific Islanders and other underrepresented groups, and support for diversifying faculty and staff. New discussions about undocumented students, individual pronouns, and reframing titles like Chicano to Chicana are all pushed by students.

Campus allies matter as well. The establishment of Asian American Studies at CSUN was helped enormously by the support, advice, and influence of the Chicana/Chicano, Africana, and women's studies departments. Influential senior faculty and leaders in those departments supported Asian American students and faculty and demanded the establishment of Asian American Studies. They also assisted in the campus political maneuvering necessary to get approval for the department and curriculum. Faculty and students of color and white faculty and students in other academic departments and nonacademic departments such as student affairs, admissions, and staff associations are also important sources of support. Indeed, Asian American Studies would not exist today without the political power of the African American and Chicano movements. Ethnic studies in general is critical for advancing diversity and inclusion.

If Asian American Studies and a social justice agenda are to thrive on university campuses, communities still matter. Asian American community organizations and leaders were instrumental in supporting the early development of Asian American Studies on university campuses. For instance, community involvement was critical during the 1968 Third World Strike that led to the formation of ethnic studies at San Francisco State University.<sup>6</sup> The 1989 landmark tenure battle at UCLA of an Asian American professor successfully brought state and local elected officials and many community leaders nationwide to press the chancellor to reverse the initial decision not to tenure the faculty member.<sup>7</sup> In 1989, the San Fernando chapter of the Japanese American Citizens League strongly supported the establishment of Asian American Studies at CSUN. Even today, universities continue to engage local and national Asian American organizations and leaders in support of issues on campuses and to raise funds from alumni and other community supporters for student scholarships, community internships, community-based research, and endowed professorships. Ignoring or alienating alumni and the community is done with great peril. All universities must have support from their local community and pay attention to “town and gown” relationships. Asian American Studies programs disconnected from their local and national communities are without souls.

#### 4 Applying Social Justice Leadership in the Real World

Serving as chancellor at the University of Washington Bothell (UWB) from 2007 to 2013 allowed me to test my theory of social justice leadership in a real-world setting. At the time of my appointment, UWB was barely 20 years old, served only 1600 students, and lacked any academic identity or clear mission that would attract students. It resides a mere 12 miles from the UW Seattle campus, established in 1861 with an enrollment of over 40,000. In addition, the campus is in a suburb of metropolitan Seattle within a primarily white middle-class community, while it was designed to serve a more diverse population by drawing from areas outside Bothell. At the same moment, public funding of universities was severely impacted by the great recession of 2008, and UWB lost more than 60% of its state funding. This required specific and targeted strategies to lead the campus.

With broad responsibilities, often described as “soup to nuts,” I was determined to approach my chancellorship with a firm commitment to social justice and equity within the university. Among the many challenges I faced, four stand out as examples of how a social justice approach to leadership is effective. The first was the necessity to gain the trust of the entire UWB community so that it would accept a

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<sup>6</sup> Karen Umemoto, “On Strike!: San Francisco State College Strike, 1968–1969: The Role of Asian American Students.” In M. Zhou & A. C. Ocampo (eds.), *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader* (3rd ed). New York: New York University Press (2016), 25–59.

<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of Don Nakanishi’s case, see Dale Minami, “Guerrilla War at UCLA: Political and Legal Dimensions of the Tenure Battle.” *Amerasia Journal*, 35:3 (2009), 143–166.

social justice mission for the university. The second was to focus the campus on student recruitment, retention, graduation, and post-graduation success to grow its size, impact, and reputation. The third was to ensure a strong and vital faculty. The fourth was fighting for support for public higher education.

The most important role of chancellors/presidents is to set the broad direction and agenda for the campus and gain the trust of the campus to accomplish that agenda. Luckily at UWB, I inherited a campus that was not bogged down by a long history of traditions; indeed, the founding faculty viewed the campus as an opportunity to reinvent the definition of a university to better serve students inadequately served by more established institutions. My role was to crystallize the goals and values of the faculty, students, and staff into a campus-wide agenda for change and to build a team of senior administrators and faculty, students, and staff from across the campus to implement our shared vision. I wanted to ensure that the campus was strongly committed to recruiting, retaining, and graduating an undergraduate population consistent with social justice values that included students who were underrepresented, first in their families to attend college, from low-income families, returning, and nontraditional age, women, and veterans. Over the years, this diverse student body has become UWB's strength.<sup>8</sup>

A social justice approach to campus leadership opened the campus to a discussion of the good, the bad, and the ugly to ensure that the entire campus and local community were invested in UWB's future. No detail was too small to discuss, and no issue was too confidential to be hidden. To be transparent and inclusive, I regularly held open town hall meetings with faculty, students, and staff to discuss the direction of the campus and to brief the university community on budget matters, campus physical planning, new curriculum proposals, student affairs, and housing concerns and, of course, the perennial issues of food and parking. Widely attended, these town halls were important occasions for me to outline the differences between making a decision based on social justice values versus decisions made to maintain the status quo. The town halls were also important opportunities to listen to the questions and concerns of the campus community. I also held regular meetings with the governing boards, community advisory boards, mayors, state legislators, business leaders, social service leaders, and other opinion leaders who needed to clearly understand and support the goals and values of the campus, particularly when the goals run against the preservation of the privileged or elite.

The second challenge was to translate the goals and values of the campus into actions that ensured student success. We targeted student recruitment to augment enrollment that would enhance our social justice mission. Recruiting a diverse student body was essential, but graduating them was the goal. UWB is now cited as a model for the recruitment and success of underrepresented and nontraditional

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<sup>8</sup>As of this writing, UWB serves over 6000 students; more than 50% are first in their family to attend college, 46% are domestic students of color, and 10% are international students, along with 300 veterans; 59% graduate debt free. *Fast Facts 2018–2019*, University of Washington Bothell.

students.<sup>9</sup> We knew that many students came with great talent and motivation but went to high schools that left gaps in their preparation for university work, and they often faced economic challenges that could prevent them from graduating. Many older/returning students had deep life and work experiences but lacked confidence in their academic skills. We also knew that students of color and women faced negative stereotypes about their potential to succeed in many fields and professions.

The campus took pride in every student who graduated and felt a personal failure for every student who did not succeed or graduate. Campus ownership of student progress is no small matter in the overall success of students. We decided that if we admitted a student, it was our collective responsibility to graduate that student. This was our social justice challenge. Faculty and staff agreed to an early alert system to identify students who were struggling in the first weeks of classes. All student support programs, including student affairs, became better coordinated and developed a triage method to work as a team to support individual students. We carefully studied students who left to determine what we could have done better and to try to draw them back to campus if that was what they desired. We also started a new School of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, with a particular focus on opening these fields to women and students of color and breaking down traditional barriers to their success.

The third challenge was recruiting and retaining exceptional faculty. Faculty responsibilities have grown over the last decades. Part of these pressures on faculty come from the severe budget reductions imposed on public universities. This has resulted in the reduction of full-time tenure-track faculty in favor of full-time and part-time adjunct/contingent faculty. At UWB, we faced several dilemmas. We were growing student enrollment rapidly and developing new academic programs and degrees. We could not hire full-time tenure-track faculty quickly enough to meet the student demand. Further, we needed sufficient student enrollment to fund new faculty positions, but we also required new faculty to open new classes and degree programs to build enrollment. How could we accomplish this in a time of recession and state budget cuts! Yet, we still had students who needed classes and wanted to graduate. Adjunct faculty are wonderfully skilled and dedicated scholars/teachers. From a university budget perspective, however, they are often seen as simply cheap labor. Universities can hire three or four part-time faculty to “cover” the basic courses taught by a department, pay each a very low fee per course, and provide no benefits/retirements. However, a short-term solution of hiring more part-time and full-time adjunct/contingent faculty and underpaying them was not consistent with our social justice values.

Applying a social justice perspective required the campus to find a way to compensate our adjuncts adequately and provide them with a supportive working environment. Although we were committed to hiring full-time tenure-track faculty who would carry the responsibilities of research, teaching, and service, the appointment

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<sup>9</sup>Shaun R. Harper & Isaiah Simmons, *Black Students at Public Colleges and Universities: A 50 State Report Card*. Los Angeles, University of Southern California, Race and Equity Center, 2019.



of full-time long-term lecturers focused on teaching also fits our campus well. Being a more teaching-/student-oriented small research university, we could combine many part-time positions into full-time lectureships with long-term contract commitments, reasonable teaching loads, full benefits/retirement, promotion possibilities, sabbatical rights, and voting rights within their departments. Within the constraints of the University of Washington's overall faculty policies, these lecturers can devote their careers to teaching and mentoring while maintaining their scholarship but at less intensity than tenure-track faculty. It isn't perfect. While greatly reducing the number of part-time faculty, it provided for more full-time, long-term positions with greater benefits.<sup>10</sup>

A fourth challenge that was superimposed over all other challenges was the decline in public support and state funding of public universities and community colleges across the nation. This was accelerated by the historic economic recession that began in 2008. The de-funding of public higher education continues as of this writing. In 2007, Washington funded 77 cents of every academic dollar; by 2015, that was reduced to 23 cents shifting the cost of attendance to the students and families. The state of Washington, like many states, spends more on prisons than higher education.<sup>11</sup>

Higher education was once considered a public good and hence publicly funded. However, public opinion, as reflected in state legislatures, now believes that funding public universities and community colleges should be the responsibility of students and their families, not the public through tax dollars. For many low-income, first-generation, nontraditional age, and underrepresented students, publicly supported higher education is often their only option. Reducing the public commitment to funding public higher education locks out the very students who need it most to advance themselves and their families. A social justice leader must provide a voice to ensure that higher education is not just for the elite or a mechanism for students to secure a lifetime of debt. As described before, I spent considerable time meeting with state and local legislators, business groups, and opinion leaders to argue for the necessary investment by the public in higher education.

Most importantly, to meet these four challenges and other issues during my term as chancellor, I did not operate alone. Effective leaders, including those who hold strong social justice values, must gather together a strong team of senior administrators, faculty, students, and staff to be successful. Progress at UWB was largely accomplished by keeping a laser focus on social justice and equity issues with an extraordinary group of vice chancellors, deans, staff, faculty, students, and community leaders.

This strong commitment to social justice leadership continues to be a central focus of the campus today. In 2022, UWB served over 6000 students and ranks

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<sup>10</sup>Some part-time faculty will always be essential to teach specialty or professional/practice courses.

<sup>11</sup>Sullich, S. Morgan, I, and Schak, O. *State and Local Expenditures on Corrections and Education. Policy and Program Studies Services*, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Development, 2016.

number 1 in the nation for public colleges that provide the greatest return on investment.<sup>12</sup> It ranks second among public universities in Washington state in highest wages earned by UWB alumni and continues its mission of being one of the most economically and ethnically diverse universities in the northwest.<sup>13</sup>

## 5 Conclusion

Not all universities are receptive to enhancing equity, diversity, and inclusion, but leaders can make a difference in even the most conservative institutions. To lead a university from a social justice perspective does not take any special talent or skill. It does not require more time or energy. It does require clear goals, values, collaboration, and allies at many levels. It compels a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. It involves leadership in the service of others. And it demands a commitment to do battle against established institutional biases and privileged positionality.



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<sup>12</sup> CNBC *Make It* (2020); Educational Resource & Data Center (2021).

<sup>13</sup> UWB Fast Facts 2021–2022; *Best Value Colleges 2018 College ROI Report* (2018) [Payscale.com](https://payscale.com), [www.payscale.com/college-roi](https://www.payscale.com/college-roi)

# Diversity and Chinese American Leadership: A Contextual and Experiential Approach to Theories with Reality Checks



Sheying Chen

## 1 Introduction

The rise of minority leaders in US higher education may be viewed and understood through the lens of diversity and related social mechanisms such as affirmative action (AA). Yet, the fundamental concepts, underlying ideas, and policy practice/programs including diversity, minority, affirmative action, etc. cry for a critical review and reexamination in changed and changing sociopolitical contexts. Of particular interest is the case of Asian (especially Chinese) Americans in relation to visibly increasing racial happenings and social sentiments in recent years.

As a former leader or partner in diversity undertaking at several educational institutions, it took me many years of learning, observation, and reflection to arrive at a deep understanding of related societal efforts and the meaning of individual and group successes including those of Chinese Americans. The roadmap for my journey spans institutional and national borders in terms of an experiential approach to relevant theories with certain reality checks.

## 2 Personal and Professional Background

My early dream, if any, was somehow a scholarly one. As one of the too-young “sent-down youths” in China, I was deprived of the right to schooling in barely reaching teenage during a historical period of politicalization culminating in the infamous, brutal Cultural Revolution (Chen, 2018). After my laboring in the

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countryside for 4 years (while a minor) and then in an urban factory for 5 years along with a persistent struggle for self-learning and formal education (still missing a Bachelor's degree for life), China opened up and began economic reform by ending extreme politicization of the society and desperate plight of individuals like my family (Chen, 2002). As one of the first, bold, and strategic changes made, a national exam for college admissions was reinstated, and I got into a junior college by taking the equal opportunity granted without regard to political status and family background. After graduation, I worked as a technical manager for 4 years before gaining entry into a graduate school by passing another tough national exam for graduate school admissions. Whether in school or at work, I devoted myself to learning with a scholarly ambition (no matter how remote it was) in mind. And I benefited from invaluable real-life experiences in addition to all kinds of reading materials I could hardly find at the time.

My scholarly career was eventually launched when I was picked from a large class of high-achieving graduate students to become an instructor and graduate studies coordinator at Sun Yat-sen University (SYSU) in Guangzhou. A charge I took was to pioneer the rebuilding of the social work profession since it was canceled over three decades ago shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (Chen, 2021). My public lecture series helped to launch a national community service movement when few Chinese people even heard about the term community. I also led the study and planning of a new social security system (the umbrella term for an overall safety net) for Guangdong, the most adventurous and advanced province in China at the time. From policy exploration to practice research and from top design to grassroots implementation, such hands-on experiences and insights laid a solid foundation for my scholarly development afterward.

I was fortunate to be able to cross the borders first to the University of Hong Kong (HKU) and then to the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) for my pursuit of advanced studies (accepted also by Ivy League and some other top universities, I made my choice based on a need for and conviction in the resources of public institutions as an international student). I obtained my PhD along with an MSW (my second master's, ever missed at HKU) degree from UCLA School of Public Policy and Social Research in 1996, as the first-ever recipient of such credentials from mainland China. That year my academic career started all over again as an assistant professor of social work (and sociology) at the City University of New York (CUNY). An exceptional case at CUNY, I became a full professor and chair of a multidisciplinary department (while program director) in 2001, then I continued advancing to administrative leadership roles at another institution in 2004.

My personal and professional growth in terms of both formal schooling and self-learning was a journey I took wildly with no set or rigid boundaries. Traversing through the kingdoms of natural and social sciences and humanities, I even joined fierce competitions for graduate studies in such specialized fields as engineering mechanics, technology and history and philosophy of science, sociology, social

work/welfare, and public policy. Besides my father (a graduate of Whampoa Military Academy in the Anti-Japanese War and then self-taught engineer turned chief engineering craftsman in a large PRC factory) and my eldest brother (one of the first admitted into graduate studies after the Cultural Revolution) who influenced me in personal and informal ways, some of the academic mentors I had the fortune to actually follow in advanced studies include: Dr. James Lubben, a prominent social health scientist/gerontologist and my doctoral advisor at UCLA, who also exerted a subtle influence on me with administrative insights as Associate Dean and Chair at the top-ranked public university; Dr. Rosina Becerra, Dean of UCLA School of Social Welfare, who personally retained me from doctoral graduation to help launch the unprecedented California welfare reform research project in collaboration with multiple schools on UCLA and Berkeley campuses and later collaborated with me on diversity management writings as Associate Vice Chancellor of Faculty Diversity at UCLA; Dr. Fernando M. Torres-Gil, first-ever US Assistant Secretary on Aging, then White House-appointed Vice Chair of the National Council on Disability, who taught me policy analysis and later, as Associate Dean and Acting Dean at UCLA School of Public Affairs, collaborated with me on research writings on aging and social policy; Dr. Harry H.L. Kitano, an internationally renowned expert on race relations and the first incumbent of the national Endowed Chair in Japanese American Studies, who was also my mentor and doctoral committee member at UCLA; and Dr. Stanley Sue, Professor of Psychology and Director of the National Research Center on Asian American Mental Health at UCLA, who served on my doctoral committee and provided invaluable feedback as well. Dr. Mitchell Maki also served on my doctoral committee at UCLA before assuming deanship at California State University (CSU), first at Los Angeles, then on the Dominguez Hills campus, and eventually became Acting/Vice Provost there. I also worked for Dr. Ailee Moon, who later became the PhD Program Director (to succeed Dr. Yehekel “Zeke” Hasenfeld, an influential figure “of our time in the social work field”); Dr. Stuart Kirk, former Dean of the School of Social Welfare at SUNY-Albany and Professor at Columbia University School of Social Work before joining UCLA (as the Crump Endowed Chair and then PhD Program Director/Department Chair), who challenged DSM (diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders), the foundational document of the psychiatric enterprise (or “psychiatric bible”), from a social work perspective; Dr. A.F. Singleton, Assistant Dean for the Drew/UCLA Medical Education Program; and other faculty in Schools of Public Affairs, Public Health, Nursing, etc. Many of my fellow doctoral students (including true friends like Herb Shon) also provided me with invaluable support at the most challenging, exciting, and rewarding time in my personal and academic life (academic wise, within 5 years of studentship and research assistantship, also gaining experiences as a research scientist, adjunct professor, data manager, and computer lab assistant at once while a doctoral candidate, producing two books in English before filing paperwork for two degrees at UCLA). Earlier during my research study at HKU, I received kind collegial support from Drs. Cecilia Chan, Iris Chi, and K.W. Boey, among other academics, in addition to the guidance of my advisor Professor Richard Nann (Dept. Chair) with the help of Dr. Joe Leung.

Numerous people in my native land assisted with my early development, including Professor QIU Shijie (Dept. Vice Chair), my MA thesis advisor turned senior colleague at SYSU, and Mr. ZHOU Lanchu who encouraged me to stay on the path of learning during a rough stint of my post-primary schooling in the Cultural Revolution. In addition, the elders and peers in my support networks whose care and high expectation held me up all along (in professional encounters such as formal job interviews, people sometimes privately asked me about my religious belief out of curiosity; I had to honestly say none and they're surprised in wondering about my perseverance and resilience).

### **3 Taking Academic Leadership as an Ethnic Chinese in the United States**

Looking “foreign” and preoccupied with scholarly work, I never imagined that I would step into administration in the United States someday. After completing my studies at UCLA, I landed my first formal job in the States, a tenure-track position at CUNY, by chance. Having turned down an offer to teach doctoral courses at a university in Washington, DC, I was attending the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)'s Annual Program Meeting (APM) in 1996; passing by a posting board in the conference hotel lobby, I stopped to take a look out of curiosity and found a handwritten note for me. A bit of surprise, it was left by Dr. Tom Bucaro, Director of the Social Work Program at the College of Staten Island (CSI), after checking out my CV deposited with the APM career services. He invited me to apply for an assistant professor opening they had. At that time, New York City (NYC) was most attractive to me, so I applied without giving it a second thought. I was offered the position after going through a full recruitment cycle (I didn't know how competitive it was until I led a search committee after becoming the department chair, when over 100 applicants jumped in the pool including even an associate professor from Harvard, for an assistant professor opening we advertised). One of CUNY's senior colleges, CSI is the largest university campus in NYC. Its landscaped Willowbrook site is formerly the largest psychiatric institution in the United States, which shocked the nation into changing its laws toward deinstitutionalization (from the 1970s until the mental hospital's overdue closing in 1987), with a related story of NYU's Dr. Saul Krugman using patients as human experiments for the treatment of hepatitis for about 20 years (which also became one of the most remembered American cases of bioethics).

In my first couple of years on the tenure track, I was given major college- and university-wide awards, named one of the first three recipients of the Feliks Gross Award for Scholarly Achievement, and approved by the US immigration authorities for Outstanding Professor permanent residency almost immediately (while still on student visa). In 2002, shortly after attaining tenure in September 2001, I was promoted to full professor without spending time on the associate rank, which was rare

among CUNY's 6000+ faculty (with a number of them preparing to retire as associate or even assistant professors) at the time. Administration-wise, there were issues within our outsized department (which housed multiple disciplines including a usually large program in psychology), with tensions running so high that the chairperson (a very capable sociologist) eventually had to resign from the chair's position (tragically, she died of cancer later with still high stress from work). The election of a new chairperson was highly contested. I originally had no intention to run for it but was finally convinced by the majority of my colleagues who voted for me. My election sent waves across campus; apparently, such a large and troubled unit to be headed by a person of my look and background was something quite unusual. Provost Mirella Affron took me, along with Dean David Podell, to lunch with a copy of *Robert's Rules of Order* as a gift, in celebration of my election as the chairperson, and later collaborated with me on institutional and community research including the Staten Island Project (SIP).

Looking back, the main motivations in my decision to assume the departmental leadership roles were the trust that my colleagues placed in me and my confidence in the new leadership required to bring the large academic unit to new heights. As predicted, things changed dramatically within the department, showing many desirable and productive outcomes of a new consensual approach. Thanks to a wonderful team of great colleagues (including Dr. Sondra Brandler in social work, colleagues in sociology and anthropology for which I also functioned as the program director, and others in the behavioral and social science disciplines), they were also amazed by the positive changes, with some joking to me "you're an administrative genius." There were, of course, many issues to deal with and hard decisions to make; however, I've cherished to this day the team support that would make one forget that I was the only ethnic Chinese (not even an American citizen yet) in the department. Outside the department, Dr. Ming Xia of Political Science shared academic interests in hosting Chinese visiting scholars, etc., while Dr. David X. Cheng of Institutional Research collaborated with me on publications on heated issues in higher education and later became an assistant dean at Columbia University and then an associate vice president at the City University of Hong Kong. I learned a lot from my teams, particularly the multidisciplinary faculty of our department, many of whom were senior academics in the "mainstream" but provided me with almost unconditional support. Some colleagues further believed that I could make a good dean and urged me to go for it if there was an opening somewhere (CSI didn't have such a vacancy at the time).

Consequently, I was named the dean of a major college, which was an amalgamation of three professional schools (formerly colleges), in 2004 at the University of Guam (UOG), a US land grant institution. A flagship university in the western Pacific, the campus context was somewhat similar to my CUNY experience. The "super deanship" was faced with different units and disciplines pulling toward different, sometimes conflicting, directions. Also similar to the dramatic changes after I took the departmental leadership at CUNY-CSI, this new, multischool college quickly moved out of chaos thanks to the support of the faculty and staff as well as a capable, collaborative team of school directors. Not distracted by Guam's military

significance, I learned a great deal about the Asian Pacific Island cultures, which had not been very familiar to me as an ethnic Chinese, originally from mainland China and then from mainland United States. On the other hand, the extensive self-learning in my early years had prepared me with a broad and solid foundation for bringing the different schools to new heights, including specialized accreditation (e.g., NCATE).

Two years later, I was offered a tenured professor and associate vice chancellor position at Indiana University Southeast (IUS). I took charge to lead faculty development, student success, and diversity efforts, among other duties as a member of the campus leadership team. As a part of the university-wide undertaking, diversity was highly valued and became an overarching theme for our campus mission encompassing teaching, research, and service. This was quite remarkable given that the campus had relatively small percentages of minority populations compared with many institutions in Louisville just across the Ohio River. The ethnic group of Chinese and Chinese Americans was especially small-sized in contrast to some institutions on the West and East Coasts. However, I was able to accomplish several important initiatives with my colleagues before moving back to NYC 4 years later to become a tenured professor and the associate provost for academic affairs at Pace University. A note to my continued lifelong learning, this experience in America's heartland opened my eyes wider not only with deeper insights into "American culture" but also with the unique (somewhat centralized) organizational and management operations model of Indiana University. I benefited from the strategic vision of IUS Chancellor Sandra Patterson-Randles' cabinet (particularly my immediate "boss" and partner Dr. Gilbert W. Atnip, who allowed me valuable professional development opportunities including leadership training at Harvard and showed me how to balance work and life as a mature academic administrator), as well as my dear colleagues of deans, directors, faculty, and staff who made the workplace truly unforgettable (believe it or not, similar to Guam as a strategic place in geopolitical matters, the small but beautiful campus adjoining the Border South is a must-stop campaign site for the US presidential candidates, including George H.W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Hillary Clinton who was represented by her daughter Chelsea Clinton on the campus while I was there).

#### **4 Focusing on Diversity: A Sample of Accomplishments**

Progressing through the ranks of a department chair, college dean, and campus associate vice chancellor/university associate provost for academic affairs, I had a full range of administrative responsibilities to support institutional missions in teaching, research, and service. Sometimes explicitly cut out for me as a part of my job responsibility and other times inherent in the work I performed, diversity was essential to the official activities and programs I helped to configure, organize, and implement. It also became more and more a marked scholarly interest that could be traced back to my years as a faculty member and then a department chair. Later as a



dean, I had much more formal responsibilities in handling diversity-related issues, with also professional development opportunities to learn about the managerial and legal implications of the matters I had to deal with as an executive. With responsibilities similar to a chief diversity officer (CDO) on the academic side, my position as the associate vice chancellor for academic affairs at IUS was all the more notable in promoting diversity.

It was a long way to truly appreciate diversity and take action to implement the fundamental ideas to respect differences and ensure equal opportunity for all. Some of my progressive efforts and accomplishments included:

- Participating in early professional development and obtaining a diversity management certificate at CUNY while chairing a department at CSI
- Continuing professional development in legal training in diversity-related subjects as a college/campus/university executive
- Assuming affirmative action roles as a faculty member or training search committees as an administrator
- Securing internal funding and acquiring external grants to support diversity initiatives
- Creating a diversity academy and supervising postdoctoral diversity fellows
- Leading international and interdisciplinary teams of academics and academic administrators to collaborate on publications on academic administration and diversity management

## 5 Understanding Diversity: Conceptual and Realistic Notes

With a national origin from China, diversity represented a major step in my learning as opposed to uniform national identity as a major context for shaping the worldview of Chinese people under Communist rule. In my crossing from collectivism and nationalism to individualism and group disparities, diversity opened a new way of thinking in understanding social relations and governance with different sorts of dynamics.

Diversity as a theoretical breakthrough and a public policy undertaking is also relatively new in the United States. Against the worst possible cases of genocide and slavery and other worse types of race relations (such as population transfer/removal and involuntary segregation) in world history, America was then hailed as an ideal “melting pot,” with the study of assimilation, acculturation, etc., ever flourishing. Later, the notion was challenged with the dismissal of a dominating group belief/characteristic, that is, the “mainstream,” as a universal yardstick for others. The so-called salad plate became the alternative, which has replaced “melting pot” as the metaphor for a new, more desirable race relations paradigm, that is, diversity, or pluralism (Chen & Brackett, 2011). Instead of looking for commonality/similarity as the sole or main interest, diversity recognizes and respects differences as a better way of achieving individual and group benefits. It is also believed to result in complementary and, thus, enhanced common strength for the larger or entire society.

Under the novel idea, different groups differentiated on any individual and social characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, and age) would be considered as created equal and should be treated as such in terms of equal opportunity for all. The reality, however, kept showing prejudice and discrimination against disadvantaged people in every aspect of social life. In addition, it was most notable concerning resource allocations, etc. To counter and rectify the negative/regressive impact of racism, sexism, ageism, etc., various social programs have been instituted including a highly consequential (and increasingly controversial) affirmative action (AA) program.

## **6 Managing Diversity: Theoretical and Practical Topics**

I was fortunate to be part of a diversity leadership with a scholarly interest while being an executive team member on several campuses. To meet the need for guiding administrative practice with a better theoretical understanding, I initiated a research/reflective writing project by convening and collaborating with an international team of contributing authors. It resulted in a valuable collection that provides insights into several important topics in diversity management for the pursuit of excellence (see book that contains Chen & Brackett, 2011).

The first part of the work provides a theoretical foundation that comprises biological, psychological, economic, legal, and other social dimensions of diversity and pluralism. Racial and gender issues are highlighted as examples to gain a deeper theoretical understanding of applied studies. Specifically, there are chapters entitled “Physical and Environmental: Human Biology and Diversity,” “Mental and Behavioral Health: An East-West Perspective,” “Social Psychology of Stereotyping and Human Difference Appreciation,” “The Economics of Diversity: The Efficiency vs. Equity Trade-Off,” “Protection and Legal Compliance,” “Understanding Race and Ethnicity,” and “Violence Against Women: Implications for the Workplace.”

The second part of the work tackles practical issues and explores approaches to promoting diversity. Some of the chapter titles/topics are: “Academic Leadership and Diversity,” “Why So Few? Faculty of Color in Higher Education,” “Diversifying the Curriculum: Leadership to Overcome Inertia,” “International Education in the Context of Multiculturalism,” “Unpacking the Personal and the Social: The Process of Developing Transformative Leaders,” and “Trust, Community Care, and Managing Diversity: Britain as a Case Study.”

As a collaborative effort, academic leaders on the author team took the opportunity to share multidisciplinary knowledge and varied experience relevant to diversity and pluralism. The topics they chose demonstrate that diversity has many different but equally important aspects that require a combination of theoretical and practical considerations. As the book editor, I also contributed a chapter on race and racial issues; some of the major points and observations are recapped below (Chen & Brackett, 2011).

## 7 Racial Diversity

Racial diversity recognizes, appreciates, and celebrates differences among racial groups to achieve racial equity and justice. This aspect/dimension of diversity is extremely important since race is one of the defining (and often polarizing) features of the American society (Donohue, III & Levitt, 2001). Racial issues permeate politics, business, education, and other aspects of our social life. The main theme of this book, that is, *Chinese American leadership in higher education*, is also best understood in this large context.

My earlier publication dealt with the subject from both social and humanistic viewpoints, including fundamental conceptual issues (Donohue, III & Levitt, 2001). It reviews historical patterns of race relations leading to diversity and pluralism as the prevailing approach since the late twentieth century. Common racial/ethnic categories are examined along with various special issues facing each minority group; implications to diversity management and related tasks are also discussed. As indicated in that systematic review, the United States had been proud of itself as a “melting pot,” a metaphor to describe the process of assimilation of immigrants in seeking their American dreams. The melting-together metaphor symbolizes a heterogeneous society becoming more homogeneous in the hope of a harmonious whole with a common culture. Yet, there are real issues with such an ideal, particularly about the rights of minority groups.

During the 1970s, the “melting pot” model was challenged with the dismissal of a dominating (or “mainstream”) group belief/characteristic as a universal yardstick for others. Critics asserted that cultural differences within society are valuable and should be preserved. An alternative metaphor of the “salad bowl” (or “salad plate”) was introduced to represent the mix of different cultures that would remain distinct. Such an approach is called pluralism, cultural pluralism, or multiculturalism. The ideal of pluralism is for different ethnic and racial groups to coexist with equal status and tolerance, maintaining unique cultures and lifestyles without developing positions of subordination.

Note diversity means plurality, which does not add up to pluralism (Eck, 1997). Pluralism is the engagement that creates a common society from all that plurality (Donohue, III & Levitt, 2001). A pluralist society is characterized by recognition and tolerance of cultural and ethnic diversity. After the world experienced a full spectrum of models of race relations, pluralism has emerged as a leading approach to diversity since the late twentieth century, even though assimilation still carried its weight in immigration studies including an argument about segmented assimilation (Healey, 2009).

## 8 Minority

A minority means being smaller in number or being a part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subject to differential treatment. In the latter sense, a minority is a category of people who lack power and privilege, subject to prejudice and discrimination. Therefore, women are often considered a minority in the American society. New immigrants, in general, could also be viewed as in a minority status, especially before they are granted citizenship and the rights associated with it.

Minority also means nonmajority. So far, whites, particularly those born in the United States or of WASP (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant) origin, have been deemed the majority of the American society, both in number and in status, who are different from new white immigrants or original non-English “White Ethnic Americans” (Donohue, III & Levitt, 2001). Many in the latter group suffered from prejudice and discrimination such as anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism (Healey, 2009). Note that while Hispanic or Latino Americans (recognized as the largest ethnic minority in the United States, with African Americans being the second most numerous racial group) are also predominantly white, they have also faced issues against their identity. It is predicted that with a steady pattern of fertility and immigration rates, white European (non-Hispanic) Americans will be outnumbered by other racial/ethnic groups by the mid-twenty-first century, while many of them are unprepared to become a future minority (Keen, 1995).

One of the greatest achievements of the novel race relations paradigm, that is, diversity and pluralism, is the protection of the rights of minority groups against prejudice and decimation as a major social undertaking for equity, justice, and equal opportunity. The nation has invested enormous amounts of effort and resources in institutionalizing such a social ideal. It has become a new tradition that may be traced back to the point Martin Luther King, Jr., made that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Since the late 1960s, minority-focused thinking has greatly reshaped political dialogs in the United States, stemming from and going far beyond the field of race relations. It has become an American core value that “injustice to one person is injustice/threat to all.” The policy attention and socioeconomic resources paid to the undertaking of minority protection have become a distinguishing feature of contemporary American society, in sharp contrast to not only its history but also the reality of such other countries as China where majority interests may still prevail at the cost of minority welfare in many people’s (including some helping professionals’) favored but oversimplified pattern of thinking.

To address/redress historical inequity and injustice and to ensure equal opportunity for all US citizens, affirmative action programs are also set up to provide various types of benefits to victimized minority groups. Of no doubt, such program benefits have achieved certain goals by playing a positive, important role in compensating for the disadvantages and vulnerabilities of protected categories in the US population. On the other hand, however, they have caused controversies and

conflicts as to who should receive the benefits and whether the benefits would jeopardize the opportunities of others (nonrecipients). Consequently, the so-called “reverse discrimination” (particularly that against white males) has become a serious concern, resulting in outcries in public policy space with many lawsuits filed in the court (and eventually a ban on AA provisions in school admissions etc.).

## 9 Asian Americans

Are Asian Americans a minority group? The answer may appear very straightforward, though their situation could be rather complicated when it comes to various diversity program benefits. We may discuss the issue by focusing on Chinese Americans as a subgroup later. Here let’s gain a bigger picture of Asian Americans first.

Asian Americans comprise the third largest minority group in the United States. Data from the 2020 US Census Bureau show that there are approximately 20.7 million Asian and Pacific Islanders in the United States—comprising 6.2% of the US population (Lim, 2022). The Asian American population is also the fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in the United States, growing by 81% from 2000 to 2019 (Pew Research Center, 2021).

It is important to note that Asian Americans are a diverse category with distinct ethnicities and immigration histories despite their sharing of some physical attributes and cultural traditions (USA Facts, 2021). People of East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian descent are considered part of the Asian race, while people from Siberia, Central Asia, Western Asia, and any Caucasians from East Asia are typically classified as white. There is another category of Pacific Islanders (also known as Pacific Islander Americans or Oceanian Americans) including Native Hawaiians; the 1980 census first combined several individual ancestry groups into “Asian or Pacific Islanders” (or API) (Chen & Brackett, 2011).

Except for native Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans share the story of immigration in modern times with other racial/ethnic groups. The Chinese were among the first Asians to immigrate to the United States, with Chinese sailors first arriving in Hawaii around the time when British Captain James Cook came upon the island (which marked the discovery of Hawaii by the Western world in 1778). Larger numbers of Chinese and Japanese began immigrating to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century to work as laborers on the transcontinental railroad. Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino immigrants also came to Hawaii to work on sugar plantations. Their labor was crucial to those vital elements of the economy at the time (Chen & Brackett, 2011).

Being descendants of Asians (or “Orientals” in a derogatory sense), Asian Americans might be treated as aliens in insensitive or hostile ways (e.g., Kim, 2022; Hutchinson, 2021). Historically, their increase in numbers, while relatively small compared to those from other parts of the world, and concentration in the West caused mainstream America to fear the so-called yellow peril. To restrict Asian

immigration, a federal law called the Chinese Exclusion Act was first passed in 1882, succeeded by an Asian Exclusion Act as part of the Immigration Act of 1924 (Andrew, 1998). It was not until 1965 that a new Immigration and Nationality Act (the Hart-Celler Act) was passed to abolish quotas for immigrants based on national origin, and Asian America was no longer subject to legal exclusions (Lee, 2007). It was not until the 1970s that immigration from Asia increased significantly, accompanied by urban poverty, ethnic enclaves, and assimilation. The widespread discrimination faced by Asian Americans until the mid-twentieth century is an important part of American history, which may continue to impact race relations in the country, in increasingly significant ways.

## 10 Chinese American Leadership in Context

Asian Americans have been referred to as a “model minority” since their educational attainment and household income on the whole appear to be the highest of all major racial/ethnic groups (Jin, 2021). However, they are often discriminated against for their “alien-like” look. On the other hand, being labeled as a high-achieving “model minority,” they may be excluded from such programs as affirmative action, which are meant to benefit only vulnerable, disadvantaged, “underrepresented,” or “protected” categories of minority people. For Chinese Americans, they no doubt are of a minority group but whether they are considered vulnerable or disadvantaged and, thus, belong to formally protected categories could become a real question. In college admissions, for instance, the usual criterion used for affirmative action is the so-called over- or underrepresentation, judged by their share/percentage in the general population as a weight for a potential quota system regardless of their academic achievements. The result is ironic in that as a minority group Chinese Americans may be treated along with whites in a similar way of “reverse discrimination,” which has been the reason for several lawsuits brought against some top universities in the United States. In general, when such great ideas as diversity and pluralism become political correctness and are deemed as over-pushed in benefits programs, there may come grave consequences in splitting rather than uniting the society which is what we see in today’s reality (including arguments surrounding critical race theory, or CRT; see Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

In terms of Chinese American Leadership in higher education, despite their accomplishments, data show that Asian Americans face the lowest “glass ceiling” compared with other racial/ethnic groups in the sense that they have by far the worst chance to rise to managerial levels in private industries, universities, and federal government (see [http://www.80-20initiative.net/action/equalopp\\_glassceiling.asp#1](http://www.80-20initiative.net/action/equalopp_glassceiling.asp#1), retrieved December 1, 2022). Therefore, it seems that the theory of diversity and pluralism is great, but the reality of affirmative action may not be that rosy for Chinese Americans. It is particularly true about some potential and subtle factors affecting their chance for leadership opportunities in higher education (and elsewhere).

Competing for a leadership position may be tougher than many could imagine without the insights and not always be a pleasant experience (especially for Chinese males according to some informal assessments). Nonetheless, I have made some really good/understanding friends/colleagues just by going through some of the interview processes. Chinese Americans as a whole have continued to make impressive achievements and demonstrate leadership as exemplified by the stories shared by the contributors to this book. This is due to their efforts and struggle and also the contemporary American core value of diversity and pluralism as well as a full set of social mechanisms with tremendous resources invested against racial injustice or inequity.

My personal experience attests to the above observation. For example, the culmination of my administrative career was an offer from Norwich University for its second-ranked vice president position, with potential professional development into a presidency within a few years. Although I finally turned down that offer for personal reasons, I held the institution, and American institutions for equal opportunity as a whole, in the highest regard in addition to my indebtedness to President Richard W. Schneider, RADM, USCGR (RET.). In terms of any regrettable moments in my career advancement, I would have taken up the job offer at that military university if my father, an anti-Japanese war veteran, were still alive. Instead, I chose to accept an offer from Dr. Geoffrey L. Brackett, then provost and executive vice president (EVP) for Academic Affairs at Pace University, with shared excitement. We hoped to bring the academic excellence of the institution to new heights by working closely together (including coauthoring a chapter for the *Diversity Management* book). Unfortunately, Geoff soon left to become executive vice president at another institution closer to his family. I had to shoulder a major responsibility to keep pace in the Doctoral/Research Universities class by dealing with the Carnegie Foundation and mobilizing academic units internally, among other urgent tasks and important initiatives on multiple fronts. Two years later when a new provost was hired, I returned to faculty devoting myself to teaching, research, and service on our NYC campus, located in the heart of the world's financial capital in Downtown Manhattan.

## 11 Conclusion

The rise of Chinese American leaders in US higher education needs to be understood in a large social context, with diversity and pluralism being the most relevant and helpful background. A historical perspective on race relations leading to the rise of diversity and pluralism in recent decades is therefore very important.

An international perspective will also help to engage in thinking about diversity versus unity/uniformity. Different nations have different stories of treating differences, particularly those between majority and minority groups. The contemporary American story is one pushing hard toward minority protection, to the extent that some affirmative action program measures may appear to be reaching the extreme of "reverse discrimination" against members of historically majority or

“advantaged” groups. Asian Americans, particularly Chinese Americans, have benefited from institutional arrangements for diversity and pluralism and are protected by equal opportunity laws and regulations. On the other hand, they have distinguished themselves from other minority groups to appear “advantaged” in certain aspects and thus suffered from “reverse discrimination” as if they were in the majority/mainstream in certain ways. In a broader view embracing the adverse impact of rapidly deteriorating and increasingly confrontational relations between the United States and China, Chinese American academics have suffered even more than their usual “alien-like” experience. They have become the subject of potential or obvious scapegoating as exemplified by the so-called “China initiative,” which has upended hundreds of lives and destroyed scores of academic careers (Mervis, 2023).

In general, racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one’s racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. How to achieve racial equity, however, will require more thoughtful and evidence-based policy design and debate rather than simply sticking to some age-old programming with far-reaching consequences threatening the integration of the American society. In a sense, Chinese Americans today still face the issue of exclusion, even if it is potential or subtle, which has been manifested by visibly increasing happenings and sentiments against them in recent years. When it comes to Chinese American leaders in US higher education, the issue of glass ceiling may have been felt by many. Fighting racist prejudice and discrimination is a call of duty, particularly for Chinese American leaders.

With such a determination and joint effort, America is still a land of opportunity for all including Chinese Americans as a minority, despite the persistence of such issues as “Asian (particularly China) hate” (Hutchinson, 2021). The author’s personal story and roadmap of professional advancement attest to this statement that joining forces against prejudice and discrimination is the only way to safeguard racial justice/equity and equal opportunity for all. This requires a full display of leadership and a deep understanding of societal efforts and the meaning of individual and group successes. Chinese American leaders are elites with extraordinary skills, hard work, and a sense of commitment. Theoretical and experiential learning in this regard will certainly help with the continuing professional development of current and future leaders.

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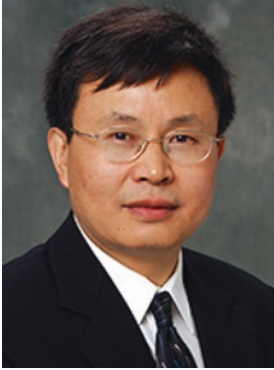
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# Ancient Wisdom for Modern Leadership



Ding-Jo Hsia Currie

## 1 First Chinese, Then Chinese American

At age 16, I was ignorant of the impact those 16 years had on me as a Chinese person whose parents were exiles from mainland China. It is incomprehensible to be told that my birthplace Taiwan was not my real home but simply an island where my parents had been stranded by circumstances beyond their control. Outside of the home, there was also a noticeable difference between an outsider Mainland Chinese versus a native Taiwanese. It was a psychic jolt because everything about the island gave me a sense of home—I should belong there because I had grown up there. After this revelation, there developed a perpetual incongruence between how I felt and the message I received. *You do not belong here.*

With my relocation to the United States at 16, the identity of an *outsider* was instantaneous from day one. This time it was quite different, an internal and external reality. There were no hints or subtleties needed to convey that I did not belong here. The message could be passed on with a simple look. Immigrants, of course, have always been more keenly aware of differences in how we behave, think, believe, and perceive. That is our lens and barometer, also a weapon of defense. Learning the language was the first bridge for me to fluidly connect, communicate, and code-switch across the two worlds in which I now lived. I needed to feel whole in both worlds. Yet, I am unsure if I ever achieved it even after having lived here for more than half a century.

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Since the first day we arrived in Ohio, the Chinese in me became more pronounced as I encountered differences in traveling between my concurrent American and Chinese lives. What was a normal and automatic mode of operation became a conscious and constant awareness that my Chinese self was neither functional nor accepted. I was very lonely in my Chinese life.

My first visit to Chinatown, New York was filled with anticipation and excitement. I looked forward to connecting with fellow Chinese people but was disappointed to find that language remained a barrier. In 1969, Cantonese was spoken in Chinatown, while I spoke Mandarin, so we had to rely on English to communicate as ethnic Chinese.

Additionally, I found it perplexing that the Chinese Americans in Chinatown seemed to maintain a very traditional way of life, reminiscent of nineteenth-century China. Their dress, mannerism, communication styles, and cultural habits were strikingly similar to those depicted in older Chinese dramas.

Little did I know that, more than five decades later, to newly arrived Chinese immigrants, I too may seem like a relic of the past, holding tightly to my cultural identity that defines who I am as a Chinese person. I recognized the importance of embracing my cultural heritage and did not want to let it go, despite the passage of time.

This is not everyone's experience I have discovered. Many immigrants, to erode the feeling of being an outsider or to evade prejudice and racism, meticulously strip themselves of any cultural identifiers of being anything other than an "American." Somehow, I did not even believe that was even a choice, but I could have never reconciled such a choice with my soul, regardless. I did the exact opposite in refusing to give up that which is precious to me and more. For example, instead of adopting a Western name, I persisted in using Ding-Jo despite much ridicule and micro-aggressions regarding my name over the years.

I understand the generational trauma depicted by Lee (2015), which Asian Americans have endured as both the despised and the model minority in the United States. Unfortunately, as Takaki (1989) described in *Strangers from Different Shores*, regardless of one being a first-, second-, or third-generation Asian American, the stereotype that *you must be from somewhere else other than here* persists. I understand, in a small part, the internal and external identity conflict from my Taiwan–China paradox—*you are born here, but you do not belong here*.

What I brought with me to this land—besides one suitcase and the two large bills packed inside my head and tucked away in my soul—were the teachings of my cultural and family values. I held on to them as the family heirloom that needed protection, just like the Chinese immigrants in Chinatown. They were the last treasures that could not be traded for who I am. I witnessed the bartering of many like me that in the end never resulted in the acceptance of their identity as an "American." Still, even if I was accepted as an American, Asian American, or Chinese American, I have yet to reconcile my Chinese identity, which will always be a prominent and permanent part of me and who I am.

## 2 Aspiring and Rising to Leadership

Navigating the whitewater currents of higher education has been like swimming upstream in the muddy roiling River. American higher education is a mirror reflection of the American society. In many ways, the system produces future generations that in turn perpetuate the system. The dominant culture of White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestants manifests itself in every aspect of the system, from faculty, leadership profiles, curriculum, policies, and practices, to program designs and institutional culture (Thelin, 2011).

It is not difficult then to understand why, in so many instances, I felt as if I were submerged in the depths of that muddy river, not knowing which way the current was flowing or where its surface and bottom were, and I felt radically powerless. While Asian Americans constitute a significant percentage of faculty in higher education, they are the least aspiring in regard to the most senior leadership position of a college or university president (American Council on Education [ACE], 2017). The vaunted academe has not been a welcoming system to people of color or women like me (Gangone, 2013).

My own experiences reflect ACE's (2017) statistics; being a president was not a position I could ever see myself assuming to ascend. The profile of a leader I had in mind then did not match my self-perception. I failed to identify with the White male or female model leadership mindsets, philosophical frameworks, styles, behaviors, and values. The possibility of being a leader was just not on my radar, not in such systems. I knew no leader who looked like me, and certainly, I thought, no one resembled my inner characteristics and values. Asian Americans were not perceived to fit the leadership profile, and this reality engenders vicious cycles of such void in both aspirations and appointments in senior leadership roles. Like many Asian American women, race and gender have become two main origins of hardship confronted on the journey toward leadership roles (Darity & Mason, 1998; Mella, 2012). There are a lot of barriers to break through before you even get to that bamboo ceiling.

It was hard to test and express my leadership style until I was in my initial leadership role. The more leadership opportunities I took, the more I experienced the effect and impact of my developing leadership. It was invigorating to uncover my unique way of leading, as I felt a sense of freedom, validation, and inner joy. However, those feelings did not come easily, smoothly, or without constant doubts and challenges. I am grateful for those who gave me leadership roles including Dr. Jim Martois, then director of the Refugee Assistance Program at Long Beach City College (LBCC); Dr. Constance Carroll, then president of Saddleback College; Dr. Ned Doffoney, then president at Saddleback College; Dr. Jess Carreon, then superintendent president at Rio Hondo College; and Dr. Bill Vega, then chancellor at Coast Community College District and on the board of trustees of 2009 for the Coast Community College District. I want to acknowledge their confidence in me by hiring and supporting me.

When serving at the vice president level, I began to see the uniqueness of my leadership style differentiated by distinct philosophical frameworks, cultural values, and intentional practices that were not many parts of the Western ideas of leadership. For example, when others suggested that I light some “fire and bomb” to the interim president to protest his decisions, I chose to maintain harmony and use the consultation process. When others want to impose strict rules, I chose to first conduct empathy interviews then followed by equity-centered decisions. One validation came after I was chosen as the final candidate for my next job as college president. A presidential search committee had come to my campus and interviewed groups from various constituencies. After the committee had chosen me as the successful candidate for my next job as college president, one trustee on that site visit shared that his decision was solidified when he asked my colleagues who wanted to follow me to the new college—the entire room of faculty, classified professionals, student leaders, and administrators unanimously raised their hands without hesitation. I felt vindicated from the wounds incurred when I stood up to injustices, inequities, and the bullying of a White dominant system. I felt validated for applying principles and values from that immigrant teenage girl who would not let her ancestors go.

I felt completely free to be me.

Being a college president soon became the ultimate test of my leadership. I was responsible and accountable for my own decisions and behaviors. I was able to truly put the theories, culture, beliefs, and values to the test. Our leadership practices are anchored in our values, philosophy, and beliefs, all of which are in turn reflected and refracted by our gender identity, race, ethnicity, and culture (ASHE, 2014). I could see, feel, and understand with evidence in concrete results, how I led absolutely reflected all the above. Don’t misinterpret this to mean that I perfected the leadership act. The difference back then was that I knew my principles worked, and I found alignment with whom I was, what I stood for, and how I led.

Living and working in a “foreign” country as an immigrant resident gave me the benefit of gaining clarity of my self-identity and my social identity. Each encounter, challenge, internal or external conflict, and moment of feeling alone became perfect prompts for self-discerning reflections. From the East to the West, I came so far away from my home. Yet, I was closer to discovering myself in a new way (Adam et al., 2018).

### **3 Confucian Influence**

For many Asians, the Confucian philosophy has become a cultural DNA with no label or identification. After nearly 3000 years, for the Chinese in particular, Confucian philosophy has become the embodiment of culture, indistinguishable from the essence of our being. A government may attempt to abolish the ideology and teachings of Confucius, such as the case during the decade-long Chinese

Cultural Revolution, but the deep-rooted philosophy resists; it cannot be wiped out so easily. Confucian thought has infiltrated the fundamental consciousness, automated behavioral patterns, and ingrained in the moral compass of the Chinese society and people. It is an integral psychocultural construct of modern Chinese ethos (Tu, 1998).

I was socialized into this mindset long before I realized who Confucius was. It was not typical for students to study the *Analects*, the collection of Confucius's teachings, until high school and college. Thus, I should have missed the opportunity to study Confucius before relocating to the United States. However, the middle school principal, Ms. Shao Meng Lan, an ardent enthusiast and exemplar of Confucian education philosophy, taught us the *Analects* weekly. She was the only one in Taiwan to include this curriculum at the middle school level and to teach the subject herself.

For this class, students made folding canvas chairs in a craft class and carried the chairs to the auditorium each week to sit through this *Analects* course. No one looked forward to this weekly torture because Principal Shao randomly selected students to stand up and recite the rest of the paragraph after she prompted them with the first phrase. She interpreted the *Analects* phrase by phrase, but to the mind of a 13-year-old, none of them made any sense despite her translations. I endured 3 years of middle school with this weekly torment. The reciting and regurgitation were merely routine, and the digestion of what I recited did not take place till much later in life. The meaning of Confucius's words came to me like the waves returning to shores. They enveloped me every time I encountered the incongruencies of confronting the American way of being and, later, the American way of leading. I feel compelled to share my reflections here, focusing on the impact of Confucius in the context of leadership.

## 4 Who Is the Betrayer?

I spent the first 10 years of my higher education career at Long Beach City College (LBCC). My job as the coordinator of the Refugee Assistance Program and the entire department was funded by annual renewable grants to support the refugee students. Coming upon the tenth year there, I received a *pink slip*, which arrived as certified mail at home. It informed me the grant might not be renewed and my job would be terminated should that occur—I would be laid off due to a lack of funds without any warning or extended explanation. A feeling of hurt and betrayal can still feel like a fresh wound whenever recalling that moment of reading the certified pink slip notice. The human resources department explained that they discovered they were supposed to send earlier notices out for the scenario, just in case the funding was cut. I could not reconcile 10 years of devotion, hard work, and loyalty to my job and the cavalier treatment from the institution following the cold, impersonal, and callous notice in the certified mail. Was this the recompense for my hard work and loyalty?

I immediately started looking for a new job elsewhere, disregarding colleagues' assurances that my role would continue. I received two job offers from two different colleges that veered my career in a new direction. To my surprise, when my father learned I accepted a new and better job elsewhere, instead of praise, he critiqued my departure as a disloyal act, as LBCC had provided me with such a good job for 10 years. I felt a sense of guilt with his reminder; yet, I could not help but wonder where the reciprocity in loyalty was.

Central to Confucius's teachings is the virtue of loyalty, *Zhong* (忠). One's loyalty to family and country is revered and considered a basic foundation of character. However, Confucius contextualized this when his disciple asked whether the son was considered loyal when he reported to the authority his father's stealing to feed his family. To my surprise, Confucius said "no," because the son's loyalty resided with his father. Nothing is set in stone. The essence of loyalty in a Confucian school of thought is complex and not simplistic regarding the modern interpretation of loyalty (Sung, 2022).

If I were to use the modern interpretation of loyalty in the context of the potential severance notice and my father's expectations, I deeply felt the breach of reciprocity in such loyalty. This experience was a poignant, profound lesson for me: Loyalty is sacred and shall not be breached. 己欲立而立人，己欲达而达人。(If you want to establish yourself, establish others first; if you want to reach achievement for yourself, then help others achieve first.) This simple rule of being loyal to others first has remained a guiding principle with me—other-centered leadership. Yet, in many ways, this concept operates contrary to the individualistic North American cultural values of what is important for the leader to develop and achieve. Coincidentally, Confucius paired another word, *Shu* (恕—consideration for others), with *Zhong* (loyalty). When asked about the cardinal and consistent teaching of Confucius, his disciple replied *Zhong Shu* was the all-encompassing rule of conduct. Linking to the concept of *Shu*, Confucius's words resonate with me. 己所不欲，勿施于人 described the essence of *Shu* as the familiar golden rule: That which we do not wish upon ourselves, do not do unto others.

My personal pink slip story influenced my future leadership action. Several times in my career, we discussed budget cuts in the context of cutting class sections or hourly workers instead of laying off full-time staff. I consistently pointed out that to those part-time faculty and hourly staff, it is effectively the same as being laid off, their livelihoods were taken away from them. Our inclusive language applied equitably to understanding the conditions, feelings, and needs of the group and guiding our actions accordingly. Furthermore, when we had to reduce staffing, we should not deliver the notice coldly by certified mail. Instead, we communicated in person with compassion, empathy, and whatever support was required. I have found *Shu* to be an inclusive and compassion-based leadership concept central to the virtue of empathy through consistent practice (Lippiello, 2010).



## 5 Internal Loyalty Versus Blind Loyalty

Navigating the vast and complex roadmaps of higher education can be quite intimidating and lonely. As an immigrant, I did not possess the dominant cultural codes and I had purposefully not sought to “assimilate” or behave like a native-born person. As a woman of color, I also faced the double jeopardy of being not male or White. I felt even a triple jeopardy because not identifying with Latinx or Black rendered me a different positionality and intersectionality. My experiences participating in and later hosting the Kaleidoscope Leadership Institute for women of color helped me contrast my leadership journey as an Asian or rather a Chinese American woman. I found myself at the crossroads more frequently than not having to choose and switch between the two worlds and often felt conflicted about being true to my cultural roots and philosophical frameworks in how I conducted myself as a leader.

I could not help but reflect on this word loyalty at those crossroads, asking myself if I was to remain loyal to how I was raised, cultured, and becoming. The *Zhong* referred to here is loyalty to one’s authentic self. To Confucius, when a cultured person remains genuine and pure, it leads to trustworthiness (*Xin* 信) and justice (*Yi* 义). My choice to remain culturally authentic—though at times carried hard consequences—proved to be the route that led me to feel relaxed, free, and confident and brought in dividends in return. The deep-rooted Confucian frameworks of loyalty, internal to self and external to the team, institution, and principles, have provided me with rewarding and rich leadership experiences. Every supervisor I had has given me feedback that my authentic self has helped them gain respect and appreciation for who I am while my loyalty to them, *not blind loyalty*, garnered high levels of respect and trust in me. One previous supervisor shared what he had said during a reference call regarding the question of loyalty: “Ding-Jo’s unwavering loyalty is unquestionable to me, to her team, to the institution, and the students. She will take a bullet for me, and that is how much I trust her.”

However, I do not seek blind loyalty to me. When I was the president, I asked one of my vice presidents why he transferred from a sister college in the district. He told me his previous supervisor asked him to do something he felt was illegal or immoral, and he felt he could not work for that person or the institution that endorsed such a request. I told him I was glad he was a man of integrity and not blind loyalty. More importantly, I wanted a vice president anchored by a clear moral compass, with the courage and honesty to stand up to me when they did not agree with my actions or requests. The trust in their own external and internal loyalty is equally important to my loyalty to be authentically me. This authenticity has been easier in principle than practice, especially when I found myself at crossroads because I was at odds with dominant cultural practices and policies and my moral compass and values of *Zhong* (loyalty).

## 6 Leadership Starts with Self-Cultivation

As a leadership practitioner, I find scholarship without practice deficient and without much merit. There are many theories and models of leadership. Yet, for those who practice the art of leadership, the Chinese call such abstractions merely 纸上谈兵 (discussing battles of the war on paper and not understanding the boots-on-the-ground reality of actual battlefields). I have witnessed educational leadership scholars failing at modeling the leadership theories they can cite book-and-verse and lecture on so well. I did not major in leadership or earn any advanced degree in leadership. Yet serving in various leadership roles was on-the-job training for leadership from the School of Hard Knocks.

The more challenges I had to face, overcome, and work through, the more I grew and developed as a leader, by sharpening my skills and mastering the essence of leading people. For this reason, I have always respected Confucius. Not only did he start from humble beginnings in poverty, raised by his widowed mother, but also worked his way up as a public servant leader in the government with prominent executive-level positions. His teachings are the culmination of wisdom gained by his intellect and his long tenure as a leader.

In my younger days, I thought the Confucian teachings I received were about cultivating one's behavior, morals, and virtuous life. I memorized the passage passed down from Confucius's disciple, Zheng Zi, that exemplified Confucius's teaching: 吾日三省吾身，为人谋而不忠乎？与朋友交而不信乎？传不习乎？ This passage is about developing the habit of self-discipline, self-reflections, and self-correction. He asks one to conduct daily self-reflection. First, examine one's loyalty in conducting business with others; second, whether one has been trustworthy with friends; and third, if one has practiced what they learned. It was not until many years later that I discovered I was using Confucian teachings in my leadership practice. This was followed by an epiphany in understanding that so much of Confucian wisdom and principles were profoundly important guidance for leaders. Confucius was not only advising and coaching the heads of state on how to govern but also cultivating the development of future leaders to serve the heads of state. Leading is modeling, as Confucius said, 见贤思齐焉 (when you witness the virtuous, one follows to think and act virtuously).

As a leader, especially for a team, department, division, or entire organization, I have found that every word a leader utters matters, and every action will be scrutinized under the microscope. The first time I experienced the Freedom of Information Act—when all my emails, memorandums, and text message communications had to be handed over for careful review—I realized everything I do must be with total transparency to stand in the public's eyes and the courts' scrutiny.

I have conducted my affairs as if I reside in a glass ball, with the intention of justifying integrity in all my affairs. It is often the advice I offer other rising leaders to model the behaviors and words they wish others to conduct themselves. As Confucius pointed out—and I later understood from witnessing other leaders at

work—whether for a team or two, a small division or as president of a country, modeling is one of the most powerful ways a leader creates the institutional culture and impacts the followers’ behaviors. It makes self-cultivation clear as the first step in a leader’s mindset and development.

## 7 Other-Centered Leadership

“修身、齐家、治国、平天下” (Confucius & Lionshare Media, 2010) (Self-cultivation, family harmony, governing a national state, and a peaceful world come in that order).

The emphasis on self-cultivation, self-reflection, and self-improvement as a foundation in the lessons by my middle school principal made at least partial sense. However, messages on family harmony, governance of the state, and world peace did not surface in my consciousness until years later. It was not until I married a Midwestern American, living the life of two cultures integrated into one and raising two bicultural and bilingual daughters that I realized the challenges of creating harmony in a family unit. If I am unable to bring about unity in a family of loved ones, how can I speak of the abilities to govern an organization or a nation-state without turmoil or aspire to a world without conflicts?

At the beginning of my career, I did not comprehend why it was important to sit in each of the escalating levels of leadership positions to climb up to the top as a senior higher education leader. After I ascended to the office of the president with retrospection upon the positions held and their value in my leadership preparation, I became a firm believer in the merit and magnitude of each leadership role’s influence and impact. Furthermore, the longevity of tenure in each position also made a difference. Each position tested my skills, shifted my positionality, and sharpened my focus on myself as a human and a leader. I can recount the challenges I had to confront, mistakes I made, and perspectives of that position level. With each step of the ladder, I gained leadership muscle built from strenuous exercising my values and principles. I observed that when a leader does not stay in one position long before stone skipping to the next promotion, one does not understand the impact of their leadership mistakes nor do they have time to learn or develop their teams.

When coaching college presidents a few years ago, I came across a president who ascended to his presidency in less than 2 years as provost with a pattern of short tenure in his leadership history. I commented that he achieved the presidency in a brief time, and he responded that his colleague reached the presidency in less time than he did. Not to my surprise, this president barely finished 1 year of presidency before the chancellor and the board asked him to leave. The cultivation of self while being a leader requires the *progressive growth* that comes from an expanded horizon of more panoramic perspectives and a deepening of the anchors from one’s upward

rise. What I experienced and observed reinforced and magnified Confucian principles of 修己以敬, 修己以安人, 修己以安百姓, requiring an intentional self-cultivated leader as a prerequisite of modeling as a force of calm, trust, and joy for others and being able to provide the comfort and safety for the people.

## 8 Ren (Love/Compassion)-Based Leadership

Higher education has operated as institutions with a lot of structures but void of emotions or compassion (Tong, 2017). Indeed these organizations are hierarchical with a power-based model that leans toward male-dominant orientation. As a woman, that orientation was part of the incongruence I experienced. I felt the absence of 仁 (*Ren*), which, to me, is the cross between love and compassion. *Ren* is a central concept of Confucius's teachings. I have come to understand *Ren* in a spiritual context as an action that carries no conditions or prerequisites for the followers. As a leader, I must ask myself whether I can unconditionally love my team, students, and institution even though I see their flaws and witness their weakest moments. I honestly did not reach that level of love until I became president.

This concept of *Ren* also does not mean I did not hold people accountable or could not let go of people who crossed the ultimate boundary in their actions. Even if I had to dismiss a person after supportive measures, I could do so with the love and compassion of *Ren* to maintain that person's dignity and humanity. *Ren* was my guide when I thought about serving those in the military studying from the foxholes and submarines or students who had been incarcerated with education delivered to their prison cells. My enlightenment on *Ren* came at the moment I internalized the process of reciprocity when unconditional love, instead of power, is applied. To have received immense love and compassion in return from those with whom I provided leadership was a transformative and triumphant moment as a leader. Tong (2017) claimed higher education could use a lot more Confucian *Ren* in practice, and I agree. In my analysis, Confucius understood the formula: 仁 (*Ren*) = 爱 (love) + 恕 (compassion) + 礼 (respect). Although I have been preaching love-based leadership for a while, I need to start to credit Confucius for his *Ren*-based model.

## 9 Unity in Diversity

As a woman of color and a Chinese immigrant, I was keenly aware of the positionalities differences among people. However, from early childhood education, I was guided to conform and avoid being different, let alone recognize or appreciate my difference. Therefore, with a monocultural and collective cultural background, being different has not been something of which I have developed a critical consciousness. I have not relied on the conflicts inherent in divergent ideologies and positionalities to address crises or believe that inconsistent intersectionality is a

healthy condition for leadership. I was socialized by my Chinese background, infused with Confucius's demand for harmony as a condition for achieving success in any context. For this reason, some perceived me as someone who may not embrace or be able to manage conflicts. I was taught to avoid unnecessary conflicts and design conditions for harmonious energy. For Confucius, 和 (*he*) (harmony and harmonization) is the ultimate ideal context for leaders to achieve despite primary differences. In other words, the goal is not to eliminate the differences or conflicts by submission and force but through the additive effect of the combined strengths (Li, 2006). I recalled the memorized words 君子和而不同,小人同而不和, (the learned derive unity amid differences, the unlearned have disunity even with likenesses) after I experienced sparks in work environments and around board tables and the increased tension in our diverse societies today. I bowed down to the wisdom of Confucius, who grasped the conceptual framework of unity in diversity with sage leadership and the dichotomy of disunity with uniformity by poor leadership. To think this profound leadership principle existed nearly 3000 years ago is something for which I am most grateful. Confucius knew that the ultimate leader strives to seek diversity in all perspectives and positionalities and to achieve unity in diversity with harmonious energy as the outcome. I would like to think that many Chinese American higher education leaders have this principle in mind, striving for harmony derived from unity amid what diverse people bring in the richness and challenges of their divergent lived experiences. Aren't we still trying to uncover how to lead in the new local and global diversity of our modern twenty-first century? I felt privileged to have been inculcated with early indoctrinations of the unity in diversity principles and concepts.

## 10 Leadership Development

Ever since I participated in my first leadership development program for women in 1985, I have become an advocate of leadership development programs, hosting many years of the Kaleidoscope Leadership Program designed for women of color, founded by Carolyn Desjardins. As a White woman, Desjardins understood women's unique and urgent needs, women who were often excluded in the mainstream leadership programs and left with unmet needs through traditional content with which they cannot identify. I have endeavored to continue Desjardins's vision of providing leadership development programs targeting and designed specifically for those who find themselves on islands in the vast sea of higher education without a compass or a lighthouse to guide their career pathways and leadership journeys.

Confucius made it his lifelong mission to cultivate future leaders of states and nations. His disciples have become his successors, the exemplars, and leaders; his teachings espoused to model. Indeed, many of his disciples and their students have become prominent leaders. I can feel the sense of duty, responsibility, and pride in Confucius's tireless teachings to accomplish these goals. Since retiring from my chancellor role, I have devoted my work full-time to leadership development. Like

many chief executive officers, we are confronting a vacuum when it comes to quality leaders with the positionality, capacity, and passion for leading in the diversity context and accomplishing the equity agenda through today's turbulent landscape in higher education.

With a modest grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, I started the Leadership Institute for Tomorrow (LIFT), an endeavor to serve first-generation, diverse, and emergent leaders. Like Confucius, who believed integrating music and the arts were important in leadership practice, I designed a program that helps leaders experience and use the arts as a leadership power tool. Confucius was right: We need the arts as a universal language to connect, inspire, and elicit transformative changes and action. I have found the outcomes thus far exhilarating, extremely empowering, and encouraging.

I am so glad colleagues such as Yolanda Moses, Jerry Hunter, Bill Vega, and Pam Walker, whom I respect and admire, wanted to join our LIFT team. On the topic of leadership, Confucius emphasized, 为政以德, 譬如北辰, 居其所, 而众星共之. He used the metaphor of the North Star Polaris as the center of the universe for all stars. Leaders must also stand out by their virtues as models, influence, and guide in the way they govern. LIFT programs have emphasized character development by first recognizing the strengths and unique dispositions of family, culture, and spiritual backgrounds, so participants are anchored in and are led by their convictions to virtues (Hackett & Wang, 2012).

I find the work of leadership development urgent and meaningful. There are many leadership gurus in modern history; somehow, the Confucian model has not been widely recognized.

## 11 Equity and Justice Mindedness

Coming from a Chinese collective and authoritarian culture with distinctive pressures to conform, obey, and be mindful of the perceptions of others, I have understood there is almost no room for individualistic thinking or appreciation for being unique. Standing out is strongly discouraged; that was the mindset with which I was inculcated. Not until the recent decade when I was teaching in the higher education leadership doctoral program, examining and reflecting on various philosophical frameworks, have I realized why I was drawn to community colleges where a 100% of applicants are accepted, indifferent to at what level or how a student arrives at the entrance door. What I recited back in middle school, 有教无类 (education without discrimination) suddenly became crystal clear—being an equity-minded educator with an open access value was seeded in the passages I memorized by heart. Except for this time, the regurgitation of those passages hit me like a lightning bolt with an exhilarating epiphany. Not only does the phrase mirror the community colleges' open-access practices, regardless of students' innate capacities or disabilities, but more importantly, it reminded me of the way Confucius practiced equity-minded pedagogy when he used an example of how one should respond differently to two

students based on their unique needs derived from their backgrounds, dispositions, and temperaments.

As educators and leaders, we are tasked with uncovering the uniqueness of individuals and developing them accordingly. This Confucian concept of 因材施教 (teach in accordance with student's background and aptitude) is foundational in the way I have been taught about designing equity-minded pedagogy and programs, but it took me a while to realize it has always been a deep-rooted conceptual framework for me. Caring about equity and not equality is a unique way of achieving justice. I loved the way Confucius taught us about equitable distribution. Without it, justice cannot be achieved; without justice, people will not feel safe and secure or be at peace. For example, the following quote was not something I could have comprehended, 不患寡而患不均, 不患贫而患不安, in which Confucius said that instead of worrying about scarcity, one should be concerned about inequity; instead of poverty, be concerned about peace and security of people. He spoke of equity not as the average, which we interpret as equality, but within a completely different conceptual framework with which to govern. In the United States, are we not just beginning to grapple with the complexity of achieving equity as a means to the ultimate fairness and justice?

I recall the plaques on the auditorium door in my middle school and hung in many great halls were 天下为公, which originated with Confucius's 大道之行也, 天下为公 (Confucius—礼运大同篇 *Liyun*—The Conveyance of Rites), meaning in the great ways to lead, the world belongs to the people. Many leaders have used it as their slogan to demonstrate that their mission and cause are to pursue the common good for all. It is a selfless and egoless mindset to protect the interest of the whole. When I first learned about Abraham Lincoln's "Democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people," I thought that was what Confucius espoused more than 2500 years ago with 天下为公.

## 12 Concluding Reflections

I have shared one of the most central and pivotal influences in my personal and professional life because so many of the ancient Eastern philosophies and teachings have not been recognized or acknowledged as valuable leadership schools of thought or models. As a Chinese American leader in higher education for the past four decades, I have witnessed the undervalued and misperceptions of leadership quality, styles, and models of many Asian Americans. The stereotypical archetypes became an artificial veil to see through the true leader identity and values of many Asian Americans who have been influenced by quite different, yet profoundly effective principles. Some principles, such as Confucian leadership—which I unconsciously subscribed to and now consciously do so—served me, and I like to think they also served many other Chinese American leaders.

Reflecting on the multitudes of challenges confronting the world today, the ancient wisdom of Confucius can be relevant, extremely valuable, and constructive toward a new world civilization, a unified nation, and harmonious families. I have merely scratched the surface of the Confucian leadership model and dream of a day when it can become a mainstream model to be studied and followed, as I have been a loyal follower and benefactor.

When we can celebrate and enjoy the freedom to lean into our authentic selves with a total alignment of their cultural, experiential, ethnic, and spiritual values, we find the best of ourselves at that intersection. For me, that path started long ago when I sat in a canvas chair reciting Confucius.

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Having served in many key national leadership roles such as board chair of the American Association of Community Colleges and board member of the American Council on Education, and Air War University, Ding-Jo is still active on many national and local boards. Ding-Jo is well known for her passion and expertise in a variety of areas such as diversity and inclusive leadership development, strength and love-based models, women leadership, and so on. Among many outstanding accomplishments, Ding-Jo has received awards such as the National Leadership Award inducted into the Hall of Fame at AACC, the Visionary Leadership Award, the Women Helping Women Awards, the SBA District Director's Awards, Commander's Award of the Airforce, and the Outstanding Chinese American Scholars. She is best known as a visionary leader and attributes the Baha'i Faith to her success as a unity builder.

# Building Leadership Capacity and Organizational Efficiency



Sharon Guan

At the 2019 Higher Learning Congress Conference, I gave a presentation called “Creating a Coherent Organizational Structure for Teaching and Learning Support.” It ended with a round of applause and a group of attendees huddling around me with their own stories of organizational structure frustration. Some asked if I could go and talk to their presidents because the structure I had changed was their reality.

However, organizational change doesn’t happen overnight. It took me 20 years to break, collect, and connect these Lego pieces to form an organizational castle that works. I did this while trying to build and upgrade my “operating system” as a leader—from gaining the fundamental competencies to manage a team to develop the ability to see above and beyond my team and to seek ways to reform, innovate, and optimize institutional operation or what the training industry called—the leadership capacity (Rothaizer & Hill, 2021).

Scott Peck says in his book *The Road Less Traveled*, “It is only because of problems that we grow mentally and spiritually” (Peck, 1978). In this chapter, I am writing about the problems I have encountered as a university administrator, the effort I have put into seeking resolutions for problems, the help I have received from my mentors, and the growth I gained in this journey of problem-solving.

## 1 Flying into a World of Problems

On August 16, 1992, I got on an airplane in Harbin, China, for the first time in my life. Thirty hours later after five flight transitions (Harbin–Beijing–Tokyo–Dallas–Chicago–Indianapolis) and a one hour car ride to Terre Haute, Indiana, I arrived on

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the campus of Indiana State University (ISU). I had my parents' life savings sewed in my underwear and a letter of conditional admission to the Master's Communication program in my pocket stating that if I couldn't keep my grade average above B, I would be expelled. A month later, I got an F on my first exam. I got an F because I heard the Mass Communication professor say he was giving an "essay exam." An essay, in my understanding, meant a composition. An essay exam in China means you sit in a classroom to write an article on a given title. And that's exactly what I did—I wrote a short article for every given question on the exam. Had I known that an "essay exam" in America was equivalent to the "question and answer" exam in China, I would have answered the questions showing I had read the textbook and understood the subject. But how could I know? I didn't have the courage to explain this to my professor. I was too embarrassed to tell him that I didn't even know what "essay exam" meant. Now, I know it takes some sense of security to admit one's insecurity, but at that time, I just didn't have it. Instead, I chose to work extremely hard to ace every other class assignment and exam to get a B+ for the course.

Speaking of embarrassment, there soon followed another incident, but I didn't know to be embarrassed! In my sociology class, we were assigned to write an essay about campus life, and the title I used for mine was "How to Make Out on College Campus." My sociology professor walked to my desk and asked me quietly, "Is this the title you want to use?" I nodded confidently. To me, the expression "make out" carried the same meaning as "work out" or "develop," but "make out" seemed stronger than the last two because you actually "make" something from your work. I don't remember what grade I received for that essay where the "make out" title was so skewed from the content, but I am still grateful to my confused sociology professor for accepting what I wrote.

These blunders, big as they seemed at the time, soon became more bearable as I started to encounter more disturbing incidents, such as a hand-scribbled insult "f\_\_king Chink" on the Chinese New Year Poster I had posted on a bulletin board or my supervisor's question—"Don't you have universities in China?" when I asked for time off to pick up Chinese students from the airport.

Twenty-plus years later when I was stressed by Covid-19 and the workload, I asked my supervisor Dr. Caryn Chaden how DePaul's provost Dr. Salma Ghanem remained so calm and peaceful during the Covid-19 crisis. Caryn replied, "Salma's from Egypt. She has been through two wars. This is nothing compared to what she had been through." Hearing this, I felt my trifling stories of embarrassment or insults were very minuscule. I understood that Dr. Ghanem bore such a heavy load of responsibilities with grace because what she had been through had given her the ability, endurance, and wisdom to do so. I came to realize the power of "having been through": The more we have been through, the more we would be able to handle; the harder the things we have been through, the easier it is for us to battle the difficulties. "Having been through" means not just suffering the hardships and misery that were dropped upon us but rather what we were able to learn from them and integrate the experience into our lives.

## 2 Getting an Offer for a Failure

In his book, *Developing the Leader Within You 2.0*, John Maxwell gives problems a very high value, treating them as a way to introduce us to ourselves. Facing problems allows us to meet ourselves, and solving the problems defines who we are. Problems also introduce us to others, and problems introduce us to opportunities (Maxwell, 2018).

My first problem-induced opportunity arrived in November 2001 when I was interviewed for the position of Director of Instructional Technology Development (ITD) at DePaul University. It was a telephonic interview, and the last question was “Tell us about a project that you’ve put a lot of effort into but failed.” “You mean the one I just did?” I chuckled. I then shared with them the Learning Management System (LMS) selection project at Indiana State University. We had a system that two instructional designers and I had trained ISU faculty to use, but the IT department wanted to replace it with the one that they thought was better. I reviewed the system suggested by IT; it was a bit better, but not better enough to warrant a switch. The IT people just didn’t seem to understand or accept the stress and difficulty for faculty to unlearn and relearn the systems. Unfortunately, faculty were not involved in any part of the discussion, and my voice alone was not strong enough to overturn the IT decision. ISU’s final decision was to switch to the “better” system, and I was put in charge of announcing and implementing the change.

When I realized there was no way to reverse the decision and that it would make things worse if I shared my disappointment and frustration with the faculty, I decided to focus my energy on creating a successful rollout of the new system. I crafted an article about the extra features the new system offered and inserted it in the announcement to the faculty. The funny thing was I later found out that my article was linked by the new system’s vendor to their website as a marketing endorsement.

I told the DePaul search committee that I was in the middle of training ISU faculty on the new system as we spoke. Since this was before every phone had a camera, I couldn’t see faces, but I could sense the appreciation and empathy from the search committee. A couple of weeks later, I was invited to Chicago for an on-site interview. After that, a job offer came from DePaul University in Chicago!

## 3 Proceeding to an On-the-Job Training

In January 2002, I moved to Chicago. The night before my first day at DePaul, I tossed and turned in bed. It was such a big leap from an assistant director in a small school in a small town to a director in a big university in a big city. Besides, I had been in that assistant director’s role at Indiana State University for just a year. I did have two instructional designers and a few students reporting to me, but I never felt like I had to manage them. We just worked together. To me, the move from Terre

Haute to Chicago seemed bigger and scarier than the one from Beijing to Terre Haute. It felt like I was given a major role in a play without a script. I was about to get on the stage; the lights were on; curtains were up; I stood there in a panic not knowing what my lines were. “Maybe the search committee was ‘fooled’ by my PowerPoint,” I cried to my husband. “Maybe my presentation made them think I could do the job! But I really can’t.” “You see, this is a manager position.” My engineer husband offered his view of management: “Management is not like engineering. Like if you can’t write code, people will know right away. The thing is *anyone* can manage. It’s not a matter of can or can’t. It’s whether management is good or bad.” I took a deep breath and replied, “They’ll soon find out how bad I am, and I wonder how long it would take to move me from ‘so bad’ to ‘not too bad’.” Twenty years later, I still remember vividly the lessons I learned on my first day at DePaul and the days after that.

### ***3.1 Lesson One: “I Want Them to Hate Me, Not You”***

The next morning, I hopped on the “L” train to DePaul’s Lincoln Park campus. When I walked into the office suite, I was shocked by the layout in front of me: The hallway was gone, and the rooms disappeared; this place no longer looked like the one I saw during the interview; it changed from the “office” suite to a “cubicle” farm. Later in the day, I met with my new boss, Doris Brown, the Associate Vice President of DePaul who hired me for the position. After a big welcome hug, Doris told me that she had ordered to tear down the walls so that staff could collaborate more easily with one another. “I wanted to get this done before you got here,” she said. “I knew some people wouldn’t like it. I want them to hate me, not you.” This became the first and most powerful lesson I learned in my management career. It taught me a core value of leadership: You don’t throw problems up; you don’t throw problems down; when a decision is hard and unpopular, you take ownership of it!

Albert Schweitzer said, “Example is not the main thing influencing others. It is the only thing.” Many years later when my title changed to assistant vice president, a staff of mine walked into my office looking very upset. “I don’t like the way so and so handled the case,” she said. “He threw you under the bus by saying ‘this is all Sharon’s idea’.” I smiled and told her that although the good idea might not come from me, I was the one who asked the person to announce it this way—because I knew staff might not like it and “I want them to hate me, not him.”

### ***3.2 Lesson Two: “Take That (Flag Pin) Off”***

Also on the first day at work, Doris caught me wearing a pin on the collar of my jacket. It was an American flag; I had been wearing it for 3 months since the 9/11 event. It was pinned to my jacket by a colleague in Indiana where most people wore

it as a sign of patriotism. “Take it off.” Doris shook her head and sighed—“People in this country have no clue what the other nations had suffered. This country hasn’t had any real sufferings compared with the others.” Standing in front of this woman, who was born and raised on a farm in Iowa and who knew so well the unnoticed sorrow suffered by the countries outside of her own, I knew I was at a bigger, better, and more inclusive place than where I had been in Indiana. It gave me a sense of comfort to know that I would be working for a person who stood in a higher place to view the world beyond her own country. A decade after my pin talk with Doris, I received a farewell card from a departing staff who wrote: “You are a boss with a big heart, which is rare to find in this world.” I attributed that statement to the heart that I had encountered on my first day at DePaul.

### ***3.3 Lesson Three: “You Can’t Do the Job if You Can’t Handle Loneliness”***

A few weeks into the job, while I was searching the calendar for a department meeting, I found a slot blocked for everyone; I then opened my staff’s shared calendar that showed a department outing—A DEPARTMENT OUTING WITHOUT THE HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT! I shared this finding with Doris in our one-on-one meeting. “Yes, that will happen,” Doris said, “There will be times you will be left out. You will feel lonely. That’s what management is. If you can’t handle loneliness, you can’t do this job.” Elizabeth Elliot said, “Loneliness is a required course for leadership.” I had been blessed to have a chance to encounter that course and learn from it at the beginning of my management career.

### ***3.4 Lesson Four: “You Should Read English”***

As a new manager, I found myself getting more and more comfortable with business meetings while dreading any gatherings that involved “small talk.” Sitting at the lunch table, watching people guffaw over a scene of a TV show, or gushing about a video game was not my cup of tea. “I feel like an outsider,” I told Doris. The next day, she put a book on my desk and said, “Read it. You will have something to talk about with them at the lunch table.” It was *Harry Potter*. Somehow I found this third-grade-level novel hard to read. Since I couldn’t keep up with the characters and those magical terms, I went back to my comfort reading genre—Chinese books until 1 day I ran into Doris on the train. She took a glance at the book in my hand and said, “You should read English.” She didn’t elaborate on why, but I knew then and I know more now the importance of reading English. It is beyond mastering the language; it is a cultural acclamation. As an immigrant joining a new culture as an adult, I have seen immigrants maneuvering between the American cultural

environment and the one they came from with great ease and comfort, but many were like me at the time who chose to divide life into a world of two: an English world at work and a Chinese world at home. However, if I want to be an effective and respected leader, I must become fluent in American culture.

Without sufficient cultural understanding, I would not be able to connect with staff; without this connection, I would not be able to lead beyond my defined authority, not to mention any influence on them. This is a long way to say “reading English” is a key to success for immigrant leaders. Nowadays, whenever I hear my son say I am more American than the other Asian moms or my aqua-aerobic classmates mistakenly describe me as “Chinese-descent,” I take those comments as compliments. It is a result of starting to read English books like *Harry Potter* some 20 years ago.

### ***3.5 Lesson Five: Great Leaders Empower Others***

In his road map of leadership, John Maxwell divided leadership into five levels: position (rights), permission (relationship), production (result), people development (reproduction), and pinnacle (respect). While those who do well in the first three levels can be considered good leaders, it is people development that separates the good from the great. Great leaders do more than just get things done; they empower others (Maxwell, 2018).

When it comes to my development, the great bosses I have had did more than just empower me; they taught me word by word and mentored me action by action. Before I met Doris, I thought my English was pretty good because that’s what I heard from others. I trusted them without questioning whether they would make the same comment to a native speaker. But Doris never said that to me. Instead, she would catch the errors I made: the wrong tense, the misuse of the “to,” “at,” “in,” or “with,” or the missing “s” in the nouns; all the things that I ignored because they didn’t exist in Chinese. I used to think if I just mumbled the words that I couldn’t pronounce, I could fake them as accents. But not with Doris, who would catch them, correct them, and ask me to repeat them until I got them perfectly. However, my English lessons stopped in 2006 when Doris retired. For the next 12 years, my English became “unnoticeably” good again; people either were not paying attention to my errors or didn’t bother to tell me. Just when I thought English was serving me well as a communication tool, Dr. Caryn Chaden, the associate provost with a PhD in English, entered my life.

Caryn became my supervisor—and writing mentor—in 2018. Every report I wrote turned into a writing essay I prepared for Dr. Chaden. The marked-up Google doc showed not only what she called “the English-as-Second-Language (ESL) issues” but also the convoluted writing patterns I used. If it weren’t for Caryn, I would have never learned how powerful it was to communicate in a simple and direct way. Doris and Caryn didn’t just teach me English; they taught me leadership. Instead of excusing me for being a non-native speaker, they set a bar or two higher for me than they did for others. What they did sent a strong message to me: They

care about me; they want to develop me into a better speaker, writer, and leader. Their care cultivated a sense of loyalty in me; they made me want to stay with them in this working environment.

When I brought this kind of care back to my team, I found the same kind of loyalty developed among my staff. A very talented staff member who planned to be in our group for no more than 5 years ended up with a 16-year tenure. He told me 1 day that when he first joined our team, he was shocked by how we cheered and celebrated for a departing staff. He learned that this was the place that cared about the person more than what the person could do for the place.

## **4 Building a Coherent Organizational Structure Through Reorganizations**

My discipline is instructional design; it is about designing a course with the right structure to make learning flow. The process is similar to that of an organization; when the structure is flawed, the work just will not flow. This was the case for instructional technology services at DePaul when I joined the office of Instructional Technology Development (ITD) in 2002: ITD was on the academic side, and there was a separate IT function on the administrative side. As a result, we had server admins doing the IT work without backup and redundancy; we had programmers building software applications even though they were widely available on the market, and we had trainers and instructional designers trying to figure out what they should do as the university's "pioneer" distance learning colleges already had their own systems and support staff in place. The question was: How to start making the change since there were funding and budget issues interlaced with university growth, college/school independence, and administrative responsibility?

### ***4.1 Implementing Change, the Right and the Wrong***

Then a top-down reorganization order came to ITD in 2006. Half of the moves made sense: The server and programming parts did belong in IT for cost-effective and secure services. The other half of the moves didn't make sense since moving tech training to administrative IT forced my area to separate technology from course design. After the move, we had to tell the faculty "if you want to know *how* to click a button, go to IT; if you want to know *why* to click that button, come to us." The more we explained it, the more confused the faculty felt, and frankly, the more ridiculous the move sounded. The video production services that I had developed also got moved to IT, which meant that course material production was separated from course design. ITD was renamed Instructional Design and Development (IDD), but the name change did not make the situation clearer. In addition, the



University's "pioneer" distance learning colleges mentioned above with their own systems and support staff kept their situation intact. It took 4 years of hard bargaining from my end to rectify these mistakes. By 2010, training and video production got moved back; we changed the name of our unit from Instructional Design and Development (IDD) to Faculty Instructional Technology Services (FITS).

Around this time, I started to work on consolidating instructional tech resources scattered in various schools and colleges at DePaul. This happened 16 years after I wrote my master's thesis on the pros and cons of media center centralization. I wanted to create a model that could keep the pros and avoid the cons; it should be a hybrid model where the instructional designers belonged to a centralized office but lived in the schools and colleges that they support. I decided to start with what I had on hand by assigning instructional designers as liaisons to schools and colleges. I approached the deans with an offer of instructional tech support tailored to their needs and a request for an office in their space for the FITS instructional designers. I told the deans to treat these FITS designers as theirs; I wanted faculty to see these FITS designers as staff in their own colleges. I didn't care if the faculty didn't know what office the designers were from or to whom they reported. In fact, I was thrilled to hear our designers using "my college" or "my dean" at our staff meetings.

To the schools and colleges, there really wasn't any difference in having the instructional designers report to me or to them; yet, this centralized structure boosted efficiency and effectiveness tremendously with the collaborative creation of resources, consistent use of materials, coordinated training events, and a community of instructional designers for cross-functional training. Best of all was that FITS instructional designers could serve as backups for one another when needed, and they could flow between colleges and schools when and where they were needed.

This was the easy part of the change because these designers were already part of the FITS team. What about the designers reporting to the "pioneer" distance learning deans? What about the local instructional support offices owned by the "pioneer" distance learning colleges?

These questions explain why this was a decade-long process. I had to convince the provost of my model to get his support in the implementation, meaning that when a "pioneer" distance learning college designer left and that dean asked the provost's permission to fill the position, they would get the provost's OK under the condition that the report line and funds moved to FITS. I had prepared proposals in advance for each of these "pioneer" situations, rationalizing the benefit of centralization and promising a service that would surpass the one they used to have. I remember one dean, reluctant to lose a direct report, who emailed the other deans asking if the services they got with FITS were really as good as I had promised.

In 2018, after incorporating the Ed Tech Center of the College of Education and the Instructional Design Unit of the School for New Learning, our office became the service hub for all ten DePaul schools and colleges. Later in 2018, we merged with the Office of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment to form a new unit called the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). From then on, there was no more confusion or tap dancing as to who covered what part of teaching support.

## 4.2 *Putting the Structure to Test During Covid-19*

In some ways, it felt like establishing DePaul's Center for Teaching and Learning was like building a shelter right before a tornado. Just as we set up the five CTL pillars for faculty development, instructional design, tech support, assessment, and supplemental instruction, Covid-19 struck us with its devastating power. In March 2020, CTL became the first responders to DePaul's call for online teaching when Covid-19 forced us to close the campus. Within 48 hours, CTL identified "what must be done" to prepare faculty for online teaching: Six webinars were developed to cover the essential technologies and techniques, D2L usage data were generated to help the deans gauge their online readiness, online tutorials were created to guide self-learning, and an information portal ([go.depau.edu/remote-teaching](http://go.depau.edu/remote-teaching)) was launched for the DePaul community. On March 4, the night before the provost advised faculty to prepare for DePaul's closure, I emailed CTL staff warning them of the upcoming work. I asked everyone to prioritize tasks, communicate workload, and seek help if needed. What I didn't tell them was how nervous I was thinking about helping some 2000 faculty members move courses online in a matter of 2 weeks! Then a message from a staff member popped up on my screen: *Thank you for this excellent "rally the troops" email, Sharon! We've got this.*

"We've got this" because we had a united troop. Having the entire instructional tech support force under a single supervisor allowed staff to face the challenge in a collaborative and creative way, such as color-coding everyone's capacity in our virtual team space to seek or offer help to one another; building a checklist to guide faculty on course development; preloading a module to each course in the Learning Management System to offer help and resources for students; or implementing a LiveChat tool on the remote teaching page for instantaneous responses. In that 1 month, our team of 26 staff put in 820 extra hours, offered over a thousand group and individual support sessions, and responded to over 900 tech support tickets. If these support sources had still been scattered in separate schools and colleges or if the troop members were not under one centralized supervisor, these would not have happened. The coherent structure we built as a result of the reorganizations created organizational agility that enabled a quick mobilization in the Covid-19 crisis.

## 4.3 *Becoming the Glue of an Invisible Force*

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi described the loss of consciousness of the self as a stage when one is engaged solely in the doing that she forgets who she is (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Looking back at my 20 years at DePaul, I see myself moving from questioning my ability to doing the job, trying to demonstrate that I could do the job, and focusing on the job instead of myself. I don't see myself as a brand builder of a service empire, or a guidon bearer of a troop; I am more like the glue that binds the team together in a time of need. This comfortable state of leadership is the result of

my internal “operating system” upgrade from leadership competencies that aims at outstanding personal performance to leadership capacity, which is “the ability to think and then act in ways that are more effective during times of increasing VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity) and rapid change” (Rothaizer & Hill, 2021).

Today if you visit the Teaching Commons, DePaul’s hub for teaching and learning resources, you will not find offices or service units. Instead, the information is organized around “what the users want to know,” which is usually not the name of an office but the service it provides. It has been a great culture change from competing for user attention with office logos to feeding the needs of faculty and students as part of an invisible force.

## 5 Leading by Learning

My job title is Assistant Vice President of the Center for Teaching and Learning. This makes “learning” a part of my signature. Learning is what I do. Learning is what defines me. I am very grateful to have this opportunity to share the stumbles I had as a student, an immigrant, and a university administrator. Scott Peck said, “If we know exactly where we’re going, exactly how to get there, and exactly what we’ll see along the way, we won’t learn anything” (Peck, 1978). All of the uncertainties, insecurities, and frustrations I have experienced during my 30-year journey in America have served me well as learning opportunities. I told my staff, “We are in the business of teaching and learning, or we could call it human development in the setting of higher education. If we were to lose interest in developing ourselves and stop learning, we would no longer be qualified to do this job.”

As James Clear pointed out in *Atomic Habit*, one can form a habit more effectively when it is driven more by the identity than the goals. The self-acknowledgment of being a runner makes a person more likely to finish the strenuous training for a marathon than the goal itself could (Clear, 2018). Being a leader, either of a team or a family or oneself, is the identity that drives a person to learn and to grow. And people who grow are effective at growing others (Maxwell, 2018). After 20 years of working in the same institution serving the same areas, I still feel the fire lit by my first supervisor burning within me; I am still working on improving my English; and I am still seeing the need to strengthen the organizational structure that we built. The identity of a leader, either by title or by mindset, offers the most powerful motivation for us to learn. It motivated me to learn; it allows me to apply what I learned; and it gives me a chance to share it by writing a chapter like this.

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**Dr. Sharon Guan** is the assistant vice president at DePaul University. During her 20-year tenure at DePaul, she has engaged in five reorganizations to consolidate faculty support resources scattered in 10 colleges into a centralized office of the Center for Teaching and Learning. She leads the Center to support faculty development, instructional technology, instructional design, assessment, and supplemental instruction.

Under her leadership, DePaul Online Teaching Series (DOTS) program won the 2012 Online Learning Consortium (Sloan-C) Award for Excellence in Faculty Development. The Global Learning Experiences (GLE) program cooperated by the Global Engagement Office and the Center for Teaching and Learning received the Association of International Educator's Senator Paul Simon Award in 2020 and the POD Innovation Award in 2019. Sharon received the Best Distance Teaching Practices Award in 2014 at the Annual Distance Teaching and Learning Conference. DePaul's Instructional Design and Development blog ([IDDblog.org](#)) initiated by Sharon was named one of the top 50 must-reads Higher Ed IT blogs in the nation by the EdTech magazine in 2012.

Born and raised in China, Sharon received her BA in International Journalism from the Beijing Broadcasting Institute (now called the Communication University of China) in 1992. She received her MS and PhD in Curriculum, Instructional, and Educational Technology from Indiana State University. Prior to coming to DePaul, Sharon worked at Indiana State University as a computer graphic designer, instructional designer, manager of Instructional Design, interim manager of the Faculty Computing Resource Center, and assistant director of eLearning Design and Development.

Sharon has conducted research on online course design, faculty development, language instruction, and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). She is one of the editors of the 2008 edition of *The Handbook of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge for Educators*. She coauthored the Faculty and Learner Support chapter for *New Direction of Higher Education*.

Aside from her administrative role, she enjoys teaching Chinese language courses for the Modern Language Department at DePaul. She likes to use her class to practice what she preaches—the new instructional technologies and techniques, such as ePortfolio, Can-Do pedagogy, multimodal learning, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), or international virtual exchange. She received DePaul University's Excellence in Teaching Award in 2019.

Sharon's also interested in writing in her native language. Her Chinese essays received honorable mention in the Han Xin North America Chinese Literature Competitions in 2018 and 2019. She started taking online ballet classes in 2019.

Sharon and her husband are proud parents of a son and a daughter.

# Navigating Tradition and Transformation: Lessons Learned in Higher Education



Andrew Toming Hsu

I was born in Beijing and grew up in China during the Cultural Revolution. At a young age, I was sent to the countryside after elementary school with my parents to be reeducated by the peasants. Working in the fields of corn, millet, and cotton, I never dreamed of becoming a university president. I had dreams, of course, but they were more of your typical teenage fantasies, like becoming a professional athlete or a musician. However, I always knew deep down that those dreams were unrealistic because I simply didn't have the right talent.

I had other ideas, of course. But going to America, a country of "enemies," was never really in my wildest dreams, despite the fact that I had extended family members who had left China and emigrated to the United States in the late 1940s. Yet as luck would have it and more out of general curiosity and boredom, I began learning English, working very briefly with an uncle who had studied in the United States and then using secondhand math and physics textbooks in English to teach myself the basics of the language.

I loved to read as a young child; my favorite books are, as you might expect, *The Water Margin* and *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. When I was able to acquire English-language books as a teenager, such as *Pinocchio*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Godfather*, and *Gone with the Wind*, I used my English-to-Chinese dictionary to read them, translating them word by word and phrase by phrase. It was painstaking, but I had a lot of time on my hands as I had been sent to the countryside for a second time after high school to be re-educated by the villagers there.

I have always believed that things and events happen for a reason, which is a cornerstone of my faith. Moments in my life have proven that time and time again. After being "reeducated" by the peasants a second time for 2 years, I had limited

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options, just like most Chinese youths. Fortunately, I still had the opportunity to attend the Hebei Institute of Hydraulic Engineering (not your ideal school for a nerd) as a “worker–peasant–soldier” student.<sup>1</sup>

Two years into my studies there, the Chinese government reinstated the college entrance exam, something Chairman Mao had abolished back in 1966. Millions sat for the exam in 1977, but much to my disappointment, I was not allowed to sit in that exam because I was already a “college student” at Hebei. Fortunately, 6 months later, the government allowed universities to admit graduate students again for the first time in 12 years. With only 2 years of college study, I performed well enough and at a level high enough in the competitive examinations to gain entrance to Tsinghua University (the alma mater of my parents) as a member of the first class (1978) of graduate students after the Cultural Revolution. There, I continued my studies in engineering. After earning my diploma, I traveled to the United States in November 1980 as one of the first “self-supported” students from Tsinghua, arriving in Atlanta, Georgia, where my aunt and her family lived. I enrolled at Georgia Tech and eventually earned my master’s and PhD in aerospace engineering.

I entered industry afterward, working as a research engineer and supervisor in the Computational Physics Section for Sverdrup Technology (an onsite contractor of NASA) and later as a staff scientist for Rolls-Royce North America, the aircraft engine company. Like many scientists with doctoral degrees, I began teaching as an adjunct faculty member in the evenings, and it was at that moment that I found my true calling. After one of my classes, a few students came up to me and shared that they now wanted to pursue a career in the engineering subject I taught. It was a life-changing episode. Knowing that I had inspired a student’s passion in a subject I was teaching was an incredible—and new—feeling of gratification. I knew right then and there that I wanted to enter academia more formally. Here, in the classroom, is where I could make a difference, so much more so than in the industrial laboratory. I left the corporate world in 1997 and joined the faculty at the University of Miami as an associate professor and a director of their new aerospace engineering program. From there, my career in higher education took off like a rocket (pun intended!). I quickly moved up in responsibility and ranks in terms of teaching, research, and administrative duties.

One lesson I learned early on is that if you are willing to take on the challenge of moving to different institutions, there are many opportunities available. My willingness to live in places across the country, such as Miami, Indianapolis, Dayton, San Jose, and Toledo, allowed me to serve in a variety of roles: associate dean, associate vice president for research, dean, and provost. The moves were certainly difficult for the family, especially for my wife, who was pursuing a career as a professor and

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<sup>1</sup>The designation “worker–peasant–soldier” (工农兵学员) represented Chinese students who attended college between 1970 and 1976. During this part of the Cultural Revolution, Chairman Mao Zedong’s intention was to open up higher education to more classes of citizens by eliminating academic qualifications. While my parents were college graduates (and therefore not the preferred “class background” for Chairman Mao’s initiative), because I had been “reeducated” in the countryside, I was designated a “peasant” and was eligible to attend college.

was a successful researcher in her own right and even more so for our four children. But those moves certainly were of great benefit to my career.

To be honest, in addition to my wish to make a bigger impact in the world, my ambition to move up in administration was driven mostly by my desire to resolve problems and issues I saw. I had more than one colleague tell me, as we were complaining about this or that issue related to an academic program or administrative hurdle, that I should do something about it and fix it. Simple advice, indeed, is “be a part of the solution.” Therefore, my entry into leadership was due to a combination of timing, professional qualifications, and a desire to do things better than they had been done before. My inclination, from my training as an engineer, is always to improve a product or process to benefit people.

In that same vein as an engineer, I know how important the right kind of training is for finding success. Because higher education is a “people” business, it is imperative to have “training,” so to speak, on how best to navigate student, faculty, staff, and alumni issues and a thousand other concerns that are inherent in creating and maintaining relationships in a university ecosystem. Mentors are key facilitators for that kind of training and knowledge base. Throughout my career, I have been fortunate to have remarkable mentors at each institution that I served—people who took the time to help me develop leadership skills, better understand a problem, ask better questions, and work toward better solutions. I had the chance to participate in an American Council of Education (ACE) Fellowship, a higher education leadership development program. My ACE mentor was Dr. E. Gordon Gee, then president of the Ohio State University (OSU) and one of the country’s most influential higher education leaders in the past 30 years. I tried to be a sponge for the year I spent around him and learned so many important lessons. Walking across the OSU campus one day, going from one meeting to the next, President Gee shared with me his three guiding principles as a university leader: (1) develop and articulate a clear vision; (2) build a strong leadership team; and (3) be visible and serve as a symbol. These principles stayed with me for the rest of my career, and when I became president of the College of Charleston in 2019, I used those lessons as a blueprint. I have found that those three guiding principles produce trust: the campus’s trust in you as a leader, trust that the institution is moving in a positive direction, and trust from the faculty and staff that the organization is a sound and positive workplace.

Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic threw all of higher education—and everyone around the world, for that matter—for a loop. But I am proud of how our campus community responded to the crisis. While other institutions and industries may have ground to a halt, we kept moving forward at the College of Charleston and even approved our new strategic plan in May 2020, in the early stages of the lockdown, and continued with its implementation throughout the pandemic. In much of my communication (in writing, online videos, social media, and virtual town hall meetings), I messaged about the need for resilience among our students, our faculty, and our staff. That grit, I have found, is critical to everything—to the individual, to the departmental team, to the entire organization—regardless of the situation. A crisis can be, in a way, a state of mind. Some people find focus in it, while others may be overwhelmed and paralyzed by it.



My leadership team and I did our best to be focused: to work through the hard moments without stopping our progress in implementing our new strategic plan. I feel that we were mostly successful. Winston Churchill is credited with the line: “never let a good crisis go to waste,” which has been used by many leaders and pundits since then to motivate others to change. We tried that same attitude in order to begin implementing different aspects of our 10-year strategic plan. As a leader of a centuries-old institution, I knew that inertia might be our biggest challenge. As a student of Newton’s laws, I know that a body at rest will stay at rest unless acted upon by an outside force. But for an object—say, a university, in this case—to be moved, that force must be inwardly felt by the community. With everyone suddenly going remote and rethinking work processes and reimagining job duties, the pandemic put change front and center, so our campus community was suddenly in a frame of mind to look at things differently. The crisis helped to accelerate the changes we were seeking.

Our strategic plan focuses on student success, academic distinction, and employee success, with cross-cutting themes of innovation; strategic partnerships; and diversity, equity, and inclusion. These pillars of the plan connect to the strategic vision to propel the College of Charleston, currently a regional player according to the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, to become a national university, something more worthy of its reputation and pedigree as the 13th-oldest university in the country. And being a national university would also be a better reflection of the extraordinary quality of the College of Charleston’s faculty, who are top-notch scholars in a wide range of disciplines. We began making the necessary incremental changes, some big and some small. The results were almost immediate. The College of Charleston saw record numbers of applications (more than doubling in under 4 years) and welcomed three of its largest first-year classes in school history. Fundraising numbers, especially among alumni, continued to break records, year over year. Simply put, the changes we, the leadership team, were making were and are working.

Let me detail some of those changes. Regarding prospective students, we streamlined our application process to make it simpler and more user-friendly, especially for first-generation students. We also joined the Common Application (known simply as the Common App). Legacy thinking had shaped our belief that a College of Charleston application needed to be different, somehow special. However, looking at our process through the eyes of the average student, who is most likely competitive shopping, allowed our team to greatly expand the pool of candidates to consider. In just a matter of 4 years, we grew from an average of 12,000 annual applications to more than 26,000, which translates to larger, more selective incoming classes of new students.

In order to achieve our goal of becoming a national university, we need to establish doctoral programs. However, the first obstacle centered around previous state rules and regulations. South Carolina’s legislature defined, decades ago, that there would be three categories of universities: research universities that offer doctoral degrees, comprehensive universities that offer up to master’s degrees, and 2-year colleges. So, our first task was to work with the state legislature to redefine the State

of South Carolina's higher education system. To do that, I reached out to peer institutions that could also see the need to expand into doctoral education, and together we worked with our state representatives to change the state law, which took 2 years. In December 2022, the state approved our very first College of Charleston PhD program.

From a curricular standpoint, our faculty had, for years, thought about introducing engineering to our academic portfolio of offerings, combining that discipline with the College's liberal arts approach (something very innovative and revolutionary in the static world of engineering pedagogy). In my first year, we were able to get a program in systems engineering approved, followed by new programs in electrical engineering and software engineering, with more on the horizon. Our faculty are also working with a wide range of industry partners, bringing in their expertise to shape a curriculum and program requirements that are not only relevant but make our students more career ready on a global level. Our strategic plan emboldened our science faculty to think differently, to expand their aperture for seeing what is possible. In addition, by having the support of leadership in their efforts, our faculty have been able to launch programs that will attract new students to the College and help sustain the institution for generations to come.

Along those same lines, in 2022, the College restructured one of its professional schools and split out its public health major in order to create a standalone School of Health Sciences. The COVID pandemic has taught us many lessons—first and foremost, we need more people in health careers at all levels. In setting up this new school, we partnered with the Medical University of South Carolina (located just a few blocks from our downtown campus) so that our faculty and undergraduate students would not only benefit from the medical university's resources but also be part of a pipeline into their graduate programs. Public health, which has been one of the fastest growing majors on our campus for the past several years, is only the first of many academic programs that will reside in this school.

Other changes and innovations may seem somewhat pedestrian, but for a school our age, they will be truly transformative. I am speaking of more holistic advising, teaching financial literacy, and being intentional in building a sense of belonging among students and their families. In some cases, it's ditching "paper" for better technology. Automation and software solutions will allow us to better engage students at risk of "stopping out" so that we keep them on track to earn their degrees. No more students are "slipping through the cracks," which has been a phrase I have heard too many times at too many institutions. As a university community, we must do everything we can to keep our students on a path toward whatever academic goal they may have. In a selfish way, I know that if we don't figure it out, our competition surely will, and to our detriment. In addition, by rethinking our internal processes—again, this is the engineer in me speaking—we improve on what we are doing. And as a leader, I believe that instilling a desire for improvement in your work community is central to any type of success.

A line from one of my favorite poets, Du Fu (712–777), in "Gazing at the Sacred Peak," seems appropriate when considering the right attitude for leadership: "Straining out of the corner of my eyes, I see the incoming birds/And I'm

determined to rise and approach the vanishing peak/And see below the numerous arrays of tiny mountains.” For me, Du Fu outlines several different traits of a successful leader: observation, analysis, perspective, thoughtful reflection, resilience, and determination. In my mind, true resilience is the effort of an individual or larger organization to ascend—to move forward and upward, no matter the obstacle, no matter the challenge.

My advice to leaders, both current and future, is to inspire others to ascend both on their own and with you. You, as the leader, must point people in the right direction and motivate them to move toward a shared destination, some height greater than where they are now. This must be accomplished by example and through influence, not by decree. This type of ascension is much more than “climbing the corporate ladder”; this desire for improvement and progress is about personal and professional growth.

In the end, for an organization, it is all about creating a culture of success, and, as a leader, you must find and define different levels of success for your team or organization so that, even in moments of failure or setbacks, lessons are learned and momentum is being built or maintained. Success takes an investment of time, energy, and resources—the three things that are not always adequately available to you or your organization. However, even when those challenges are most difficult, I have seen, time and time again, when the desire to ascend to “the vanishing peak” is present, having that aspiration as part of your organization’s shared values and culture makes all of the difference.



**Dr. Andrew Toming Hsu**, in May 2019, became the 23rd president of the College of Charleston, the oldest university in South Carolina and the 13th oldest in the United States. Before joining the College of Charleston, Hsu was the provost and executive vice president for academic affairs at the University of Toledo, a public research university in Ohio. Before becoming provost and executive vice president at Toledo, Hsu served as the dean of engineering at San Jose State University and as the associate vice president for research the dean of the Graduate School at Wright State University. Throughout his career, Hsu has remained actively engaged in the community. As of 2023, he serves on the Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative Board of Directors, Spoleto Festival USA Board of Directors, the Charleston Symphony Board, Charleston Regional Development Alliance Leadership Council, and the SC Commission for Minority Affairs – Asian American and Pacific Islander Advisory Committee. At the College of Charleston, he is the first ethnic minority president in the institution’s more than 250-plus-year history and also holds the distinction of being one of the first recent Chinese immigrants from Mainland China—particularly of the generation who came to the United States after the Cultural Revolution—to become a university president in America. Making that kind of history is not lost on him, and he has done everything in his ability to ensure that his legacy will be one that reflects his Chinese cultural heritage and traditional values of humility, benevolence, courtesy, wisdom, and honor.

# Leading and Managing: My Experience in Serving in Academic Leadership



S. Jack Hu

## 1 Introduction

On July 1, 2019, I began my service as senior vice president for academic affairs and provost at the University of Georgia (UGA) (Hu named senior vice president for academic affairs and provost, [n.d.](#)). As the first public university chartered in the country, UGA is Georgia's flagship, land-grant, and sea-grant university. Its mission is "to teach, to serve, and to inquire into the nature of things." UGA has been ranked by *US News and World Report* as one of the top 20 universities for 7 years in a row while providing a significant economic impact to the state of Georgia. I was attracted to the UGA provost role because of the university's excellence in education, innovation, public service, and outreach. UGA also has the foundation for preeminence. The university has made significant investments in the learning environment for the last several years, which has led to impressive student success, the rise of its academic reputation, and an improvement in its rankings. UGA has reached a record 6-year undergraduate student completion rate of 88.1% (UGA achieves record-breaking completion rates, [n.d.](#)). The student life experience is also highly positive as evidenced by the number 2 ranking in *Niche's* list of colleges with the Best Student Life in America.

After serving in the provost's role for 3 years, I wrote a short reflection on my LinkedIn account on July 1, 2022, which summarizes the momentum of the university.

Today marks the beginning of my fourth year as senior vice president for academic affairs and provost at the University of Georgia. It has been an exciting but surely challenging three years as 29 of the past 36 months were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the

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significant challenges, UGA has been able to continue advancing excellence in the classrooms, in the labs, and out in the fields and communities, thanks to the dedication and perseverance of our excellent faculty, staff, and students. UGA undergraduate and graduate enrollment is reaching an all-time high and the interest in a UGA degree continues to rise. Our research enterprise continues to expand, in traditional disciplines and new emerging fields. Several new academic initiatives will further advance UGA academic excellence, including Active Learning, School of Computing, Institute for Integrative Precision Agriculture, Johnny Isakson Center for Brain Science and Neurological Diseases, the University of Georgia Research Institute, and our ongoing Presidential Faculty Hiring Initiatives in Data Science and AI. UGA's impact on the State and the nation continues to grow through innovative partnerships with organizations and communities. Thanks to all of you for working closely together.

## 2 Role of Provost: Leading Versus Managing

The provost is typically the chief academic officer in American universities. To better understand the role of the provost, it may be necessary to examine its history as the public may not fully understand the position and the responsibilities associated with the office of the provost.

Benjamin Franklin recruited the first provost at the University of Pennsylvania in 1754, 14 years after the university's founding. Many universities followed suit with provost appointments in the subsequent years. The deliberation of Cornell University trustees on the role of provost around 1931 was quite interesting, with intense discussions on the title and the role of the provost. The account of these deliberations at Cornell reads as follows (History of Cornell's Provosts, [n.d.](#)): "The post of provost was created, because the President, overburdened with the routine of administration, needed an executive officer with the power to decide matters on secondary importance...." However, in 1943, the Cornell Board of Trustees briefly considered changing the title of the provost to vice president before ultimately decided against the move. According to the Board of Trustees proceedings of October 15, 1943, "The President and several other members of the Committee expressed themselves as opposed to the title of vice president .... It was held that one of the great virtues of the title of provost is its ambiguity. It is not a second-rate title; .... and this position needs a title that will cover that conception of its status." Supporting the president in administration, but different from a typical vice president, were the two salient aspects of the deliberations on the role of the provost.

Most US universities began using the title of provost in the mid-1930s. Today many universities are using a combination of two titles: vice president for academic affairs and provost, senior vice president for academic affairs and provost, or other similar combinations.

In August 2007 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, "Vice President vs. Provost," Ray Maghroori and Charles Powers (Maghroori & Powers, [2007](#)) wrote about the two roles. The authors argue that a provost was expected to carry out both

sets of duties, as vice president and provost, but the two roles entail distinctly different, sometimes conflicting responsibilities. Some of their writings are quoted below:

The traditional role of a vice president for academic affairs is to promote and maintain a distinctive academic vision. That means leading the intellectual community on the campus, playing the role of visionary, and, when necessary, defending lofty principles.

The vice president's central responsibility is to make sure the institution clarifies and stays true to its mission.

By contrast, the provost's traditional role is to make sure that administrative and support operations run as they need to on a daily basis. The provost monitors those processes, resolves personnel matters, balances budgets, arbitrates demands for facilities, ... Success requires that the provost operate more as a pragmatic manager than a prophetic visionary.

According to the authors, to be effective in the role "means developing the instinct to know when to put on which hat."

The vice president for academic affairs and provost has two sets of responsibilities: leading the academic enterprise in pursuing academic excellence as guided by a strategic vision and supporting the president in managing the university. While the two roles may entail different responsibilities, my leadership experience at UGA and the University of Michigan would illustrate the complementary and integrative nature of leadership and management.

### **3 Role of Provost at the University of Georgia**

UGA has a well-defined organizational structure with the provost also serving as the senior vice president for academic affairs. It is the responsibility of the individual holding the office to always maintain focus on the university's mission by advancing excellence in teaching, research, and service while monitoring operations, managing academic personnel, and continuously improving the academic enterprise.

The responsibilities of the provost at the University of Georgia are quite comprehensive. The provost oversees instruction, research, public service and outreach, and information technology. The vice presidents of these four areas, the deans of UGA's 18 schools and colleges, and the campus dean of the UGA/Augusta University Medical Partnership report to the provost. The vice provost for academic affairs, the vice provost for diversity and inclusion and strategic university initiatives, and the vice provost for graduate education and dean of the Graduate School also report to the provost, as do the associate provosts for faculty affairs, global engagement, libraries, and academic fiscal affairs. The UGA Arts Council, Performing Arts Center, and the Georgia Museum of Art report to the provost through the vice provost for academic affairs.

An organization chart of the UGA Office of the Provost is provided below.



### 1. Advancing Excellence with Strategic Initiatives

My first task as provost was to assemble a leadership team. Among the new hires, I appointed a new vice provost for academic affairs and a new chief of staff from within the institution. Being new to the university, I needed experienced and respected leaders who could guide me in my journey, at least initially. I spent a significant amount of time on campus engagement, learning about the aspirations of the faculty and academic leadership and gaining a better understanding of the culture of scholarship. First, I joined the University’s New Faculty Tour at the beginning of August, traveling through 43 counties to learn about Georgia communities and industries, as well as UGA’s engagement with the citizens across the state. Starting in September 2019, I attended faculty meetings across campus, toured academic buildings and research laboratories, held informal “Coffee and Connection” networking opportunities for faculty and staff, hosted lunches with distinguished professors, and offered office hours for undergraduate and graduate students. These and other engagement activities reinforced what I had learned throughout the process of my candidacy and interviews: UGA possesses an outstanding undergraduate learning environment and administers an exemplary public service and outreach program. The university enjoys strong support from the State of Georgia and its citizens.

To identify new initiatives in education and research, I assembled a Provost’s Task Force on Academic Excellence to help guide me in the identification of areas for strategic investment. When I charged the Task Force, I asked for recommendations for strategic, focused investment in areas of strength while leveraging emerging opportunities and cultivating interdisciplinary collaborations. Based on metrics that included UGA’s existing expertise, external grant funding, scholarly metrics, and impact, the Task Force identified key research strengths such as precision agriculture, life/biomedical sciences, social and behavioral sciences, and environmental sciences. The Task Force also identified potential future strategic opportunities that aligned with anticipated global challenges and new or enhanced external funding programs and UGA’s mission. These opportunities included security (including

topics related to defense, cyber, food, and supply chain security challenges) and addressing rural concerns.

The university has taken several steps to implement many of the recommendations. These include the establishment of the UGA Institute in Integrative Precision Agriculture, the University of Georgia Research Institute and membership in the Battelle Savannah River Alliance with the US Department of Energy, the Johnny Isakson Center for Neurological Diseases, and an annual Rural Engagement Workshop series and seed funding program to support teams of faculty in research on topics relevant to rural Georgia.

In addition, the work of the Task Force has guided the Presidential Interdisciplinary Faculty Hiring Initiative for 3 years. In 2021, UGA launched an ambitious initiative to recruit 50 faculty members with expertise in data science and artificial intelligence (AI) to address some of society's most urgent challenges. This hiring initiative builds on the expertise of our existing faculty and leverages our strength as a comprehensive research institution with a land- and sea-grant mission of service. Rather than being housed exclusively in a single department, the majority of UGA's newly recruited faculty will focus on the fusion of data science and AI in cross-cutting areas such as infectious diseases, integrative precision agriculture, ethics, cybersecurity, resilient communities, and the environment. The hiring initiative was expanded in the fall of 2022 by adding 20 positions in data science and AI for teaching and learning and computational social sciences. These hires are organized into 10 clusters, and several of these clusters have the potential to evolve into research centers. Of the 70 positions, 35 are funded centrally and the other 35 are matching positions provided by academic units.

This cluster hiring initiative is the most aggressive and collaborative in UGA history. The hires are based on campus-wide competition, and faculty across different units collaborated on the proposals. Deans of the schools and colleges provided the matching positions to expand the scale and scope of the Presidential Faculty Hiring Initiative. For example, in dynamics of infectious diseases, faculty from the Odum School of Ecology, the College of Public Health, the College of Engineering, and the Department of Statistics worked together to develop a cluster proposal for a total of eight positions.

UGA was also successful in recruiting several Georgia Research Alliance (GRA) Eminent Scholars whose research has been well funded and recognized nationally and internationally. Once at UGA, these exceptional scholars have served as catalysts in expanding research in their respective areas.

UGA research continues to grow at a significant pace, as evidenced by a 10% increase in research expenditures from the fiscal year (FY) 2021 to 2022. For the first time in FY22, the university's research and development spending surpassed half a billion dollars (US\$545.6 million).

## *2. Enhancing Graduate Education*

With a growing and vibrant research enterprise, the need for graduate students has been increasing at UGA. In addition, many disciplines are seeing the master's degree as an entry-level degree for professional practice. With ever-changing



technologies, there is also a growing need for graduates who entered the professional practice to return to college to update their knowledge through advanced education with either a master's degree or a professional certificate. Given these dynamics, the Provost's Task Force took on additional deliberations and developed several recommendations for improving graduate education at the University of Georgia.

The Task Force recommendations focused on four main themes: (1) elevate/prioritize the graduate education enterprise; (2) enhance the national and international reputation of UGA graduate programs; (3) increase the quantity and quality of graduate students at UGA; and (4) enhance the integration of UGA's graduate education and research/scholarly activity enterprises to increase institutional productivity.

As a first step toward enhancing UGA's graduate programs, I elevated the dean of the Graduate School to a vice provost. The new vice provost for graduate education and dean of the Graduate School serves as a thought leader on campus to advance excellence in graduate education and to ensure that critical issues about graduate education are represented at the highest levels of the university. This newly elevated position provides leadership in every facet of graduate education and helps execute other recommendations such as fostering a culture of excellence in graduate mentoring, increasing external fellowships and awards received by graduate students, increasing the quantity and quality of incoming graduate students, enhancing UGA's reputation for graduate education through external fellowships and more prestigious placements, and assisting in fundraising support for graduate students.

Since the appointment of Dr. Ron Walcott as vice provost for graduate education and dean of the Graduate School, UGA has experienced an increase in enrollment of graduate students, launched GradFIRST as a first-year seminar for new graduate students in research training, and increased financial support for graduate students through innovative funding mechanisms.

### *3. Ensuring University Operations During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

While my first several months as provost at the University of Georgia had been smooth sailing, a massive storm soon arrived: The COVID-19 pandemic arrived in the United States at the end of February 2020, interrupting every facet of the university's operations. UGA, in concert with all public institutions in the University System of Georgia, moved instruction online and paused many other activities. The decision was made during Spring Break, while many students were away from campus. Spring Break was extended by an additional week to allow students to return home if desired and to allow faculty to adapt their courses for online instruction for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester.

In the late spring, President Jere Morehead appointed several working groups to plan for a phased return to full operations at UGA in the fall of 2020. The working groups included instruction, research, public service and outreach, student life, enrollment management, budget and finance, athletics, and workplace safety.

The president also appointed a Medical Oversight Task Force that consisted of the deans of three health science colleges and the executive director of the University

Health Center. The Medical Oversight Task Force was directed to develop protocols for COVID notification and isolation, to coordinate plans for contact tracing with the Georgia Department of Public Health, and to explore options for COVID testing. The president also appointed a Preventive Measures Advisory Board (PMAB), consisting of faculty and staff who were experts in infectious diseases, health communications, infrastructure, and maintenance. PMAB developed guidelines on preventive measures to ensure safety and reduce COVID transmissions.

Thanks to the foresight of the Medical Oversight Task Force, UGA quickly sought approval for Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) certification. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) soon granted an emergency use authorization, allowing us to deploy the UGA Veterinary Diagnostic Lab for COVID testing. Asked by the president to work with the Medical Oversight Task Force to develop a budget for surveillance testing, I immediately realized that the budget was the least of our concerns. The greater challenges in developing surveillance testing included sourcing supplies for test kits, including swabs.

In searching for solutions to this dilemma, I learned that Augusta University had used 3D printed swabs for testing on a small scale in its hospital. I asked the provost at Augusta University to provide 200 3D printed swabs so that UGA could begin experiments and pilot testing. We also mobilized labs with 3D printing machines across the UGA campus to begin the fabrication of our own swabs. After several rounds of test experiments, the executive director of the Veterinary Diagnostic Lab and I were first in line to get tested on August 2, 2020, demonstrating the capability of the UGA faculty and staff in mobilizing our knowledge and infrastructure to address the challenge of the pandemic.

While initial pilot testing continued in the Veterinary Hospital, UGA's Facilities Management Division worked to set up a testing site on the central campus to support large-scale testing before the Fall 2020 semester began. Throughout the next several semesters, I continued to work with the Medical Oversight Task Force to ensure budget and supplies for surveillance testing, which proved to be an extremely valuable safety measure for campus operations.

The Fall 2020 semester was carried out with social distancing and classes taught in three different modalities: in-person for classes with small enrollments to allow social distancing, hybrid classes to allow in-person and online rotation, and online for classes with high enrollment where social distancing was not possible.

Despite initial challenges with these different instruction modalities and the difficulty of managing attendance due to COVID-19 infection notifications and isolation, UGA continued its instruction throughout the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters and returned to full in-person instruction in Fall 2021.

Developing a surveillance testing system and supporting the university's gradual return to normal operations required systematic planning and project management. There is no better example to illustrate the role of a provost in their management responsibilities to support university operations. I was glad to be able to use my systems engineering thinking in some aspects of project management.

## 4 My Journey in Academic Leadership

“十年磨一剑，百年筑一城”

Comprehensive research universities such as the University of Georgia and the University of Michigan are complex organizations. Leading such organizations requires comprehensive knowledge and understanding with the support of leadership teams to address the broad spectrum of responsibilities. This section provides details of my leadership roles at the University of Michigan and how they have laid the foundation for my progressively more important, expanding leadership responsibilities.

### 1. *Program Leadership*

My journey in academic leadership began in the fall of 1999 when I was appointed director of graduate programs in the Department of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Michigan. I was recommended for this role because I had been serving on the graduate program committee in the department and was active in graduate student mentoring and recruiting. I helped organize graduate student visits to campus and continued to engage with them after their visits with the hope of recruiting these top students to join the department as graduate students. Even though I had enlightened self-interest as I was hoping to recruit some of the best students to my own lab, my engagement activities were much broader as I was recruiting graduate students for the entire department.

I served in this role for 2 years and then took my one and only sabbatical leave in Europe, spending time at Chalmers University in Sweden and the Technical University of Berlin in Germany. My time at these universities provided an opportunity to learn about higher education in Europe and to establish friendships and collaborations with faculty in these universities that continue today.

After I returned from the sabbatical, I was asked to serve as director of the Program in Manufacturing (PIM), an interdisciplinary graduate program at the College of Engineering at Michigan. PIM offers the Master of Engineering and Doctoral of Engineering degrees in manufacturing. While serving in this role, PIM developed distance education programs for graduate students who were employees of various companies, including General Motors. Later, I was appointed executive director of Interdisciplinary Engineering, the umbrella organization that supports six interdisciplinary graduate programs in the College of Engineering, including programs in manufacturing, automotive engineering, and financial engineering.

### 2. *Associate Deans in the College of Engineering*

On July 1, 2006, Dr. David Munson began his tenure as dean of the College of Engineering at the University of Michigan. As in most new leadership tenures, Dean Munson was assembling a new leadership team that included an associate dean for undergraduate education, associate dean for research, and associate dean for graduate education. Based upon nomination from the faculty, I was invited to interview

for the position of associate dean for research. I had a very active research program with a balanced funding portfolio and had experience working with industry and government agencies. I also served as a director or associate director for two research centers. I assume these credentials served as the basis for my nomination. During my interview with Dr. Munson, I indicated that I might not be the best candidate for either associate dean for research or associate dean for graduate education, but that if he were to combine the two associate dean jobs into one, I would be the best candidate for the combined position of associate dean for research and graduate education. In addition to running an active research program, I explained that I had broad experience in graduate education, having served as director of graduate programs in the Department of Mechanical Engineering and executive director of interdisciplinary graduate programs for the College. A few days later, I was offered the position of associate dean for research and graduate education effective from January 2007.

In the University of Michigan College of Engineering, the associate dean for research and graduate education plays a key role in supporting research, including research development, research infrastructure, cultivating large-scale team projects, and partnerships with industry. In terms of graduate education, I worked with the graduate program chairs across the college to expand the college graduate student recruitment effort. I also organized the annual graduate research symposium that served as a recruiting event for students from diverse backgrounds to visit Michigan Engineering to observe the current research and meet with faculty and students. I also partnered with the Rackham Graduate School to leverage graduate student support to incentivize large-scale research proposals that helped grow research in the college.

In 2019, I was appointed associate dean for academic affairs (ADAA) in the College of Engineering, the senior associate dean in the College. ADAA oversees faculty affairs, works with department chairs in operations, and partners with the dean on resource planning and allocation. In many ways, the ADAA has responsibilities similar to that of a provost except that these responsibilities are at the college level. Working with the department chairs and with the provost's office on faculty affairs was the most fulfilling aspect of the ADAA role.

Institutional excellence in research and education rests on the scholarly and creative contributions of its talented faculty and staff and the intellectual quality, vitality, and passion of its students. During my service as ADAA, I had the pleasure of working with department chairs and Dean Munson in recruiting more than 50 faculty members to the College. I interviewed every candidate. By the time I left Michigan for UGA, many of the faculty members I helped recruit had become stars in their disciplines.

Michigan Engineering features strong faculty governance through an elected faculty Executive Committee. My experience working with the Executive Committee in all faculty hiring, promotion and tenure decisions, and budget discussions gave me an appreciation of the role of faculty governance in enhancing institutional excellence.

As associate dean for academic affairs, I also had the opportunity to advance diversity goals as chair of the Dean's Advisory Committee on Faculty Diversity. The committee developed recommendations designed to increase the number of women on the Michigan Engineering faculty. The committee also created a new faculty development program, "The Next Profs." This annual workshop series invited senior PhD students and post-doctoral research fellows from underrepresented backgrounds to Michigan for 3 days of seminars and interactions. This program was very valuable in identifying candidates for future faculty hires. I saw firsthand how diversity enriches classroom instruction and experiential learning, where students learn from each other and from diverse faculty members. Research teams were also greatly strengthened with diverse team members who brought creativity and different perspectives.

### *3. Vice President for Research at Michigan*

In October 2013, I got a call from the Office of the President. President Mary Sue Coleman was looking to appoint an interim vice president for research after the incumbent had announced that he would be stepping down from the role. I was quite honored to be considered.

While I had worked with the President's office in various ways when I served in the associate dean roles, it was the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership from 2011 through 2014 that gave me an opportunity to work closely with President Coleman. The Advanced Manufacturing Partnership was a White House initiative under President Obama, organized to develop recommendations on manufacturing technologies, shared infrastructure, education, and policies to strengthen advanced manufacturing in the United States. While President Coleman served on the Executive Committee of the Advanced Manufacturing Partnership, I served as a member of the Operations Committee. I advised President Coleman on the University of Michigan research and education programs in manufacturing, provided inputs on partnership deliberations and recommendations, and traveled with her to the White House several times. Hence, President Coleman had opportunities to observe me work in various settings.

The vice president for research serves as the senior research officer and leads the Office of Research with a mission to catalyze, support, and safeguard research and scholarship across the University of Michigan. Advancing research, cultivating interdisciplinary collaboration, and ensuring integrity and compliance are the key priorities of the Vice President for Research.

#### *3.1. Cultivating Interdisciplinary Research*

The University of Michigan has an expansive research enterprise that spans the campuses of Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint. Annual research expenditures at the time totaled more than US\$1.5 billion. Faculty in all disciplines were active in research and scholarship, but the major contributors to the volumes of research during my service were the Medical School, College of Engineering, Institute for

Social Research, College of Literature, Arts and Sciences, and School of Public Health.

During my tenure as vice president, UM launched several large-scale interdisciplinary initiatives, including the Michigan Institute for Data Science, a US\$100 million investment over 5 years. The investment included faculty hires, seed grants supporting data sciences in learning analytics, transportation, computational social sciences, and precision medicine. UM also launched Mcity, a public–private partnership for connected and automated transportation. Mcity was supported by the university, Michigan Department of Transportation, Michigan Economic Development Corporation, and more than 40 companies. The partnership provided faculty and students with not just financial resources but also societally relevant problems for research, innovation, and testing.

### *3.2. Ensure Research Integrity and Compliance*

As Vice President for Research, I provided management and oversight to ensure research integrity and compliance, including responsible conduct of research and scholarship, conflict of interest, human subject research, animal care and use program, research security, international engagement, and export controls. One of the major challenges I encountered was the animal care and use program. Due to the decentralized nature of the university budget and management, animal research had also become decentralized. This led to inconsistent messaging and staff training and a lack of central resources to support the animal care and use program. In turn, this led to some deficiencies in infrastructure and institutional animal care and use committee (IACUC) oversight challenges with accreditation review. With support from the president and provost, I led a 2-year effort to restructure the campus-wide animal care and use program. These changes included the recruitment of an associate vice president for research who also served as the university’s attending veterinarian and an assistant vice president for animal resources, the centralization of all animal resources staff across campus, and greatly enhanced communications. The restructuring promoted a consistent set of policies and practices across the three campuses and led to subsequent successful accreditation reviews.

These leadership roles at the University of Michigan provided me with an opportunity to gain experience in faculty affairs, graduate education, research, budget, and resources. They helped me build a strong and broad foundation for my role as provost at UGA, which has wide-ranging responsibilities in instruction, research, public service and outreach, and information technologies.

## **5 Lessons Learned**

Through my leadership experience serving in different administrative roles at two large public research universities, I have gained insights into the complexity and operations of higher education institutions.

1. *Leading versus Managing*: While Maghroori and Powers (Maghroori & Powers, 2007) discussed the difference between the two roles of a vice president for academic affairs versus a provost, and the need to be able to wear the right hat at the right time, my own experience would indicate the complementary and integrative nature of leadership and management. Leadership means articulating a compelling vision for the institution that galvanizes the support of the leadership team and faculty and inspires them to pursue strategic goals. Effective management means minimizing interventions so that the organization can focus on the institutional mission and strategic vision. Both leadership and management are critical to academic excellence and success in fulfilling a university's mission.
2. *Relentless Focus*: In each leadership role, one must focus on the mission of the office. For example, the senior vice president for academic affairs and provost at UGA have overall responsibility for the institution's academic excellence including instruction, research, and public service. Pursuing strategic goals in each area is necessary for a successful leadership tenure. The academic mission guides the strategic initiatives and investment and the day-to-day operations. For a vice president of research or chief research officer, growing research, cultivating interdisciplinary collaborations, and ensuring integrity and compliance are the essential missions. A new leader must define these objectives and create a strategic vision through discussions with the faculty and other leaders. Ambitious, yet achievable, goals for the office can then be set.
3. *Importance of Leadership Team*: The institutional vision needs to be supported with common goals. The provost cannot do everything alone and needs a strong and diverse team of academic leaders who bring wide-ranging experiences and perspectives to the table. I have been fortunate to collaborate with an outstanding team of leaders, vice presidents, vice provosts, associate provosts, and deans who work closely together to advance academic excellence at the University of Georgia.
4. *Importance of People Skills and Emotional Intelligence*: Serving the institution and supporting faculty and students in their pursuit of excellence lies at the very foundation of academic leadership. Emotional intelligence is vital when working with people. When the formal search for the vice president for research began, the University of Michigan president articulated several desired personal and professional characteristics for the new vice president, including:
  - A high degree of intellectual curiosity, extending to disciplines beyond one's own
  - Absolute integrity
  - Sense of humor
  - Energy
  - Altruism—taking joy in bringing value to others' work
  - High respect for colleagues
  - Charisma, the ability to sell ideas, and
  - Being incisive and decisive

Many of these characteristics are what I consider elements of emotional intelligence that can serve one well when in leadership positions. Developing these characteristics and practicing them regularly will support leadership and management.

As an institution of learning, our mission is all about people: creating the next generation of leaders, innovators, and citizens. However, it is the faculty who carry out the teaching and create the new knowledge, and it is the staff who will make the university run efficiently. As a provost, hiring the best faculty and staff and supporting them with resources lies at the very center of advancing academic excellence in a top institution.

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**Dr. S. Jack Hu** joined the University of Georgia (UGA) as senior vice president for academic affairs and provost on July 1, 2019. In this role, he oversees instruction, research, public service and outreach, information technology, and UGA's 19 schools and colleges. Before his current appointment, he was the vice president for research at the University of Michigan where he oversaw a research enterprise with annual expenditures exceeding US\$1.5 billion. He is a member of the National Academy of Engineering and an elected fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME), the Society of Manufacturing Engineers (SME), and the International Academy for Production Engineering (CIRP). He is also the recipient of several awards, including the ASME William T. Ennor Manufacturing Technology Award, the SME Gold Medal, and several best paper awards.



# The Presidential Quest of a First-Generation Chinese American Academic



Guiyou Huang

## 1 Motivations for Leadership

Born or made, leaders develop from individuals who have gained enough societal experience, as well as greater insight into their personality traits and professional ambitions. My leadership journey started as a class officer in elementary school during the chaotic years of China's Cultural Revolution, when learning as a core academic activity was severely undermined and happened inconsistently within a loosely structured curriculum.

Leadership at any level of an organization comes with varying amounts of responsibilities. For me, these additional responsibilities accompanied my educational journey from elementary, secondary, and tertiary schools through graduate school in China. However, the concept of leadership, per se, was rarely used in those settings, as being a class officer often meant handling chores in the classroom and around the school and exercising more responsibilities than a peer student not playing such a role. The only time in which I was not a student leader was the years of my doctoral studies in Texas, starting in Fall 1989. During this period, the thought of leadership went into dormancy as I was ensconced in a rigorous doctoral program in English, which was, for me, a second language. Because of that choice of study, I was repeatedly warned by fellow Chinese compatriots that with that particular degree, I would not find a job teaching English (literature) in this country (and I even acquiesced).

While the pursuit of a doctoral degree for international students in the United States is by no measure a facile affair, it paves the way for a collegiate teaching career, which involves years of quality, measurable work toward tenure and

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promotion. During this time, the mere thought of assuming a leadership role is as far-flung as the imagination can reach. Hard work pays off with tenure and rank promotion, an indication that one has finally gained a footing in their department and the discipline practiced. However, in the early years of my academic journey, the thought hardly occurred that I would embark on a leadership path. I believed then that those things were not meant for immigrants who needed to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers to make a decent living wage in their adopted country. Achieving tenure thus afforded the first opportunity to think outside the position as defined in the original job description. As I deliberated what to do to further my career, thoughts beyond the parameters of teaching began to emerge, first as an inkling that would eventually evolve into an initially tepid motivation. The question was not the Shakespearean “to be or not to be,” but rather a Frostian dilemma about which road to take in a wood with divergence.

Forrest Gump, in the eponymous movie, says his mother told him, “Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re going to get.” My life’s journey sort of echoes that scenario, although I would frame it as a series of ironies, or unexpected twists and turns. Although my parents encouraged education, never had I thought I would go to college; or attend my dream university; or come to America; or as an immigrant teach English to native speakers; or become a college dean or vice president, let alone a chancellor or president. Not a member of the Catholic Church, never had I imagined I would serve as a dean for a Catholic-based university. Having no military background, never had I thought I would be a senior vice president at a senior military college, holding the honorific rank of brigadier general, wearing stars on my epaulets, and receiving salutes from cadets. This all happened ... and more ... and I am grateful.

## 2 The First Leadership Role

The university where I landed my first tenure-track position as an assistant professor of English was a 4-year, public, comprehensive state university that, like many similar institutions, has an Honors Program, which was led by a department colleague. When she was stepping down, she encouraged me to apply. I was grateful for her confidence in me, and I threw my hat in the ring for the Honors Director position. On October 2, 2000, 3 months after achieving tenure and promotion to associate professor, our first child, George, came into the world at 10:30 p.m., the day before my interview for the position. During my interview with the search committee, I mentioned that I had not slept a wink because I was taking care of my wife postpartum and our new son. My ability to handle the interview despite a sleepless night perhaps impressed the committee, and the next thing I knew, I was hired as the Honors Program Director, which marked my initiation into the world of higher education administration.

The Honors Program curriculum is interdisciplinary and requires coordination across departments and colleges in course offerings, as well as collaboration with

faculty and university leaders, which afforded opportunities to learn about other programs and disciplines. Fifteen months after assuming the director role, my home department was conducting a chair election, and I was recruited by some faculty colleagues to run for election, partly because I had achieved additional administrative experience and partly because I showed leadership potential. After being elected through an anonymous vote, I wore two hats for nearly 3 years—serving as chair of the English department and as the Honors Director. In these dual roles, I experienced some notable successes, including increasing enrollments in both English and Honors, while widening my professional network and honing my leadership skills.

When the news of my election as chair reached the university president, with whom I had traveled abroad before, he called to congratulate me and then added, “Stay there. I’ll drive by your office and take you to lunch.” During that lunch, in a tiny Greek restaurant where for the first time I ate grape leaves, the president asked me about my future plans. Before I could respond, he said something I’ll never forget, “If you can be an English department chair, you can be anything.” The same president was the first person to express the observation about my sense of humor, which is often recognized as a good trait in leadership.

### 3 Administrative Influences

The influences on my administrative journey started at home when my grandfather and great uncle were involved in government activities. Because of my grandfather’s leadership and his political stance, he succumbed to violent political persecution in the heyday of the destructive decade of the Cultural Revolution. The lesson learned from this experience was that serious, and heavy, consequences certainly can come from the decisions one makes, among many other things, during tenure in office.

A decade after his political persecution, I went to college. Prior to 1977, the year China restored higher education, I had not dreamed of college. It became a reality in 1979 when I went to a college that no one in my family or among my relatives thought I should have gone Qufu Normal University, located in Confucius’s hometown. Upon graduating, I was asked to stay on as an instructor, teaching English (mostly grammar, reading, listening, and speaking skills), while also serving as a political director, a job that essentially consisted of leading student affairs in the department. This dual appointment provided opportunities to influence students, both academically and extracurricularly. During the following 3 years, my department head encouraged me to succeed, which was not the norm in the academic environment then. One of the most affirming compliments I heard from him was that I had “enthusiasm” for my job.

Attending graduate school at Beijing University in 1986, I was entrusted with several significant responsibilities, including teaching English part-time to economics undergraduates and serving as the president of the English department’s graduate student association. Coupled with my graduate coursework, it often felt like I

was working three full-time jobs. My busy graduate school schedule taught meaningful lessons about time management and relationship building.

Even during my graduate studies in Beijing, hardly did it occur to me that someday, I would fly across the Pacific Ocean to obtain a doctorate in a country that was not considered an ally of my home country. However, anyone can change your life or your opinion if you are willing to listen with an open mind or with a growth mindset as author Carol Dweck outlined. I had toyed with the idea of pursuing a doctoral degree at my alma mater in Beijing, until the secretary of graduate studies of my department 1 day said innocuously, “If you want to get a doctoral degree in English, why don’t you do it in an English-speaking country”? Voila! This simple question spoke to me and led me down to a path that I had not considered and that would change my life and career dramatically. Ten months later, with the GRE and TOEFL scores to support my journey, I landed in Brazos Valley, Texas, amid extreme mid-August heat.

After obtaining my doctorate, I taught a variety of courses in English for many years, first in Texas and then in Pennsylvania, while publishing books and articles in North America, Asia, and Europe. Following a year-long stint directing an Honors College at a public university in Michigan, I landed a position as a division dean and then college dean at a Catholic-based university in South Florida. It was during this time that I had the good fortune to participate in leadership institutes at Harvard (Management & Leadership in Education and Institute for Educational Management). I also received personal encouragement from sitting presidents, one of whom casually said, “You should be a president.” While a college presidency was not yet on my radar, a deanship was a common precursor to a vice president or provost position. At this juncture, my responsibilities had involved leading mainly undergraduate programs until a restructuring occurred, and I was appointed the dean of a newly formed college composed of programs in liberal arts and social sciences at both graduate and undergraduate levels.

After some time, I was beginning to be approached by search firms for provost/vice president for academic affairs positions, and I felt ready to take on these bigger challenges. I was fortunate to have several options, and I ultimately accepted an offer based upon my belief that the president of that institution would be a good leader, partner, and mentor. Such a leader has to believe in and trust you enough to take on a great responsibility to educate students. This individual, who had served with the US Coast Guard and in Vietnam, selected me from four outstanding candidates. During two separate on-campus interviews leading up to the hire, he took the time to tell me that he had successfully mentored a couple of vice presidents who went on to become university presidents. A man of integrity and honor, this president allowed me to take charge of academic affairs, to travel with him to Washington, DC and China, and to embark on fundraising trips. When he learned that I was a candidate for a presidential position, he shared his knowledge of budget and fiscal matters.

## 4 Accomplishments and Achievements

Every professional has their shares of successes and failures. The former grants us the pleasure of achievements and celebrations, while the latter offers sobering lessons on how to do better. One of the presidents mentioned earlier once counseled me when I became a department chair that either you survive the problems or the problems survive you. It takes no stretch of imagination to recognize the depth of the wisdom implied: If one survived a problem, it means one either solved or avoided it; if the former, one succeeded, and the latter, no difference was made. Solving problems equates to removing obstacles or making progress toward set goals.

As a first-generation immigrant, the fact of having taught English as a foreign language in China and then to native speakers in the United States alone was a fulfilling accomplishment, and that I did it well boosted my confidence. Even more importantly, when I could write a paper in English, have it accepted, and deliver it at a scholarly conference, that was an uplifting experience. When, after some rejections, I was able to place articles for publication in journals and publish books with publishers like Modern Language Association (MLA), Columbia University Press, the University of Edinburgh Press, and Peking University Press, among others, I was convinced that I could, and would, survive in the competitive world of academia in the United States.

Accomplishing as an administrator or academic leader is something else because the scope of responsibilities is much broader and more affective of employees and students than my bailiwick as a teaching faculty. The stint at my first private college included two back-to-back deanships that involved a good deal of administrative obligations that would not be a routine for a faculty member. For example, the transition from a division dean to a founding dean of a new college represented a significant commitment as I was charged to produce a plan for faculty and program alignments, departmental configurations, mission statement, and goals, all of which required creative and thoughtful leadership. When the college was established and the new structure was accepted and worked well, you know you did the right thing.

In my next role as a senior vice president, I implemented initiatives with a high degree of autonomy. In an institution with a long history and many traditions, change is necessary and possible, but it does not come by just talking about it. The faculty complement of the university was highly dedicated to the institution's mission and was engaged in teaching and research. However, no matter how one's time is divided or managed, it is not realistic to expect greater outcomes when more time is not made available to enable higher productivity in research. Therefore, serious concern was expressed by the faculty for extra time needed to conduct research, travel to conferences, or engage in creative activities. After rounds of conversations and consultations with the faculty senate, the upper administration, and the faculty, I was able to restructure the teaching load (not the workload) to a more manageable scheme, with the express intent to increase productivity in research and creative domains.

Of course, restructuring the teaching load entailed higher expectations for research productivity but also had implications for the institution's budget and faculty complement. Since the average load reduction was one course per year per tenure-track faculty member only, the impact of academic personnel increase for this private institution was modest; in fact, a cost increase was not a primary concern for the teaching load redesign from the get-go, as the overarching goal was about the expected enhancement of research and creative activities as a result of reimagining the workload. This result boosted faculty morale, which was a positive outcome from listening to and acting on their concerns.

Another major legacy achieved was the reorganization of the academic division. This private university has two distinct student populations: cadet corps and civilian students. Together, the enrollment at the time stood at 4200, grouped in eight schools, reflecting a rather inefficient operational structure. Some faculty were ready for a structural change, while others remained skeptical or nervous, as a new organizational configuration would impact the leadership structure and trigger program realignment. This reorganization was done with a great deal of sensitivity, as it involved managing emotions and expectations, negotiating with individuals and units, and communicating at all levels within academics as well as across the campus. The process to change to a new academic structure went on for more than a year, and in the end, the rationale for stronger accountability and operational efficiency won. This gave birth to a more agile, less bureaucratic, and more synergistic structure composed of four academic colleges (instead of eight schools), along with a distinct unit that I dubbed the military arm of the university. Due to fewer colleges and deans, some overhead savings were realized though that was not the driver of the structural change.

Chief academic officers (provosts or vice presidents for academic affairs VPAs) constitute the larger pipeline to the presidency than other senior leadership positions. Becoming the CEO of a university is an exciting validation of one's prior accomplishments and is testament to proven leadership skills. In my new role as a chancellor, coming through the academic ranks, I took on numerous initiatives of which three stand out. One was the establishment and implementation of student retention plans on two levels: a university plan and a department plan. When the plans were implemented, student retention rates increased 10%, which represented laudable collective efforts made by faculty, staff, and the administration, and these well thought-out and properly executed plans enhanced student success. Another notable achievement was to increase pay for faculty and staff across the board, after many years of stagnation. 40% of the employees received an additional increase as a result of equity-based adjustments, and this was a morale booster. Finally, two new academic departments were established as a result of enrollment growth in programs that merited a larger, separate identity and recognition.

By the time I assumed a second presidency in a familiar state and system for which I had worked previously as a faculty member, all things seemed well and good until COVID-19 reared its ugly head and swept across the globe in March 2020. Needless to say, no other priority loomed larger than the health and safety of all students, faculty, and staff. The urgency and frequency of meetings of the system

presidents was an intense indication of how dire the situation was that needed to be managed on a daily basis. The creation and implementation of COVID-related protocols, involving Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), state health agencies, the county health department's rules, and university policies, suddenly converged to ensure institutional compliance with these protocols. As a result of our swift action, with welcome relief, no student death occurred. While all this was taking place, we managed to award pay increases to university employees, and salary increase notices were signed a few days before I left that nifty campus, to assume my current presidency at Western Illinois University.

Continuing to be a COVID president, albeit at a new institution, I found myself immediately engaged in discussions regarding work conditions and employee compensation, while establishing priorities for Western. Just about 2 years after I took over the reins of this great institution, we have achieved some successes to propel the university forward. For example, numerous plans have been established and implemented and are succeeding. These plans, aligned with the priorities I articulated since my arrival, include a recruitment/an enrollment plan, a student retention plan, a plan for our branch campus, a financial sustainability plan, a comprehensive capital campaign plan, and an institutional distinctiveness plan to enhance the university's national profile and recruitment appeal. The recruitment plan, implemented since the early summer of 2021, yielded significant enrollment growth for domestic, first-year freshmen (16.7% increase) in Fall 2022; graduate school enrollment, which exceeded 2300 students, was the largest since 2008; and international students now total over 1100 (which is a record in the history of the university).

Since my arrival at Western, there have been in-depth discussions surrounding a comprehensive campaign, and in September 2022, a US\$100 million campaign was formally launched. Just as exciting was the installation of fencing and construction beginning to get underway of a much-anticipated Center for Performing Arts. The seed for a new performing arts building was planted nearly half a century ago, and it remained on the state's priority list of capital projects for 16 years. During this time, the university actually broke ground twice only to have the project cancelled until Fall 2022. Many concerted efforts took place between the university, the governor's office, the state legislature, and the Illinois Capital Development Board, to bring the project to fruition. The capital funds were released earlier in Fall 2022, and a groundbreaking ceremony was held on our Macomb, Illinois campus, attended by Gov. J. B. Pritzker, along with numerous state and local dignitaries. This center, which is expected to be completed by Fall 2024, will be an enormous asset not only to students at the university but also for the west-central Illinois region.

In addition, we were able to implement pay increases both for represented staff and faculty and for nonnegotiated staff across campus, which helped to improve employee morale. In addition, helpful to enhancing the campus culture was an in-depth scan and multiple conversations with stakeholders concerning racism that resulted in a courageous action to establish an Anti-Racism Task Force, something the university never had in its 123 years of existence. To create and sustain a safe learning space and an inclusive and just culture, I established a new Office of Justice, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (JIDE), with approval by the Board of Trustees, as

the go-to place for all students and employees on issues and matters related to diversity and inclusion. These two notable events in the history of the institution are already making differences in the life of university constituents and in building a more inclusive culture.

## 5 Reflections and Lessons Learned

It is often said that people learn from their failures and mistakes but not necessarily from successes and gains, which I think is generally true. Each organization has a unique history, and humanity overall owns a collective history replete with glorious successes and enormous failures. An organization's leader is no different, except that the successes or failures of a leader are often, if not always, intertwined with those of the organization, though the blame generally tends to fall on the person rather than the organization or its structure. The following offers brief reflections on what is important to successful leadership.

**Context for leadership:** Cognizance of the context for a new leader—both historical and current—is crucial. Institutional history and the university's current culture are significant aspects worth learning. Depending on the position one takes over—a unit director or a university president—it is necessary to gain insight into one's predecessor: Did they retire or were they forced to leave, or did they experience a vote of no confidence? Furthermore, why and how did it happen? What can one learn from it?

**Relationship building:** Leadership is locked in a symbiotic relationship with followership, and for an organization to be effective, the individuals within need to be willing, ideally, to get on board and follow the leader. However, not all members of an organization are ready to accept new leadership; therefore, it is critical to build relationships at all levels. A clear vision, along with realistic priorities, is a start, but must have buy-in.

**Important constituents of a university** typically include a board of trustees, the student government association, the faculty senate, the staff council or its equivalents, and, in a unionized environment, faculty and staff unions. Because the educational mission of the organization largely rests on the shoulders of the faculty—the individuals who maintain and advance the mission—a strong rapport with the faculty is highly recommended. Because the board of trustees sets the general direction for the university, exercises fiduciary responsibility, and selects the president, the board is an important influencer on the president and the university.

**Board relations:** Public and private university boards are different in orientation and behavior. For the former, trustees are typically gubernatorially appointed or publicly elected; therefore, they are primarily governing boards that carry a public, and sometimes political, agenda. Such boards tend to be small in size, though a state-level system board can be quite large. Private university boards tend to be larger, self-selecting, and self-perpetuating; often, they are both fundraising and governing boards. One of the most important responsibilities of a board is the



selection of the president, and as such, the president's relationship with the board is crucial for institutional success. Thus, managing board relations is an important aspect of a president's portfolio. In addition, a positive relationship among board members serves the university, the board, and the president well, benefiting the entire institution and its communities.

**Town and gown:** The location of an existing university was not a decision made by the new leader, yet it is the latter's business as to how the town/gown relationship is managed and maintained. I have seen this relationship thrive when the CEOs of both organizations share common visions for the future of both, and I have witnessed dynamics that are not favorable to either when leaders hold differing views on the future of both or either. In a small city where a university is located and enrolls hundreds, or even thousands, of international and diverse students who have varying and sometimes distinct needs, it serves both organizations well when they work together creatively to make all students feel welcome and their needs met.

**External relations:** These include the governor's office, the state legislature (both hold an important say in state appropriations), congressional delegation, and alumni throughout the world, and at the community level, mayors and city councils/boards, the local chamber of commerce, school districts, and the economic development board, among others.

**Leadership team building:** Every leader should strive to have a high-performing, cohesive team; however, the leader has to build that team. It is possible to have the good fortune of inheriting an effective leadership team that buys into the vision of the new leader, but that is neither a guarantee nor a safe assumption, which means one needs to build a new team that is supportive, communicative, and collaborative. While collaboration is key, there is true value in contrarian thinkers serving on a leadership team, as out-of-the-box thinking provides broader perspectives, and opposing views allow one to gain the whole picture on the pros and cons of a decision or action. Building a high-achieving team takes time and sound judgment, particularly when politics and personalities are thrown into the mix. There has also been a ubiquitous demand for diversity at the C level, to reflect the demographic of the current US population.

Diversity is a good segue to discussions of racism, sexism, and the use of the English language. Racism and sexism are age-old problems, which remain rampant today, in every corner of the world, including higher education. Equity and justice are among the motivators to eliminate racism and sexism, and higher education is in a powerful position to make a difference in these domains. It is only self-evident that C-level offices in industries, government, and higher education are held by low numbers of individuals of African American, Latino, Native American, and Asian American backgrounds, among others. Asian Americans comprise an even smaller percentage compared to that of other underrepresented groups and that of the faculty of the same category on university campuses throughout the United States. The history that led to the current state of Asian Americans aside, Asians today continue to face not only racism and hate, but also marginalization and invisibility. In higher education, there is a genuine need to develop and train next-generation leaders of Asian descent (as the Committee of 100—a Chinese American leadership

organization—has been doing across industries), to grow the pipeline of Asian American leaders from the department chair's level up to the presidency. The stereotype of Asians being quiet and not rocking the boat must be toppled, and no one can do that but Asians themselves. After all, if one does not get heard or seen, one cannot expect to be noticed or promoted, despite the quality or quantity of the work performed.

Sexism likewise holds its own sway on our industry, as evidenced in the lower pay structure for female faculty, coaches, staff, and administrators. Some Asian Americans who originated from Confucian countries like China continue to experience sexism in the adopted culture, and it is doubly hard, if not more so, for Asian women to surge ahead when the docile, obedient stigma continues to be perpetuated.

For Asian American leaders in higher education, or any industry for that matter, racism and sexism are realities that must be fought and overcome. Just as importantly, they need to be effective in communications (both verbal and written) by obviating racist and sexist languages. This is done to show respect and equality to members of their communities. It is easy to know words of English by their dictionary definitions, but harder to discern their denotations, connotations, and political and cultural nuances and utilize them properly in their respective context. Therefore, it pays off when an immigrant or English as a second-language speaker spends time to master the nuances of relevant concepts and expressions. One seemingly small thing from which I benefited was a workshop conducted for teaching assistants of freshman composition, where I received guidance on how to avoid sexist and racist language for the simple sake of making writing, and ultimately communications, effective to the audience. Something I did three decades ago still benefits my leadership practices today.

## **6 Advice for Future Leaders**

Leadership is about a multitude of things, and each leader has to focus on matters important to the organization one leads. A leader can be a change agent in the right context, but change is not always readily accepted unless it is channeled properly and convincingly. A new leader needs to know for what they were hired so that they can take necessary steps to accomplish the goals and meet expectations. In a time of resource scarcity, the priorities for a leader will likely include resource generation. Under different circumstances, the focus can be on faculty or program development, innovation, capital projects, or partnership with industries. Areas in which academic-based leaders may need to develop greater expertise could include athletics and advancement. On the other hand, a nonacademic assuming a presidential role may find it beneficial to learn the academic culture and the faculty's role in teaching, research, advising, creative activities, and university governance.

Good leaders distinguish between leadership and management. Leadership is about creating a vision and achieving it while setting the direction and tone for the organization. However, a leader also needs to manage routine operations, as well as a few aspects of life that cut across personal and professional domains, including management of image (appearance and presentation), emotions (e.g., anger), time (prioritization), health, relationships, expectations, and consequences. All these require patience, diplomacy, discipline, emotional intelligence, and self-awareness. Properly done, the leader will be successful.

Leadership, like everything else, is often accompanied by changes and uncertainties, including upward or horizontal moves and departures from positions. When one's vision, values, qualifications, and experiences match an institution's goals or aspirations, it spells fit and forebodes well for both the leader and the institution. To be successful often means achieving articulated goals. The decision to stay in or depart from a position hinges upon several prominent factors—climate, location, compensation, and fit, among other things. If not a good fit, none of these would matter. How long one's tenure should run at an organization depends on the amount of time it takes to achieve the set goals and whether one will want to establish new, more ambitious goals. If not, it is about time to throw in the towel and seek new opportunities.

Advice is easier to give than practice and is useful only to those who want to listen—it is critical that one understands the fundamental importance of listening—listen to others and to yourself; and know yourself, as well as the organization you lead or work for. Persistence, grit, and resilience keep good company of each other—don't give up easily. Be a good follower both before and while being a leader. Patience is a virtue insofar as things get done. A bit of an ego doesn't hurt, but a dose of humility goes further. Courage is important. Aristotle in his *Ethics* states, "for it is just in facing fearful issues that the brave man excels." Socrates equates courage with knowledge, while Francis Bacon calls knowledge power. Knowledge, courage, and power—use them all and use them wisely. Walk as much as, if not more than, you talk. Speak genuinely, communicate frequently, and act thoughtfully. Always read—reading is one of the best habits to keep. Finally, I conclude with a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Action is the perfection and publication of thought."



**Dr. Guiyou Huang** serves as the 12th president of Western Illinois University. Born in Aletai City, Xinjiang, in the early 1960s, Huang grew up in Shandong province, eastern China. He attended Qufu Normal University, located in the historical hometown of Confucius, where, after graduation, he taught English and directed student affairs in the Department of Foreign Languages. He completed his graduate studies in British literature at Beijing University, while teaching English part-time and serving as the president of the Association of Graduate Students in English. In Fall 1989, he began his doctoral studies in American literature at Texas A&M University – College Station, receiving his PhD in Summer 1993.

Huang has held a variety of administrative and academic positions at the US institutions. He was a lecturer in English at Texas A&M until 1995 when he landed a tenure-track position at Kutztown University, where he was tenured and promoted to associate professor in 2000 and to full professor in 2003. He was appointed director of the University Honors Program in 2000, and, in Spring 2002, became chair of the English Department. During this period, he adjunct-taught the first Asian American Studies course at Lehigh University. In 2004, he assumed the director's position of the Honors College at Grand Valley State University, prior to becoming the dean of Undergraduate Studies & Programs and then the dean of Biscayne College at St. Thomas University. During 2010–2016, he served as vice president in Norwich University for academic affairs and dean of the faculty before he was promoted to senior vice president, followed by the chancellorship of Louisiana State University (LSU) of Alexandria, the presidency of Edinboro University, and currently the presidency of Western Illinois University.

An author and editor of 13 books published in the United States, the Great Britain, and China, as well as numerous essays and articles printed in the United States, Mexico, China, France, and the Netherlands, Huang is a 2009 graduate of the Institute for Management and Leadership in Education and a 2012 graduate of the Institute for Educational Management, among other Harvard institutes. He was a Visiting Global Scholar at Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton in 2007 and served on the College Board's SAT Critical Reading Test Development Committee during 2008–2010.

Huang is a member of the Committee of 100, which is a non-partisan leadership organization composed of extraordinary Chinese Americans in business, government, education, and the arts and a member of the Illinois Commission on Equitable Public University Funding. He is also on the Missouri Valley Football Conference Presidents Council and the Summit League Presidents Council. Locally, he served as a member of MAEDCO (Macomb Area Economic Development Corporation), the Macomb Chamber of Commerce, and the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce. He has also served on the National Committee on the United States–China Relations and as chairman of the Presidents' Council of National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA).

Huang and his wife, Dr. Jennifer Qian, have a daughter, Claire, who is a seventh grader, and a son, George, who is a graduate of Rice University in Texas.

# The Man Who Races Against Time



Changqing Ke

## 1 Humble Beginnings

I have known Professor Wei Zhao for over two decades. The first thing to be said about him is that, in the community of Chinese scholars in the United States, he is among a handful of those who have held high-level leadership positions both in comprehensive universities and in the pivotal federal government. Nevertheless, it was not until 2001, when I was working in Texas, did I meet Wei Zhao in person. The moment I walked into his office at Texas A&M University, I felt the aura of a scholar and a gentleman: modest, polite, considerate, and lucid in thought and words. Despite his stature and fame, he was delightfully deferential, exuding graciousness and great-heartedness throughout our conversation.

Our conversation began with stories of his youth. Wei Zhao's family hailed from Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, China, a beautiful city steeped in culture near Shanghai. He, however, was born in Xi'an, a city laden with history in northwest China, where his parents relocated in the 1950s after being appointed to positions as part of the

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government's drive to develop China's northwest region. By a stroke of bad luck, just as he was beginning his studies in the 1960s, China was turned upside down by the catastrophic *Cultural Revolution*. Overnight, Zhao and his family became political pariahs, tainted by having relatives in Taiwan.

It was a time of disaster and utter disorder. Wei Zhao had just finished elementary school in 1966 when political madness engulfed China. All schools were closed. It was not until 1969 when junior high schools were reopened in Xi'an so that he and many other students could return to school. After just 1 year, his entire class graduated from junior high as the authority at that time decided to abbreviate the length of secondary education. About his experiences in high school, Wei Zhao humorously remarked, "When I started, we were learning rational numbers; when I graduated, we were still learning rational numbers." Upon leaving high school, most of his high school classmates were immediately assigned to help build a strategic railway from Hubei Province to Sichuan Province. Wei Zhao, however, was denied this "privilege" as he failed the background check, because of his family's connection with Taiwan. Nor could he qualify for any meaningful job in any enterprise. So, young Wei Zhao found himself jobless in Xi'an. After much pleading, he was grudgingly given a blue-collar job as an electroplater in a factory.

Given his family's politically undesirable background, securing a position as a worker in the city was considered a huge "step-up." He treasured his hard-won opportunity. Losing no time in mastering electroplating skills, he became a *Model Worker* and earned respect from his peers and superiors. Universities eventually reopened. Strangely, admissions were not based on academic merits, but on practical experience in factories or on farms. In 1974, after toiling away for 4 years in a factory, Wei Zhao managed to wrangle an admission to the Department of Physics at Shaanxi Normal University (SNU). At that time, scholars were rated socially inferior to blue-collar workers. Receiving a university education was considered a "bad option" as intellectuals were targeted for harsh treatment during the Cultural Revolution. None of his friends or relatives thought it was wise to give up a paid job to become a college student. Wei Zhao, however, thought otherwise. He told them, "I would give up everything—I mean everything—to study at a university."

College education at that time was only 3 years. Therefore, in 1977, Wei Zhao graduated from the undergraduate program just when the Cultural Revolution was fizzling out. This time, luck was on Wei Zhao's side. His academic potential was quickly recognized, and, incredibly, at the young age of 24, he was offered a junior faculty position at the same university. This was quite remarkable, given that he only had 10 years of formal education, that is, 6 years in elementary school, 1 year in junior high school, and 3 years in college, compared with the standard 16 years of education leading to university graduation.

As the Cultural Revolution sputtered out, Wei Zhao could now catch up on the 6 years of education he had lost. He used every possible minute to study, waking up early and staying up late. While others were taking an after-lunch nap, he was in the library with his nose in a book. Summers in Xi'an were sizzling, and air-conditioning was nonexistent back then. To ensure that heat did not disrupt him from studying, he would soak his feet in a basin of cold water and place a wet towel on his forehead to cool himself off.

## 2 Journey to the West

As the saying goes, “opportunity favors the prepared.” By the 1970s, relations between China and the United States had thawed. In 1979, the two countries established diplomatic ties and began educational exchanges, gifting life-changing opportunities to many students. Wei Zhao was one of those fortunate few. In 1980, he sailed through a selection examination and received a scholarship from the China Education Commission. With this scholarship in hand, he wanted to apply for a master’s program in the United States. However, hurdles remained as he was deemed to have insufficient qualification to meet the admission standards in any reputable comprehensive university in the United States (Fig. 1).

However, Wei Zhao could see opportunities when others could not. When a delegation from the University of Massachusetts (UMass) at Amherst visited Shaanxi Normal University, Wei Zhao with the help of SNU’s leaders and colleagues courageously approached the delegation to make a case for his academic potential. Impressed by his persistence and passion, the delegation went back to UMass and persuaded the university to grant him discretionary admission into its master’s program.

Wei Zhao thus managed to pry open the door of opportunity. In 1982, he finally took off from the Shanghai Hongqiao Airport and arrived in Amherst, a New England town famous for hosting five higher educational institutions. Compared with the privations of Chinese universities at the time, Wei Zhao was excited by both the comfortable living conditions and the superior learning environment: air-conditioned classrooms, modern computers in laboratories, books galore, and the most recent journals of every discipline in the library.



**Fig. 1** Taking off to the United States in 1982

However, there was one potentially embarrassing issue: At that time, Wei Zhao was already 29 years old, 2 years older than his thesis advisor. Determined to catch up on the time he had lost, he greedily took remedial courses and studied around the clock. In only 1 year, he completed a total of 30 credit hours and received a master's degree in 1983. From September 1983 to January 1986, in two and a half years, he finished his doctorate study. In total, he spent three and a half years receiving his master's and PhD degrees, an accomplishment that typically takes someone 5–7 years to achieve. This becomes more remarkable if we consider the fact that Wei Zhao had an abridged high school and college education and was far from confident in English proficiency.

### 3 Working in Texas

With the PhD degree in his back pocket, Wei Zhao began knocking on academic doors. The first universities to answer his knock were Amherst College and the University of Adelaide in Australia, both offering him faculty positions. From there, his work in real-time computer and communication systems attracted much attention and appreciation. In 1990, six American universities came calling, enticing him with offers of plum faculty positions, including Texas A&M University (TAMU), a highly regarded institution boasting over 45,000 students and with over US\$450 million in annual research funding. Wei Zhao opted to join TAMU not only for its excellent start-up package (including an early promotion to associate professorship) but also because it presented him an opportunity to work with iconic NASA on its space station Freedom project, in which real-time computers were critically important. Wei Zhao performed admirably as a faculty member at TAMU and was promoted to full professor in 1996. Normally, the path to full professorship would take at least 12 years for a freshly minted PhD. Wei Zhao shortened it by 2 years. Once more, he was winning his race against time.

In 1996, the department he worked in was enduring a bumpy ride. Internal “politics” began to encroach on teaching and research, resulting in external research funding drying up, plunging by two-thirds within 1 year. To address that problem, the University launched a nationwide search for a new department head. Through a rigorous selection process, Wei Zhao was crowned the new department head of Computer Science at Texas A&M University.

Facing the crisis, Wei Zhao sprang into action, painstakingly talking to faculty members, listening to their concerns, and calling on its members to build a rejuvenated department together. In his own words, it was the Chinese Confucius philosophy of “moderation” and his velvety touch that had gladdened the hearts of all, uniting the department behind him. Within a year, the department's external research funding had jumped by 100%, in comparison with 1997. Subsequently, he managed to lead his own team and motivated others to focus on “large” projects. By 2000, external research funding had skyrocketed astronomically to 300% over 1997.



Meanwhile, the department's undergraduate program ranking had climbed to the 17th in the United States and saw enrollment in its graduate program doubled.

From 1997 to 2001, within a short span of 4 years, as a department head, Wei Zhao with his spectacular leadership skills transformed the Department of Computer Science into the pride of the university. It came as no surprise when, in September 2001, Wei Zhao was elevated to the position of Associate Vice President for Research.

While excelling in his administrative positions, Wei Zhao's own scholarship efforts were also coming to fruition. He became an internationally recognized scholar in real-time computer and communication systems, databases, and secured and fault-tolerant computing systems. He and his research team won numerous honors and awards, including the IEEE International Conference on Distributed Computing Systems Best Paper Award, the IEEE National Conference on Space and Electronics Best Paper Award, and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) Technology Transfer Award. Wei Zhao was also a much-loved educator. His graduate students finished second in the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) international scientific competition. One of them triumphed over a swarm of candidates to become a NASA astronaut. Wei Zhao himself held multiple US patents and was inducted by IEEE as a fellow.

Enjoying a university-level leadership position with a tenured faculty status in a highly respected university, Wei Zhao looked back from time to time. He was full of gratitude for the support and help he received during his early years and the opportunities presented by his alma maters, Shaanxi Normal University and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He appreciated the academic apprenticeship he received and valued the close relationships with many colleges and universities in China and the United States.

Through it all, Wei Zhao felt that he owed Texas A&M University a debt of gratitude, which he considered his second home. This is the place where his dream took off and took shape. He repaid that gratitude by taking steps to connect his adopted hometown with his native one. In November 2002, with Wei Zhao as the go-between, Texas A&M University and Peking University jointly hosted the Sino-US Relationship Conference whose guest of honor was none other than President George H.W. Bush (Sr.) (Fig. 2) with a cluster of other VIPs.

On an even bigger stage, he was instrumental in coordinating and orchestrating President Jiang Zemin's visit to Texas A&M University and the George H.W. Bush (Sr.) Presidential Library. His efforts obviously left such a deep impression on the former US President that when Wei Zhao became the Rector of the University of Macau (UMacau), he was able to invite President George H. W. Bush (Sr.) to accept an honorary doctorate from UMacau.

**Fig. 2** Talking to President George H.W. Bush (Sr.) in the Sino-US Relationship Conference in 2002



#### **4 In the Corridors of Government**

Success in his career did not decelerate Wei Zhao's race against time. One breakthrough followed another. In 2005, the biggest arrived: He was offered and gratefully accepted a concurrent appointment as the Director for the Division of Computer and Network Systems in the National Science Foundation (NSF) in Washington, DC.

This change from a faculty member (and leader) at a university to a senior executive in government was by no means a walk in the park. The first shock came during a casual conversation with NSF Director Dr. Arden Bement, who was appointed as the 12th Director of NSF by President George H.W. Bush (Jr.) in 2004 and stayed in that position until 2010.

Dr. Bement asked Wei Zhao, "What is your job?"

Wei Zhao was all too aware that NSF had been a federal agency dedicated to the development and advancement of American science by funding basic scientific research. Naturally, he thought the answer to this question was a no-brainer. He replied, "My job is to lead US scientists to advance computer science and engineering by doing research ...".

"No, this is not your job!" Dr. Bement interrupted. He told Dr. Zhao point-blank, "Your job is to destroy!"

This statement left him shell-shocked. "Destroy what?" Wei Zhao asked.

Dr. Bement then “taught” Wei Zhao an important lesson. He explained that in the process of initiating a new scientific field (say, computer science or material science), scientists from different areas would typically join efforts in developing it and growing it. However, once a field was established, researchers may seek to form alliances to maintain a stable hierarchy. This could include possibly corralling representatives of government agencies, who may help to dominate funding resources and consolidate the hierarchy for their own benefit. Once that happens, the growth of that field might stall, adversely affecting young researchers. That is why the job of the NSF is to “destroy” those hierarchies and to ensure equal opportunities for all scientists in their multidisciplinary research.

Agreeing wholeheartedly with this philosophy, Wei Zhao followed it faithfully during his tenure at NSF, as well as in other subsequent executive positions. One example of his adherence to this strategy was the creation of a new research field called “Cyber Physical Systems” (CPS). In surveying the US industry, he found that there was a great need for research and development for using computer systems to monitor and control physical devices and equipment (e.g., autonomous driving vehicles would be a good example). However, in the research community, there were several disconnected fields (real-time systems, embedded systems, control theory, engineering, etc.) that were relevant to this subject but, individually, did not meet the needs of the industry.

Following Dr. Bement’s “destroy” strategy, Wei Zhao led the research communities to discuss ways to change the status of these fields to satisfy industry demand. He was instrumental in (eventually removing the hierarchies of these fields and) merging them into a new field which he named Cyber Physical Systems (CPS). As the Division Director, Wei Zhao strategically allocated financial resources and started a new NSF research funding program for CPS, a memorable first in the world. The new CPS program turned out to be critical for transforming research and development in computer and network systems. Not only did the industry applaud the creation of this much-needed new research program, but the US President’s Council of Advisors on Science and Technology (PCAST) also listed CPS as the top priority for technology development in 2007. Subsequently, many US government agencies joined NSF in sponsoring CPS research projects. Other governments across the globe also injected billions of dollars into this new emerging field.

In his relentless race against time, Wei Zhao did not forget to foster a robust relationship with senior scientific leaders like Dr. Bement. In a meaningful footnote to a pivotal relationship, after Wei Zhao became the Rector of the University Macau (UMacau), Dr. Bement was awarded an honorary doctorate by UMacau in recognition of his leadership in science development (Fig. 3).

In 2007, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI) recruited Wei Zhao as its Dean of Science. RPI is one of the oldest technological universities and enjoys an excellent reputation in the United States. Among many Chinese scholars who came to the United States after 1980, Wei Zhao was one of the first few who was appointed Dean of the top 50 US higher educational institutions. With this high honor, one would think that his race against time had led to his triumphant crossing of the finish line. But a bigger job fell into his lap. To everyone’s surprise, when 2008 arrived, the



**Fig. 3** Dr. Bement, the former Director of NSF, was awarded an honorary doctorate by UMacau in 2012

auspicious year of the Beijing Olympic Games, a fateful opportunity presented itself. After an exhaustive global search, the University of Macau picked Wei Zhao as its eighth Rector. Another race was beckoning.

## 5 Transformation of the University of Macau

The University of Macau was established in 1981 by three Hong Kong residents. It was a private university with the purpose of providing higher education primarily for the youth of Hong Kong. Ten years later, it was acquired by the Macau government and promptly converted into a public higher educational institution.

Macau was returned to Chinese sovereignty in 1999. The new government decided, as one of its highest priorities, to elevate the status of the University of Macau to meet the demand of the city's social and economic development. The government first assigned a new chairman for the University Council—the supervising body of the university and then passed a new law on the governance of the university, thereby conferring more autonomy upon it. Most importantly, a global search for a new rector was launched. Based on his outstanding scholarship and his wealth of experience in university administration, Wei Zhao was officially appointed as the eighth Rector of UMacau by the Chief Executive of Macau.

For many, the rectorship is a prestigious position. But for the man who has always raced against time, it meant another race to run: How to accelerate UMacau's development in order to keep pace with the growth of the Macau Special Administrative Region. This now became his next monumental challenge. When he first set foot on UMacau's campus, he realized that this task would be mammoth. The campus of the university was no bigger than two football fields. Students had to make day trips to the campus every day as there were few residential accommodations for local students. In terms of research productivity, the entire faculty published no more than 169 SCI papers in 2008. It was obvious that the university faced a yawning gap when stacked up against modern first-class universities.

This time, his race against time would not be for himself but for the university he led. Any race must have a goal: Upon his landing in Macau, Wei Zhao declared that the University of Macau was to train and nurture leaders for the city up to and including its future chief executives. In his installation speech, Wei Zhao cited Harvard University, Tokyo University, and Peking University among others as examples of the first-class universities, which produced top talents for their own nations and regions. Macau had yet to achieve this mission in 2008 when he was sworn in as the Rector for UMacau.

With his goal clearly defined, Wei Zhao took three decisive actions to jump-start his project. First, within a month of his arrival, his proposal to establish an Honors College (HC) was approved by the University Council. HC is a key instrument to fulfill Zhao's promise that UMacau will train and nurture local talents for governing Macau. HC admits the top 5% of enrolled students and trains them in leadership and organizational skills. What's more, it provides them with an opportunity to attend one of top 50 universities in the world for a semester. HC turned out to be as successful as envisioned. The first class returned from spending a term at the top 50 universities (e.g., the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor) after scoring an average GPA of 3.6 out of a maximum of 4.0. This greatly bolstered the confidence of the university community: Our UMacau students were as good as those in these top 50 universities. The success of HC translated into twin benefits: helping to train students on campus while attracting the cream of local students to the university. Previously, these tip-top students would opt to attend overseas institutions with many staying and working overseas thereafter.

Next, within 3 months of his arrival, he spearheaded the effort for the faculty senate to agree to the establishment of a tenure system for faculty management. The tenure system exists in most American and Canadian universities. It provides permanent employment for a faculty member after a certain period (normally 6 years) in which she/he has demonstrated excellence (by a rigorous external peer review) in both teaching and research. While the tenure system does have its drawbacks, it is an indisputably effective way to protect academic freedom and elevate faculty quality. Back in 2008, the tenure system was still a new concept in the nearby regions. Most universities in Hong Kong only adopted the tenure system in the 1990s, while only a few universities in mainland China were considering it. Without a doubt, the tenure system helped UMacau to significantly elevate the status of its faculty.

The third action, perhaps Wei Zhao's most visible and immortal contribution to UMacau, was the development of the Hengqin campus from scratch. As a small city, Macau had only 29 km<sup>2</sup> of land at the time, meaning that land was at a premium and there was no room for a new campus. In May 2008, within 6 months of his arrival, the University of Macau, at Wei Zhao's insistence, submitted a proposal to the Macau government and subsequently to the central government, arguing for the need for a new campus for UMacau and proposing (1) to acquire a parcel of land from adjacent Zhuhai for UMacau's new campus and (2) to allow the Macau government to exercise judiciary power over that parcel of land.

There was much debate on and off campus and within and even outside of Macau on this bold and aggressive proposal. Many believed that the proposal was asking for the impossible. In May 2008, *Science*, the famous academic magazine, published an article written by its journalist Mr. Richard Stone asserting that the proposal presented "an unprecedented dilemma." However, life again blessed those who dared to dream.

In June 2009, to cheers from the university community, the People's Congress of China officially approved the proposal: The land granted covers 1.09 km<sup>2</sup>, which is 20 times bigger than the old campus. In fact, the physical size of Macau itself has increased by 3% after this acquisition! UMacau subsequently managed to secure the government's investment of US\$2 billion for campus construction and development, which promptly started in December 2009 and was completed on schedule in July 2013 (Fig. 4). The University of Macau now had a new campus to match its new era, one that is worthy of this up-and-coming city.



Fig. 4 The new campus of the University of Macau

With both hardware (i.e., a new campus with 60 new buildings) and software (new governing law and faculty management policies) in place, Wei Zhao aggressively launched a sequence of measures to elevate the University's academic status. He designed and implemented a new educational model that synthesized both in-classroom teaching and extracurricular activities and emphasized both academic excellence and competency development. The model has four distinct components:

- *Disciplinary education* includes coursework students should take in order to complete a degree program in their chosen fields and prepare them well for the job market.
- *General education* helps students to broaden their knowledge base for a foundation of lifetime learning and advancement.
- *Research and internship education* provides students with opportunities to create knowledge and to apply their learned/created knowledge in the real world.
- *Peer and community education* allows students to experience and learn, mostly on their own, interactions with peers and communities to prepare them to eventually adapt to societal environments.

This four-in-one model was adopted gradually by UMacau with the establishment of ten residential colleges, which were critical for peer and community education. Data show that for students participating in this new four-in-one model, not only did their academic performance (as measured by GPA) improve but their general competency (e.g., leadership skills and cultural appreciation) was also enhanced in parallel.

New academic programs such as life sciences, material sciences, history, and philosophy were launched, and annual funding programs for faculty research and development were established. Two state-key laboratories (one for Chinese medicine and the other for microelectronics and VLSI) got the official nod from the central government.

All these efforts helped UMacau to win its race against time. During Wei Zhao's tenure as Rector for UMacau, its academic reputation climbed rapidly, and its societal impact increased significantly. The numbers tell the story. In 2008, UMacau published a total of only 169 SCI papers. By 2016, that is, 8 years later, the number had shot up to 1276, inching close to an eightfold increase. For a proper perspective, bear in mind the amount of time it normally took comparable universities to make the same progress (from 169 to 1276 SCI papers): The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, which was ranked the 58th in Times Higher Education World University Ranking in 2023, took 10 years to reach a similar academic output. In the period leading up to 2008, UMacau seldom appeared in any university ranking system. However, by 2015, UMacau had appeared on the academic leaderboard, leaping to the top 300 in the Times Higher Education World University Ranking.

Wei Zhao's lasting contribution to transforming UMacau was recognized as an extraordinary feat celebrated both domestically and internationally. During his tenure there, he earned 12 honorary doctorates from universities around the world and was inducted as an Academician by the International Eurasian Academy of Sciences.

In the words of the Chairman of the University Council, Dr. Peter Lam, during the appreciation party held upon Wei Zhao's departure from UMacau, "The university had made a great leap forward under Rector Wei Zhao." With Wei Zhao as its Rector, UMacau had leapfrogged onto an unimaginable stage until he took office. Thanks to him, the university had won its race against time.

## **6 From the Middle East Back to the Middle Kingdom**

After completing his tenure in UMacau, Wei Zhao accepted an invitation from the American University of Sharjah (AUS) in the United Arab Emirates to become the first Chief Officer of Research (i.e., Vice President for Research) in the AUS history. Speaking of his experiences in Sharjah, Wei Zhao jokingly said that it was a "recuperative" period of 3 years before a bigger challenge consumed his being.

He didn't have long to wait. In 2019, Shenzhen, China's high-tech darling city, otherwise known as the Silicon Valley of the East and an upstart in the last 40 years, announced that it had reached an agreement with the Chinese Academy of Sciences to establish a new university to be called the Shenzhen Institute of Advanced Technology. In truth, despite its remarkable economic development, Shenzhen's higher education has fallen far short of other parts of China. Shenzhen is keen to play catch up. Once again, Wei Zhao was invited to run this race against time.

In July 2020, Wei Zhao was named vice chair of the university preparation committee and provost of the university to be established. In true Wei Zhao style, no time is wasted, and the race is now in full swing. By November 2020, the main campus of the new university held its groundbreaking ceremony. By June 2021, five deans of academic colleges were recruited, and by September 2021, a temporary campus of nine buildings became operational as did the University's first residential college. Clearly, our man is in yet another race.

## **7 Final Words**

Forty years have passed in the blink of an eye since Wei Zhao took the flight from Shanghai Hongqiao Airport to the United States in 1982. From studying to teaching, from university to government, from Texas to Washington, from the United States to Macau, and then full circle back to mainland China where it all began. Every day, Wei Zhao counts his many blessings, grateful for the decades of discoveries, joint ventures, and new beginnings.

His life is the story of contemporary China and global transformation writ large. He has crisscrossed cultures and continents. This unassuming man, too modest and deferential even for a Chinese scholar, lets his actions do the talking, running race after race, scaling height after height. In many noteworthy historical developments, he was not only an eyewitness but also an active player. In my conversations with



him, I can see a satisfied smile playing across his lips, knowing that he has been successful in “beating the clock.” He has outrun himself. For him, life is a race, and the race is life. As long as one exists, the other never ends.

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# From Leading Others to Leading Yourself



Monica Lam

## 1 Elements, Concepts, and Development of Self-Leadership

It is commonly accepted that leadership requires followers. Northouse (2021) defines leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. The term “a group of individuals” refers to the followers of a leader. However, a broad and comprehensive definition of leadership does not necessarily include followers or formal positions (Ferrazzi & Weyrich, 2020). In this chapter, leadership is defined as the process of initiating, executing, and sustaining activities to fulfill a nontrivial mission. The “nontrivial mission” can be for one single individual including oneself, a group of followers, an organization, or multiple organizations. Moreover, formal leadership positions are not a prerequisite to executing leadership. While a formal leadership position gives the hierarchical authority and associated resources to a leader to accomplish goals, there are informal influences and networks that can be effective or more effective than the formal counterparts for achieving goals. As long as a person has the talent, motivation, opportunities, and support to engage in the process of initiating, executing, and sustaining activities to fulfill a nontrivial mission, it can be considered leadership. The “nontrivial” in the mission of leadership is to emphasize the significant impact of the leadership outcome. It is not some simple outcome that can be easily achieved but life-changing and direction-changing endeavors for the well-being of those involved.

The concept of self-leadership in the literature of the past four decades has been reviewed and summarized by three major papers: Neck and Houghton (2006),

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Stewart et al. (2011), and Goldsby et al. (2021). The operationalization of self-leadership can be found in the abbreviated self-leadership questionnaire (ASLQ) (Houghton et al., 2012). Self-leadership appeared in the literature in the mid-1980s as an expansion of self-management and self-control (Manz, 1983). Self-leadership is broadly defined as the process of influencing oneself through specific behavioral and cognitive strategies (Neck et al., 2020). Those behavioral and cognitive strategies support people to overcome reluctance and provide motivation to achieve personal and organizational goals (Neck & Houghton, 2006). There are three categories of strategies: behavior-focused strategies, natural rewards, and constructive thought.

Behavior-focused strategies for self-leadership enhance self-awareness in order to create desirable factors to support goal-oriented actions. The literature suggests self-observation, self-set goals, self-rewards, self-punishment, self-correcting, and self-cueing as strategies to move individuals toward desirable goals. The ASLQ (Houghton et al., 2012) provides the following behavioral items for the behavior-focused strategies:

- I establish specific goals for my own performance.
- I make a point to keep track of how well I am doing at work.
- I work toward specific goals I have set for myself.

The loading for factor analysis of the above items into the factor of *behavior, awareness, and volition* are all above 0.7. The physical objects and environment can also be arranged to provide concrete cues to encourage constructive behaviors such as job lists, notes, screensavers, posters, reminders, and alarms. Concurrently, negative cues that can lead to destructive behavior should be removed, such as cluttered desktops or offices that may divide attention and objects that may lead to unpleasant memories or failure experiences.

Natural reward strategies are to enhance the appealing or enjoyable features of those activities that accomplish goals for a leader. Naturally rewarding activities have the characteristic of making performers feel competent and self-determining (Neck et al., 2020). The feelings of competence and self-determination generate intrinsic motivation to accomplish tasks. One natural reward strategy involves building a pleasant by-product of a difficult task. Another strategy is to refocus attention away from the annoying aspects of a task to the positive aspects. The overall psychological effect is to maximize the cognitive association with the rewards and minimize the perceptible negativity. Another characteristic of naturally rewarding activities is the feeling of purpose (Neck et al., 2020). In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the highest level is self-actualization, which is similar to the idea of a feeling of purpose in self-leadership. A purpose-driven goal is an enlightening objective to pursue regardless of the obstacles and challenges. The ASLQ (Houghton et al., 2012) provides the following behavioral items for the natural reward strategies:

- I visualize myself successfully performing a task before I do it.
- Sometimes I picture in my mind a successful performance before I actually do a task.
- When I have successfully completed a task, I often reward myself with something I like.

The loadings for factor analysis of the above items into the factor of *task motivation* range from 0.6+ to 0.8+. Along the line of self-determination and feeling of purpose, it is suggested that self-leadership can enhance psychological capital as a key cognitive resource for shaping innovation (DiLiello & Houghton, 2006), health protective behaviors (Maykrantz et al., 2021), and entrepreneurial activities (Eng & Knotts, 2022). The psychological capital enables self-discipline, delay of gratification, focusing on long-term, productive forgetting, and the use of heuristics for exploring new cognitive pathways to overcome difficulties.

Constructive thought strategies identify dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions and replace them with positive self-talk and mental imagery (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Self-talk is what we tell ourselves including self-evaluation and reaction to stimuli in the environment. The first constructive thought strategy is to carefully examine our self-talk whether it is fact-based or our imagination. If it is not fact-based, we can choose to replace it with positive mental imagery, which can be a cognitive creation of a successful task before its physical execution in reality. Envisioning the success of a task enhances the likelihood of its successful performance (Driskell et al., 1994). The ASLQ (Houghton et al., 2012) provides the following behavioral items for constructive thought strategies:

- Sometimes I talk to myself out loud or in my head to work through difficult situations.
- I try to mentally evaluate the accuracy of my own beliefs about situations I am having problems with.
- I think about my own beliefs and assumptions whenever I encounter a difficult situation.

The loadings for factor analysis of the above items into the factor of *constructive cognition* range from 0.7+ to 0.8+. Constructive cognition is a state-like efficacy that relates to beliefs about our abilities to mobilize resources, identify viable action paths, create positive proclamations for success, activate focused energy, and recover from adversity and failure (Luthans et al., 2007). It is a process of optimism, hope, initiation, action, and resilience.

The behavior-focused natural reward and constructive thought strategies in self-leadership may be considered as overlapping with many classic theories of self-motivation and regulation (Neck & Houghton, 2006). To defend self-leadership as a distinct construct from other relevant theories, it was argued that self-leadership is a normative theory, which is prescriptive in nature emphasizing the “how” aspect of issues. Neck and Houghton (2006) provided an in-depth discussion regarding the differences between self-leadership and self-regulation, social cognitive theory, self-management, self-control, and self-motivation, which are summarized as follows. Comparing self-leadership with self-regulation, Neck and Houghton (2006) suggested that self-leadership strategies operate in the broad theoretical context of self-regulation. Self-regulation indicates that people can adjust their behavior to reduce the gap between a standard and the status quo. While self-regulation assumes that standards exist externally and cannot be changed, self-leadership advocates the process of self-goal setting. While self-regulation accepts that self-regulation failure

occurs and provides few remedies, self-leadership focuses on cognitive strategies that effectively support and sustain self-regulation.

Comparing self-leadership and social cognitive theory, Neck and Houghton (2006) pinpointed the mediating role of self-efficacy, a key concept in social cognitive theory, between self-leadership and performance outcome. Self-efficacy is a person's self-assessment of his or her capabilities and resources to accomplish a goal, which involves aspiration, effort, persistence, and thought patterns. Unsworth and Mason (2012) found that self-leadership training significantly reduces work stress via the increase of self-efficacy. While social cognitive theory proposes a system of discrepancy production followed by discrepancy reduction, that is, creating goals and then actions to reduce the gap, it is the behavioral and cognitive strategies of self-leadership that increase the self-efficacy leading to the final desirable performance outcome. Self-reflection is discussed as an element in social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). It is a process of inspecting and evaluating one's thoughts, feelings, and behavior to improve cognition change (Eng & Pai, 2015). As such, self-reflection enables individuals' intellectual flexibility, broadens perspectives, and stimulates novel ideas (Hao et al., 2016). Wang et al. (2019) showed that individual intellectual capital mediates the positive relationship between self-reflection and creativity. The construct of self-reflection needs further exploration and may be subsumed under the umbrella of self-leadership.

Self-management is based on the concepts of self-control in clinical psychology (Neck & Houghton, 2006). Self-management describes the process of individuals choosing a less attractive for the time being yet a more desirable action in the long term. It is about rejecting a short-term pleasant behavior by mobilizing energy to focus on the long term. However, the self-management theory does not involve the assessment of the standards. While self-management addresses the process of producing self-influence to achieve goals, it does not concern the appropriateness and purposes of the goals. Self-leadership strategies appeal to the high-level purposes and meaning of life, which can tap into substantially richer cognitive resources of self-influence to achieve goals. Therefore, self-leadership can be considered as expanding self-management and self-control to a comprehensive level.

Self-motivation can be classified into two categories of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards originate from external sources such as pay raises, praise, recognition, promotion, and awards. Intrinsic rewards drive self-motivation through the need of feeling competent and self-determining. While extrinsic rewards can change, intrinsic rewards are relatively stable and are more reliable and powerful motivations for performance. The need of feeling competent propels people to acquire and extend their capabilities. The need for self-determination motivates people to free themselves from pressures such as contingent rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Both needs play a central role in the natural reward strategy of self-leadership. Overall, in the literature, self-leadership is advocated as a distinct construct by its prescriptive nature, determining purposeful and meaningful goals independently from external influence and building self-efficacy and self-motivation through intrinsic rewards.

## 2 Self-Leadership in the Higher Education Environment

Many higher education institutions are nonprofit organizations. Neck et al. (1998) suggested three propositions regarding the use of self-leadership to improve nonprofit organizations:

- The use of individual self-leadership strategies will have a positive impact on the cognition (thought patterns) of workers.
- The use of individual self-leadership strategies will have a positive impact on the behaviors (performance) of workers.
- The use of individual self-leadership strategies will have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the nonprofit organization.

There are several factors that may make self-leadership especially suitable in nonprofit or higher education institutions, which are discussed below.

First, many top-level administrators in higher education institutions have short tenures. While there are presidents who serve long periods of time, presidents who fail to last for a few years are not rare. During my 10+ years of academic career at a state university, there were three presidents, four provosts, and five business deans. When my former dean recruited me to be one of his associate deans, one of the questions I asked was for how long he would continue to be the dean. One piece of advice I treasured when I stepped into my first full-time administrator position is to plan for your exit strategy from day one. After having served in higher education administration for a while, I experienced the importance and wisdom of that advice. The short tenure of many top leadership positions in higher education institutions may be caused by the obfuscatory relationship between the board of trustees and the president. Once a president steps down, the administrators in different areas hired by the president usually leave voluntarily or are let go. Since changes in education institutions tend to be slow and difficult, an administrator usually needs to be in a position for about 5 years to generate impact and success. The frequent turnover of key administrator positions leads to inconsistency in strategies, low morale, waste of resources, progress interruption, confusion, resentment, or even sabotage from those who are damaged in the turnover process. Human minds, enthusiasm, and energy are precious resources to protect and utilize in a work environment. In the volatile and treacherous higher education administration environment, self-leadership can be a reflective platform at both the individual and organizational levels. When leadership is not available or when the existing leadership is obscure or detrimental, self-leadership can be exercised to fulfill personal and organizational missions.

Second, similar to other nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions often have missions that cannot be accurately measured and evaluated. Many higher education institutions have student success, diversity, inclusivity, ethics, academic excellence, societal impact, community service, etc. as elements in their missions. If we randomly select two universities, it is likely that 70–80% of their missions are similar. In terms of measurement, for example, how do we measure student success?

Are the retention rates, graduation rates, placement rates, GPA, graduate salaries, or assessment results for accreditation the significant predictors of long-term student success? Some goals such as societal impact, diversity, and ethics are even more difficult to operationalize in higher education. When a mission cannot be easily translated into measurable objectives, we don't have reliable performance indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of an administrator. When it is difficult to evaluate administrators, there can be many unfit or incompetent leaders in higher education. Therefore, if formal leadership is not working or after we step down from leadership positions, we can exercise self-leadership to advance ourselves and our organizations. After my mentor stepped down from her leadership position, she started to focus her energy on bringing up the next generation of female administrators in higher education. I am a product of her enthusiastic endeavors in organizing workshops and seminars through national and local professional networks. After I stepped down from my leadership position, I shifted to focus on developing my spiritual capital as a preparation for my life-long teaching and learning in seminars. I applied for the Doctoral Program of Education Ministry at Dallas Theological Seminary, got accepted, and started my first course in the Summer of 2022. Moreover, I contribute my leadership knowledge by participating in different activities of the Transformative Learning Institution on campus and in other venues.

Third, many higher education institutions are facing a funding crisis due to the enrollment decline in the past 10 years. State universities gradually become more and more reliant on private funding rather than public funding. Some state universities establish creative revenue streams from self-support programs that operate as a private business arm in the state support environment. The share of the budget from the private business arm can be as high as 40% in my administrative experience. This hybrid operation mode of nonprofit and for-profit in higher education requires considerably more sophisticated skills, tools, and cognitive resources from the leadership to deal with different rules, cultures, and mindsets. Marvel and Patel (2017) concluded that self-leadership is an important behavioral and motivational resource for speeding product development in the entrepreneurial environment. As many administrators nowadays wear the hat of entrepreneurs to increase enrollment by creating innovative programs, novel education deliveries, and fundraising avenues, self-leadership can play an important role in the process. When I was in the administrator's role of managing self-support programs at a state university, I experienced the motivational power of self-leadership. At that time, one institutional goal was to increase international enrollment on campus. The first step in pursuing that goal was to bring our brand name closer to the marketplace. Then I started to develop the plan of launching a graduate degree program off-campus in a city overseas. What can be more effective for recruiting students than the visual reminder of your program in the marketplace! Since it was an entrepreneurial adventure, my self-leadership kicked in to gather information, seek approval, evaluate risks and threats, convince skeptics, and acquire support. The mental imagery of seeing our program in a foreign city and students taking classes in our partner's facility was a natural reward to me. I even imagined my thank-you speech after the successful launch of the program. It was a long 2-year process, but I finally overcame all obstacles and launched

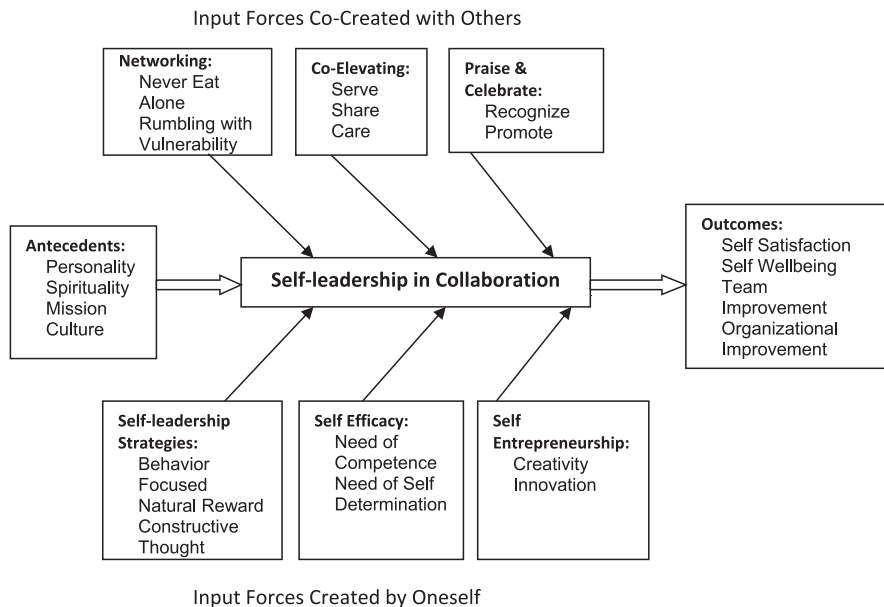
the first cohort in a foreign city. I remember I was moved to tears when the first student was admitted into the program. The local newspaper reported the groundbreaking news on its front page with the headline *Success from around the Globe*. It was a product of self-leadership. In hindsight, I think most people would give up on that entrepreneurial endeavor. I can attest to the power of self-efficacy supported by intrinsic motivation for a higher purpose than my immediate gratification as advocated in the self-leadership theory. I eventually carried out the second step of pursuing the goal of increasing international enrollment by launching the same degree program on campus so as to attract international students to campus. That was also a successful endeavor under self-leadership!

Fourth, decision-making and problem-solving in higher education institutions are usually through a formal or informal governance system. A governance system has a multilevel committee structure for checking, balancing, and approval. Depending on issues, many administrators feel that they have no or limited authority to make decisions. When we are in leadership positions without authority or are not in a formal position, what can we rely on to generate desirable outcomes? Self-leadership! Self-leadership does not require followers, formal authority, official standards, or external goals. Self-leadership generates desirable goals independently of external influence, creates possible pathways, enjoys intrinsic values, and initiates actions to accomplish a mission. I experienced the above self-leadership process when I took the initiative to achieve two unprecedented US News national rankings for two programs on my watch. No one required me to achieve national rankings for those programs. Actually, the general belief was that could not be done. I am generally not confined by what people think or what the environment looks like. I started the ranking pursuit by understanding what factors are evaluated in the ranking system. Then I systematically created tools, surveys, processes, and networks to collect the required data. I patiently submitted those data to the ranking system. Since I was not under pressure to achieve rankings, I was motivated only by my intrinsic values to advance those programs. After 3 years of diligent work, our first ranking appeared in *US News & World Report* and our second ranking for another program appeared the year after. Those rankings secured second place for our programs on campus among all similar programs in the state-wide university system. My experience demonstrates that self-leadership works effectively in the complex decision-making environment of higher education administration.

### **3 A Working Model for Self-Leadership in Collaboration**

Based on the information and analysis of sections one and two above, this final section proposes a working model for self-leadership in collaboration to guide the leadership behavior of administrators in higher education. Figure 1 presents a working model for self-leadership in collaboration, which consists of antecedents, input forces cocreated with others, and input forces created by oneself, all feeding into the process of self-leadership in collaboration, and generating the final outcomes of





**Fig. 1** A working model for self-leadership in collaboration for higher education. (The figure is created by the author herself)

self-satisfaction, self-well-being, team improvement, and organization improvement. The different elements in the working model are explained in the rest of this section.

Steward et al. (2019) suggested that there are antecedents including individual and environment that facilitate self-leadership. One facilitator at the individual level is personality. Williams (1997) proposed hypothetical relationships between self-leadership and the five personality types of extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness. Extraversion refers to individuals who are outgoing, gregarious, enthusiastic, and optimistic. Neuroticism refers to distress, nervousness, insecurity, and tension. Conscientiousness refers to individuals who are dependable, responsible, goal-oriented, efficient, and organized. Openness to experience refers to the traits of imagination, artistic sensitivity, and intellectualism. Agreeableness refers to individuals who are trusting, cooperative, and good-natured (Barrick & Mount, 1993). The proposed hypotheses are as follows (Williams, 1997):

- Extraversion is positively associated with self-leadership meta-skills prior to and after training.
- Extraversion moderates the effectiveness of self-leadership interventions so that those low on extraversion will show the greatest gain in meta-skills.
- Neuroticism is negatively associated with self-leadership meta-skills prior to and after training.

- Neuroticism moderates the effectiveness of self-leadership intervention so that those high on neuroticism will show the greatest gain in meta-skills.
- Conscientiousness is positively associated with self-leadership meta-skills prior to and after training.
- Conscientiousness moderates the effectiveness of self-leadership interventions so that those low on conscientiousness will show the greatest gain in meta-skills.
- Openness to experience is positively associated with self-leadership meta-skills prior to and after training.
- Self-leadership meta-skills and the effectiveness of self-leadership training are unrelated to agreeableness.

The above hypotheses show that personalities such as extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness to experience may facilitate the practice of self-leadership. If a certain personality type is not conducive to self-leadership, training activities may remedy this to a certain extent. It has been shown that self-leadership training is especially beneficial to employees who are low in conscientiousness (Steward et al., 1996). The relationship between personality and self-leadership is still under-explored in the literature. From my personal experience, personality has a bearing on self-leadership. In my administrative endeavors, a positive outlook, inquisitive mind, genuine interest in people and care for them, inclusivity, delayed gratification, perseverance, faith, resilience, discernment, and explorative action support me well through the years.

Another antecedent for self-leadership is workplace spirituality (Steward et al., 2019). While there is a lack of a commonly accepted definition for workplace spirituality, the investigation focuses on the three dimensions of inner life, meaningful work, and a sense of community for individual and organizational performance (Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Gupta et al., 2014; Petchsawang & Duchon, 2009). The existentialist view of workplace spirituality asks the following questions (Houghton et al., 2016):

- Why am I doing this work?
- What is the meaning of the work I am doing?
- Where does this lead me to?
- Is there a reason for my existence and the organization?

Workplace spirituality is considered as a mental atmosphere that promotes intuition and creativity beyond normal boundaries, honesty and trust, personal fulfillment, personal commitment, and organizational performance. When there are motivational answers to the questions listed above, we don't just work for a paycheck but for higher purposes that open up relationships, resources, and workspace. Brown (2018) reported that trust in organizations is the primary defining characteristic of the very best workplaces. Companies with high levels of trust create much higher returns for their stakeholders than other companies. Since one characteristic of self-leadership is a self-set goal independent of external influence, there is a natural linkage between workplace spirituality and self-leadership. When workplace spirituality exists, it facilitates the execution of self-leadership. Even though

spirituality does not exist in the workplace, the spirituality of intrinsic origin at the personal level is still an instrumental antecedent for self-leadership.

Another antecedent for self-leadership is a mission consisting of a personal mission and an organizational mission. A personal mission addresses the question of why I exist. An organizational mission describes why the organization exists. There is the concept of person–organization fit (P–O fit) that provides a theoretical context for measuring workplace spirituality in terms of the compatibility between individual preferences and organizational supplies (Sheep, 2004). My professional objectives in my administrative career are:

- Lead, influence, and innovate educational institutions to achieve their maximum potentials.
- Build multidimensional relationships to allow collaboration for the greater good.
- Mentor the next generation to be responsible and competent leaders.

The mentor in my administrative career always reminds me of the importance of the compatibility between an administrative position and a job applicant. A common question during administrative job interviews is: Why are you interested in this position? I always look up the educational institution's mission, vision, and goals before an interview. My answer to that question is based on the commonality between my personal mission and the organizational mission. During a campus visit interview, the university president told me bluntly that people who want to work on distance education should not come, and it is impossible for their programs to receive national rankings. It is likely that the antecedent for self-leadership is very weak in that environment.

Another antecedent for self-leadership is culture (Steward et al., 2019). It was confirmed that certain national culture enables self-leadership. Neubert and Wu (2006) confirmed that self-goal, visualizing success, self-talk, self-reward, and self-punishment can be generalized effectively in a Chinese context. On the other hand, self-observation, evaluating beliefs and assumptions, and self-cueing are more applicable in the Western culture. In a team environment, Kirkman and Shapiro (2001) found that teams in collectivist cultures such as Japan are less resistant to team self-leadership. In addition, teams in high-involvement cultures and those in less centralized companies are more effective for self-leadership (Manz et al., 2009). Chu and Vu (2022) investigated the impact of self-regulation on moral actions in the Confucian and Buddhist systems. Since self-regulation is an element of self-leadership, their research results shed light on how cultural systems may drive self-leadership. They found that both the concept of relational self in Confucianism and the concept of nonself in Buddhism constrain the ego self and promote the social person leading to moral action. There is some evidence that self-leadership may lead to long-term and nonmaterial benefits to individuals and organizations.

Joshanloo (2014) investigated the concept of happiness in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. In Buddhism, happiness cannot be found in material gain, bodily pleasure, or interpersonal relationships. Instead, genuine and everlasting happiness is from internal peace that outgrows the mind's habit of reacting to external stimuli. The highest level of happiness is the understanding of being one with

others that brings peace and harmony into the lives of others (Ricard, 2011). In Taoism, this world operates through the interaction of two opposite poles: yin and yang. The two poles complement and support each other. For example, failure complements and supports success and vice versa. People can achieve happiness when they embrace both poles, accept the pattern of change, and face adversity with non-action. In other words, accepting the positive and negative sides of life and personality leads to happiness and contentment (Peng et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2013). In Confucianism, happiness is from social and interpersonal virtues toward internal and social harmony. The interpersonal relationship is structured in circles starting with one's family in the innermost circle, then going outward to more remote relationships. Confucianism stresses the importance of self-cultivation first, then taking care of family members, then the well-being of the nation, then finally the peace of the whole world. A good life can be obtained by observing virtues, discipline, self-governance, and maintaining a harmonious attachment with others and the world (Lee et al., 2013). The above simple comparison among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism reveals that Confucianism can be a conducive culture to support self-leadership because of its emphasis on self-discipline and self-governance. On the other hand, Taoism's nonaction strategy to deal with adversity may not lead to behavior-focused responses. Buddhism can be somewhere between Confucianism and Taoism in terms of supporting self-leadership.

There are two categories of input forces to the working model of self-leadership in collaboration: input forces cocreated with others and input forces created by oneself. The proposed working model is named "self-leadership in collaboration," which refers to the synthetic interaction between self-leadership and collaboration in the higher education context to achieve desirable outcomes for individuals and institutions. In higher educational institutions, collaboration is essential in the mission life cycle. Rarely can one administrator initiate, execute, and sustain all. While self-leadership is beneficial in many aspects of an administrator's endeavors, working through the complex and multilayered decision-making, authorization, and implementation system still needs substantial collaboration between internal and external stakeholders. Since the elements of self-leadership have been covered in the first section, the following focuses on discussing the input forces cocreated with others.

There are three major input forces cocreated with others: networking, coelevating, and praise and celebration. Ferrazzi and Raz (2001) and Ferrazzi and Weyrich (2020) discussed their personal experience in creating connections and achieving success in his two books: *Never Eat Alone*, and *Leading without Authority*. Ferrazzi asked a great question, "Who are on your team?" Who are on our team are not just those who report to us but all surrounding us who can do good or harm to our work. When we take care of people in our work environment, we need to take care of those who are on our team. Our attitude and thought logic can make a significant difference in whether we can achieve our mission. If we feel that people behave badly toward us, per self-leadership, we need to take time to check our assumptions and beliefs. It is important to allow time and opportunities for us to verify the assumptions and beliefs. I like the term "Never Eat Alone," which refers to using all

opportunities to connect with people. When I initiated the process of changing the culture of graduate education to be more engaged at a university, my first task was to establish the MBA Networking Association (MNA). MNA is truly about networking among students, faculty, alumni, employers, and community supporters. Many community activities were launched through MNA: golf tournaments, luncheons, panel discussions, summer picnics, retreats, and graduation parties. It is the community sense that drives the brand name, commitment, and resource raising. Another networking technique is rumbling with authenticity (Brown, 2018). Brown did not advocate rumbling with authenticity as a self-leadership strategy, but I believe it can be one. When we are reluctant to connect with people, it may be due to the unwillingness of exposing our vulnerability to attack, rudeness, or ridicule. But if we consider ourselves a learner rather than a knower, our attitude can have a fundamental change. If we practice reaching out to others to share resources, empathy, and compassion with the goal of creating value for them, our generosity will be returned to us in the appointed future. The goal of collaboration with others is to coelevate with them using mutual serving, sharing, and caring. The concept of coelevating is especially useful in fundraising. In a fundraising project, before asking for money, I spent time in understanding what may be of great value to our potential donors. I finally identified a wealthy alumnus who was very interested in developing students' leadership skills. I worked with the VP of advancement to develop a proposal for the Academy of Honors Students, which was gladly accepted by the alumnus. The technique of praising and celebrating everything is powerful in most situations. Helping others to help you is the similar logic in leading yourself to lead others! While we celebrate success and achievement, we can lament failure and mishaps in a positive manner. If we treat a failure as one step closer to success and one experience we learned to avoid next time, we can turn it into positive motivation.

Finally, I would like to conclude this chapter by highlighting one special benefit of self-leadership to improve individuals and organizations: reducing career and social costs for women (Houghton et al., 2016). Being a woman administrator in a field where the top level of leadership is dominated by men, I pay attention to leadership models that advance women administrators. Hall et al. (2012) found that a greater level of sanctification of work or workplace spirituality predicts lower interrole conflict, higher positive affect, and higher job satisfaction for working mothers. As women tend to pay higher social and career costs than men, self-leadership in collaboration provides a model for aspiring women in higher education to assess their readiness, evaluate the cost, and strive for success!

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# Shared Governance in American Higher Education and Water-Like Servant Leadership in Daoist Psychology



Yueh-Ting Lee

In American higher education, it is very common to have conflict, disagreement, or crises between faculty members and administration (Blumenstyk, 2015; Cassutto, 2015; Labaree, 2017). While boards (e.g., boards of directors, trustees, governors, or regents) and administration tend to control and make top-down decisions, faculty/staff members tend to push back, which leads to tensions between these groups, including the resignation of administration members, departure or resignation of faculty members, no-confidence vote from faculty or other constituencies, low morale, and other negative impacts on campus (Lombardi, 2013). A recent example of this includes the case reported at Michigan State University on the conflicts among the board, administration, faculty/staff, and students (Stripling, 2022). While higher education is a learning business, it is also a part of the very complex, public, or common good. It is a place where, in theory, employees and students intentionally enjoy their work and learning (Friedman, 2014) although the reality might be different. American higher education is not truly a business but is a very complicated enterprise academically, politically, and culturally (Newfield, 2016; Trachtenberg et al., 2018). Addressing key issues, like shared governance and collaborative leadership (i.e., water-like leadership), may help in institutional success and harmony in a long run (Lee, 2019, 2021; King & Mitchell, 2022). Thus, this paper aims to examine shared governance and water-like leadership style (i.e., positive, collaborative, and in service of others).

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## 1 Shared Governance

In Spring 2021, I was elected to serve as the Faculty Senate President, representing 1500 faculty members at my institution. On July 15, 2021, representing the faculty members and the Faculty Senate (as one of the constituencies), I attended the Board of Trustees meeting of Southern Illinois University. Below is part of what I presented to the SIU's BOT about shared governance in American higher education (Lee, 2021):

As a research university, it is very important for SIU Carbondale campus administration to collaborate with faculty and to support shared governance. Our academic excellence and research success greatly depend on our faculty members and shared governance. Why? Here are two examples for you as SIU BOT to consider: Example 1) In 1948, former President Delyte Morris came here with two big strategic goals—to build a school of excellence and to enhance economic and cultural vitality in Southern Illinois (Mitchell, 1988). He accomplished these two strategic goals by collaborating well with faculty members and his Board. Example 2) American higher education (including The Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities) basically agrees that governing with knowledge and confidence can be achieved largely by collaboration with faculty—also see the writings by previous President L. S. Bacow (2018) at Tufts and retired President F. A Hrabrowski (2018) at the University of Maryland Baltimore County in the book, *Leading Colleges and Universities* (Trachtenberg et al., 2018). According to a recent article on the meaning and principles of shared governance (Eisenstein, 2021), governance at universities includes a triad or three main groups: Board, administration, and faculty, and it means shared responsibility, accountability, and promoting collaboration via communication and respect.

More specifically, shared governance in higher education refers to the processes and structures that governing boards, faculty, professional staff, and administration use to develop policies and make decisions that affect the institution (Eisenstein, 2021). It is also common for colleges and universities to invite input from their students. At the BOT meeting on July 15, 2021, I concluded as follows:

In summary, while the Board is our legal authority in the process about all business matters, faculty members and shared governance, via daily interaction with administrative colleagues, play a very important role in checks and balances in academic programs, policies, and other processes that impact universities. We are all equal partners, united for one common purpose (i.e., to serve, to work, and to lead together for our students and other constituencies/stakeholders in Southern Illinois). Thus, collaboration and mutual respect (not unilateral top-down decisions) among the board, administration, and faculty will determine SIUC's success in the future (Lee, 2021).

Therefore, by definition, shared governance means shared responsibility, accountability, and promoting collaboration via communication and respect among all stakeholders.

## 2 What Is Water-Like Leadership in Daoist Psychology?

Before discussing water-like leadership, I would like to elaborate on why I am interested in Daoist ideas and discuss how I became interested in researching Daoist psychology. What is water-like leadership in Daoist psychology about anyway? In 1986, I was admitted to the Graduate School at the State University of New York at Stony Brook (also known as Stony Brook University) to pursue my doctorate in psychology. On a weekend trip during Fall 1986, I went to a large bookstore in New York City and, serendipitously, I saw and purchased an English version (which included the original Chinese) of *Dao De Jing* by Laozi (Wing, 1986). Since then, over the last 30 years, I have read and reread this text, trying to understand it, though not easily or fully sometimes. Nearly every week, I read it and try my best to practice the ideas contained within. Thus, I really enjoy contemplating Daoist writing and researching Daoist principles, like the water-like leadership style. An overall message from Daoist psychology includes speaking simply, harmony with oneself (internally), harmony among ourselves and other human beings, and harmony with nature (Lee & Holt, 2019).

Since the 1990s, my colleagues, students, and I have been doing research on Daoist psychology, specifically focusing on water-like leadership (Lee, 2003, 2004, 2016, 2019; Lee et al., 2008, 2009, 2013a, 2015). For more than three decades, our group has conducted empirical research on this topic in the United States and throughout the world (Lee & Holt, 2019). To summarize, there are four main ideas from Daoist psychology (Lee, 2019; Lee & Holt, 2019), namely, (1) welfare for others and the world, (2) moderation by avoidance of extremes, (3) practicing *wu-wei* (non-interference), and (4) water-like personality style (i.e., Daoist Big Five leadership style: altruism, modesty, flexibility, honesty, and gentleness with perseverance) (Lee et al., 2013a).

Why is “best like water?” In his writings, Laozi, the founder of Daoist philosophy, used water many times as a metaphor to explain the personality or leadership style of the Sage. More specifically, water is altruistic and always serves others and is modest, flexible, clear, and transparent, demonstrating both power (or perseverance) and softness (Lee, 2003, 2019; Lee et al., 2008).

First, water is altruistic. All species and organisms depend on water. Without water, none of them can survive. What does water get from us? Almost nothing. A good Daoist leader or administrator should be as altruistic as water. For instance, Laozi advocated a “water personality.” We, as human beings, including leaders, should learn from water because it always remains in the lowest position and never competes with other things (Lee, 2019). Instead, water is beneficial to all things. Laozi’s Chapter 8 of the *Dao De Jing* (Wing, 1986

) states: The highest value (or the best) is like water,  
The value of water benefits All Things  
And yet it does not contend,  
It stays in places that others despise,  
And therefore is close to Dao.

Second, water is very modest and humble. It always goes to the lowest place. As the above quotation illustrates, although water benefits all things, it does not contend and remains in the lowest places (which others despise). Being humble and modest is necessary for good leaders to appreciate and understand the Dao of things, always be ready to learn, and be cognizant of overconfidence in the self (Lee, 2019). To Laozi (Chapter 66), modesty or humbleness (humility),

willingness to help and benefit others, and the ability to maintain a low profile (just like water) are qualities essential to an individual who wants to influence others: The rivers and seas lead the hundred streams  
Because they are skillful at staying low.  
Thus, they can lead the hundred streams (Wing, 1986).

Third, water is adaptable, resilient, and flexible. It can stay in a container of any shape. This flexibility (or fluidity) lends a great deal of wisdom to us. Successful leaders and administrators in higher education can adjust themselves to any environment and situation just as water does in a container. Maintaining flexibility and adapting to the dynamics of change, like water following its path, are likely the best traits. There is no such thing as the best leadership style or governing method across time and space in the world; therefore, the best principle is being flexible and fluid, finding the appropriate approach for here and now (Lee, 2019).

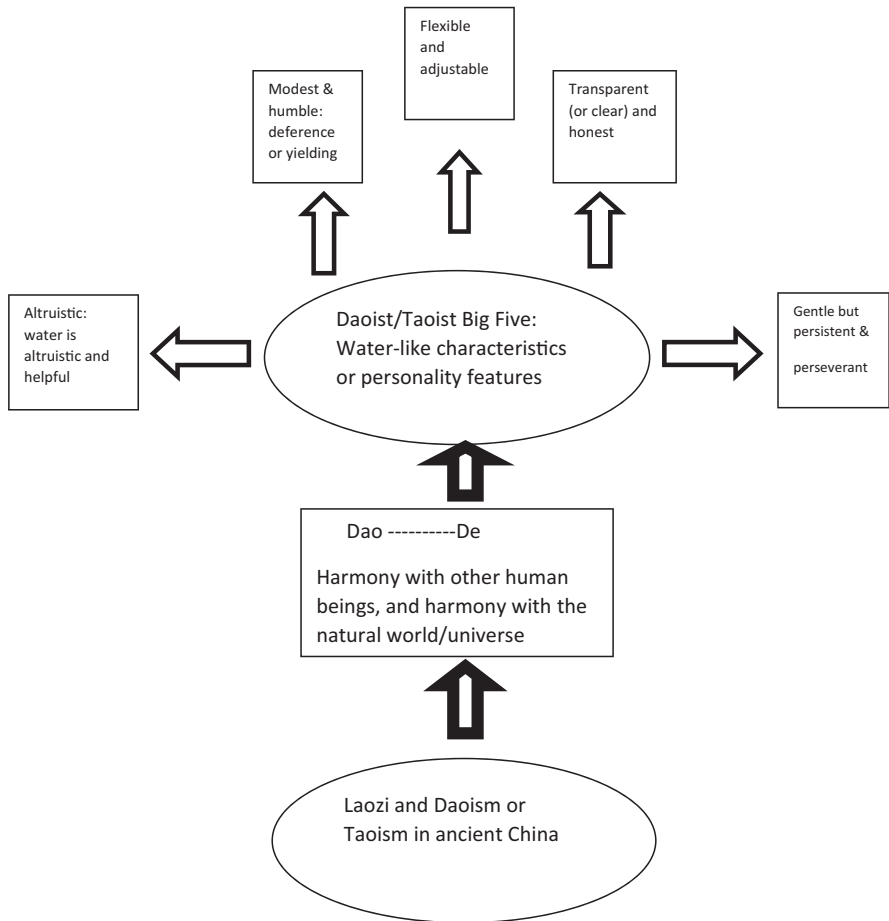
Fourth, water is transparent and clear. To gain trust, one should be honest and transparent to his or her followers. The most honorable individuals (not only leaders) are usually transparent (i.e., honest), like water. Though Western Machiavellian or other deceptive approaches might work temporarily, being honest and transparent is one of the most ethical approaches in modern management (Lee, 2019). Water itself, when not muddied, is clear and transparent.

Finally, and most importantly, as per Lee (2019), water is very soft and gentle, but also very persistent and powerful. Over time, water can cut through the hardest rock, forming valleys and canyons. If drops of water keep pounding at a rock for years, even the hardest rock will yield to water. Similarly, leadership style should be gentle and soft, but perseverant and powerful. The *Dao De Jing*

(Chapter 78) provides an example of what we could learn from water: Nothing in the world  
Is as yielding and receptive as water.  
Yet in attacking the firm and inflexible,  
Nothing triumphs so well (Wing, 1986).

To summarize what is discussed as the water-like leadership style (i.e., Daoist Big Five personality), below is a chart to provide visuals and help make these ideas clear (Lee, 2019) (Fig. 1).

More specifically, Daoist philosophy focuses on harmony with external world (i.e., *Dao*) and with oneself and other human beings (i.e., *De*). This harmony helps to generate the water-like leadership style and Daoist Big Five personality traits, including altruism, modesty, flexibility, honesty/transparency, and gentleness with perseverance (Lee, 2019; Lee et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2013a).



**Fig. 1** The Daoist/Taoist theory of water-like personality (i.e., the Daoist Big Five). (The figure below is created by the author himself)

### 3 What Is the Relationship Between Water-Like Leadership and Shared Governance?

As discussed above, water-like leadership in Daoist psychology is different from shared governance in American higher education, although both are intimately related to one another. First, about their differences, the former (i.e., water-like leadership) is broader and more generic than the latter (i.e., shared governance). For instance, the former can be applied to almost all aspects of human interactions and relationships, including all human institutions and organizations, whereas the latter is specific to American higher education. Second, although they are different, both are closely interconnected. This is because water-like leadership and shared

governance explicitly and implicitly share a **common theme** that focuses on service, humility, collaboration, flexibility, transparency/honesty, and respect for all. For instance, shared governance involves honesty and transparency to gain trust from others which, in turn, cultivates a strong sense of shared responsibility and accountability. Similarly, those with a Daoist water-like leadership style tend to be helpful and altruistic, flexible and resilient, humble and modest, transparent (honest) and clear, and soft (gentle) and perseverant. Put together, both the water-like leadership style (or Daoist Big Five personality) and shared governance are highly correlated (Lee, 2021).

Although further research is needed and more empirical data should be collected to verify this relationship, recent work from our Applied Culture and Evolution (ACE) laboratory demonstrated shared features among water-like leadership style and workplace outcomes (Zhou et al., 2022). Findings indicated that, compared to agentic or masculine leadership styles, Daoist water-like leadership enhanced the favorability, empowerment, and democracy (FED) of the workplace. Our  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  factorial experiment (leader gender, males and females; leadership style, Daoist water-like and agentic styles; perceivers' masculinity values, high and low scores) found that the Daoist water-like leadership was perceived as more favorable, empowering, and democratic (FED) than agentic leadership. Moreover, Daoist water-like male leadership was seen as the most FED, while the agentic male leadership style was seen as the least FED. Finally, perceivers with low masculine values tended to view the Daoist water-like leadership as more FED than agentic leadership (Zhou et al., 2022). Implications of the benefits afforded by Daoist water-like leadership are clear, shedding light on effective leadership practices that may be used by American higher educators. Given the shared commonalities between water-like leadership style and shared governance, it is expected that these concepts are interrelated via FED, though we have not directly examined this relationship and future work is necessary.

#### 4 Addressing the “Common Theme”-Related Questions

Over approximately 20 years, after having served as a Departmental Chair, Director, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Associate Vice President, and Dean of the Graduate School at various institutions, I had never thought of serving as the Faculty Senate President at a research university like SIU to advocate for shared governance, shared collaboration, and shared responsibility/accountability. I feel very honored and humbled to have been elected twice (in 2021 and 2022) to represent 1500 faculty members. I enjoy this servant leadership role to advocate for faculty members and students by working with the administration and other constituencies. As a constituency, based on its operating paper and by-laws/constitution (SIU Faculty Senate, 2022), the SIU faculty senate has the following powers and responsibilities:

### **The Faculty Senate**

- (a) is the body empowered to act as an agent for the university faculty with delegated power to formulate broad policies in regard to the educational functions of the university
- (b) is charged to initiate, promote, and ensure the enforcement of policies involving academic and intellectual freedom and to concern itself in all matters of faculty status and welfare
- (c) is charged with the responsibility for encouraging and facilitating active and effective faculty involvement in policy determination and decision-making, particularly in all academic units at all levels within the university
- (d) shall in no way be restricted with respect to the matters it may choose to discuss and resolutions it may make, nor concerning the communications it may choose to direct both within and outside the university
- (e) is charged to establish and maintain a Judicial Review Board for the redress of grievances
- (f) consonant with the charges and responsibilities noted above shall reserve the right to establish any standing or ad hoc committee necessary for the conduct of its business
- (g) shall formulate its own rules and procedures in a manner not inconsistent with this operating paper and the *Bylaws* and *Statutes* of the Board of Trustees (SIU Faculty Senate, 2022)

As the President of the Faculty Senate, I am the fiscal officer of the Senate and speak for the Senate on all official matters. I also preside over the annual faculty meeting, serving as chair of the Faculty Senate Executive Council. I call special meetings of the Senate or Executive Council, as needed. My additional duties include but are not limited to overseeing the office of the Faculty Senate; charging committees (as needed); meeting with candidates for senior administrative positions; participating in constituency meetings with Chancellor/President; attending SIU Board of Trustees meetings; attending meetings of Executive Planning and Budget Advisory Committee; representing faculty members at the University's Commencement, Honors Day, and other award ceremonies; and joining Chancellor leadership forums. Working very closely with our Chancellor, Provost, and other offices and constituencies has provided me with a 360-degree perspective into the university and its various operations.

#### **4.1 *What Were My Motivations for Assuming a Leadership Role?***

It is very important to gain the trust and respect of faculty members. Serving in leadership positions, such as Faculty Senate President, offers an effective way to gain trust and respect by advocating for and serving students, staff, and faculty.

Importantly, this service does not directly help me gain anything (e.g., financial incentive). There is no course release; I teach and oversee a research lab (the ACE lab), just like other faculty members. The duties and responsibilities of my Faculty Senate President position are above and beyond my expected services as a professor. So why do I assume this leadership role? The faculty senate as a constituency is very important for the university. Therefore, I am motivated to serve because, via shared governance and collaboration, these constituencies may have positive impacts on campus climate both for faculty/staff and students.

## **5 How Did I Take on This Faculty Senate Leadership Role? What Was the Campus Context?**

For approximately two decades, I served as an administrator in various roles at different universities. However, before 2020, I had not served as a campuswide faculty leader. After returning to a faculty member position, several fellow colleagues (i.e., faculty members) nominated me to run for the Faculty Senate. In 2020, I was elected to the Faculty Senate and became part of the Faculty Senate Executive Council.

Leading up to this time, the context of institutional policies and programs on campus was uncertain. Over 3 years (2015–2018), when I was working as the Graduate School Dean, SIU did not have a state budget. Furthermore, senior leadership had little stability (e.g., chancellorship changed every 2 years). Due to these leadership instabilities and financial uncertainties, the administration began to merge all academic units unilaterally. Thus, our enrollment declined from 18,000 students to 12,000 students, resulting in a budget loss of approximately \$60 million. Similarly, we lost over 400 faculty members to “Tier 1” research universities (which may be partially explained by a lack of salary raises in the 10 years before 2020). During this period, campus morale was extremely low. Thus, to advocate for faculty members, I decided to return to teaching and research (as a faculty member) to serve my fellow colleagues in a different capacity.

## **6 What, and/or Who, Influenced You Over Your Administrative Journey?**

Two factors influenced my decision to serve faculty members and students. First, I fundamentally believe in Daoist psychology and shared governance as a means to practice water-like leadership. These psychological or philosophical perspectives motivated me to run for the Faculty Senate President position. Next, during my past 30 years in the United States, I have gotten to know the Honorable Shien Biau Woo (aka S. B. Woo), the former lieutenant governor of Delaware, the former member of the Board of Trustees, a professor emeritus of physics at the University of Delaware, and currently the President of 80-20 organization and 80-20 Education Foundation.



His tireless services to education and unwavering commitment to Asian American communities inspired me. I have enjoyed working with him, and he teaches me a lot about shared governance, collaboration, and servant leadership every week when I work with him directly.

Several other leaders in American higher education who were my mentors explicitly and implicitly influenced me as an academic and administrator, such as the late Vice Provost, David Glass, at Stony Brook University; former Provost Susan Coultra-McQuin, at State University New York Oswego; former President Roy H Saigo at St. Cloud State University and Southern Oregon University; former senior Vice President William Logie, at the University of Toledo; and our current Chancellor, Austin Lane, at SIU Carbondale. In brief, all those colleagues mentioned above are role models for me and I respect them greatly as leaders in higher education. I benefit from their styles, actions, and behaviors. They taught me how to serve and work with faculty, staff, students, other individuals, constituencies, and communities. I greatly appreciate their support and guidance for me in and outside American higher education.

## **7 What Are Your Most Proud Accomplishments?**

As the Faculty Senate President during the initial COVID-19 pandemic, I am most proud of the collaborative efforts between the faculty and the different offices and constituencies on campus. We worked together to support face-to-face teaching with flexibility and to support the student letter grade policy (instead of implementing pass or no-pass grades). Beyond regular business matters, the Faculty Senate worked together, via shared governance and concerted efforts (collaboration and innovation), to also initiate and implement several important initiatives, including an Ad Hoc Committee on Institutional Ranking/Education Quality, advocacy for the SIU faculty members through the reduction of racial profiling related to China initiative by the Faculty Status and Welfare Committee; implementation of parliamentary procedures by the Governance Committee; amendment of the FS operating paper/by-laws; advocacy for undergraduate academic success and mental wellness at the faculty-student town hall meetings by working with the Undergraduate Student Government and Faculty Senate; and consistent advocacy for SIU's shared governance. I am also very proud of the monthly publication by our team, *Faculty Senate Updates/FYI*.

## **8 What Are the Lessons You Have Learned? Regrettable Moments? Ongoing Reflections?**

With regard to lessons, on the positive side, before being elected to serve in this position, it had never occurred to me that I was well respected by so many people (faculty and staff members). This was a surprise to me. On the negative side, being

Faculty Senate President has taken more time than what was required when I worked as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. Every week, I work almost 80 h in FS business, teaching/advising, and research. While serving as the Faculty Senate President requires more of my time than serving as Dean did, the nature of this work is more rewarding to me.

Reflecting, I do not have any regrettable moments while serving the faculty and students at SIU. However, if I could rewind the clock, I would like to serve as an academic leader or faculty president first, as this would allow me to practice and role-model shared governance and water-like leadership for my colleagues. Many administrators in higher education started by serving in academic positions, like the Faculty Senate President or the University Senate President, before beginning their careers as professional administrators. My path has been somewhat different and unique. When beginning 20 years ago, I wish I had had the opportunity to serve as a faculty leader before becoming a Department Chair, CAS (College of Arts and Sciences) Dean, Associate Vice President, and Dean of the Graduate School. The ability to practice these approaches (shared governance and water-like leadership) would have only aided my effectiveness as an administrator. Nonetheless, it is never too late to serve the faculty, staff, and students. I feel fortunate that my current role allows me to do just that.

## **9 What Advice Would You Like to Offer to Future Leaders?**

Two pieces of advice are in order. First, shared governance (i.e., collaboration, communication, transparency and trust, and shared responsibility/accountability) is closely related to the water-like leadership style. Thus, the best academic leaders should strive to embody the characteristics exemplified by these approaches. Related, it is very important for leaders to be humble and modest, flexible and resilient, honest and transparent, and gentle, yet persistent. That is to say, employing a water-like leadership style (i.e., practices corresponding with the Daoist Big Five personality traits) is beneficial for organizations because it allows for more effective and successful functioning. Second, although we might believe that we can control others or manipulate situations, it is just the opposite. Our ability to control and manipulate is directly constrained by personal, familial, social, cultural, political, environmental, or other factors. Thus, it is very important to respect reality and appreciate both what we have and those around us.

To follow these recommendations is to be Daoistic or, more simply, be like water (i.e., water follows its course, naturally). There is no doubt that financial incentives and/or administrative ranking benefits (e.g., in higher education or in private businesses) can motivate and influence the actions of others, whereas being in service (for communities, nonprofit organizations, and institutional constituencies) may not be similarly incentivized (e.g., no monetary compensation) and require more time and resources. However, these positions of service may produce a positive impact

on others, which is in line with the principles of shared governance and Daoist psychology (i.e., water-like leadership style). As stated by Laozi:

The more you serve others altruistically,  
the more respect and trust you gain from them;  
the more you give to others,  
the more you get back! (Chapter 81, Wing, 1986).

## 10 Conclusion

Competition in higher education gets more intense every year. State budgets are unpredictable (Crow & Dabars, 2015; Newfield, 2016). To survive and thrive, institutions (public or private) must compete with other institutions in terms of enrollment, academic quality, accessibility, affordability, and service (Levine & Van Pelt, 2021). The institutional boards, administrators, faculty, staff, and other members play a very important role in student outcomes, institutional accessibility and affordability, and broader community engagement. To best aid these endeavors, we need to share governance and collaborate with different constituencies via water-like servant leadership. Competitive institutions are community-connected, student-centered, market-sensitive, and mission focused, engaging in innovative, forward-thinking entrepreneurship across shared governance and vision.

To address unique challenges and leverage opportunities, dialectically (or Daoistically), institutions need collaborative and innovative leaders (Chen & Lee, 2008; Lee & Holt, 2019; King & Mitchell, 2022). Important indicators to pay close attention to include enrollment, academic quality, accessibility and affordability, and diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI) initiatives, as these are associated with regional vitality, increased scholarly reputation, higher program quality and marketability, and greater faculty-staff commitment (Davidson, 2017). Faculty and staff members (e.g., administration) play a critical role in student success via their shared governance, water-like leadership, and collaboration with other constituencies and communities. While the future may be uncertain (Levine & Van Pelt, 2021), shared governance and collaboration (via water-like leadership) surely make the future brighter in American higher education.

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**Dr. E Yueh-Ting “Y-T” Lee (E aka Elk)** is a Professor of Psychology at Southern Illinois University (SIU) at Carbondale, where he served as the Dean of the Graduate School (2015–2019). Since 2020, he has served as an academic leader (i.e., Faculty Senate President), elected twice (2021 and 2022), by faculty members (to represent approximately 1500 individuals) at SIU Carbondale. Before he came to SIU Carbondale, Dr. Lee had served as Ethnic Studies Departmental Chair at Minnesota State University Mankato, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Associate Vice President at the University of Toledo, Ohio, and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Minot State University in North Dakota (during which he was honorably adopted into the Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara Nation of Fort Berthold Reservation and was given his “Elk” Indian name). More specifically, since 1999, Dr. Lee has been working with and engaged with a variety of Native American communities—i.e., American Indian tribes and reservations in Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota, Michigan, Montana, Alaska, New Mexico, and Arizona—for the purpose of learning, service, mentorship, and research. He completed field research on unique similarities of beliefs between Native Americans and East Asians or Chinese. He was greatly honored and very proud of being adopted into the American Indian Hidatsa Tribe, part of the Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara Nation on Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota in summer 2006. His given American Indian name is Ehr-shi-hra-ri in Hidatsa language or Elk in English.

Dr. Lee received his BA in English and American Literature from Central South University in China and his Ph.D. in psychology from Stony Brook University and completed his postdoctoral training in the early 1990s at the University of Pennsylvania. He has produced 12 scholarly books and has authored (or co-authored) approximately 120 refereed journal articles and peer-reviewed book chapters. Dr. Lee has supervised and advised over two dozen doctoral graduate students (Ph.D. students) on their dissertations and three dozen masters-level graduate students on their master’s theses. Dr. Lee has secured and implemented approximately \$6.6 M in grants to support research, education, training, and other projects. He fundraised approximately \$10 M (in various gifts and donations) for educational institutions and cultural communities (e.g., scholarships, fellowships, endowments, and capital campaigns).

Professor Lee has been actively involved in the scientific/scholarly review process (journal article reviews, grant reviews, and book proposal reviews) for approximately 50 different journals, publishers, and grant agencies. He also served as a special issue editor for two APA journals: *Psychology of Religion and*

*Spirituality and Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences*. He has served as a peer evaluator/site visitor for doctoral program accreditation for American Psychological Association and institutional accreditation for North Central Association-Higher Learning Commission for the past 20 years.

Primarily on a pro bono basis, Professor Lee has actively been involved in consultations and training sessions/workshops for business and corporate leaders, health/medical staff members, law enforcement officers, lawyers, judges, and NGO or other professionals, with a focus on leadership, organizational behavior, group dynamics, diversity and different appreciation, equity and social justice, conflict resolution, and harmony/peace education.

# A Humble Beginning to Higher Education Leadership



Joanne Li

## 1 The Beginning

It was a starry night when I landed in Florida on December 28, 1988. Determined to get out of Hong Kong, I took a chance to join my friend, Agnes Au, in Orlando to see what life had in store for me. As a first-generation college student with parents who never even finished high school, I knew very little about higher education in the United States. With Agnes's encouragement, I registered for my first semester at Valencia College. Agnes paid for my first semester's tuition because she was proud that I showed up. From the second semester onward, I was a full-ride scholar because of my academic performance. Even with the scholarships, I had to find jobs to pay for living expenses. Often, I worked late in a restaurant until around midnight and then did my homework into the early morning. With the help of a mechanic, I bought a used car at an auction for \$2400. It was a Honda Civic hatchback that always had problems on hot summer days and broke down frequently on the highways. Yet, I loved every bit of my first car. It was a constant reminder of my new-found freedom, a life filled with new people and different cultures. I finished my undergraduate degree at Florida State University and graduated summa cum laude in 3 and a half years. My plan at the time was to complete college and return home. Then my journey took a detour when my professors started to send me to Ph.D. seminars in my last year of college. I had no idea what a Ph.D. was but was recruited to attend the graduate finance program with full scholarships and stipends at my alma mater. After graduating from my Ph.D. program in finance, I had a total of 14

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interviews including three universities in Hong Kong. Life just picked me to start my career in this country.

## 2 Early Leadership Development

After enjoying a relatively successful career as a finance professor and a researcher at a private university in Maryland, I was recruited by a colleague from a local public university to be the chair of a department of finance. I remember asking the question of why they wanted someone so young and inexperienced to be their chairperson. My now dear friend, Bharat Jain, told me at the time, “we have seen something in you that you have yet to discover.” In my life, I have been exceptionally blessed to meet friends and mentors like Bharat who gave so much and never expected anything in return. His answer was the beginning of my leadership journey. I am forever grateful to him because through the years I have discovered who I am and what I am living for.

When I was a chair, I discovered what leadership could offer that otherwise would not be available if I participated as a professor. I was serving a public university with over 20,000 students. Routinely I would meet with students and parents. Through those experiences, I was trained to be a good listener with empathy. I worked with students who had physical and/or mental challenges, as well as emotional disturbances. In the fall of 2006, I had a student who was diagnosed with cancer. He had to go through chemotherapy, and yet some professors would not excuse him from final exams. Overcome with compassion, I acted as the student’s advocate to convince those professors that he had no intention to make excuses other than health issues. He graduated with a 4.0 GPA and was one of the all-time brilliant students that I ever had the pleasure to teach. The student taught me determination and hopefulness. Learning that he attended graduation and celebrated with his family and doctors was one of the most rewarding moments in my career.

In subsequent years, many students passed through my life to leave unforgettable memories in my teaching career. Among them was an orphan who lived on his own. Another one had a mental breakdown and subsequently received psychiatric help. I always remembered when one student told me she wanted to give up her business career because she decided to be a teacher for inner city schools. And there was another student who, not made to be an accountant, eventually walked away from his business career and became a medical doctor. These students probably would never find out how they had changed me to be a compassionate person through their own stories. These encounters built my capacity to understand complicated relationships and recognize the complexity of issues.

Another insight I learned as a chair was through working across departments within the university discussing ideas of collaboration and the revision of curricula. The opportunity to influence and make changes in other people’s lives in a scalable manner is exhilarating. I still remember one of my favorite students who defended her thesis on mortgage-backed securities using the Black-Scholes option model to



derive her mathematic equations. Her thesis was a brainchild birthed by a collaboration between the finance department in the business school and the risk management department from the school of mathematics. That was my first glimpse of the power of collaboration and shared resources and how they impacted knowledge and people. As a chair of a department, I was put in charge of managing faculty and staff in addition to working in concert with the vision of the dean. It was an invaluable experience because I was trained in how to take care of our stakeholders as well as balance their goals with limited resources.

Shortly after I became a professor, I also pursued the Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) credential because I wanted to encourage my students to do so. With a CFA charter, many firms outside of higher education attempted to recruit me. While a job on Wall Street might provide a lucrative compensation package, something was holding me back. There is not anything noble about me staying in higher education. I am simply grateful for all the professors and mentors who took care of me and the scholarships I received from people whom I never met. I am fortunate to have been educated here in this country. I never dreamed of going to university let alone finishing my Ph.D. The little girl who grew up in Hong Kong has been given so much in life. Higher education is a catalyst to change lives, and my life was changed by higher education. The gratitude I hold in my heart makes up the “why” for me to stay in this country and continue to work at a university.

### 3 Embracing the Role of Leadership

In 2012, I became a dean of a business school at a public university in Ohio. During the recruitment process, the then-president asked me to give him 5 years of my career. While excited and humbled to accept the offer, I was curious about how my skillset would expand with a higher level of responsibility. Most people would describe me as having a strong work ethic and high energy. In truth, I just want to learn everything and do everything. There is often an insatiable desire in me to identify problems and figure out solutions. I thrive in uncertainty and fancy myself a multitasker. I enjoy my busy life and work every waking moment to tackle challenges.

This attitude was brought to a halt when my president told me to look up in 2015. He advised me that a good leader does not just look down and do busy work. He nominated me to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) *Millennium Leadership Initiative* (MLI). I was selected with a scholarship as 1 of the 24 proteges of the 2016 cohort. In this professional development program, we had over 20 university presidents and system chancellors as our teachers. The MLI was founded in 1998 by a group of minority presidents and chancellors with the hope of bringing diversity to higher education leadership. The program was very real and pragmatic. As part of the preparation before attendance, we wrote essays about ourselves, took a personality test, and provided statements regarding ourselves and our career goals. Faculty of this program include a Harvard-graduate

lawyer, media and marketing professionals, capitol hill politicians, financial strategists, crisis management experts, and many more. The schedule was very intense and required us to work from early morning until late at night.

The defining moment came when we gathered at dinner time to listen to stories of presidents and chancellors in attendance. Often these presidents or chancellors would share how difficult it was to be a president and how impossible the job truly was. These are the presidents that have served through the most racially challenging time in higher education, financial crises of institutions, and public relations disasters. Yet halfway through their discussion, they changed course and said, “now I want to tell you why you *need* to be a president.” Through their talks, I witnessed pain, suffering, courage, and selflessness. Their stories and experiences will be something I remember as long as I live. Maybe with intention, these presidents and chancellors had forever changed my career aspirations. From that point onward, I wake up with a purpose and have become intentional in the pursuit of greater goals for the many who will come after me. As of today, half of the ten founding presidents and chancellors are already deceased, but their legacy lives on. Their decision to diversify leadership in that fateful year has created a ripple effect in higher education. There are over 694 proteges who graduated from MLI, 149 of them went on to become presidents or chancellors, and 189 presidencies and chancellorships are or have been held by MLI proteges.<sup>1</sup>

My awakening came soon after graduating from MLI. I took the advice of looking up and becoming more intentional to be a better leader. Since 2016, I have sought out professional development opportunities annually to allow myself to grow. In subsequent years, I have participated in many outstanding leadership and professional development programs provided by institutions, such as Harvard Graduate School of Education, Wharton School of Business, and the American Council on Education. The quest to be a good leader brought me to understand something very fundamental about leadership. In addition to courage and bravery, we all need intentions and deliberations to become good leaders. Good leaders exhibit not only natural abilities but also skills in tackling difficult situations. To build leadership capacity, I look for opportunities to learn from people outside of higher education. I want to learn about their challenges and study their solutions. Often, their corporate culture and people impact the results. I recognized most of the time leadership skills are forced and trained. Acknowledging our limitations opens our minds to improvements so that we can better serve others. I don't categorically label myself as a servant leader because I believe being a good leader implicitly assumes the responsibility of service. But whom we serve and what service we owe should be important questions to reflect upon.

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<sup>1</sup>American Association of State Colleges and Universities, August 18, 2022, <https://www.aascu.org/MLI/About/>

## 4 Scaling Up and Facing Adversity

I became a dean of a very substantial business school in Florida in the year of 2017. The school is substantial not only by the size of the student body but also by the potential to excel. The university serves over 58,000 students that have a rich diversity in both ethnic backgrounds and economic resources. In recent years, it has become a Carnegie classification R1 university and is perceived as a rising star among its peers. The acceptance of this job put me on a journey to understand how to manage a much larger-scale institution both in operation and finance. I was particularly excited to serve in a city with a population of over six million. Traveling around the world and visiting many cities, I believe urbanization will continue to define higher education. To give a better context, the state of Florida has nurtured a rather competitive higher education environment with all the universities in its system subject to annual performance evaluation. While performing universities are rewarded with additional incentives, underperforming universities are subject to a significant amount of resource reduction. I was excited to operate in a highly competitive environment and ready to take on difficult tasks. However, the real challenge arose when I found myself truly a minority among the constituents.

There are about 6.5 million people in Miami-Dade County. Crowned as the financial center of Latin America and with one of the busiest international airports in the country, Miami is heavily influenced by Latino culture and driven by its entrepreneurial spirit. Naturally, the university has many substantial Latino and Latina leaders and employs many of Hispanic heritage. Asians represent a little over 2% of the population in the metropolis. Naturally, having an Asian woman come in to run the largest business school in Florida at the time might seem unimaginable to many. Growing up in Hong Kong with a homogeneous population, I was rather naive about the potential racial conflicts. Certainly, I have had my share of prejudice in the country before moving to Miami, and thought I would be able to tackle any racial challenges. Yet I was confronted with something completely foreign. Eager to advance the business school in status and recognition, I began to launch significant changes in operations and personnel. Nine months after assuming my position, anonymous letters started to arrive in the mailboxes of the whole business school, faculty and staff, and external stakeholders such as alumni and employers, attacking my race, gender, and faith.

Whether because of technology, or the lack of, or the lack of real interest from the administration to identify the culprit, I was never able to find out who sent these hateful emails. In a short 6-month period, three letters were sent with defamatory allegations and slanderous accusations with the obvious intention to discredit my leadership because of my race and gender. As each additional letter arrived, more people who worked closely with me were also dragged into the center of these allegations. My close confidants started to see their characters being assassinated. In the initial few days of these letters, I had a difficult time comprehending the situation and began to doubt my ability to manage the crisis. Then my husband asked for my patience because he believed the true signal would be revealed. He argued under

most circumstances it would be difficult to decipher how others perceive the work we do due to our positions. However, extraordinary events such as these defamatory letters would provoke people to express their opinions openly about my performance and the overall state of the affairs. Soon enough, supporting and encouraging letters began to pour in. Faculty, staff, and alumni would apologize in person for the unfair treatment I received. With each word of encouragement, I resumed my task of leading the changes that started since the first day I joined the university. No doubt my character was put to a test during those 6 months. And yet I never walked away from what I committed to doing. I continued to change the operation of the business school, initiate new programs, reform our financial strategy, create innovative partnerships across the globe, and build up its reputation.

Sometimes I looked back and realized those letters stopped coming not because I fought back. I never defended myself in public. I never even brought up those letters in our faculty and staff meetings. These accusations were silenced because the faculty and staff were happier than they had ever been before, and the business school's reputation continued to rise as we achieved unparalleled success in a short 4 years, garnishing national and international attention both in rankings and results.

In some quiet moments of my life, I often reflect on what I would have done differently if I had to relive those 6 months. Undeniably, that crisis challenged me to the core. It had shaken my confidence as a person and almost defeated my belief as a leader. Despite the stress I had to live through, I did not walk away with regrets. I became more determined to always do the right things. This experience reminds me of some random Pinterest quote, "no matter how badly someone treats you, never drop down to their level. Remain calm, stay strong, and walk away." In fact, I farewelled my students, colleagues, and communities with gratitude and even bigger aspirations. The business school was a wonderful chapter of my career. It was a perfect partner to advance my purpose to serve a bigger mass of students and the community. It taught me resilience and perseverance. It made me emotionally strong. It provided me with the best laboratory to execute some of the most brilliant strategies in the world of business schools. Along with our students, faculty, and staff, we celebrated successes that many would call inconceivable. Among all, the crisis allowed me to find out who I am and what I am made of. The lesson I learned is that being truthful to who you are and focusing on the purpose you serve can shelter you through some of the tumultuous storms in life.

Honoring all my mentors, I accepted the position to be the 16th chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha on July 1, 2021. I am the first Asian American to ever serve in the executive role of the University of Nebraska System and the only woman in the President Council. Fate has an interesting way of finding me. As I began to research and write this chapter, I found out that one of the ten founding members of the AACSB MLI was Dr. Gladys Styles Johnson. She was the chancellor of the University of Nebraska Kearney, a sister institution in the University of Nebraska System. In the *MLI 20th Anniversary Monograph – Influence and Impact: The Meaning and Legacy of the Millennium Leadership Initiative*, Dr. Johnson was remembered fondly as a dedicated leader, "...[i]n addition to serving many years on the AACSB Board of Directors, Gladys also served as a member of AACSB's Committee for Women Presidents..." During the period between 1999 and 2018,

only two Asian American women completed the MLI program, and I am one of those two proteges. In many ways, Dr. Johnson found me without ever knowing who I am. She passed away in 2018, 2 years after I completed the MLI program. From one woman chancellor to another, I am humbled to live in the legacy she created 24 years ago.

## 5 My Vision of Higher Education

Except for my first appointment, I have deliberately sought out public universities to serve. It is particularly meaningful for me because I graduated from a public university. University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) is the only 4-year public research university in the city of Omaha. It serves a diverse student body, of which many are first-generation college students and learners of color. Among our students, I am home. Omaha is the largest city in Nebraska and the economic powerhouse of the state. Yet, UNO has many challenges despite its prime location. As an urban university, UNO faces a long-rooted perception of subpar quality. It has a mission to serve underprivileged communities and students of color. Whether it is prejudice or reality, learners with less economic means are often regarded as academically ill-prepared students. Many of our students have economic challenges and come from difficult financial circumstances. In addition, UNO does not receive the kind of financial support of a land-grant university or a medical center due to research capacity and/or mission. This brings me to the question of the existence of institutions such as UNO.

For years, the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education has classified universities and colleges by their research productivity. Universities are labeled as R1, R2, and others. Consequently, universities and schools became focused on earning higher recognition. Strategies were identified to alter operations and finances to make progress. These labels, while helping to delineate research portfolios and productivity, created many unintended consequences. Unfortunately, universities with severe financial constraints and a mission to serve underprivileged populations seemingly became less important or irrelevant.

Arguably, universities have two constituencies – students and faculty. Faculty are in place to educate students through teaching and/or engaging in research. Regardless, the existence of higher education is to educate. Once the institution has achieved a recognizable quality, shouldn't we focus on our efforts in expanding our reach so more students/learners can be educated? As such, shouldn't our fiduciary duty be to pursue those students who don't believe they belong to the system? After 25 years of working in higher education, I have decided whom I want to serve and to whom I owe my service. My mission is to bring social mobility to many of our candidates and to ensure economic prosperity for the community. I argue if we reach the threshold of quality, our goal as educators is to ask the question "who is that student we missed and how can we reach them?" I believe research and discovery have the power to influence public policies and change business practices. But they also carry the most important intention – to improve human conditions. Higher

education is an essential tool to change the world by educating the mass. I grew up poor, but higher education opened doors of opportunities for me. I want to see those learners who never thought they belonged will find a home at our university. I dream of the day when students enter our space, they find comfort and encouragement. I need them to know they are never outsiders.

## 6 Advice for Future Leaders

To those interested in taking on a leadership role in higher education, I would recommend finding your purpose first. Purpose serves as a roadmap for your career and provides you with a reason to wake up every morning. Ask why you want to be a leader. At one point in my career, someone asked this insightful question. “Do you enjoy the work of a leader or the title of a leader?” I hope your answer is the former and not the latter. If you want to belong to something bigger than yourself, then your answer becomes obvious. Be a leader in higher education for there is no better job than serving learners from all walks of life. Yes, you will take on an insurmountable volume of work and confront difficult tasks. Yes, you will be challenged to your core and often find yourself in a sea of uncertainty. But you will also find your journey rewarding because you will be able to help students like me. By being a leader, you become a multiplier of influence. By leading, you are in a position to change lives.

No great leader ever achieved success alone. There will be plenty of people in your life who will lift you up as you climb. Most likely they are the reason why you got here. In reflection on my leadership journey, I recognize I have been blessed with many mentors who generously shared their wisdom. Be intentional to build a network of mentors and a circle of advisors. Look for someone who will take a genuine interest in your career and give different perspectives. While it is great to have someone always agree with you, it is extremely valuable to gather opinions that challenge your thinking. You should be honest and feel safe with these people and know that they don't have other motives but want you to be successful. Don't be shy to ask for advice because you will be delighted that many are eager to help. As you advance in your career, you should start mentoring others. The future of humankind requires all of us to invest in others.

Getting to know yourself is also important. Leaders come in different styles, temperaments, and personalities. Knowing who you are is crucial to find your complementary team players. There are many personality tests available and take those tests.<sup>2</sup> For instance, if you are an introvert, you want to add a team player to your inner circle who is an extrovert. If you are known to always have big ideas, you might need someone who can provide structure. The reasoning is simple. You will need to create a team that can have different strengths to complement each other.

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<sup>2</sup>Personality tests such as Emergenetics, Gallup Strengths, and Myers-Briggs tests are some examples.

Don't be tempted to hire someone who thinks as you do. It is flattering to always have people agree with you, but you will also stifle creativity and innovations if your team thinks exactly alike.

Don't forget to look up. By looking up, you will start to see the bigger picture. All the different parts and units of your operations will begin to make sense. Study your people and study with them intently. Listen and hear their concerns and ideas. They are your opportunities for innovation and creativity. Ask a lot of questions because all good leaders do. Their answers open many doors for you to envision the future. Build your capacity for empathy for people and circumstances. Work on your ability to persuade and your openness to being persuaded, for democracy relies on our commitment to debate. A big vision requires many to come with you, so take good care of your people. Remember every successful organization is made of caring stakeholders. These days I look up often to discover the stars in the big picture. I study these stars with the hope that I can connect with them one day. May you join the leadership role and become part of this constellation. I shall leave you with a quote from J.R.R. Tolkien, "all we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."



**Dr. Joanne Li** was named the 16th Chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO). Li is the first Asian American to be appointed to an executive role in the Nebraska University System.

UNO is the only urban university within the Nebraska University System and has an operating budget of around \$2B. UNO is proud to serve its diverse student body of over 15,000+ students. In 2014, UNO was awarded the Presidential Award by President Obama, the highest national honor for creating economic opportunity through community engagement efforts.

UNO is also home to the National Counterterrorism, Innovation, Technology, and Education (NCITE) Center of Excellence, a strategic partnership that connects 26 partnering institutions and the Department of Homeland Security. NCITE has gained international recognition as an important component in national counterterrorism efforts.

Before joining UNO, Li was the Dean of Florida International University's College of Business (FIU Business), the largest business school in the state of Florida and home to the #2 US News ranked International Business program and #1 Real Estate Research program in the world.

A native of Hong Kong, Li graduated summa cum laude from Florida State University with a major in finance and a minor in economics. She then earned her Ph.D. in Finance, with a support area in Econometrics, from Florida State University. Li is a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) Charterholder, as well as a protege of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Millennium Leadership Initiative's 2016 cohort. She has also completed executive programs from Wharton Business School and Harvard Institute for Management & Leadership in Education. Li is a 2022 graduate of the Harvard Seminar for New Presidents through the Graduate School of

Education. She is actively engaged with the community, currently serving on multiple boards and international schools, such as the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD), Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City and CNBC Financial Wellness Council.

Li is proud to have also joined the Board of Trustees of the Higher Learning Commission, as well as the Executive Committee of the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU).



# Courage at the Intersection of Preparation and Opportunity



Teik C. Lim

Like most people, I did not set out to lead an institution of higher education. I have, however, been blessed with two such opportunities. This resulted from an evolution that occurred over many years and consisted of exposures to many, many life experiences, lessons learned, and intense preparation of the mind and the heart that readied me to become the president of the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) – one of the top 100 national universities in the USA. Of all my life lessons, the most significant and impactful ones have been the time I spent with my wife raising three great children. At the time of this narrative, all three of my children are young adults between the ages of 27 and 34.

Before I share my story further, let me briefly introduce you to NJIT and then discuss how I got to this point. NJIT is a public polytechnic research university, a Carnegie R1 research university, a top 50 public university with more than 12,000 very diverse students, and exceedingly innovative and entrepreneurial. It is ranked in the top 2% in the USA for return on educational investment and is an engine for social mobility. I am truly fortunate to be able to lead such an institution.

I was born in Malaysia, and my ancestry is Chinese. I came alone to the USA as a teenager in 1983 after high school to pursue my higher education. I grew up with limited means and supported myself through college, and I became the first member of my family to earn a college degree. I was able to pursue my tertiary studies in the USA because of a generous undergraduate scholarship from Michigan Tech. Although my original intent was to obtain a bachelor's degree and move back to Southeast Asia, I went on to earn master's and Ph.D. degrees because of the influence of several Taiwanese friends in college. I worked really hard during those years

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and was able to complete my degrees at three different schools in about 6 years. While pursuing my Ph.D., I married my lovely wife, Gina, who also is from Malaysia. We had our first son during that time, and Gina has been my best friend, a trusted advisor, and a life partner.

I next spent about 7 years in the industry and then made a shift to working in higher education because of my passion to teach and mentor students. It was God's blessing that my adopted country and the institutions I attended had given me so much, and I wanted to repay those blessings by contributing to society through my work in higher education.

My story isn't very different from many Asian immigrants. I don't see myself as special, but I have been presented with extraordinary opportunities. Some of my closest friends have said that I have been lucky in my career, but I believe you are "lucky" when preparation intersects with opportunity. This has happened to me many times.

In 2005, I was presented with the opportunity to lead a large engineering department at the University of Cincinnati when both the department head and dean of the college resigned. I was the youngest faculty member in the department and, within the first few months, some senior faculty members tried to influence me to steer resources to their pet projects. After a few months, I built up the courage to take a stand. I needed to act in the best interests of the entire department and its 1000+ students. Since that time, I have always questioned how any investment of resources or the initiation of a project may impact students. This has become a guiding principle for me.

During my time as the department head of mechanical engineering, I knew I had to work in the trenches with the faculty to earn their support and respect while also supporting the students. Therefore, I decided to personally contribute toward expanding our research portfolio in the department and began pitching the idea that we needed to establish more research and learning centers. My strategy was to pursue industry collaborations, which was born out of several things I knew or had experienced:

- Cincinnati had a vibrant industrial base.
- The university had a 100-year-old mandatory co-op program with companies around the world.
- My former experience as an engineering consultant gave me practical knowledge of the industry.
- Most importantly, I saw a need for engineering education to become more holistic and experiential-based, requiring participation from industry beyond the co-op program.

I also rebranded our industrial advisory board into a more collaborative board. In fact, I even told the board that I wanted their collaboration before I would take their advice.

During that time, I noticed that there were very few collaborations beyond hiring our graduates between the university and Procter & Gamble (P&G) – two major anchor institutions in Cincinnati. Initially, I tried to convince P&G to support the

college through endowed professorships and scholarships, but that was not successful. I realized P&G is a for-profit entity and that my endowment idea was not a priority for P&G because it wasn't germane to their mission. That is when I learned the lesson that for a collaboration to be successful and sustainable, it must be mutually beneficial. With the help of a member of the department collaborative board who was a director within P&G, we were able to convince the chief technology officer to test a concept of establishing a center focusing on digital simulation work of interest to P&G. At that time, P&G was trying to move away from labor-intensive and somewhat trial-and-error experimentation in laboratories to using computer simulation to design and enhance their products. The center started with just a handful of students, gaining successes along the way and ultimately becoming one of the most prominent industry-university collaboratories in Cincinnati, with nearly 100 students, faculty, staff, and P&G engineers engaging in the Simulation Center by the time I departed Cincinnati in 2017.

In 2011, I was asked to lead the college's graduate studies and research when the associate dean who held this appointment stepped down. To this day, I believe one of the reasons for my selection to this post, in addition to my success as a department head in working with faculty and students to advance research and teaching in our unit, was because of my collaborative nature. I worked respectfully with peers and members of the upper administration, especially when we found ourselves having diametrically opposing views.

The third time preparation and opportunity intersected for me happened a year later when my dean left and I was appointed interim dean and later earned the permanent title after a national search. Again, I believe that my collaborative instinct acquired over the years is what landed me the deanship back then. In fact, I have at times stressed the importance of effective collaboration by stating, "In the past, it was publish or perish in higher education. Today, it is collaborate or perish." Later in my narrative, I will come back to a form of collaboration, namely, micro-collaboration, that I find to be a very effective tool for leading an academic institution.

Once during my tenure as dean, my president visited the Ohio State University to participate in an Asian student event. All my children attended and met President Ono, who told them I was a very good dean. My children replied, "No, he is an even better father." I was touched because I was always concerned that I may not have given my children enough attention due to being so busy with my work. Later, when the position of provost at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) became vacant, I again seized an opportunity. Almost 3 years into my tenure, I was called upon to lead UTA as the COVID pandemic struck the USA in March 2020.

In my latest instance of being "lucky," I was presented with another extraordinary opportunity during the Fall of 2021 to become president of one of the finest public polytechnic institutions in the country – NJIT. I will return to my presidential experiences later in my narrative.

These opportunities that were presented to me also came with enormous challenges. I faced financial shortfalls, falling morale, student dissatisfaction, and several other obstacles that sometimes seemed insurmountable. Even though there are

many East Asian faculty in this country who have made spectacular contributions, there are very few who have become top administrators at major academic institutions. Some call this the bamboo ceiling, while others say it is the perception of Asians lacking leadership qualities. So, why was I given these many leadership opportunities? I have pondered that question each time I was asked to take on more leadership responsibilities. I know it is not luck because my experience tells me several key factors prepared me for these leadership opportunities.

First, I am a microcollaborator as opposed to a micromanager. I am very interested in understanding and learning about the details of the work people around me are engaged in, and I stand ready to roll up my sleeves to work alongside them, but I do not try to micromanage their responsibilities. I like to surround myself with smart and dedicated people and let them make decisions.

Second, I work hard to listen and learn. That is not easy to do. The act of listening and learning is a very humbling experience, and it also is an admission and reminder of my shortcomings. Oftentimes, as leaders, we do not want to show or reveal our weaknesses, but being open-minded and collaborative does not mean one is weak. Understanding that we all have deficiencies and allowing others to help compensate for our own is a wise thing to do, and that distinguishes great from average leaders.

Third, embrace diversity ubiquitously and involve everyone. No one should be left behind, and valuable contributions can be made as a result of attacking a problem from a unique perspective. Diversity is an effective tool to advance our educational mission and is the hallmark of a successful institution. As an engineer, I know from experience that a homogenous group of people cannot consider all the possible applications and uses for a product. Nor can they optimize a system that will, ultimately, be implemented by people of different backgrounds, skills, and experiences. The value of having people with a broad array of opinions, talents, and experiences is extraordinary. On a small but personal scale, the fact that my wife, Gina, and I are very different people and approach problems very differently is extremely beneficial. I am a quiet introvert, and Gina is a joyful extrovert. She and I are very different and think very differently. The combination is what makes us a great pair especially in caring for the family and raising our children.

Fourth, a leader needs to be transparent. To be transparent, you must have integrity and be flexible. My first name, Teik, reminds me daily of integrity and flexibility because Teik means bamboo in Chinese. Bamboo grows straight up, signifying integrity, but it bends without breaking when a typhoon or hurricane comes and can quickly spring back when the storm passes, signifying flexibility. When people have all the accurate information given to them openly and honestly, they are more effective in their jobs. When I became dean of engineering and applied science in 2012, I inherited a college with financial challenges and declining morale among the faculty. I knew I needed the cooperation of the faculty to solve these challenges, so I decided to open the financial books to them and let them see how resources flowed. Once the faculty understood the challenges, they were on board to help the college revamp its curricula and attract more students and corporate support which resulted in a significant surplus when I left in 2017. In addition, as part of the effort, I had to convince our finance department to let us use the remaining of our savings to create

more scholarships to recruit top students from the area to create momentum that had a snowball effect leading to more students becoming interested in the college. That was challenging because we were losing money, and our finance director felt (rightfully so) that we needed to conserve resources to meet shortfalls. As a last resort, I told my finance director that we need to spend money to make money, which must have resonated with him because we did create scholarships, and the strategy worked. As a result of the steps we took and the successes we had, the college had millions of dollars to invest in research, hiring more faculty, providing more student services, and embarking upon many other academic initiatives. This boosted faculty morale, and faculty productivity grew significantly. This all was possible because of honesty and transparency.

When you take on a leadership role, there is a tendency to be pulled in thousands of different directions. If you are going to accomplish anything meaningful and impactful, you have to focus. I learned this lesson from the numerous academic administrative positions I held previously. As the executive in charge of UTA, I was laser-focused on three goals:

- Successfully navigate UTA through the COVID-19 pandemic with students as our central focus. That meant ensuring students would continue to learn and attain their degrees without delay. Students are our business. Everything we do, research, for example, should be for the sake of educating students.
- Emphasize the collective vision of a campus community that supports student success and research excellence equally and is a welcoming place for students from all demographics who can be successful at UTA.
- Enhance our external engagement to strengthen existing and new partnerships with alumni, corporations, nonprofit organizations, and elected officials. This was important because, as a public institution, we needed to be a value-added entity of the State, the USA, and globally.

In the pursuit of these three goals, I found myself applying the same principles of collaboration, listening and learning, championing diversity, and honesty and transparency that I shared earlier. I knew that our ability to navigate through the pandemic required sound health and safety protocols, so I mobilized an army of faculty, staff, and students (over a hundred of them) and empowered them to develop our campus reopening plan. This required collaboration, listening, diversity, and transparency.

During my time leading UTA and now NJIT, three things have resonated with me in an especially strong way. First, I have seen many heroic acts, many sacrifices, and a great deal of hard work by the faculty and staff. Their efforts resulted in record degrees and certificates conferred at both institutions during the pandemic. Leadership is not about position or title. Leaders can exist throughout an organization at every level, and the leadership of our faculty and staff has shined brightly. Second, I was humbled while leading UTA during the first 2+ years of a global pandemic and through an unprecedented nationwide protest against racial injustice. That experience taught me humility and empathy. I was continuously reminded of how fortunate I am, how little I know, and how important it is to listen and learn. I

believe this experience prepared me well for my transition from UTA to NJIT, despite them being two very dissimilar campuses located in two very different parts of the country. Most importantly, I learned how to strike a balance between listening and learning versus actions and empowerment as I began my presidency at NJIT. To me, achieving the appropriate balance is critical because the community expects a new president to lead but, at the same time, to be inclusive and value the experience and knowledge of those who have served the university for many years. Too much of one or the other can be detrimental. Third, the campus communities at both NJIT and UTA are resilient, innovative, and very entrepreneurial. These two great institutions are bigger than any one person because of the ever-prevalent spirit of community and teamwork. Despite the many challenges presented in recent years, I believe the future of both institutions is bright and both are on a great trajectory.



**Dr. Teik C. Lim** is the 9th president of the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) and also holds the title of distinguished professor of mechanical engineering. Before joining NJIT on July 1, 2022, Dr. Lim led the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) as interim president from 2020 to 2022 and was provost and vice president for academic affairs at UTA from 2017 to 2020.

Dr. Lim's career has spanned from the private sector to university administration. He worked as an engineer at Structural Dynamics Research Corporation before joining the Ohio State University Center for Automotive Research as a research scientist. Dr. Lim taught at the University of Alabama beginning in 1998 as an associate professor before joining the University of Cincinnati in 2002, where he advanced from associate professor to professor to department head and to associate dean for graduate studies and research before being named dean of the College of Engineering and Applied Science.

Dr. Lim earned his bachelor of science in mechanical engineering (ME) from Michigan Technological University, his master of science in ME from the University of Missouri-Rolla, and his Ph.D. in ME from the Ohio State University. Dr. Lim is internationally recognized as a leading scholar in the field of structural vibrations and acoustics as well as modeling and simulation technology. He was named a fellow of the National Academy of Inventors in 2018 and is a fellow of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers as well as the Society of Automotive Engineers, from which he received numerous research and teaching awards, such as the Arch T. Colwell Merit Award in 2003 and the Ralph R. Teetor Educational Award in 2002. Dr. Lim also was recognized with the Thomas French Alumni Achievement Award in 2010, the GearLab Distinguished Alumnus Award in 2017, and the Distinguished Alumni Award for Academic Excellence in 2019 from his alma mater, the Ohio State University.

# Data-Informed Decision-Making in Higher Education



Ying Liu

## 1 Introduction

My career in the field of Institutional Research (IR) started in 2008 at McMaster University in Canada. McMaster is a large public institution with high research activities. It is 1 of the 13 research-intensive Canadian universities that exchange data regularly. The data being exchanged includes who are in enrollment, retention, graduation, research, etc. My main responsibility was to collect, submit, and use the multi-institutional data for benchmarking. This experience enriched my thoughts about and insights into how higher education institutions could utilize both internal and peer data for measuring performance, identifying weaknesses, and making reasonable aspirational goals.

After several years at McMaster as a senior analyst, I found that Institutional Research is a great fit for my career interests and academic background. It involves the exact skillset that I have: statistics, survey research, experimental design, and computer programming. Furthermore, I deeply enjoyed supporting data-informed decision-makings and ultimately promoting student success. I started to seek leadership opportunities to further advance my career in IR.

In 2013, I moved to the United States to serve as the Director of Institutional Research at the University of Toledo (UT) in Ohio. UT is a public 4-year institution with 20,000 students enrolled in undergraduate, master, and doctoral programs. It also has a medical school. As a large and complex institution, there was a constant need for up-to-date data to support both operational and strategic decisions. One of

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the examples is to track student registrations several months before a term starts and project how many students will enroll. Many of these data and analytic needs were best served by using modern technology rather than emailing PDFs and spreadsheets.

Under my leadership, the IR office started implementing modern business intelligence reporting tools with self-serving dashboards. There were two major steps involved in building these tools. The first step was listening to Deans, Chairs, and other end users on their specific needs on data, including the level of students, separating first-time in college vs. transfer, etc. The second step was to develop a projection model that ran behind the scene to provide accurate projections based on the yield rate of new students and the retention rate of continuing students. After developing initial draft tools, feedback was sought from the end users to further improve the usability of these tools. Close collaboration with academic and administrative units was the foundation of successful BI products.

After completion, these tools provide users with easy and quick access to enrollment, retention, graduation, and other data. Many of the readers of this book may have experienced using IR or IT dashboards. These dashboards provide self-service functionalities such as filters and dimensions to allow users to slice and dice the data in their own way. For instance, a dean of Engineering can focus on engineering enrollment data by filtering on college or further select gender as the dimension to compare female and male student counts at each Engineering program. Regardless of the specific software tool, accurate data and smooth user experience are the key factors for a successful product.

## **2 Data Sources**

In the next two sections, I will discuss the process that I took as an IR leader to lead the development of successful data products. There are two key steps: identifying the data sources and defining data elements.

### ***2.1 Internal Data***

Higher education institutions utilize enterprise systems to manage course registers, billing, degree audit, human resource, and other functions. Data in these systems are normally live data. Although sometimes reporting from live data is needed, snapshots (extracted and stored historical data) often work better for reporting. The snapshots are taken at a fixed interval and capture the key data elements from a live system. For instance, student-related snapshots are often student or course-level data with information such as student name, ID, demographics, academic program, etc.

At Florida Atlantic University, the snapshots are taken twice per academic term: 4 weeks after the term starts and 4 weeks after the term ends. The first snapshot that is taken 4 weeks after the term starts is called the preliminary snapshot, and the



latter snapshot is called the end-of-term (EOT) snapshot. These two snapshots serve as the basis for State University System reporting and capture similar data elements but for different purposes. For instance, the preliminary snapshot includes all students registered earlier in the term, whereas in the EOT snapshot students who canceled all courses due to allowed reasons and are not fee liable are excluded. The preliminary snapshot often has a higher student count than EOF but lacks some information that is not available at the time it is taken. One obvious piece of information that is not available in the preliminary snapshot is course grade.

The preliminary snapshot is often used for federal reporting such as IPEDS (see Sect. 2.2). Other reports such as bond ratings that adopted the IPEDS' definitions inevitably also rely on the preliminary snapshot. The EOT snapshot is the base for many State University System of Florida reports and metrics including the performance-based funding calculations (<https://www.flbog.edu/finance/performance-based-funding/>).

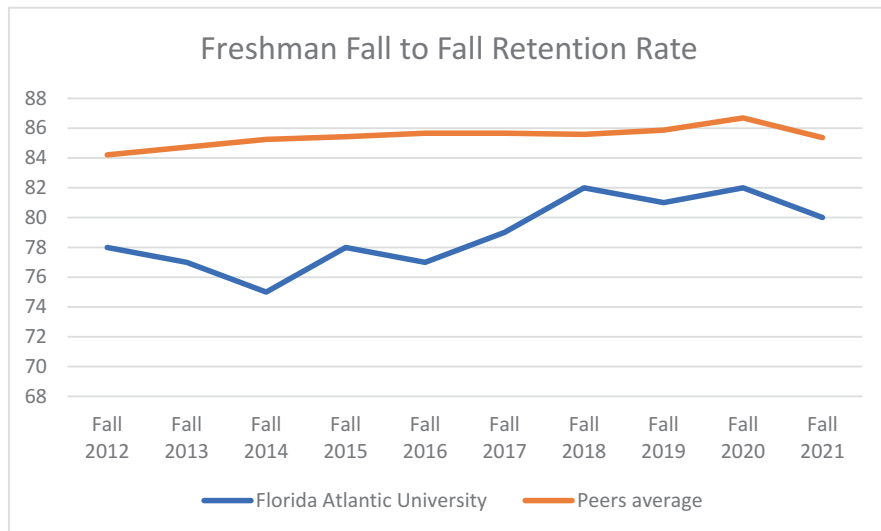
I suggest all institutional leaders work with your IR team to develop a strategy on when to use live data versus when to use snapshot data. The live data is fluid, and it may serve operational purposes. However, for strategic purposes and decision-making, it is often better to utilize the official snapshot data that are more stable. With the fast-growing number of self-serving dashboards, the IR team may not be available to address users' questions in real time. Frequent user training and a clearly defined data dictionary are crucial to the success of IR dashboards.

## 2.2 External Data

Many data sources on higher education are available to the public or through some kind of data consortium. They provide not only the data itself but also well-thought-out data definitions that are very important for higher education professionals to be familiar with. Here we introduce two main sources of publicly available data: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and Common Data Set (CDS).

The IPEDS data is collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), part of the Department of Education (<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data>). All institutions receiving Title IV funds are required to submit data annually. According to the NCES Handbook of Survey Methods (2019), in 2017–2018, a total of 6642 Title IV institutions and 73 administrative offices (central or system offices) in the United States and other US jurisdictions participated in data collection.

The IPEDS provides standard web-based templates for collecting data on admission, enrollment, degrees awarded, graduation rate, financial aid, library, finance, and human resource. It is a great source for data definitions and peer data comparisons. At FAU, the IPEDS data is used as one of the major sources for developing institutional peers for benchmarking. These benchmarks are very useful for setting university strategic goals and allocating resources efficiently.



**Fig. 1** Retention rate of FAU vs. large public 4-year Carnegie R1 & R2 Institutions. (All the figures were created by the author himself)

For instance, retention is a key measure of student success. In the past several years, FAU's freshman fall-to-fall retention has been around 81%. Although we know there is always room to improve, is 81% retention right sized for FAU? This question can be addressed by examining the retention rate trend of peer institutions from IPEDS (Fig. 1). From the figure, it can be seen clearly that FAU's retention has been growing over the past 10 years and outpaced the national growth. A slight drop both nationally and at FAU can be seen in fall 2021 due to the COVID pandemic. FAU uses this IPEDS information to closely monitor the national trend and set the retention goal for the next 5 years. My team utilized predictive models to identify students who were less likely to continue and passed the list to frontline units for retention initiatives. In Sect. 5 we will discuss a specific example of these models.

### 3 Data Definitions and Data Dictionary

Data management and integrity are crucial to the success of an institutional research/effectiveness effort. There are many constituents involved in the collection and dissemination of it. For instance, enrollment data is normally managed by the registrar. Sometimes IR is responsible for the official reporting of enrolment counts and full-time equivalence (FTE). These officially reported numbers are used by governments, organizations, accreditation agencies, and ranking agencies like *US News and World Report*. The registrar, IR, and other involved departments work closely to

ensure that the data reporting is based on an accurate understanding of the current data definitions and student management system.

Working with multiple constituents on campus and referencing national data sources such as IPEDS, and State of Florida definitions, my team developed the initial draft of university data definitions, including applications, admissions, enrollments, retention rate, graduation rate, etc. Then we went through these elements with the Data Integrity Committee for broader input until finalized. Readers are welcome to look at the complete list on my office's website (<https://www.fau.edu/iea/documents/pdf/data-dictionary/data-dictionary-2021.pdf>). It is not surprising these definitions vary slightly from state to state or from institution to institution. For instance, the State University System of Florida focuses on a 4-year full-time FTIC graduation rate vs. the more widely adopted 6-year graduation rate. Florida also has its unique 3-year transfer student graduation rate which includes both full-time and part-time starters.

It is inevitable for university administrators to deal with data points, metrics, and performance indicators. However, not everyone is familiar with the exact definitions, and it can cause confusion, such as whether part-time students are included in a specific metric. Frequent user awareness activities are often necessary to keep administrators informed, especially at the college level. At FAU, a process called "college KPIs" has been in place for several years to keep College Deans and Department Chairs involved in key metrics by calculating data points at the college level based on the official data definition. Colleges also set their annual goals utilizing these data points.

## 4 Office Goals

Institutional Research (IR) started as a professional field responsible for reporting student numbers in higher education institutions. Since the Association of Institutional Research was formed in 1966 as a profession, the scope of IR has been greatly expanded. Data and information are valued more and more in decision-making.

With the high demand for data and very often limited resources available at FAU, it is important to set the scope and priorities of an office. I worked with the university leadership and office colleagues to set the following duties and functions of Institutional Effectiveness and Analysis. This is just one of the examples of what IR offices do. While not all offices of IR/IE will necessarily have the same duties and functions, some may be responsible for additional tasks, and effective institutional research includes the majority of these aspects:

- Provide historical or current data about FAU's students, programs, personnel, and resources, in response to internal and external requests.
- Complete surveys and questionnaires as requested by external agencies.
- Publish an annual "Quick Facts" brochure.

- Provide a website including a Fact Book, interactive reporting tools, departmental dashboard indicators, and other official statistical data and research reports.
- Build and maintain institutional databases to meet the ongoing data needs of the university.
- Coordinate the reporting of official data to the Florida Department of Education, Federal agencies, and other organizations.
- Coordinate the reporting of academic activity and workload productivity.
- Design and administer survey instruments, manage data collection, and analyze, interpret, and disseminate results.
- Conduct special studies as requested by university committees or administrators.
- Assist academic departments and academic support units in assessing, reporting, and improving the effectiveness of their programs and activities.
- Support teaching improvement through sponsorship of faculty workshops.
- Regularly evaluate and document IEA's effectiveness and use findings for improvement.
- Contribute professionally by attending conferences, making presentations, publishing papers, and holding office.

## 5 Student Success

One of the ultimate goals of public institutions is student success. The State of Florida University System strongly encourages student success and includes multiple metrics in the performance funding metrics:

Metric 1 – Percent of Bachelor's graduates employed and/or continuing their education further 1 year after graduation

Metric 2 – Median average wages of undergraduates employed 1 year after graduation

Metric 3 – Net tuition and fees per 120 credit hours

Metric 4 – 4-year graduation rates (full-time FTIC)

Metric 5 – Academic progress rate (second year retention with GPA above 2.0)

Metric 6 – Bachelor's degrees awarded in areas of strategic emphasis (includes STEM)

Metric 7 – University access rate (percent of undergraduates with a Pell Grant)

Metric 8 – Graduate degrees awarded in areas of strategic emphasis (includes STEM)

Metric 9a – 2-year graduation rate for FCS Associate in Arts transfer student

Metric 9b – 6-year graduation rate for students who are awarded a Pell Grant in their first year

Metric 10 – Board of Trustees' choice

It can be seen that five out of the ten metrics are student success related such as retention, graduation, and employment. The FAU IEA office leads the utilization of analytics to identify students who may not return or graduate on time. These analytics calculated scores representing term success, retention probability, and

graduation probability. A combination of commercial software and IEA-developed models is used. Here I would like to introduce a model predicting the probability of students graduating. Two IEA colleagues and I developed this model. We presented this research at the Association of Institutional Research Annual Conference (Liu et al., 2019).

This research focused on transfer students who differ from traditional students in many aspects, including student characteristics such as age and enrolment status, plus other social, environmental, and psychological factors. As shown in a report published by the National Student Clearinghouse (Shapiro et al., 2018), among the fall 2011 cohort of 2.8 million first-time students, within their first 6 years, over one million of them continued their studies at a different institution, resulting in an overall transfer rate of 38.0%. The transfer rate of students who started at 4-year institutions was slightly higher than 2-year institutions at 38.5% vs. 37.1%. One of the contributing factors to this phenomenon is a recent trend of universities enrolling more community college students to meet their enrollment and degree completion goals.

However, transfer students face unique challenges in terms of degree attainment. Jenkins and Fink (2016) suggested that lower-income students were less likely than higher-income students to earn a bachelor's degree after transfer. In a study conducted within a large-size Ontario University, Bell (1998) showed that although college transfer students performed academically as well as students who came directly from high schools, the former were less likely to graduate. Bell suggested that factors like culture, the goal of education, cost, and social economic background may be the cause of the above effect.

Unlike students directly from high school, transfer students are more likely to be so-called nontraditional (older, part-time, and commuter). The factors affecting the persistence of traditional vs. nontraditional students are different. Bean and Metzner (1985) proposed a conceptual model for the persistence of nontraditional students. They suggested that socialization or similar social processes are crucial for understanding attrition in traditional students, whereas these factors are lacking in nontraditional students. Thus, outside environmental factors rather than social integration played a more significant role in the persistence of nontraditional students.

Efforts have also been made by researchers to explore the factors impacting transfer students' degree attainment using statistical models. In a recent study using logistic regression, Wang (2009) found that among 18 predictors measuring demographic background, pre-college characteristics, college experience, and environmental factors, the probability of attaining a bachelor's degree is significantly associated with gender, SES, high school curriculum, educational expectation upon entering college, GPA earned from community colleges, college involvement, and math remediation.

Although logistic regression appears to be an effective method, challenges do exist. Unlike FTIC students who normally graduate between 4 and 6 years, transfer students could graduate as fast as within a year or as long as 8 or more years. Logistic regression models require one binary (or multinomial) outcome. Very often in studying degree attainment, a fixed length outcome is set for all students in the

analysis. This approach eliminates cohorts that started within 3 years and at the same time ignores graduations that happened after a fixed length of time.

An alternative approach to logistic regression is using proportional hazard model, a specific survival analysis model to study student retention and graduation. Survival analysis considers the time to event in a way that reflects the longitudinal nature of the process. Menard et al. (2010) applied proportional hazard regression to fit students and found several significant predictors for student dropout. This model is especially suitable for studying transfer students because, unlike the mostly homogenous first-time student population, transfer students join at a different stage of their study with varied completed hours, course load, family responsibilities, etc.

## 5.1 Method

A longitudinal dataset was collected from the student record system. The data covered students who transferred into a degree-seeking program between the fall of 2010 and the summer of 2018. Each student was tracked from their entering year until the fall of 2018.

The variables in this dataset cover demographic, academic, and financial information (Table 1).

Generally, the proportional hazard model involves the modeling of time-to-event data. In the present study, graduation was defined as the event, and the number of years from entering to graduation as the time to event. Right censoring was applied to non-event records. The right censoring is a very important feature in survival analysis which allows for the full utilization of data. For instance, a student entering the institution in the fall of 2017 can still be a valid data point in the data with no event as of the fall of 2018. This data point is right censored which means whether/when this student will graduate in the future is unknown.

## 5.2 Results

In total, there were 34,773 students in this dataset which consists of transfer students who started between the fall of 2000 and the summer of 2018. Among these students, 15,778 graduated (with an event) and 65 were removed from the model due to missing data points.

**Table 1** Predictors used in the model

Demographic	Academic	Financial
Gender	Obtained associate degree	Pell eligibility
Race ethnicity	Transfer GPA	Live at home
Age	First-term course load	Has dependents
In-state	Credit hours earned	

### 5.2.1 Descriptive Results

Table 2 shows the description of selected variables.

### 5.2.2 Proportional Hazard Model Results

Using graduation as the event and years to graduation as a time to event, we carried out the model using R function COXPH which is part of the R survival package. Table 3 shows the significant predictors with graduation as the event.

Here is a summary of findings based on Table 3:

- Female students are more likely to graduate than male students.
- Older students are more likely to graduate.
- Students living with parents are more likely to graduate.
- Students with dependents are less likely to graduate.
- Pell-eligible students are less likely to graduate.
- Students with higher GPAs are more likely to graduate.
- Students with higher course load in the first semester are more likely to graduate.
- Students who carried forward more credit hours from previous institutions are more likely to graduate.

**Table 2** Descriptive of selected variables

Gender (% female)	Entering age (Mean)	Florida resident (%)	Prior degree (% with Associate degree)	Pell eligible (%)
58.50%	24.7	93.10%	54.40%	47.40%

**Table 3** Significant predictors in proportional hazard model

Predictor	Comparison	coef	exp(coef)	se(coef)	z	Pr(> z )	Sig.
Gender	Male vs. female	-0.1161654	0.890328	0.0165971	-6.999	2.58E-12	***
Age	Age at entering	-0.01391	0.9861863	0.0015428	-9.016	2.00E-16	***
Live at home	Live with parents vs. not	0.1087383	1.1148705	0.0202851	5.361	8.30E-08	***
Has dependents	Has dependents vs. not	-0.0580517	0.9436011	0.0265621	-2.186	0.028852	*
Pell	Pell eligible vs. not	-0.0637944	0.9381979	0.0179268	-3.559	0.000373	***
Transfer GPA	GPA from previous institution	0.5228215	1.6867803	0.0183411	28.505	2.00E-16	***
First-term course load	Credit hour entering	0.0740313	1.0768405	0.0024763	29.896	2.00E-16	***
Credits earned	Credit hours earned before entering	0.0123412	1.0124176	0.0003724	33.143	2.00E-16	***

Significance: 0 '\*\*\*', 0.001 '\*\*', 0.01 '\*'

### 5.3 Discussion

This study confirmed that many impact factors of transfer students are consistent with findings based on first-time students, such as gender, age, and Pell eligibility. As shown in Wang's logistic model on transfer students (2009), GPA is one of the most important factors that affect retention. The survival models in the present study further confirmed that transfer GPA significantly impacts the probability of graduation. The exponential of its coefficient is 1.69, which suggests that an increase of transfer GPA by 1, such as from 2.5 to 3.5, increases the graduation rate by 69% in any given year.

Credit hours carried from previous institutions are also a good indicator of student success. There is no question that more previous credit hours lead to graduation sooner. However, in this proportional hazard model, we are looking at the graduation probability for each year, and this finding suggests that students with more previous credit hours not only graduate faster but also are more likely to graduate overall.

Another interesting finding is that students living with their parents are more likely to graduate. This might be one of the environmental factors that affect students' achievement. Living with parents not only reduces financial burden but also provides more social and environmental support to students.

The first semester is very important to new students, even if they already had college experience. Our finding on first-term credit load suggests that taking more courses is a good indicator of future graduation. Since there are variables like transfer GPA and financial predictors in the model, this suggests that among two similar students, the student taking more credit hours in his/her first semester would have a higher chance to graduate. Although with an observational study, we cannot make any causal inference; it seems a good idea to have a transfer student start with a relatively high course load in the first semester.

This model not only provided a theoretical exploration of impact factors on student graduation but also had a practical use as a prediction tool. At FAU our team incorporated it into the individual student "graduation score" that not only considered the likelihood of graduation but also the time to graduation. Students who were likely to graduate but with a prolonged time received low scores for administrators and advisors to provide enhanced outreach and advising.

## 6 Final Comments

In the above sections, I reviewed my career growth in Institutional Research and several major achievements I had. I believe the ultimate goal of higher education institutions is to serve our students and community by conducting teaching and research. With the current availability of data, very often the challenge is not lack of data, but how to use them. Well-designed data and analytical products can make



those questions that once took weeks to answer now be addressed in minutes. Working together with both academic and administrative units, Institutional Research is in a unique position to build the connection between questions and answers.

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# Leading Research and Enhancing Scholarship: Fostering Interdisciplinary Collaborations and Faculty Diversity



Zhanjiang (John) Liu

## 1 Background

I was born in an underdeveloped mountainous area and grew up in a time when food security was a huge problem in China. Affected by the situation in my teenage years, I was thinking one day when I grew up, I would want to enter an agricultural university and learn the skills to grow crops and raise animals to secure food for all people. This seemingly simple goal of going to college could not be achieved upon my graduation from high school because all college admissions were stopped during the Cultural Revolution. Finally, after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the first college entrance examination was conducted at the end of 1977. As you can imagine, the 11-year worth of high school graduates in 1966–1977, an aggregate of many millions of young people, all put our bet on this seemingly only opportunity to get into a college. Across the country, more than 5,700,000 high school graduates ranging from 18 to 31 years of age participated in the examination, competing for a total of 273,000 college slots available; the success rate was 4.8% (China's Class of 1977: I took an exam that changed China, 2017). That sounds very competitive but was not too bad overall. However, education in my hometown area lagged far behind, with most high school students being taught by former high school graduates. We did not have textbooks after primary school, and what was taught very much depended on teachers, and in our case, our teachers did not have much to give, making the already competitive process of college entrance examination almost impossible for students from remote and rural areas like mine.

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Unbelievably for a long time back then, I was among the luckiest to get admitted into a college. Even luckier was that I got into my choice school Northwest College of Agriculture, now a key national university renamed Northwest A&F University in early 2000. Getting into college was the very first step in achieving my ambition in changing the world through increasing food production to provide food security, but thinking back, I believe this first step was truly a game changer.

From day one of college, the new competition started. I am grateful to my professors at Northwest A&F University for their encouragement, support, and fostering of my confidence—one of the keys for first-generation and disadvantaged students to succeed. The competitive college life of 4 years passed quickly. Before I knew it, it was time to take a graduate entrance examination. Compared to the college entrance examination, one change this time around was that I felt well-prepared and ready to take on the challenge. As I expected, I was successful in passing the exam and was also selected as a study-abroad student going to the United States, an outcome well beyond my expectations, and it became an opportunity that my family could not comprehend and that the local people never knew existed.

In 1983, I went to the University of Minnesota to work on my Master's and then Ph.D. degrees. Although I was academically well-prepared, my English was terrible. I am extremely grateful to my professors at the University of Minnesota, particularly to my graduate advisors Dr. William Bushnell for my Master's degree and Dr. Perry Hackett for my Ph.D. degree. Their encouragement and support helped me establish confidence quickly. In 6 years, I obtained a Master of Science in Plant Pathology and a Ph.D. in Cell and Developmental Biology.

When I obtained my Ph.D. in 1989, I felt that I was then prepared to realize the dream I had back in China, but for various reasons, that dream never materialized. Instead, I became a faculty member at Auburn University, a land grant university in Alabama. There I spent 22 years, working through the ladder of assistant professor, associate professor, full professor, and then distinguished Alumni Professor. As a faculty member, I occasionally thought about better ways of doing research, better ways to collaborate and support research, and involving faculty of various backgrounds. It was probably because of such thoughts that I was noted by my department head Dr. John Jensen, a great mentor, colleague, and friend. He encouraged me to pursue leadership training. In 1999–2000, the College of Agriculture sponsored my participation in the USDA ESCOP/ACOP leadership training programs.

After the leadership training, I was unconsciously involved in leadership roles in many activities, especially those leading the peaks of excellence program of Cell and Molecular Biosciences (CMB) at Auburn University, an inter-college program involving more than 80 faculty members. In 2007, I competed for the position of Associate Dean for Research in the College of Agriculture at Auburn, and I was selected to serve. After 6 years in this role, I was encouraged in 2013 to apply for the position of Associate Provost and Associate Vice President at Auburn University. Once again, I was selected and served in that role for 4 years until 2017 when I was recruited to serve as Vice President for Research at Syracuse University. I served in that capacity for 3 years before I was asked to step in as Interim Vice Chancellor and Provost. I served in the latter role for 2 years before I started my current role as Vice

President for International Strategy in 2022. As I reflect on my decades of service and leadership at Auburn University and Syracuse University, I am deeply proud of our institutions' achievements and the impact Auburn and Syracuse students, faculty, staff, and alumni continue to make on our states, nation, and the world. I am grateful to Auburn University for many years of opportunity to lead its research and grateful for the support of the faculty at Syracuse University. I am particularly indebted to Chancellor Syverud for his confidence in me in leading the Academic Affairs and serving in the role of the Provost during the unprecedented, difficult period of the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been an honor to serve Auburn University and Syracuse University in so many capacities with shared successes in many areas such as academic excellence and student success, research and creative work excellence, outreach and public impact, internationalization, diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA), and resource generation and management. This chapter will focus on my leadership experience in leading research, enhancing scholarship, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and faculty diversity through cluster hires.

## **2 Leading Research to Be Relevant to Global Challenges**

Research can be interpreted in many ways. In general terms, research is a process of generating knowledge, seeking truth, providing answers to questions, and finding solutions to the world's problems. As my mentor Dr. Hackett told us, "Science starts with questions, and good science starts with good questions." Universities were set up to create and disseminate knowledge. In this regard, land grant universities clearly define their mission of teaching, research, and outreach/extension. These mission areas align so well with my passion for research and using research to enhance the life qualities of people.

Despite many scientific and technological advances in the last 40 years, major global challenges have been persistent. These remain to include food security and safety, energy, the environment, global climate change, natural resource sustainability, human health, poverty, and social justice, as well as global and local conflicts. While the situation of food security has improved, it continues to be a major challenge for some parts of the world. The energy challenge continues because fossil energy will be eventually used up, and with the increasing world population and much greater numbers of automobiles, the consumption of oil and natural gas is at an increasing pace. The world must find renewable sources of energy. Over the decades, the increased usage of fossil energy has caused an increased accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, which, along with other human and economic activities, is believed to be the primary cause of global climate change. Although there are different opinions about the trends and patterns of global climate change, it is apparent that extreme weather conditions are becoming more extreme and more frequent. Extreme temperatures, drought, flooding, and hurricanes are some forms of extreme weather. The threats of global climate change could be paramount because the extreme climate alone is capable of destroying all human achievements

in a short moment. The environment overall has worsened over the decades, threatening human health and economic sustainability.

Although most university research is addressing these global challenges, the level of its alignment determines the relevance of university research. In a way, research at universities must be well-aligned with the global and societal challenges because active research programs require funding, and funding sources, for the most part, have programs highly relevant to the abovementioned global challenges. For instance, the largest research funding agencies in the USA are the National Institutes of Health, which addresses human health-related challenges; the Department of Defense, which addresses challenges related to national security; the National Science Foundation (NSF), which supports all fields of fundamental science and engineering except for medical sciences; Department of Energy, which addresses challenges related to energy; and many other smaller funding agencies such as USDA, which addresses challenges related to food and agriculture, environment, and human sciences enterprises; Department of Commerce, which addresses challenges related to natural resources; and Environment Protection Agency (EPA), which addresses issues related to the environment. Of course, there are overlapping areas among funding agencies, and there are also inter-agency areas of research.

Because research requires resources, alignment of university research with national research trends and funding trend is a critical matter. Reflecting on my research leadership career, lots of activities I guided were related to aligning university research with global challenges and national research and funding trends. For instance, in the College of Agriculture at Auburn, we had excellent faculty. However, over time, many faculty members became “old-fashioned” because of technological advances. Many of us were doing highly relevant research related to crop and animal production but at the organismal levels. Since the 1980s, most funding agencies shifted their support to more basic, fundamental research involving molecular biological research. We must align our new hires with the funding trend. Cluster hire is one of the most effective approaches to make the such alignment.

### **3 Leading Research to Enhance Collaborations**

Many of the global challenges, if not all, require collaborative research efforts to solve the problems because none of the real-world challenges can be resolved by single disciplinary research. Many such collaborations require not only multidisciplinary efforts but multi-institutional, national, and global collaborations. Taking climate change as an example, breakthroughs and solutions can only be developed by international collaborations. Global food security requires scientists to work together across the world.

In most cases, university structures do not necessarily support collaborative efforts effectively. Universities are composed of colleges and schools, which include related departments and disciplines. In a typical university, there are a dozen, more or less, colleges, and schools. For instance, a university may have colleges of arts

and sciences, social sciences, engineering, business and management, communications, architecture, education, human ecology, pharmacy, nursing, medicine, law, etc. Although such structures make good sense in organizing disciplinary teaching and research activities, the structures themselves are barriers to collaboration. Global challenges, on the other hand, are not present in the forms of colleges or departments. This would mandate collaborations of scientists and engineers, humanists, artists, and social scientists beyond the borders of departments and colleges. Research leaders and university leadership must find ways to enhance interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary collaborations.

Theoretically, most university faculty can agree that collaboration is important. However, researchers are extremely busy people, and they tend to work independently, leading to silos. Most faculty do not know what is being done in other colleges, or other departments of the same college. In the worst situation, some faculty members do not even know what is being done by their colleagues in the same department, posing serious barriers to the development of solutions for real-world challenges.

To promote collaborations, universities often establish interdisciplinary programs, centers, and institutes that prove useful in promoting collaborations. For instance, an institute of environmental research may include researchers from various colleges. However, at times, such centers or institutes may be conflicting with home colleges or departments, especially when financial conflicts are involved. The challenge is how to reduce or resolve such conflicts. The key issue is transparency and communication. A case needs to be made as to why collaboration is better. Taking the inter-college CMB Program at Auburn as an example, the colleagues from different colleges who work in genetics, molecular biology, and genomics would have so much more in common with my research of aquaculture genomics than those of my colleagues in my department working on other aspects of aquaculture. Cluster hire is a great approach to hiring multiple faculty members into various colleges with the expectation of collaboration.

## **4 Supporting Research Infrastructure and Core Facilities**

Modern research is expensive because many research projects require the use of very expensive equipment, supercomputing facilities, and core facilities. Traditionally, research equipment is supported by startup packages during faculty hiring. The faculty member usually provides a list of needed equipment, and the university offers a lump sum of funds to meet such needs through the startup package. This model works well when the research equipment is not too expensive, and when research equipment needs are relatively stable, stable enough for most of the faculty's career. Such a model worked well back in the past century but is increasingly challenging for most universities. First, the list becomes longer and longer and more and more expensive; second, many pieces of the requested equipment are duplicates in the university and often even in the department; and third, the waste of

expensive equipment without equipment sharing because such equipment is regarded as “my laboratory equipment.” Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it is not possible to provide individual faculty startup funds sufficient enough to buy very expensive pieces of modern equipment such as DNA sequencers, cell sorters, bifocal microscopes, gas chromatography, mass spectrometry, electron microscopes, and supercomputer clusters, among many other pieces of equipment required for modern research, nor do they need such equipment in their laboratory because they may use such equipment just a few times a year.

I started to learn about these problems in 2007 when I became associate dean for research. In 2013, I started to serve as Associate Provost and Associate Vice President for research at Auburn University. My responsibility included approval of startup packages for new hires. Very quickly, I realized how significant these problems were. For instance, there existed over 40 HPLC (high-performance liquid chromatography) units on the Auburn campus already, but several new hires requested HPLC in their lists of equipment needs. Such situations required us to have innovative solutions so that we no longer need to buy more HPLCs at Auburn while the new hires are assured availability of the equipment for their research. This is where core facilities came in. Rather than each faculty member possessing individual units of expensive equipment and using such equipment only a few times a year, we supported the core facilities to provide capabilities, capacities, and shared usage.

Through this simple example, I hope the readers are convinced that we need to reduce redundancy, increase equipment sharing, and as a university, offer greater capabilities and capacities to purchase, upgrade, and replace expensive pieces of equipment. While in theory this is so simple, putting it to practice requires lots of details as to how to cost share between the colleges and the university or how to charge individual users user fees to promote the equipment usage but generate funds for maintenance, upgrade, and replacement. Thanks to my great colleague Dr. Carl Pinkert, who also contributed much to solving this problem. Our efforts streamlined the university’s core facilities. Just the savings on startup funds alone were significant enough to allow the university to provide millions of dollars in supporting the core facilities. In 2014, research needs at the university required the acquisition of next-generation sequencers and supercomputer clusters. We worked with the faculty on various ideas. Thanks to my colleague Dr. Nick Giordano, who had worked at Purdue University, for introducing the “Purdue model” for supercomputing. Purdue University had so large computing needs that they had to purchase one supercomputer every year. By the seventh year, they would have seven supercomputers. Starting in year eight, they would allow the retirement of the first supercomputer. This way, they were able to have the capacity of seven supercomputer clusters simultaneously running. Auburn’s computing needs were smaller, but we adopted the modified Purdue model, purchasing one supercomputer cluster every 3 years, and in the seventh year, the first supercomputer cluster was allowed to retire. This way, we always provided a capacity of two supercomputer clusters in service. The funding model was particularly interesting. Those who had the largest computing

needs provided half of the funds to purchase the nodes, while the university provided the other half of the funds. When these faculty members were not using the supercomputers, their nodes became available for other faculty members to use.

In 2010, through a competitive grant, I led a team and won a large construction grant from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), which allowed the construction of the CASIC (Center for Advanced Science, Innovation and Commerce) building. This was the first interdisciplinary building on campus. This building hosts the most active researchers in five cluster areas: food safety, water quality, bioenergy, climate change, and genomics. Since its construction in 2013, the building has been a hub of interdisciplinary research. The building, along with the core facilities and supercomputer clusters it hosts, serves as a capstone of the success of interdisciplinary research at Auburn University.

## 5 Cluster Hires

Cluster hire means hiring multiple lines of faculty of related fields in different colleges and schools. For instance, in a cluster of environmental research, multiple faculty lines can be allocated to cover air quality research (could be a faculty for the College of Forestry or College of Sciences), water research (could be a faculty line for the College of Natural Resources), mathematical modeling (could be a faculty line in the mathematics department in the College of Science), environmental engineering (could be a faculty line in the College of Engineering), natural resources (could be a faculty line in the College of Agriculture), economics (could be a faculty line in the College of Social Sciences or College of Business), and communications (could be a faculty line in the College of Communications or College of Liberal Arts), among other disciplines.

One of the major objectives of cluster hires is to enhance interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary collaborations. As reflected in the program, faculty members recruited through cluster hires are expected to collaborate with existing and newly hired faculty in the cluster. In addition to the expectations, the accountability also lands on the promotion and tenure decisions where collaborations are evaluated by both the home department and the involved cluster. Many clusters also have regularly organized platforms and activities, such as equipment core facilities and regular seminar programs, through which faculty learn, interact, and initiate collaborations. Most importantly, each cluster is established to address a major scientific area, societal challenge, or technology development. As such, their collaborations are not only mandated by the intention but also necessitated by the research and instructional needs.

A second major benefit of cluster hires is to align the university with societal challenges and hence with funding trends. In most cases of cluster hires, the cluster area must be fundable which is usually an evaluation criterion. Such alignment most often leads to increases in extramural funding at the university. In addition to the



alignment of the cluster with the funding trend, various expertise available in the cluster offer golden opportunities for collaboration, which also increases the chances of projects getting funded.

The third major benefit of cluster hires is to enhance faculty quality and competitiveness. In the current competitive research environment, it is the competitiveness of the faculty that defines the level of success of university research. Cluster hires attract top talents to apply for the positions and therefore allow hiring of the most competitive faculty.

In addition to aligning faculty hires with societal challenges, enhancing faculty competitiveness and success, and enhancing collaborations, cluster hires have been found to help increase faculty diversity (Report of the Provost's Ad Hoc Advisory Committee to Evaluate the Cluster Hiring Initiative University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003; Flaherty, n.d.; Faculty Cluster Hiring for Diversity and Institutional Climate, n.d.). Some major research universities such as the University of Wisconsin at Madison started cluster hires as early as the late 1990s and used the mechanism repeatedly to boost the competitiveness of its faculty, enforce collaborations, and enhance faculty diversity (<https://facstaff.provost.wisc.edu/cluster-hiring-initiative/>). Their many years of work indicated a great level of success, with many rounds of cluster hires (Report of the Provost's Ad Hoc Advisory Committee to Evaluate the Cluster Hiring Initiative University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003; Report of the Cluster/Interdisciplinary Advisory Committee to Evaluate the Cluster Hiring Initiative, 2008). Similarly, cluster hires are used by many other research universities such as UC-Davis, University of Virginia, Vanderbilt University, and of course, as I will further describe as examples of my work, Auburn University and Syracuse University.

Cluster hires can be in various forms to achieve the goals and priorities of the university. One of the benefits of cluster hires is its positive effect on enhancing faculty diversity. This is because when multiple lines of faculty are considered robustly, underrepresented minority applicants are likely to be included in the pool, and they are competitive to be hired in one or more slots of the cluster. In addition, all candidates, including underrepresented minority applicants, are more attracted to clusters because they have a cohort of colleagues to work with, which enhances success. Cluster hires can be used directly to enhance faculty diversity by establishing diversity-focused clusters (Oldach, 2022). At Auburn University, we established a cluster of Health disparities, and at Syracuse University, we established a cluster of social difference and social justice, which allowed us to increase the hiring of underrepresented minority faculty, in both universities. In addition to the selection of clusters, which may directly enhance diversity, financial incentives can be provided to further enhance faculty diversity. For instance, at Syracuse University, I guided a policy to incentivize hiring faculty from underrepresented minority groups; central university funds cover 60% of the total costs when an underrepresented faculty member is hired, as compared to 50% for the cluster hires program.

## 6 Making Cluster Hires Work for Our Universities

Cluster hires are beneficial in many ways, but such efforts can fail due to many reasons. Education Advisory Board (EAB) published “A Playbook for Effective Cluster Hiring” (n.d.) which provided many of the processes and cautionary steps. However, even if you follow the playbook, guiding successful cluster hires is by no means an easy task. In many cases, great efforts for cluster hires may be perceived as choosing winners and losers. The key is to figure out what works for the university. Among many factors, we must understand in what areas we are doing well in the nation and around the world and in what areas we could be doing well in the nation and around the world. Once the university’s strengths and niche areas are determined and communicated to the university community, it is time to start discussions of what clusters the university should have to play to strengths and avoid weaknesses. Leaders help set a strong vision, inspire the community to achieve the vision, and work with the community to find effective strategies to achieve the vision. While cluster hires provide a good venue for such discussions, they do not automatically offer any benefits.

In 2013, I became Associate Provost and Associate Vice President for research at Auburn University. In light of the rapidly changing environment in national and global research priorities and extramural funding for research, I led the inaugural Associate Deans for Research (ADR) retreat. While it was called the ADR retreat, the retreat involved all the deans, several vice presidents, the Provost, and the President. Through serious preparation of 5 months of work, we concluded the ADR retreat with a consensus report. This report included eight recommendations: (1) increase the proportion of research-active faculty; (2) expand research funding portfolio, making it well-aligned with extramural funding opportunities; (3) hire competitive faculty and increase tenure standards to ensure an excellent faculty; (4) set clear research expectations; (5) install policies that provide incentives for continued productive services throughout their entire careers; (6) provide competitive startup packages to attract top talents; (7) prioritize equipment needs and make strategic and coordinated investment on research equipment and research infrastructure; and (8) transform the culture, foster a culture of research importance and support. All these recommendations were adopted by the university. This ADR retreat sets a vision of achieving Carnegie Research 1 classification. I guided the efforts and established task forces working on specific recommendations for achieving the R1 status. The entire university worked relentlessly in the years following that retreat. In 2018, Auburn University achieved its R1 status.

One of Auburn’s efforts was cluster hires. Because of the ADR retreat and related work, cluster hires to align the university research with the funding trend were a relatively easy sell. Sitting where I was in the lead roles, I must make sure cluster hire proposals were generated by faculty, supported by departments, and colleges and supported by the Provost and the President. Our rationales for these cluster hires included (1) government funding agencies shifting their efforts toward more basic research; (2) mission-driven agencies focused more on future problems such as

climate change, human health, and energy; and (3) funding agencies funded more interdisciplinary research involving team collaborations. Cluster hires could address these changes. Through a series of faculty forums, and vetting processes among departments and colleges, in 2015, we established 5 research clusters with 41 faculty positions. These clusters spanned Climate, Human and Earth System Sciences (CHESS), Institute for Scalable Energy Conversion Science & Technology (ISEC-S&T), Health Disparities, Omics and Informatics, and Pharmaceutical Engineering. Each of these clusters involved at least four colleges or schools.

Syracuse University is a private research university. There is no state funding available for research. In addition, a large proportion of the colleges and schools at Syracuse University are professional schools. These professional schools conduct excellent research but, for the most part, are not in the STEM areas. Making a case that cluster hires will generate great results requires lots of work. The first thing is to be inclusive of all schools and colleges.

The success of cluster hire programs requires the determination of proper cluster areas, the hiring of competitive faculty, and concerted efforts in fostering collaborations. Selected cluster areas must represent university strengths, align with national research trends and funding opportunities, and have high relevance to the advancement of science and technology, economic development, environmental enhancement, social progress, and intellectual and creative growth in the humanities. Over a period of 18 months, we engaged in ideation processes that led to the approval of seven clusters in the first round of cluster hiring, funding 56 positions. We provided strong guidelines to assist in the hiring of competitive faculty who can contribute to cluster activities and enhance the diversity of our faculty. We also provided guidelines for faculty evaluation, including advertising the positions, the interview process, the expectations specified in offering letters, annual reviews, pre-tenure reviews, and tenure and promotion.

The seven clusters represented strengths and niche areas at Syracuse University. These included (1) aging, behavioral health, and neuroscience; (2) artificial intelligence, deep learning, autonomous systems, and policy; (3) Big Data and data analytics; (4) bio-inspired; (5) energy and environment; (6) innovation and entrepreneurship; and (7) social differences and social justice. The first round of cluster hires at Syracuse University was regarded as a great success. Using one faculty's original words: "We have not seen such excitement in research at Syracuse University for a long time." Because of the success, we conducted a second round of cluster hires in 2018 that added three additional clusters: (1) quantum computing and cryptography; (2) citizenship and democratic institutions; and (3) digital and immersive interactions.

Reflecting on the processes, it was never easy to obtain a consensus on what the clusters should be. It took many rounds of ideation and many rounds of vetting. The final approval process was most democratic but with very strong guidelines. It was most democratic because the ideas of clusters were all generated by the faculty; all college deans, associate deans for research, and faculty senate research committee members were involved in ranking, using cluster hire criteria as guidance. We wanted to be sure the position will generate significant scholarship, will have a

substantial impact on research and education, and were relevant to the strategic positioning of the school/college for long-term success. With two rounds of cluster hires, we have approved a total of 122 clusters hire faculty positions, which is more than 10% of all tenured and tenure-track faculty. We have already started to see the results, with significantly increased extramural funding. In 2022, the new cohort of faculty from cluster hires succeeded with 10 NSF Career Awards, indicating the competitiveness of these cluster hires. As you may imagine, the impact is huge in the years to come.

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**Dr. Zhanjiang (John) Liu**, a native of China has worked around the world as a scientist, educator, and leader. His areas of research expertise include aquaculture, biotechnology, genetics, genomics, and bioinformatics.

Dr. Liu is serving as Vice President for Research Tennessee Tech University. Before this role, served at Syracuse University as Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs for 2 years and Vice Presidents for Research and International Strategy for several years. He held at Auburn University such positions as Associate Provost, Associate Vice President for Research for 4 years, and Associate Dean for Research in the College of Agriculture for 6 years.

A “first-generation student,” he obtained his BS degree and graduated with distinction in 1981 from Northwest A&F University, China, majoring in Plant Protection. He obtained his MS (1985) and Ph.D. (1989) in Plant Pathology and Molecular and Cellular Biology from the University of Minnesota. He worked in the Institute of Human Genetics of the University of Minnesota Medical School as a research faculty and then as

Director for R&D at National Biosciences, Inc. before he joined the faculty of Auburn University in 1995, where he worked through the ranks of assistant professor, associate professor, full professor, and distinguished Alumni Professor. He served as center/institute director, associate dean for research in the College of Agriculture, associate director of the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station, Associate Provost, and Associate Vice President for research at Auburn University. In 2017, he was recruited to serve as the Vice President for Research at Syracuse University, and in November 2019, he was appointed as Interim Vice Chancellor and Provost, Chief Academic Officer at Syracuse University.

As an international authority in aquaculture genomics and bioinformatics, Liu has trained more than 100 Ph.D. students and postdocs, obtained more than 80 grants totaling more than \$50 million, and published four books and more than 350 papers and book chapters. He received numerous awards including the Creative Research and Scholarship Award from Auburn University and the Outstanding Achievement Award from the University of Minnesota. He was elected a Fellow of AAAS in 2007 and a Fellow of the World Aquaculture Society in 2017. He coordinated the USDA National Aquaculture Genome program for almost 20 years and was inducted into the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture Hall of Fame in 2022.

# To Lead, to Serve, and to Transform: From Law School Dean to University President



Wallace D. Loh

I began my faculty career in 1974 as an assistant professor at the University of Washington (UW) Law School with an adjunct appointment in the Department of Psychology. My proudest moment as a faculty member was when UW Law students selected me as the “Outstanding Professor of the Year” (1990).

In 1990, I was asked to serve on the dean search committee of the UW Law School. One day, the committee requested that I excuse myself, and, when I returned, the committee informed me that it had decided to nominate me for the deanship. Of course, if I agreed to it, I would have to resign from the committee. I had not sought the position, but after reflection, I consented to be a candidate. A couple of top external candidates withdrew from the dean search process, so the UW president appointed me. In 1990, I became the first Chinese American dean of a US law school. When news reporters asked the UW president about my appointment, he stated that he selected me because of my academic leadership potential and not for any historical or ethnic reasons.

During my years as dean, the number of highly qualified Asian American student applicants to the UW Law School soared, even though there were no changes in the admissions criteria or process. The UW Law School rose to the top 10 ranked US public law schools, established clinical legal education and public service programs, achieved a new record in fundraising, and secured state appropriations as well as private funds for a new law school building.

In 1993, the National Asian Pacific Bar Association presented me with the “Trailblazer Award” and the Hispanic Bar Association gave me its “Diversity Award.” To this day, I still consider myself an “accidental dean.” In 1996, I was

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elected President of the Association of American Law Schools, the scholarly and professional society of the academic legal profession. My experiences as a law dean and later as the Director of the Executive Policy Office of Governor Gary Locke of the State of WA were invaluable in preparing me for the presidency of UMCP.

Among the approximately 4000 colleges and universities in the USA, there were as of 2020 about 400 sitting presidents who are lawyers, or 10% of the total. But from 1900 to 1990, i.e., during most of the twentieth century, there were only about 40 sitting presidents who were lawyers, or only 1% of the total number of presidents. Thus, the increase in the number of lawyers as university presidents is a relatively recent and growing trend.

The sitting presidents with law backgrounds are mainly academic lawyers, not practicing lawyers. Academic lawyers have the teaching and scholarly credentials that give them credibility with their peers in other academic disciplines on campus, such as the arts and sciences faculty. They also have administrative experience, if they served as law school deans. In contrast, most successful legal practitioners are unlikely to have this academic background and experience. This is why I believe that a successful law dean is likely to be a successful university president. The question, then, is what constitutes “success” in a law school deanship and a university presidency? In my view, a successful law school dean is:

- (1) A transformative dean, one who does not simply maintain the status quo of the institution.
- (2) A university statesman or stateswoman, one who seeks to improve not only his or her school but also to improve the larger university of which that school is a part.
- (3) A prophetic pioneer, one who seeks to anticipate future trends and acts accordingly. When Wayne Gretzky, one of the greatest professional hockey players ever, was asked what made him such a great player, he said: “I don’t skate to where the puck is, I skate to where the puck is going to be.”

After I served as the UW Law School dean for 5 years (1990–1995), the UW announced the search for a new Provost. I asked the UW president, who appointed me to the law deanship if I would be a viable candidate for this position. He said he would strongly recommend me for the provostship at any university in the country, but he would not hire me at the UW. The reason was that I had spent my entire administrative career at the UW and, therefore, I would not bring a new or fresh perspective to the position of the chief academic officer. I then applied for and accepted the position of Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculties (since retitled Provost), and Professor of Law, at the University of Colorado at Boulder, starting in 1995.

At that time, the CU-Boulder campus had about 25,000 students and 2300 faculty and staff in nine colleges and several major interdisciplinary research institutes. My office oversaw 11 deans, 9 associate vice chancellors, and several academic directors across the campus. I mobilized 60 faculty and staff members to help craft a 4-year strategic plan to strengthen undergraduate education and the research

enterprise and also to expand continuing education and outreach to better serve the citizens of the State of Colorado.

My family remained in Seattle because I had elderly parents and a daughter who was still in elementary school. I commuted weekly between Boulder and Seattle. After 2 years (1995–1997), I stepped down from my position at CU-Boulder for family reasons and returned permanently to my home in Seattle.

Governor Gary Locke of the State of Washington – a lawyer and the first Asian American governor in the continental USA – then asked me to join his administration and serve as his policy director. In this capacity, I oversaw some 20 policy advisers and staff in the Governor’s office who worked on a range of policy issues, such as welfare reform and saving the Pacific Northwest salmon. I helped launch and staff Governor Locke’s “2020 Commission on the Future of Higher Education in the State of Washington,” comprised of business, community, and academic leaders from around the state. One result of this commission was the creation of the “Washington Promise Scholarship,” a 2-year grant to expand access to public higher education in the state and funded by state appropriations.

After 3 years in the Governor’s office, I accepted the deanship of the College of Arts and Sciences at Seattle University, drawn by its Jesuit mission of “the service of faith and the promotion of justice.” I served in this role from 2000 to 2008. During this period, the College of Arts and Sciences grew in student enrollment, faculty size, new academic programs, tuition revenues, and philanthropic support.

I then applied for and was offered the position of Executive Vice President and Provost at the University of Iowa. The new president of the University of Iowa, who appointed me to this position, became an invaluable mentor. I started amid the Great Flood of 2008, the worst in the history of the state of Iowa. It damaged numerous campus buildings, and the cost of recovery and rebuilding was enormous. Then, the Great Recession of 2009 led to historic reductions in state funding to public institutions, including the University of Iowa. I was deeply moved when many faculty members on campus volunteered to accept deeper cuts to their paychecks to protect lower-paid staff members as a result of the state funding reductions.

After I served for 2 years at the University of Iowa (2008–2010), UMCP offered me the position of president starting in 2010. At the time, UMCP had about 40,000 students; some 10,000 faculty and staff, distributed among 13 schools and colleges; and an annual operating budget of about \$2 billion.

From my years of working in state government, I knew that the presidency of a public research university can be the most political, nonpolitical (i.e., non-elected) position in a state. Thus, shortly after I took office, UMCP’s state government relations staff urged me to meet soon and develop a relationship with the longest-serving and powerful president of the Maryland State Senate, Mike Miller, a UMCP alumnus. I met President Miller at the scheduled appointment and I introduced myself, but he just looked at me for a while. Then, he said somewhat dismissively, “So, you’re the new UMCP president? I would have thought that UMCP would have appointed someone like “X” [the provost at a California university who became the US Secretary of State], or someone like “Y” [the president at a Texas university who became the US Secretary of Defense].” I have known many politicians in the State



of Washington during my years in Governor Locke's administration. I realized that I was being tested, so I ignored President Miller's comment. Instead, I thanked him for his years of service as Senate President and for his loyalty to his Alma Mater. I expressed my interest in seeking his support and guidance as we work together to raise UMCP to the next level of academic excellence and service to the people of Maryland. I passed the test.

A few months after I met Senate President Miller, I went to a fundraising event for him, attended by hundreds of his supporters and contributors. He saw me in the crowd, announced my presence, and asked me to join him, his wife, and two daughters on the platform. He then invited reporters to take photos of the platform group. The photos appeared in newspapers the next day. The message that I think President Miller sought to convey to state legislators and the voters of Maryland through the publication of the photos of the platform group was that he considered the new UMCP president to be like a member of his own family. He became my strongest supporter and my most valued adviser in the Maryland legislature during my decade as UMCP president (2010–2020).

Soon after I started as president, the UMCP Director of Athletics informed me that the intercollegiate athletics department had a substantial financial deficit. Therefore, several varsity teams had to be cut to balance the budget. By state law, no state funds can be used to support intercollegiate athletics. Athletics is the "front porch" of a university. It is not the most important part of the academic house, but it is the most visible part. With the Athletics Director, we had heartbreaking talks with the student-athletes. I informed them that their lifelong dream of playing for, and representing, UMCP in various sports could be over due to financial reasons. However, I assured them that UMCP would continue to honor their athletic scholarships, so they could complete their college degrees. After meeting confidentially with, and securing the support of, top elected and higher education officials in Maryland, I approached the Big Ten Commissioner. The purpose was to negotiate secretly and sign a confidential agreement that UMCP would join this conference and, in return, the Big Ten conference would provide substantial new revenues to UMCP's intercollegiate athletics program. This would ensure the program's long-term financial viability.

Members of the public and the media, unaware of the large budget deficits or of the anticipated large revenues to the intercollegiate athletics department, were incensed when UMCP announced that it was ending its decades-long membership in a southern-based athletic conference to join a northern-based conference. (During the Civil War, some Marylanders fought for the North and some for the South.) The campus police provided me with a security detail. My seasoned UMCP staff anticipated public pushback on this change of conferences, but even they were taken aback by the intensity of the opposition. As it turned out, when the amount of new revenue from the Big Ten Conference was leaked and published in a national sports magazine, people were relieved that the intercollegiate athletics program would be saved and its future assured. (UMCP was **not** the source of the leak.) The faculty was pleased that UMCP would join the Big Ten Academic Alliance, a consortium of peer universities with extensive and shared educational and research activities in addition to competing in sports. Thus, joining this conference resulted in substantial academic benefits as well as unprecedented athletic revenues.

In 2011, the American Immigration Council bestowed on me its “Immigrant Achievement Award” and in 2012, and the *Huffington Post* included me among the “Ten Most Popular College Presidents.” In 2015, I was elected a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences for “iconoclastic leadership” of UMCP, and the Governor of Maryland awarded me the “Presentation for Excellence.” In 2017, the *WA Business Journal* included me among the “Power 100 Leaders” in the Washington, D.C. area. In 2018, the *Daily Record* listed me as an “Influential Marylander,” and the Steamboat Institute in Colorado presented me with the “Courage in Education Award” for advancing freedom of expression on campuses. In 2020, the Maryland State Senate enacted Resolution 202 for my role in “guiding UMCP to transformational advances in academic, community, and economic development,” and the Maryland House of Delegates enacted Resolution 93 for my “visionary leadership in guiding UMCP to new heights of academic excellence.”

In 2022, the College Park City Council unveiled a plaque in City Hall in appreciation for my role in helping make the city “a better place to live and work with collaborative programs in education, development, transportation, and public safety 2010-2020.” My strategy of “place-making” in College Park was to create an ecosystem that blends education, research, innovation, and entrepreneurship and is built around the state’s flagship university as the anchor institution.

My volunteer community service activities, while in office as UMCP president and/or thereafter, include the “Scholars’ Advisory Committee” to the Museum of Chinese Americans in NYC (2021–2022); the Washington D.C.-based Bipartisan Policy Center’s “Academic Leaders’ Task Force on Free Expression on Campuses” (2020–2021), which produced a report with recommendations that have been adopted by many college and universities; the advisory board of the US Comptroller General, Government Accountability Office (since 2013); the board of directors of the American Council on Education and mentor to ACE Fellows (2014–2018); and the Greater Washington Board of Trade (2017–2020).

I held a top FBI security clearance and served as chair of the academic advisory council to the US Secretary of Homeland Security (2011–2013). I served as board chair and founding member of a public charter school, College Park Academy (2014–2020). As UW Law School dean and UMCP president, I initiated and completed major fundraising campaigns supporting financial aid, education, research, new facilities, and community development.

As for my background, I am a “Latasian” or Latino-Asian. I was born in China, and at the age of 2, I moved with my parents to Peru. My native languages are Spanish and Chinese. They opened a small mom-and-pop grocery store that was open 365 days a year. I worked at the store when not attending school. We lived in four rooms behind the grocery store. After graduating from high school, my parents gave me their life savings (\$400) and a one-way airline ticket to the USA. At the age of 16, I came to a field of dreams called Iowa. I had a partial tuition scholarship and worked my way through college with part-time campus jobs, first at Iowa Wesleyan College and then at Grinnell College. Each of them subsequently awarded me an honorary doctoral degree in 2010 and 1994, respectively.

I was sustained – as generations of immigrants before and after me have been sustained – by an unwavering faith in this land of freedom and opportunity, and that with

hard work, scrappy determination, perseverance, and education, I could realize my dreams. I am grateful to the trailblazers of earlier generations whose struggles paved the way for me and many others. My personal story is of no consequence other than as a story of the importance of education and the promise of America. After I became a naturalized US citizen, I helped sponsor my parents' immigration, and we were reunited.

Serving as a university administrator and helping educate the next generation of citizens and residents is a way of giving back to a country that has given me so many opportunities.



**Dr. Wallace Loh** was born in China; moved with his parents to Peru at age 2. He came alone to the USA at age 16. He attended Grinnell College (BA), Cornell University (MA), University of Louvain (Belgium), University of Michigan (Ph.D., in psychology), and Yale (JD).

He served as President of the University of Maryland, College Park in 2010–2020; Provost of the University of Iowa (2008–2010); Dean of Arts & Sciences at Seattle University (2000–2008); Policy Director of Governor Gary Locke (WA, 1997–2000); Academic Vice-Chancellor of University of Colorado (1995–1997); Dean of the University of Washington Law School (1990–1995); the first Chinese American dean in US legal education); a visiting professor at the University of Texas, the University of Houston, Emory, Vanderbilt, and Cornell. Dr. Loh served on the boards of the US Comptroller General; the Greater WA Board of Trade; the American Council on Education; the Academic Advisory Council to the US Secretary of Homeland Security; Big Ten Conference representative to the NCAA D-1 presidential forum; and President of the Association of American Law Schools (1996). He received many honors including the State of MD Senate's "First Citizen Award" (2018); MD House of Delegates' Resolution 93 for "Visionary Leadership of UMCP" (2020); Steamboat Institute (CO) "Courage in Education Award 2018"; *Daily Record* "Influential Marylander" (2018); *WA Business Journal* "Power 100 Leaders" (2017); Fellow of American Academy of Arts & Sciences (2015); *Huffington Post*'s "Ten Most Popular College Presidents" (2012); American Immigration Council's "Achievement Award 2011"; National Asian-Pacific American Bar Association "Trailblazer Award" (1993); Hispanic Bar Association "Diversity Award" (1993); and the University of Washington Law School "Professor of the Year" (1990).

Dr. Loh was a visiting professor of law at Peking University (1989), Cornell University (1987), University of Texas-Austin (1984), University of Houston (1981), Emory University (1980), and Vanderbilt University (1977). He taught courses in Criminal Procedure, Criminal Law, Contract Law, Law and Social Science, freshman seminars, and continuing legal education seminars. His scholarship and academic publications are centered around legal policy issues informed by research and statistical analyses, evaluation of criminal justice reforms, and law and social change. His 1985 book, *Social Research in the Judicial Process* was published by Russell Sage Foundation Press.

# When You Were a Student at Harvard, Did You Dream of Becoming a Dean?



Xiao-Li Meng

The question in the title was posed by a reporter from a Chinese media in Boston shortly after I was appointed the Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS) at Harvard. My immediate thought was, “What kind of question is that?” Students’ minds are filled with dreams of all forms and shapes, but I doubt becoming a dean is one with any detectable signal. As a Chinese student coming to the USA in 1986, struggling to comprehend why no one understood my slowly and correctly pronounced English, I would be delusional if I were hallucinating then about becoming a dean. Indeed, that thought never registered even after I was appointed the chair of Harvard’s statistics department in 2004. Only after I was asked to become the GSAS dean, did I sit down and ask myself, “Wait, what have I done?”

However, after my knee-jerk reaction, it dawned on me that the reporter’s question had a far deeper undertone than reflected by its apparent naivety. If I never had dreamed of becoming a dean, how did I end up being one? My honest answer is that I do not know. It just happened. Yes, from a student to a dean is a long journey for those who had such a dream during their students’ days. But for the rest of us, it is merely many life meanderings, with one thing leading to another.

To start, I managed to complete my Ph.D. thesis with 12 chapters, of which 8 articles were eventually published. That apparently qualified me to be appointed an assistant professor of statistics at the University of Chicago in 1991, hence completing my transition from student to faculty. That is a step many have taken successfully before me, with me, and after me. There is nothing special about it for those who choose to stay in academia.

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Similarly, during my Chicago years, I went through the usual steps going from assistant professor to associate professor and then promoted to full professor. Many have done that before me and many after. I was then recruited by Harvard, which again was not anything special since most academics have had positions in at least two institutions in their careers.

When I joined Harvard's statistics department in 2001, it was a very small one with only six full professors (including me). For a small department, it is not unusual for senior faculty members to take turns being the department chair. (Whether that is a good idea or not is the subject of a different article.) Unlike almighty department chairs in some countries, being a department chair in US institutions is mostly considered a thankless job, worrying about lack of resources and how to staff courses; dealing with complaints from faculty, staff, and students; reading and writing many administrative documents; etc. Since I was the newest senior faculty and had not had my share of doing the "thankless" job, I became the department chair in 2004.

Appointing a dean from department chairs is another common practice at US academic institutions. Of course, most of the department chairs do not become deans, nor do they want to be deans even when asked. So how could any chair say that it just happened? Well, I felt this way because my deanship was primarily the result of responsibilities I took on as a department chair and the scholarly activities I engaged in as a statistician. These responsibilities and activities naturally shape my professional life, which I would experience one day at a time, much like living our biological life. We hope for the best, prepare for the worst, and reality goes on somewhere in between until it does not.

As an example of my chair's responsibility, during my first year as the chair, the department faced a mini-crisis: the enrollment in an introductory course went from under 100 to over 150 because of the popularity of a new instructor. Since Harvard did not have pre-registration then, we needed to hire three additional teaching assistants (TAs) after the course already started (in general, we require an additional TA for every 17–20 students).

Whereas we found three warm bodies, they were not given any warmup exercise or even warmup time. Complaints followed almost instantly. The students in the class complained that the TAs were unhelpful, the instructor reported that she had to spend more time helping the TAs than they helped her, and those three TAs felt frustrated because they were put into this position without any training. I agonized over what could be done to at least avoid such a situation in the future until some graduate student representatives came to my office.

"Xiao-Li, you guys teach us everything except for how to teach," one student started the conversation. "How true – nobody taught me that!" was my response. With a bit of laughing together, the same student made the suggestion that ultimately led to my deanship: "Xiao-Li, the department should create a course on how to teach." That of course was a great idea, but to maximize its benefits, I realized that I needed to teach it myself as the department chair, which would send a strong message to both faculty and students. It is no secret that in research universities, passion for and commitment to teaching vary considerably more than for research. But, of course, managing my teaching does not qualify me to teach others how to teach.

Hence my immediate second thought was that I must seek professional help, which was available through Harvard's Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning. (Derek Bok was Harvard's 25th President, known for his strong commitment to undergraduate education.)

The director of Bok Center was delighted that a department chair reached out to him for help in creating a course on pedagogy and immediately arranged for an associate director to work with me to create "Stat 303: The Art and Practice of Teaching Statistics." The development of Stat 303 deserves a separate article since it has evolved from training TAs to teaching how to teach, communicating how to communicate, and learning how to learn. But its benefits are easy to enumerate. It started a new chapter in the department (teaching) culture, gradually changing its image from a pedagogically struggling and culturally isolated department to a hub for statistical education in addition to statistical research. The results were that the deans of the college were happy that the statistics department provided significantly better learning experiences for undergraduate students; the deans of GSAS were delighted that we provided professional development opportunities for graduate students; and the deans of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) were pleased because other department chairs praised statistics as providing better teaching service to their students. (I used "deans" because Harvard had 128 deans, as I was told by a former dean when I was considering if I should take on the GSAS deanship; whether he was joking or not, the serious message was to "not take yourself too seriously," which proved to be sage advice.)

Besides the credit I received for (accidentally) fostering the change in the department, I later learned that my broad research activities were another factor to me becoming a dean. Because GSAS hosts all Ph.D. programs at Harvard, not merely those from FAS (the complex organizational structure at Harvard would take a yet another chapter to explain), it is ideal to have a dean who can appreciate the values of as many disciplines—and in as substantive terms—as possible. As a statistician, I have collaborated with astrophysicists, engineers, epidemiologists, physicians, psychiatrists, political scientists, sociologists, etc., and hence I have had the opportunities to directly appreciate these disciplines. But of course, the list is only a fraction of what GSAS covers. I still recall the sweat dripping down on my spine as I was walking with my team to an admission meeting at the Department of Romance Languages when I suddenly realized that I had little idea what constitutes Romance languages or even how many of them there are!

As the GSAS dean, I needed to deliver an orientation speech and a commencement speech each year. Reflecting on my accidental journey from a GSAS student to a GSAS dean, I thought the most useful advice I could provide was those lessons I learned along the way. It would be too naïve to hope that sharing my stories would reduce the hard lessons waiting for students as they embark on new journeys, be they at Harvard and beyond. Rather, the hope was that having seen how naïve I was and yet ending up as their dean, the students could be better prepared psychologically for the hard lessons awaiting them. Besides, having to look up the dean who delivered the commencement speech when I graduated (and of course, I recall zero phrases from that dean's speech), sharing personal stories—and some

academic humor if there is such a thing—was the only noncontroversial strategy that I could think of to increase the probability that the students would still remember who their dean was three decades later. Below are four such speeches, and they are chosen because they cover stories from four different stages of my accidental “dream” journey: being a student, being a faculty member, being a chair, and being a dean. They are reproduced here for students beyond my deanship, beyond Harvard, and indeed of all ages, with a simple message: dream on!

## 1 2014 Orientation Speech

Twenty-eight years ago, I sat in your seat, excited, overwhelmed, full of energy, full of curiosity, but completely clueless about what would lie ahead of me. I am sure you all have a lot more clues than I did, but I suspect that some surprises will still come your way. Therefore, as your dean, I feel obligated to help you by sharing three stories from which I learned hard lessons. Please listen carefully because I will randomly quiz some of you during lunch today about the common theme underlying these three seemingly unrelated stories. (Yes, you still need to take quizzes in graduate school.)

### 1.1 Story One

One of the first things you need to do here is to establish a computer account. This was the same during my time, except that I had never heard of the concept of a *computer account* before I arrived at Harvard; indeed, I didn’t even know what a *bank account* was. So, I was literally clueless when a fellow student reminded me that I needed to open a computer account. What’s that? Fortunately, she was patient enough to take me to the basement of the Science Center and helped me to get an ID and a password. Then she brought me to a terminal and said, “Now you need to log in.” Noticing that I looked puzzled, she wrote on a piece of paper the phrase “log in.” She must have been thinking that I was having trouble understanding her English. Seeing me nodding hesitantly, she moved on to another terminal to catch up on her work.

I did understand the meaning of “in”—that’s why I nodded somehow—but I was really unsure about the meaning of “log.” I, therefore, took out an English-Chinese dictionary, my lifesaver then. It said: “Log: a piece of dead wood floating in a river.” Well, that was very enlightening, because I was feeling exactly like a piece of floating dead wood!

The moral of the story is that if you do not understand a phrase, don’t look it up, because what you find may depress you! (Pause) Seriously, the real moral of the story is that no matter how well you think that you are prepared and how smart you are, chances are that Harvard will provide occasions where you will find yourself completely dumbfounded. Don’t be surprised or depressed when it happens, as you

have been warned. Rather, embrace such occasions because that is when profound learning takes place.

## 1.2 *Story Two*

Another thing you need to do very soon is to decide which courses to take, just as I did back then. Again, being clueless, I called a friend who had come to the USA a year earlier and who was also studying statistics, but at a different institution. He gave me a constructive piece of advice: take something easy and something hard, so I'd learn something useful without overwhelming myself. This was all good, except that he did not tell me which courses were easy and which ones were hard! But I was confident in my judgment. I read through the course listings and saw "Probability Theory." Well, anything labeled theory must be hard, right? Then I saw "Linear Regression," which is just a fancier phrase for drawing a line—how hard could that be? I had drawn many lines in my life even by then.

So, you see I did follow my friend's advice, choosing something easy and something hard, except I got everything upside down! The Probability course turned out to be completely within my command, so much so that the professor distributed my solutions to the homework instead of the TA's. In contrast, drawing a regression line turned out to be much harder than I had imagined because to make sure a line is statistically meaningful, I had to check all sorts of so-called goodness-of-fit or residual plots. And no real data follow a straight line, so one has to consider making all sorts of transformations and adjustments. But the real trouble was that whenever a lack of fit seemed to be fixed for one segment, a new problem arose in another. I had absolutely no idea how to end the process because I was mechanically following the procedures given in the textbook without any understanding whatsoever of the big picture of regression. The result was that I handed in a huge deck of computer output as my homework. The professor called me in and asked me to explain. Well, I really had no idea what to say. Fortunately, my English was so poor then that the professor eventually gave up trying to understand what I was mumbling!

The moral of the story is that whenever you cannot answer your professor's question, try to speak in Chinglish. (Pause) Of course, the real moral of the story is that our judgment is heavily shaped by our past experiences. You see, I was a pure math major, and hence I judged the difficulty of a course by how theoretical it was, not by what problems it tried to solve. Simply being aware of this "experience bias" could go a long way in preventing yourself from making wrong choices.

## 1.3 *Story Three*

I learned enough hard and good lessons to survive my first year, but they did not stop coming! After I passed my qualifying exam, I needed to write a post-qualifying paper and make a post-qualifying presentation. Both were very new experiences for



me. I somehow managed to complete a 30-page, rather technical paper that made my advisor happy. With my confidence boosted, I went on to prepare my post-qualifying presentation, which was to be 30 minutes long. Perfect, I thought, 30 minutes for 30 pages. I xeroxed the entire 30 pages onto 30 slides and practiced reading one slide per minute.

Half a minute into my presentation, something disastrous happened. A professor asked a question. There was absolutely no time budgeted for questions. And how dare the professor interrupt me? I had never interrupted him when he was talking! So, I muttered some mumbo-jumbo and tried to move on. The professor stopped me immediately: “Xiao-Li, you are not answering my question.” I was dumbfounded again because I absolutely did not know how to handle this situation. To this day, I still don’t know how I walked out of that room alive.

The moral of the story is that when you prepare for a presentation, please practice reading two slides per minute, not one. (Pause) OK, the serious moral of the story is that communication skills are absolutely crucial. I know you are all very creative (unless your department made an admissions mistake) but I am less sure that all of you are very good communicators. Being creative keeps you excited about what you do, but being a good communicator keeps everyone else excited about what you do. Understanding that communication skills are not necessarily among students’ strongest suits, we at GSAS are doing more and more to help. We launched the Harvard Horizons program 2 years ago, enabling our Ph.D. students to present their most advanced research projects to general audiences, but in 5 minutes, like a super TED talk. We are also in the midst of establishing a writing center at GSAS, focusing on disciplinary-specific writing skills, which require nuances beyond the writing skills you have learned in college. And all these are a part of our overall program for professional development, which will start today with the orientation program “Becoming a New Professional in Your Field” beginning in the next hour or so.

And it is indeed the time for you to switch your mindset from merely being a student to being both a student and a professional. It is always a good idea to maintain the attitude of a student throughout life because learning is truly a life-long process. But it is also important to prepare yourself to take on professional responsibilities and accountabilities, and to be mindful of the impact and consequences of what you do or say to others, especially those who look up to you. Yes, I know that could sound rather heavy or even scary while your mind is occupied by thoughts of surviving your first year. But soon you will be trusted with the task of being a teaching assistant, a lab mentor to undergraduate students, or a residential tutor in our undergraduate houses. These are all professional responsibilities. But absolutely do not treat them as a burden necessary for your financial support. Rather, these are incredible opportunities for your own professional and career development. I do not think I would offend any of my fellow deans elsewhere by saying that any other school would be thrilled to have undergraduate students like ours working with their graduate students. This is truly a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work with so many talented students, with such rich diversity, all in one place. Believe me, they will inspire you and challenge you in every possible way you can imagine.

In short, Harvard is a wonderful place. But don't stay for too long, especially if you want to hear my stories of the hard lessons I learned after graduating from GSAS, stories that I will tell during the commencement. I won't be Dean forever! Until then, let Harvard make you proud, and may you make Harvard proud. Congratulations and welcome!

## 2 2013 Commencement Speech

At the very beginning of this academic year, I had the great pleasure of welcoming our new students. I told them three stories from the days when I was a student here to prepare them for some possibly tough times ahead. To be fair to you, I am now going to tell you three stories from the days after I graduated here to prepare you for some possibly tough times ahead.

### 2.1 Story I

Let me begin by posing the following question. How many of you are sitting there, just realizing, "Oh my God, this is it. I'll never have another chance to take exams, and I'll miss it so much!" Judging from the laughter, I gather many of you are thinking "What kind of dumb question is that? Who is going to miss taking exams?" Well, that's what I thought, some 20 years ago, sitting in your seat.

I then went on to teach at the University of Chicago, and I took my job very seriously, spending essentially the entire first quarter teaching an introductory statistics course. I carefully prepared my lectures and homework assignments, and then the time came to give the midterm. After years of taking exams, I was super excited about giving my first exam! But as the day of the exam approached, I found something strange. I found myself becoming increasingly anxious. Indeed, the night before the exam, I lost sleep.

So, I got up, and asked myself, "Xiao-Li, this makes no sense. Why am I so anxious? I am not taking the exam; I am giving it!" Then it dawned on me. It actually makes perfect sense. You see, when I was taking an exam, if I did not prepare it well, I would screw up one person—that is, me. But when I am giving an exam, if I do not prepare it well, then I will screw up everybody, including me. My body was just reminding me of that simple fact.

So, what's the moral of the story? "Never graduate, and never stop taking exams!" (Pause). Of course, that won't work, would it? The serious moral of the story is a very trite one, but one worth repeating every generation. That is, *authorities and responsibilities always come together*. If you think just because you are graduating, you will never experience exam-taking stress and anxiety; well, it is not too late for you to come here to withdraw your degree application.

Just to add a bit more stress to you, it turns out that having a good sense of responsibility is a good start, but it is far from being enough. So here comes my second story.

## 2.2 *Story II*

Earlier in the same course, I needed to give a homework assignment that involved using statistical software. Knowing many of my students had never used statistical software, I was very careful to give command-by-command instructions. Also knowing students tend to do homework at the very last minute, I told my students that I would be in my office until midnight the night before the homework was due, and they can stop by or call if they run into any problems. (You see, I took my responsibility very seriously.)

And indeed, students were stopping by, and there were phone calls, but I was able to answer all the questions. Just as I was about to pat myself on the back and call it a night, the phone rang again. It was 11:45, and it was a panic voice: “Professor Meng, I cannot download the data.” You know, to a statistics professor, that statement sounds as dreadful as a father hearing his daughter or son calling, “Dad, I cannot find the credit card you gave me.”

But I knew my responsibility. So, I responded: “Don’t worry. We will work out this together.” I asked her to double-check the Internet connection, triple-check her spelling, and whether she got into the right directory, etc. But nothing worked. She was getting really frustrated, and so was I. Then it was midnight. Out of desperation, I told her, “All right. Let’s start all over again. Erase everything. Retype the command exactly as given in the instruction. Hit return, and let’s see what happens then.”

Then there was this silence, complete silence. (Just like now.) For a few seconds, I thought the phone was disconnected. So, I asked, “Are you still there?”

“Yes, yes, I am here,” came her unsettling voice, “But what *is* a return?”

“Oh boy,” I was telling myself. I wish I could see what she was doing—then we would have solved the problem in one second!

So, what’s the moral of the story? Yes, you have guessed it: “Never try to solve a problem over the phone!” (Pause) Seriously, the moral of the story is that *one of the hardest things to do in life is to be able to truly put ourselves in other people’s shoes.*

“Come on,” you may be thinking, “Xiao-Li, you are being unreasonable here. How could anyone anticipate that a person who uses a computer does not know the return key? How did she log in?” You might be right, as to this date I am still wondering how it could have happened. But then your dean had conveniently forgotten at that moment that when he came to Harvard, he had no clue whatsoever about how to log in. I still recall that the first time I was told that I needed to “log in,” I had to check my English-Chinese dictionary to find out the meaning of the word “log.” (I did know what “in” meant!) My dictionary said it means a piece of dead wood, which was a good description of how I felt then. I hope none of you is thinking,

“How did Harvard admit someone *that* ignorant?” because otherwise you are just being preached to by the most ignorant dean Harvard has ever appointed!

“All right, all right, we get your point.” Some of you may be thinking. “We need to work harder to put ourselves in other people’s shoes. But we are still waiting for your third story. So please drop the other shoe, so we can all graduate!” Fair enough, we need to move on, so here comes the third story.

### 2.3 *Story III*

Perhaps I was working too hard, during my first few years in Chicago, for I suffered some mysterious symptoms, having pains here and there, feeling fatigued all the time to the point that I would completely black out during lectures, literally not knowing what I was talking about while talking. (Of course, I did not know then how essential that skill would be for being a dean.) My doctors did a lot of tests on me, but they couldn’t find anything physical, so they sent me to see a psychologist, who in turn sent me to see a psychiatrist. After many hospital visits, I was told that I have CFS.

Does anyone know what CFS is? To my psychiatrist, it was chronic fatigue syndrome, which means feeling fatigued all the time. To my psychologist, CFS meant Chicago Faculty Syndrome because she thought I was under too much pressure trying to get my tenure at Chicago. Feeling unsettled and still suffering, I consulted a senior colleague of mine, Paul Meier. Paul was an extremely famous statistician both in statistics and in medical sciences because of his groundbreaking work on randomized clinical trials in medicine and on estimating patient survival time. Paul was also an extremely good-hearted person. Indeed, he not only sat down with me to listen carefully to all the symptoms I had and what I was told by my many doctors but also searched the medical literature (in those days without Google) on what was known then about CFS. Based on his study, he convinced me that CFS was a code name for “Cannot Find, Sorry” because the literature provided no explanation nor any treatment of CFS, and therefore I should not have an added fear that there was something seriously wrong with me.

Regardless of whether I had a serious mental health issue then or whether Paul was right about CFS, the care and comfort provided by Paul helped me get through the hardest period of both my professional life and personal life, for which I am eternally grateful to him.

So, what’s the moral of the story? “Whenever you have a serious medical problem, don’t forget to consult a statistician for a third opinion!” (Pulse) Seriously, the moral of the story is that: *As you start your career, it will be very beneficial to seek a mentor who cares about you, and more importantly, as you advance your career, try to serve as a caring and compassionate mentor to those who are in need.* The Harvard degree you are about to receive will open many doors for you, as it should. But without enough compassion for your fellow citizens, especially those who are

not as fortunate as you are, a few of these doors could lead to career paths that none of us will be proud of.

Therefore, your faculty will be extremely proud and pleased if every one of you will be known to your future colleagues, friends, or students as someone who has not only the most beautiful mind but also the most beautiful heart. That is what a Harvard degree truly means—or, at least, should mean.

On that note, let me conclude by making you a virtual toast, as I know many of you are eagerly awaiting the free champagne that you have worked for over all these years. So here comes my “3D” toast: drink now, dream tonight, and do something beautiful tomorrow! Cheers and congratulations!

### 3 2016 Commencement Speech

A couple of months ago, I had the privilege of attending an event in honor of the late Reverend Professor Peter Gomes. During the event, former Governor Deval Patrick reminded everyone of a message Rev. Gomes used to deliver to Harvard graduates. “Harvard graduates never die,” he declared, “They just turn into buildings.”

Of course, I don’t have Rev. Gomes’s divine power to ensure your immortality. But I did design and teach a Gen Ed course on *Real-Life Statistics: Your Chance for Happiness (or Misery)*. (You see I am a very responsible professor, so I make sure that all my students will get at least one thing out of my course.) I, therefore, hope that I have some credentials to hold your attention, especially as I am still holding your diplomas, for the next 10 minutes or so, to hear a couple of my personal stories that could potentially help to increase your chance of happiness before you turn into a building. And the theme of my stories is *becoming a builder*, to follow Professor Gomes’ theme.

Many of you are on your way to becoming a builder of our global society, from building a local school to a global brand, from building a personal device to a multidisciplinary field, and from building a cultural icon to a social norm. After all, you are not only among those with a higher education; you are among those with the highest education. Therefore, your faculty and peers expect no less of you. So please go full speed ahead and make your Harvard proud. My only advice is that whatever you intend to build, please keep future generations in mind, so that there will be a good chance that the building you will turn into will stand in perpetuity.

However, the *builder* I want to emphasize here is one that I suspect most of you are not considering at this moment, but is urgently needed in our increasingly globalized society. And the best part of this kind of building job is that it offers “equal opportunity” to each of you, regardless of who you are or what you study. If you have never tried this kind of building, you can start practicing tonight, especially if you get into a heated discussion after too many glasses of champagne.

Yes, I am talking about *consensus builders*, by which I don’t mean those “nice people” with whom everyone just finds it easier to agree or those who always compromise. Rather, I mean those individuals who can bring out the best in everyone, or

at least prevent the worst from coming out, when conducting a difficult conversation or facing a challenging choice, so that collectively we can move forward with a positive step, however small or large we individually may judge that step to be.

Now unless you happen to be a nerd of the highest order, you undoubtedly have seen plenty of evidence as to why we need more consensus builders, from campus debates to election drama and global conflict. Of course, some of you may think, “Well, I am not a nerd, but I really have no interest in politics—I am just going to mind my own business and have a quiet, little, happy life, and I have absolutely no interest in becoming a building.”

That’s all fair and fine. But whether it interests you or not, sooner or later you will find yourself in a situation, either professionally or personally, where you will discover that life would just be a bit easier if you have practiced how to build a consensus. So here comes my first story, which starts with a question.

I was appointed as department chair in 2004. What was the first decision I was asked to make as a department chair? (You will get a special handshake today if you guess it correctly.) Well, we could be here the whole day playing this guessing game because it was truly unexpected. On my second day, a staff member petitioned that I allow another staff member to regularly bring her dog to the office. Yes, my first decision was about a dog—how exciting! The staff member who had been bringing her dog to her office had intended to keep the dog under her desk. But as you must have guessed, that is not easier than trying not to doze off while a dean is preaching. So, the dog would often run into a nearby classroom during class. While many students did not mind at all such an entertaining interlude, the instructors were not amused. And one colleague was particularly annoyed because the dog seemed to enjoy his teaching and attended his class more than once. Some of my faculty colleagues, therefore, demanded that we ban the dog, which seemed to be a common-sense solution. However, the staff member who petitioned me reported that her colleague with the dog was dealing with some personal hardships and needed the dog for companionship, and the rest of the staff also found that having the dog around the office had made their work life somewhat less stressful.

However trivial this issue was, it was about conflicting interests between two groups of people who need to interact with each other routinely. So, what did I do? My department was, and still is, in the Science Center, so my first thought was “Well, the Science Center must have some policy about pets,” right? I, therefore, asked our department administrator to find out what policies were in place. To my amazement, she reported back that not only were there no policies but also that the then director of the Science Center brought his dog into the office routinely—so much for my clever strategy! Therefore, I had to build a consensus among faculty and staff about what to do. Eventually, the agreement was that the staff member could keep her dog if she could demonstrate that it would stay in her office for 2 weeks without ever running out of it.

It was my first consensus-building experience that actually had an impact, however trivial. (Of course, there was a tiny problem: I forgot to build a consensus with the dog—but you need to forgive an inexperienced new chair.) You might say “Xiao-Li, you had way too much time on your hands to worry about building

consensus for such a mundane matter.” And indeed, you would be right—being a new chair, I guess I was just eager to test my ability to build consensus. But it was a great warmup exercise, one that reminds me to this day that there are just so many things in life, however insignificant and mundane to bystanders, that can cause conflicts between two groups of very reasonable people.

It is with this understanding that I want to encourage each of you to practice consensus-building, for all the small or large issues that surround you. It does not matter if you will ever become a good consensus builder—few can claim that they are always able to build a consensus. What matters is that the more of us who practice it and the more often we practice it, the happier we all become, both individually and as a society.

And you do not need to be in a position of authority (of any kind) to have an opportunity to practice. Any time you are sitting in a meeting and getting bored—which as a statistician I can guarantee that the probability of this happening will reach 99% very quickly—instead of checking emails or daydreaming about the love of your virtual life, you can try to observe how people argue and debate. Who is convincing and who is not, and why? Why do some issues seem to be commonsense to some people but would drive others up the wall? Which arguments drive you up the wall, and how would you avoid building a wall for others (especially if you are not going to pay for it)? And if you were running the meeting, how would you build a consensus that would lead to a bit of action, not counting the scheduling of the next meeting?

As you probably can tell, much of what I suggest you practice is the art of listening, because listening—not just hearing—is truly a necessary step in building an inclusive community. To put it concretely, inclusion starts with exclusion: you need to exclude your own voice and your sense of entitlement in order to genuinely appreciate the voices and perspectives of others. I learned this the hard way, as you will tell from my second story.

When I was appointed GSAS dean, I gather I was eager to prove that I was worthy of the title. I conducted several meetings with the GSAS staff, and I was running these just as I conducted research meetings with my students and younger colleagues. I was talking most of the time, throwing out half-baked ideas, pushing arguments, and cutting off others’ sentences with “Yah yah yah, I thought about that too, but here is the tricky part.” These meetings seemed to go efficiently as everyone was nodding and agreeing with me. Being a dean seemed to be not as difficult as I had thought, until one day I noticed a staff member was working on something that I was not aware of. Naturally, I questioned her: “Who told you to implement that?” She looked at me, quite puzzled: “Well, you.” “What? When did I tell you that?” Then she reminded me of the time and location of the meeting. Oh my god—I told myself—my staff did not understand that I was brainstorming. I didn’t really mean it! And why didn’t they just double-check with me?

But how could they? I was their new boss. I had a stronger voice. I was cutting them off. I was eager to show off that I had thought far ahead of whatever was on their minds. They had neither the opportunity nor the incentive to make their voices

heard. They were too busy trying to figure out what I meant and what I wanted. Yes, everyone nodded all the time, but that was not consensus. That was fear.

Don't get me wrong. Much of your academic training is about brainstorming, provoking, challenging, pushing arguments to their extremes, and telling uncomfortable truths. Your professors and I would be profoundly sad if you lost any of these abilities as you advance your career—the advancement of our society depends on your critical thinking and your ability to push boundaries. But you need to know your audience and know when it is effective to argue about an idea just for the sake of it, and when for the sake of being effective, the idea is better argued by others, even if the idea was yours originally. In general, it is much easier to advance an idea agreed upon through consensus, rather than advance an idea that demands consensus.

I have a feeling that I have preached long enough that there is a consensus being built right now among you, “Enough, just give me that damn diploma!” So, it is time to let you go, however much Harvard loves you. Speaking of love, I have many more stories to tell about how skillful consensus builders tend to have better and longer marriages or love lives. But too bad that I won't have time to share these with you now, as I gather that you are much more eager to receive that piece of parchment now rather than a marriage license or a prenuptial agreement.

So, let me conclude by congratulating each of you for forever bringing that big Harvard H with you, and I hope my preaching today can help you to increase two more Hs: heart and happiness. Congratulations and cheers to all three Hs!

## 4 2017 Commencement Speech

How many of you heard my welcoming speech when you joined GSAS, in this very theater? OK, I gather the rest of you either skipped your new student orientation or didn't feel the urge to complete your degree within 5 years. Thanks to President Faust and Dean Smith's trust and many colleagues' strong support, I have had the privilege to serve as GSAS Dean for the past 5 years, and this commencement marks the completion of my first term as GSAS Dean. Naturally, I reflect on what I have learned, starting from day one. I surmise that how I felt 5 years ago is not very different from how many of you are feeling right now: excited, anxious, and bedeviled by self-doubt: am I really ready to navigate a new world?

Well, if you are seeking reassurance from me, my response will be a very short one: NO! I was not ready, nor are you ready for whatever your new world will bring, even if it's just another degree program. A curveball is easy to handle because at least you know it is a ball, and the curve is eventually coming in your direction. But you just don't know what you don't know.

I am not trying to scare you off so you can take the dropout option—it's too late for that anyway, and indeed there is no way to drop out of life, only to drop dead. But I would like to share with you a key lesson that I learned in navigating a new world: the insights generated from whatever disciplines you studied can help you in ways that you may not expect. And God forbid, should your field not generate any



useful insights (I'm sure Dean Smith will want to know which field that is, so he can stop funding it), you are always welcome to borrow mine, that is, statistics.

So let me give you an example. Fundraising is a good part of my job, for which I received no training. But I was intrigued by it. Why would anyone give me money just because I asked for it? Can I be that persuasive and charming?

I doubt that most of you have had fundraising experience. But I surmise that the following scenario may sound familiar to many of you. You were introduced to someone at a party, and you hit it off. The evening was too short. You made an arrangement to have dinner, and it went as beautifully as you had hoped. You started to communicate with each other more frequently. The feeling was getting stronger, and it seemed mutual. Your heart started to beat faster: OMG, this might be the one!

Then suddenly it's all silence. Your invitation for the next dinner was never answered, no text, no email, no nothing. You were completely puzzled. What did I do wrong? Did I move too fast? Did I misinterpret the whole thing from the very beginning? Am I just not that charming?

The chances are that you will never find out the real reason, no matter how much time you spend driving yourself crazy with replay, speculation, regret, or even guilt. In fundraising, that person could be someone who indeed had intended to give, but then their business went south; or someone who was flirting with multiple institutions and then decided to commit to another one; or someone who was treating philanthropy as an investment and then realized that was a mistake.

Indeed, my initial mistake was to expect a positive return from every one of my investments, that is, the time and energy I put into building each fundraising relationship. But such expectations only bring disappointment, frustration, and even self-doubt—am I perhaps just not good for this job? Fortunately, my statistical training soon stopped me from consuming myself with these not-very-helpful thoughts.

You see that there are simply too many factors that are beyond my control or even outside of my awareness that would determine the ultimate outcome of each fundraising effort. It is just unwise and unproductive for me to worry too much about each case and overthink its reasons. What I can predict reasonably well is the total amount of funds raised annually, which reflects the overall fundraising effort. That's the essence of the law of large numbers: while individual outcomes can vary tremendously for reasons hard to decipher, with enough trial and error, we can expect a rather stable average, capturing a central characteristic of our overall effort. That statistical insight redirected my energy from working unproductively on trying to save every fundraising relationship to building and communicating the clear message of how additional funding can establish, sustain, and enhance GSAS's global leadership in supporting students' well-being, scholarly training, and professional development.

I also started to enjoy those fundraising conversations much more because I no longer needed to worry about where any particular conversation would lead. All I cared about was knowing that as long as we communicated our message loudly and clearly, to as many people as possible, we would do better and better. Indeed, one day I received the largest check in my life from a GSAS alum, with a simple note,

“Dean Meng, here is my number. Give me a call.” I called, and the alum told me that he very much liked the effort we were making and wanted to support it in ways he could. That’s how we were able to fund the new Center for Writing and Communicating Ideas, located in Dudley House, a center that celebrates writing and communication as a critical part of graduate education; it might already have helped a few of you to arrive here today.

So, the law of large numbers helped me to be more productive and happier. And I hope it can help you too as you navigate your new world both professionally and personally. You of course should have high aspirations and you should work hard to achieve your goals. But you should not expect a positive return from every effort you make. That would make you miserable and, worse, make everyone around you miserable. I have seen some very unhappy colleagues, unfortunately in every generation, trying to receive recognition for everything they do, to compete and expect to win every grant or award, and to advance their careers at every possible opportunity. Perhaps the saddest thing is that many of them would have achieved what they wanted if only they hadn’t tried so hard, thereby making themselves less respected and less liked by their peers.

I certainly hope you won’t become one of them. With 95% confidence, I can also guarantee that your love life won’t last too long if you expect an ounce-for-ounce return every time you do something nice for your love interest. Keeping the law of large numbers in mind can help to remind yourself that the payoff for your effort comes in aggregation and on average. That should be your aim, not to expect unrealistically positive returns in every effort you make.

To practice what I just preached, having given each of you some profound advice on how to have a happy—at least a happier life—I am not expecting a positive return from each of you. But I expect someday to receive a few checks from some of you with a note “Dean Meng. Here is my number. Call me.” In fact, I am willing to expect even less. No need to write a note; just put your number on your check. I will call. Until then, may the law of large numbers always be with you, and may your life be happier than those who don’t appreciate it. Congratulations!



**Dr. Xiao-Li Meng** is the Founding Editor-in-Chief of *Harvard Data Science Review* and the Whipple V. N. Jones Professor of Statistics. Meng was named the best statistician under the age of 40 by the Committee of Presidents of Statistical Societies (COPSS) in 2001, and in 2020, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Meng received his BS in mathematics from Fudan University in 1982 and his Ph.D. in statistics from Harvard in 1990. He was on the faculty of the University of Chicago from 1991 to 2001 before returning to Harvard, where he served as the Chair of the Department of Statistics (2004–2012) and the Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (2012–2017).

# The Asian Way: Chia-Wei Woo and the Education of a University President



Max Millard



Photo credit: San Francisco State University

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Mr. Max Millard wrote this article in November 1987 for *Rice* magazine.

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In 1983, when Chia-Wei Woo was chosen over 175 other candidates to become President of San Francisco State University, one of the first people to congratulate him was his old friend S. B. Woo, who would soon achieve national fame as lieutenant governor of Delaware.

“We actually grew up together,” said Woo, the only Chinese American to ever head a major US university. “We were born in the same year (1937), in the same city. We both went to grade school in Shanghai and high school in Hong Kong. We went to the same college in Kentucky for a year. We were graduate students together in the physics department of Washington University in St. Louis. Until the middle-1960s we had the same resume, you might say.

“But we’re very different,” he quickly added. “I would never go into politics, because I just don’t know how to make deals. S.B. doesn’t either, but he knows how to reach solutions. We’re different in that I know how to deal with faculty, but I don’t know how to deal with politicians.”

An informal, disarmingly friendly man who has worked 7-day weeks his entire career, Woo attributes much of his success to his “Asianness,” a word he uses repeatedly when describing his method of resolving conflicts.

“A typical American way is that when a controversial issue is raised, you put it on the table. Then some people would look at things this way, some would look at it the other way, and you would debate and then take a vote,” he explained. “But on many major issues, going along is not sufficient. You have to put your heart into it. The Asian way is: ‘Let’s sit around the table and talk it out.’”

“I do that with my colleagues here, no matter how long it takes.”

“The Asian mentality is almost the opposite of Ramboism. I am a little saddened to see Ramboism taking over. People lose their patience and say, ‘Well if we can’t solve the problem, let’s just proclaim that a solution has been given, and act on it. ... But the world is not binary. Not everything has just two solutions. One should be able to find a third way. When I say, ‘If we just sit, talk, and think clearly, and not be rushed by your digital watches,’ that would be Asianness.”

His workload in managing a campus of more than 26,000 students and over 4500 faculty and staff—the largest single organization in San Francisco—would be staggering enough in normal times. But today, with Asians comprising 22% of the student body, all minorities forming about 44%, and women 58%, he faces special pressures in trying to bring the faculty and staff to the same level of representation.

His pursuit of affirmative action at San Francisco State has been the most aggressive in the campus’s 87-year history. Last year, of the top five administrative positions filled, three went to minorities or women. Of the nine dean positions, six are held by minorities or women.

“Administration-wise, I think our balance is fine,” he said, in his barely detectable accent. “In terms of the faculty, we’re still only about 25 or 26 percent women, 15 or 16 percent minority. But the incoming stream is very good. Of this year’s incoming faculty, 49% are women and 30 percent are minorities. We have really gone out to do affirmative action, but we have not picked anybody other than the best.”

Surprisingly, Woo never intended to be anything but a college professor. Arriving in the USA in 1955, barely able to communicate in English, he earned a Ph.D. degree in physics and in 1968 got an assistant professorship at Northwestern University in Chicago. (He eventually published more than 100 scientific papers.)

The Department of Physics and Astronomy was split by several contending groups, and when the chairman resigned, Woo was named to replace him. "I always gave my opinion in faculty meetings and never worried about offending any one group," said Woo.

In 1979, he was named provost and professor of physics at Revelle College, the oldest and most prestigious of four colleges at the University of California at San Diego. During most of his time at Northwestern and San Diego, he volunteered about 20 hours a week of his own time to further academic exchanges with the People's Republic of China.

"I've been involved [with US-China relations] for at least 15 years now," he said. "I consider myself very lucky that I was born a Chinese and am now an American, because they are two of the most influential countries in the world. And I always enjoy playing the role of a bridge."

He became an important advisor to the Chinese Education Ministry and the Chinese Academy of Sciences, as well as serving on several nationally based committees in the USA, including the National Science Foundation. In 1978, during a 4-month sabbatical in China with his family, he delivered a 3-hour speech, in Chinese, 47 times from Shanghai to the far western outpost of Urumchi.

He is now the only American on a planning committee for the new Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, projected to open in 1991 on 100 acres near Clear Water Bay. According to publicly released figures, almost \$300 million (US) has been set aside for capital construction and development, and the campus will eventually accommodate 10,000 students.

"It's going to be emphasizing science, engineering, business, and management," he said. "Hong Kong's technological infrastructure has fallen way behind. It is still labor-oriented. This university's major mission is to help Hong Kong tune up its technology and industry and move to the next stage."

While discussing the American educational system, Woo revealed two views of bilingual education. "First, I'm strongly supportive of it—but only as a condition during a transition period," he said. "We don't want a student to slow down just because he or she is new here. So, we want to phase the student in. On the other hand, outside of those classes where you don't want the students to lose pace, I do believe that immersion in the remaining classes and in the community is crucial for learning a new language.... From my own experience with immigrant kids, I can see that both methods can be done."

"My second view," he continued, "is that I think the country worries too much about bilingualism where it should be thinking about trilingualism or multilingualism. We're such an immigrant land and a world influence, and we have not done so well in international trade or diplomacy, or cultural exchanges. Who says a person can only learn two languages?"

On the question of “unofficial” quotas against Asian Americans in higher education, he said, “I have no doubt that, intentionally or unintentionally, maybe even subconsciously, such quotas have been set at a number of leading universities. More so in private universities...because they have less emphasis on factors other than what is quantifiable. They can have very subjective processes such as interviews and preferences for alumni children.”

“I think such quotas are totally un-American,” he went on. “Certain people have said, ‘Gee, aren’t Asians overrepresented?’ And I need to know what overrepresentation means. Because with affirmative action, we have always talked about underrepresentation. But overrepresentation is a new word. Do we ask how many are Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Buddhist? Do we ask how many are of Italian or Irish origin? Or do we only go by the color of the skin and the height of the cheekbones?”

However, he expressed confidence that the recent publicizing of the “unofficial” quota system, in both the San Francisco Bay Area and national media, is changing the situation. “The public is waking up that something un-American is going on,” said Woo. “It takes time, but it already has some effects in the public universities.”

Last March, he was a co-recipient of the annual Eleanor Roosevelt Humanitarian Award for his contribution to the elimination of racism. Four hundred people—mostly Caucasian business leaders—sat attentively while Woo used the opportunity to speak out.

“I asked them when was the last time they met an Asian American on their corporate board. Other than Japanese banks and Chinese real estate firms, if you look at the major boards, you don’t find a single Asian name—especially in San Francisco,” he said. “People here do live together and cooperate, but there are very clear boundaries.”

He took aim at the boards of California utility companies for excluding Asians. “There are blacks, Hispanics, and increasingly more women. The Asians don’t even rate as a token yet,” said Woo. “Maybe their (Asians’) management style is different; people are not used to it. But even that is not a good excuse when it comes to utility companies, because they are so regulated that many of the decision-making processes are pretty routine. And throughout the country, utility companies are often at the forefront when it comes to putting ‘token’ members on. But not in California.”

Supermarket chains, in which no stockholder owns more than a small percentage of the stock, are also notorious for excluding Asians from their boards, he pointed out. “In San Francisco, Asians have 40 percent or more of the buying power. Yet you don’t find an Asian director. Now how are you going to understand that market if you don’t have an Asian on the board?”

He smiled as he recalled the speech. “I meant to—if I had to—offend a few,” he said with satisfaction. “But I got a standing ovation.”

Woo’s wife Yvonne, who attended medical school for 3 years, gave up plans for her own career when Woo’s rapid promotions prevented him from spending much time at home, even for meals. They have three children in their early 20s and a 6-year-old.

“I do feel sorry, looking back, for my children,” he confided, his voice dropping. “I don’t remember much about the three older kids when they were little. And I miss that. ... I would like to believe that kind of sacrifice is not necessary. But my wife is an incredibly good woman.”

Woo is listed in “Who’s Who in the World.” Among his many other achievements, Woo is a trustee or honorary professor at five universities in China and a member of the board of directors of San Francisco’s World Affairs Council and Mount Zion Hospital. In 1984, he was the national president of the National Association of Chinese-Americans and the official attaché to the Chinese Olympic Committee.

Downplaying his own accomplishments, Woo attributed much of his success to the time and place—that, had he been born 20 years earlier, he never could have become a university president and that 20 years from now, Chinese American university presidents will probably be common. But he cautioned Asian Americans against sacrificing their ethnic identity to conform to American standards.

“To me, the most important thing is to keep the pride and faith in one’s own culture and background. People should bring that, as a treasure, to the main street of America. If that means that it takes a little longer to get through—it’s easier to be a Rambo, yes?—then my feeling is, let it be a little longer... To go after a 100% all-American, Superman image is a sentiment that I can understand. Yet if in that process we lose the best trait in the Asian culture, then what have we got to give to this country that others haven’t given already?”



**Max Millard** was on the staff of ten newspapers in San Francisco, California, from 1980 to 2002, including *Asian Week* and *East-West News*. He also freelanced for many publications. With the decline of print journalism, he switched careers to become a schoolteacher and retired in 2019. He is the author of *100 New Yorkers of the 1970s* and coauthor of *In the Black World* with Thomas C. Fleming. He lives in San Francisco with his wife Salve. Website: [www.maxmillard.com](http://www.maxmillard.com).

# Community Colleges and 4-Year Universities: My Experience Creating a Community Impact



Rose Y. Tseng and Priyanka Verma Chugh

My journey in higher education was not planned. It developed organically from my passion for community building, interest in creating a communal vision, and drive to help individuals and organizations tap into their unmet potential. This is my experience creating an impact on communities through higher education.

## 1 Early Life

It all began with my upbringing. I was born in Shantung, China, to two physician parents. I was the third of four children, which gave me a unique spot in our family dynamic. I did not have the pressure of being the oldest and did not have to always be the first or the best. The spirit engrained in me by my parents was simply to do my best and to contribute to society, as they did in their jobs as physicians. I did not have to strive for perfection, which gave me the space to learn how to think creatively and to push beyond the expectations laid out for me.

When I was 5, my family moved to Taiwan due to unstable political conditions in mainland China. We left a more comfortable life where we were living with our extended family, got on a plane without luggage or money, went to Shanghai, and soon after took a crowded boat to Taiwan. We had few resources, but I watched my

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parents rebuild our lives there. My father found a job in a hospital, and with four children at home, my mother decided to open a clinic in our house. We had to learn to be flexible in this situation, and we learned to have compassion for others. Many people in the community did not have the means to pay for their healthcare, and my parents took care of them in their clinic for free. We were by no means affluent either, and we helped make ends meet by helping with the clinic and by sewing our clothes. Despite our hardships, I saw the happiness that giving back to a community gave my parents and the way that they used their education to fulfill a need. They taught me to have a simple overall goal, like simply making things “better” and being flexible in how that goal is fulfilled. Those are lessons that I’ve returned to continually over my life and career.

My interest in education was also born here in Taiwan. I started in public schools and earned admission into a competitive all-girls public high school in Taipei. The principal at my school was a woman who had devoted her entire life to education. As such, this school had a very demanding curriculum and many teachers who pushed me to exceed the expectations I had of myself. They would ensure that I was excelling in such courses as math and science and not let me become complacent. They encouraged me to focus on areas where I was weak, even in subjects such as physical education. The school song was even one of encouragement, with a message of how women carry both society and family on our shoulders and they can make a real difference in the world. I felt that I could do anything and be anything. To me, that was the impact that a strong, encouraging education could have on students.

After high school, I went on to Cheng Kung University in southern Taiwan and majored in architectural engineering and chemistry. In my sophomore year, my parents joined the World Health Organization and went to work in Ethiopia. I decided to join them, and this trip proved to be pivotal in shaping my future education and career. I was struck by the widespread malnutrition and suffering that I saw there. We were living among people who were experiencing abject poverty, people who had very few resources and were hardly able to feed themselves. What they did have often had to be sold to make ends meet. They were suffering major health consequences from malnutrition and lack of access to basic health services. I again saw how the compassionate care my parents were providing could make a difference and that a life of service and commitment to a community could be so rewarding. I became, honestly, emboldened by what I saw. I thought all the people of the world should be treated equally and fairly. I thought there had to be a solution to this world hunger. With that passion, I decided to go to the United States to continue my education. I applied to three universities and decided to attend Kansas State University.

At Kansas State University, I earned a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry. I learned persistence from my experiences there. I had only become comfortable with the English language while I was in Ethiopia. Classes such as science and math were more comfortable, but I again pushed myself out of my comfort zone and took speech communication, American history, and social science. I even took courses in German and radioactive technology, a relatively cutting-edge course at the time. It

was tough to get through these classes, but I felt it essential to have a well-rounded education.

From there, I went on to receive a scholarship to attend the University of California at Berkeley, where I earned master's and doctoral degrees in Nutritional Sciences with minors in Biochemistry and Physiology. I also stayed on to do post-doctoral research in biochemistry and nutrition. I felt that this focus on nutrition, rooted in science, would help me achieve my goal of finding a career that could truly help people.

## 2 San Jose State University

San Jose, California, is the biggest city in Silicon Valley, which is a region in Northern California that is known as a hub of technology in the United States. There are numerous major tech corporations with their headquarters in this region such as Apple, Google, Intel, IBM, and Hewlett Packard, as well as many small startup companies. The energy around the area is very entrepreneurial and fast-paced. In 1973, I began my career at San Jose State University, a public 4-year university in San Jose. San Jose State University had a population of about 28,000 students. It is the oldest public university on the West Coast and is the founding campus of the California State University (CSU) system.

This area also attracts a lot of immigrants. Many of my students were from Mexico and Vietnam and had come to San Jose and Silicon Valley to find a better life. They were often poor and without access to many resources. I noticed that once they were able to access education, they went on to become very successful in their chosen professions. They were such hard-working people that their contributions would help the local economy flourish. Here I saw what education could bring not only to an individual but to an entire community.

Not long into my time at San Jose State, we came to realize that California was undergoing some budget cuts. I was hired to teach nutrition, which at the time was housed in the department of Home Economics. We feared that our department would be closed due to the perceived "old-fashioned" nature of Home Economics. We had a good number of students who would have been impacted by this closure. I took this opportunity to create the new Department of Nutrition and Food Science with a new curriculum. As a result, I became the founding chair of this department. This allowed us to have a greater focus on science, which would give our students more skills and make us more marketable for funding and collaboration.

I then began to look inward at the needs of our students and at ways in which we could improve their experience. In nutrition and dietetics, students need internships, and previously internship opportunities were far away or challenging to find. I reached out to our local community to find a solution. Stanford University was nearby, as were other major hospitals like Valley Medical Center. They welcomed our students into their internship positions, and our students were wonderful! Their

work ethics, pragmatism, and quality work helped them stand out from their counterparts from other nearby institutions.

Intending to create even greater opportunities for the students interested in nutrition, we expanded our general education, creating courses such as the very popular "Introduction to Science through Nutrition". This class was so well received that we even gave the curriculum to local community colleges to expand interest and opportunities to study nutrition in the region. Encouraged by our success, we decided to start a master's program to help our students gain even more skills. As part of this effort, we developed an innovative masters' practicum whereby our students could conduct activities that would shorten their required internship time to 6 months. We got this approved by the American Dietetic Association and became a leader in the field with our unique curriculum. We attracted faculty with this pool of students interested in research and were able to recruit from UC Berkley and other top-notch universities to become an even stronger department.

I eventually became Dean of the largest college at San Jose State University, the College of Applied Science and Arts, with approximately 200 faculty and 4000 students. It was not common back then that someone from within the university to ascend to the dean's position, but I was unique in my commitment to the community and our students, and I had the trust of our faculty to lead them. Becoming the first Asian American Dean, I also had a unique opportunity to mentor and sponsor other diverse faculty members. I broke from tradition with the appointment of Associate Dean. I didn't just choose from senior faculty but instead did a comprehensive open search. As a result, I found Dr. Michael Ego, a Japanese American professor from California State Northridge in Southern California, who was a wonderful fit to be the Associate Dean. We worked very well together and built a lot for the university. When I eventually moved on from San Jose State University, Dr. Ego was elected the next Dean of our college. Together we mentored many diverse faculty members.

In addition to mentorship, I thought it was important to facilitate our faculty connection to the community. A lot of faculty and leadership at 4-year universities do not have much connection to their surrounding community. The focus at many of these institutions is on research as a way to advance. While that is important, I knew to make San Jose State a stronger university; we had to push to be a core part of our community. That is what our students wanted and, honestly, what they needed. With that in mind, I successfully advocated for senior leadership to make community involvement a core tenet in faculty promotion.

A stronger faculty connection to the community benefitted our students in even more ways. Our college spanned multiple professional disciplines such as technology, aviation, criminal justice, health science, nutrition, food science, nursing, occupational therapy, journalism and mass communications, and recreation and leisure studies. We found ways to connect our faculty and students to local companies and opportunities. For criminal justice, we worked with the police department. For technology and aviation, we found connections within Silicon Valley. We created interdisciplinary programs in gerontology and hospitality management to better meet the needs of our students and the community. As many of these were "applied" professional programs, rather than purely theoretical, we had to be sure these experiences

and connections were valuable to our students. We created firm guidelines and competencies, approved by faculty, for our students doing internships in the community. They were well received by the students and community organizations and gave our students concrete skills to be successful. These initiatives all created value for our program, and by the time I departed in 1992, we had increased our enrollment to about 5000 students.

### **3 West Valley-Mission Community College District**

I found my work at San Jose State University to be very motivating and gratifying, but in 1993, I was approached with a new challenge. The West Valley-Mission Community College District was in search of a new Chancellor and CEO. The district consisted of two separate institutions: West Valley College in Saratoga, CA, and Mission College in Santa Clara, CA, and served over 350,000 residents with a combined enrollment of over 25,000 students. This district was also in Silicon Valley, like San Jose State was, but served a different community. West Valley College was in a more affluent and less diverse area, while Mission College was in a poorer, working-class, and largely immigrant area.

Accepting this role would be a challenge for me in multiple ways. It would require me to transition from a 4-year university to a community college system and learn the additional roles that come with that. I would be going from a Dean to a Chancellor, overseeing two colleges and presidents, and balancing their vastly different populations and needs. I had to learn how to work with a community college board, and this was a particularly political board with elected politicians. We had open board meetings every two weeks with representatives from both colleges, five unions, and all the resident representatives of the two distinct communities. I would also be faced with managing the challenges the college was facing at the time: a large budget deficit, an economic recession in the area, and thereby declining enrollment.

My first step was to do as I always did: get to know the community I would be working with. This included the local community served by West Valley-Mission Community College District, the students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Together, we created a vision for how to streamline our current budget in a way that was thought to be fair and equitable. We wanted to make reductions in a way to preserve as many programs and student services as possible and to treat all employees humanely and equally in these decisions. A strategy that was approved by all five unions was to create incentives for voluntary retirements, reductions in work, and resignations. We gave post-retirement benefits, continued medical benefits, severance pay, and more as incentives for those who made these voluntary moves. We also evaluated programs with input from this group to determine what was productive and efficient and what could be ended or consolidated. These group initiatives were successful in streamlining the budget almost entirely through voluntary actions. I found that this strategy was essential for community buy-in and to make

decisions that were in line with the needs and mission of the college system. While this work was useful to streamline what we already had, we had to think outside of the box to be able to overcome our large budget deficit and increase enrollment.

I heard about the Educational Foundation that was established before I arrived in 1985, to explore different ways to use excess land owned by Mission College. The efforts in this project had stalled before my arrival and were costing the university hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. This was my next area of attack. Fifty-four acres of land were sitting unused. We brought in a team of experts to help make an appropriate assessment of the land and to work with developers to figure out how to best use this land to overcome our budget deficit. We transitioned the Educational Foundation to the Mission-West Valley Land Corporation. Then after board negotiations and a lengthy legal process with the county government, we were able to sign a 99-year lease with a major development company to develop this land profitably. Office buildings, the second-largest AMC Theater multiplex in the nation, and several other restaurants and businesses soon filled this space. This brought in a reliable, steady stream of income, which has brought in from \$4–10 million yearly. This took us from a yearly loss at this site to such significant income growth that we eliminated the budget deficit in my time as Chancellor. We also made this additionally beneficial for our students by arranging to have them get paid a higher salary if they worked at any of the businesses that were part of this development.

While this addressed the budget deficit problem, we still had the issue of decreased enrollment. We started to tackle this by using some of the funds being brought in by the Land Corporation to renovate our campus and develop programs to attract more students. I appointed and looked to Dean Fred Prochaska for grants and research ideas. We established an Innovation Fund to provide startup funds to help devise new programs and services in our district. We specifically looked for and funded projects that were closely linked to college/district strategic goals/priorities that possessed the significant potential for the development of linkages with external organizations and had a high level of potential for procurement of additional private or public sector funding because of innovation fund support. We saw this seed money multiply in that time and generate income with over 30:1 financial return largely through outside grants. We have seen a lot of growth in the college/district due to these funds with the development of better technological infrastructure (such as interactive teleconferencing), new program development (such as the networking management certificate option), new courses, and professional development for staff and faculty.

Despite all these programs, there was still more to be done to improve our enrollment. We say that “community college is for those to get their first chance or last chance.” This means that our target students are those who don’t have the opportunity or means to go to a 4-year university, so we give them their “first chance” or those later in life who didn’t go to college and this is their “last chance.” With that in mind, I had to think about where to find and appeal to these students. With the local area in an economic recession, that was a bigger challenge than one that could be overcome with advertising and new buildings. Again, we had to be flexible and creative and reach out to the community.

From my time at San Jose State University, I knew how beneficial partnering with industry could be. I reached out to the major Silicon Valley companies such as Cisco, Applied Materials, Apple, and Intel and offered them an opportunity to work with our colleges to provide an education for their staff. We had more flexibility as a community college and were able to arrange for our faculty to go to the students at work. It was very cost-effective, as we didn't need classrooms and the company could offer college courses to their staff conveniently on site. We offered courses such as English as a Second Language (ESL), statistics, and other general education courses. These were real college courses that students could get credit for and take right at work. Our faculty also liked the interaction with high-tech employees, and it allowed them to get additional pay beyond their union-negotiated salary.

Some of our students needed the 4-year college experience to achieve their goals. I focused energy on developing our 2 + 2 program, where we would give our students the chance to transfer to a 4-year university after completing 2 years with us. We were able to do this because of my familiarity with the degree requirements at San Jose State University, and we were able to match some of our courses with theirs, enabling our students to transfer credits and keep working toward bachelor's degrees.

I feel very proud and accomplished with what we had achieved in my time at West Valley-Mission Community College District. Our slogan at the time was "Building Silicon Valley: One Student at a Time," and we did just that. I gained tools to make even more of an impact by working with legislators and exploring more of the business side of higher education. I was even named among the Top 50 Businesswomen in the Bay Area, something I never expected as an educator. I worked with this community to create a vision that fit their needs and interests and used my flexibility and creativity to make it happen. These skills and tools helped me greatly as I tackled my next challenge at the University of Hawaii at Hilo.

## **4 University of Hawaii at Hilo**

I have always loved Hawaii; I used to go for every vacation. I was nominated to be the Chancellor of the University of Hawaii at Hilo, another 4-year university, and felt like it could be a good fit. When I arrived, I was asked what my goal was for my time as Chancellor. I thought back to my parents and said simply that it was "to be better." I wanted to help the university be better at science, better at helping the community, better fit into the environment of Hilo, and better to help the world. To do this, I knew I had to go back to what had always worked – getting to know the community.

The native Hawaiian population in Hilo has a very justified mistrust of outsiders. They have had a long history of negative interactions with outsiders, and to many, there is still a sense of discomfort with the current political climate. For me, another outsider, there was quite a barrier to trying to break through. I talked to many Hawaiian elders, and I came to realize that my Asian heritage made me more

approachable to them. I was not associated with the mistrust. I was able to be a bridge for them between the East and West, especially with Hawaii being physically positioned in that space as well. They shared their desires for the university, and I shared mine. They hoped for a place where the Hawaiian language could be studied and preserved. I hoped to expand science and research on the island and to bring the University of Hawaii at Hilo into the modern era. I knew a focus on technology and science would be difficult to propose to the Hawaiian elders, but I helped them to recognize that we could preserve and respect their culture while also keeping the island relevant and forward-thinking through science. I helped to build the Ka Haka 'Ula O Ke'elikōlani College of Hawaiian Language and get approval for the world's first Ph.D. program in the indigenous language to help revitalize interest and study in the native Hawaiian culture and language. We named it in honor of Ruth Ke'elikōlani Keanolani Kanāhoahoa, a Hawaiian high chiefess who was a strong advocate for the Hawaiian language and culture.

With this push to bring Hawaiian culture and education to the forefront, I wanted to show the community that they could expand their educational horizons even more. University of Hawaii at Hilo was only granting bachelor's degrees when I arrived. I pushed for expansion to where we added ten bachelor's degrees, six master's degrees, and two doctoral degrees. These programs included conservation biology, clinical psychology, education, and more. We proudly created the first college of pharmacy in Hawaii, creating an option for our students to become pharmacists without going to the mainland. No one thought we could do that, as the health-related schools were at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, the main flagship campus. We persisted and created this college of pharmacy to allow our students to advance to a doctoral degree, stay on the island, and give back to the community.

In addition to being an educator, at my core, I am a scientist and a researcher. I realized all the untapped potential that Hilo had. We had plenty of land, access to the ocean, and plenty of resources that could be researched. It was a surprisingly difficult direction to convince people to follow me. People thought that the campus at Manoa was where the research could happen. They didn't think we needed it or should have it, but over time I convinced them otherwise. As I had seen throughout my career, I knew that framing our campus as a comprehensive, research campus would help us bring in funds to advance and strengthen the already existing liberal arts programs.

To build this research infrastructure, we needed resources. I learned from my time at West Valley-Mission Community College District that a keyway to getting resources for an institution was through working with legislators and funding agencies. I had been long involved with the National Science Foundation (NSF), and I approached them about funding opportunities for our university and learned about the NSF Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) program. This is a program that focuses on regions of the country that have a history of being underfunded in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). They aim to create an impact for a diverse set of individuals by funding projects that focus on the development of new research capabilities and work on a large scale with

reach in academics, government, and private sectors. I knew that the University of Hawaii at Hilo needed funds of this magnitude to kick start our research mission.

To be able to even consider an EPSCoR application, I had to convince several stakeholders that this was a game changer. Most importantly, I needed to convince the University of Hawaii at Manoa to partner with us in this venture, as this award goes to a state and not a single institution. It was hard for them to see at Manoa how important this funding might be, as they already had a lot of resources. But I made it as easy as possible for them and offered to split grant funds with them if they agreed. I did the work as the principal investigator of our EPSCoR statewide planning grant, which we were successful in obtaining. This grant started as \$4 million – \$2 million for Hilo and \$2 million for Manoa. This was just enough to get us started, hire faculty, and eventually generated over \$40 million in research projects in the state. With our research mission up and going, we had a major push for grant funding with a 600 percent increase in funding. With proper justification and support from the community and legislators, we built seven new buildings to expand our classrooms, laboratories, and student life centers. We increased our student enrollment by 50% as a true testament to the idea of “if you build it, they will come.” These initiatives were again informed by and supported by the community and the history of Hilo. One such initiative was the development of the ‘Imiloa Astronomy Center of Hawaii. It is well documented that the early Hawaiian people relied on the stars for navigation. Astronomy has been an important part of the culture in Hawaii and a driving force of research on the island. The summit of the Mauna Kea (White Sacred Mountain) has been a site of astronomical research since the 1900s due to its high elevation and particularly night skies. There are numerous research facilities, telescopes, and observatories there that have attracted researchers from around the world for decades. To bridge the disconnect between the historical Hawaiian culture around astronomy and the current, highly technologically advanced research at the summit, we worked with Senator Daniel Inouye to create the ‘Imiloa Astronomy Center. Senator Inouye was able to help us secure \$28 million in funding, largely from NASA, and truly helped us create this community vision of a place for education and exploration. The center now has pre-K-12 programs, camps, and other enrichment programs to help nurture a new generation of Hawaiians interested in science and astronomy.

We wanted to make sure that after my retirement, we could continue to raise the profile of the University of Hawaii at Hilo and encourage our students to strive for world-class careers. My late husband and I created an endowed lecture series, “The Rose and Raymond Tseng Distinguished Lecture,” as an avenue to continue this mission. The first speaker was Dr. Jennifer Doudna, an astounding biochemist, who went on to win the Nobel Prize in Chemistry and who grew up in Hilo. She was an incredible example of what our students can achieve, and this series continues to inspire us to this day.



## 5 Conclusion

My life and career took me all around the world, with my upbringing in China and Taiwan, my experiences in Ethiopia, my education in Kansas and California, the start of my career in Silicon Valley, and the culmination in Hawaii. I had to learn about a lot of different people and a lot of different communities. It broadened my horizons and gave me the confidence to lead. I learned to not let what the world expected of me, an Asian American woman, ever hold me back. My Asian upbringing and values surely played a positive role in my leadership style and success as well. I have always been a dedicated hard worker and had the desire to give back. As my parents made the world better through medicine, I found my path through education. I always felt that the purpose of higher education was far beyond educating the individual student. Through every step of my career, I learned that students do not learn in a silo. They are part of their communities, and they have immense potential to give back to those communities if given an education that is useful to them. At San Jose State, we strengthened the education the students were receiving by developing relevant areas of study and working with local partners to create structured, hands-on experiences that would give them real-world skills. At West Valley-Mission Community College District, we found ways to meet the students where they were by going into the community to teach. We had to be flexible to make the most of the resources we had, and we found ways to reverse our budget deficit. Finally, at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, we wanted to educate our students in a way that was harmonious with the history, culture, and aloha spirit of the Hawaiians. We built so much together during my time there that has had a lasting impact on the students and the community.

I want to thank the wonderful faculty and staff of the universities and colleges that I worked with over the years. I could not have had any of these achievements without their support and dedication. This all would not have been possible without the cooperation of community members, the state, city, and county governments, board members, and community economic organizations. I always believed that when we work together, wonderful things happen. We can help our students reach higher, we can make a more prosperous community, and that can lead to a better world for all.



**Dr. Rose Tseng** was the first Asian American woman to serve as a president of an American university. She was Chancellor and Professor of the University of Hawai'i Hilo from 1998 to 2014 and Chancellor of West Valley-Mission Community College District in Silicon Valley from 1993 to 1998. Previously, she rose through the ranks of professor, department chair, and then dean of the College of Applied Sciences and Arts at San Jose State University from 1970 to 1993.

Born in Shandong and raised in Taiwan, Dr. Tseng attended National Cheng Kung University and then moved to the USA to complete her BS Degree in chemistry at Kansas State University.

She received her M.S. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of California at Berkeley and a certificate for Executive Management from Harvard University.

An educator, administrator, and champion of entrepreneurial projects, she believes in higher education's power to bring about local economic development and has built university parks in California and Hawaii including 'Imiloa Astronomy Center, a modern museum, with a 3D planetarium and interactive exhibits, that integrates indigenous Hawaiian culture with advance science to inspire the island community, general public, and island visitors to explore culture, science, and technology. She initiated the grant that brought the National Science Foundation's Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) program to Hawai'i to improve the entire state's research infrastructure.

Dr. Tseng has also contributed to numerous national and international groups to advance nutrition and education worldwide. To name a few, she served as Principal Consultant for Nutrition and Manpower Development at the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for 6 years and developed several higher education programs in China. She served on the NASA Education Advisory Committee. She served on the Commission on Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness for the American Council on Education (ACE) and as a board member on the ACE Network Executive Board. She also served on the Board of Directors of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and was vice-chair of the Steering Committee of its Millennium Leadership Institute.

In addition to her national and international work, Dr. Tseng has been actively involved in many local, community organizations both in Silicon Valley and Hawaii. These include the California Governor's School-to-Career Task Force, Pew Health Advisory Committee, Urban City University Task Force of San Jose, various Rotary Clubs, and Hawaii Governor's Economic Momentum Commission Task Force, among many more.

Dr. Tseng is the author and co-author of many peer-reviewed publications and has presented numerous papers at professional conferences on health, leadership, higher education, and multi-cultural issues. She is the recipient of many awards including honorary doctorates from Josai International University, Japan, and International Technology University in Silicon Valley. She is an honorary professor at China Medical University, and she was a visiting professor at Fu Jen University as well as an outstanding alumnus of National Cheng Kung University. She received the Athena Award and she was honored as a Woman of Distinction by the Girls Scouts Council of Hawaii. The San Jose and Silicon Valley Business Journal named her one of the Bay Area's Top 50 Women in Management. She was Statewide Role Model Woman of the Year from the California State Legislature and received a White House Commendation. She received the Ho'oulu Leadership Award from the Hawaii Institute for Public Affairs in 2010.



**Dr. Priyanka Verma Chugh** was born in New Jersey to two physicians from India. Dr. Chugh grew up in a multicultural community and has had a long passion for diversity and higher education. She received her undergraduate education from New York University with a bachelor's in Psychology, with minors in Chemistry, Public Health and Policy, and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Studies. She was heavily involved in student affairs during her time there and served as a Resident Assistant. Dr. Chugh then completed a Master of Science (M.S) in Biotechnology at Johns Hopkins University. She went on to medical school, receiving her M.D. from Cooper Medical School of Rowan University. Throughout medical school, she also had a strong focus on diversity through leading the student Diversity Council and creating a disability advocacy group for medical students. She is currently a resident in general surgery at Boston Medical Center, where she serves as a diversity, equity, and inclusion fellow, and a research fellow at Boston Children's Hospital. She is also involved in the Society of Asian Academic Surgeons (SAAS) where she serves as an associate member with an appointment on the communications committee.

# Leading with Courage, Vision, Perseverance, Execution, and Impact



Ching-Hua Wang

## 1 The Journey to the United States

I was born and brought up in Beijing, China. Everything around me was seemingly uneventful until the calamity of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) when my life changed forever. I was among an estimated 17 million middle school to college-aged students taken from their homes and families to be “reeducated” as manual laborers on farms and in factories. Many more professionals, government officials, intellectuals, and artists suffered the same fate.

For 6 years in Inner Mongolia, I lived in a tiny mudroom in a village that had no running water, no insulation, and no electricity. During the long-dreaded winter season with snowstorms and blizzards, the temperature would oftentimes plunge to  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Two years into my exile, I received a package from my father containing an Oxford English Dictionary that literally changed my life path, leading me to medical school, to the United States, and eventually to my presidency.

In those hopeless years, I would be physically exhausted with the fieldwork during the day, and at night, I would read the Oxford English Dictionary word by word next to a lamp I fashioned with an old ink bottle filled with kerosene. My nose would be black each morning due to the smoke from the handmade lamp. I learned to pronounce the words by listening to Voice of America on a transistor radio I brought with me. To this day, the dictionary is in a drawer in my office. I hold it close after all these years. It has the pen markings that I had made during those Inner Mongolian years.

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Toward the end of the Cultural Revolution, I returned to Beijing to attend the Capital Medical University. When China opened the door for the first cohorts of graduate students at the master's level, I became the first graduate in my medical school to attend graduate school in Beijing University to earn a master degree in Immunology. Not satisfied with a master's education, I decided to apply to doctoral programs in the United States, and I was admitted to them all, including Harvard and Cornell, which offered me a full scholarship. I was thrilled.

On August 31, 1981, I boarded a transpacific Pan-Am flight and flew to JFK with only \$20 in my pocket. I was the first in my class of graduate students to go overseas on my own to pursue further education. In 1986, I completed my Ph.D. in Immunology and became the first Chinese student to graduate from the doctoral program in immunology at Cornell University. By then my husband, also a Ph.D. student at Cornell, and I had two children, and we had every intention of returning to China. However, that changed in 1989, when the Chinese government declared martial law to squash student-led protests calling for democracy. When Tiananmen Massacre happened, my husband and I, for our children's sake, decided to stay in the United States.

My journey in China and to the United States was a bumpy one. I encountered severe downturns and major setbacks. What kept me going was my parents' support and my unwavering desire of attaining an ever-higher level of education. Those years in the destitute village in Inner Mongolia shaped me into a person with perseverance and tenacity needed for the rest of my life. It opened my eyes for the first time to what was truly going on in China. It taught me that what we learned in the classrooms and from textbooks were not what was really happening in the country. It also inculcated in me the empathy for students who lacked learning opportunity and appreciation of the transformative power of education.

## **2 Breaking the Mold from My Native Culture**

Growing up as a Chinese girl, I went to boarding schools throughout my life in China. Among the many excellent teachings and traditions from the Chinese culture, including the value of education and work ethics, I was also taught to listen to the elderly and the teachers. Be obedient. Be cautious. Not to stick your neck out. Not to mind other's businesses. Not to stand out. Not to question authority. Do not overthink on your own. Do not think different thoughts. Save face.

In boarding schools, I was insulated from the outside world. My experiences in the Cultural Revolution and in Inner Mongolia, on the other hand, were like the giant buckets of ice-cold water pouring down my head, time and again, waking me up to realize how detrimental and harmful some of these teachings were to a young person still trying to form her own character and finding her own value. What I witnessed and experienced during the Cultural Revolution and in Inner Mongolia helped me begin to think on my own, to defy what I was told to do, to develop the Socratic approach, to question what was going on, to be more independent, to seek

the truth, and to pursue my own path. All of the old behaviors I learned growing up had to be modified and disrupted as I gradually developed into my own being.

From Beijing University to Cornell University, I took a big leap of faith. I had no idea that it was about to fundamentally transform my life. When I went to Cornell as a graduate student, I felt an intense feeling of freedom. The fresh air, the endless green lawn, and the students lying on the lawn, riding bikes and roller blades, and playing with their dogs, all made me feel so happy and so free. However, when it was time for my own actions, I was so timid in class to raise any questions to the professors. I was always busy taking notes, but I seldom asked any questions. I was tempted a million times to do so. Nevertheless, I was afraid that I might embarrass myself. I might be wrong. I might be standing out. I might be challenging authority. I might be thinking too hard; and I might be losing face. Even though I often got excellent grades, I was not confident. I was still too afraid. The good thing was that I was very much self-aware of what was happening within and around me. Something was missing; something was just not right; and I must make the necessary change.

This precious kernel of self-realization compelled me to break out from my old mold of being. I challenged myself to have American roommates in the dorm. I befriended people who were different from me. I deliberately not always mingled with Chinese students and put myself in uncomfortable situations to learn from others. I wrote down questions to ask and thought through things thoroughly on my own during my research. The more I disrupted myself from the past, the more I felt enlightened, uplifted, and empowered. Consequently, my experience at Cornell propelled me to pursue my academic career and, at the same time, helped me tremendously to find my values and goals in life. In the end, I found courage. I found myself. I gained confidence. I was no longer afraid, and I was on my own path to truth and happiness. Above all, I found my own calling – working in higher education to better people’s lives.

To find oneself is not an easy process for anybody while growing up from anywhere. It is especially hard for people like me who had been indoctrinated in a systemic way to not be oneself but be one of over a billion people with same thoughts. It took years for me to finally shake off the old cultural mold and unshackle myself to learn to raise questions, express my own thought, and worry not about face saving but worry whether I had my independent thoughts on critical issues and concerns. To be appreciative and yet critical of one’s own complex culture, to be able to self-reflect and self-aware of one’s own vulnerability, and then to take actions to relentlessly pursue the truth, discover one’s own self, and seek life’s meaning defined by myself are imperative to shape a person for a strong leadership role.

### **3 Shattering the Glass Ceiling**

In 1990, I became an assistant professor at California State University, San Bernardino. Subsequently, I was tenured and promoted to associate professor and then professor ranks. In 2001, I was recruited from more than 2,300 candidates to

be 1 of the 13 founding faculty members to establish California State University, Channel Islands, from the ground up. During the ensuing 11 years at Channel Islands, I engaged myself enthusiastically in all aspects of building the university, and through which I gained so much invaluable experience. I was appointed to leadership roles starting as department chair and later as special assistant to the provost.

In 2012, I became dean of the School of Health and Natural Sciences at Dominican University of California. By serving as a faculty member and later as a university administrator, I felt I was giving back to America, the country that provided me with many opportunities. I also recognized that all these efforts were not about trying to climb the corporate ladder; it was about serving others and helping more people to become successful. I had the opportunity to reach the American Dream, and I wanted more people to achieve that dream. In January 2017, I was hired to serve as provost and vice president for academic affairs at California State University, Sacramento. Then I was recruited by the Board of Regents of Samuel Merritt University to serve as its president. I became the first woman immigrant from China serving as president of a 4-year university in the United States after China opened its door in the late 1970s.

While serving as senior administrators, whenever I was invited to give a speech at public events, Asians and Asian Americans in the audience often were thrilled to see me on stage. I quickly realized that there were too few people like me serving in senior leadership roles in higher education. By serving these roles, I was helping to break the glass ceiling for women, especially women of color and Asian American women. What an awesome responsibility!

The experiences of my path perhaps can provide some lessons and shed some lights that others may find beneficial. For one thing, it is never easy for an East Asian American to become a senior leader, especially for an Asian American woman. It is almost against our nature instilled by our native culture to do so. To break out from it, one needs to be intentional and conscientious about it. To do well, one needs to focus on and answer the following questions first. Why are you trying to be a leader? What is your calling? I certainly hope that it is not merely for your own happiness, albeit you will be, among many other feelings you may experience. I certainly hope that it is not simply that you see others not fitting for leadership roles and you believe you can do a better job than they can, which is definitely not a sure thing. I certainly hope that it is not just to make your parents or children proud, which they undoubtedly will be, and yet that concentric circle is too small for the purposes of a leadership role. I certainly hope that it is not mainly to have the authority to order other people around that makes you happy and feel empowered because that will be a misunderstanding of what leadership is all about. Once you figure out the reasons for seeking a leadership role, you will be more empowered to proceed and to overcome the obstacles to reach your goal.

There will be plenty of obstacles and roadblocks along the way. There will be many denials and rejections. There is truly a glass ceiling, but the baggage from our own culture also has something to do with its creation. To break through it, we have to break away from our own culture. It takes courage. However, if our reason for a leadership role is strong enough, we summon our courage, we persevere, and we will be able to shatter the glass ceiling eventually.

## 4 Leading with Courage, Vision, Perseverance, Execution, and Impact

Throughout the years of my progressively evolving administrative experiences in higher education, I attended multiple leadership training programs, including the coveted programs at Harvard, MIT, and ACE. I also read numerous books on leadership. Often, I would purchase the books I have read and appreciated and give them to my direct reports as holiday presents for their growth and development. I sincerely believe that one of my roles is to help people who work with me to grow and develop. Accordingly, I would often use various occasions as teaching moments for my colleagues. Six years ago while I was attending the Executive Leadership Academy at Berkeley, one of the faculty members said something that made an indelible impression on me. She addressed the program attendees, most of whom were under-represented and yet aspired to be senior leaders in higher education. She said, “Be not afraid.” Later on, upon reading *Forged in Crisis: The Making of Five Courageous Leaders* by Nancy Koehn, I realized how important it was to have courage in leadership.

I reflected on my journey in the United States, my growth stemming from recognition of the fissure that I experienced from my multifaceted cultural background, and my less-traveled path to become a university president. All of these reflections have led to the insight that courage helps to anchor a successful leader, especially when encountering challenges. Before the winter holidays of 2019, I customarily purchased the aforementioned book for my cabinet members, because by then I had assembled my new cabinet team and would like to prepare them for any possible crisis ahead of us. Lo and behold, a few weeks later, a real calamity in a global scale unexpectedly unveiled itself right in front of us. The global public health crisis in the form of a pandemic was followed by a severe environmental catastrophe in the form of a series of wild fires in California. Then there was the not so surprising financial crunch due to the pandemic-induced business shutdowns and subsequently the social unrest after George Floyd’s killing. As if that had not been enough, the political watershed moment of January 6, 2021, ensued. Indeed, we have experienced nearly 3 tumultuous years since the pandemic hit the United States in March 2020. During these defining moments in history, nobody was prepared. All were shaken up. As leaders, we must summon our courage to stand firm. We needed to clear our heads; steady ourselves; critically analyze the situation; and recognize that these happenings would lead to a shakeout of epic proportions. We needed to realize that no sector was immune, higher education included. We needed to anticipate profound changes ahead. We must also realize that there would be no silver bullet in dealing with any of these crises. University leaders are always under pressure, either from the boards or from the constituencies. Leaders could choose to move swiftly and find an expedient solution to save the institution from any of the crises. However, it takes courage and vision to refrain ourselves from the urge to move hastily to show that we are on top of things and we are in control. Letting go of this pressurized quest of saving the institution can actually free us to be more thoughtful, inclusive, and acceptable for a diverse set of approaches, strategies, and deployment



actions, which could then truly make a differentiating impact for the institution in the end.

Faced with the tremendous head winds and uncertainty, I reminded my team of the courageous leaders in *Forged in Crisis*. We organized virtual town halls and check-ins with the faculty, staff, and students. Together, we collected ourselves, steadied the ship, steadfastly focused on the university mission, firmed our vision, developed a myriad of strategies, drew action plans, established taskforces, appointed and corralled leaders, set up cadence on work streams, executed the strategies, and communicated frequently with the campus community. By doing so, we gained the confidence from the campus community that our university was going to survive the crises. Better yet, we forged ahead in spite of the upheaval. We completed the Strategic Visioning of Diversity Equity and Inclusion Plan 2021–2026 for the university. We launched the strategic visioning process to drive the campus community to think ahead and be more aspirational for the future of the university. We also seized a perishable opportunity and transformed the university into an independent institution away from a sole membership of a giant healthcare delivery system on our board. We charged ahead with our new campus building project. We installed an entirely new enterprise resources platform as well. We effectively pivoted the university from the crisis mode of operations and poised the university for the future.

Instead of being despondent and feeling depleted, we replenished our resilience. Instead of coasting along and waiting it out, we gathered our strengths and kept our momentum. Together with our faculty, staff, and the students, I called the campus to be all hands on deck to work as a team, to roll up our sleeves, and to carry out the yeoman's job. Throughout this time, I carefully drafted my speeches for the town halls and campus-wide meetings. I made them calming, comforting, and yet brutally honest about the challenges we were facing. I injected a great sense of urgency for change and inspired the campus community to take the long view and aspire for the future. To be inspirational during a time of crisis, let alone multiple crises, requires courage. My years of experiences, some under extremely difficult circumstances, shaped me to be not afraid and instead to exude with infectious confidence and audacity.

Throughout the last 5 years of my presidency, I have learned so many lessons from our collective successes as well as my own and others' mistakes. To forge ahead, a university president must have a clear and aspirational vision for the institution. Such a vision must be specific about the university, not dreamed up out of a vacuum. It must be bold and cast a long view. It must make the mission of the university so impactful that it can inspire the people who work at the university to feel the meaning and worth of their work. As the leader, one must gather people's input toward the vision, pervasively socialize it, and galvanize the people of the institution to identify with and embrace the vision. To reach the vision and carry out the mission, strategies must be developed including the SMART goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based. For each of the goals, there must be specific individuals who are held accountable for the achievement of these goals. Clear communications must be in place so everyone knows who is responsible for

what. Cadence must be set up to help monitor progress toward completion of the goals.

To deploy the strategies and reach these SMART goals for the university, the president must have the right cabinet members on the bus. In fact, the top priority for a university president is to assemble his or her leadership team with the best team members. Individually, they must possess great leadership qualities; collectively, they must be solid team members. Without this team in place, the bus cannot go anywhere. More importantly, when you find that you have gotten the wrong person on the bus, you must act quickly to either coach the person to improve or make a decisive personnel decision to let the person go. Having the wrong leaders on your team in a prolonged period not only can ruin the team ethos but also ruin the strategy execution. In the end, the institution suffers from this unresolved personnel issues.

When dealing with sensitive personnel issues, actions are taken, and yet campus communications cannot be explicit due to confidentiality. This could easily lead to complaints and negative feedbacks from the campus community. Nonetheless, as a leader, one must bite the bullet and carry on, so long as the personnel decision is made in the best interest of the institution. One must spend no time dwelling on the unpleasanties. Instead, one must focus on the vision, mission, the strategies, and their execution. To successfully execute the strategies, the institutional leader must be perseverant, disciplined, inspiring, and insistent. Strategy development is relatively easy. Strategy deployment is hard. Many people can get excited about the former process by theoretically coming up with all kinds of strategies to get an institution to a different level. To actually tease out the key strategies to move forward with and then execute them on time and within budget in reality through trying times demands more from a leader.

To be successful, one must recognize that one person, no matter how strong a leader you are, cannot do it alone. One needs a team of leaders to carry out the tasks of strategy deployment. How to best keep the team of leaders, especially those who are ambitious achievers, on the same page and work in collaboration becomes the key element of effective leadership for a university president. Coaching for oneself might be needed, and even team coaching could be helpful during this process. One also needs to recognize the support needed to deploy the strategies and provide it promptly. This leads to the importance of culture. There is a saying that “culture can eat strategy for breakfast any day.” To establish a healthy culture for an institution to ensure successful execution and deployment of strategies, a leader must uphold the highest integrity and honesty, be transparent as much as circumstances allow, and be inclusive and caring of the employees. Having a healthy ethos at a university led by the example of the university president will boost the strategy deployment tremendously.

## 5 Leading Ahead Relentlessly

Being a university president naturally puts one in the lime light. More often than not, university presidents receive praise and flattering comments from the people who report to them. They often dine and wine with potential donors, political dignitaries, and community leaders. To do that, they usually dress up in their Sunday's best and put up a smiling face. However, peeling off the glamour and pleasantries of the position, one would realize that there are many reasons that university presidents are often seriously challenged from many fronts. The truth is that it is not easy to be a leader in higher educational institutions. There are so many complexities in the higher educational sector. There are so many uncertainties, especially after the pandemic. Nobody has a crystal ball, enabling them to predict what is lying ahead. We are all wading in uncharted waters.

For Asian American leaders in higher education, especially for the rare Asian American women leaders, it is even harder. Due to biases, people often question whether an Asian American woman can be a strong leader, including her ability to lead men; her ability to go out there to give public speeches; her ability to hit the road to fundraise; her ability to make tough decisions; her ability to hold people accountable; and even her ability to fire people. This makes it even more important for those who are in such leadership roles to appreciate all the reward to be a leader, cast the doubts and fear aside, and have the tenacity to draw strengths from all possible sources and take the responsibilities head on to overcome the challenges facing them daily, especially Asian American women leaders. While doing this hard work to overcome biases, one also needs to keep her chin up, demonstrate strong leadership with decisive actions, and remind people about the vision and mission of the institution and the impact they engender for public good. This disciplined approach will time and again save the day and help one drive the institution ever forward and upward.

To maintain the energy and motivational leadership needed to serve as a university president, one requires a lot of support from his/her circle of loved ones, trusted friends, and colleagues with similar professional and personal experiences who can serve as confidants in time of need. Seeking professional coaching is beneficial as well. It is ideal to have a few friends who have served and are serving as presidents with whom one could share information and cases to get consultation. Often than not, being a university president means that one will encounter issues and cases that one cannot discuss with anyone else at the university. Withholding difficult cases all to oneself is hard on one's body and mind. To avoid harming oneself, one must learn how to compartmentalize issues, how not to take things personally, and how not to get emotionally involved in the decision-making process. This is a very difficult thing to do and requires one to be highly self-controlled. For me, even with a medical degree and training, who has learned the ability to not become personally and emotionally attached to any particular cases in medical practice, I still find it challenging to be disciplined to protect myself, mentally and physically, from occasional gushing vitriol in language and feedback targeted against me based on untrue

accusations or rumors. It is most grueling when you cannot defend yourself due to the position you hold or because of the confidentiality of the case. In all these situations, I have found tremendous support from the loved ones in my family. In the end, having the courage and integrity will allow you to sleep and eat well, enjoy what you do, and carry on in your life and work. Additionally, recognizing the limitation of one person's capacity and ability is a key factor of humility one must possess in order to do a great job as a university president. Never be a know-it-all person. Instead, always have an open mind and ready to learn from others. Having a Chinese cultural background is tremendously valuable in this regard because it deeply infuses us to be modest, humble, and prudent and to never stop learning from others.

One of the things that has been essential in my success in all the leadership roles that I have held is effective communication. Because English is not my native language, from the get-go when I began my journey in the United States, I emphasized on my communication skills, both in writing and speaking. Early on, I deliberately shared dorm rooms with American roommates in graduate school. I purposefully went to numerous social activities to hone my people skills in the American university settings. I intentionally learned popular sports and songs, which I could use in my conversations with colleagues to gain trust and friendship. I became much more humorous as I developed myself to overcome challenges at work.

I take careful notes during meetings. I organize my thoughts to prepare for key meetings with my board, my direct reports, and various group settings. I carefully prepare all my speeches to make them more connected to the audiences, relevant, and meaningful. I ask communications expert to edit my writings and then meticulously learn from their edits to improve my own writing. I take any communications released from my office very seriously. This is not only to protect the presidency but also my reputation as a non-English speaker who happens to be Chinese American serving as a university president.

As I mentioned before, I have attended multiple leadership workshops and read many leadership books. I have recommended colleagues for these development opportunities and given inspirational books to colleagues who are aspired to develop themselves to be higher educational leaders. I have also presented at leadership forums, especially women leadership forums, as well as AAPI forums. I hope one day we, Asian American leaders, particularly Asian American women leaders in higher educational institutions, are not going to be such rare occurrences. I hope that day will come soon.

Meanwhile, operating within this framework and together with my leadership team, we have mustered all our bravery and moved the university forward without missing a beat in the last 5 years. Throughout this period, especially during the pandemic, we continued our classes, virtually and later in hybrid format. We graduated students on time. We obtained the longest accreditation for the university and specialty programs. We secured our independence and began charting our own destiny. We forged ahead with our fundraising efforts.

Ordinarily, any one of the above tasks and initiatives would be monumental in nature. It would take months if not years to accomplish in a peaceful and uneventful

environment. During the extraordinarily trying times, however, we not only completed all the above complex tasks but also achieved them all with remarkable impact for the university in such a short period of time. In the end, all these have been accomplished because of the strong support of my loved ones surrounding me and my team's exceptional courage, vision, perseverance, and execution.



**Dr. Ching-Hua Wang** was appointed as President of Samuel Merritt University, a nonprofit private health sciences university, in 2018, and became the first woman immigrant from China serving as president of a 4-year university in the United States after China opened its door in the late 1970s. Since then, she has built a new cabinet team, formed two colleges, led the university through a pandemic, moved forward with a brand-new headquarters building in Oakland, and forged partnerships via a new Center for Community Engagement and corporate partnerships. Under her leadership, the university developed a strategic vision for diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as a Strategic Growth Initiative, executed the independence of the university from Sutter Health, and mounted a fundraising campaign with over \$35M raised so far from corporations, foundations, governmental agencies, and private donors to support the university. Prior to her presidency, she had served as provost, dean, and chair at four other universities and has been tenured as professor in Immunology. Dr. Wang President Wang obtained her Ph.D. in Immunology from Cornell University, an MS in Immunology from Beijing University, and a medical degree from Capital Medical University in Beijing, China.

# An Introvert Leading Higher Education in Academic Nursing and Healthcare



Jing Wang

## 1 Where It All Started

Studying nursing was not my first choice. It is amazing how sometimes life makes the perfect choices for you. I was selected into the nursing program in the year when Jiangxi Medical College (now part of Nanchang University) was starting a new Nursing Department. At the time, earning a bachelor's degree in nursing was not the norm, and most practicing nurses only had associate degrees. It was a new thing at the medical college, and only one or two students chose to study nursing. I was 1 of the 119 students who selected other majors as their first choices but were moved into Nursing. My father was not happy at the time because he always thought I would be a physician or dentist. As a high school graduate, I didn't care too much about what I would do in the future, but a random call from my cousin studying in the USA. changed my mind. I was going to dive headfirst into nursing regardless of it not being what I had originally hoped for.

Long story short, I fell in love with the nursing profession. I did surprisingly well in college and was fortunate to be awarded a lot of top scholarships. In addition, I took on a few student leadership roles. I became a student leader in two department and university-level organizations, and I founded a nursing student group that visited home-bound seniors in the community on weekends, which later became part of the required clinical experience for the community nursing course. I am not a natural-born leader; it was very uncomfortable being elected or nominated to be the president of the student organization. I even cried after my first meeting with all members of the organization. The only reason I agreed to take on the leadership role

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was that I was a “doer.” I was very passionate about our work, and I wanted to do everything I could to help the organization.

Fast forward, I had the opportunity to study at the University of Pittsburgh in the BSN-Ph.D. program. The program was a direct-entry Ph.D. program for nurses who did not have a master’s degree. Being a very shy student who was struggling with the new environment in the USA, I was very focused on doctoral work and took advantage of all the programs that were available to me as a Ph.D. student. I had the opportunity to be trained not only in nursing but also in public health and medicine for clinical and translational science. I attended many conferences and made many presentations. I worked with students and trainees not only from health-related disciplines but also from engineering, computer science, rehabilitation science, business, and others. It was a solid 5 years where I transitioned from an introverted shy person to one with a strong confidence in being a scientist, yet still deeply introverted. I did not have any leadership experiences during those 5 years, but it gave me rigorous training and experience working with world-class researchers who built my confidence in becoming a leader in the field one day.

After graduating from a top-ranked nursing program at the University of Pittsburgh, I got a tenure-track faculty position in Houston, Texas. The process was very fast. I felt valued as a new Ph.D. graduate and decided to take on this new adventure and canceled the other interviews I had with two other nursing schools. My experience as a candidate proved to be an asset in future roles that called upon me to recruit others.

Where I started and ended up in academic nursing taught me the lesson that the initial “failure” in life can bring you surprises, and sometimes following where life takes you will bring you wonders in life. I cannot imagine myself being a dean today if I had gone to my dream university to become a physician or dentist.

## **2 Leadership Development Programs in Preparing Me for Deanship**

Since I started my deanship at Florida State University College of Nursing, I realize how well I was prepared for this role. I appreciate the mentorship of my former Dean, Eileen Breslin, at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio. My life had forever changed as I had the luxury of having over 60–70% of my time protected/funded for over 5 years in two leadership development programs that I am going to mention below in more detail. Thanks to many great mentors that I met during a few prestigious leadership programs in nursing and health profession education, which truly prepared me well for the deanship. My academic leadership training started in 2013 with Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Nurse Faculty Scholars Program with national leaders/deans in nursing for 3 years. A lot of my fellow scholars would agree with me that we had a transformational experience in the RWJF program. I had 60% of my time protected plus research funding

for a research project, along with local and national mentoring. Every year, we met with top nursing school deans and leaders of national nursing organizations to learn about their leadership experiences and were introduced to national organizations such as the American Academy of Nursing and the National Academy of Medicine, as well as how to work with policymakers. As a junior faculty, I did not truly appreciate the need to study no coursework strategic planning and finance, now I do as a dean. I had the opportunity to work with my former Dean on a strategic plan to establish a center on interprofessional education and collaborative practice. In the process, I learned the inner operations and financial aspects of a complex academic health center. I had three mentors who were all leaders in their fields: my Associate Dean for Research, Dr. Nancy Bergstrom, a pioneer and a giant in pressure ulcer research; my research mentor, Dr. Jiajie Zhang, who shortly became Dean of the only free-standing School of Biomedical Informatics in the USA; and Suzanne Bakken, professor at Columbia Nursing, then President of the American College Medical Informatics, the first nurse to hold the position and a globally renowned nurse informatician. I also have a cohort of 12 scholars from various schools of nursing who became the best peer mentors and friends in my academic career. It was a very intense 3 years, but I was proud to see our final project evolve into a proposal to establish a research center on mobile and connected health technologies that would bring all the research partners from across the campus together on this topic. It evolved to have an interprofessional education piece and an industry collaboration component with Texas Medical Center Innovation Institute, later through the Macy Faculty Scholars program that I started immediately after the RWJF program.

I continued to advance my leadership skills through the Macy Faculty Scholars program, where I was one of the only five nurses/physicians selected in 2016. The program offered me the opportunity to learn from national leaders in health profession education and collaboration. In this program, I was able to immerse myself in connecting the dots among faculty, students, industry leaders, and university and school administrators. The program was wonderful that focused on providing us with hands-on experiences in conducting interprofessional projects. I learned so much about the science of teaching and learning and all academic rules that presented challenges in implementing an interprofessional project. Most importantly, I was now connected to two important communities: the Macy Faculty Scholars, where I meet every year with other leaders in innovative teaching and interprofessional initiatives, and the Harvard Macy Scholar community, where I continue to teach and be engaged as a faculty facilitator for its innovation program.

These two highly competitive national leadership programs not only supported my research and interprofessional education projects in the local academic health science center but more importantly provided me with opportunities to develop close relationships with a national network of emerging and established leaders in the field of nursing, medicine, informatics, and interprofessional education. During the Macy Faculty Scholars Program, I also joined two Harvard Macy Institute programs, one which focused on health profession education and the other being the



Harvard Medical School and Harvard Business School's joint program on "Leading Innovations in Health Care and Education."

Toward the end of the fifth year, as I was finishing the Macy Faculty Scholars program, I started my first official academic leadership role as Vice Dean for Research at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio. I then realized the importance of policies in healthcare and academic health centers, so I decided to apply and was selected for a health policy fellowship, as well as a leadership program designed for deans. As a Fellow in the Health and Aging Policy Fellows Program/American Political Science Association Congressional Fellow, and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)-Wharton Executive Leadership Program, I expanded my network with healthcare leaders and health policy leaders in shaping national policies and preparing academic health science centers, identifying the relevance of educational priorities and research growth to funding priorities coming in the pipeline. This experience enabled me to have a strategic vision to provide faculty and students with opportunities to learn and grow with the best support and resources to compete at the national level.

In summary, I had the opportunity early in my academic career to be selected for several academic leadership development programs. These programs not only expanded my views and perspectives in higher education and grew my networks across many higher educational institutions but also gave me exposure to role models who became my mentors and sponsors and who are leaders at the national and global levels.

### **3 Lessons Learned during Leadership Journey in Academic Health and Higher Education**

During my tenure as Vice Dean for Research at UT Health San Antonio, I benefited from building infrastructure for an expansive research portfolio and leading operations for the School of Nursing in collaboration with other Vice Deans while supporting the Dean in her role leading at the university level and cultivating external relations. I learned to be a dean through hands-on experience at every level. This infrastructure and organizational expansion significantly built my skills and confidence in leading as a dean later. As Vice Dean for Research, I led the development of new research/grant infrastructure to support a portfolio of over 27 million (in FY 2019 and FY 2020, a rapid and significant growth from 2 million in FY 2017 and 7 million in FY 2018) in grants and contracts spanning from nursing research, education, student success to services/practice, with a diverse funding body including National Institutes of Health (NIH), Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT), the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, Department of Education, and private industries. Within the School of Nursing, we developed grant writing and faculty development

programs focused on NIH R series grant submissions, and as a result, we significantly increased NIH grant submissions and the diversity of grant mechanisms and funding agencies. We also had first-time submissions to the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grants, National Science Foundation, Department of Defense, a first-time contract with the local Bexar County on the clean syringe program, and a first-time contract with the Interprofessional Education Collaborative (IPEC). All this expansion comes with cultural change at the School and University. While I am most proud of the wide recognition at the University for the School of Nursing's increased efforts in research and collaborative efforts with the School of Medicine, I am most appreciative of the learning through the constant struggle with staffing and HR challenges that come with constant hiring for both faculty and staff within a rapidly growing organization.

As a Vice Dean, I have spent a lot of time networking with leaders in other units at the University. I have gained strong administration experience (student and community engagement in research, institutional core lab, technology and commercialization, sponsored programs, pre- and post-award management, research staff titles, research center/institute management, pre- and post-doc hire, and training) as well as business operation, information technology (IT), human resources, and marketing, through building and aligning the school's efforts with the institution's transformative initiative, the EDGE (Enterprise Design for Growth & Effectiveness), guided by HURON consulting group, as a core working group member of the teams that targeted IT, digital marketing, business services, and research administration to prepare the institution for future growth. Through the establishment of a new business service center, we were able to increase post-award processing efficiency from several weeks/months to within 24–48 h.

Coming from a very competitive environment to a very relationship-based one, I learned to lead with heart and passion. Culture eats strategy. Learning individual faculty needs is so important to building an office that is focused on customer service and creating efficiency. It took me about 2 years to have the right staff on the team and streamline the support services. I also spent a lot of time networking with colleagues at the University and medical school. It opened many doors for the school of nursing including postdoc positions and training resources for nursing faculty. We were able to have all our postdocs funded by outside resources or funded individually by institutional programs. Junior faculty were added to externally funded grants, and we successfully prepared a junior investigator to transition from postdoc to junior faculty by her securing an NIH R01 award in the first year as a tenure-track Assistant Professor. In this role, I learned that through collaboration you can always find resources internally and externally to grow your unit. It is a matter of finding the right people and support to make it happen.

I have learned to embrace open, fair, and transparent communication and leadership. One of the initiatives I led to promote fairness, transparency, and faculty-shared governance was establishing the PURSUE awards to enhance faculty research and scholarship endeavors with decisions from the Committee on Scholarship to provide research bridge funding support. I strengthened the biobehavioral lab support, which resulted in the institution of a new biobanking

barcoding system, an increased capacity that helped our faculty win the opportunity to house the National Children's Health Study's samples, and established service centers to be revenue generating for both the Biobehavioral Lab and Center on Smart and Connected Health Technologies' Connected Health Platform. It is essential to have an entrepreneurial spirit as we provide key infrastructure support for needed research areas and growth, but in the meantime, we must be creative in recovering our costs from grants and contracts while being compliant with state and federal rules and regulations.

Academic and industry collaboration, innovation, and entrepreneurship are key in the twenty-first century for academic nursing. As an invited teaching faculty in the Harvard Medical School and Harvard Business School's joint program, "Leading Innovations in Health Care and Education," I became very familiar with the academic health innovation models nationally and globally. Through this network, I am also deeply connected with the digital health community in Boston and across the USA with scholars participating in this program. Digital health and healthcare transformation have come fast at us since the COVID-19 pandemic. I was the founding director of the Interprofessional Center on Smart and Connected Health Technologies, which streamlines academic research and promotes industry collaboration. I successfully secured contracts to collaborate with AT&T to develop an Aging in Place lab and telehealth training to prepare nursing to meet the emerging healthcare transformation in digital health. Active collaboration with the local industry community is key to positioning academic researchers to be at the forefront of innovation. I convened a faculty panel at the Entrepreneurship Week in San Antonio, developed the first Hackathon in collaboration with the Texas Medical Center Innovative Institute, was selected as a participant in the first accelerator program at UT Health San Antonio, became a member of the advisory committee for the Blackstone LaunchPad program, and participated in a steering committee to advance InnoClinic to foster student-led innovation within the academic health center. I also further developed my knowledge through the University of Pennsylvania Wharton's Entrepreneurship training and MIT's Artificial Intelligence on business applications. These are some of the initiatives and activities that also brought the school of nursing recognition of innovation across the university ecosystem as well as the innovation and entrepreneurship national network.

Diversity and inclusion are critical to workplace civility. As an academic leader, being mindful of civility issues in the classroom and the school among faculty and staff is critical to leading successfully. With a good number of planned and unplanned faculty and staff turnovers, a key responsibility of mine is to recruit and retain faculty and staff and develop programs to address these issues. Conflict resolution is required almost every day in my job as we build the rapidly growing research enterprise in the School of Nursing and with issues around job performance, disability, mental health, and bullying behaviors; this experience is crucial in refining my leadership skills and in having difficult conversations and emotional intelligence as we navigate through uncharted waters. Being an invited panelist at the American Academy of Nursing's expert panel on the "Role of Microaggression in Academic Healthcare," I am very sensitive to the impact of implicit bias and microaggression

in academic research and healthcare environments. I actively network with national leaders, serving on the diversity and inclusivity committee with the American Academy of Nursing, AARP/RWJF's Nursing Campaign on Action's Steering Committee on equity, diversity, and inclusion to be at the forefront of addressing these issues.

## 4 Starting Deanship Journey

I joined Florida State University's College of Nursing as Dean in August 2021. My previous Dean always told me to follow my heart and supported my decision. I am always reminded of her saying to me "Life is a marathon, not a sprint." But my heart has always been attracted to challenges where I can make a difference. It was a difficult decision to go to a new place and become a dean earlier than I would have liked, but I was deeply touched by a community of people who recognized my weakness but still wanted me badly as their dean and believed that I am the person who can make a lasting difference. It proved to be one of the best decisions I had ever made; I fell in love with being a nursing dean.

I have been able to leverage the nursing shortage in the state of Florida and nationally to secure funding from the state and healthcare systems to grow and expand the College of Nursing. Additionally, I have enjoyed the benefits of a new President, a new Provost, and a new Vice President of Research in securing resources to recruit research-intensive faculty and significantly grow the research enterprise making huge cultural changes and increasing our research ranking from 43 to number 8 nationally. In my roughly 16 months as Dean, our college received the only nursing-led (in partnership with Medicine and Psychology) 14.5 million NIH FIRST award in the USA to recruit underrepresented minority faculty for success in mental health and chronic illness research. Our projected 2022–2023 NIH research expenditure will exceed the current number 1-ranked nursing school in the USA, with the successful recruitment of heavily NIH-funded research teams. We more than doubled American Academy of Nursing members, doubled enrollment for Undergraduate and DNP programs, and opened two new DNP tracks: Lifestyle Medicine and Executive Health Systems Leadership (options with joint MBA and Law) and a Ph.D. program. We have also planned to launch an online MSN program highlighting innovation, entrepreneurship, and nursing engineering. We established two new research centers focused on brain science and symptom management, digital health, and innovation that fostered cluster faculty hires with strong NIH research support. We also developed an innovative academic-practice partnership with over 2 million in funding to support student scholarships and clinical faculty. In positioning the college at the forefront of healthcare and education, we doubled the simulation space featuring 360-degree care and "hospital or advanced care at home" with virtual reality and augmented reality, as well as remote monitoring technologies. We also successfully engaged all stakeholders in launching the "Boldly Rising 2023–2028" strategic planning. We also developed plans to triple staff support in

student services and launch a new Student Success Center as we fearlessly expand our program to address the critical nursing shortage. This is a roller coaster of change for the college, with lots of changes in management and leveraging university resources to grow a small organization within a short period. Seizing opportunities happening at every corner is the biggest lesson learned. Never waste a crisis and turn it into an opportunity.

Fundraising is a major role of the Dean to garner resources and support the growth of the college. Being an introvert, it is hard to imagine myself enjoying this part of Dean's job, but surprisingly I enjoy relationship building. I have built a strong alumni engagement network and revived the alumni and friends' interest in supporting nursing. We doubled new donors in a year and secured the largest gift in the college's history from a living donor. My previous Dean also taught me to be present with the community, so leaders in our foundation board often joke with me that I should get the "Presence Award" since I am always there at university events, such as President Box and Alumni events. At the time of writing this chapter, FSU just beat Oklahoma in the Cheez-It Bowl game and had a great year of wins at FSU football. Very naturally, I learned to enjoy football and the conversations and friendships that opened doors for our college and made the community know more about nursing, which they admitted they knew nothing about before. I could not figure out whether it was the introverted me becoming more extroverted, but it felt very natural in building friendships and relationships, which bring me joy and fun in this job.

Recruitment and retention of talented faculty and staff is a significant part of a dean's job, especially in a smaller college like ours where we do not have departments. Recruiting many racial and sexual minority faculty and staff leveraging national and local networks has been demonstrated to be the most effective way in my recruitment efforts. Partnership with the College of Medicine on developing a diversity pipeline with underrepresented counties throughout the state of Florida significantly increased the diversity pool of student applicants in the college. Opening doors to more people who love nursing and struggle to get in due to the limited slots we have has been one of the proudest accomplishments I have had in my career.

## **5 National Service for Leadership Journey**

I have found the volunteer experience that later turned into leadership experience very helpful in growing the academic reputation of our college due to the expansive network through professional organizations. I have been very active in a few professional organizations since I was a Ph.D. student. I found a home and tremendous support in several professional organizations focused on minority nursing. I am currently President of the Asian American/Pacific Islander Nurses Association, Inc. (AAPINA). I became a member when I was a Ph.D. student at the University of Pittsburgh. I was a very active volunteer for its newsletter and later became the newsletter co-editor and supported the founding of a communications committee for the organization to establish a formal infrastructure. I was elected

President-Elect in 2021 and became President in 2022. This president role also brought me to the Board of Directors at the National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurses Associations (NCEMNA). NCEMNA is a unified force advocating for equity and justice in nursing and healthcare for ethnic minority populations. Incorporated in 1998, NCEMNA is made up of five national ethnic nurse associations: Asian American/Pacific Islander Nurses Association, Inc. (AAPINA), National Alaska Native American Indian Nurses Association, Inc. (NANAINA), National Association of Hispanic Nurses, Inc. (NAHN), National Black Nurses Association, Inc. (NBNA), and Philippine Nurses Association of America, Inc. (PNAA). In the meantime, I was learning higher education administration and was nominated for the Council of Chinese American Deans and Presidents and elected to be the President-Elect in 2022 where I will be working with pioneering Chinese American deans, provosts, vice presidents, chancellors, and department chairs who are aspiring deans. Leading the leadership development or mentoring program with these organizations has been my way of giving back to the community but also continues to grow my leadership skills.

Service at the national level is also critical to growing one's academic leadership brand. Recognized as a national leader in interprofessional education and research on mobile and connected health, I am sought after for my expertise by national programs and committees to shape policy change and public awareness. I was invited to be a panelist at the National Academy of Medicine's Emerging Leader Forum on the topic of wearable technology for chronic disease management and care for the underserved. I am a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing and serve on the panels on aging, technology and informatics, and primary care. A result of the panel collaboration is the recently published paper in the Academy's official journal on nursing informatics innovation for the twenty-first century. I have also been invited to shape the FDA Precertification Program for Software as a Medical Device and have authored a publication on this policy report. Of note in shaping national guidelines and policies, I was invited as the steering committee member for the American Nurses Association (ANA) Connected Health/Telehealth Professional Issues Panel that updated and published the ANA's Core Principles on Connected Health in 2019. I was also invited to be a member of the Revision Workgroup of the 2017 National Standards for Diabetes Self-Management Education and Support which is updated every 5 years to set the standards for diabetes education practice. My work has also been cited by the Standards of Medical Care in Diabetes. I was also a grant reviewer for NIH, NSF, PCORI, American Nurses Foundation, and Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science, Editor-in-Chief of JMIR Aging, and editorial board member for the Diabetes Educator. This experience not only resulted in multiple collaborative publications and national guideline updates but also gave me opportunities and networks to disseminate my work and understand national funding priorities. Being the nursing leader on precision health, artificial intelligence, population health, telepresence, and Big Data initiatives at UTHealth and/or UT system and Expert Panels on the American Academy of Nursing and ANA Connected Health/Telehealth panel, I am keenly aware of regional and national research funding priorities and how to support faculty and students from health sciences centers to collaborate across the health sciences center and with

other non-health professions in identifying the relevance of their work to these funding priorities. These voluntary professional services helped tremendously build my network and national reputation quickly. The combination of the academic administration experience and leadership volunteer experience at these national forums has put me in a uniquely strong position with strong recognition in my institution and nationally that significantly benefited and contributed to the significant increase in national reputation for our college, our university, and myself.

## **6 Leading through Interprofessional Collaborations**

I believe strongly that a successful academic leader needs to have broad expertise beyond our discipline and profession. Interprofessional collaboration is the easiest way to grow one's expertise in this area. Interprofessional collaboration is embedded in my training and has been my practice in my higher education and academic leadership career. During my training in Pittsburgh, we often worked with engineers and computer scientists from Carnegie Mellon University. In San Antonio, through collaboration with internal and external partners, we established a strong presence of nursing research across the health science center and sister institutions' schools of business, engineering, and computer science. With strategic planning in identifying focused research areas, we had first-time School of Nursing involvements in submissions for the NIH-Alzheimer's Research Center and Diabetes Research Center, National Institute of Aging-funded Pepper Center renewal, National Cancer Institute-designated cancer center renewal, as well as planning for the NHLBI cohort on rural health and Hispanics, NSF Artificial Intelligence Institute Planning Grant, and NIA's high priority on Aging and Artificial Intelligence center. Another strategic research move is to increase predoctoral and postdoctoral trainees in the three focus areas to build a pipeline for tenure-track faculty and prepare NIH T32/P20 research center and training grant applications. We brought five postdoctoral fellows for the first time in the history of the School of Nursing through full or partial funding from partners outside the school – a feat I am incredibly proud of.

## **7 Board Service and National Leadership Roles**

With my leadership role as Dean and President of professional nursing organizations, I gained a national spotlight, and I started to receive several invitations to serve on national committees, including board services. One of the big surprises for me was the Board at RWJF. Starting in July 2022, I began to serve on the Board of Trustees at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. I was also recently invited to join the National Institutes of Health's National Advisory Council on Nursing Research at the National Institute of Nursing Research and American Academy of Nursing's Diversity & Inclusivity Committee, where I will be able to support leading organizations at the national level on important matters that I care about and to which I can contribute.

## 8 Strong Personal Support System during My Leadership Journey

Many people have paved the way in my leadership journey on and off campus. I cannot name all my mentors and sponsors as there are so many. I work hard and volunteer a lot in professional services, and one of my strengths is to make the best out of any situation. I later learned that my initiatives and activities have earned me a reputation as a mentor who is spoken about highly even when I am not present. I am also very fortunate that I have a very supportive family. I have a husband who never expects me to cook and allows me to travel for 2–3 weeks at a time. As an only child, my parents stand ready to support me anytime I need them, and they are staying healthy as a way to support me, so I do not need to worry about them as I have been laser-focused on building my career. I have two loving girls who always love me, hug me, kiss me, and say they miss me and love me even when I am not the primary caregiver for them. My parents never taught me this and I missed it in the Chinese culture I grew up with, but I am lucky to have that from my American-born and American-raised children.

## 9 Pearls of Wisdom for Future Leaders

Introverts can lead successfully. Work is work; do not take it personally. Always be positive. Build your network. Stay authentic. Be yourself and listen to your heart. Lead with heart and passion. Be humble. Have a sense of humor. Live in humility. Appreciate and celebrate more.



**Dr. Jing Wang, Ph.D., MPH, RN, FAAN,** Dean at Florida State University College of Nursing, nationally known for her research in digital health and health equity. Wang is an elected fellow of the American Academy of Nursing, president of the Asian American/Pacific Islander Nurses Association, and board of directors at the National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Nurses Association. She currently serves on the Board of Trustees at HCA Florida Capitol Hospital, and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), the largest foundation in the USA solely dedicated to health. She was an RWJF Nurse Faculty Scholar, TEDMED Scholar, Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, Macy Faculty Scholar, Harvard Macy Scholar, Health and Aging Policy Fellow, American Political Science Association Congressional Fellow, and National Academy of Medicine Emerging Leader in Health and Medicine. Wang earned her MSN, MPH, and Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. She received her BMed in Nursing at Jiangxi Medical College in Nanchang, Jiangxi, P.R. China.



# Starting from “Two Suitcases”: My Journey Leading Academic and Research Libraries in America



Xuemao Wang

## 1 My Family and My Upbringing in China

I was born in the western part of Sichuan province, China, a city known as Ya'an 雅安 – famous for the concentrated large population of giant pandas. Situated about 200 miles away from the capital city of Sichuan, Chengdu, Ya'an has a relatively small population of 1.4 million people. When I was 3 years old, my father changed his job from Xikang 西康 province (later Xikang merged with Sichuan province) to Chongqing. My mother followed with three children and relocated to Chongqing, the largest city then in the southwest region of China. (Chongqing eventually became the most populated city in the world with a population of 33 million and a municipality status that directly reports to the central government in Beijing.)

My father was a professor whose specialization was political economics theory. My father taught generations of civil service officials as a head of the department of public administration at the Institute of Public Administration of Chongqing. My mother, before playing professional volleyball in her youth, was trained to become a nurse. After following my father across the country, she worked as a manager of a department store. I have two siblings: my elder brother Xiaoqin is a biomedical engineering professor at Johns Hopkins University, and my sister Xiaoya is a licensed traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture practitioner in Long Island, New York.

I grew up in a very tumultuous time known as the Cultural Revolution in China. My father belonged to the group of intellectuals who were devalued and removed from their roles in the professional society when the workers, farmers, and Red

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Guard students were considered the trustable force to lead the revolutionary changes of China. My siblings and I were part of the group of “disregarded kids” whose parents were in the “5 black classes” category that was subjected to suppression by the communist party.

By the time I graduated from high school in 1976, China shut down all colleges and sent all high school graduates to rural areas for what was called a “re-education” movement. I was sent to a region about 300 miles from home. In today’s Chinese high-speed railway travel, it may only take 45 min, but back then it took 2 days by bus plus ferry.

After years of “re-education,” I returned to Chongqing with a government mandate that my parents’ employer create a job to hire me so that I didn’t become a burden to the city. I went to my father’s university for an interview. The HR person asked me what skills I had, my simple answer was “plant sweet potato” as that was what I had done in those “re-education” years. The man responded, “that’s not useful for university... well, you look tall, and our library needs people to shelve books.” This is how I accidentally became a librarian, a role I would hold for the rest of my professional life.

Over the next 10 years, I worked at the university library in Chongqing, progressing from a library pager to a cataloger to an acquisition librarian, then to the head of a reference department. During this time, I also completed my undergraduate study with the top library science program in China at Wuhan University and received my Bachelor of Arts in Library Science. Wuhan University’s Library Science program, today now known as the School of Information Management (SIM), is the oldest and largest library science program in China.<sup>1</sup> After I received my BA, I was ready to pursue my next education and career goals.

## **2 Coming to America: From a Graduate Student to the Dean of Libraries**

My American Dream started with my brother Xiaoqin. After graduating from Sichuan University with a degree in Electrical Engineering, Xiaoqin won a Fulbright Scholarship and went to the University of Michigan for his graduate studies. Later he completed his Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering at Johns Hopkins University with postdoc work at the University of California, San Francisco, and eventually became a full professor and an accomplished scientist at Johns Hopkins.

In the Spring of 1987 when Xiaoqin learned that I would soon get my bachelor’s degree in library science, he wrote me a letter describing his graduate studies

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<sup>1</sup>The predecessor of SIM was Boone Library School at Wuchang, which was founded by two Americans, Mary Elizabeth Wood and Samuel T. Y. Seng, in March 1920. In 1953, Boone Library School merged into Wuhan University and became Wuhan University’s Department of Library Science. More information at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wuhan\\_University\\_School\\_of\\_Information\\_Management](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wuhan_University_School_of_Information_Management)

experience in America. His letter ended with an aspirational line that changed my life trajectory. He wrote, “the sky is the limit in this free country.” Reading those words was the starting point of my American Dream.

Three years later in the brutally cold winter of 1991, I came to America alone with two suitcases and \$50 in my pocket. Supported by my brother from his graduate student stipend savings at Johns Hopkins, I started my first graduate degree study at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania. Because I did not have a scholarship or graduate assistantship support for my studies at Kutztown University, I had to take three part-time jobs while enrolled as a full-time graduate student with a course load average of four courses. During the day, I worked as a student cafeteria assistant where I got free meals in addition to my student wages. In the evening, I worked for the library’s computer lab where I took a great interest in using PCs and Macintosh computers. On the weekends, I drove to Allentown Pennsylvania to work for a Chinese restaurant as a waiter. This was after I bought my first car—a used Mitsubishi Mirage hatchback—with all \$700 savings of my earnings from my first-semester part-time job. On the day I went to have the car’s title transferred from the seller, I had to ask the friend who drove me there to lend me \$20 so I could fill up the gas tank to drive the car home.

The summer of 1991 made me financially independent. I took a summer job as a cashier in a take-out restaurant in a Baltimore suburb. That summer I earned enough money not only to pay my tuition and living expenses for the next semester but also to begin saving to bring my wife and son to America.

A year later in the summer of 1992, my family reunited in Kutztown Pennsylvania. On July 4, a very symbolic date—the US Independence Day, my wife Weihong “Wendy” and our son Scott landed at Newark International Airport. Scott was overwhelmingly excited when he told me with a big smile on his 5-year-old face that he saw so many fireworks from the plane as they were landing. That symbolic entry on the Fourth of July in 1992 to America was a profound memory for Scott. He later reflected on that experience in his college application essay.

As I finished my graduate degree at Kutztown University in 1992, I realized the upcoming revolution of information technology and its impact on library and information management, so I decided to pursue more depth training in the IT field. The University of South Carolina offered me a graduate assistantship with full tuition and a \$750 per month stipend. I felt rich compared to my previous years at Kutztown where I had to earn both tuition and living expenses.

As a graduate assistant at the College of Library and Information Science of the University of South Carolina, my primary responsibility was to support the school’s computer labs, which included a PC-based teaching classroom and a multimedia lab with AV equipment and Macintosh computers. It was the summer of 1993, and the Internet was in its early stage. I vividly remember when I installed the first copy of the Mosaic browser on a PC and saw the colored graphics easily displayed with mixed text on the screen. I was so excited to witness the beginning of a new information era.

After another year and a half focusing on information technologies and their application in the library and information sector, and with a second master’s degree

under my belt, I went to Miami, Florida, for the 1994 American Library Association annual conference. My goal was to explore job opportunities at the conference's job placement center. I was hired on the spot by the Queens Public Library of New York City. Later, I learned that Queens Library hired me because of my deep technical training, as well as bilingual skills in English and Chinese Mandarin. Queens is the most diverse borough with residents speaking about 120 different languages at home, and Chinese was one of the largest immigrant populations in that borough. My family moved to New York.

My early career at Queens was successful. Even though I had 10 years of experience as a department head in a Chinese academic library before I came to America, I had to start from the bottom in the Queens Borough Public Library IT department as a system analyst. One of my most significant accomplishments at Queens was the project WorldLinQ, a multilingual web resources portal that allows librarians to collect, organize, and disseminate information resources in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean languages. It started over a lunchtime conversation with the library director Gary Strong. Gary and I started at the Queens on the same day, and he later became my mentor. Gary asked me if the new web technology was capable of displaying both English and other Asian languages on the same page. I took that question seriously and did some prototyping design using HTML language. Soon my first demo of a multilingual web page with English and CJK (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) language was ready to share. Gary was astonished and pleased and immediately instructed the library foundation office to work with me to write a grant proposal. Later, the WorldLinQ (the "Q" for Queens) multilingual web project was born at Queens Library with a \$500,000 grant from the AT&T Foundation. I became the project lead and received large media exposure from mainstream media like *The New York Times* as well as many New York City local ethnic news outlets. This experience at Queens helped me to understand what "you can be all you can be" means in America.

With a strong desire to advance my career, building on my successful WorldLinQ project leadership experience, I realized that I needed to learn more about American management skills and gain more senior experience by holding a senior leadership position. The Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO) offered me such an opportunity, and then Director Dottie Hiebing made me a great offer. I became the director of information technology of METRO and negotiated an education opportunity to get my MBA at Hofstra University in Long Island where we lived. My METRO experience grew my knowledge of the multi-sectored American library profession and allowed me to complete my third graduate degree of Master of Business Administration (MBA).

My family and I have profound memories of our work and life in New York. Not only did we experience major historical events like Y2K and 9/11, but we also raised our son Scott from 3rd grade through high school and his entrance into the University of Chicago. In addition, we became permanent US residents (green card holders), made many local friends, and even established a community-based Chinese

language school, the Long Island School of Chinese (LISOC), to teach the Chinese language to our children.<sup>2</sup>

After almost 10 years in New York, I was ready to make my next move and return to academia where I started in China. In 2004, Johns Hopkins University (JHU) Dean of Libraries Winston Tabb recruited me to be the head of the system department of JHU Sheridan Libraries. Winston became another mentor to me. My family moved again to Baltimore, Maryland. I was grateful to JHU for the opportunity which allowed me to move back to academia. The job also provided me with much larger and more comprehensive responsibilities in managing operations, projects, people, and financial resources in a large and top-ranked academic and research library.

Residing in Howard County, a suburb of Baltimore, was a good experience living close to my brother Xiaoqin’s family and making many new friends. Another important milestone of our time in Baltimore was that we became American citizens. When I raised my right arm to swear allegiance to the American flag, I was excited that America became my chosen country.

JHU was a great university to work for, and Howard County was a beautiful suburban community to live in, but I started to realize that my true career interest was to become a general manager, perhaps even a dean/university librarian. To be able to get there, I needed to gain more comprehensive library management experience beyond the information technology specialization that I had focused on since I started in America.

After several years of service at JHU, I started to think of my next career move to become a general manager of a top research library. I was recruited by Emory University in Atlanta by the Vice Provost and Director of Libraries, Rick Luce. He offered me a milestone opportunity to become their library’s second in command for operations as Associate Vice Provost for library operations. My wife and I moved to Atlanta, Georgia, in 2009. The Emory opportunity provided me with the most comprehensive management experience yet in a close partnership with the Vice Provost of Libraries. Rick became a good mentor and my best friend. At Emory, I led the library operation to restructure during the 2008 economic downturn and assisted the library to advance digital humanities and a digital scholarship agenda. My time at Emory prepared me to take the most senior role in managing a large academic and research library. Another significant career booster at Emory was my completion of another significant management training—the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) Leadership Fellows Program, created to develop future deans/university librarians for the ARL libraries.

During our time in Atlanta, we enjoyed many of the rich and diverse resources that the city had to offer. We explored the natural surroundings of Atlanta and nearby warmer southern regions. However, we regretted that we were too busy to make new friends due to a relatively short stay compared to my previous jobs.

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<sup>2</sup>I served one term as President of the Long Island School of Chinese (LISOC). More information at <https://lisoc.org/>

By the time I completed the ARL leadership program, I was ready to take the helm of an academic and research library. I set a target for myself; I was only interested in the dean/university librarian position at an ARL library. When I was recruited by Emory from Johns Hopkins, the chair of the search committee was Dr. Santa Ono, then the senior vice provost of undergraduate education at Emory. Santa and I became good friends during my Emory tenure. Later, he became the Provost of the University of Cincinnati (UC) in Ohio. He called me when UC's dean of library position opened. After I was appointed Dean of Libraries at UC and relocated to Cincinnati in 2012, Santa had become the President of the University.<sup>3</sup>

When I took the UC's deanship, I was told that I was the first immigrant from mainland China to take the helm of an ARL library. I had a great time during my decade-long tenure at UC. With the support of and partnership with university senior leadership, librarians faculty, and staff, we set a new and bold vision to make UC Libraries an intellectual hub of the University. We developed new priorities and pursued four strategic pillars: digital innovation, people, space, and collections, which we redefined from data and information to knowledge. We established a joint Digital Scholarship Center (DSC) with the Arts and Science College. The DSC went on to receive two large grants from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support the development of an open-source AI/machine learning platform to analyze large sets of archival data. We transformed our library spaces by creating more inviting spaces for student engagement, as well as creating a university faculty enrichment center in the library to stimulate the faculty's interdisciplinary engagement. We redefined our librarians' role by demonstrating the library's new value proposition in emerging areas of digital scholarship, research data management, GIS, and digital literacy. Upon finishing my first 5-year appointment, I was renewed for a second term and was also promoted to the position of Vice Provost for Digital Scholarship with additional responsibilities in coordinating university-wide digital scholarship practices.

After finishing my second term at UC—the longest tenure I had served for a single institution—I started thinking of my next move. I have profound memories of my time at private institutions, and I enjoyed the working environment and research-centric focus of top-ranking private universities' operations. When an opportunity arose at Northwestern University, I answered the recruiter's call. I was also attracted by the Northwestern opportunity because it would be close to our son Scott's family in Chicago and our newly born granddaughter Hanna. We moved to Chicago's north shore suburban Lake Forest after I accepted an offer to become the Dean of Libraries and Charles Deering McCormick University Librarian at Northwestern University.

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<sup>3</sup>Later, Santa and I kept in touch when he moved on to become the President of University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada. He is now the President of the University of Michigan. More information at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa\\_Ono](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Santa_Ono)

### **3 The Changes to the Information Landscape and the Impact on the Library and Information Profession**

I have witnessed the revolutionary changes in the information landscape and its impact on my profession since I came to this country and joined the profession at the dawn of the Internet age. I want to share several notable observations and trends I've observed in my 30+ years of professional experience in the academic and research libraries field.

#### ***3.1 Libraries Have Been Riding the Top of the Waves of Digital Transformation***

Today's libraries have been transformed by digital technologies. Digital technologies not only have transformed libraries' traditional workflows such as acquiring, organizing, disseminating, and preserving information resources, but they have also helped libraries create new service models, articulating emerging roles and demonstrating new value propositions.

#### ***3.2 Libraries Work Hard to Redefine Their Roles and Value Propositions***

There has been a perception, particularly from science, technology, engineering, and medicine (STEM), that the role of the library is diminishing in the digital age. Libraries and librarians are reinventing themselves, redefining, and demonstrating their new roles or new value propositions. From spaces to collections to services, academic and research libraries are working hard to redefine their resources. We are changing our spaces from book warehouse functions to universities' living rooms with inviting features including natural light, lounge furniture, cafés, and collaborative learning spaces. The goal is to create twenty-first-century student and faculty engagement and collaboration spaces and to make university libraries an intellectual hub of the university. On the collection side, libraries work together and partner with commercial companies such as Google to digitize special, unique collections and archives for both purposes of creating digitally oriented services and preservations in a digital format. On the services side, libraries and librarians are proactively engaging and demonstrating their new expertise and roles in areas of digital scholarship and e-research support, particularly with computational analysis of archival-based data, research data management, and visualization, GIS with its application to interdisciplinary research. On the education side, librarians are partnering with teaching faculty to work hard to integrate information and digital literacy into the curriculum as part of critical thinking skill set building for today's students.

Librarians build partnerships with faculty and researchers and desire to be seen as education and research partners not just as the support staff for core academic operations.

### ***3.3 Academic Libraries Continually Face Challenges with Recognition in the Academic Community of Their New Role***

Despite all the proactive efforts with which libraries and librarians have demonstrated their new roles, the traditional perceptions of what libraries are and what librarians do are so deep that others can hardly imagine that libraries and librarians could and should play roles beyond books and archives. With the weakening usage of physical collections by STEM users and with Internet tools like Google and generative AI tools largely transforming many traditional librarian workflows in organizing, seeking, and accessing information, the gap between the gradually marginalized library roles in traditional services versus unrecognized roles in emerging services has widened. The way to address such a gap is to persistently pursue our emerging roles and aggressively launch a campaign for new roles in the community. Library leaders need to have a tough mindset that transformational change in libraries is not only a demonstration of our new value proposition but how we combat the existential threat to the future of academic and research libraries.

### ***3.4 The Future of the Library and Information Management Profession***

The profession will continue to face a new phase of expedited revolutionary transformation through digital technologies. If you think of the first phase of digital transformation impact is automating library workflows and digitizing a library's collections, then the next phase of digital transformation impact will be a focus on the AI-driven service model redesign (think about what ChatGPT may do for the library reference works, as well as information discovery), machine learning (ML)-driven collection knowledge insight mining, and the library's role in interdisciplinary catalyst and partnership building. This round of transformation will broaden, deepen, and significantly alter the perceptions of libraries as knowledge, culture heritage, and archive organizations focused on "collections" to a new organization that will focus on "connections" of the people, technology, and resource. It will also change the perceptions of librarians from a focus on "stewardship" and "triage" role to the new role focused on "mining and analyzing" knowledge insights, as a "catalyst" and "enabler" for interdisciplinary researchers.



## 4 American Higher Education: The Greatest Soft Power with Potentially Weakened Global Influence

I was brought up by parents who believe that education is not an option but a necessity for one’s life advancement and meaningful contribution to society. I have followed that family tradition of tirelessly pursuing educational opportunities.

Higher education is often considered a country’s greatest soft power because it can significantly contribute to a nation’s intellectual, cultural, and economic development. The United States is unquestionably the most powerful country in the world in its quality and quantity of higher education institutions. In the past 20 years, following broad economic globalization, higher education has become a critical soft power. There are several benefits to integrating higher education globally. First is cultural exchange and understanding: higher education can promote cultural exchange and understanding by bringing together students and faculty from different countries and cultures. This can foster greater understanding and cooperation between nations and help to build a more positive image of the host country on the global stage. Second is economic development: higher education can contribute to the overall economic development of a country by providing a highly educated workforce, which is often more productive and innovative. This can lead to increased competitiveness and economic growth. Third is research and development: universities and research institutions are often centers of innovation and intellectual inquiry, and they can provide opportunities for individuals from different countries to collaborate on research and development projects. This can lead to the creation of new technologies and industries, which can further drive economic growth. Fourth is talent attraction: countries with renowned universities and research institutions can attract highly skilled and educated individuals, who can contribute to the country’s intellectual and cultural wealth. This can also lead to an influx of international students, which can bring economic benefits to the host country through tuition and living expenses. The last one is improved quality of education: higher education institutions around the world can share best practices and collaborate on research and development projects, which can lead to improvements in the quality of education.

I had been fortunate to be able to contribute to the several universities’ global outreach effort, particularly with its engagement with China. At University of Cincinnati, the College of Engineering and Applied Science has established a large operation in Chongqing, China—a joint international undergraduate dual-degree program known as UC/CQU JCI (the Joint Co-op Institute of the University of Cincinnati and Chongqing University).<sup>4</sup> This is one of the most successful programs among several joint degree programs between UC and China. The program is a 5-year program, built on UC’s traditional strengths of co-op education. The program

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<sup>4</sup>More information on the Joint Co-op Institute of University of Cincinnati and Chongqing University at <https://ceas.uc.edu/real-world-learning/global-opportunities/joint-engineering-co-op-institute.html>

has graduated three cohorts of students, each about 200 students with an impressive 85–95% of graduates admitted to top global university graduate schools. I played an instrumental role in the program from its inception until I departed from UC. I have taken many trips with UC faculty, students, and administrators to CQU and hosted many faculty, students, and administrators from CQU at UC including presidents from both universities. It was a rewarding experience using my cultural and language connection to directly contribute to academic programs in a global context.

Nowadays, with the United States and China increasingly in conflict on geopolitical tension, the so-called “de-coupling” or “de-risking” effect has created tremendous uncertainty and difficulties for these two countries in higher education exchange. The controversial “China Initiative,” the unprecedented “export control,” the Chip Act, etc., and the new Cold War mentality have created a chilling effect and discouraging environment for higher education collaboration between US and China. These policies are shortsighted, and it is a mistake for both countries. De-coupling with China, isolating China, and treating China like a potential enemy can only push China to behave more like an adversary. Higher education institutions should play an active role to build bridges between countries, opposing the Cold War mentality. We should promote the value of free markets, fair global competition, trade, and enterprise, and most importantly the global human and culture exchange. We should build bridges, not walls. We should promote mutual understanding, not hatred. We should stand for peace, not war. And we should respect the differences among people, and cultures, not the hegemony of dominance in global affairs. Those are the values of American higher education, and those are core values that we teach to our students. It is those values that have made American higher education the greatest soft power in the country. It is precisely in today’s difficult times that higher education should hold a greater responsibility to bridge countries and peoples. A country’s true global leadership and soft power are to create followers, lead by example, and influence others for positive changes. In my opinion in today’s global competition game, the United States should focus on how to run faster rather than slow others down.

## **5 My Journey of Pursuing Leadership and Lessons Learned**

Being an immigrant and the first person from mainland China to become the dean of an ARL library, I often encounter questions about how I planned my career advancement and how I overcame challenges due to cultural and language barriers as I pursued leadership roles in American academic institutions. In this section, I share some of my reflections, observations, and suggestions.

### ***5.1 Strive for Reaching One’s Greatest Potential with Flexibility and Mobility and with an Ambitious Mentality of “If You Can Lead, Why Do You Follow”***

Wanting to become a leader should never be “accidental,” but a designed, planned, persistent, and resilient effort of one’s professional career. I developed such a desire at a young age in China while I went through hardship. This desire drove me from a library page person to move up to a department head at an academic library in China. Coming to America, starting from two suitcases and through every step of my career, I never gave up my pursuit of career advancement. I remembered that when I worked at the Queens Public Library, for several years, I was wondering what would be the next step on my career path. One day, I was driving behind a city bus with a bank advertisement on the back of the bus reading, “If you can lead, why do you follow?” It was a moment that struck me so hard and confirmed my decision to pursue a management career. I never forget that ad and I use it to teach others when they are at the crossroad of whether management is a good fit for them.

Several key things I learned from my personal career advancement and leadership journey are to follow your dream; never give up; carefully assess your current job for learning opportunities that could lead to your next job; and understand that “to move up, you need to move around.” I learned from one of my leadership training coaches about how to assess whether it is time to move on from your current job by asking yourself three key questions: Are you still learning? Are you still contributing? Do you have fun? If all answers are no, then pack and go.

### ***5.2 Knowing Your Strengths and Leveraging Them to Create a Comparative Edge, Recognize Your Weakness, Improve Them When You Can, and Delegate to Those with Complementary Skills When You Need To***

No matter what career you choose, you need to understand your strengths—what you are exceptionally good at (or at least above average). You also need to understand what you are not so good at. Stick with what you are good at and leverage your strengths by intentionally designing your career role to maximize such strengths. Continually sharpen your strengths to make them become your competitive edge. For what you are not good at, learn how to delegate to others to assist you to accomplish your responsibilities.

For instance, I often got questions from many of my Chinese-American colleagues about how you can effectively manage a diverse human workforce considering that as an immigrant, there are gaps in knowledge of language and culture. My answer to such a question is always: speaking English with an accent, not knowing local cultural details, not recognizing a joke, or lacking a knowledge of history are

not roadblocks for you to becoming a leader. As long as you can communicate clearly as a leader, you are conscious of your cultural, language, and knowledge gaps, and you are willing to learn new knowledge and adopt the new culture, you can lead. The most important characteristic of a leader is that she/he is a self-confident person, knows her/his limitations, and knows how to get help from others to get the job done.

### ***5.3 Lead with an Example, Lead with Courage, and Be Human, Humble, and Compassionate***

There are many leadership principles, and each successful leader would tell you which ones they believe the most. For me, there are two leadership principles I preach and practice the most. They are (1) *leading by example* and (2) *courageous leadership and consultative and participatory decision-making*.

Leading by example is the principle that you don't ask people to do anything that you won't do by yourself, and you set an example and do things first when you ask people to do something—so-called walk the talk. Courageous leadership calls for leaders to make a tough decision about what is best for the organization, not what's the most popular. However, decisiveness does not mean being "cutthroat." The wise decision-maker needs to be able to listen to diverse perspectives and even opposing viewpoints. In some cases, actively seeking participation and maximizing buy-in on difficult decisions define consultative and participatory decision-making.

## **6 Closing**

Asian Americans are not considered underrepresented minorities in the higher education sector. However, public data<sup>5</sup> indicates that in the United States, Asians make up 5% of the population, 6.5% of college students, and 8.5% of faculty members, but Asians only comprise 1% of college presidents.

The personal journey that I shared in this chapter was intended to demonstrate how a strong desire for making a difference, how the perseverance of reaching one's greatest potential, and how the compassion for helping others to become a leader all together can drive one's tireless pursuit of leadership positions.

Becoming a leader is not an accidental event; it takes a burning desire, courage, perseverance, and mobility to embark on one's leadership journey. In today's increasingly globally oriented and diverse organizations, having a diverse background and coming from a different country and culture is not a liability but an

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<sup>5</sup>More at <https://edprepmatters.net/2022/05/asian-american-leadership-in-higher-education-a-glass-cliff-or-golden-opportunity/>

asset. However, continued improvement in gaining new knowledge, adopting a new culture, assimilating to the working environment, and knowing how to get help are key to accomplishing your management goals using your unique leadership abilities.

The most rewarding part of being a leader is to make a difference—to make a difference for the organization you lead, to make a difference for the career advancement of the people in your organization, and to make a difference for the professional field you serve. The difference between being an individual expert in the field vs a leader at the helm of an organization is that as a leader you can make a broader differences and maximize a broader impact.



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Wang has over 35+ years of diverse library and information technologies, services, management, and leadership experience, with a career that spans the public, academic, large library consortium, and international libraries worlds. He has held global leadership positions in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), American Library Association (ALA), Center for Research Libraries (CRL), Association of Research Libraries (ARL), Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition (SPARC), and OhioLINK. He is currently serving on the governing board of HathiTrust, as well as on the Global and Regional Council of OCLC. He has been frequently invited to international conferences to speak on topics of digital humanities/digital scholarship, library strategic visioning and planning, and implementation of transformational organizational changes. He has strong connections and networks with global library community leaders, particularly with China’s academic and library leaders.

# My Accidental Path to Leadership and What I Have Learned Along the Way



Phyllis M. Wise

## 1 Introduction: My Start

I wish I could say that I planned my career path and that I knew from my youth that I wanted to become a leader in public higher education. But that would not be true. I got a head start in considering a career in academics and in biology because of my parents. In fact, I cannot remember a time when I didn't think about the plan on going into science. After all, my parents, who had immigrated to the United States to complete their education, had instilled in me the importance of education and of science from the time I was a very young child. My father received his MD at Peking Union Medical College and came to the United States to pursue his Ph.D. in Neuroscience at Northwestern University, and my mother got her nursing degree at Yenching University in Beijing and came to the United States to get her Master's in Nursing Education at Columbia University Teachers College. Both of them became ardent citizens of the United States. They had instilled in me a deep and abiding sense of the importance of education and the sciences. As with most Asian children, following my parents' advice was not a choice but almost a forgone conclusion.

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## 2 My Education and My Mentors

I majored in Biology as an undergraduate at Swarthmore College and completed my education with a doctoral degree and postdoctoral training at the University of Michigan. During my undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral education, I was incredibly fortunate to be taught and mentored by wise and caring faculty, both women and men, who taught me not only the “facts” and the principles of hypothesis testing but also taught me about collaborating with other students and faculty. My Ph.D. thesis advisor and mentor, Dr. Billy Frye, and postdoctoral mentor, Dr. Anita Payne, were not only amazing scientists, researchers, advisors, and mentors, but they were wonderful human beings who cared about the whole person and their students’ lives in and outside of the lab. I had my first child while I was a graduate student, and the whole lab celebrated my son’s birth. Dr. Frye even visited me in the hospital. I learned the importance of working with a team of students and postdoctoral fellows and the value of collaborating with others. When I heard stories of other students who did not have the benefit of this kind of mentorship, I realized how fortunate I was to get a start being guided by this kind of people.

After my training, I was offered a Research Assistant Professorship in the College of Medicine at the University of Maryland Baltimore. Rising through the professorial ranks and being awarded NIH grants were my path. I truly thought that I would remain on the faculty, teaching and doing research for the rest of my professional life because I enjoyed teaching and mentoring graduate and postdoctoral students. I truly believed that I would have an impact on the next generation of physicians, teachers, and researchers, and together, we would improve the health of people.

## 3 Being a Minority

Being both an Asian American and a woman means that I am a double minority. I always felt I had to try harder than others. I had the sense that when a minority did well, we were considered the exception, and when we failed, people thought that all women or Asians were going to have the same limitations. However, being a minority sometimes had its benefits: in addition to teaching and doing research, I was asked to serve on many committees. This gave me the opportunity to meet faculty who were not in my discipline and thus had a chance to learn about academic leadership. I observed people and started to mentally evaluate what made a person a successful leader, even though I had no intention of becoming one. It seemed clear that some people were more successful than others. But why? Were there really characteristics that made some better than others in inspiring people to collaborate with them? Was it that some were more commanding in their appearance or was it the compelling way they spoke? Were there really “born leaders”?

## 4 A Turning Point in My Career

It turns out that my committee work was the fortuitous beginning of my accidental path to academic leadership. One of my fellow committee members on the MD/Ph.D. Committee was Dr. Tyson Tildon. He was an African American in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Maryland College of Medicine. He was unique in so many ways: a minority, a Ph.D., a basic researcher in a clinical department, and an amazingly generous person who observed and took several junior faculty under his wing. He mentored us before we even realized we needed his mentoring. He was one of the greatest gifts in my professional life, and his impact is incalculable on my understanding of my possible career path and the academic world. It's hard to express how critical his support and mentorship meant to me, particularly at a turning point in my career. I had been a Full Professor for a few years when Tyson pulled me aside one day and said "I think you will get bored here doing the same thing again and again. You've served on most of the important committees and contributed to them. I think you should consider becoming the chair of a department of physiology and I will help you get nominated for positions that you would like to consider." This was the first time I realized it would be better to be nominated for leadership positions by someone more senior and respected than to simply submit your application letter. Boy did I have a lot to learn! He urged me to think more broadly than my narrow research specialty, to consider where I thought the broad discipline of physiology was going during the next decade, and not to narrow my thinking to my subspecialty of physiology or only the next 3–5 years. This was a very new mindset for me; I was always thinking only about the course I was to teach next semester or the next grant deadline. I had not been thinking in 10-year intervals, and I never thought much more broadly about fields beyond my own. Tyson was wonderfully supportive and the first person to show me the importance of a mentor in showing you the steps you must take and the ones to avoid. It is a lesson that I have remembered all my life and have tried to emulate as I went from faculty member to being a department chair, a college dean, a provost, and a chancellor. I was fortunate to be taken under the wing of someone more senior before I realized that I needed to learn about leadership positions. I have tried to pay back his generosity and pay it forward by advising graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, junior faculty, and people who want to take leadership positions. I have always focused on mentoring women and minorities since I have thought of them as people like me, people who would benefit most from mentoring and advice.

During this time, I learned so much about how to be an effective leader from all sorts of wonderful people, books, and other sources. I will call out only a few of the many people who have inspired me during my leadership journey: Mary Sue Coleman, President of the University of Michigan from 2002 to 2014, and Interim President in 2022; Freeman Hrabowski, President of the University of Maryland Baltimore County from 1992 to 2022; and Henry Yang, Chancellor of the University of California Santa Barbara since 1994. Chancellor Yang is a contributor to this book. These three academic leaders exemplify a much larger group who have been



forward-thinking, principled, inspiring leaders who have transformed their universities and the whole academic world as they have led their institutions. They are also minorities in terms of gender and race, and they broke barriers – “glass ceilings” – following these paths.

## **5 Born Leaders or Learning How to Lead?**

There are thousands, if not tens of thousands, of books on leadership and I have read my share, hoping that they would tell me the secrets to successful leadership. Many of them are excellent and written by successful leaders in the academic, nonprofit, and corporate world. I would urge you to lead with your brain and your heart and not just from one or the other. I am sure that we are all familiar with the theory that people who are left-brain dominant are more analytical, quantitative, and calculation-conscious, whereas right-brain dominant people are more artistic, creative, imaginative, and holistic. But the two sides of our brain are connected by millions of neurons, and both sides of our brain actively participate in and provide input to any decision. Make decisions based on both data and your feelings. As a scientist, I tend to lead with my left brain, namely, to collect enough data, perform thorough analytics – both quantitative and qualitative analysis – and calculate the likelihood of a certain outcome before taking any steps. I did not let my heart enter my decision-making. It was a mistake. Oftentimes, letting your spiritual self be part of your decision-making can make a difference. I believe that you must be true to yourself; trying to emulate someone who is just not you will not work in the long run. Having said that, there are a few principles that I have learned and hope I used in my positions. In some cases, I learned the hard way. I hope that I can help you avoid some, if not all, of my missteps and that you can have a wonderfully successful career and will pass them forward to the next generation of academic leaders.

## **6 It Takes a Village**

Most importantly, leadership is about us, not about me, or any one person. It is absolutely true that a president or chancellor has the authority and responsibility to guide the overall long-term direction of a university. But it takes a knowledgeable and respected team working together to make a university thrive or to deal with tough issues or crisis situations. Leadership benefits when it is shared, and strategic development of the leadership community takes thought and time. Different teams are needed for different situations, and the team can consist of senior leaders, administrators, staff, faculty, and students. These teams cannot be formed quickly only when they are needed, so academic success requires finding and building the right teams with the future in mind. Broad and shared leadership teams are critical not only for short-term success but to enable long-term academic success, to

innovate, to take advantage of opportunities, and to face challenges. There have to be many stakeholders who are deeply engaged in the enterprise to make it successful.

It is essential to recognize the work and potential of the people around you and their ideas. You can never show too much gratitude or celebrate the university's and the community's successes too much. All of the critical work of a leader requires a team to accomplish the goal. It is essential that you and your team celebrate milestones along the path to success, and it is always important to take note of small steps toward a goal, the progress being made frequently so that neither you nor your team burns out. Sometimes, the task will be led by someone other than you. In these cases, it is even more important to recognize the work of the person(s) you have chosen to lead.

## **7 Culture, History, and Shared Values Are Important to Consider**

If you are moving to a new institution to accept a leadership position, it is critical to take time to listen and learn about the culture, history, shared values, and perceived strengths and challenges. Listen to well-respected university and community leaders, faculty, staff, and students – they have a wealth of information. They may have different experiences and perspectives and maybe even different opinions. Knowing this history will help you lead effectively. If you are considering big changes, maybe even changes that will impact the culture of the institution, be sure to consult with a large group or groups of people with diverse backgrounds and interests to be sure that you will be able to build momentum for your ideas, which must be embraced as our ideas, not just yours. Ultimately, change has to be a shared goal – not necessarily by everyone – but certainly by a majority of people who care about the future of the institution. Institutional change is hard, particularly at institutions that are already highly ranked and respected. People may not want to “rock the boat.” Change can be perceived as threatening if the university community is not prepared or thinks that a newcomer has not done adequate background learning. I believe there is more danger in moving too fast than in moving too slowly at the beginning of the tenure of an academic leader, particularly when you are “the new kid on the block.”

You will be working with many people who are starting from a different place with different points of view. I have found that the discussions and the outcomes are best when people with very different perspectives are included. There may be some difficult conversations about controversial situations. But it is best to know the full landscape as you begin the decision-making process. Listen with the same passion with which you want to be heard. When you are burdened with multiple consecutive meetings, it is often difficult to concentrate on the discussion at hand. Nonetheless, it is essential that you listen attentively, as though it were the only item on the agenda. It is always important to try to recognize when events may balloon into crises and get ahead of them whenever possible so that you and your team are not just reacting to problems. This is not always easy, but the payoff is tremendous.

## **8 My Biggest Decisions Required a Team Working Tirelessly with Courage and Conviction**

When I took the position as Chancellor at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, I embarked on a “listening and learning” tour of the colleges and administrative units. One aspect of the campus that became clear was that one missing academic unit that could add real value to the teaching and research mission of the University: a college of medicine. But the question was: did the state of Illinois or the country need another college of medicine, or should we think carefully about what our campus could do to contribute in a truly unique way to innovation in health and healthcare? I gathered a team of amazing community members, leaders, and healthcare leaders, and we brainstormed for a few months. We all came to realize that with our world-renowned College of Engineering, which embraced the idea of co-creating a College of Medicine in partnership with Carle Health, we could build the first-ever engineering-based College of Medicine in the world. But ideas are cheap. The amount of work that it took, the courage, conviction, and persistent efforts of a huge team of colleagues were greater than I imagined. But we did it: we passed all the university and state requirements, we developed a totally unique curriculum, we hired a dean and recruited faculty, and we accepted our inaugural class of outstanding and diverse students. For me, it was proof that the leadership team was essential to take such a huge step. We broke new ground in medical education and research, focusing on the interface of engineering and medicine, and none of us could have done it alone.

## **9 Situations Are Rarely Urgent**

Don't be tricked by the urgency of now. There are very few decisions that must be made immediately though there are exceptions. Be sure to appreciate the importance of strategic decision-making with your team. There are always emergencies, and hopefully, you have an emergency response team whose sole function is to jump into action when an emergency occurs. Sometimes, the emergency requires an outside company to help to deal with these situations. I learned belatedly that there are companies that focus solely on handling crises: providing dealings with an emergency situation; using multichannel communications, including the press, to communicate with the internal and external community about the situation; and providing possible solutions and ways to learn from them so as to avoid repetition of the same kind of situation. You and your inner circle of trusted advisors should recognize when something is a true emergency that requires fast action.

It is important to understand when you must make a decision. As a colleague told me: know when to stop stirring and start painting. This may be difficult, but it is essential to be decisive when it is important for you to decide. I remember a colleague criticizing someone for never being willing to make a decision because she

knew that she would offend someone. There will be tough conversations that feel uncomfortable. Be sure to explain your decision so that people understand that you came to your decision for certain reasons. Be willing to change course. Sometimes when circumstances change, you should or must change course. You'll need to explain why you have made the change.

## **10 Equity and Diversity Are Paramount**

The importance of equity and diversity in all university activities cannot be overstated. Broad participation, collaboration, and interaction, which often involve not only the campus community but the community we live in, always lead to better decisions that are relevant to and embraced by the broader community. Equity and diversity have always been important, but now they are an essential part of any organization that strives to be the best. These should be considered at the beginning of every committee that is formed, every event that is planned, and every decision that is contemplated. It should never be an afterthought. Of particular importance is the recruitment of diverse faculty, students, and staff. The people that we study with, work with, or lead should reflect the diversity of the wider world. My team and I spent a lot of time trying to create a welcoming and supportive campus for all, an environment that embraced differences in perspectives of people whom we did not always agree with. We had to be open to adopting innovative, nontraditional ideas that came from students and faculty. Higher education has the opportunity, no, the responsibility to play a unique role in society to help decrease divisiveness and misunderstanding by listening to people with whom we disagree and trying to understand the reasons behind the misunderstandings and divisions.

We need to shed our reputation of being an ivory tower that knows all the answers and is not part of the broader community that we live in. I have always been at a state university, and these institutions have to answer not only to the local community but the state-wide community. We must always demonstrate how our university contributes to the health, well-being, and economy of the state. Research-intensive campuses must demonstrate how the scholarship of the faculty, which sometimes may seem esoteric and unimportant, contributes as much as the teaching that we do. Thus, campus-community partnerships are critical – and often it is the privilege and responsibility of the President or Chancellor to be the major outward-facing leader who meets with different community constituents. It is her or his responsibility to meet with members of the community to hear their concerns, explain what the university is doing in any given situation, consult broadly with the community, and listen attentively to them.

## 11 One Final Note

It may seem out of character to suggest at the end of this chapter that an important component of the academy is to seek legal counsel for yourself. Universities have offices of legal counsel to protect the university, but one of my mistakes was not realizing that legal counsel for myself would be essential. I realized this too late. Having a professional lawyer examine all legal documents that you sign is important because people have different memories of what was promised and what the expectations were. Lawyers are trained to do this, and there are lawyers who specialize in academic issues. Be sure to find a good lawyer; it will save a lot of time.

## 12 Conclusion

In the end, I feel incredibly privileged to have been an academic leader at great universities during a time of tremendous change in higher education and in the broader global community. I had the opportunity to work with faculty and administrators who were intelligent, devoted, and generous. I had the opportunity to teach and learn from thousands of students and prepare them to become the next generation of leaders in whatever professions they chose. And I had the opportunity to expand the way universities contribute to society and interact with the broad community around them.

For me, academic leadership became a calling – a calling that I never imagined when I was an undergraduate student. I have come to believe that the responsibilities and privileges of academic leadership gave me a bully pulpit and the ability to influence learning in ways that no other profession that I know of can. But leadership can be lonely. I wish I had spent more time finding and developing a network of colleagues and friends from whom I could seek advice, in whom I could confide, and with whom I could relax and have some fun. I wish I had taken the time to develop relationships with people who had experienced professional, personal, and legal situations that would have given me invaluable counsel. As I said at the beginning of this chapter, I was fortunate to get advice and mentoring before I even knew I needed them. But I should have learned from these initial experiences the benefits of getting advice from others and been more willing to ask. Of course, it is critical to give forward so that the next generation of leaders is more prepared. I cannot emphasize this enough. I hope that sharing some of my experiences has been helpful. Many of them come from my experience of not knowing or taking these suggestions myself and learning the hard way.



**Dr. Phyllis Wise** is the Chief Executive Officer and President of the Colorado Longitudinal Study (COLS). Their bold vision is to create a repository of biological specimens and comprehensive clinical, community, and public health data for hundreds of thousands of Colorado residents that will help to uncover the true social determinants of health. To do this, COLS is building one of the most comprehensive, large-scale, longitudinal biobanks in the world, with biological specimens collected annually and personal health information collected more frequently. Participants provide responses to a questionnaire about life experiences and their environment; have their physical measurements such as height, weight, waist circumference, and blood pressure taken; and have the ability to walk 4 meters, sit-to-stand, and answer cognitive questions. Participants will provide a blood sample.

Previously, she served as Chancellor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. As the Chief Executive Officer, she had the authority and responsibility to guide the overall long-term strategic planning of the university. Probably the most important contribution Dr. Wise made was to lead a tremendous team to establish the first-ever engineering-based College of Medicine in the world. It was the first new College at the University in over 60 years and involved partnership with the College of Engineering and the Carle Health System. Prior to this position, Dr. Wise served as Provost, Executive Vice President, and Interim President at the University of Washington where she led strategic planning and established the College of the Environment by bringing together six academic educational and research units into a single College to coordinate and amplify the ways of tackle the most complex environmental issues. She is a passionate advocate for public education and health, health care, health equity, and the role they must play in meeting society's greatest global challenges.

Dr. Wise received her undergraduate degree in Biology from Swarthmore College and her Ph.D. in Zoology from the University of Michigan. She has received honorary degrees from Swarthmore College and the University of Birmingham (England). She is an elected member of the National Academy of Medicine and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She has received several awards that recognize her leadership in education including the Asian Pacific Americans in Higher Education Leadership Award and the Chang-Lin Tien Educational Leadership Award.

Dr. Wise has a significant foundation and corporate experience. She serves on the boards of directors of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Children's Hospital of Colorado, the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra, the RAND Health, and the Carle Foundation. She served on the NIKE and First Busey Corporation Boards of Directors.

# High Expectations, Short Fuse: The “Intangibles” Facing an Asian American President



Leslie E. Wong

## 1 Entering the Culture and Context of Campus Leadership: Why Did I Take This Path?

Teaching and learning are lifelong habits for me. To this day, a subject or skill I know nothing about becomes a 1-year experience devoted to learning more about that one topic or skill. This included ice climbing, women authors, astronomy, piano and trumpet, sewing, rebuilding cars, archery, fly fishing, woodworking, cross-country skiing, learning animal tracks, surviving in the woods (including snow), and golf. If my students wanted to learn, then a good role model would learn, too. Friends and mentors referred to me as a “learning junkie,” wanting to know what I was studying this year.

I spent nearly 20 years as a professor until institutional leadership opportunities entered my radar. I was motivated to engage in the challenges of leadership because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of staff, faculty, students, and the public we served just as I cared about my students in the classroom. As a faculty member, I wanted to make a difference in students’ lives. Campus leadership embodied this same commitment. Campus leadership was teaching and learning on a bigger scale than a classroom. It also meant a role filled with more risk and satisfaction but still motivated by the same passion. How could I make a difference in the lives of a living, breathing, complex, and dynamic college campus? I could assist, contribute to, and inspire others to excel and make a difference in the health and wellness of a campus and its community. When done well, effectiveness at the campus level streams across to the even larger scale of state and federal opportunities. We inspire

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our students to discover successful and productive selves because of their education. Likewise, we inspire the campus and its community to excel because of the education we provide and the relationships we establish and sustain. While I missed the formal classroom, the campus, and the surrounding community became my classroom. The skills I learned in the classroom were critical to my role as a president. Effective teaching is inspired by a profound belief in the improvement and continued development of a student. Campuses are no different. Students change because of their education. Campuses change because of their leadership. The challenge of motivating a campus, like motivating a student, is why I chose leadership. The guiding spirit of campus leadership is directing the aspirations of campus into the reality of today and the prospects of tomorrow. An existential challenge as fulfilling as it is difficult.

Presidential leadership is also a huge lifestyle change from a faculty or staff role. You are still in the culture and ecosystem, and your experience is critical in this ecosystem as you move from faculty and staff to lead a campus's evolution. Your personality and your respect for the campus personality must match. These experiences develop one's leadership style. But that match means your life is more public. Your partner and family start factoring into your success and potential failure. You become symbolic and representative of the values and expectations of the entire campus and the community. If you find yourself at odds with those values and expectations, then it is not the place for you. That's the tough job of trustees and search committees: the candidate must share much in common (again no metrics for what that means) with campus values, aspirations, and attitudes and yet understand how this common identity also enables one's leadership to move a campus and a community forward and upward.

The stakes are higher for the leader. The responsibilities are broader and deeper, and more and more will be expected of you. You get to revel in everyone's success, and you are accountable for every mistake on campus. This complexity and the conundrum give context to your power and ability to push institutions forward and upward if you are aware of the intangibles that surround your leadership. Your role is to provide leadership for the campus. Your role is also to reflect the values of the campus community. Your leadership team and your support team must do better tomorrow than they did today and they must "fit" the mores and attitude of the campus as well. That's what motivated me and fascinated me as a campus leader. Success comes from complex psychological, social, and interpersonal awareness of who you are and your relationship with the campus community. Let's not forget the public's sense of who you are and how you represent them revolves around almost everything you do. Leadership is a lifestyle where your public presence is observed and judged by many. That is an intangible.



## 2 Listen, Pay Attention, See the Road Ahead and Behind You: The Search Process

Presidential searches, appointments, and contract renewals systematically overuse the words, “vision” and “style.” Vision is an elusive term. It can be an individual’s vision, a campus’ vision, or even the vision of trustees and community leaders. It takes time on campus to identify and align these visions. Style is more concrete. Individuals see their style consistently develop throughout their careers, and it is the most observable behavior seen by campus teams. Both words are important. Make no doubt. But vision is collective and comes from a growing understanding of the campus. This takes time and requires campus experience, maybe 2–3 years of it, but the campus wants it yesterday. Style, on the other hand, is developed individually and brought to a presidency. One can mold one’s style to a campus culture, but it is hard to mold a campus culture to an individual’s personality.

“Fit” is an apt way to describe whether a campus is good for a student or not, and “fit” also applies to whether a president is good for a campus or not. “Fit” is a common discussion on search teams for all leadership positions ranging from the president to the department chair. Far more important than vision is the “fit” between a campus’s personality and its self-concept and that of its chosen leader and the leadership team. Granted, some have the gift of looking forward, this thing called vision. The point is that vision is determined by many players often with a loose sense of institutional history and an awareness of many potential opportunities shared by many others and not often agreed upon by many others. The social–political dimension of “vision” is underestimated. A sense that one can identify another’s vision is overrated. One can easily see that a new strategic plan coming in the early years of leadership is but one way to synchronize and clarify various visions found on campus.

A leader’s style is a recognizable attribute of leaders. The campus may not agree on how to talk or label a leader’s style. But behaviors and attitudes of the leader are evident to all. A match of the campus “style” (its collective but clear personality) with the president’s “style” (his or her personality) is a match everyone looks for. This is the desired fit. One’s growing and evolving experience on campus confirms or denies whether a “fit” is happening, and that is not the territory of vision. Funny there are no metrics for “fit,” but alas, we know it when we see it. This is a key idea for my use of the term, “intangibles.”

Given the variety of how one talks about “fit,” one must also be aware of how management is so different from leadership. One can manage the performance of teams using clear work criteria. Management occurs in a vacuum and is rewarded so long as goals are met. Management skills and habits, good and bad, can produce results. But trustees, donors, the public, families, and students want and demand to see leadership that complements and supports their sense of campus direction and reflects their emotional investment in the future of the campus. This is far more important than management. Leadership goals are often fuzzier because how one feels about the progress toward goals is as important as getting there. Leadership is

not only about moving people to hit desired goals. Leadership motivates people to follow, to be proud to be emotionally invested in the process of reaching those goals. That is what I mean by the difference between managing people and leading people. Many people can manage; few can lead.

Developing a sense of collective ownership, pride, and participation leads to higher morale and effectiveness. When teams choose to and want to follow a leader, good things happen. Campus expectations of where it should be headed, how it will get there, and how a potential leader will fulfill these expectations occur before the leader even appears. A leader shouldn't expect total campus consensus on issues and direction. But leaders can and should seek to identify broadly accepted pathways to the future that most would agree are appropriate and desirable for the campus. These pathways will emanate from the feedback a leader hears from constituents. Themes will arise from this critical listening to support the proposed path forward as it links leadership's decisions with campus expectations. This means that the intangibles of leadership become far more important for the president and his/her senior leadership team than the vision. Knowing the community takes time. Listening becomes incredibly important. A growing sense of campus knowledge informs a leader's style, a team's focus, and ultimately, one's effectiveness. Critical listening will make it hard to ignore what one hears from the community. This growing awareness of fit and style becomes the backbone of the intangibles.

This sounds overly simplistic, but moving complex organizations demands presidents to pay attention and to listen well before speaking and acting because what you pay attention to builds confidence in your team and yourself. Paying attention isn't personal. I learned to trust my teammates even more when I could humbly admit to them that I wasn't understanding this event, this person or group, or this issue. What are they hearing? Is everyone hearing the same things? What am I not getting? Are we listening to those who disagree with us? What can we control and what must we delegate or when do we ask for help? Trust building is the backbone of my leadership, and yes, it is a two-way street. My role models were excellent listeners and doers because they were sensitive to what they heard, what they saw, and how they measured their responses. Failed leadership isn't a solitary, personal attribute. It is a failure to pay attention to what goes on around you, what happens because of you, and how this connects your relationship to people, places, perceptions, and expectations of you. Listen to how campuses talk about their leaders. Especially, listening to how they talk about previous leaders. This applies to department chairs, deans, VPS, provosts, and presidents. Fit and style are key elements but often intangible.

### **3 Your Partner Can't Get You the Job, But They Can Cost You the Job**

There have been many lessons learned from my years of campus leadership. Yes, bumps and failures but far more successful and fulfilling benchmarks as well. I would like to share some of these lessons and hope that my offering is seen as

thoughts to consider rather than advice or sermons. My sense of how I dealt with intangibles may be helpful.

For example, I learned to sit and prepare for presidential events with my spouse. Even though spouses/partners were not formerly interviewed (they should be), they are being judged as the clearest sense of who you are as a husband, wife, partner, and leader. My wife and I often asked ourselves the same questions: “What did you hear?” “Who did you meet and would you want to meet with them again?” “What do you think they expect of you, of us?” “Do WE fit here?” “What would you like to accomplish as First Lady if we accepted this job?” A clear understanding of the Trustees and campus expectations of your spouse should be part of the questions you ask the board at your interview. Don’t forget to debrief with your partner when you are alone. Are we happy and satisfied here? A critical aspect of this conversation must be said: your partner’s comportment, language, attitude, and behavior toward staff and community members mean a lot. Yes, how we both dress on the golf course, how we walk to campus together (often hand in hand), and where we go shopping and dining matter a lot. Everyone is keeping score about everything they see the two of us do.

The respect for the presidency often compels constituents to send their concerns and messages through my wife. If she thought it important, she found an appropriate time and setting to pass it to me often in the presence of my Chief of Staff. But our rule was never to “talk business” at home and especially at dinner. No names, no issues. If needed, we would enjoy our time together and set a time to discuss her concerns about what she heard. My wife understood clearly that she would never ask me to consider my decision or a decision made by my cabinet. Her job was to inform me, to pass along what she hears, and her concern for the campus. But it is not shared decision-making by any means. She knew and told others that it was my job to make decisions. She recognized how indiscreet (and important) her role was and how important it was for me to be seen as a leader and decision-maker. We made a pact that she would not talk to vice presidents, cabinet members, or even staff about institutional issues. They in turn reciprocated. They honored her space and her distance from their jobs and knew she would not get between me and my cabinet. It is amazing what that trust means between a spouse and the president’s team. It’s even more important for a president and his cabinet and staff.

#### **4 Learn About the Institution from the Bottom Up: Trust Others Who Earn It**

The first people I wanted to meet were the people who cleaned the buildings, manicured campus grounds, moved snow, and looked out for our safety. Who are the officers of campus safety? Who are union leaders and stewards of key campus groups? Who are your office staff? How do I cultivate their trust in me and mine in them? Who are my cabinet members? Each group requires an informed yet unique

conversation. They understand who you are, and more importantly, they see clearly how you treat employees and students. This tells them the most about you and your partner. When the inevitable emergency occurs, the respect you have shown for them comes back to you as the best teamwork leading to the best possible results.

*A case in point:* At Northern Michigan University, we were alerted to a potential “shooter on campus.” The tip, determined to be credible, clearly stated I was the target and where an attempt to kill me would occur. We closed the campus, sent folks home, alerted neighboring schools, law enforcement, and federal agencies, and went into emergency status. People acted quickly and thoroughly because we listened and trusted one another. I was guarded like no one’s business, and safety strategies were set around everyone working close to me. I could now concentrate on my work with the FBI, city, and state authorities, campus safety, etc. I had never before had an armed bodyguard, whose job was to protect me everywhere I wanted and needed to go. The campus officer’s assigned job was to stay at my side. Period. Everywhere. He wouldn’t let me go into the men’s room first. He ordered me to wait. I thought it odd, but the officer assigned to me went in, came out, and with a smile said, “Dr. Wong, you are not dying on my watch. You can go in now.” I bought his family dinner when all this was settled. It is about respecting the work done by everyone and taking pride in their work well done. Such work exemplifies every relationship you have with your team and those around you.

Trust should not be underestimated. Trust will be your most fundamental value as you work with others, especially as your leadership team develops. Campuses are complex ecosystems. That is why you need smart, alert, and dedicated teams around you. That means they will always know more than you, they will want to help you, and they will want to be effective. A leader’s success is their success. They are learning just as you are. Be humble, trust their judgments, give them room to work, and ensure that they can speak their mind without denting your ego. This is another intangible.

Covid and societal violence have brought down the “social insulation” campuses used to enjoy. University life is more complex now than ever before. Campus members experience mental health issues, physical health issues, deaths in families and close friends from Covid, from guns, hunger, alienation, and loneliness. Some can’t afford computers and cell phones, and many live in neighborhoods where internet services are insufficient or nonexistent. Life is very complex for students and staff in ways I couldn’t imagine. Think of your campus ecosystem as a small city, and you’re the mayor or city manager. Is the water clean? Is power present and predictable? Are people fed and can they get safely from the parking lot to their classrooms? Do they feel safe? Do they feel heard by you? Do they see their input in your decisions? Do you say simple but powerful things over and over again like “Thank you!” Do you stop, talk to staff, and ask them about today’s work? Do you express your appreciation for their work?

## 5 Lessons Learned: Did You Leave the Campus Community Better Than You Found It?

This question captures most of my daily thoughts at the end of the day. Did I set up and support others who will help make the campus better? Most of what I do personally, professionally, and socially is about continuous improvement. But I also recognize quickly there were bumps in the road, and realistically, I was responsible for some if not most of them. Change is never a smooth process. Change can and often will disturb people. But education is about change in so many ways. That should tell you that leadership is never an easy push, and an awareness of change is an intangible.

*Two examples:* Building better relationships between the campus and the surrounding community at both Northern Michigan and San Francisco were expectations of me. I am proud of restoring the town–gown relationship in Northern Michigan and the city of Marquette, Michigan, and the Upper Peninsula. In a somewhat different vein, building a relationship between San Francisco State University (SFSU) and the corporate and civic centers, local and state governments, non-profits, neighborhood entities, and school districts demanded more time. To do this right takes a lot of time away from campus. But building trust and confidence in and from the community requires you to be “present” and at a moment’s call. Whether it is the Chamber of Commerce, the mayor’s office, corporate offices, civic clubs, a school principal, a parent, and, often, athletic, social, and entertainment events, you have to be there whether you like to or not. When you are “present,” people know you and learn to trust you; their relationship with you is real. When you build that trust, they’ll support you and invest in your efforts. That said being presently built confidence in our alums around the world and in our community. This led to two 25-million-dollar gifts received in the same year, and we exceeded the campaign goal of \$150 million at San Francisco State. Relationships are important. These relationships require considerable effort and are critical to campus success. Another intangible no one teaches you.

I would also add that my SFSU team built three new buildings and set the stage for the 4th, now being completed (2022). We also completed the remodeling of athletic facilities. This new construction and remodels represented the most significant physical change of the campus in nearly 50+ years. Our work left SFSU in a far better place. There is no better sight for a president than seeing construction cranes on campus. That takes teamwork. No one does it alone. *Another tip:* Give more credit to the teams that made big and small projects happen successfully. You can be assured they spent many a night and weekend working on these projects. Give them public and private kudos! Another important intangible.

My team also rebuilt the athletic program at SFSU. Hiring an energetic and productive athletic director who welcomed the challenge of reinvigorating athletics produced results. I asked him to be a change agent; I supported his efforts to make those changes. Tough on him? Yes. Yet it couldn’t have been done if he and I had not trusted each other. Before my presidency, SFSU was not a competitive program in

one of the toughest National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II athletic conferences in the United States. We recognized how athletic success could improve the visibility and positive perception of SFSU in a complex city like San Francisco. Pride, student involvement, marketing, and all kinds of successes flow from athletic programs. My last year before retirement saw all 13 varsity teams make post-season tournaments. Our women's track and field won the conference and finished 13th in the nation at the NCAA finals. Our teams also had some of the highest team average Grade Point Averages (GPAs) in our campus history. We were on television, and we came close to defeating Division I teams. In many ways, we were present. We believed we could succeed. We paid attention to who we were, who we wanted to be, and the work required to achieve our goals. When TV cameras showed up at the gym, you saw the excitement of students and staff. We made a difference in how students, staff, and faculty saw themselves, and we were very proud of that. I will say it now that I learned my lesson: winning on the field, in the gym, and the classroom builds campus pride and confidence. I also was clear about the role of athletics. Athletics was the front door to the university. If it is broken and worn out, no one wants to enter the house. But if the front door welcomes you because we took pride in its appearance and success, you will want to enter the house and see all the personal and academic opportunities within. Successful athletic programs complement academic success while also building confidence in donors, parents, and students who want to be part of a "winning" perception.

I am also proud that my team at SFSU fulfilled my dream that a majority of students would graduate with no debt. Over 40% of our students were Pell-eligible. Most were the first in their family to go to college, let alone graduate. We met that goal, and I appreciate our alums, donors, and supporters who gave hard-earned money to make this possible for so many of our students. Maybe that is the magic that makes San Francisco State so special. That is another intangible.

While I was the President of Northern Michigan University, I had the honor of hosting President George W. Bush in 2004 and President Barack Obama in 2010. What a special honor to have two sitting presidents come to campus. Both men were personable, student and staff friendly, and thoughtful. President Obama had local citizens drive the Secret Service vehicles into town (his SUV included). They stopped to get a burger on the way. What a surprise to lunch patrons! President Bush wanted to meet with the maintenance staff who set up the large venue for his speech and made sure the campus looked spectacular and then had to clean up the mess. Both men took personal pictures with staff and students. They didn't have to do this, and they did. That is what presidential leadership is all about. Believe me, I was paying attention. They respected the work done by everyone. Another intangible not to be forgotten.

Lastly, at SFSU we faced the challenge that we could not legally and safely hold commencement on campus. What to do? I was approached by the SF Giants who offered their stadium if it didn't conflict with the baseball schedule. We jumped at the opportunity. We were only the second university to be given access to a ballpark by Major League Baseball and club ownership to house university commencement. Powerful? Yes, 38,000 attendees filled the stadium as early as 3 p.m. for 6 p.m.

ceremonies. What a sight to see our graduates enter the field through center field gates and walk to their “box seats,” then graduate on the field with their pictures on the jumbotron. To close the night, I thanked everyone for coming, and the center-field fireworks began. City hall lights were in purple and gold, our colors. Our graduates and families filled restaurants and took thousands of pictures. Walking out onto the Giant’s infield to get your degree in front of 38,000 fans was over the top for the students and their families. I am proud that my team brought this to reality for students and their families. Amazing work done by working together: quite an intangible.

## 6 Bumps, Bruises, and Regrets Along the Road Ahead

There were many to be expected. One which galls me to this day was my hope to open a satellite campus in San Francisco’s Bay View neighborhood. My team and I met often with the community, civic, and city leaders. A site was chosen. Plans started. However, promises of support and city-university agreements did not occur. The community wanted it, I wanted it, the faculty wanted it, and the students wanted it. It didn’t happen for many complex reasons. Many of these civic leaders called to say, “you tried.” But I continue to feel awful. For many, this was an opportunity to seek an education in their neighborhood that would boost them, their families, and their community. But they are resilient and their efforts to secure a local educational space will happen. I regret not being able to build that campus in their neighborhood.

## 7 Leadership Is Activism: Be Careful!

As an Asian American activist, becoming a president means that you are and must be a president to *ALL the students and employees on campus. ALL of them*. Partiality is tolerated but if overdone, the risk is high. Which departmental celebrations do you attend? All of them? None? Which community events do you attend? All of them? None of them? I struggled when President Bush and particularly when President Obama visited campus. President Bush wanted our field house (known as the Superior Dome) so that anyone could come until capacity (about 4500 seats) was reached, and it was. President Obama wanted a smaller intimate gathering of about 1200. He wanted every student club leader assured one of the “golden tickets.” Some single tickets to business leaders and some tickets to politicians. Suddenly everyone was my friend. But it worked. Both events were wonderful for the experience of students and the community to see and be near very popular Presidents of the United States. But I couldn’t be seen as the Asian American president attending all Asian events and not others. Those were tough decisions, and I am sure our choices on where I should be were controversial. But Asian American issues were “my thing.” People understood that. But they also knew I was being present at as

many other campus activities as possible. They were grateful when I popped in. As I said earlier, it is a lifestyle, and there never is enough time. But the effort is intangible and when seen by the community, it's magic. Your public gets it because they see you. That is why a presidency is a lifestyle, not a job.

Many thanks to my wife, Phyllis; we often split up to cover many events. She was terrific. When I announced to Northern Michigan University my impending resignation and move to San Francisco, I received many humorous but serious notes of congratulations and wondering if Mrs. Wong would stay in Marquette!

Lastly, when I decided to retire, I left my leadership team in limbo. I still feel awful about how presidential transitions affect many, many lives. They gave their all for me, and now I was bowing out. There is something to be said about going out on a high note. We had turned the place around through new construction, reconciling budget crisis after budget crisis, hiring new faculty, better marketing, and raising needed dollars to support students. I remain so proud of my cabinet. We hit way above our weight, in baseball terms. Luckily, most of them moved up and out to other campuses. Those who stayed prospered and continue to serve the campus well. But most left when I did. I never meant to disrupt their personal and professional lives. But I couldn't help it. It was time for me to step down. I know it is inevitable in higher education, but it didn't make me feel any better. Presidential decisions affect many lives especially those closest to the President. I don't know if there is a way to step aside without seriously affecting their lives. Dealing with the emotion accompanying a retirement or even leaving campus for another opportunity is indeed an intangible, a very personable one.

It is a good lesson that an important intangible is the relationship one builds with their leadership team. It is a "fit" one that builds over time, and when that "fit" works, good things happen. We learned to share our excitement with the successes that came with good teamwork. Whether it was sports, corporate work, community work, or any kind of leadership work, it was about team building and trust building. One can never trust someone too much. But it is a disaster when you don't trust someone enough.

## **8 Connecting All These Intangibles into Purpose: A Pipeline of Asian American Leadership**

The importance of developing and supporting a leadership system for Asian Americans cannot be stressed enough. It is not only to fill a pipeline of young and effective leaders but also to provide the wisdom and support to help sustain their appointments. The path forward is fraught with mostly intangible challenges. That is why my comments are mainly about recognizing the myriad number of intangibles before leaders. Accepting leadership means accepting the necessity to be aware and recognize how to confront these intangibles. That is where mentoring comes in.



There were so few if any veteran Asian American higher education leaders during my presidencies. I would have welcomed their guidance. The current rise in anti-Asian violence, the short tempers, and insulting behavior toward Asian American governors, mayors, and campus leaders are troubling, especially when minor errors occur. I have been surprised at how communities have such short tempers and serious impatience. The feeling never left me that the expectations for me as an Asian American president were different. I was blessed with a spouse who recognized what was unfair and said so. If I was seeing and feeling racism when it wasn't there, her advice to me was to “go for a run, get over it and get back to work.” She (and the run) returned me to a place where being effective was the most important attitude for me. It brought home to me how one can consume books and articles about leadership (of which there are many), whereas it will be an intangible that derails a leader. That doesn't make it any easier. More often than not, it is an intangible that derails Asian American leadership faster than one would expect. The tempers and the anger one sees are so out of line with what caused it all. I was so surprised by the vitriol thrown at me all too often. The late Mayor of San Francisco (Ed Lee) and I would talk about this. He couldn't go anywhere without being badgered and called names; he couldn't even enjoy an event. He was guarded constantly, and we shared many of the same kinds of treatment. His passion for San Francisco never wavered. I tried to emulate him at San Francisco State.

Entitled “High Expectations, Short Fuses,” this chapter gets at the core of this challenge and what I see ahead for other Asian American educators looking for that corner office. Our reputation for high educational attainment is more than offset by the few numbers in our community that become presidents and chancellors. The rising number of members, who are so quickly terminated, demoted, and embarrassed for the slightest of events, takes my breath away. Did mishandling an intangible on any of the points I have raised in this article torpedo a career? If so, why the quick and consuming effort to dismiss so quickly?

American culture can picture us as teachers, doctors, lawyers, and counselors. But this culture has a hard time picturing us as CEOs, head coaches, generals, and military commanders. Consider how hard it is to imagine Asian Americans as academy award winners, producers, directors, or head football coaches. When one of us moves to campus leadership, we are new, we are the “other.” We are often the first Asian American leader for many to experience. It is easy to see how expectations can run so high when our successful track record of achievement as teachers, professors, and scientists is well documented. But raising money, being political, running a championship athletic department, hiring and firing people, being in the public eye, and solving huge financial issues don't seem to complement our image. Are we “tough enough” to handle a crisis, to lead? Can we step up and defend the campus, our faculty, and our students? In closing, the most intangible of all intangibles may be whether our public sees that we do have the “stuff” to lead. Having the “right stuff” is the key aspect of leadership stereotypes we work against and the most fragile of perceptions to sustain. I believe we are, and that record is becoming more clear as more and more Asian Americans are being tapped for leadership roles.

The wisdom of children is immeasurable. My three sons (no daughters), now fathers of my eight grandchildren (a good Chinese number) know my love for B-grade science fiction movies, especially monster movies. My father loved these movies too. When the boys were young, say 9–13, we would bet on the likely success or failure of any character, especially if one of the major roles was held by an Asian actor. Our bet? That the first person to die in these B-grade monster movies is inevitably Asian. If they make it halfway through the movie, they must have martial art skills. Our phrase when we watched these movies was “watch the Asian guy die first.” I asked them once, “Will the Asian guy kiss or hug a non-Asian woman (usually the starlet) before the movie is over?” or “Could the Asian actor win over the non-Asian starlet before the movie was over?” “No way Dad, c’mon this is Hollywood.” I can’t help but connect the dots from depictions of Asians in the media, Asian victims of hate, and the absence of Asians on corporate boards, university presidential offices, and head coaching jobs. Are we ignorant about sports, theatre, and the arts? Are we not fitting that American tough cowboy image of being “tough enough” to lead and to care or to have enough “star power” to lead?<sup>1</sup> Are we inevitably the first to “die”? I believe we are tough enough, and the growing number of Asian American appointments to leadership roles says the same. I don’t want Asian American presidents to suffer the Hollywood syndrome of first to die or doomed never to win the starlet. The presidency is tough enough already. There are no firm rules about being judged fairly and equitably. No firm guidance on dealing with your unfair treatment by the public. There is no class or seminar to take for either task. How do you become tough enough? How do you avoid perceptions of being too soft? Two more intangibles to add to the list.

I want to close by again thanking my wife of 51 years for standing with me. She would be the first to tell you that leaders are listeners and doers. Leaders must acknowledge that they can’t do it alone. She believes that being respectful, humble, and confident is at the heart of being tough. Pretty good advice.

I want to thank the many staff, faculty, students, and members of my cabinets and teams, who were amazingly effective and often successful. I could not have done it alone. Many of our successes were because of them. We overcame fires, floods, active shooter alerts, student protests, power failures, and budget cuts and coped with the deaths of colleagues and family members. We cared about the lives of our community in a very difficult and challenging world. They shared my belief that education should challenge you, never be easy but always liberating. Our work together continues to be a source of pride for me. It was our way of defining the future. Their stars will burn far greater and brighter than mine ever will. I am grateful to have worked in their presence.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2023 Oscars were a wonderful, positive sign. Sweeping the Oscars, I want to credit all the stars who made “Everything Everywhere All at Once” so significant and emotional for the Asian American community. We have waited a long time and watched many movies, a touching moment for all of us.



**Dr. Leslie E. Wong** is President Emeritus of San Francisco State University (SFSU). He serves as Interim President of Connecticut College from July 2023 to present. He also served as President of Northern Michigan University. He held previous administrative posts in North Dakota, Colorado, and Washington State. An educational psychologist by training, his work includes cognitive aspects of supercomputing applications, cross-cultural approaches to teaching math, and cross-cultural counseling, especially in the area of PTSD with Vietnam veterans and southeast Asian refugees. Dr. Wong initiated and oversaw the construction of four major buildings at San Francisco State and helped revitalize WNMU radio and TV in Marquette, Michigan. He launched and completed SFSU’s first comprehensive fundraising campaign of \$150M. Restoring the reputation of the SFSU athletic program led to the conference and national recognition in 2019.

Dr. Wong has served on the Board of Directors of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, the American Council on Education, the Association of State Colleges and Universities, and the National Collegiate Athletics Association’s Division II President’s Council. Additionally, he has hosted two United States Presidents at the Northern Michigan University campus, President George W. Bush (2004) and President Barack Obama (2010). He has continued to work with federal, state, and local legislators to ensure awareness of and protection from anti-Asian American activities. He has provided podcasts and lectures on Asian American leadership and is active with C100, a nationally recognized organization for Chinese Americans, and is also involved with the Asian Pacific Americans for Justice.

He retired from San Francisco State University in 2019 and currently serves on the Board of Trustees for Connecticut College (New London, Connecticut) and on the Lingnan University Foundation Board (Los Angeles and Hong Kong). He maintains an interest in Asian American issues including the recruitment and retention of Asian American executives in higher education.

He credits the roots of much of his leadership skills to experiences playing highly competitive baseball in California. Often the only Chinese kid on the field, and one of the smallest, many thought it an anomaly. Is he tough enough? But sticking to it, playing through the racism and disbelief, a gift for hitting, a team player set in motion resilience, effort, teamwork, and a competitive attitude that served him well throughout his career. Sports do that for many, especially for this small, Chinese kid that believed he could play with the big kids. It is no wonder that sports play a role for many of the early Asian American leaders in higher ed.

Phyllis, his partner of over 50 years, is a successful, award-winning author (Wong, Phyllis Michael. *We Kept Our Towns Going, The Gossard Girls of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2022) and an outdoor photographer. His grandchildren and interest in woodworking and music keep him quite busy.

# Everything My Asian Immigrant Parents Taught Me Turns Out to Be Wrong



Frank H. Wu

## 1 The Dilemma

I must explain that my title is facetious. I would be a wicked child and for that matter a contemptible human being if I failed to appreciate the sacrifices my parents made, willingly, for the benefit of the next generation and to acknowledge the standards that they set to ensure the prosperity of their progeny. I would not have achieved anything without them. As I surpass an age at which I considered them old when I was young, I have come to understand and respect the context in which they grew up and then undertook a journey to a new land that beckoned with opportunity but was fraught with the betrayal of its allure.

I offer the story of how I came to be the President of Queens College, one of the founding institutions of the City University of New York system. I grew up in Detroit in the 1970s. My parents were Chinese immigrants from Taiwan, scholarship students. My father was an engineer at one of the “Big Four” automakers back when everyone drove an American car or fantasized, they could afford that mighty V-8 engine symbolizing upward mobility. My mother was a librarian, devoted to her children. I was born in the United States. Like many, I would stay away from the uneasy subject of race, except that Vincent Chin was killed, and it came together for me, accelerating into abruptness. I did not know Chin, but I knew he could be an uncle, a cousin, or me, and I was emphatically of the same time and place, during the 1980s recession which had further devastated the magnificent wreck of Detroit. A Chinese American, out for a bachelor’s night celebration, he was bludgeoned with a baseball bat, his head cracked open. The guests who would have attended his

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wedding went to his funeral instead. The killers, white autoworkers who shouted racial epithets and obscenities before blaming him for the success of imported cars (as witnesses swore: “it’s because of you motherfuckers we’re out of work”), never denied they had carried out the act. They repeated as a mantra that it was a bar brawl, which had gotten out of hand. It was a mistaken identity twice over. Chin was Chinese, not Japanese; an American, not a foreigner. He was like his assailants, working class. The color of his skin, the texture of his hair, and the shape of his eyes triggered them. Under a plea deal, they were sentenced to probation for 3 years and a fine of 3000 dollars. In the death of an Asian American individual was the birth of the Asian American movement. He became an icon. I gave up my goal of becoming an architect. I knew I had to be an advocate.

I admonish myself to be aware that the narrative I share here is mine alone. Perhaps others will discern a family resemblance to their own recollections. Asian American identity springs from a cathartic insight. Racial discrimination is neither in your own head nor your own fault but instead an experience common to so many due to an abiding animus. Yet we can reduce ourselves to stereotypes, excusing our own choices by referring to group circumstances. All authors should submit the standard disclaimer: I am responsible for my mistakes.

Thus, this essay can be summed up through representative proverbs. Asian cultures, with their collectivist orientation, have aphorisms of duty such as the Japanese “the nail that sticks up is pounded down.” That precept expresses elegantly the demands of conformity, deference to one’s elders, fidelity to tradition, and not making a fuss; it is a paean to disappearing into the crowd, with genuine relief at the prospect. In Chinese, the warning is “the loudest duck is shot first by the hunter.” Compare the American adage of dissent, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease” or the exhortation to “march to the beat of a different drummer.” Those epigrams exalt the individual who stands up and speaks out, a defiant loner who is compelled to fight the system, from Tom Cruise’s “Maverick” as the protagonist of the *Top Gun* movies to Thoreau in retreat at Walden Pond. The Asian veneration of elitism and the glorification of premium brands as in fact having intrinsic value are at odds with the American cheering on of the underdog who is unique and comes from behind in any sport to clinch the championship. Some Asians even argue that Asians are hierarchical and accordingly not compatible with democracy.<sup>1</sup>

Asians and Americans revere what is diametrically opposed; hence, the Asian American confronts a dilemma between debts and freedom. In deciding on a college, studies have shown, Asians would rather opt to be the small fish in the big pond, others the big fish in the small pond.<sup>2</sup> Asians by and large would settle for being at the bottom of the class, so long as they are at a top school. Non-Asians

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<sup>1</sup> The claim “Asian values” are incompatible with democracy was advanced most prominently by Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, and it remains a subject of debate. (Bell & Li, 2013; Chu & Diamond, 2010; Kingsbury & Avonius, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> The preliminary research compares European Americans and East Asians. (Wu, Garcia & Kopelman, 2018). Other research by psychologists suggests that Americans and Asians perceive differently, picking out individual fish in an aquarium versus seeing an ecosystem. (Nisbet, 2004).

would trade institutional rank for individual standing. In this tendency, Asian Americans may be more Asian and less American. That leads to the cases of Asian American youngsters who devise elaborate frauds to pretend they have matriculated at an Ivy League institution and evade the ignominy of enrolling at their state university.<sup>3</sup> (Ninh, 2021). An Asian American kid is not going off to college alone; his family is going along, too.

In the Asian immigrant household, at least the one I lived in, there is to be no “to thine own self be true” or “I gotta be me” or “you do you” or “let your freak flag fly.” Otherwise the child is classified, as I was in Chinese, as *bu ting hua*, which can be translated inertly as “disobedient.” That fails to depict the severity of the situation. For if you are not only oblivious to the mandate of filial piety but also romanticize rebellion, you cannot comprehend the breach of norms. The rules are more than edicts private to a family. A child’s ability to be integrated into the mainstream corresponds to the parents’ failure to uphold authority and sustain discipline, which is vital for status within the ethnic community. A child, who is too American and too liberal, dishonors the ancestors with the selfishness of independence. The child may be heedless of the affront, which the parents regard as an obvious disgrace. To those who hail from a similar setting of extra homework, music lessons, and weekend language school, then this is an effort to come to terms with my own inadequacy. My mother yearned for the longest time, even after I was established as a lawyer and law professor, for me to become a medical doctor, and that is no joke.

As Asian marriages are perceived as loveless by others, Asian child-rearing probably looks to Americans to be abusive. The Tiger Mother’s “hothouse” techniques exacerbate the damage. The doctrine that is instilled is you are good for nothing but what you can accomplish. Parents must be able to brag about their children and gossip about others in an unceasing contest. All activities are subordinate to educational attainment. The computation of success is conformist and not creative. Here is a minor example of the endless quarrel, memorable decades later. When I was a high school sophomore, I managed to be elected to an office in the student government. My parents instructed me to resign from it at once, the better to be dedicated to the study that would result in admission to a prestigious college. That was an error. The role would have inculcated skills that would prove useful, not to mention helping and not harming the chances of ending up at a selective institution.

## 2 The Shame and the Embarrassment of Racial Discrimination

So to continue toward confession, I am ashamed to admit it now, but as a child, I was always embarrassed of my own parents and a bit angry at them. All teenagers are humiliated by their parents of course, and they are afflicted by mutual exasperation.

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<sup>3</sup>The federal government also has begun prosecuting organized criminal rings that cheat on standardized tests, and they have deported Chinese foreign nationals involved in these efforts.

For those who are born overseas from the perspective of their elders, the difference in cognitive dissonance is in kind and not in degree. The second American president, the curmudgeon John Adams, was attributed the quote that he is a soldier so in turn his son may be a merchant so in turn his son may be a poet. The Asian immigrant counterpart would substitute an infinite series of doctors, engineers, professors, and scientists. Various populations have undergone kindred schisms over Americanization, as documented in the coming-of-age canon. It is the “generation gap” with a vengeance. In the hit movie and source novel *Crazy Rich Asians*, the plot centers on not the clash of civilizations envisioned by demagogues but among Asians: the Asian Asians versus the Asian Americans (in the mahjong scene, the American born interloper must lose, not win, to convince the matriarch who opposes her marrying into the family that she can be Asian enough to fit in).<sup>4</sup>

I blamed my parents, too. I figured it was my lineage, which subjected me to the casual bigotry of the playground for being different before diversity was celebrated. My parents were not reckless, but the harassment was relentless. “Do you eat dogs? Are you Communist? How can you see with eyes like that?” I suspected my parents had consigned me to the cliched cruelties of childhood, the teasing and taunting, the bullying of racial slurs, in the care of the teachers and administrators who were unconcerned or recommended to respond, “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Even as a kid, I knew that retort was for perennial losers. The sticks and stones are revealed and produced by those fighting words, the violence instigated by the rhetoric. The words themselves pack their own punch, an accumulation of microaggressions that add up to motivate suicides.<sup>5</sup> The adults on the scene, such as volunteers who were the parents of those who would inflict the torment, visibly wished not to have the headache, as if they were the ones aggrieved, put upon. My parents, not so much ingratiating as idealistic, would scold me to “try harder to fit in,” like applying myself academically; that endeavor rendered me pathetic. Your classmates resent how you show them up with higher grades and revile your attempts to imitate them. No amount of “try harder” overcomes racial prejudice. Try harder for its own sake; however, it is a futile strategy to defeat racism, especially for Asian Americans who, as the late historian Ronald Takaki pointed out, are punished for virtues rather than vices, as the Yellow Peril of unfair competition (Takaki, 1989).

My parents made assumptions as well, that they had brought unto themselves the mistreatment on account of their accents and lack of cultural fluency, and their children being born in America would be accepted automatically by other Americans. My parents ate funny foods (my father urged me to try chicken feet for the medicinal qualities), they did not laugh at quite the right moment watching television

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<sup>4</sup>The original “clash of civilizations” popularized by Samuel Huntington was a conflict among the West, Islam, and China. (Huntington, 2011; Allison, 2017; Fukuyama, 1992). The star of *Crazy Rich Asians*, Constance Wu, explained in an interview that Asians and Asian Americans are not the same (Seigel, 2017).

<sup>5</sup>Army Private Danny Chen, serving in Afghanistan, killed himself after being subjected to racial bullying.

sitcoms such as *Happy Days* (featuring restaurateur Arnold as the rare Asian American character albeit in the background), and if there was a dispute with the bank, they had to call on their child to serve as a translator in an awkward role reversal. I anticipated that once I shaved in the morning like my father, dressed in a suit, and drove away to an office, I would not have to endure such abuse. I was not acquainted with the adult version of these antipathies, sometimes more sophisticated, sometimes not, which my parents encountered daily and could not fight effectively either. What neither they nor I reckoned with was the hostility, not to what we had done but to who we were. I did not speak the language of civil rights because I was a child, and they did not speak it either because they spoke another language, literally. Our family was not disruptive. President Jimmy Carter spoke of the imperative to dial down the thermostat to 55 in the winter due to the energy crisis and don a sweater. My parents obeyed. We shivered at night.

Once, out shopping at the supermarket, my mother and I returned to the car, a model “made in America” as was the only patriotic possibility in the Motor City besieged by imports. Some miscreant had shattered the windows. My mother complained to the manager of the suburban store. She was told, “That just happens.” I was skeptical. I cannot determine that the incident was racial rather than random. Back then, people were apprehensive about the empire of the rising sun, dubbed “Japan Incorporated,” a vanquished foe that by its cleverness shading into sneakiness would overtake the United States, victorious but vulnerable. Taken together with staring and whispering while in the aisles of those grocery stores, prank phone calls to the house, petty theft in the school hallway, being challenged to kung fu matches during recess, the mispronunciation of names or bestowing of easier names, the supercilious query whether we liked it in America – what could you say but, deferentially, “yes, thank you.” You cannot be rude. After all, Asians are supposed to be polite.

My parents and their cohort had been able to come to America thanks to their skills or their apparent potential. Their mindset was well suited for the era and their origins. Whether they were able to obtain visas depended on whether they were attractive to a reluctant host as additions to the labor pool under the post-Sputnik policies that boosted what are now termed STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) areas of study as patriotic priority. If you aspired to improve your lot in life by departing what was still a “developing” nation, you would favor a field of study based on marketplace dynamics and not individual desires. My parents carried their convictions with them that those who were too dimwitted for the preferred majors would be relegated to the liberal arts. They also, without alluding to bias, were compensating for it. They were mitigating the risk that any subjective factors would adversely affect evaluations by the bosses at work, selecting professions that relied on numbers and formulas rather than words and literature. They had the best interests of their offspring at heart by guiding them away from what was confusing and arbitrary, livelihoods in which you had to pick up the proper fork at a fancy luncheon, command a vocabulary that was both studious and vernacular, and appeal to those who as the majority would judge if you were eligible to join their club. Ironically, the evidence shows that the so-called “bamboo ceiling” holds back even



those with unsurpassed credentials in the occupations Asian Americans are reputed to dominate. (Meiksins & Tang, 2001; Tang, 1997a, b; Tang, 2005). Asian Americans move up into management ranks at lower rates than any other demographic in Silicon Valley, as a *Harvard Business Review* statistical study indicated, a discrepancy all the more noticeable for the abundance of Asian Americans toiling away in research and development or entrusted with the manufacturing chores of the clean room. (Gee and Peck, 2018).

The confidence in standardized testing as a fair measure of moral worth is as characteristic as it is problematic. From the civil service regime of imperial China to the after-school cram programs of contemporary Japan and South Korea, the ideology of tests as a fair instrument for assigning a station in society surpasses any American creed of “meritocracy.” The assessment is interpreted not as a predictor of future performance but esteemed as the Platonic form of merit itself. An Asian American who asserts he deserves to be hired or promoted due to a score would be dismissed as displaying the hubris of impending downfall, but ambitious Asian Americans bewail their predicament to their ethnic confidantes along these very lines.

To avoid being misconstrued, I hasten to add that the SAT, LSAT, GRE, MCAT, and so on are reliable indicators if utilized sans exaggeration, of how students will do at the next stage of their education, students plural, approximately and in the aggregate, with no guarantees as to any student singular. Even then, they could be characterized as polite proxies for parental education and family wealth. Whatever your score, to be a leader your abilities across your domain of activity are necessary but not sufficient. Although you must be competent and diligent, you need to cultivate “soft skills” and grit. If you are certain your top percentile test result entitles you to the bounty of the nation or technical expertise suffices to acquire it, you will be disillusioned and embittered. Asian Americans seem to overestimate what is due to them for their SAT. They belittle the advantage of being a “people person.” That is to their detriment. The best baseball player may not be the best coach. The essential talents are not the same and not even similar.

Other Asian Americans have had misgivings like mine. Patrick Hayashi, an artist who was among the initial organizers of Asian American Studies as a field, resisted the worship of the multiple-choice, because of the systematic disadvantage imposed on racial minorities. As a member of the University of California leadership in the late 1990s, he implemented the holistic review of applicants. Chang Lin-Tien, the first Asian American to head a major university in the States as Chancellor of the University of California at Berkeley, had the gravitas to proclaim excellence required diversity. His tenure preceded the recruitment of Asian Americans as the plaintiffs to test the constitutionality of affirmative action. Among the absurd episodes for me as a teacher was the complaint from a student, Asian American, at a “top ten” law school who informed me with utmost sincerity that the grade I had assigned her (an A minus and not an A unadulterated) had to be incorrect. She insisted her LSAT score had been just shy of perfect. If she had reflected on it, it might have dawned on her that almost all of her classmates could have said the same.

Despite the pop culture which would conspire against my forebears, I have internalized the lessons of my upbringing. I have been nudged by those who report to me not to divulge my self-image, that I am a wretched slacker, and if I had applied myself I would have amounted to something. As by definition, every immigrant is an emigrant from elsewhere, so too assimilation is perforce alienation from that place, literal or metaphorical, a land or a memory. To be estranged from Asia confers no defense from being reviled in America. The immigrant parents are prevented from returning from whence they came because the American-born children are deficient to adjust backward. The former are condemned to remain, and the latter expect them to remake themselves.

Yet a residue of Asia has been imprinted; even for the unenthusiastic, the impression is indelible. The “banana” has pale yellow flesh. The Asian American project might be to no avail. I wonder if an Asian American has no “authentic” personality for all the energy invested in keeping up a front. The fortune cookie is an American invention: the California roll, Canadian. They can be procured overseas only to the extent tourists demand to be catered to. Asian Americans may be counterfeit to Asians and other Americans. Almond boneless chicken is a “Chinese” dish peculiar to Detroit restaurants, like Vernor’s ginger ale and Saunder’s chocolate sundaes.

In chit-chat, people ask the question how I enjoy my job. They laugh nervously at my reply: “I was raised by immigrant parents who did not believe in fun.” Like much else, that is a prepared jest, integral to the habit of defensive distancing akin to code-switching. You have to be ready to poke fun at your identity preemptively in order to exercise a modicum of control over whom you are presumed to be. You cannot let down your guard, since the childhood friends you invite into your home might mock your parents, and your friends’ parents will not become your parents’ friends. People who are uncomfortable in their own skin are further disparaged as self-hating, but they are products of their inapposite environment, inevitably and unescapably in the wrong place at the wrong time. The implication, incessant and irritating, is your rightful domicile is back in Asia, which you explore as a prodigal son awaiting redemption, where you soon enough recognize that you are an American through and through, even walking down the street with a swagger that takes up excess space in distinct contrast to the more modest passersby.

Attitudes toward Asia have been transformed only recently by the rise of Asia, the People’s Republic of China exercising its dictates of “hard power” to patrol access to consumer markets, and the advent of social media with global participation, K-Pop in myriad manifestations demonstrating the “soft power” equivalent by winning over superfans of boy bands and girl bands. The image of Asians, and by extension Asian Americans, has come full circle. The antagonism persists and may have escalated. Asians have ceased to be quiet and submissive. Now, as they rush by the busload to national parks and boutiques, they are loud and pushy.

As a supervisor, I disdain giving positive feedback owing to having received none growing up. At the outset, I was inept because I was surprised by how direct reports were noncompliant. The pursuit of individual happiness strikes me as vaguely corrupt. I have had to train myself in maintaining eye contact while talking and deploying a hearty handshake, but I cannot bow properly, impaired by

self-consciousness. (Teshima, 2006; Uono & Hietanen, 2015). My mother once reassured me though that I could learn Mandarin if I tried by dint of not being afraid to open my mouth and make a fool of myself. I have striven to be idiosyncratic on my own terms because to overseas Asians and other Americans alike to swear you are Asian American is to announce you are abnormal; even the designation itself, introduced in the epochal year of 1968, would be to some observers a nonsensical oxymoron.<sup>6</sup> As I practiced speech and competed in debate tournaments to cure a stutter, becoming a public speaker able to earn a fee, I have long been granted the infelicitous compliment, “my, you speak English so well.” Asian Americans embody the imposter syndrome compounded by racial uneasiness, what W.E.B. DuBois deemed dual consciousness before anybody labeled themselves a hyphenated American. (DuBois, 1987).

The anguish is justified, not the woe of the sensitive. Anti-Asian feelings lead to material consequences. Asians have been the recurring enemy in the wars that can be recalled by those now living: coming out of the trenches, the foxholes, the caves, the guerilla tunnels, swarming hordes of the Japanese, the Chinese, the Koreans, the Vietnamese – even “Arabs” dwelled in what was “the Orient.” Allies have been indistinguishable (“you all look alike”), much less the veterans who became refugees, who had enlisted in the American cause with the promise of being welcomed after peace was restored, such as the Filipinos and the Hmong. The Exclusion Act of 1882 naming the Chinese as despicable heathens, subsequently extended to an Asiatic Barred Zone; and the internment of Japanese Americans, two-thirds native-born US citizens, are official actions intended to expel or somehow contain an Asian menace. The hate crimes are designated as such begrudgingly if at all, from the forgotten nineteenth-century wholesale destruction of frontier villages, at the hands of mobs who included European immigrants; to the murder of Vincent Chin and the Stockton massacre; to the post-9/11 targeting of those who are Muslim or stand in as satisfactory approximations, as Sikhs did; to the pattern of assaults during the COVID-19 pandemic, the perpetrators shouting at victims the virus was their fault, culminating in the Atlanta shooting spree which left eight dead, six of them Asian women. The sentiments beneath the surface are the same as the car of teenagers who drive by jeering, “go back to where you came from,” or yelling, “ching chong, Chinaman.” Aggressors act out of the explicit fear of an Asian invasion. Avowed white supremacist Lothrop Stoddard foresaw “the rising tide of color” a century ago. (Stoddard, 1920). His fans on the fringes of the internet tout “replacement theory” nowadays, a conspiracy of the cosmopolitan set. They are terrified immigration and intermarriage will doom whites as a species, prompting what they would rationalize as their defensive measures to forestall that demise.

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<sup>6</sup>Emma Gee and Yuji Ishioka, among others, are credited with coining the term.

### 3 The Reconciliation of Civil Rights

The most far-reaching decision I made as a fledgling professor was to join the faculty of Howard University Law School. I was humbled to be the first Asian American law professor there, at the institution that trained almost all of the legal team who prevailed against *de jure* Jim Crow racial segregation. I learned as much as I taught, what was not available to be gleaned from books. I could witness, if only in glimpses confirmed by repetition, the disparities of white over black which exceeded by far any insult to my dignity. Each of us, as if a solipsist, knows our own suffering and slights. The challenge is to progress from agitation to remedy those personal offenses toward advocacy for universal principles. The historic struggle for Black equality set the precedent, even as others contribute as partners with their own claims. The 1964 Civil Rights Act was a prerequisite for the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. The passage of protections for African Americans was the impetus for the repeal of the racial quotas against Asian immigrants. Absent African Americans campaigning for social justice, Asian immigrants would be prohibited from even entering the country. Both enactments, homage to the slain President John F. Kennedy, were expansive in spirit. They had primary beneficiaries, but they were unlimited in scope.

That is why it pains me so much, the uninhibited anti-Black racism of more than a few Asian immigrants and the indignation over any solicitude for African Americans. In the absence of others, except their own children who have been willing to call out the issue, their invective about biological inheritance and pathological culture echo what alt-right white supremacists would utter: if only those people would behave themselves, like us, they insinuate.<sup>7</sup> I am alarmed by their ethnic pride. They style themselves as transnational elite, not domestic minorities; or, if they must, they will appoint themselves as the good immigrants and the model minorities. They are expatriates, unlike those who have put down new roots. They boast among themselves, sanguine about the ascendancy of the sovereignty they represent, that they will subjugate “Americans” as if their descendants will not count among them. Their sense of superiority over other people of color – even other Asians not their particular “people” – is palpable. They likely are not more partial to their own “blood” than others to theirs, but to be honest, what troubles me is their opinions will be ascribed to me. It is the vindication of unfairness as innately Asian that I protest, the venerable customs of sexism or birth order patrimony, the counterfactual belief there are no gays or lesbians in the old country, the blatant colorism of advertisements for arranged marriages, the shunning and scorning based on caste and class, the loathing of minorities from their homeland even if transplanted like them. My plea to them is to renounce their Asian supremacist dogma. While these kinship networks are betting on Asia as the center of civilization about to supersede the status quo, they are hedging by sending assets to

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<sup>7</sup>Asian American youngsters have published “open letters” to their immigrant parents, similar to this essay. (Huang, 2020; Meraji & Chow, 2016).

America, including children to be installed in posh accommodations. This flourishing contingent of the well-to-do obscures the dissidents seeking asylum, the displaced whose faith is being eliminated systematically, and the undocumented who work as ride-share drivers and waitstaff at all-you-can-eat seafood buffets. Asian immigration is what social scientists portray as “bimodal” or highly stratified, with a flow possessing privilege looking down at a corresponding flow lacking it, even once both have relocated to an America, which is unaware of their internal divisions.

To be fair, in some instances the people I have in mind even disparage earlier Asian immigrants as compromising their position. Some of the latest Asian arrivals, hailing from a would-be global power, describe their predecessors on these shores as weak for failing to protect themselves, arrogance that is galling, derived from ignorance that is worse. From time to time, someone who has just been introduced to me requests I pay a visit to their local Chinese school to deliver a lecture. They, my age but newcomers, are anxious their children, who are my true peers, are verging on ridiculously American. I am not sure what I could say. They may not conceive of themselves as “Asian American,” either affiliating with other Asians or pledging to be American; as Chinese diaspora, their imagined purity of heritage would not extend to the adoptee, the mixed, those whose families long ago traveled to Latin America and took up Spanish as their natural language and “chifa” as their cuisine, and so on. Diversity contains diversity. They ought to be curious about the “Yellow Power” movement. Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, and Filipino Americans emulated “Black Power” in the “Summer of Love” in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Nonetheless, I am confident people will have an epiphany. I would have ended up in denial about race but for the shock of the Chin case and the support of Howard University. My father and I had a conversation, itself not an everyday occurrence, when the killer of George Floyd was on trial for murder. My father, transfixed by the proceedings on television as all of us were at the time, isolated in quarantine, declared, “What the police did to that man was wrong.”

I was inspired by admiration for the president of Gallaudet University. An administrator at the school for the deaf, the only one of its type in the world, had me over to conduct a workshop. They then invited me to become a trustee. President I. King Jordan had been tapped by the governing board in resolving a spectacular protest, “DPN,” for “Deaf President Now!” Gallaudet had been led by hearing persons all along, and even on the board, there was only a sole deaf member. The president who had been designated before Jordan was capable as a manager but had no involvement with the deaf nor proficiency in American Sign Language; she stepped down before moving into her office. The deaf, encompassing those who had no formal relationship to Gallaudet but for whom the campus was a center of “big-D” Deaf culture, had revolted, and the world heard them. As a professor, I already loved what I did. In the company of Jordan, a leader on a mission, whose motto was “the deaf can do everything except hear,” I realized as much as you could do in a classroom or through an academic article, you could do much more through an institution.

All of the above constitutes the preamble. I could not replicate my resume if I set out with that as the plan. I had no mentors. My advice is not to follow any advice,

none that is the received wisdom anyway. I have my dream job. I did not apply to be a college president; I was a candidate in one search and only one search, to be the Queens College president. I was not chasing an opportunity to be merely in charge, to hold a title, and inhabit an office that is elevated if generic. I wanted to be someplace that advanced the proverbial American Dream. I am committed to it. I am lucky to live where I belong, in Queens, “the World’s Borough.” The neighborhood of Flushing owes its revitalization to Asian immigrants, the Chinese (Taiwanese and then the Hong Kong exodus circa 1997) and the Indian alongside the Korean and the Filipino, with every province and dialect to be found in critical mass, and combinations such as the Guyanese Indian and the Dougla. You would not be able to find an analogue in Asia, a locale with such extraordinary admixture. The Asian Americans live and work side-by-side with the Orthodox Jews and the Latinos, the “white ethnics” and the African Americans descended from the Great Migration. A third of our students are immigrants. Another third are the children of immigrants. Our tuition is a tenth the cost of attendance at some rivals. Forty percent of our students pay nothing.

I started during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although everyone said, “That must be so difficult,” I disagree. It was easier to become President during the pandemic because I stayed at home to set an example consistent with our campus closure and felt as if I wasn’t working though I was “24/7.” The pandemic set a clear shared priority (singular, not plural). The national standard for leadership was not set high, with folks touting quackery such as drinking bleach to stave off infection. Once it was over, we commenced again with all of the usual issues. As vaccines rolled out, the range of tolerance for risk and preferences about safety measures expanded and whether to don a facemask became contentious enough to provoke fist fights. Once back, we had to rebuild for people who had missed out on a year, or more, of education in person, and everyone feeling on edge being around others not in the pod with whom they had sheltered.

Even while remote and virtual, we finished our strategic plan. Our consultant had not assisted with such a comprehensively democratic process. I appointed six dozen stakeholders to the steering committee and various working groups, more than triple the number previously involved, and we invited more faculty, rank-and-file staff, and students. With 11 convenings and outreach, well over a thousand people participated. Enhanced by that input, we had the backing for a new arts and business schools. Announced simultaneously, they enabled us to become the college of the double major. My approach is to empower those who will make it all happen – my own role is modest because while I may have a vision others will execute it.

I conclude by promising a sequel in the process of reconciliation. My mother told me before she died that my parents were pleased with the course of my career. At a dinner with other Asian American academics prior to a presentation on how to provide the community with effective services for mental health, another taboo, I broached the topic of writing an open letter to Asian immigrant parents with the message, “Your Child’s Choice of Major Will Not Ruin His Life.” I am familiar with too many Asian Americans who by all appearances are doing fine but who have disappointed their parents, and none more so than the college student who is either

forced to be miserable in an approved major or threatened to be disowned for an alternative that the parents have not heard of. I lamented that as a college president I could not pen that piece to address dysfunction or plead for forgiveness. The others at the table suggested to the contrary that I was obliged to use my role to make the statement in the hope of alleviating conflict. They nodded at my premise. They “get it.” That persuades me that readers will have empathy for my title, which could be transposed, as I did everything wrong and it turned out all right. Together we will adapt, and together we can change America.

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**Frank H. Wu** serves as the 11th President of Queens College. Prior to joining the City University of New York (CUNY) system, Frank was Chancellor and Dean, and then William L. Prosser Distinguished Professor at the institution previously known as University of California Hastings, the original law school of the UC system. Before then, he was a member of the faculty at Howard University, the nation’s leading historically black college/university (HBCU), for a decade. He served as Dean of Wayne State University Law School in his hometown of Detroit, and he has been a visiting professor at the University of Michigan, an adjunct professor at Columbia University, and a Thomas C. Grey Teaching Fellow at Stanford University. In his leadership roles as well as on the faculty at Howard, he was the first Asian American in such a capacity. He was appointed by the Obama administration to the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) of the federal Department of Education. He served on the Board of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund from 2004 to 2010, and briefly as Chair of the Washington, D.C., Human Rights Commission. Frank is the author of *Yellow: Race in America Beyond Black and White*, which was immediately reprinted in its hardcover edition, and coauthor of *Race, Rights and Reparation: Law and the Japanese American Internment*, which received the most sizable grant from the Civil Liberties Public Education Fund. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and regularly in the *Daily Journal*, the legal newspaper of California. He has been a guest on the Oprah Winfrey show, *O’Reilly Factor*, and C-SPAN *Booknotes*. Earlier, he practiced law with the firm of Morrison & Foerster in San Francisco – while there, he gave a quarter of his time to pro bono work on behalf of indigent clients. He earned a B.A. from Johns Hopkins University and a J.D. with honors from the University of Michigan. He completed the Management Development Program of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He was selected for the Chang-Lin Tien Award in 2008 and the John Hope Franklin Award in 2020. He has run more than 200 half-marathons.



# Leading Climate Change Actions in Higher Education



Hong Yang

## 1 Introduction

Many of us have stayed in academia long enough to have experienced some kind of crisis in higher education—whether financial or pandemic but nothing is comparable to the magnitude and far-reaching impacts of climate change that we now confront (Haass, 2020). Unprecedented, monumental, accelerated, and consequential, climate change has caught higher education, and society as a whole, woefully unprepared. Despite decades of warning by scientists of the warming planet and its potentially catastrophic consequences (Weart, 2008), rather than being treated as an existential threat, climate change was, and perhaps still is, largely regarded as a political issue of “down-the-road” problems at both national and international levels.<sup>1</sup>

The grim truth of the ever-increasing natural disasters related to climate change—frequent extreme weather, intense heat waves and cold snaps, widespread wildfires, severe droughts, and rapid sea level rise—constantly reminds us of the urgency of

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<sup>1</sup>On a global scale, instead of leading the fight for climate change, the two major powers, the United States and China, are locked in a fierce economic competition and political confrontation (see Wang 2022 and Moore 2022 for latest accounts of climate issues in US–China relations). At the national level, political gridlock on climate issues is neither new nor has seen the light of its solution (see Cohan 2022 and Mann 2022 for detailed updated discussions).

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the crisis. The mounting scientific evidence indicates that we are at a critical moment within a narrow window of time to act on climate change and related problems before it is too late (Armstrong McKay et al., 2022; IPCC, 2023). The lack of action has been at least in part due to the absence of strong political will and leadership at various levels, including higher education.

Climate change exacerbates existing issues in higher education, especially high operational costs, demographic changes, increasing tuition, social justice, and campus political tensions. Higher education leadership needs courage, wisdom, and knowledge to lead transformational changes in response to the societal needs of mitigating and adapting to the changing climate through large-scale decarbonization. Academically, researching and teaching climate change are no longer a topic only for environmental scientists, as climate issues are a full-fledged human crisis cross-cutting almost all academic disciplines.

I share my pathway toward realizing the urgency of the climate crisis and its consequential impacts as a trained earth scientist with decades of interdisciplinary research and teaching experience in climate change-related fields. As an administrator in higher education for more than a decade, I learned lessons firsthand in climate-related administration issues, albeit from the perspectives of American universities. Finally, as a recent Harvard Radcliffe Institute Fellow working on climate change projects, I outline leading-edge thoughts and insights that my students and I obtained through interviewing faculty, staff, students, and administrative leaders at Harvard University and elsewhere regarding higher education leadership for climate change action. We ask critical questions, such as what is the basic intellectual competency of climate change that a college student needs, what are the opportunities and advantages for colleges and universities to lead climate-related interdisciplinary teaching and research, and what kind of leadership skills are required to better prepare students for their lives in the climate “crunch time.”

## **2 My Path to Witnessing the Climate Crisis**

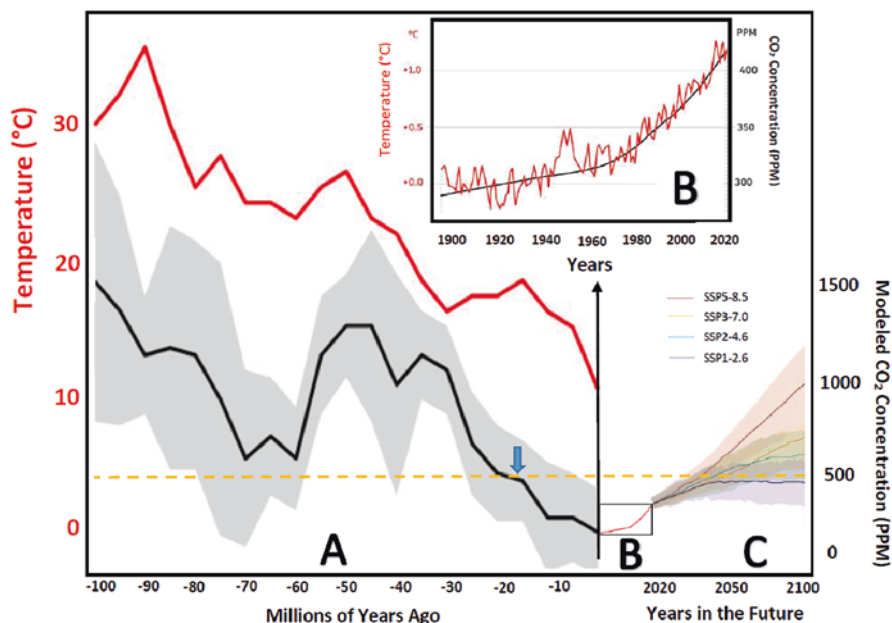
Some 40 years ago, when I entered the China University of Geosciences as an undergraduate major in geology in the city of Wuhan, which is known as one of China’s “four furnaces” due to its extremely hot and humid summers, I never had predicted that the world was getting warmer. While spending nights on the rooftop of our university dorms to escape the unbearable heat, by any stretch of the imagination, I had not envisioned that this was the start of my professional journey studying the force and rate of climate change. Looking back, it is ironic that as geology students, we were taught that the knowledge and skills we were acquiring would help find more coal, oil, and natural gas, rendering natural energy resources to fuel the world’s economic development. However, few at the time were informed that greenhouse gases, especially CO<sub>2</sub>, emitted from burning fossil fuels would elevate atmospheric temperatures to the dangerously high levels recorded today. Although scientists working for the oil company ExxonMobil accurately modeled and

predicted the warming impact of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted from fossil fuels as early as the late 1970s, their companies have employed various tactics to deny it to the general public (Supran et al., 2023). We learned from our geology lessons that “abrupt” climate shifts on Earth took millions of years; thus, no one would have foreseen that we would encounter such an abrupt climate event during our lifetime, devastating the livelihood of human civilization as we know it. Of course, I was not alone to be caught off guard, as our entire society has only seemed awakened recently by the harsh reality of climate change. As an earth scientist, I benefit from my training that allows me to closely examine the factual evidence related to climate change, while simultaneously witnessing the rapid pace and enormous force of such changes.

During my graduate studies, I became interested in plants and their adaptations to different climates in both modern and ancient environments. By examining the fossil record, I learned that vegetation shifted back and forth in response to past climate variabilities. For example, even the modern-day cold and barren Arctic area was once occupied by lush forests during geological warm periods. Upon the completion of a field trip that I led as a volunteer during my Master’s program for an international academic conference in Shangdong, China, an American professor based at the University of Idaho came to me introducing his paleoclimate research program and invited me to conduct a comparative analysis for my Ph.D. This professor, the late Dr. Charles “Jack” Smiley, whose name I now carry in my endowed chair professorship, became my academic advisor and mentor, unleashing my career toward climate change studies. It was also at this time that I first set foot on the now world-renowned geological site, Clarkia, in northern Idaho where Dr. Smiley conducted his “groundbreaking” research, both literally and figuratively. In Clarkia, extraordinarily preserved fossil materials were unearthed from sediments formed some 16 million years ago, a geological period known as the Miocene (Smiley, 1985).

We always knew that the organic-rich, finely layered lakebeds associated with local basalt volcanic eruptions would yield past climate information. But little did I, nor the entire scientific community, realize that the Clarkia site holds potential keys to unlock secrets of near-future climate change. As my postdoctoral research in Michigan shifted to the extraction and amplification of DNA from mammoths and mastodons (Yang et al., 1996; Yang, 1997) that roamed during the Ice Age some 40,000 years ago when our planet was much colder than the present, I thought of the ups and downs of global temperatures as happening only in the geologic past (Fig. 1a). The realization that we are living in a world where human-induced dramatic climate change occurs during a person’s lifetime with consequential impacts was mindboggling even for a scientist—but it was both a “seismic” shock to my mind and a “tectonic” shift to regain a sense of purpose for my professional career.

The value of the Clarkia Miocene site as a “gold mine” for climate research gradually became apparent over the years. Only during the past decade or so, my colleagues and I came to realize that the timing, location, and unique quality of the Clarkia Miocene deposit made it special to probe the force and consequences of future climate change. My research team at Bryant University in Rhode Island has periodically returned to Clarkia to apply emerging biological and biogeochemical technologies to these exceptionally preserved fossils (Fig. 2) that still contain



**Fig. 1** Global atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations (in part per million, or PPM), mean temperature (in °C), and its impact in the past, present, and future. (a) Estimates of global CO<sub>2</sub> and mean temperature changes over geological time (in millions of years) (modified from Tierney et al. 2020). The horizontal yellow dashed line represents the reconstructed Miocene Clarkia CO<sub>2</sub> concentration (~500–550 PPM) (data from Liang et al. 2022) and the blue arrow indicates the time of the Clarkia deposit. (b) Global CO<sub>2</sub> and temperature changes since the industrial revolution as partially measured at the Mauna Loa Observatory in Hawaii (an enlarged box of global mean annual values, modified from NOAA and Climate Central, is inserted). (c) Projected near future changes of CO<sub>2</sub> under different shared socioeconomic pathways (SSPs) (in years; CO<sub>2</sub> in logarithmic scale; modified from IPCC report AR6). Note different time scales among A, B, and C

delicate original tissues and biomolecules (Yang & Huang, 2003; Yang et al., 2005). Along the way, we documented changes in water levels and oxygen conditions for the Clarkia ancient lake (Wang et al., 2017), pinpointed the precise age of the deposit in association with volcanic eruptions that emitted large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> at a relatively short duration, and demonstrated annual accumulations of lake sediments at 15.78 million years ago (Höfig et al., 2021). More recently, applying a new technique developed in our lab to Clarkia plant fossils, we showed that the middle Miocene atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels were more than 500 parts per million (ppm) (Liang et al., 2022), putting current human emissions on a trajectory to reach Clarkia time CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations in the next few decades (Fig. 1c).

Today, the concentration of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> has hit a global monthly mean of 420 ppm, the highest level in at least the past 3 million years (IPCC, 2021). Most credible climate model scenarios predict that a continuous increase of greenhouse gases over the next decades will likely approach levels last seen during the Miocene Clarkia time. To me, it is like rewinding a “16-million-year geological tape” of



**Fig. 2** A photograph showing an opening layer of Clarkia sedimentary rock containing diverse and well-preserved plant fossils with extracted organic molecules; some fossils render original coloration upon exposure and yielded climate information of Earth's ancient past with CO<sub>2</sub> level that our society may approach in next few decades with elevated global temperatures. (An American quarter coin on the upper right for scale; Photo credit: Hong Yang)

increasing global CO<sub>2</sub> within less than 200 years of human time. The result will be unmatched consequences for humanity, raising the specter of crossing a climate “tipping point”—a critical time frame after which many major elements of the Earth system will accelerate into new and irreversible shifts, a scenario that can only be seen through the geological record (Armstrong McKay et al., 2022). The Clarkia fossils and associated climate signals offer us a “visualization” of what the Earth would look like in a post-tipping point world, turning abstract theoretical numbers of uncertainties into vivid images, which are both stunning and scary. My research data and results impressed on my sensitivity toward the urgency of the climate crisis and invoked my social responsibility as a scientist to go beyond the halls of science to contribute to public narratives. “Returning to Miocene,” as I have dubbed our recent field expeditions to Clarkia, has become a geological analogy for the trend of future climate change forced by accelerating rates of manmade carbon emissions. The whole society needs to rally together in preventing the Earth from “returning” to the Miocene climate, under which the outdoor heatwaves and other harsh conditions would simply be too hazardous in many parts of the world so that wearing protective clothing like the spacesuit that my colleagues at Rhode Island School of Design are currently suiting for NASA astronauts would be a reality rather than science fiction (Fig. 3).

**Fig. 3** A proto-type space suit designed by a team at Rhode Island School of Design for NASA's future Mars exploration. Similar protective suits may be needed in some regions on Earth in the near future given the rapid increase in global temperature. (Photo credit: Hong Yang)



### 3 Higher Education Feels the Heat of Climate Change

After the devastating Category 5 Hurricane Katrina caused over 1800 fatalities and \$125 billion in damage in the US Gulf States in late August 2005, I took students to inspect its ravages in New Orleans where the beautiful campus of Tulane University is located. Due to its enormous destruction, Tulane University closed for 4 months after being flooded, which along with other affected institutions, displaced about 100,000 students. Since then, portions of the Tulane campus have been flooded multiple times, and the frequency of disruptions seemed to rise alongside the rising sea level due to climate change. Many universities, like Tulane, are now facing climate-related threats, ranging from wildfires to the high costs of energy associated with the heating or cooling of buildings that were originally built on concepts and experiences of centuries of climate stability (Gardner, 2021). Yet, climate-related challenges in higher education are far beyond temporary disruptions to university operations and financial impacts. In my view, far more serious issues rest on the lack of long-term strategies to overcome learning barriers, the need to facilitate immediate climate actions, and the ability to encourage students' long-term behavioral changes.

In a recent talk given to university presidents and other senior leaders in higher education at the annual meeting of the American Council on Education, I showed two statistical predictions for the middle of this century: "By 2050, the Greenland

ice sheet will likely shrink by 20% ... which will lead to an ice-free Arctic Ocean in the summer, and global mean sea level rise of about half meter ...” (IPCC, 2021). This was followed by another forecast at the same time frame: “By 2050, the applicant pool of new first-year students will shrink by 20% ... which could result in as much as 50% decline in enrollment for many universities ...” (Hubbard & Minter, 2021). Predictably, the second 20% reduction got much more attention from the audience, not because university presidents did not view climate change as a challenge, but due to the fact that they considered the potential decline of student enrollments as an immediate existential threat. Compared with the average tenure of 5.9 years<sup>2</sup> for American university presidents, higher education leadership has viewed climate change as a “long-term” issue that did not make it to the top of most presidents’ priority lists. Seemingly more urgent daily operational issues, ranging from managing athletics to dealing with accreditation, can easily dominate discussions at presidents’ cabinet meetings (Trachtenberg et al., 2018).

As products of modern higher education, we take academic divisions of disciplines in universities for granted: We pride ourselves on the capability of drilling deeper into our specialized research field to pursue discoveries that bring us rewards and distinctions in our own disciplines. However, while the century-old pedigree has proven to be an advantage in creating new knowledge, such an academic setup has generated obstacles for effectively communicating and disseminating climate change information crossing different fields, the very condition that climate change education requires. This, along with the academic culture, led some observers to suggest that the current higher education system itself is a problem, rather than a solution, for climate change (Antusch, 2022).

Having taught climate-related courses for more than 20 years, I personally feel that the current college-level curricula covering climate change are inadequate, unsystematic, and in many cases, outdated. Contents related to climate change are traditionally covered within narrowly focused natural science programs. Climate change has been treated as a subdiscipline of environmental sustainability which, despite 40 years of effort, is still at the margin of curricula (Reimers, 2021). In contrast to the intensification of climate problems during the past decade, the coverage of climate change content in college biology textbooks actually shrank (Ansari & Landin, 2022). As a result, climate change information is usually taught in parallel with biology, physics, and chemistry rather than an interdisciplinary subject that integrates other scientific disciplines, let alone incorporating social sciences, humanities, business, medicine, and law. Given the multifaceted nature of climate change, it is clear that climate change education deserves comprehensive academic treatment in higher education. One way to think about climate change as a unified academic topic is to compare it with teaching evolution in biology or plate tectonics in geology courses; that is, placing climate change at the core of college general education.

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<sup>2</sup>Data from the latest survey conducted by American Council on Education: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/college-presidents-are-less-experienced-than-ever-and-eyeing-the-exit>

Students across university campuses have voiced their desires for more climate change coverage, some requesting all students to formally engage with climate change in its curriculum (Magdolen, 2022). University support services, such as career centers, are asked to help guide students toward better-defined climate change-related professional careers. Along with the exponential increase of scientific evidence, the general public's views and perceptions about climate change and its repercussions have started to shift (Rifkin, 2022). Grassroots university alumni organizations have questioned the ethical values of investing endowment money in fossil fuel companies and receiving funding from them in return (Cartier, 2022; Hartocollis, 2021). They have backed up their voices with increasingly philanthropic donations for placing climate change and sustainability as a priority. In short, I believe that the current higher education enterprise has a lot of soul-searching and catching-up to do in response to students' demands and societal needs in dealing with the all-dimensional crisis of climate change. University leadership needs to realize that if their institutions fail to meet their commitments to environmental actions and students' desires for more climate change knowledge, their students will eventually vote their confidence with their feet. Thus, as its impact on different sectors of society, climate change poses immediate existential threats to higher education from university infrastructure to revenue streams, which requires university senior leaders to treat climate change as an immediate existential threat rather than merely a distant risk factor.

#### **4 A “Perfect Storm” Pounding Cloistered Walls of the University Campus**

Climate change creates a “perfect storm” that pounds both sides of campus cloistered walls—giving the rationale and necessity to better connect academia with society in equipping our students with knowledge, skills, and determination to implement real-world climate change solutions. Thus, making climate education a social experience to link classroom learning with cocurricular and extracurricular activities will capture students' aspiration for action and, in turn, enhance their overall college experience. One effective way to achieve this is through experiential learning as identified in a recent Harvard Climate Change Education Report (Holbrook & Tingley, 2022). On one hand, the real-world experience deepens the understanding of abstract and theoretical aspects of climate change, and on the other hand, students are attracted to the opportunity of applying their climate change knowledge to climate mitigation and adaptation practices. Such active learning opportunities open students' eyes through actions, challenge their minds to think critically about broader issues, and change their hearts for lifelong behavioral modifications beyond graduation.

Starting more than a decade ago, my colleague Dr. Qin Leng and I have run an annual, field-based “Climate Change Workshop” in Clarkia as a part of our



“Returning to Miocene” activities. The workshop usually involves lectures and discussions on climate change by expert faculty and scientists from different institutions. More importantly, participating students—many of them being international, woman-identified, and minority students—are attracted to the opportunity to “experience” climate change by examining the geological record at Clarkia and by comparing freshly unearthed fossil plants (Fig. 2) with modern vegetation nearby. The magic moment of realizing the force of climate change and its impacts recently happened to Taylor Vahey, one of Bryant University’s undergraduate students majoring in entrepreneurship. As remarked in her presentation at a recent national conference (Vahey et al., 2022), she stressed that the experiential learning opportunity provided her with a better understanding of the facts, force, and future of climate change, reinforced her beliefs of engaging more women and minority students in climate change, and motivated her seeking immediate action on campus and beyond. Upon graduation, she was inspired to become Bryant University’s first ever sustainability coordinator.

As the impact of climate change is felt disproportionately in various communities and populations, climate injustice is also a key social equity issue that has become an integral part of higher education. It is clear that to better prepare our students, universities have to move beyond merely creating and transferring climate knowledge to instead promoting actions and nurturing behavioral changes. Recent research shows that engaging college students in an early intensive course on climate change had long-term impacts on a strong personal connection to climate solutions and daily behavioral changes throughout their professional careers (Cordero et al., 2020). This is certainly true for our student Joshua Turner who is researching climate change using Clarkia material. Josh credited his early lessons regarding climate change to his enrollment as an environmental science major at Bryant and active involvement in climate change research at both Bryant and Harvard Universities. From mitigating the pace of climate change to adapting to decarbonized economies, the next generation of students will be forced to change their daily lifestyles (Jahren, 2020); but university education has so far largely fallen short of preparing the majority of students for their lives under the “new world” (Wallace-Wells, 2022).

Climate solutions need to involve various businesses, particularly those in the private sector (Gates, 2021). While stressing the threat and risk of climate change to the business community, it has become abundantly clear that climate change brings tremendous business opportunities. From governments’ financial and tax incentives to private capital investments, the business community has realized that, instead of treating climate issues as a zero-sum game, companies can make profits while reducing their carbon footprint (Henderson, 2020). Over the years, I have seen increasing interest from my colleagues in business disciplines at Bryant University and elsewhere to cover more climate change-related topics in their courses. Business education should seize the opportunity to make climate change and sustainability a key component in their teaching and research. Dr. Gao Niu is a young faculty member at Bryant who specialized in actuarial mathematics and its applications in the insurance industry. Through professional conferences, he sensed the influence and

impact of climate change, particularly sea level rise, on the insurance industry and started to participate in a climate change journal club that I helped organize for Bryant faculty and students. It was music to my ears when I learned, at the end of the year holiday gathering, that he regarded his better understanding of climate change and his incorporation of its severity and impacts in his teaching and research as one of his major feats for the year. I wish that more faculty from various disciplines, such as Dr. Niu, would embed climate change into their teaching and research to benefit more students.

Combating the climate crisis requires the integration of global sustainable development, cross-cultural perspectives, world environmental justice, and international collaborations, thus demanding international education to be an integral component of climate change education. Benefiting from being an international education administrator, I have observed some parallels between climate change and international education: both infused and intertwined in multiple disciplines, enriched by the experiential experience, and resulted in a profound and lasting impact on student's life. Elements of climate change are readily incorporated into existing international education pedagogy that would attract both domestic and international students with diverse social–economical, cultural, and ethical backgrounds (Kormann, 2020). More importantly, climate-focused international education programs have the potential to generate lifelong active engagements for students to make a difference in the changing world. However, alarmingly, the recent rise of nationalism and the impact of the global pandemic, and the shift of geopolitics caused the decline of international collaborations among universities, resulting in international programs being under threat in many universities.

I observed the power of transformational changes made through international experiential learning programs more than 20 years ago, when I created and led Bryant student study trips for “environmental study in China” (Yang, 2001), a model of short-term experiential learning program that the University later adopted and modified to establish campus-wide faculty and staff led international programs, such as the “Lingnan Exchange Program” and the “Sophomore International Experience (SIE).” Through these exchanges, faculty development programs were designed and implemented to provide international experience for both faculty and staff members who either traveled with students or conducted their research overseas. A reversed SIE program was offered for Chinese students and faculty to spend summer or winter breaks at Bryant to interact with their American counterparts and to visit businesses and cultural sites. These bilateral engagements have benefited both sides, leading to the increase of transfer students enrolled at Bryant while facilitating faculty collaborations and increasing the understanding of the American education system by Chinese faculty. These frequent interactions eventually led to the establishment of Bryant's branch campus in Zhuhai of Guangdong Province aimed to serve as a comprehensive overseas base for Bryant's international exchange programs with China and nearby Asian countries.

Over the years, I have seen so many undergraduate students, many of whom used their passports for the first time, to travel to a foreign land to engage with their peers for discussion and debate about climate issues (Fig. 4). They observed inequality of



**Fig. 4** American and Chinese students from Bryant and Sun Yat-sen universities discussed and debated global issues, including climate change, at the Lingnan Forum in Guangzhou through a joint summer exchange program sponsored by the Lingnan Foundation during 2005–2007. (Photo credit: Hong Yang)

the climate impact through these trips, and upon returning, their ideas concerning with various climate issues were transformed. Robert Patalano and Caitlyn Witkowski were early Bryant participants in these programs. The trip must have provided them with new global perspectives and instilled in them the confidence of traveling and working overseas as both later went on to pursue climate-related advanced degrees in foreign countries, in Canada and the Netherlands, respectively. After their postdoctoral training in Germany and the United Kingdom, Dr. Patalano returned to Bryant as a faculty member to teach climate-related courses, while Dr. Witkowski works at the University of Bristol as a Royal Society Dorothy Hodgkin Fellow for paleoclimate research. Both attributed experiential learning opportunities and international programs as important college milestones that had impacted their professional careers.

## 5 Calling for Bold Leadership to Weather Climate Change

While climate change poses extraordinary challenges for higher education, I am convinced that it also creates enormous opportunities for colleges and universities to innovate in response. Climate change has already caused serious damages to the ecological livelihood of human society, elevated risks in human health and food security, and in certain areas, negatively impacted daily activities and survival strategies. For example, new evidence clearly shows that climate change is a key driver

for the increase in outbreaks of emerging infectious diseases over the past 50 years, such as malaria, chikungunya, and influenza pandemics (Flahault et al., 2016), illustrating the close association between the human health and the planetary health. With such high stakes involved, swift and transformational changes are urgently required to render mitigation and adaptation solutions. While leadership is needed across the board, to me as a university professor and administrator, few places other than higher education stand out to answer the desperate call for intellectual leadership and technological solutions, as well as hope and preparation for the next generations.

University leadership for climate change actions should start at the highest level to bring climate issues to the forefront of higher education with institutional dedication to the purpose. Universities' boards of trustees should be educated about the urgency and risks, and more importantly, about the opportunities and benefits that climate change actions can bring to their schools. Boards can help set the vision, tone, and strategic goals toward addressing their institutions' own carbon emissions as well as outlining transparent policies for investing endowments to reflect their institutions' values and ethics held in the public consciousness.

Strategic planning is a hallmark exercise of American colleges and universities to frame long-term (usually 10 years) outlooks for the institution. Given both existential threats and enormous opportunities related to climate change in the critical time frame of the coming decade, I argue that climate change should be factored into every school's strategic plan and be examined closely in their institution's SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat) analysis. University presidents need the courage and judgment to prioritize climate-related issues and have the vision, intellect, and capabilities to implement actions for both short-term university operations and long-term education strategies. Instead of passively reacting to the pressure or serious prodding from the boards, notable alumni, and members of the community, the president and university senior leadership should be champions for addressing climate change and sustainability issues on campus, including the utilization of renewable energy in new constructions. Based on an institution's culture, tradition, and strengths, the university administration can empower faculty and students for transformational changes that bring immediate actions to meet climate change challenges on their campus and beyond.

While interdisciplinary interactions are always desirable in academic settings, to make it happen, interdisciplinary work requires the leadership to provide opportunities, resources, and support. Provosts and deans can advocate and facilitate interdisciplinary environments to advance and catalyze climate change research in relevant disciplines to create equitable and impactful climate solutions. They should encourage, nurture, and support faculty to move decisively beyond the confines of their subject specialization (Weber, 2020). An example of an interdisciplinary platform is the Climate Change Initiative<sup>3</sup> at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at

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<sup>3</sup>The Harvard Radcliffe Institute Climate Change Initiative: <https://www.radcliffe.harvard.edu/about-the-institute/our-work/climate-change-initiative>

Harvard University, which intentionally brings together scholars from a wide range of relevant fields to examine the impact of the climate crisis and to address issues related to climate justice at both global and local scales. My experience as a Radcliffe Fellow led me to believe that once a unique interdisciplinary intellectual environment is created and nurtured to bridge traditionally defined academic disciplines, innovative ideas develop rapidly and cross-field communications tend to flow naturally beyond an individual's narrow disciplines. As an earth scientist, such interdisciplinary interactions helped me not only connect but also "reorient" climate-related topics of past, present, and future in my teaching and research and brought new meaning and satisfaction to my intellectual life.

While visionary academic leaders can pivot resources to hire or cluster-hire faculty with climate change expertise and identify gaps and barriers related to climate change teaching and research, they should seize the opportunity to develop pedagogical frameworks to ensure that climate change-related courses in their schools and departments can be better coordinated, and ideally, collaborated. Adding more climate change courses into already packed college curricula seems a challenging task for faculty and administrators alike. But I have noticed a few models of recent practices that facilitate such changes. Backed by single or multiple large donations, Columbia, Harvard, Stanford, and Penn have established centralized university-wide academic resources under one "clearinghouse" to catalyze climate-related research, teaching, and engagement across the university community and beyond.<sup>4</sup> While these institutions are leading the new trend of climate change education, it remains to be seen that such centralized approaches can be spread outside of elite schools where resources are less constrained. Meanwhile, smaller scale but still interdisciplinary centers or problem-solving-oriented departments focusing on climate and sustainability have also been set up to prioritize core climate problems that hosting institutions are uniquely positioned to contribute solutions.<sup>5</sup>

Given the governance structure in most colleges and universities, faculty are in the right position to lead comprehensive curriculum changes to provide more climate-change-related course offerings. There are several pathways to cover climate contents: offering a "buffet style" variety of climate courses for students to choose from, embedding a climate change module in existing courses, or requiring

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<sup>4</sup>A few examples of university clearinghouses to coordinate campus-wide climate change education efforts include the ambitious Columbia Climate School (<https://www.climate.columbia.edu/>), Stanford Doerr School of Sustainability (<https://sustainability.stanford.edu/>), Harvard Salata Institute of Climate and Sustainability, under the Vice Provost Office (<https://www.harvard.edu/climate-and-sustainability/salata-institute/>), and the Penn Center for Science, Sustainability, and the Media (<https://web.sas.upenn.edu/pcssm/>), which focuses on communicating climate and sustainability to the general public and policymakers.

<sup>5</sup>Examples of such centers include the Purdue Climate Change Research Center (<https://ag.purdue.edu/climate/>), the Georgetown Climate Center (<https://www.georgetownclimate.org/>), and the newly incepted Climate Resilience Academy at University of Miami (<https://resilience.miami.edu/>). University of Buffalo created a new interdisciplinary and problem-solving-oriented department of environment and sustainability (<https://arts-sciences.buffalo.edu/environment-sustainability.html>).

introductory level courses such as “Climate Change 101” for students with little to no background knowledge. Many schools have established climate and sustainability-related degrees at the master level, while other schools offer certificate programs to provide practical applications of climate change and sustainability to attract nontraditional students. To do this, it requires participating faculty members to be willing and able to move out of their comfort zone of specialized academic fields to adopt an interdisciplinary and problem-solving-oriented approach to better contribute their expertise to address climate-related issues (Rome, 2023). Reforms of climate change education are not only limited to higher education, as innovative and internet-based climate change curricula and resources are being designed for K-12 school teachers and students.<sup>6</sup> While students need resources, support, and guidance to acquire climate knowledge, they also act as agents for change and action. After all, courses and programs on climate change in academia can’t have a lasting impact without intersecting them with students’ unique interests and passions. Ultimately, the university leadership should be very clear about the outcome of enhancing climate change education: better understanding climate science, providing viable solutions, and preparing the next generations to live in a much warmer world.

While this chapter is being written, international education is facing serious challenges due to the combined forces of a global pandemic, uncertain economic perspectives, and the change in world politics. The “perfect storm” is exemplified by the deterioration of the US–China relations that play an imperative role in addressing both mitigation and adaptation of climate change, with the United States being historically the world’s largest greenhouse gas emitting country, and China, the current largest emitter in the world. The collective action and responsive collaboration between the two global powers on reducing carbon emissions and providing climate solutions will not only benefit the two nations but also have a consequential impact on the entire world (Moore, 2022; Wang, 2022; Lewis, 2023). At the entire spectrum of the current US–China interactions, from confrontation to competition to collaboration, compared with security and geopolitical issues, education and climate change topics tend to forge collaborations rather than confrontation because the benefits are clear and the risks can be reasonably constrained. Indeed, as I have advocated and experienced, if managed well and acted on responsively, educational exchanges and climate collaborations can be the beacon of light shining through the uncertain future shaped by the intertwined forces of global politics and climate change.

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<sup>6</sup>An example of these efforts can be seen in the MIT Center for Energy and Environmental Policy Research’s Climate Action Through Education (CATE) project (<https://ceep.mit.edu/cate/>) and the interactive Climate Science, Risk & Solutions resource (<https://climateprimer.mit.edu/>).

## 6 Concluding Remarks

At the occasion of the 70th anniversary of my alma mater, I reminded the audience that the dramatic increase of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, during the past 70 years, from 315 to 420 ppm (Fig. 1b), equates to the magnitudes of CO<sub>2</sub> shifts between glacier and interglacial periods during the Earth's past 800,000 years, causing 3–8 °C global average temperature swings. The unprecedented rapid rate of climate change and the urgency to act on its dire consequences are not future concerns but problems of today. Climate change is no longer an academic issue, but it does require academic institutions to lead the search for solutions. The risks of not taking a leadership role in addressing the pressing climate issue are simply too big for higher education. As one of the most trusted professions, higher educational institutions require a reassessment of their purpose to make climate change education a priority in response to students' strong demands for learning more about the subject and involving in seeking solutions. Society, especially, university faculty, staff, and alumni, is calling on higher education leadership to act in consistency with their institutional values, ethics, and reputation. New models, curricula, and innovations in climate change education have built a forward momentum toward a new trend of climate action in higher education. Ultimately, tackling the climate crisis will require an all-hands-on-deck approach that includes government, academia, business, and community groups working together at all levels, from local to global. From research to teaching and from university administration to international education, I have found that climate change education may be the most consequential work that I, and many of us in higher education, will ever do.

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# Innovation and Community Dialogues



Honggang Yang

For more than three decades I worked at several academic institutions in the United States. Along with rapid socioeconomic and technological changes, I was progressing steadily as a lifelong learner as well as a servant leader. In many ways, I am attempting to translate and convey the Chinese folk saying “往事并不如烟”; in English, the past events are still vivid as if they had occurred yesterday.

## 1 Early Days

In 1977 when China reinstated its college entrance exam on the provincial level, I missed the acceptance score for where I applied by two points. I took the national exam in 1978, failing by one point. As a consolation, I was invited to attend the Harbin City School of Health Professions for 3-year studies in medical English. Half of my college coursework was for English, and the other half was for allopathic medicine without hands-on labs or clinical rotations. By the time of graduation in 1982, I became more interested in social issues and human challenges in the context of economic reforms even though the healthcare sector was in high demand for translators. I served as an interpreter in the Heilongjiang Provincial Health Bureau for various international delegations from the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and Western academic institutions visiting rural China.

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In 1983 I took the national graduate school exam for sociological studies at Nankai University in Tianjin but failed. Nankai has had a distinguished, resilient history in the field of higher learning. One of the shining episodes was during World War II when Nankai partnered with Peking University and Qinghua University over 86 years ago as the National Southwestern Associated University to train and cultivate so many scholars, artists, scientists, and writers.

In the same year, I had an opportunity to participate in a 1-year advanced study in social psychology at Nankai that was instrumental to the revitalization of sociology and social psychology in China. I retook the national exam in 1984 and was the highest scorer among graduate students admitted to Nankai.

My leadership journey began spontaneously when I was in graduate school serving as a physical education and wellness representative for my cohort of fellow students in the Department of Sociology at Nankai. As the student representative, I coordinated quite a few intramural soccer games, organizing additional pickup games after class almost every other day, a shared passion among my fellow students. I attended the late Professor Fei Xiaotong's illuminating lectures and workshops at Nankai as well, inspired to become an enlightened reformer. Dr. Fei's fieldwork monograph *Peasant Life in China* (1939) was exemplary and influential domestically and internationally.

Upon graduation with my master's degree in 1986, Nankai kindly sent me for doctoral studies in Applied Anthropology at the University of South Florida (USF), which has had a long-standing academic exchange with Nankai. The Ph.D. in Applied Anthropology at USF launched in 1984 was the first doctoral program of its kind to focus on practical solutions to sociocultural issues from anthropological perspectives. I didn't receive my visa in time, arriving late and taking midterm exams in my first week on campus. Fast forward to 1987, I was elected to preside over the Chinese Students and Scholars Association on the beautiful campus in Tampa. I was also selected to serve as President of the Florida Eta Chapter of the Pi Gamma Mu International Honor Society in Social Sciences. I was fortunate to work with great professors and wonderful mentors at both Nankai (e.g., Professors Kong Lingzhi, Su Tuo, Ma Zuli, and Visiting Professors Shen Decan and Zhu Chuanyi) and USF (e.g., Drs. Alvin Wolfe, Michael Angrosino, Susan Greenbaum, Jamil Jreisat, Edgar Nesman, David Stamps, Patricia Waterman).

The late Professor Francis L.K. Hsu at Northwestern University where Dr. Wolfe, my major professor, graduated, was also an inspiring anthropologist throughout my doctoral studies. He wrote the seminal book, *Americans and Chinese: Passage to Differences* (1953, 1970, and 1981), having served as Chair of the Department of Anthropology for two decades, and as the President of the American Anthropological Association from 1977 to 1978. He was the first Chinese American academic leader that I heard about at the time. I was very excited to meet and talk extensively with him in person at the 1990 American Anthropological Association Conference in New Orleans (Wolfe et al., 1990). Dr. Hsu studied under the same mentor, i.e., Professor Bronislaw Malinowski, as Professor Fei Xiaotong, at the London School of Economics.

One of the highlights during my doctoral studies at USF was receiving the Scholarships for Academic/Professional Advancement from the International Underwriters/Brokers, Inc. as the First Prize Winner in the US National 1989–1990 Scholarship Essay Competition for International Students by the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA). My essay was titled “Resolving Neighborhood Disputes.” The other memorable episode was earning a doctoral minor in Comparative Public Administration from the Department of Government and International Affairs at USF’s College of Arts and Sciences.

In 1991 after graduation from USF, I began working at the Carter Center of Emory University in Georgia, as a Research Associate in the Conflict Resolution Program, my first full-time job in the US Former President Jimmy Carter has been such an inspiring transcendent champion for humanitarian causes. Later I also coordinated the internship program that was funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, advising undergraduate, graduate, and first-professional students in collecting and compiling weekly information rearmend conflicts around the globe, preparing for international consultations and peacebuilding trips that President Carter, Mrs. Rosalynn Carter, Program Director Dayle Spencer, and other senior leaders were making overseas.

A central, practical question I focused on at the Carter Center was how indigenous perspectives on peace, multilateralism, and multitrack diplomacy can be better understood in context, and how grassroots devices for non-colonial, nonviolent dispute settlement can be made more applicable, more efficient, and more widespread (Yang, 1993, 1995a, 1996, 1997a, b, c, d, e).

It was an unforgettable period of time in that I learned so much, including facilitating socioeconomic and historical research roundtables with student interns, participating in assertiveness training, and serving on the Emory University Senate’s Campus Life Committee for Diversity and Multicultural Affairs. And I was filled with pride when President Carter shook my hand after using the briefing materials that I had prepared for him before a meeting with a Sudanese delegation. He said to me sincerely with his warm smile, “Thank you for your help.” I became more fascinated with the constant search for viable alternatives, nonconventional approaches, and creative options inside and outside academia.

## **2 Embarking on a Leadership Path**

Working with students closely was very fulfilling, leading to my thinking more and more of my mentors and role models who were all teachers. I joined the faculty at Antioch University in 1994 to teach in the individualized Master of Arts program in Conflict Resolution in Ohio. Antioch has been a progressive liberal arts institution with a distinguished history in higher learning. Ever since the lasting motto from the Founding President Horace Mann at his last commencement has always reminded me “Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity.” I was also inspired by Paulo Freire’s “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1970) throughout my higher learning career. His commitment to cultivating critical awareness and

empowering the individual's learning and thinking processes was unwavering and far-reaching.

Dr. Douglas McGregor from MIT served as Antioch's President from 1948 to 1954. In 1994 the former School of Adult and Experiential Learning at Antioch was named the McGregor School of Antioch University to honor his championship efforts in participatory management. At the naming ceremony on campus in Yellow Springs, I was deeply moved by vivid stories from his daughter about his life-long passion for human dimensions in organization management.

I contributed my expertise of humanistic research methods training to the interdisciplinary curriculum development (Yang, 1995b, c). I volunteered to serve as a coordinator for the preparations of the Kenneth Boulding Memorial Library on campus, a gift from the Boulding family to the Peace Studies Program of Antioch College and the Master of Arts Program in Conflict Resolution of the McGregor School of Antioch University in 1994–1995. I served on the Antioch Faculty Committee with the George Meany Center for Labor Studies and the Antioch McGregor School Curriculum Committee in 1995–1998, learning more about pedagogical assessment, academic personnel, campus finance, and day-to-day operations.

Through these services, I gained valuable experiences and insights, which prepared me for my first administrative role. In 1997 I was appointed Chair of the M.A. Program, amid some turmoil, to continue improving the working relationships among faculty, staff, alumni, and mid-career students. With recurrent internal strife in progressive organizations, “walking the talk” has been so critical. I steadfastly and skillfully stabilized the program enrollment and retention, achieving both student and faculty recruitment successes.

### **3 Fostering Academic Innovation**

In the autumn of 1998, my family moved back to Florida for my daughter's advanced training as a junior tennis player. I joined Nova Southeastern University (NSU) in Fort Lauderdale, taking on various academic and administrative tasks in cocreating with faculty, students, alumni, staff, and community partners quite a few innovative programs and interdisciplinary projects.

Founded in 1964, NSU provides programs from preschool through doctoral levels with the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement designation. It awards undergraduate, graduate, and first-professional degrees in arts and sciences, health-care and helping professions, law, oceanography, osteopathic and allopathic medicines, and cross-disciplinary studies. In June of 1999 when I was serving as an associate professor and department chair, I was appointed to the deanship of the School of Social and Systemic Studies to expand several unique graduate programs in Dispute Resolution, Family Therapy, and Peace Studies that were fiscally challenged.

In my first 6 years as an academic dean on NSU's east campus in Fort Lauderdale, I focused on expanding and building on the existing campus-based programs,

through dialogues to launch several innovative modalities and cross-disciplinary initiatives in improving student enrollment, program quality, and marketplace reach. With assistance from the Office of Human Resources, I also had to close a couple of noncredit-bearing areas that had negatively been affecting the academic program delivery and campus operations.

Together with colleagues and students, we transformed a narrow Alternative Dispute Resolution program into a multidisciplinary curriculum in Conflict Analysis and Resolution, a broader offering based on applied arts, humanities, social sciences, and helping professions. We refined the residential doctoral program to embrace a wider field of peacebuilding, violence prevention, and conflict resolution from interdisciplinary perspectives. In 1999 I designed and cocreated with faculty the first distance learning Ph.D. program in Conflict Analysis and Resolution in the United States and beyond. It was via a hybrid delivery format, i.e., online seminars, community-based practicums, and residential institutes on campus. Out-of-state students and nontraditional working adult learners no longer had to move to Florida or quit their jobs for their graduate studies.

One of my early moves with colleagues' backing was to initiate the first school-wide Student Association to ensure that student voices were heard. We also began the first school-wide Faculty Assembly to foster cross-disciplinary, interprofessional collaborations with a strength-based approach and consultative practice in the absence of a shared governance structure. I drafted the first award policy for student presentations and publications based on peer reviews. In 2001 the school's name was changed to the Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences (SHSS) based on input and feedback from students and alumni who expressed their concerns about the connotations of the former school's acronym, SSS, and recognized the intellectual roots.

I also addressed a long-standing faculty concern over divergent teaching loads with a unified policy with a middle-ground number of courses for each trimester. Considering the rubric as a best practice in specifying and articulating the expectations for faculty coursework assignments and tasks was another example of learner-centered innovation. Initially, it encountered lots of resistance and misunderstanding, which was remarkably similar to the challenging processes of exploring new learning technologies in the late 1990s. The leadership team and I supported its gradual adoption with a pilot and took it one step at a time, encouraging peer training and empowering the "risk takers" along the way. The first third of our colleagues embraced rubrics swiftly, with the second third supporting the rubrics after numerous rounds of open conversations with empirical evidence for its effectiveness.

## **4 Launching New Programs**

In 2002 we successfully developed the Doctorate of Marriage and Family Therapy (DMFT) with an innovative practitioner orientation. Like initiating the hybrid modality-based programs, we proactively sought input and feedback from students, alumni, prospective applicants, and practicum agencies, adopting the good

collaborative practice from Antioch's individualized graduate programs where students had a significant role in curriculum development and refinement.

The year 2002 was special. My daughter graduated from high school and went on to the College of William and Mary as a student-athlete. Halle Berry became the first African American actress to win the Academy Award for Best Actress. The XIX Winter Olympics were held in Salt Lake City, Utah, in February, and Former President Jimmy Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October. I was recognized as NSU's Academic Dean of the Year in Student Life Achievement.

We teamed up with our sister programs in designing and launching the Master of Arts in Cross-disciplinary Studies (MACS) in collaboration with other academic units in 2003. We secured the first accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE) for the Ph.D. Program in Family Therapy in 2004. In partnership with NSU's Division of Student Affairs, SHSS codeveloped a novel Master of Science in College Student Affairs with significant Conflict Resolution Studies components, after successfully putting in place the graduate certificate program in College Student Personnel Administration in the year before.

SHSS also designed and delivered an online Master of Science Program in National Security Affairs in 2011. By launching more hybrid distance learning, practice-oriented programs, we attracted and served more mid-career, first-generation graduate students from nonprofit, corporate, and governmental sectors, from minority communities, and from abroad.

Regarding new program building, I have reflected on several practical approaches that can be applied to various institutional settings with limited resources alongside campus dynamics (Yang, 2009a, b), through community dialogues with stakeholders.

**Building on and Repackaging the Existing Offerings** We can start with an elective, a minor, or a specialty track, for example, in Conflict Resolution Studies, with emerging careers in mind. There are many discipline-based departments on campus that have related curricular elements such as anthropology, area studies, arts, communications, economics, history, humanities, law, management, political science, sociology, and theology. It often does not require much seed money to get it off the ground. Some of the challenges include philosophical and pedagogical differences between disciplines, differences in communications and terminologies, historical baggage, faculty overload issues, inter-program frictions, inter-professional tensions, perceived course redundancies, methodological preferences, and interpersonal disharmonies found in the "hosting" programs and/or "initiating" units.

**Delivering a Certificate or Micro-credentials** Credit hours of such an offering are lower than those in full degree programs, and thus running a certificate program is less expensive and more efficient. It can still serve as an initial base for the new program organizers to help build momentum, reaching out to a critical mass on campus and in the community. My college launched innovative graduate certificate programs in advanced conflict resolution practice, college student personnel administration, family studies, national security affairs and international relations, peace



studies, qualitative research, and solution-focused coaching, for example. A more recent micro-credential or a noncredit-bearing training certificate is another viable idea at a preliminary stage such as workshop series, skill-focused symposiums, performances, or exhibits related to the constituents' passions and interests.

**Seeking Grants** This is an indirect but pragmatic approach to heightening the campus awareness of the feasibility of such programming endeavors down the road. It may give you an effective platform to get various constituencies more organized and engaged as well. It addresses an enduring concern over resource allocation and reallocation, as external funds may help expand the pie.

**Planning for a Nontraditional Delivery Format** Technology-mediated modalities can overcome the geographic and time constraints for student recruitment. More and more disciplines and professions have been moving into this learning technology-mediated arena over the recent decades. A hybrid model presents the best of both worlds: face-to-face learning on-site that is intensive and flexibly scheduled, combined with a synchronized learning environment online with asynchronous options. This kind of innovative blended format can also avoid those sensitive issues (e.g., perception of competing for students away from the existing programs, overlapping courses).

**Partnering with Other Colleges Where Related Studies are Offered** This win-win approach is promising, such as joint degree programs, dual admissions, faculty consortiums, internship, and practicum exchanges, study abroad arrangements, experiential learning opportunities, clinical simulations, and service-learning articulations. It also gives an invaluable opportunity for Peace Studies educators and Conflict Resolution specialists to practice what we preach, walking the talk and leading by example. As far as the revenue and cost-sharing dimensions are concerned, the collaborative parties may find it fair and handy in applying a middle-ground solution to make it transparent and sustainable (Yang, 2003, 2009a, b).

## 5 Initiating and Sustaining Campus Diversity Dialogues

In the fall of 2003, I was very excited to see NSU becoming a majority–minority campus based on student demographics (NSU's Fact Book 2004, p. 64). With an unwavering commitment to student and faculty diversities for inclusive excellence, the *South Florida Business Journal* recognized SHSS in 2004 as a Finalist for Academic Diversity of "Diversity Works! Award." Dr. Debra Nixon, Faculty Advisor for the SHSS Student Association, and I began organizing an inclusion and diversity council in 2006 as part of "Do Something Different." We started with students, alumni, staff, and faculty in a campus diversity dialogue. The council's primary objective was to promote and advance campus-wide diversity matters. Over successive years, we were devoted to celebrating diversity and strengthening inclusion.

Dr. Nixon served as a faculty facilitator alongside student leaders, alum presenters, faculty speakers, community representatives, and other campus constituents. The Inclusion and Diversity Council with Dr. Nixon's organizing efforts uploaded the first edition of the *Campus Inclusion Handbook* in 2009. At the same time, I talked extensively with our colleagues in the Division of Student Affairs about adopting "Inclusion" as part of the core values for the annual NSU Student Life Achievement Awards. And it did adopt. I also presented and facilitated "Daoist Perspectives on Change and Continuity" (Lao Zi, 1982) at the Campus Diversity Dialogues in the spring of 2009. In 2010, SHSS cosponsored a multicultural campus summit of South Florida by the National Diversity Council. With forthcoming, steady support from students, alumni, and colleagues, we continued the monthly campus diversity dialogues over each term for 14 consecutive years.

## 6 Championing Community Engagement

With regards to community outreach, several of my colleagues, students, and alumni were part of the Civility Project to facilitate open-minded conversations among stakeholders, for the Broward County 2000 envisioning and planning efforts. We also set up the first school marketing office with 1.5 staff FTEs in Fiscal Year 2000 to coordinate program showcases, public networks, and community relations locally and virtually. For student assistance and faculty support, the leadership team started building one graduate assistantship over each fiscal year (i.e., 20 hours/week), which was wonderfully received by all the school's constituents.

After 9/11, SHSS held numerous community peace dialogues with students, alumni, faculty, staff, and civic partners from multidisciplinary, multi-professional, and multicultural perspectives. Our student leaders launched the school's online newsletter, *SHSS Dialogues*, and Interdepartmental Symposiums that year.

In 2002, SHSS began hosting the Common Ground Film Festival on campus (since then held every year till 2011). The festival was organized by the Search for Common Ground (SFCG) to help transform recurrent adversarial and violent approaches to socioeconomic issues and human challenges in moving the world toward collaborative, peaceful problem-solving processes. These independently produced films and documentaries were often featured with underprivileged communities, grassroots movements, social changes, nonviolent solutions, and indigenous mechanisms in tackling structural inequality, disputes, and injustices. Faculty, students, and alumni served as planners, presenters, facilitators, and discussants before and after each film's showing.

In 2009, SHSS, with multiple community outreach track records over the years, was instrumental to NSU's successful application for Carnegie's Community Engagement Classification, as an academic unit pilot. SHSS was also the only school with an endowed Student Government Association Scholarships fund for Community Outreach at NSU. To support and assist degree-seeking Fulbright

students, SHSS developed NSU's first policy in that we hosted most of the Fulbright scholars and students at NSU over the years.

In many ways, the entire school was committed passionately to the scholarship of community engagement. Michelle Manley, our esteemed student leader (and later a well-accomplished doctoral alum of ours), for example, also initiated NSU's annual CommunityFest on campus in 2003 to celebrate and connect students, colleagues, families, friends, and community constituents. "One of the strengths of the scholarship of engagement is its openness and flexibility in making use of both local and academic knowledge, including the opportunities to forge unique types of reciprocal partnerships that are consonant with both the requirements of the academy and the history, needs, and skills of the cultures served through the projects" (Boyd et al., 2012).

In my career, I have been actively involved in the Chinese American community. At the 2003 American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) Conference in Washington, D.C., I met and talked with the late President Bobby Fong of Butler University. It was right in front of the conference exhibit area as I still remember it vividly today. Dr. Fong's passion was contagious. I shared with him that several of our fellow Chinese Americans took on some challenging leadership posts on various campuses. For over a couple of years, we had an informal working group, a small network (later becoming the Council of Chinese American Deans and Presidents—CCADP in 2008).

Dr. Fong urged us to become more organized, introducing to us AAHE's caucus for the Asian American and Pacific Island (AAPI) colleagues, an underrepresented group in higher education administration. He sent the 2014 CCADP Teleconference his warm remarks (CCADP Archives). Inspired by his enthusiastic encouragement and my mentors' strong support, I initiated and facilitated or co-facilitated roundtables "Becoming an academic administrator" at the Association of Chinese Professors in Social Sciences (ACPSS) conferences (Yang, 2003, 2008; Yang & Chan, 2010; Yang et al., 2011; and Yang, 2012), and presented the related subject matters at other professional forums (Yang, 1997a, b, c, d, e, 1998, 1999a, b, 2001; 2006a, b; 2009a, b; Yang & Chan, 2012; and Yang & Xu, 2014).

## 7 Reorganizing and Realigning

In 2015, NSU went through an ongoing academic realignment on campus for vertical integration to "leverage our graduate and professional programs to attract the best and brightest undergraduates" and reduce silos to become INSU. The senior administration started lining up the undergraduate and graduate programs in the same disciplines or related fields since they were housed in different schools, colleges, centers, and institutes.

I was appointed to lead the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences (CAHSS) to bring together several academic units with divergent academic calendars, faculty contract tracks, class sizes, full-time student standings, grading

policies, student and alumni organizations, and contribution margins. We successfully engaged the constituents in innovative, cross-disciplinary, interprofessional, and multicultural initiatives on and off campus. I organized an open CAHSS Faculty Advisory Roundtable to seek input and feedback, address peer review processes, criteria, terminologies, and so on, and adopt good practice models in academic life, with elected representatives from all the departments. I also kept up weekly office hours in various facilities spread all over the campus to ensure my office's accessibility and keep up stakeholder consultation.

My colleagues, students, and I went through quite a few moves over the years. SHSS moved earlier from the backyard of the east campus to the front building late in 2003. The degree of difficulty in moving offices and classrooms is high as it often comes with expected interruptions and uncertainties, and unexpected delays. The Faculty Assembly and leadership team codeveloped a considerate space assignment policy based on faculty seniority (e.g., academic rank, years of service, time of terminal degrees earned in case it is a tie of the points, ADA, etc.). In 2005, SHSS began its relocation to the main campus in Davie, amid on-and-off institutional reorganization talks as well as pressing calls for more research output.

While half a dozen departments' relocations (i.e., all full-time faculty and staff members in five different buildings went through one move or another at various phases over a couple of years) were full of dynamics ("Hurry up and wait" was the pattern), the stakeholders remained at peace with one another, understanding frequent delays and unexpected disruptions, thanks to our continuous collaborative problem-solving and solution-focused conversations.

To practice "the best is like water" (Lao Zi, 604 BC–531 BC) when the transitions were fast-paced and strenuous (e.g., a couple of reorganized programs and restructured departments at CAHSS were being reassigned again), the CAHSS leadership team and I spent time explaining the senior administration's rationale in supporting the latest university reorg by moving the criminal justice and human services programs to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education, the paralegal studies programs to the Shepard Broad College of Law, and the pre-nursing program to the Halmos College of Natural Sciences and Oceanography.

To put the complex challenges and opportunities in a larger context, we observed some delicate factors seemingly less related to the academics such as financial concerns, territorial behaviors, perceptions or misperceptions of favoritism, changing priorities, resource competitions, or facility constraints that may often have an unsettling impact on the innovative pluralistic academic formation and collaboration. "The same thing can be said about the so-called intangibles such as interpersonal discomfort, intellectual subtleties, paradigmatic differences, self-contradictions, blind premises, organizational cultures, underlying conflicting assumptions, hidden agendas, and the past campus episodes that define the individual or institutional relationships" (Yang, 2009a, b).

The University's reorg had a ripple effect on a range of things including curricular offerings, program building, student organizations, alumni relations. The leadership team and I started a planning process earlier to co-construct a flex-term with faculty to foster varieties of scholarly initiatives and secure external research and

outreach funds in a primarily teaching-focused setting under a trimester calendar. It was built in flexibilities and operating details in terms of the course sequence, distribution, repeated or new classes, modalities within full-time workload, financial feasibility, and accreditation requirements. By 2009, the Faculty Flex-Term moved forward further to a new phase becoming the Faculty Research and Development Term.

The CAHSS leadership team and I initiated the NSU Arts Roundtable with colleagues from the Alvin Sherman Library and the Art Museum to initiate communications and partnership-based activities in 2016. At the same time, we started offering online undergraduate programs in criminal justice and sociology. In the spirit of academic creativity with clear career pathways, CAHSS also transformed the Master of Arts program in Writing into the Master of Arts in Composition, Rhetoric, and Digital Media. In 2017 the Quell Foundation started funding the Equine-Assisted Family Therapy program that was developed in 2012 and began its certificate and concentration offerings in 2020.

In the meantime, our student organizations, faculty committees, and faculty–student–alum interdisciplinary working groups were engaged continuously in various dialogues over diverse student learning styles, student learning processes, student learning strategies, and so forth. Various student networks moved forward to transitioning their organizations to an inclusive student–government association and their online publication from “SHSS Dialogues” to “CAHSS Dialogues” continuing the Interdepartmental Symposiums with more sister departments. The student-run campus journal *Digressions: The Literary Magazine* was refined to *Digressions: Literary & Art Journal* to be more inclusive and supportive of more cross-disciplinary explorations.

In 2019 we held the inaugural annual humanities student conference to build an innovative, learner-centered momentum before launching the NSU Center for the Humanities and its website. In the same year, we designed an interprofessional, cross-disciplinary program, the Bachelor of Science program in Health and Wellness Coaching, in collaboration with the Dr. Kiran C. Patel College of Osteopathic Medicine. In the meantime, CAHSS offered a novel healthcare theater course in collaboration with faculty at the Dr. Pallavi Patel College of Health Care Sciences to combine the academic fields of medical science and theater by creating experiential simulations in the classroom. Between July 2019 and May 2020, for another example of our sustained successes, CAHSS was No. 1 with regards to NSU’s alumni giving among all the colleges, while it was No. 3 in the year before. It demonstrated the new college’s caring efforts in getting reoriented and reengaged our alumni who graduated from various former units in earlier years before reorg.

Throughout 2019–2020, CAHSS kept up the Inclusive Campus Conversations steadily once a month for students, faculty, alumni, staff, and community partners, based on the Campus Diversity Dialogues and the Intellectual Conversations, to continue sharing ideas, insights, and experiences (see examples over the recent years in the electronic references), despite the overwhelming pandemic impact.

Constant change, common and inevitable in the current landscape of higher education, often exacts a human toll. Self-reflection and self-care, therefore, are essential capacities for academic leaders. Earlier anthropological fieldwork has been

certainly illuminating and insightful. Crane and Angrosino (1992) dedicate one section to “Getting to Know a Very Important Person: Yourself” in the third edition of their book titled *Field Projects in Anthropology*. There are many commonalities between their perspectives on campus dynamics and anthropological fieldwork. Academic innovators, change agents, planning facilitators, and visionary leaders must be aware of themselves in terms of strengths, skills, limitations, comfort zones, and self-reflexivity. Knowing oneself is one of the most challenging aspects of ongoing leadership development, and self-care determines one’s effectiveness and longevity in a leadership role.

## 8 Reflection and Recognition

Leadership is a journey in great need of inner peace, acknowledging present strengths, pressing challenges, and multiple realities. One of my ongoing reflections was about how to diligently keep stakeholders informed and connected when you were between a rock and a hard place (e.g., how you would lead with no precedents or policies in place and no resources to implement instructions from senior administration to grow enrollments when constituents are loaded with existing work).

To tackle ambiguities and adversarial situations in balancing competing or incompatible priorities, leaders must “be the change you wish to see in the world” as the Honorable Mahatma Gandhi urged us. To minimize unilateralism, leaders must become more skillful in facilitating difficult dialogues in search of an innovative, well-grounded, non-colonial solution with internal and external restraints.

**Assertiveness vs. Arrogance** I learned some lessons while trying hard to find my voice amid campus dynamics. Because of my upbringing in another culture, early on I was often confused between assertiveness and arrogance. I was not assertive enough to stand firm against combative opponents from the mainstream programs and related areas, as I hated to be arrogant. However, over “the land of the free and the home of the brave,” we must be more forthcoming, as leaders, to defend and advance the emerging, viable alternatives to coercion, overlitigation, violence, and pathology-centered methodologies in leveling the playing field, and at the same time, we should not become arrogant and put down others.

**Diligence vs. Fairness** As a firm believer in hard work and earnestness, it is important for us to pay attention to issues of tangible and intangible fairness on campus. Those unwritten rules or embedded assumptions could be undermining, if unchecked, especially during the delineation of resource allocation and development of measurable goals.

**Confidence vs. Humility** Academic leaders can be both confident and humble. With ubiquitous competition, we must keep up a steady balance between being firm and fair, critical and civil, and down-to-earth and diplomatic, with institutional constraints in mind. I was influenced by Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970)

and other teaching and learning models for community advocacy. How I applied it to daily academic life in various settings was often a matter of degree of relativity with a keen sense of timing and pragmatics, not a contest over which approach would be purer or more ideal.

**Courage to Stand Alone vs. Courage to Adapt as Times Have Changed** Courage is essential to a successful leadership role that is also under recurrent tests in terms of sound judgment and versatile capability to learn, communicate, and execute. “Stand Alone” is often tougher as the critical mass may not be with the leaders at the time while one’s immediate self-interest is at risk. “Adapt” requires moving on as inertia or ego may get in the way. And timing is critical, especially in a turbulent context. Considering and adopting artificial intelligence, for example, are testing our pedagogical facilitation, learning assessment, and research administration at a critical moment.

On a personal front, I also faced some difficult situations over the past three decades. Due to my work schedule, I didn’t go and visit more with my ailing parents in China before they passed away. I didn’t get to be part of my daughter’s tennis tournaments and family gatherings either. My pains were often alleviated at the commencements when I was congratulating on the stage our graduating students who overcame so much in life and work. New student orientation and opening convocation were also constant and meaningful reminders of why I chose to work in the field of higher learning.

I am taking this opportunity to thank my former colleagues, Faculty Advisory Roundtable, and SHSS and CAHSS leadership teams for their trust, wisdom, shared passion, and enduring support. I had lots of fond memories of our spirited, strategic dialogues on academic and fiscal benchmarks, comparable programs, best practice models, innovative rubrics, common and divergent definitions of success ... My appreciation also goes to our students, alumni, student and alum leaders, and community partners for their inspiring perspectives and commitment to making positive changes around the world.

I am respectfully acknowledging Jie, my wife, for her tolerance, understanding, savviness, and invaluable common sense. She often helped bring me home when I was buried amid program, budget reviews, and personnel meetings. Jie also reminds me that there is tomorrow and that Earth is only part of the vast universe while doing your best to make things better. My profound gratitude is also to ancient and contemporary philosophies in timeless Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism for oceans of enlightenment, empowerment, and liberation.

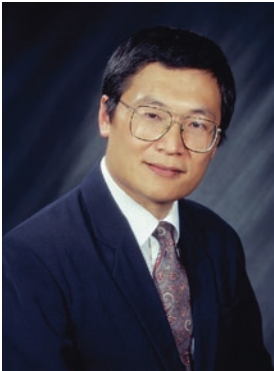
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# Leading with Passion, Purpose, and Perseverance



Lin Zhan

## 1 Introduction

I grew up in the city of Chengdu in Sichuan Province. My leadership journey started when I, as the first and only nurse, was selected from China to study at Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) as a visiting scholar in 1985. During my study at MGH, I was determined to pursue advanced studies in nursing. The drive, determination, and concerted efforts led me to receive a master's degree from Boston University (1987) and Ph.D. from Boston College (1993). I am grateful for my professors and nurse leaders who guided and mentored me. I am most grateful for my parents who taught me to be self-aware and self-confident and instilled in me the important values of integrity, humility, perseverance, purpose, and diligence.

My journey in academia started as an assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston) and progressed through academic ranks as a prolific scholar and educator. My path to a leadership role started as the Director for the Ph.D. Program in Health Promotion and Nursing at the University of Massachusetts Lowell (2003–2008); from there, I became the Dean of Nursing at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, a private college in Boston (2008–2010), Dean of Nursing at the University of Memphis, Tennessee, an urban Public Research University (2010–2021), and the Dean of Nursing at the University of California Los Angeles, the top-ranked tier-one Public Research University (2021–present).

Being a Chief Academic Officer for Nursing for 15 years, from a private college to public research universities, from east, south, to west of the United States, I have

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experienced different cultures, organizations, policies, politics, and people as well as challenges and opportunities across these institutions. Amid an ever-changing environment of higher education and health care, I reflect review and rethink my leadership journey, and what qualities, attributes, and lessons strengthen my leadership. To me, leadership is a multidimensional journey of leading with passion, purpose, and perseverance.

## 2 Leading with Passion

What is my inner drive? What makes me excited and energized when I wake up in the morning? Where does my passion come from? What is my passion?

Upon completion of my Ph.D. study focusing on cognitive adaptation processing in hearing-impaired older adults, I was appointed an Assistant Professor at the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston) in 1993. UMass Boston is an urban public university where I learned about a gulf of health disparities among the vulnerable – the aged, the minority, the underserved, and the disabled – and became enthusiastic to expand my scholarly work for health promotion among the vulnerable. Much of my early scholarly work has focused on cross-cultural studies, health promotion and practice in ethnic elderly women, substance abuse among Chinese women of childbearing age: exploring resilience factors, self-care and self-consistency among African American elders, medication practices in community-dwelling elderly Chinese Americans, experiences of Chinese family caregivers for persons with Alzheimer’s disease, and best practice for caring for Asian American elders.

I collaborated with scholars, researchers, educators, and thought leaders across disciplines on the UMass Boston campus and beyond to address challenging issues in higher education and health care. The disparities in health, education, and social opportunities among minority populations have led to higher rates of morbidity and mortality, limited access to health care and higher education, and tremendous obstacles in social mobility. As a fellow at UMass Boston Institute of Asian American Studies, I gained a deeper understanding of the experiences and lives of Asian Americans. “Who are Asian Americans?” “How well do health educators and providers understand Asian Americans?” “Why does a gulf of health disparities exist among some Asian Americans?” “How can we do better?” I led to assembling scholars, educators, and health-care providers who contributed to my three edited books: *Asian Voices: Asian and Asian American Health Educators Speak Out* (Zhan, 1999), *Asian Americans: Vulnerable Population, Model Interventions, and Clarifying Agendas* (Zhan, 2002), and *Asian American Voices: Engaging, Empowering, Enabling* (Zhan, 2009). The series of Asian Voices as noted by Dr. Winston Langley, the former provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs at UMass Boston, “*Asian American Voices* ... edited by Dr. Lin Zhan, Dean, and Professor ... constitutes an important contribution to our understanding of Asian Americans, and educators at all levels – healthcare providers, researchers, policymakers, and practitioners from a

variety of fields (psychology, psychiatry, nursing, and education, for example) – will benefit from reading it” (Zhan, 2009, p. ix).

Passion drives action. As the Dean of Nursing at the University of Memphis (UofM, 2010–2021), I seized the opportunity to obtain over \$11 million in funding sponsored by the Urban Child Institute to address health disparities among children and families in Memphis. I led a group of faculty members with expertise in pediatric nursing and community engagement to have successfully implemented the pediatric asthma management program across Shelby County Schools in the city and served the most vulnerable children as most of them live in the zip code area of poverty. To prepare future nurses with knowledge and skills of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), I led nurse educators to design and integrate ACEs knowledge into the nursing curriculum (Gill et al. 2019a, b). Furthermore, I developed an instrument to assess to what extent students benefited from ACEs curricular integration (Zhan et al., 2021). When nursing graduates are equipped with ACEs knowledge and skills, they advocate for trauma-informed care, support children and families in building resilience, and inform policies to promote health for children, families, and communities.

The year 2012 marked my second year as the dean at UofM. Also, the year the State of Tennessee asked UofM to acquire a private university for opening the UofM Lambuth Campus in Jackson, a rural area where health care needed better-educated nurses. With that mandate, I led faculty, collaborated with leaders at West Tennessee Healthcare and UofM, and launched the first Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree program at the UofM Lambuth campus. The first cohort of 15 students with only one full-time faculty member was in outdated classrooms and facilities. Today, hundreds of nursing graduates from this program practice in the area. Faculty capacity is significantly increased; millions of dollars in student scholarships support nursing students; and the renovated nursing building funded by the state provides conducive teaching and learning environment at the Lambuth campus, making the Lambuth nursing program sustainable, outstanding, and impactful to continue serving health-care needs of the community. As former president and CEO of West Tennessee Healthcare Bobby Arnold commented, “Your impact in delivering high-quality, patient-centered nursing education at a public institution to West Tennessee nursing students has contributed greatly to the delivery of healthcare in Jackson and Rural West Tennessee ... Thank you for your passion and dedication” (University of Memphis, 2021, p. 8).

Since 2012, my leadership has extended to both Memphis and Lambuth campuses. I led faculty and worked with health-care nurse leaders to have built academic and practice partnerships in the Jackson community. An example includes my federally funded grant for the project, “Gerontological Nursing for Rural Older Adults.” We successfully implemented this project to graduate nursing students with compassion and competency to care for vulnerable older adults in rural areas. Chief Operating Officer of West Tennessee Healthcare Tina Prescott noted, “Dr. Lin Zhan is a truly visionary leader for the advancement of nursing across both the Memphis and Jackson communities. Her continued drive and determination for growth and advancement of the role of nursing have been done with a personal

leadership that embodied humility and an appreciation for the partnerships needed for success ...” (University of Memphis, 2021, p. 12).

I lead, serve, and deliver. Leading with passion starts with the self having a sense of agency, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of accountability with confidence and positive energy. Passion is lit up from within by a cause or an activity that electrifies and energizes one. Passion connects to the mission and engagement of others to work together to fulfill the mission (Miller, 2017). The success of community-engaged and funded projects, sustained academic programs, and expanded academic and practice partnerships has continuously made positive impacts on preparing a pipeline of professional nurses, advanced nurse practitioners, nursing faculty, and nursing scholars/scientists that transform health care and improve health for patients, families, and communities. Leading with passion is through collaborative, dedicated, and unwavering commitment toward achieving the goal. Leading with passion also involves seeking solutions to problems and appreciating differences with open-mindedness. Leaders motivate, inspire, and create a shared vision. Leading with passion, therefore, requires our focus and a powerful sense of purpose.

### 3 Leading with Purpose

Building a powerful sense of purpose is essential for leaders who ask the question of why. “Why do we do what we do?” “What is the purpose?” Purpose helps organizations set goals. In practice, an organization’s purpose is stated as its vision, mission, and goals. Vision and mission without execution is hallucination. To lead with purpose, leaders play a key role to inspire, influence, communicate, and guide people in a way that is aligned with the mission, vision, and goals.

Serving as the Director of the Ph.D. Program in Health Promotion and Nursing at UMass Lowell, I set goals with the clear purpose to prepare future nurse scholars/scientists. Despite scarce resources available in the department, I worked collaboratively with faculty, built collegial relationships with the Deans of the School and the Graduate Division, and led with focused efforts toward set goals. The success of the Ph.D. program was measured by high-quality graduates who became educators, researchers, and/or scholars, and by receiving positive external review comments for the quality of the program (2008). Serving on the Provost Strategic Planning Committee also taught me *how to do so*, and this experience served me well after I became dean of nursing. To date, I have successfully led several strategic planning sessions for schools/colleges at both private and public universities.

My first deanship started in 2008 at a private college. Nurse leaders from Boston’s hospitals called for increased nursing graduates because of a shortage of nurses. As the dean, I was charged to increase enrollment and expand programs to other campuses. I took the challenge by giving up my tenure (prior, I was a tenured full professor at UMass Lowell). From designing curriculum, recruiting faculty, setting achievable goals, identifying needed resources, and building relationships on campus

and with practice settings, we purposefully implemented an accelerated nursing program, an innovative approach to help address the needs for a better-educated nursing workforce. We took one step at a time toward building sustainable and high-quality academic programs, resulting in faculty capacity increased, an innovative curriculum implemented, academic-practice partners forged, student enrollments increased, and academic offerings expanded to three campuses across two states. In reflection, building successfully accelerated nursing programs confirmed my passion and purpose. Academic leaders are not only called to design, implement, and evaluate newly established academic programs, but also to inspire a shared vision through engaging, empowering, and enabling faculty, staff, students, and community partners. Building, sustaining, and advancing academic nursing have become my passion to prepare the best graduates. This deanship experience led me to publish the book *Accelerated Education in Nursing: Challenges, Strategies, and Future Directions* (Zhan and Finch, 2012).

In 2010, the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) School of Nursing tried to recruit me as the chair of the community health nursing division. Also, the University of Memphis (UofM) tried to recruit me as dean of nursing. Comparing two opportunities, I revisited my passion and purpose by asking “Which place can I make more impactful differences?” It became clear to me that the UofM needed me to bring the school to a higher level of excellence. I turned down UPenn’s offer to accept the offer of the UofM. I also thought that living in the South would assess my passion, purpose, and adaptability as I would move to a new place, step into unknown territory, and face new challenges.

For the second deanship, I was purposeful to advance academic nursing at the UofM and to prepare future nurses with compassion and competencies to improve the health of patients, families, and communities. Improving health care for the vulnerable energizes me. Purpose helps me focus. Focus is the hidden driver of excellence (Goleman, 2013). Leading with purpose requires my focused commitment to make work fulfilling. One lesson I learned from the first deanship was about how to communicate effectively. Communication involves science and art. Leaders are communicators. Effective communication requires knowledge, skills, and experience to help reach a level of shared understanding for all involved. I purposefully continue developing my leadership knowledge and skills. Over the years, I intentionally focus on these qualities including *authenticity, humility, and crucial integrity-based and engaged conversation*.

Authentic leadership involves self-awareness, self-reflection, the ability to trust one’s thoughts, feelings, motives, and values, responsiveness to feedback, and the ability to resolve conflict in honest and non-manipulative ways (Gardner et al., 2011). In practice, I am true to myself and others. I act in a non-egocentric way. To be an authentic leader, an important trait is humility because a sense of humility authenticates a person’s humanity. Humility seeks to understand others first before being understood. To do so, I am self-aware about what I do well and what I do not. Integrity-based communication aims to build high-trust relationships. Truth is perceptual, filtered, and interpreted. I am mindful not to impose my own perceived truth on others and to use an approach of creating a space to allow sharing of

different views (Baur, 2013). In crucial conversations, I start with sincerity or genuineness to make a safe space for conversation and serve as a facilitator to listen attentively for gaining a better understanding, appreciate diverse thoughts, communicate rationales and/or priorities, and clarify as needed. The principles of integrity – honesty, transparency, and humility – help me be mindful of my own emotions, avoid my assumptions, examine my own implicit biases, and engage with crucial or difficult conversations to manage conflicts, address tough issues, and bring resolutions.

Leading with purpose helps me communicate to form shared purpose(s) with faculty, staff, students, university leaders, and community partners. Asking a simple question “Why do we do what we do?” leads to dialogue, debate, discussion, and deliberation. Engaging people in goal-creation also gives them ownership and enables working together to achieve shared goals. Leading with purpose is to make an impact, sometimes, one thing and one person at a time. “Going small is a simple approach to extraordinary results” (Keller and Papasan, 2013). Taking each step or doing one small thing at a time toward the shared goals requires perseverance, a powerful leadership trait needed for consistency, continuation, and commitment in a course of action moving forward despite difficulties, setbacks, challenges, and obstacles.

## 4 Leading with Perseverance

Perseverance refers to our ability to pursue a goal or passion over time and stick with it when we encounter obstacles, challenges, and/or setbacks. Related concepts to perseverance are resilience, drive, determination, grit, and conscientiousness (Miller, 2017). Various studies have shown that perseverance is an essential quality for success in life (Duckworth, 2016), and perseverance is a more accurate predictor of achievement than talents and other measures as it entails effort and practice and involves our ability to learn from failure and try again without giving up (Dweck, 2017). I have developed the ability to pursue the goal without giving in or quitting when facing challenges. I attribute my success to my desire for new knowledge, for learning and learning from mistakes, for self-development, and for doing with passion and purpose.

When I became the dean of nursing at UofM in 2010, I realized what challenges I was facing. At that time, only 20% of the nursing faculty had terminal degrees in the school. The school did not have a designated “home” in one building despite over 229 buildings on the campus, leaving nursing faculty and students in nine separate places for their teaching and learning. The school of nursing was invisible in the community as a meaningful academic-practice partnership was not built. No nursing program was nationally ranked. Racial division existed. I became the very first Asian American dean in the university’s history. In one meeting after I raised questions, I was told “We thought you as an Asian American would be quiet...” My

deanship also challenged existing assumptions and was sometimes “disruptive” to those who wanted to maintain the status quo.

I started by listening to faculty, staff, students, and community partners to gain a deeper and better understanding. Then, I initiated a strategic planning process to engage, empower, and enable all involved. I purposefully allowed more time to focus on the process as it brought people together to analyze strengths, weaknesses, internal and external threats, and opportunities. In the process, core values – caring, diversity, integrity, and leadership – are embraced. Gaps were analyzed. Strategies and tactics were outlined. Major threats were examined. Opportunities were identified. The finalized document “Vision to Excel” served as shared goals and vision for all. Since then, we use our shared vision and goals to guide what we do, how we allocate resources, and where we continue to improve or close gaps. I recalled when the University revisited its original strategic plan, the chief advisor to the president told me, “... nursing’s strategic plan is a masterpiece ...” A few years later, the provost invited me to conduct a workshop on strategic planning for incoming new deans.

The shared vision and mission paved a pathway for what we aimed to accomplish. One identified gap was a lack of educational community or a sense of “home” for nursing. I began conversations with the university’s top administrators about fundraising for a nursing building. From the initial answer “not now,” it became “let’s explore” and then “let’s do it.” I was thrilled to have support from the university president who shared, “... If we raised \$15 million, the state would match \$45 million for a new building.” With this clear goal, working collaboratively and dedicatedly with the university president, chief advancement officer, the team, and the deans, we identified and approached potential donors – individuals and foundations. In this process, we pursued the set goal without “giving in” or “backing up” yet kept strategizing and being driven by doing. In 2 years of efforts, we raised more than \$15 million, and the State funded \$45 million. In 2015, the \$60 million new “Community Health Building” (CHB) was opened, becoming the largest educational facility in the Middle South, with 200,000 square footage. The new building has created a sense of educational community for nursing faculty, staff, students, and community partners. Since then, the \$60 M investment has helped nursing to set up a state of art simulation center, faculty and students collaboration rooms, a large research suite, a large auditorium, and each faculty office well equipped with a window, to name a few. Quality working conditions bring quality work. Faculty wrote to me, “Lin, moving into nursing’s beautiful new building could not have been executed more flawlessly than you did. You made it so quite easy. The new building changed the world for Memphis nursing ...”

A critical incident in my leadership journey began during the academic years 2013 and 2014. The UofM had budget deficits of over \$20 million. The senior administrators announced the consolidation of programs and schools as one of the ways to reduce costs. The consolidation would subsume the school of nursing under a newly consolidated college of health sciences. The first question in my mind was, “What does this consolidation mean to Nursing’s response to the Institute of Medicine (IOM)?” In 2011, the IOM published its landmark document *Future of*



*Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health.* The key messages included that nurses should practice to the full extent of their education and training; nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression; nurses should be full partners with physicians and other health professionals in redesigning health care in the United States; and effective workforce planning and policymaking require better data collection and improved information infrastructure. Specifically, academic nursing can play a key role to double the number of nurses with doctorates, achieving 80% of nurses with a bachelor's degree, and advocating for a full scope of practice of advanced nurse practitioners. Academic nursing is at a critical time to respond to IOM recommendations to advance health care. I was firm that the school cannot be consolidated; rather, it must be strategically positioned to prepare future nurses to meet the dire needs of the community. I began to think of ways to help close the budget gap while sustaining nursing as an independent school.

With my passion for the nursing profession and a clear goal to advance academic nursing, I decided, with moral courage, to do the "right" thing for nursing at UofM. During that time, the official announcement of consolidation was made to the campus, the UofM board of visitors, and the public – newspapers and media. I was told by some fellow nursing deans: "... there is no way you could turn this around ... a done deal"; "...you may lose your deanship; go along with the publicized plan." I told myself: "Do not give in"; "Do not quit"; "This is not about me, this is about nursing"; "Even if I were told to step down as the dean, I would 'fight' for the right cause ...". I consulted community nurse leaders and listened to concerns and insight from faculty, staff, and students. I then strategized what and how to communicate with my provost. Reconfirming passion, purpose, and determination, I began to write a memo to the provost. The written memo offered an optional model for closing the budget gap, requested for reconsideration "... to leave nursing independent," and articulated several compelling rationales: (1) supporting IOM recommended future of nursing; (2) helping nursing to position strategically and to meet needs and demands locally, regionally, and nationally; (3) being financially viable to enable expansion of nursing education; (4) helping reduce expenditures while preserving visibility and efficiency of the school; and (5) supporting meaningful collaboration and productive partnership. My assertion was clear that nursing must be strategically positioned and visible to respond to the high demand for a better-educated nursing workforce in health care and to serve the community of Memphis and the region (my memo to the provost, November 20, 2013).

When I sent the memo to the provost, I felt "a relief" as I did what I could have done, and my moral compass was in the right place. After 48 hours, I got a call from the provost, "... I read your memo, and thank you. I am open to having further discussion with your faculty and community leaders." I was thrilled at that moment and thanked him for his openness. After meetings with faculty, alumni, and community leaders, the provost wrote to the campus, "... after careful study, thoughtful review, and considerable discussion with a host of internal and external partners, I have decided to remove the school of nursing from the further discussion as part of an integrated College of Health. This decision will allow the Loewenberg School of

Nursing (LSON) to continue in autonomous status, allowing a foundation for continued growth and evolution ... we will explore the possible transition from LSON to a college status ... Under the highly effective and innovative leadership of Dean Zhan, I have great confidence that the LSON is poised for growth and success in the coming years” (University Provost, January 23, 2014). In 2015, with the approval of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the school was elevated to a college status as the Loewenberg College of Nursing. The faculty wrote to me, “Dean Zhan, this is the best gift you give to nursing at the University of Memphis” (emails). Indeed, at that moment I was proud of myself – my perseverance with passion and purpose, proud of the provost and president – their ability to listen and revise, proud of community nurse leaders and my faculty – their insight and advocacy for nursing!

Leadership is a multidimensional force. I believe that more could be accomplished if we work *together* to strengthen nursing at all levels from the campus and beyond. I led a group of faculty members with the support of the senior leadership to implement the first Ph.D. program focusing on Health Equity Research at UofM (2018). I mentored nursing faculty for their teaching Ph.D. students through engagement and role modeling. The Ph.D. program director wrote, “I would like to thank you for your mentorship ... your kindness and encouragement... You took the college to a new height, and I am grateful ...” (University of Memphis, 2021, p. 10). Continuously, the college thrived under my leadership. Examples include increased extramural funding up to about \$7 million (2018–2022), top-ranked academic programs in the state and the nation, fully accredited academic programs in 2020, increased faculty with a terminal degree to nearly 80% (2021), forged and sustained academic and practice partnerships, established global education collaborations, increased diversity among faculty, staff, and students, and exemplified high rates of student retention and degree completion in the university. The former Vice President/Chief Information Officer of Baptist Memorial Healthcare Corporation, Beverly Jordan, said, “A fearless visionary, Dean Zhan kept pushing for additional ways to recruit students, retain them through graduation, enroll them for advanced degrees, and encourage them to join local employers in various settings and roles ... Nurses are proud to say they graduated from this program. Employers are proud to have these graduates on their teams. These are not coincidental outcomes. They are intentional goals, orchestrated by Dr. Zhan and carried out by one nurse at a time” (UofM, p. 11).

## 5 Leading with Passion, Purpose, and Perseverance

We are living in an ever-changing world – emerging new knowledge, rapidly developed technology, financial setbacks, public health crisis, health inequities, increased responsibility and accountability of health care and higher education to the public, and evolving needs of students from diverse backgrounds in higher education – to name a few – which demands us to respond quickly to ongoing changes that are unpredictable and requires us to take actions without certainty amid dynamics,

multi-interdependencies, and unfamiliarity, and sometimes outside of our expertise (Mintz, 2018). COVID pandemic started later in 2019 and exposed all of us to deal with an environment of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Leading in crisis needs passion, purpose, and perseverance to change volatility to vision, uncertainty to understanding, complexity to clarity, and ambiguity to agility. We as leaders must focus on and sustain passion and shared purpose to achieve success. Our ability of adaptability, agility, and nimbleness is needed, and our qualities of humility, authenticity, integrity, and consistency matter. Leadership is a journey. In this journey, passion motivates, purpose directs, and perseverance fuels our energy and efforts; in this journey, we learn and grow to become wiser; in this journey, we continue to lead with passion, purpose, and perseverance.

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**Dr. Lin Zhan**, an expert in health equity for the vulnerable, began her term as the eighth dean of the UCLA School of Nursing on August 1, 2021. Before joining UCLA, Dr. Zhan served as dean of the Loewenberg College of Nursing at the University of Memphis (UofM). There, she was the chief academic officer for the college's programs on two campuses in Memphis and Jackson, Tennessee. Before her appointment at the UofM, Dr. Zhan served as dean and professor at the School of Nursing at Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, leading the school's programs on three campuses in Boston and Worcester, Massachusetts, and Manchester, New Hampshire.

From 2003 to 2008, Dr. Zhan was a full professor who directed the Ph.D. Program in Health Promotion and Nursing at the University of Massachusetts Lowell School of Health and Environment. Before that, she spent 10 years on the faculty at the University of Massachusetts Boston's College of Nursing and Health Sciences and 4 years as clinical faculty at the head trauma center of West China Medical University.

In addition to her scholarly work on health equity, Dr. Zhan focuses her scholarly work on developing better measures for health-related behaviors and higher education diversity, and higher education workforce development. She has published more than 100 articles, edited six books, and is frequently invited to give keynote speeches and professional presentations.

Dr. Zhan serves on the editorial boards of the *Journals of Nursing Report*, *Gerontological Nursing*, and *Aging and Geriatric Medicine*. In 2001, she was inducted as a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing, and she has since served on the Academy's Expert Panel on Aging and Global Health. She has served as a member and treasurer of the Board of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) and as board liaison to the AACN New Essentials Leadership Team. She is an honorary professor at 10 universities in China and, in this capacity, has provided consultation to advance Chinese nursing education. She serves on the Board of the National Clinician Scholars Program and the Board of the National Council for Le Bonheur Children's Hospitals.

Dr. Zhan was named one of the "Visionaries in Geriatric Nursing: A Legacy for the Future" in the *Journal of Geriatric Nursing* in 2020 and one of the top 100 nursing professors in the United States by [BSNtoMSN.org](http://BSNtoMSN.org) in 2012. She is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including the National League for Nursing 2010 Outstanding Leadership Award in Nursing and Education.

Dr. Zhan received her bachelor's degree from West China Medical University. She was selected as the first nurse in China to study abroad as a visiting scholar at Massachusetts General Hospital Boston in the United States in 1985. She received her Master of Science in Nursing from Boston University (1987) and her doctorate from Boston College (1993). She has become a leader in nursing education and research .

# Internationalization Innovation: One SIO's Journey as an Academic Entrepreneur



Chunsheng Zhang

## 1 Introduction

The preparation, training, and qualification for Senior International Officers (SIOs) vary from person to person, from institution to institution, and from country to country. The SIO's role has evolved to address the internationalization priorities of an institution, a nation, and the global society. My experience at three different American institutions reflects the varying demands and expectations of these institutions. My preparation as a career SIO dates back to the early 1970s when I began to study English.

Born in 1957 in Nanjing, China, I grew up during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). In 1971, I was selected to study English at a foreign language boarding school in Tianjin, my hometown, as part of the government's plan to prepare future diplomatic personnel. My preparation for becoming an SIO started then without me realizing it. I was 13 years old, and that was the first time I discovered a strong interest in and passion for language learning. This passion of mine remains strong today, and it has become an integral part of my life, my career, and my professional accomplishments. I believe that the ability to understand and appreciate other languages and cultures is essential for becoming a successful SIO.

My dream to become a diplomat did not materialize when I graduated in 1975 because China was “closed” to the world during the Cultural Revolution. Instead, I began my teaching career as a high school English teacher at age 18. Two years later, the national university entrance exam was resumed as a major change soon after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976. I was fortunate to pass the 3-day exams

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and was admitted by my first-choice university, Nankai University in Tianjin, the alma mater of the first Premier of the People's Republic of China, Mr. Chou Enlai.

The '77 cohort of graduates was a historical class, many of whom were among the first waves of Chinese students pursuing advanced studies in the United States. I majored in English Language and Literature and studied French as a second language. Upon graduation, I was assigned to teach English at a local college in 1982. By the mid-1980s, the Chinese government began to allow Chinese citizens to apply for a "personal passport" to pursue "self-funded" graduate studies abroad with scholarships from overseas universities. I was among these lucky young people.

## **2 Voyage to the Land of Opportunity**

Studying in the United States was a dream of mine since my language boarding school. That goal became a reality on November 5, 1986 when I flew from Beijing to Shanghai and then to Detroit. It was my first experience flying in an airplane, and the flight was so long that it seemed never to end. Thirteen-plus hours later, I finally landed in Detroit and a new chapter of my life began.

There were four Chinese graduate students in the College of Education at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in Ohio. After earning my master's degree in education administration, I became the first Chinese doctoral student in the higher education administration program. My wife, who joined me a few months later, became a fellow doctoral student after earning her master's degree. Our 5-year-old daughter joined us in Ohio almost 3 years later in 1989. Bowling Green was a special place for us. My daughter started her first grade there, and my wife and I earned our doctoral degrees. I also discovered the profession of international education and earned my credentials to work in the field.

## **3 Catch-22 Job Hunting Experience**

Being accustomed to being assigned a job upon college graduation in China in the 1980s, job hunting in the United States was a new concept and a challenging adventure. With a Ph.D. degree in hand, a 370-page dissertation on college presidential leadership, and 6 years of college teaching experience in China, I initially started applying for faculty positions only to find out that I was in a Catch-22 situation. While I had 8 years of teaching experience including 6 years at the university level in China, it did not count since it was not in the field of US higher education administration. I had to earn some teaching experience in the United States first to meet the minimum requirement of a faculty position, but I would not be able to gain that required experience unless I was given an opportunity to teach.

To overcome the Catch-22 situation, I began to put my Plan B in full gear. Now my focus was to find a staff position in study abroad, international admission, or international student services. Fortunately, I had earned some experience in managing study abroad programs since I did my doctoral OPT (Optional Practical Training) coordinating study abroad programs at my home university. This experience helped me secure my first administrative position in 1994 at the flagship university in Missouri. This is the true beginning of my journey toward a challenging but rewarding SIO career.

## 4 Becoming a Career SIO

The titles of SIOs vary by institution or by country, but the essential roles and functions of SIOs are similar (Di Maria, 2019). The concept or position in the United States existed as early as 1950. The SIO is “an individual at a high level of institutional leadership” who is charged with “leading and facilitating comprehensive internationalization efforts” (Dessoff, 2010; AIEA, 2022). While presidents, provosts, and academic deans provide leadership and support for internationalization efforts, SIOs carry the responsibility for articulating internationalization visions, developing internationalization strategies, and executing internationalization plan 24/7. SIOs routinely work across global time zones, manage diverse global partnerships, and implement multiple international collaboration projects all at the same time. Like in any business, identifying the right markets and cultivating the right partnerships takes skills, experience, time, and resources. An experienced, well-connected, and innovative SIO will make a true difference in what an institution can accomplish in its internationalization efforts.

I became an SIO in 1999 as an Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs and International Studies at a regional university in Minnesota. This was the first time that I had the opportunity and responsibility for leading the comprehensive internationalization efforts, which included a significant increase in study abroad participation and international student enrollment.

Twenty-three years later, I have had the honor and pleasure to serve as a career SIO at three very different universities in the Midwest, West Coast, and the deep south. I have developed various successful models for developing (1) innovative global partnerships, (2) creative international enrollment strategies, (3) affordable and quality education abroad programs for students and faculty, and (4) strategic international college abroad.

Institutional priorities change over time, and so does the role of SIOs. However, the need for SIOs to serve as a catalyst in achieving internationalization goals is unchanged. SIOs must exercise innovative thinking and build alliances in developing internationally friendly policies and garnering resources for meeting the internationalization goals that fit the institution's aspiration and growth needs.

## 5 SIO as Academic Entrepreneur

Comprehensive internationalization has become an integral part of the strategic growth of higher education institutions across the globe. Given the tuition-driven funding model in the United States, the competitive nature of international recruitment, and to stay competitive, SIOs are expected to establish innovative ways to promote and brand their home institutions globally.

To meet these challenging expectations, SIOs must spend energy, time, and resources on the development of recruitment strategies, curricular internationalization, global partnership cultivation, internationalization fundraising, and international alumni relationships. These efforts are all critical elements of an institution's strategic growth and priorities. Consequently, the SIO must have direct access to the provost or the president. Without such direct access to the top two institutional leaders, it would be very difficult for the SIO to be an effective internationalization leader.

As a result, I view SIOs as academic entrepreneurs who are “innovators and risk takers.” They constantly look for new opportunities to promote and grow broad global engagement both internally and externally. Such SIOs possess a “niche expertise and a strong desire to use that expertise to make a difference in the world” (Academic Entrepreneur website, 2022). This niche expertise requires “a new mindset” to think “outside” of the box and search for creative ways to achieve the internationalization goals and the overall growth of the institution.

To lead the innovation of higher education through internationalization, SIOs must be able to (1) assess the institutional needs and readiness for growth through international collaboration, (2) maximize existing human and financial resources, and (3) generate new revenue through external grants, tuition revenue, and service fees. Based on my observations and experiences at four different institutions (two flagship and two comprehensive doctoral universities), most SIOs bear the responsibility to help grow their institution in key internationalization areas such as (1) education abroad, (2) international enrollment management, (3) global partnership development, and (4) fundraising for internationalization.

I began my third SIO position in 2009 at a regional university in Alabama. There were a few factors that suggested this opportunity would be a good fit for me: (1) the university was looking for a veteran SIO by using a search firm; (2) the president was directly involved and promised resources needed to rebuild the international office; (3) the entire international office operation was self-sufficient with over a million dollar in reserve; (4) the English language program reported to the SIO; and (5) the SIO position came with a tenured full professorship. The senior faculty rank is not only an important recognition of my academic credentials but also job security that allows me to promote creative solutions more freely while partnering with critical faculty.

Fortunately, my “niche expertise” in internationalization innovation and global partnership development was broadly supported by the president, provost, and academic deans. Each time I assumed the SIO leadership role at a new institution, my



new employer benefited from my existing global network and proven models for collaborations because some international partners followed me. It saved significant time and resources to bring new international collaborations from cultivation to fruition.

## 6 Study Abroad Is Critical. Global Learning for All Is Essential

Study abroad has long been recognized as a “public good” in the United States. It provides critical learning opportunities to college students and “the ability of the United States to lead responsibly, collaborate abroad, and compete effectively in the global arena” (NAFSA, 2008, p. 1). Unfortunately, only 1–10% of college students study abroad according to NAFSA data. Historically, study abroad was known as the junior year abroad, and most participants were from well-to-do families that could afford the opportunity. Nowadays, many higher education institutions offer a variety of education abroad opportunities including faculty-led short-term programs to give more students much-needed exposure to other countries and cultures. The benefit of education abroad is “too great to be restricted to a student elite” with financial and/or academic advantages (NAFSA, 2003, p. 6). This transformative experience “changes people and humanizes people,” it “deepens our capacity for humility, empathy, and fairness.” It also serves as “a catalyst for peace and a long-term antidote to systemic racism” (IES Abroad website). As Mark Twain once stated eloquently in his book, *The Innocents Abroad*,

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's life. (Mark Twain, 1911, p. 407)

Promoting such life-changing opportunities has been a passion of mine since I entered the profession in 1993.

In the past three decades, I have seen and experienced tremendous growth in education abroad, from student participation number to faculty engagement, from program designs to learning outcome assessment, and from changing destinations to learning modalities. The global pandemic and advanced technology make virtual global learning not only acceptable but also feasible. The term “education abroad” or “global learning” is more commonly used to include all credit-bearing global learning activities such as service-learning, internship, research, internationalization at home programming, and COIL initiatives (Collaborative Online International Learning). These new opportunities have the potential to reach the 90% of US college students who normally do not embark on traditional education abroad during their college career.

If institutions cannot provide global learning opportunities for all, then it begs the question, how can college students be prepared as global citizens? Based on my

experience, two critical needs must be met to promote education abroad more effectively. Namely, more faculty need to be engaged and more financial obstacles need to be removed for students. When I took my third SIO position at a regional university, there were about 40 students who studied abroad each year and no students ever studied in China at that time. To help improve the situation, I began to identify “ready allies” among faculty and shared with them my knowledge and experience in developing quality study abroad programs, which include four principles I developed over the years:

1. *Curriculum-Based*: Dovetail study abroad with general education requirements and degree offerings
2. *Student-Demand-Driven*: Systematic data collection of student study abroad interest and timely development of new study abroad opportunities
3. *Faculty-Expertise-Supported*: Find your ready allies for international education through systematic data collection and initiate faculty international professional development opportunities
4. *Assessment-by-Design*: Hard data speak louder than anecdotes

It is no secret to SIOs that finding faculty champions for developing quality education abroad programs is only half of the challenge. Finding the necessary resources to support student participation is a bigger challenge. I began by searching for external grants and internal matching funds. Fortunately, I received a grant of \$20,000 from US–China Education Trust (USCET) to launch the university’s first faculty-led China study abroad program in 2011. Twenty-six students studied in China with all program costs covered by the grant and matching funds. The external grant enabled me to raise an additional \$45,000 to support over 100 students and six faculty to study in China over a 3-year period.

To encourage interdisciplinary faculty collaborations in developing education abroad opportunities, I wrote another grant of \$25,000 funded by the *100,000 Strong in the Americas Initiative*. Through this grant, the university launched a multidisciplinary study abroad program in 2015. Thirty-nine students and four faculty members from four disciplines went to Peru to conduct a comparative study of the connections between food, nutrition, exercise science, and behavioral psychology. The students received a scholarship of \$1250–3000 from the grant and matching funds. The actual cost was reduced to a range of \$500–2250 for a 3-week program.

It is such innovative programs that have propelled the growth of international education at our university. More faculty members are engaged in developing cross-disciplinary faculty-led education abroad programs. More students participate in education abroad each year. The annual student participation in education abroad has grown from 40 to over 200. To keep this growth momentum, the university recently launched the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) initiative to provide cost-effective global learning and engagement opportunities for students as well as faculty.

## **7 Smart International Enrollment Growth: Online, On-Campus, and On-Site**

Enrollment management has been a top priority for institutional leaders, including SIOs. To help achieve this institutional priority, international enrollment has played an increasingly important role, and SIOs often serve as the chief architect of international enrollment strategy designs. As higher education institutions around the world compete for more international students, SIOs are expected to develop innovative program offerings as well as scholarship strategies to be more competitive.

However, a philosophical question must be asked first regarding the main motivations for wanting more international students on campus. This question will help drive the institution to reach a campus-wide understanding and expectations of the (1) academic, (2) cross-cultural, and (3) financial benefits and commitment such a desire will require. Having a shared understanding of these three key motivators will impact what kind of internationally friendly policies an institution is willing to put in place to attract and retain international students.

If the presence of diverse international students is viewed as essential for creating a global learning environment on campus, then the institution should be willing and ready to make the necessary international-student-friendly policies as well as financial investment to achieve that goal. However, if attracting international students is viewed as mainly a revenue-generating mechanism, then efforts to recruit international students tend to focus on the bottom line and, sometimes, at the risk of compromising the academic and cross-cultural values and benefits. Experience indicates that there are ways to meet all three needs through a balanced approach to developing international recruitment strategies that include the availability of an English language program.

## **8 The Importance of the English Language Program**

An English language program is an important service to international students. While the majority of international students achieve their English proficiency before coming to the United States, there are still many who need to study and improve their English proficiency first before they are eligible to take academic courses at the bachelor's or master's level. Institutions with such language programs can offer conditional admissions to international students and build a natural pipeline for their academic programs. Unfortunately, not every institution (2-year or 4-year) has an intensive English program, whether it is owned by the home institution or by a service provider. Even when such a program is owned and operated by the home institution, it may not be under the supervision of the SIO, which could be a missed opportunity. Conversely, under a centralized model, the SIO can utilize the English language program as a special tool for building global partnerships and enrolling diverse international students.

## 9 Innovation in Program Offerings

Broad program offerings are the foundation building blocks SIOs must have to develop global partnerships and build pipelines of prospective international students. Since few institutions offer all the programs that are popular with international students, SIOs must innovate and improvise to develop new program offerings through repackaging and rebranding existing courses that meet the interest of international students. I developed various internationalization collaboration models to promote theme-based academies, international early college programs, English language immersion training, global study certificates, stand-alone international minors, micro-credentials, associate to bachelor degrees (2 + 2, 3 + 2), double bachelor degrees (2 + 2, 1 + 2 + 1), accelerated master degrees (3 + 1 + 1, 4 + 1), and double master degrees (1 + 1). These programs allow international partners to choose *a la carte* collaborations that meet the special needs of their students and institution.

### 9.1 Building International Freshmen Pipelines

It is common knowledge among SIOs that the ROI (return on investment) of recruiting undergraduate international students generally pays a larger dividend than transfer or graduate students. This is because undergraduate international students spend more years on campus, which helps with the retention rate. Besides, they are good candidates for honors college and graduate programs after they earn their bachelor's degrees. To develop a strong pipeline of incoming freshmen classes, a partnership with IB schools (International Baccalaureate) is normally a top choice. Other American-style international schools such as GAC (Global Assessment Certificate) also produce high-quality bilingual international high school graduates. In addition to developing such partnerships, I helped my university launch an international early college program that allows students at international feeder schools to take general education courses online at a minimum cost. Through the early college program, the high school students not only earn American college credits but also develop a sense of belonging and affinity with the host university.

### 9.2 Building International Transfer Student Pipelines

International transfer students from open markets (directly from their home country or within the United States) are good sources of enrollment growth. For 4-year institutions, developing major-specific cohort transfer partnerships with international universities are more effective in building strong long-term pipelines of transfer international students. For undergraduate students, 2 + 2, 1 + 2 + 1, and 2 + 1 + 1 are effective models of collaboration for cohort recruitment.

The 2 + 1 + 1 program is the most cost-effective model that meets the academic and financial needs of international students. It allows them to have more time to finish their home university's degree requirement while taking degree-required courses online from the host university in the United States. By spending their final year at the host university, they become eligible for OPT or STEM OPT. Many international students want to accumulate some work experience before they return to their home country or find employment opportunities in the United States.

For graduate students, 1 + 1 double master's and 3 + 1 + 1 accelerated master's degrees are common models of collaboration. 1 + 1 collaboration is possible, but it often is challenging for the international partner institution to send 10 or more students in any given year. A more effective model would be for one US institution to work with a few international institutions as a mini consortium, which will have a better chance to meet the minimum enrollment requirement on the US side to offer in-person classes. The 3 + 1 + 1 model works best in markets where there is strong interest in graduate schools and getting admitted to graduate schools in the home country is more difficult, such as China. This collaboration model can make the graduate admission progress seamless for the students and build a strong pipeline of graduate enrollment.

### ***9.3 Bringing Education to Where International Students Are***

International recruitment is more challenging than most people working in higher education realize. A broad understanding and deep appreciation of the challenges international students must overcome to be able to come to the United States to study will make a difference in the manner in which we serve them. This could be a big challenge for the majority of university employees when they do not have common experiences similar to international students.

Before international students arrive on any US campus, they have to spend many years learning English (if it is not their mother tongue), and their parents have to save a lot of money. When they are ready to apply for admission, the students will either find a university themselves or through the assistance of an international recruitment agency. Once they get admitted, they have to pass the last and most challenging step, the visa interview. If their visa applications are denied multiple times and never receive approval, then all their preparation for years and dreams of coming to the United States will become impossible. It is a sad situation, and there is little an institution can do to improve the odds of admitted students receiving their visas. However, there is one solution, which is to bring education to where the students are. Some forward-thinking institutions have developed branch campuses or instructional sites abroad to deliver high-demand programs.

However, such an international adventure is a major undertaking for any institution regardless of its institutional type, size, or reputation. Academically, the on-site programs must comply with the accreditation standards in the United States and the host country. Financially, it must be a win-win situation for both collaborating

institutions and, most importantly, for the students. Administratively, both institutions must be able to understand the nonnegotiable conditions of the other party and be willing to find common grounds. Therefore, the SIO's ability to understand how institutions work in both countries and facilitate sensitive discussions is critical.

Assuming successful implementation, such collaborations will have a major impact on international enrollment, credit hour production, and tuition revenue in addition to providing opportunities for US faculty to gain international teaching and research experience, and for American students to experience global learning abroad. More importantly, international students can now earn a US university degree without having to leave their home country. I have helped my university establish its first international college in China with an enrollment capacity of 1200 students. The first two cohorts of 480 students already started their academic journey in the fall of 2022 and 2023 respectively. This is indeed a win-win situation for the collaborating universities, students, and faculty. As the demand for American degrees increases, the trend for establishing branch campuses abroad is likely to continue.

#### ***9.4 Maximizing Technology as a Tool for Internationalization***

Educational changes and/or innovation often occur as a result of dealing with crises. The Chinese people believe that there are opportunities embedded in any crisis as the Chinese characters (危机 *wei ji*) indicate 危 *Danger*, 机 *Opportunity*. When COVID-19 hit the world, many institutions were forced to convert in-person teaching to online instruction on very short notice. For institutions with experience in online instruction familiar with QM Standards (Quality Matters), the conversion process in general went smoothly. I saw new opportunities for growing online international enrollment because online education is becoming more acceptable and even embraced across the globe. I helped my university launch several online opportunities to continue the growth momentum of attracting new international students through "Academic English Online," "Online Now, On-Campus Later," "International Online Minors," "Micro-Credentials," and "International Early College Program." The enrollment in the English program alone increased from 30 to about 300 students per semester. As a result, the university has experienced a record number of international students in these online programs.

### **10 Innovation in Scholarship Offerings**

If finance were not an issue, many institutions could easily recruit from around the world their desired number of international students who are highly motivated, well-prepared, and career-focused. Many high-achieving international students have been unable to attend US colleges and universities due to the lack of financial

resources. In addition, unlike their American counterparts, international students are not eligible for financial aid, grants, or loans, and they cannot work off campus without special permission from the US government. Therefore, many international students rely on academic scholarships to fully or partially support their studies in the United States.

### ***10.1 Reinvesting Nonresident Tuition to Support International Students***

Scholarships are the key for most institutions to attract quality students, domestic or international. While few institutions have sufficient funding to provide scholarships for international students, there are ways to develop an international scholarship program that is self-sufficient. For example, most public universities charge international students nonresident tuition. What if the nonresident tuition paid by international students can be reinvested as scholarships and given back to them? They will still generate 100% of the in-state tuition while helping diversify the student population and strengthen the global learning environment. I was very fortunate to be able to convince my university to create such an international student scholarship for both undergraduate and graduate students. The scholarships are structured into different tiers and are renewable based on academic performance. These scholarships are a recruitment as well as a retention strategy that has worked well.

### ***10.2 Global Learning Community Housing Scholarship***

Creative thinking leads to creative solutions. This is the case when I helped my university create a global learning community housing scholarship program. During a conversation with the university president, I was asked if I had any use of a large residence hall that had been vacant. Without any hesitation, I said "Yes." A few days later, I submitted a proposal to establish a global learning community housing scholarship program, and the proposal was approved by the university for implementation in 2017. My university became one of the first institutions that offer a housing scholarship to all international students. In the past 5 years, the housing scholarship program not only provided free accommodation to international and some American students but also strengthened global learning among residents through daily interactions and cross-cultural activities.

These academic and housing scholarships made a tremendous difference in our international recruitment efforts and global partnership development. As a result, the university has experienced record international enrollment increases during the past 5 consecutive years with a total of 850 students on-campus, online, and on-site in China, which represents about 9% of the total student population.

## 11 Personal Reflection

As global societies become more interdependent, there is an urgent need for global-minded people. Those of us, who are fortunate to serve as Senior International Officers, have a challenging responsibility to guide our institutions to develop comprehensive internationalization plans and strategies. These efforts must be driven by institutional mission and value, they cannot be left to chance.

As I reflect on my career as an SIO, I believe that international education, in its broadest sense, remains the only hope for global peace due to its shared values and transformative impact. At its core, international education is about opening the minds and hearts to understand, appreciate, and embrace other cultures and people. I also believe that people from different countries can and should coexist peacefully. Regardless of the difference in people's ethnic and cultural backgrounds, we all share the same dream of pursuing happiness and prosperity. We can do it by sharing knowledge and resources in education, technology, and sciences.

I have worked for 30 years as an international educator and traveled to more than 50 countries. I never lost sight of the power of international education and its transformative impact on our global society. There is an emerging need for more SIOs who are visionaries, innovators, creative problem solvers, and willing collaborators because yesterday's solutions cannot solve today's problems.

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**Dr. Chunsheng Zhang** is a visionary and experienced international educator and administrator in the United States. For the past 24 years, he has served the role of Senior International Officer (SIO) at one flagship university and two regional public universities in Alabama, Minnesota, and Oregon. He was the Senior Vice Provost for International Affairs at the University of North Alabama (UNA) from 2009 to 2023. He provided institutional vision and leadership for achieving the University's global education mission and internationalization goals, building strategic global partnerships, and expanding global learning and engagement opportunities for students, faculty, and staff. Under his leadership over the past 14 years, the UNA achieved many internationalization goals, most notably, (a) the record-breaking increases in international student enrollment, (b) the expansion of study abroad program offerings, and a significant increase in education abroad participation by students and faculty, (c) the successful development of online Academic English Program, and (d) the successful launch of UNA's first international college – *Guizhou University-University of North Alabama International College of Engineering and Technology*. This new college is approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education to offer three 4 + 0 bachelor's degrees in Engineering Technology, Occupational Health Science, and Sustainability and one 2 + 0 master's degree in Applied Manufacturing Engineering. The international college has a current enrollment of 480 with a capacity of enrolling 1200 students in 4 years.

Dr. Zhang has a track record for developing effective internationalization strategies for establishing global partnerships, creating innovative collaboration models, managing smart growth of international enrollment, and developing global learning for all initiatives. Due to his experience and expertise, he was invited in 2003 to serve on NAFSA Task Force on Education Abroad, which published a report entitled "*Securing America's future: Global education for a global age*." He was also invited by China Education Association for International Exchanges (CEAIE) in 2015 as a guest presenter at the CEAIE Chinese SIO Training in Beijing entitled "Academic linkages and partnerships: Internationalizing higher education." Other invited presentations include "Fit + Engagement + Support: Strategies to boost international student success in college, career and life" at the GAC Mexico Conference, Aguascalientes, Mexico (2017); "Internationalization: Commitment beyond rhetoric, impact beyond numbers" at the annual conference of the International Student Exchange Program (ISEP), Washington, D.C. (2008).

In addition, Dr. Zhang has been invited to serve as an external consultant at public universities in Illinois, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, and Wisconsin regarding strategies for (a) developing an effective organizational structure for the office of international affairs, (b) increasing and diversifying international student enrollment, (c) increasing education abroad opportunities and participation, and (d) fundraising to support internationalization efforts.

As a veteran SIO, Dr. Chunsheng Zhang is a long-time member of AIEA, AIRC, and NAFSA. He served on the NAFSA Board of Directors, the AIEA Executive Committee, the AIRC Certification Commission (Chair), and Study Alabama (Chair). After working more than four decades in public higher education sector in China and the US, Dr. Zhang founded the Global Partnerships Simplified, LLC, a consulting firm that provides strategic insights and assistance to colleges and universities in developing meaningful and impactful international partnerships that allow *a la carte* collaborations to meet the special institutional needs of global engagement.

# Advocating Users' Needs through a Leadership Role in Research Libraries



Shali Zhang

## 1 Introduction

A recent special report in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* discusses the shifts of campus libraries from their past as the places for paper journals on the shelves to the contemporary ones that serve as the hosts for supporting programs (Carlson, 2022). Furthermore, rapid development in information technologies also puts research libraries in the forefront as intellectual hubs to meet the needs of teaching, learning, and research endeavors of their institutions.

I have worked at several academic and research libraries in the United States for over 35 years. It has been a remarkable journey in witnessing many challenges facing higher education in its social, environmental, and economic contexts. Along the way, academic libraries have changed their ways to deliver services and programs. By embracing these changes, I have moved up from a frontline librarian in a small community college to a library leader in one of the top 125 research libraries in the United States.

I was born in Beijing, P.R. China, in a family where education was valued and encouraged. Later, my family moved to a city in the northwestern region of China. During my years in an elementary school, the Chinese Cultural Revolution started. Schools were closed, and children were sent home. In the following years, though schools opened here and there and I went through my middle school and high school, much of the schooling involved in reading the small red book (Mao's quotation book) and other political doctrines, or the students were sent to local factories for education by "the working classes" for several weeks during the semesters.

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Upon high school graduation, there was no job for these young people in cities. We were sent to the countryside for farm work. Out of personal interest, I kept reading literature and other books that I brought with me; I also reviewed my English textbook from high school. When the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, and subsequently the doors of colleges and universities in China were opened in 1978, I took highly competitive entrance exams and was accepted into the Department of Foreign Languages, Lanzhou University. I consider myself very lucky for this opportunity. I spent countless hours studying in the library during my college years. Upon graduation, I received the Best Student Award from the University.

## **2 Becoming a Professional Librarian**

In my high school years, I volunteered in the small school library from time to time in order to check out new books. During my college years, I was a regular visitor to the main library of the university campus. Nonetheless, I never thought about becoming a librarian. My major was English literature and linguistics; I thought that a translator for a publisher would be an ideal profession to pursue. However, I was assigned a job at the main library of the university upon graduation. The University Librarian requested me for this position with the justification that I was a frequent visitor throughout my 4-year undergraduate studies, and the main campus library needed a current graduate with a good grasp of both English and Chinese to translate library materials. It took me a while to make the transition.

In the 1980s, there were only two departments of library and information sciences (LIS) with undergraduate programs in China; one was in Beijing University and the other in Wuhan University. Obviously, the two programs were not able to produce sufficient numbers of professional librarians for all college and university libraries in China. In 1982, the Chinese Commission of Education hosted a certificate program in Fudan University in Shanghai, for those who graduated from colleges and universities with broad subject backgrounds, i.e., humanities, social sciences, medicines, health cares, STEM fields, and so on and provided them with 1 year of intensive training through LIS courses. I was among these people who went through this training program. When I returned to my library, the library director assigned me rotations across several library departments so that I would become familiar with overall library operations such as collection development, acquisitions process, cataloging/organizing library materials, and reference services. This kind of work experience enabled me to learn broad library service scopes.

### 3 Pursuing a Graduate Study in the United States

In academic and research libraries in the United States, a master's degree in LIS is considered a terminal degree for librarian positions, and there are over 60 graduate LIS programs in the United States and Canada (ALA, 2022). These programs are accredited by American Library Association (ALA), the largest and oldest library association in the world. Therefore, having a master's degree from an ALA accredited LIS program is the first step toward becoming a professional librarian.

In 1986, I received a graduate assistantship and enrolled in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science (now School of Information Sciences) at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I was very fortunate for having a wonderful mentor and academic advisor, Dr. Ann E. Prentice. She was the director of the ALA accredited program. As her graduate assistant, I was able to support several projects in which Dr. Prentice was engaged, including editing the bibliographies for one of her book project, *Information Science: The Interdisciplinary Context* (Pemberton & Prentice, 1990). At that time, Dr. Prentice was also the President of American Society for Information Science (ASIS). Throughout ongoing conversations and regular meetings with Dr. Prentice, I learned much about the importance of professional LIS associations and their roles in supporting libraries and library professionals in the United States.

### 4 Gaining Early Leadership Experience

Upon completing my master's degree in LIS in 1988, I accepted a position at Southeast Community College in Cumberland, Kentucky, as a Technical Services Librarian. The small community college is located in the Appalachia where coal mining was the major industry. Most students were the sons and daughters of local coal miners. It was a beautiful campus in the mountain community, clean and well-maintained; people are very friendly. I was the only recent immigrant in the community, and I had a lot to learn.

The small library was located on the second floor of a two-story building on campus; several classrooms occupied the first floor. It was a relatively new library space, with new furnishing. Students had easy access to the library in the same building from their classrooms. I was the first professional librarian besides the library director at that time. There were three staff members as well. The small library enabled me to learn all library operational aspects. I also worked with faculty and taught library instruction classes that helped students to learn how to use the library and how to find the needed materials. Gradually, I got to know most faculty and staff on the campus. From time to time, I was invited to help take care of the final exams for a couple of classes when their instructors were away. Many years later when I looked back on my first position in this rural community college, I felt

very grateful that it gave me the opportunity to learn all library aspects, though in a small scale.

My first assignment at this position was working with the librarians at the University of Kentucky in Lexington and the IT staff on our campus to move the library search system from a card cataloging to an integrated online library system. In preparing the conversions, Machine-Readable Cataloging Record (MARC) standards were used. According to Wikipedia, “MARC standards are a set of digital formats for the description of items catalogued by libraries, such as books, DVDs, and digital resources ... so that bibliographic information can be shared freely between computers” (Wikipedia, MARC, 2022a). Although many libraries adopted this new set of standards in the 1970s in structuring library search engines, such as the Library of Congress, faculty and students in my rural community college still used card cataloging to search library materials; of course, most of the library materials were books. Because the collections in this library were relatively small, it was possible to move this project forward within the targeted timeframe.

The first step of this conversion project was to ensure that the bibliographic records of all library materials were in the international online cataloging database, Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) (Wikipedia, OCLC, 2022b). In the late 1980s, this community college library’s connection with the OCLC database was still via a long-distance telephone line. In order to keep the telephone expenses low, I often worked in early mornings and in late evenings to input and update the library collection records in the OCLC database, much more beyond my regular working schedules. After several months of hard work, the majority of the library records were created and updated in the OCLC database. It helped the IT personnel to extract our cataloging records from OCLC and download them into the local online cataloging system. One year later, faculty and students were able to search library materials through the computerized online library system, though the library kept its card cataloging drawers for a while.

I gained initial leadership experience as a project manager through this successful system migration project. It offered me the opportunity in leading the library’s transition from a manual search to computerized search. In addition to technical aspects of this project, I also learned the concept of broad collaborations, timely communications with the involved parties, ongoing promotions of the new online system, and user training. I achieved tenure and was promoted to the rank of Associate Librarian; I was also promoted Head of the off-campus library in the community college system.

## **5 Seeking a Mentor for Professional Growth**

The valuable experience at this small community college library proves to be very beneficial for my professional growth. While I worked in a couple of similar positions in between, in 1999 I became Division Head of Technical Services at Wichita State University (WSU) Libraries in Wichita, Kansas. This institution valued my

experience in managing library operations, directing a major library system migration, my professional records in research activities, and my personal aspiration to move up the leadership ladder.

At the WSU Libraries, while the major task for me was to lead the migration of the Libraries' decade-old cataloging system to a new integrated platform with current technologies and enhanced search capabilities, I was also expected to build a respectful work environment that would support the library operations behind the scenes in the areas of material acquisitions, cataloging, authority control, database maintenance, metadata and cataloging portal maintenance, preservation, and government document processing. Among the personnel in the department, there were library faculty who needed the support for their tenure and promotion and staff members who needed to upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to work on the new integrated library system.

With the increased responsibilities of the new position, I felt that I needed to have a mentor who had more experience and who had a deep understanding of the organizational cultures. I was very fortunate to have an excellent colleague who was the Libraries' Head of Special Collections and a longtime library faculty. He was willing to assist me in this new position. During my 6 years in WSU Libraries, I was successful with my early tenure application and was promoted to the full professor rank. I have remained professionally indebted to my mentor for his guidance and encouragement.

In conversations with all personnel in the department, I learned that timely communication, professional development opportunities, and technical supports to staff members were some major concerns. Some feared that they did not have the needed technical knowledge and skills to operate the new library online system. In working with the library administration, I organized numerous training sessions with the new system vendor who customized its training materials and training styles for our staff to ensure that people would have the needed times to absorb the new knowledge and skills before the actual system migration. During that period of time, I hosted numerous departmental parties in celebrating each milestone. I met with the operational managers on a weekly basis to adjust our migration timetables. I also shared the progress through weekly updates with all in the department to keep people well informed. The library system migration process was successful. This process offered me the opportunity for collaboration, open communication, operational transparency, and engagement with all stakeholders. The faculty and staff members were also motivated to give presentations at library conferences to share their experiences with others. It was a very rewarding experience to me.

While working full-time in the WSU Libraries, I started taking doctoral classes in education at Kansas State University (KSU) in fall 2000 and completed my dissertation in fall 2004. At that time, there were no online options but in-person classes. I needed to meet the first-year residency program requirement, and I had to complete 24 credit hours on campus. I met the requirement by taking the classes in the evenings and weekends. For instance, I took the 3-hour evening classes by driving 3 hours to the KSU campus after work and drove another 3 hours home after the

classes, and then I must get ready for the next day's work. It was a very intensive time period. The process helped sharpen my time management skills.

## 6 Advocating for Open Access and DEI

In spring 2005, I accepted the position of Assistant Dean for Collections and Technical Services at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) Libraries. This new position offered me increased responsibilities with supervision of four major library departments: Cataloging and Metadata, Acquisitions, Scholarly Resources, and Preservation. I also coordinated with the Libraries' subject liaisons with their collection development in their respective academic departments. By this time in my professional career, I had a solid foundation in these areas. In addition to keeping up with the daily operations in my responsible areas, I actively looked for new opportunities to learn and to expand my professional horizons. One of the projects that helped support the strategic priorities of the University and the Libraries was working with faculty and library liaisons to establish an institutional repository (IR) that would showcase faculty's scholarly output to a large audience. The Library Dean appointed me to lead a team and explore the strategies for an institutional open access program at the UNCG Libraries. The team conducted research in library literature for general framework of IR, looked into the best practices of IR, and recommended action plans for the Libraries in implementing an IR program. With the assistance of our IT personnel, the Libraries' IR program, North Carolina Digital Online Collection of Knowledge and Scholarship (NC DOCKS), was established in 2007 (NC DOCKS, 2022). Through this open access platform, UNCG faculty and graduate students' research output and scholarship are shared worldwide. This project also helped increase the institutional visibility. Recently, I looked at the NC DOCKS website under my name for the number of public views of the published journal articles. It is very encouraging that one of my peer-reviewed articles received over 1900 views.

Another major project that I led during that time was the recruitment of diversity students for the graduate LIS program as a pipeline for academic libraries. The ALA's *Diversity Counts Report* states that institutions are not recruiting or graduating enough ethnic minority librarians to replace those expected to retire in the next two decades, highlighting the need for recruiting the next generation of ethnic minority librarians (Davis and Hall, 2007). With the support from my supervisor (UNCG Library Dean) and the Department Chair of the LIS program, I formed a great team in fall 2007 and prepared a funding proposal, *Academic and Cultural Enrichment (ACE) Scholars Program: Collaborating with Libraries to Recruit and Prepare Ethnic Minority Librarians for the 21 Century*, for the federal agency, Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). It was the first time that I worked on a large grant proposal. I am grateful that our team members, including librarians and LIS faculty, fully supported this project and helped us submit the proposal to IMLS on time. In June 2008, we were very excited to learn that we received a grant



of \$862,014 (Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), 2022a). The grant assisted students with their tuitions, fees, stipends, and expenses for professional development, technologies, and other aspects. In addition to other recruitment strategies, I wrote personal letters to the department chairs of over 30 private colleges and universities in North Carolina and asked for their assistance in recruiting diversity students. Consequently, our team recruited the first cohort of 14 students with diverse backgrounds, commencing in fall 2009. I also worked with library directors of the ten academic libraries in North Carolina in arranging internship opportunities for these students. This project enabled me to work collaboratively with those who were passionate about and committed to increasing future librarians with diverse backgrounds. They hosted these students and helped them gain the needed work experience for employment. As a result, most of these students received job offers within a few months after they received their master's degrees in LIS. Taking the momentum of the successful first cohort of the ACE program, I led the team and submitted the second proposal, which was also funded with \$889,401 in June 2010 (Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), 2022b). We recruited a group of 20 students with diverse backgrounds as the second cohort to this degree program. They graduated in spring 2013. Almost 10 years later, many of these students have become leaders and advocates in promoting diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) in their libraries. It has been gratifying to witness their professional growth in the LIS field. One ACE Scholar is an Associate Dean now at a research library; some became department heads in university libraries; and others moved up to be managers of public libraries. It was a very rewarding experience seeing the impact of this diversity recruitment program.

## 7 Embracing a New Opportunity

After over 7 years at the UNCG Libraries, my supervisor who was the library dean encouraged me to seek a library dean's position. In October 2012, I accepted the position of the library dean at the University of Montana (UM), a flagship institution in the Treasure State. It is the largest library and holds the largest research collections in the State. UM is the only institution of higher learning in Montana that still maintains the union contract with its faculty; librarians are also in the union. Prior to UM, I only worked in nonunion institutions. Therefore, it presented an opportunity to learn the institutional cultures, faculty governance, and local regulations. During the interview process, I was very frank with the search committee that I did not have experience working in a union environment. Nonetheless, the search committee encouraged me to ask any questions and ensured assistance in my learning process. The Search Committee Chair, who was also the dean in one of the colleges in the University, even spent lengthy time to explain the similarities and differences between a union and nonunion environments to ensure that I was not scared away. I am grateful for the encouragement from the search committee members and from the committee chair, who wanted to see me succeed in my first dean position.

During my first 6-month of listening tour as a library dean, I hosted a series of meetings with library faculty and staff that presented the opportunities for them to share their thoughts with me. One of the ideas that emerged from this process was the creation of the Libraries' Student-Centered Innovative Program. This Program provided small grants each year since 2013 that enabled library faculty, staff, and library student assistants to present proposals that are student-centered, innovative in nature, and with direct and measurable outcomes enabling student success. The Program was welcomed by library faculty and staff. Some of the examples of the completed projects through this program include *Creating Online Tutorials to Help Students Access Archives and Special Collections* (2018), *Online Interactive Exhibits: Created by Students and for Students* (2017), *Mapping Oral Histories of Montana* (2016), and *Web Presence Journey Mapping* (2015). This program also provided the opportunities for library faculty and staff's continual professional growth (UM Libraries Newsletter, 2013–2018). Out of the similar concept, with my leadership, the Libraries implemented numerous innovative projects, such as One Button Studio that created an inviting and individual space for students and faculty for video productions without needing library personnel assistance; Light Board Studio for faculty to create online courses; MakeSpace that enabled students to create their own models by using 3D printing; and AR/VR Studio for students to experience new digital course materials. These new services were welcomed by faculty and students.

To enhance my leadership capacity, I attended the Leadership workshops at the Institute for Management and Leadership in Education (MLE) at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University in 2015. The assigned reading was *Reframe Academic Leadership* (Bolman and Gallos, 2011). The authors suggested four basic requirements for academic leadership: a structural view, a political view, a human resources view, and a symbolic view. During the 2-week study, I examined my own leadership styles. The book helped me recognize that a structural view and a human resources view have worked well with my introvert personality and my strengths in connecting with people. It also reminded me that I should gain strengths in political view and symbolic view.

At the UM, I worked with all library faculty and staff and developed the Libraries' 3-year Strategic Plan, 2013–2017. It guided the Libraries to be a mission-driven organization and aligned the library services and programs with the UM's strategic priorities. Guided by the Plan, I led a successfully project that completed a state-wide library system migration by using cloud-computing technology to connect all library collections in 16 colleges and universities within the Montana University Systems in Spring 2016 (ProQuest, 2016). The statewide library system greatly enhanced resource discovery and sharing for faculty and students across the state system.

Academic deans in research universities spend a good amount of time in fundraising and development. At the UM, I also learned many aspects of fundraising and engaging library donors to support the Libraries' priorities. Among numerous library programs funded by private donations, I am most proud of completing the Learning Commons project with private funds of close to \$500,000 in fall 2018.

This renovation project removed brick walls in the entrance floor of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, the main library on campus, and installed large glass-windows that make the new space much more attractive and inviting. The renovated space is much brighter now, especially during the long wintertime in Montana. Students love the new space. Through this project, I worked closely with the University's Architect, the University Foundation, the chosen architect firm, the construction companies, and campus Facility Management. It was a huge learning experience in all aspects of a renovation endeavor. This project transformed the library space into an active learning environment that facilitates group studies, individual studies, quiet studies, and social gathering for UM students. The library donors are very pleased that their generous donations support students directly, and they see the impact.

During my nearly 7-year tenure as a library dean in the UM, I worked with several provosts: a permanent provost for 4 years, an interim provost for 1 year, an acting provost for a few months, and a new permanent provost for several months before I left the UM. This kind of change in high-level leadership positions provided me with more experience on how to communicate with my bosses who come from different academic backgrounds and who may have different views on the importance of the Libraries. It is beneficial to gain support in sharing student feedbacks, faculty needs, and new library services and programs with each of the provosts, and in connecting the library services with the University's strategic goals.

## **8 Aligning My Leadership Role with the Institutional Priorities**

I thought that I would work in the library deanship position at UM for many years to come. I genuinely liked the community, the campus, and the people in the University Libraries. However, when a call for the library dean post at Auburn University in Alabama came, it was hard to resist. During the initial/airport interview process, the search firm director advised that I visit the Auburn Libraries unannounced. I was very impressed by the newly opened Mell Classroom Building at Auburn University that is connected with the main campus library, which enables students to visit the library in a much easy and accessible way. Subsequently, after a competitive national search, I accepted the library dean position at this newly claimed R1 institution and started my current position in spring 2019.

In the spring and summer of 2019, I led the Libraries' broad participation in the development of the Libraries' Strategic Plan, 2019–2024 (Auburn University Libraries 2022a, b). The five strategic priorities in the Plan are closely aligned with those of Auburn University: Student Success, Research Support, Communication, Engagement and Outreach, Space, and Organizational Excellence. These strategic goals have guided our operations ever since, especially through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Guided by our strategic plan, I worked with the Libraries' Leadership Team for an organizational realignment in spring 2020. It helped us strengthen the Libraries' role in supporting the institutional research endeavors. Under the new organizational structure, a new library department, Research Support, was established. Subsequently, a new library space, Innovation and Research Commons (AUL/I&RC, 2022), was designed and implemented during the COVID-19 time when the campus was locked down. Our team worked very hard with the campus Facility Management and other campus units on the space renovation project and on receiving material deliveries from various vendors. The University's Executive Vice President had to issue a letter to ensure that we were "essential operators," and we would not be stopped in getting into the campus during the lock-down period in spring 2020. By the beginning of the fall semester 2020, the new library space was opened to the entire campus in welcoming new and returning students.

The new programs and services in the Libraries' Innovation and Research Commons include the following: Data Services that support the needs of graduate students and faculty's research projects; Adobe Creative Space that facilitates the university-wide initiative as an Adobe campus; MakeSpace providing a series of tools for digital creation and production; Extended Reality (XR) program that enables faculty's exploration in using the AR/VR haptic technologies in their teaching and research; Audio Studio that offers a production space and equipment for the creation of digital voice and music production; Digital Wall bringing enhanced classroom experiences; and the Tech Lending program that lets students check-out the needed equipment freely for digital creation and production. Two years have passed since the opening of the new space in fall 2020; Auburn University's faculty and students have taken advantage of these new offerings. For instance, the reservations for the Audio Studio have been all time high. Students and faculty have used this new facility for creating and mixing music, for adding voice to their videos, and for voice recording for their podcasts. The XR service enabled the faculty in the College of Pharmacy and other colleges to receive grants for classroom experiments. With these new programs, there have been new challenges, such as the needs for more staffing with technical specialties, for ongoing upgrades on technologies, and for making the new programs known to faculty and students. We continue addressing these issues and making improvements.

## 9 National Recognitions

With my expertise and passion, I understand the importance in supporting and serving professional organizations of library and information sciences. For instance, I am a life member of ALA. Throughout the years, I served in and chaired various ALA committees, working groups, taskforces, and ad hoc capacities. In 2020, I was appointed by the ALA President to the ALA Committee on Accreditation that is responsible for the execution of the accreditation program of ALA, and to develop and formulate standards of education for library and information sciences (LIS), in

my role to bring the perspectives of the practical fields to the conversations and discussions on LIS education programs. In 2021, I was nominated and selected as one of seven ALA Endowment Trustees to assist in managing ALA's largest investments. My selection to this prestigious group is the recognition of my longtime services to the organization and my leadership experience. My contributions to the LIS profession were also recognized by the Distinguished Service Award from the Chinese American Librarians Association in 2007. In 2014, I received the Humphry/OCLC/Forest Press Award for International Librarianship from the International Relations Committee, American Library Association (ALA, IRC 2014).

With my passion in international librarianship, I have served on International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) since 2007. I chaired the *IFLA Journal* Editorial Committee in 2017–2021 and remain as a member of this Committee through 2023. With my leadership of this Committee, we have expanded the authorship to IFLA regions in Africa, Asia, and South America.

## 10 Giving Forward

I would like to give credits for my professional growth to the institutional and organizational support, workplace environments conducive to success, and the encouragement from wonderful supervisors, in addition to my personal desires for excellence. I would also like to give credits to professional development opportunities throughout my career that have enabled me to keep abreast of current topics, new technologies, and the best practices in facing leadership challenges and opportunities. For this reason, I established my endowment in 2022 for library faculty and staff in Auburn University to support their professional development. It is one way to give forward to cultivate and develop the best team to support the institutional priorities.

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# Promotion of Bilateral Collaboration in Health Sciences Between the United States and China Against Various Global Health Challenges



Jialin C. Zheng

My journey to the United States started with my arrival in 1992 as a visiting scholar at the State University of New York – Buffalo. At that time, I had just completed my medical training in China and had an opportunity to go to the United States for research training. I had only brought one piece of luggage, the clothes on my back, and as much money as my low-income family could save. They had sacrificed everything on the whim I could succeed in America. At the Society of Neuroscience Conference in October 1992, I briefly met my future mentor, Dr. Terry Hexum. I had no idea he would change my life completely. In January 1993, he offered me a postdoctoral position at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). I spoke limited English during those years and, at first, could only communicate with him via the written word. I promised him that even though there was a bit of a language barrier, I would make up for it through my work ethic. I would work ten times harder than anyone he had ever overseen.

My effort during my first few years at UNMC was focused on research in neuropharmacology and pathogenesis research of HIV-associated dementia under the guidance and support of Drs. Terry Hexum and Howard Gendelman. I obtained the position of Instructor in 1997, was promoted to Assistant Professor in 1999, an Associate Professor in 2003, and finally Professorship in 2008. There was no Asian representation on the leadership team at UNMC in the 1990s and 2000s. Although I spent most of my time researching, I tried to be as involved as possible in various campus activities. I wanted to serve as a voice for the Asian population by creating Asian culture immersions and practicing ancient Chinese culture in medicine.

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I traveled back to China in the summer of 2002 for the first time after a decade in the United States. I visited my former universities and met with my previous supervisors and leaders at Shanghai Second Medical University (now Shanghai Jiao Tong University School of Medicine, SJTUSM). My Ph.D. advisor and leaders at SJTUSM proposed a collaboration with UNMC. After 10 years in the United States, I began to understand the differences between the United States and China in education, health care, and medical science. This led me to believe that education and health care are two areas without national borders. I set a career goal to explore and promote collaborations between the United States and Asia in health sciences against various global health challenges all the while being heavily involved in my funded research program.

In the spring of 2004, after 2 years of exchanges and coordination, Dr. Thomas H. Rosenquist, UNMC's Vice Chancellor for Research, along with Don Leuenberger, Vice Chancellor for Business and Finance, led a delegation to visit China. They met Drs. Xiaoming Shen (President of SJTUSM) and Wei Cai (Vice President of SJTUSM) and discussed the strategies and implementation for collaborations between the two universities. In the summer of the same year, a delegation led by the Governor of Nebraska visited Shanghai. Witnessed by the leaders of the Shanghai municipal government and Nebraska Governor Mike Johanns, a framework agreement on cooperation between the two universities was initiated and signed.

Since then, various projects have been carried out, such as the 3-month UNMC clinical rotation program for the medical and nursing student exchange, the first joint MD–Ph.D. training program between the United States and China, the leadership management training project, and the summer research rotation for medical students. UNMC also had many medical students, nursing students, faculty, and leaders visiting Shanghai. These students from Nebraska, who had never been overseas in their life, took their first international trip to Shanghai. During the mutual visits, a profound friendship was forged between faculty and students and between the two universities.

All of these were supported by UNMC's former Chancellor Harold Maurer, who strived for UNMC to be a world leader in transforming lives for a healthier future. These events taught me that the vision and commitment of a leader are vital to changing health care. UNMC established the Asia Pacific Rim Development Program (APRDP) in 2005 in response to UNMC's vision toward global health education to support the growing partnerships between UNMC and top institutions in the Asian Pacific regions. I was then appointed the founding Director of the program. I started traveling between the United States and Asia to increase research scope and efficiency, provide meaningful exchange programs for faculty and students, and foster friendships and cultural understandings. I was named the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies in International Affairs in 2007. In 2010, I was then named the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, and in 2013 I became Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs.



UNMC established alliances with more than 15 top medical schools and health science institutes in Asia, with the majority in China under my leadership. UNMC's College of Allied Health Professionals, College of Medicine, College of Nursing, and College of Pharmacy were integral partners in exchange programs that benefited medical, nursing, pharmacy, physician assistant, and physical therapy students. The UNMC and students from partner universities studied at each other's campuses for 1–3 months. APRDP's Summer Research Program invited international students to spend the summer working under the guidance of one of UNMC's outstanding researchers for 2–3 months. More than 800 students, faculty, and physicians were in exchange programs between UNMC and Asian (including Chinese) institutions for short- and long-term exchanges between 2005 and 2016. The UNMC students not only learned about the health system and patient care from other countries but also experienced Traditional Chinese Medicine. The students explored similarities and differences in patient care and culture and became lifelong friends. A few exchange students from Asia came back to UNMC to further their degree studies.

UNMC became a member of the Annual International Student Research Forum in 2006 through my efforts. Other members include Griffith University (Australia), the University of Tokyo (Japan), the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences (China), the University of Southern Denmark (Denmark), and Simon Fraser University (Canada). The members host the forum on a rotating basis. The annual forum aims to attract the world's brightest upcoming scientists, calling for collaboration beyond the lines of discipline. Since the very first forum, more than 120 UNMC students shared their research with their peers from around the globe.

One highlight is the collaboration in family medicine. UNMC established one-of-a-kind training centers in Shanghai and Xi'an, helping universities understand and improve family medicine by developing curricula to educate Chinese-adapted family medicine practitioners. Annual symposia were held in both Chinese cities, resulting in thousands of practitioners having been trained. In addition, over 80 Chinese physicians and young leaders have traveled to UNMC to participate in the exchange since 2012.

The need for physical therapy in East Asia is increasing due to the aging population. UNMC provides clinical faculty training for different partners in China as well as Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) training. Students received degrees from UNMC and became faculty and leaders in physical therapy in their home countries.

After more than a decade's effort, UNMC's presence in Asia is one of the most significant among American academic health science centers. The strong ties developed through these exchanges have been beneficial to students, faculty, patient care, and community engagement. In addition, it has fostered enduring friendships among institutions, mutual respect, and admiration among the people. Although our cultures are different and our distances great, our human needs are the same. The enormous work to enhance translational medicine, primary care, and rehabilitation in the United States and Asia makes significant differences through cultivating high-quality talent including the training of physician-scientists and the establishment of international exchange platforms.

It has been rewarding to watch UNMC's relationship in China grow and the gravity of this work hit me in Shanghai in 2013 when I shared a cab with an Italian woman who came to Shanghai as a visiting student. As we talked, I explained how I forged partnerships between UNMC and Chinese institutions. "Professor Zheng," the woman said, "Do you realize you do the most important work in the two most important countries in the world?"

In 2016, I accepted the offer to serve as the Dean of Tongji University School of Medicine. No matter where I work, I continuously hope that I can do more for the joint effort in health science education between the two countries. After 8 years, Tongji University School of Medicine participated in the ACGME-I accreditation, completed the WCPT evaluation, and is listed as one of the 18 high-quality medical schools by the Chinese Ministry of Education. My journey through promoting partnerships in health and education between these two countries now has different perspectives. The goal remains unchanged.

I have many heroes and role models in my life, who encourage me to continue my efforts. One example is the special tie I share with my grandfather. He was a famous traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) doctor in my hometown. He inspired me to go to medical school when I was young, and he died from lung cancer before I entered medical school. He inspires me to combine TCM with Western medicine to help tackle global health-care challenges. Another role model would be my doctor advisor in Shanghai, China, Prof. Zheng-Jun Jin who taught me, "It is not only important to be a great scientist, but also be a great person." He died from cancer when he was 78. He was still giving lectures to students before he was sent to the hospital. He inspired me to continue my collaboration effort while I kept an active research program throughout my career. All my heroes have great vision, a strong spirit, and a tremendous heart dedicated to helping others.

Through these endless efforts, I know that what I am pursuing is not simply adulation but rather a kind of soul-searching and maturation as a scientist. I want to be known, not for my great personal achievements, but as a contributor in service to society. Health science has no national boundaries, and my current leadership at Tongji University School of Medicine continues my contribution to leadership in, and advocacy for, global health education. While the COVID-19 pandemic was a grave and dismaying time for us all, it further cemented the notion that we as human beings need each other to learn and adapt. My commitment to enhancing health science education, fighting against global health challenges, and promoting friendship and partnerships is a lifelong journey, and I am thrilled to be a part of it.



**Dr. Jialin C. Zheng, M.D.**, is an internationally recognized medical scientist who has led the Tongji University School of Medicine (TUSM) to new heights as a world-class academic health science center through his vision and promotion of team efforts. He is a distinguished Professor of Neurology and the Dean of TUSM in China. Before joining TUSM, Dr. Zheng spent 24 years at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) in the United States, serving as professor and the Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies for nine of those years.

Dr. Zheng has been recognized widely for his achievements, both at UNMC and TUSM. Among those, a few are notably his expertise in the research of brain inflammation in the pathogenesis and stem cell therapy of neurodegenerative disorders, including Alzheimer's Disease and HIV-1-associated dementia. He has served as the PI for numerous research projects funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the United States, an international cooperation project of the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC), a key project of the NSFC, and a National Basic Research Program of China (973 Program). His research studies have resulted in more than 200 peer-reviewed manuscripts and book chapters (Citations: 9600, H-index: 58, i10 index: 134). Dr. Zheng was the recipient of the UNMC 2005 Gilmore Outstanding Young Investigator Award and the 2008 UNMC Outstanding Investigator Award. He has served as a standing member of several NIH study sections for more than 20 years. He also serves as a founder and an Associate Editor for the journal *Translational Neurodegeneration*.

His achievements at TUSM include leading more than 42 million USD in private donations toward TUSM's foundation for medical education and research, the move of TUSM to an independent medical campus, and being included in the newly released list of 18 high-quality medical colleges/universities by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2022, leading the institution to new heights of excellence in education, research, and clinical care.

Dr. Zheng is an invited expert/standing member of the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) Life Sciences and Medicine Divisions, a member of the Education and Instruction Committee of MOE, a Certified Expert of Clinical Medicine of MOE, Vice Chairman of Medical Education Branch of Shanghai Medical Association, a CCADP's board as Secretary/Treasurer, and a Steering Committee member of the Association of Academic Health Centers International (AAHCI). He has played an integral role in the success of numerous educational and research collaborative programs between China and the United States. He recognizes the significance of enhancing translational medicine, primary care, and rehabilitation in China and aims to make a difference through cultivating high-quality talent, including training of physician-scientists; promoting the integration of academic health centers, affiliated hospitals, community health centers, and building international exchange platforms.

# Leadership – A Pathway from Surviving to Thriving



Jianping Zhu

## 1 Early Career

I came to the United States in 1986 to pursue a Ph.D. degree. It was before China's economic development gained momentum and later sustained over three decades of astonishing growth. Besides two suitcases of clothing and books, all I had was \$50. When I arrived at New York's JFK airport, I couldn't even find a taxi or shuttle driver who was willing to take me for \$50 to Stony Brook where the university is located. Fortunately, another student was heading to the same university, and his friend came to the airport to pick him up. They had space in their car and were very kind to invite me to join them. By pure luck, I overcame the first challenge after I landed on American soil and got to the State University of New York's Stony Brook campus smoothly.

During my 4 years at Stony Brook, I spent most of my time studying and doing research to complete my Ph.D. degree in Applied Mathematics. In addition to interactions with fellow graduate students and faculty, I also worked as a residence assistant in the apartment complex where I lived. Through that part-time job, I had an opportunity to interact with working-class Americans, including pest control technicians, janitors, and appliance service staff. My initial impression of America was that it is a beautiful country ruled by law. Everyone enjoyed freedom and could realize their dreams. It had an abundance of resources. People were polite and courteous to each other. They greeted each other in elevators and held doors for me even if they didn't know me.

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As some of my upper classmates graduated, I saw they found good jobs at well-known companies or universities. Some of them came to the United States just like me with little or nothing. Now after a few years, they found good jobs, bought new cars, acquired their first house, and were busy building their careers, raising families, and realizing their American Dreams. I was amazed by the life-changing impact of an American education. Their success inspired me to follow the same path to realize my American Dream.

I graduated in 1990 with a perfect GPA of 4.0 and got a tenure track Assistant Professor position. Like many of my Chinese American academic colleagues, I believed that advanced degrees and hard work were all that was needed to help us realize the American Dream and enjoy freedom and equal treatment. I was laser focused on my teaching and research and eager to establish myself as a fine teacher with a strong research program. I was not interested in any leadership role, didn't think I could do it, and had no appreciation for its importance.

Looking back many years later after I had seen first-hand how ugly departmental politics and infight could be, I really felt fortunate to join a department for my first faculty job at a time when that department had a chair who was fair and open-minded. The department faculty were very supportive of each other. The department felt like a big family with a very diverse faculty, including those from China, Germany, India, Iran, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam. The University was just awarded a major National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to establish a campus-wide cross-disciplinary research center. The Department of Mathematics was part of the Center. As a result, I was provided excellent startup support through the Center on computing facility, academic year teaching release, and summer salaries to jump-start my research program. It was not surprising that with a very supportive environment and more than adequate resources, I was able to make rapid progress in teaching and research in my early career. As a result, I was promoted to the rank of Associate Professor in year 3 and to Full Professor in year 7 of my initial faculty appointment. The regular process would have taken 10–12 years for a new tenure track Assistant Professor to be promoted to the rank of Full Professor.

While my record in teaching and research had contributed to my early career success, it could not have happened without a supportive working environment and strong support from the department faculty and university academic leaders at all levels (department, college, and university). Throughout my academic career, I have seen many cases at my institution and other institutions that merited early promotion but didn't work out due to departmental politics (faculty committees vote on tenure and promotion cases) and/or lack of leadership support (department chairs, deans, or Provosts).

Along with my early career success, I was also establishing a happy family with a caring wife, two lovely children, new cars, and a new home. Life was great. I felt I was realizing my own American Dream.

## 2 How I Became Interested in Leadership

In early 2000, a new department chair was appointed to lead my department. The search process was a typical academic search. The open position was advertised nationally. A search committee reviewed the applicant pool. The finalists were brought to campus to meet with the university administration, faculty, staff, and students. This new chair had the required credentials and experience on paper and did well during the on-campus interview. Most of the department faculty members were satisfied with the outcome of the search and looked forward to working with the new chair.

Soon after he started in our department, I ran into him in the hallway and introduced myself. I briefly explained my research projects, expressed a desire to work with all other faculty to elevate the department to a new level of excellence in research and hoped we could continue to count on the department chair's support. His response was lukewarm and emphasized that "there was only so much teaching release the department could allow no matter how much external grant funding a faculty had," as if I were arguing with him for more teaching release. Although I felt a bit uneasy, I was hoping he was just trying to make sure that every department faculty taught an appropriate number of courses and that all departmental teaching needs were covered.

A few months into his tenure, he began to change interpretations of some existing department policies and put in place new policies that demonstrated a clear lack of appreciation of contributions made by Asian American faculty. For example, under his new interpretation of the department's annual evaluation policy, most Asian American faculty in the department received lower annual teaching performance ratings (given by the department chair) than they had in the past. When Asian American faculty received highly competitive grants, he wouldn't share the news with the department faculty. Yet, when other faculty received less competitive grants, he would go out of his way to publicize the news. Within the first semester, he already formed his favorite go-to group of faculty for advice on department matters and major committee appointments. None of the Asian American faculty was included in that group. Factions began to form among department faculty, and, as a result, friction between factions took place more and more frequently. What used to be a family-like department was polarized within 1 year after this department chair was appointed. While none of these issues alone appeared to be threatening or devastating, collectively they created a non-welcoming and discriminatory working environment for Asian American faculty. It made Asian American faculty feel that they were outsiders in the department, their opinions were not valued, and their contributions were not appreciated. As a result, some of them began to leave the department.

Looking at how quickly the department environment had changed, I began to understand how much impact an individual holding a leadership position, from department chair to the country's President, could have on the unity or polarization of the department or the country they lead. Up until that point, I thought America

had a perfect system that provided equal opportunity to all, and everyone enjoyed freedom and equal treatment. The country and all entities within it were governed by laws, rules, and regulations that were equally applied to everyone. Facing what happened in my department, I began to realize that laws, rules, and regulations were developed, interpreted, and applied by human beings who often exercise subjective judgment. Given various explicit and implicit biases, it is not surprising that some leaders would, intentionally or unintentionally, treat different people differently without appearing to violate any laws, rules, or regulations. This reality helped me understand the importance of leadership. Even within a well-designed democratic system with a sophisticated check and balance mechanism in place, such as the one in America, leaders could still have a significant impact on people's lives and careers. This is particularly challenging for minority groups that are not adequately represented in leadership or not actively participating in the governing process. It is inevitable that the groups' interests and well-being would not be adequately advocated and protected due to bias, discrimination, or competing priorities.

As I was planning to leave the department, it dawned on me that I should not just continue to seek another place with the hope that there would be a good boss there to make sure I would be treated fairly. That's a *surviving* mentality. Department chairs come and go. Even if the department chair who hired me was reasonable, there was no assurance that chair would be there for my entire career. Instead of counting on someone else to take care of me, I should participate in the governing process and become a leader myself! That way, I would be able to fight for equal treatment not only for myself but also for other faculty. Complaining and counting on others to look after our interests would not solve the problem. We need to be at the table when policies and rules are being made, implemented, and interpreted. Our goal should be to *thrive* in America, not just to survive. The greatest thing about the governing process in this country is that the door is open although the threshold to get in might be different for different people. For a minority ethnic group, the threshold can be expected to be higher. But at least the door is open. We would only have ourselves to blame if we do not make every effort to get into the governing process. That's how my journey to the "dark side" started (faculty often refer to the administration side in a university as the "dark side").

As a side note, the department chair who polarized the department had to step down 1 year after I left the department under the pressure of department faculty and university administration.

### **3 My Journey Through the Dark Side**

#### **3.1 *Testing the Water***

My first academic leadership appointment was a department chair position at a different university. In retrospect, I think I was selected for the position because of (1) my experience in working with interdisciplinary faculty teams, (2) my outgoing

personality, and (3) my balanced approach to teaching, research, and motivating faculty. For item 3, I didn't have a track record as I had never been an academic leader. I developed my leadership philosophy based on some last-minute research on how to be a department chair, a book written by a successful department chair, and most importantly, how I would like to be treated by a department chair as a faculty. Clearly, it was well-received by the faculty, the dean, and the Provost whom I met during my campus interview.

The department faced several challenges at the time when I became the chair. Some of the challenges were universal across different institutions. For example, friction among faculty with expertise in different branches of mathematics, or between faculty who were highly productive in research and those who focused on teaching. From my own experience as a faculty, I thought a good department chair should foster a supportive and collaborative environment in which every faculty member would contribute, based on their strengths, to the university's mission of educating students, creating new knowledge, and serving the public. Instead of forming a group of "favorable faculty" and deepening the existing divide among faculty, I strived to create opportunities for all faculty to contribute and did everything I could to make sure all faculty's accomplishments and contributions were recognized and appreciated.

For example, there were a few senior faculty in the department whose research was probably not at a level to compete for NSF research grants or to publish refereed journal articles. However, they had been excellent teachers, were really good at coming up with meaningful and interesting research projects for undergraduate students, and most importantly, had a passion and genuine interest in mentoring undergraduate students. While some faculty who have active external research grants felt these senior faculty were "dead wood" and shouldn't get any department resources other than the bare minimum needed to teach, I thought their desire and experience of working with undergraduate students was an important endeavor worthy of support. I encouraged them to learn best practices at other institutions, expand their efforts, and develop a formal proposal for funding to support their undergraduate research program. With the department's support of travel and matching funds, they were able to establish a formal Research Experience for Undergraduate (REU) program with a grant from the National Science Foundation. The program had been very successful. It not only attracted undergraduate students from all over the country to participate in a summer undergraduate research program but also stimulated these students' interest in continuing their research by pursuing graduate degrees, which helped to accomplish a major national goal to encourage more US citizens and permanent residents to pursue graduate degrees in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). As proof that it is truly a small world, one of the students who participated in this REU program moved on to finish his master's and Ph.D. program and ended up being a faculty colleague of mine almost 20 years later at Cleveland State University when I returned to faculty after stepping down from the Provost position.

Although I enjoyed being a faculty who could focus on teaching and research, I found serving as an academic leader more fulfilling and rewarding as I could play a



bigger role in supporting faculty and students. To faculty, it is career success. To students, it is better education and an enriched learning experience that could be life-changing. Over a decade had passed by while I served as a department chair at two different institutions. It was going to continue until I received a call from a former colleague.

### ***3.2 Getting Deeper into the Dark Side***

A colleague who was a junior faculty member at the institution where I had my first department chair appointment moved to another institution. His college was searching for a new dean. He called me and encouraged me to apply. He and many other faculty who observed me functioning as a department chair all felt I could be a good dean. Their encouragement and faith in me gave me the confidence that I should consider leadership positions at the next level. Although I did not get the dean's job at my colleague's institution, it did get me started on the process of pursuing a more senior-level leadership position. After a few tries, I was appointed Dean of the College of Graduate Studies at Cleveland State University.

The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies is a very unique position. It is very different from the dean positions for academic colleges, such as the college of arts and sciences or the college of engineering. In my view, the responsibilities of deans of academic colleges are similar to those of chairs of academic departments, which include setting strategic directions, enhancement of academic and research programs, student success, fundraising, and all faculty-related matters such as recruitment, tenure and promotion, professional development, workload assignments, raises, and grievances. The main difference is the scale. An academic college dean is usually responsible for a number of departments (for a dean of a college of arts and sciences, it could be up to 30 or 40 departments).

Although the detailed responsibilities of a graduate dean's position vary with different institutions, they usually include oversight of the development of new graduate programs, review and update of existing graduate programs, professional development and preparation of graduate assistants, and enforcing common standards for graduate faculty, graduate student admission, and graduate degrees to ensure consistency across the university and compliance with requirements set by the accreditation and regulatory bodies. At Cleveland State University, the graduate dean is also responsible for the allocation of graduate assistantship funds to academic colleges based on each college's teaching and research needs.

Since all graduate programs and graduate assistants are housed in the academic colleges, a graduate dean has to work closely with deans of academic colleges to ensure existing graduate programs are up to date, new graduate programs are being developed in response to the market needs, and resources in the form of graduate assistant funds and professional development opportunities are provided to support the colleges' academic and research programs. Although a graduate dean may be viewed by some as a pseudo-dean who doesn't have as much authority as an

academic college dean who oversees many faculty and staff, controls a significant budget, and has a real “territory” (buildings), I found it a very interesting position that provided me with valuable opportunities to interact with all academic deans, develop people skills to resolve issues by negotiation and consensus instead of the position’s authority (as there was not much with the graduate dean’s position), and gain a university-wide perspective, which was valuable for me when I was later appointed the Provost. This graduate dean advantage is not unique to me. Through interactions with other graduate deans and provosts, I learned that many graduate deans moved on to become Provosts.

After serving as a graduate dean at Cleveland State University for about 4 years, I was appointed the university’s Provost. There had been four Provosts during the 5 years prior to my appointment as Provost, which had affected faculty morale and caused confusion, inconsistency, and a lack of long-term planning for the university’s academic enterprise. My first priority was to stabilize the leadership team in the Provost Office. The experience of serving as Graduate Dean at the same university was very helpful as I was already familiar with the university-level operations and developed a good working relationship with all academic deans. With the strong support from the university President, the transition was smooth.

During my 6 years as Provost, I worked with faculty, staff, and the university leadership team to develop a comprehensive plan that set the university’s strategic priorities for the next 10 years; completed university-level accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission; improved student retention and graduation rates; and strengthened faculty and research by hiring over 200 new faculty.

Take the enhancement of faculty research as an example. Ten to 15 years ago, the university was not able to attract new faculty with a strong funding record as the university was not able to provide an appropriate startup package. The highest amount was about \$100,000 for engineering or science faculty. By prioritizing the use of university funds, during the later years of my tenure as Provost, the university was able to provide a startup package of over \$1 million to attract new faculty with a proven track record of external funding. Some of these faculty brought newly awarded NIH R01 grants (typically over \$1 million each) with them to Cleveland State University. With increased support, the university faculty’s research accomplishments received much more recognition at the national level. For example, prior to my appointment as Provost, only one university faculty received the NSF Early Career Award. During my tenure as Provost, four faculty received the NSF Early Career Award.

## **4 Managing Expectations and Perceptions**

### ***4.1 A No-Win Situation***

There are many challenges facing a Chinese American academic leader. One of them is to manage the expectations and perceptions of the constituency groups. For a Provost, that includes faculty, deans, university president, students, and staff,

among many others. In this section, I will focus on balancing the expectations of Chinese American faculty and the perceptions of non-Chinese American faculty.

Given the significant underrepresentation of Chinese Americans in higher education leadership, it is natural that most Chinese American faculty are very happy and proud to see a Chinese American faculty being appointed to a senior leadership position. Along with that excitement often comes an expectation that the Chinese American leader should be a strong supporter of Chinese American faculty and go out of the way to help Chinese American faculty when they face any major difficulty, for example in tenure/promotion, merit raises, or appointment to leadership positions.

Soon after I was appointed as Provost, some Chinese American faculty who were interested in further advancement in academic leadership inquired whether I could create additional leadership positions for them, such as Assistant or Associate Provost. Although these faculty's positions had already been fully funded by the university and giving them additional titles would not have incurred significant new expenses, I did not entertain the requests, which were not fully justified by the university's operational need, to avoid the appearance of favoritism.

Many universities have been facing ongoing financial challenges. As a result, our faculty often sought additional resources, beyond what was provided by their departments and/or colleges, for conference travel, lab supplies, and student support. Some Chinese American faculty approached me for funding to support their travel, research, and other academic needs. While I did have a significant amount of discretionary funds, I always evaluated these requests using the same criteria I had used for requests from all faculty. Inevitably, some requests from Chinese American faculty were not approved for funding.

Another example was that some Chinese American faculty brought their issues with their faculty colleagues, department chairs, or deans directly to me with the hope that I could resolve those issues in their favor quickly. In these circumstances, unless there was clear evidence that the relevant chair or dean had procrastinated in responding to the faculty or did not address the issues appropriately, I would refer the cases back to the department chair or college dean following the usual protocol that we have been using for all faculty. I was a department chair for over a decade and understood that department chairs would appreciate an opportunity to address any issues with faculty in the department before upper-level administration's involvement.

All these examples were viewed by some Chinese American faculty as a reflection of me being weak or not willing to stand up for Chinese American faculty. On the other hand, some non-Chinese American faculty had perceived that I treated Chinese American faculty more favorably simply based on my ethnicity. For example, a department at our university was in the process of selecting a new department chair. There were two final candidates running for the position, one of them was a Chinese American faculty. The non-Chinese American candidate received support from a majority of the department faculty. The Chinese American candidate did not receive support from a majority of the department faculty. By the university personnel policy, a candidate must receive support from a majority of department faculty

to be eligible for the appointment as a department chair. Clearly, the Chinese American faculty was not eligible for the chair appointment due to the lack of department faculty support. The problem with the non-Chinese American candidate was that he had to step down from the chair position several years ago due to faculty grievances. Before this candidate could be appointed again as a department chair, I needed to do due diligence to look into whether the issues that led to his stepping down a few years ago had been fully addressed.

This delay in the appointment created some anxiety among a small number of department faculty. They started a conspiracy theory that I was a close friend of the Chinese American faculty candidate. The purpose of the delay was to figure out a way to circumvent the university rule to appoint the Chinese American faculty as chair. I didn't know this conspiracy theory until a university board member, who is a friend of the faculty who started the conspiracy theory, called me to inquire about the delay in the appointment. When I asked the board member what evidence he had about my being a close friend of the Chinese American candidate, he brought that faculty into a three-way call to provide the evidence. It turned out that this faculty once heard the Chinese American candidate tell other faculty that he had lunch with me. Based on that, the faculty deduced that the Chinese American candidate and I were close friends. Actually, the lunch the Chinese American candidate was referring to was part of a university celebration event. I as university Provost often attended university events and joined the faculty for lunch. There were usually eight to ten people at each lunch table. During my tenure as Provost, I had such lunches with many faculty. I never had a private lunch with that Chinese American candidate. This example shows how sensitive people could be and how far perception could be away from the truth.

This conflict between expectation and perception of different faculty groups often created situations where no matter what I did, some faculty would not be happy. How to handle this type of “damned if you do and damned if you don't” situation? My philosophy was to focus on consistency and fairness, instead of who would be happy or unhappy.

## ***4.2 Focus on Fairness and Consistency***

The responsibility of an academic leader is to lead and make fair and consistent decisions, not to please everyone. That approach not only put me at ease when handling this type of situation but also gave me the courage to stand up and make difficult decisions when necessary.

One example is the reappointment review of an endowed professor in global business. The holder of this endowed position is a Chinese American faculty, whose research focused on trade between China and the United States. During his 5-year appointment as the endowed chair, his papers generated the highest number of citations among all full professors in his college according to Google Scholar. His highest cited paper during those 5 years was also the highest cited paper of his college.

According to the Web of Science, his papers generated more citations during those 5 years than the total number of citations of all other full professors combined (more than 10) in his college. He clearly demonstrated the impact of his scholarly work. However, his dean had shown some clear bias in his evaluation of this endowed professor's scholarly work. For example, the dean slighted keynote presentations at conferences in China as he didn't recognize conferences in China as mainstream international conferences. Neither did he consider universities in China "international universities" as this Chinese American faculty was born in China. In his view, a Chinese American faculty's research on China-US trade was not global enough. With a combined US-China share of over 40% of the world's GDP, I found this dean's argument very biased. Given the endowed professor's focus on trade between China and the United States, it was logical that he has research partners in China and his keynote addresses were often presented at conferences in China. Backed by data to demonstrate the impact of this endowed professor's work on global business, I overrode the dean's recommendation and renewed the appointment of that endowed professor.

Another example is the reappointment review of a department chair who is a Chinese American. He had a can-do spirit and was effective in getting jobs done. He had strong department faculty support and was interested in seeking reappointment for another term. His dean, however, had a different plan. The dean was relatively new. Shortly after the Dean started in the college, he began to marginalize that chair, for example, by moving a research center out of that department (to the dean's office) without discussing it with the chair. When the chair asked to meet with the dean to discuss his work plan, the dean never formally responded to the request. It appeared that the dean had made up his mind as part of his startup plan to replace that chair. The decision was not based on the chair's performance as there was not enough time for the dean to observe and assess the chair's performance. It was not surprising that the department faculty strongly objected to the dean's decision to replace the chair. The conflict was elevated to the Provost's Office following the university personnel policy. After I discussed with the department faculty and reviewed the relevant documents, I reversed the dean's decision and reinstated that department chair. The dean was not happy with my decision and appealed my decision to the university President. When the President discussed this with me, I elaborated on the rationale of my decision and pointed to my record as a transparent leader who had been making consistent decisions and treating all faculty and academic leaders equally. Although the dean was trying to imply that race and ethnicity played a role in my decision, I emphasized to the President that while I would not extend any extra favor to Chinese Americans, I would not shy away from supporting Chinese Americans when it is the fair and appropriate thing to do. In the end, the President upheld my decision.

Here I want to emphasize the importance of a strong track record. Since I was appointed to the position of Provost, I have made every effort to establish a track record as a fair, consistent, and transparent leader. I treated all faculty and academic leaders equally and applied university policies and rules to everyone in the same way. Thus, I could defend difficult decisions with confidence when questions arise.

Although the record may not help me avoid the disappointment of those faculty who expected me to do more to support them or the perception of faculty who had the preconceived notion that I was going to treat Chinese American faculty more favorably than other faculty because I am a Chinese American, it did help me make difficult decisions and keep me in good spirit as I knew I was doing the right thing.

As a testimonial that I was doing the right thing, here I share two of the many anecdotes that happened after I stepped down from the Provost position. One chilly day, I ran into a Chinese American faculty in a local ski resort. I knew he was one of those faculty whose expectations I didn't meet. While sharing a ski lift chair with me, he told me that he now realized some of his expectations were unrealistic and that he understood how difficult it must have been for me to deal with those unrealistic expectations and perceptions from non-Chinese American faculty. It certainly warmed my heart on a very cold day. Another encounter was with a staff member whom I didn't know and never interacted with before in Student Services. One day I stopped by Student Services to try to resolve an issue related to a student in my class. The staff member was very helpful in resolving the issue. At the end of the conversation, she said "I have heard a lot about you. You are the fairest Provost." I was not expecting that and felt it was a genuine compliment to my record as a Provost. She didn't have to say that to please me as we didn't know each other, and I was no longer Provost.

## 5 Conclusions

The American Dream is more than just having a good job, cars, and a new home. It is about freedom, equity, and most importantly, having a voice when laws, rules, and policies are being made, implemented, and interpreted. Without that, we will always be in a survival mode. To truly thrive, we must actively participate and reach equity in leadership.

Although I detoured from a typical academic faculty path into leadership by accident, I hope future generations of Chinese Americans will start their career being more intentional and better prepared for leadership. While it is good for our future generations to continue to excel in schoolwork, know how to play piano, violin, or tennis, and receive advanced degrees from elite universities, it is much more important for them to be interested in and prepared for leadership. That requires a collective effort to instill in them the importance of leadership and build their confidence for leadership long before they start their professional career.

Even with the challenges and problems America is facing today, I still think it is the Land of Opportunity. What we need is more intentional and active participation in the leadership and governing process. The personal stories shared in this book are proof that Chinese Americans can do it. I hope the personal stories shared in this book will help to promote the importance of leadership, build the self-confidence of young Chinese American faculty for leadership, show that it is possible for Chinese Americans to achieve success in leadership, and inspire more Chinese Americans to

take on the challenge and become academic leaders. I am confident that it will not take another 140 years for Chinese Americans to reach equity in leadership.

**Acknowledgments** I could not have successfully completed my journey of over two decades in higher education leadership without the support of my wife and family. She was always there when I needed support. She zig-zagged throughout the country with me as I moved to different institutions and did everything possible to take care of the family and raise our two lovely children. As the saying goes, “behind every successful man there stands a woman.” I am not sure if I can be considered a successful man. But there is no question that behind me there stands a great woman. My two lovely children had brought so much joy and happiness to the family that kept me going, especially when I was facing difficult situations at work. They also helped me better understand American culture and what is important for school kids and college students, which was tremendously helpful to me as an academic leader.

I am indebted to Dr. Ronald Berkman, Dr. George Walker, Dr. Paul Paulus, and Dr. Roger Creel for their support and mentorship, which was essential to my success in academic leadership. My heartfelt thanks go to Dr. Honggang Yang and Dr. Wenying Xu for their efforts and leadership in this book project, which will no doubt inspire more Chinese Americans to take on leadership roles in American higher education. I am also grateful to Dr. Honggang Yang for his encouragement to share my leadership experience. Last but not least, I want to express my deep appreciation for the support from Springer Nature that made this book a reality.



**Dr. Jianping Zhu** was the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs at Cleveland State University from 2016 to 2021. Before his appointment as Provost, he served as Interim Provost from 2015 to 2016, as Senior Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, and as Dean of the College of Graduate Studies from 2012 to 2015. During his tenure as Provost at Cleveland State University, he worked closely with faculty, staff, and the academic leadership team to significantly enhance faculty and improve student success, which was recognized by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Excellence and Innovation Award in the category of Student Success and College Completion. The University was also named one of the five finalists for the 2016 Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) Degree Completion Award.

Prior to joining Cleveland State University, he was Chair of the Department of Mathematics at the University of Texas at Arlington from 2005 to 2011 and Chair of the Department of Theoretical and Applied Mathematics at the University of Akron from 2001 to 2005. At the University of Texas at Arlington, he led the Department of Mathematics to significantly expand its graduate program and increase the number of Ph.D. degrees awarded to underrepresented minorities and US citizens. In recognition of this accomplishment, the Department was selected by the American Mathematical Society in 2013 to receive the Award for an Exemplary Program or Achievement in a Mathematics Department.

From 1990 to 2001, he was on the faculty of Mississippi State University. He holds a Ph.D. in Applied Mathematics from the State University of New York at Stony Brook, an M.S. in Computational Mechanics from Dalian Institute of Technology, China, and a B.S. in Solid Mechanics from Zhejiang University, China. During his academic career, he received the second-place award in the 1990 IBM Supercomputing Competition and the Intel Research Fellowship Award in 1992. He has written one book, edited two books, published over 80 refereed papers, and made over 120 invited and contributed conferences, colloquium, and seminar presentations in 21 countries. He was a former president of the Texas Association of Academic Administrators in Mathematical Sciences (TAAAMS) and served on the Board of Directors of the Council of Chinese American Deans and Presidents from 2014 to 2016. He also served on the editorial boards of six international journals and numerous conference-organizing committees. Over the past three decades, his research and education projects have been funded by over \$6 million in grants from various federal agencies and industrial partners in the United States.



# Journey to the “Dark Side”



WeiDong Zhu

## 1 The Dark Side

“Welcome to the dark side,” said a colleague jokingly on August 17, 2018, the day the email went out from the Office of the Provost announcing my appointment as the interim dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Saint Peter’s University. Several people offered their congratulations while others expressed their condolences. One colleague gave a witty remark, “You know, as your office becomes bigger and bigger, remember the additional space is for aspirin pills.”

But why “the dark side”? The term “the dark side” is commonly believed to have originated from George Lucas’ 1977 film *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*. But some sources date the origin of this term as early as 1650 in the work *The Light and Dark Side of God* by radical theologian Jacob Bauthumley (Bottomley). The “light side” is affiliated with Heaven and the angels, and the “dark side” is with sin and the Devil. I had a rough idea of what the colleague meant by “the dark side” at the time, but it wasn’t until a few years later while preparing a talk for a group of high school students, I finally googled “why is administration in higher education considered the ‘dark side’?” The results were nothing short of astonishing. Obviously, this is a topic constantly discussed in the academe. Academic administrators are often considered “unfavorable,” “ineffective,” “over-paid,” and “bureaucratic” – all the characteristics someone from the “dark side” would have.

So, how did I get to the point of making that decision? What was it like along the way? To answer those questions, I will have to mention briefly my early life, a few critical choices I made, and several people whom I consider important for my growth.

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## 2 Early Life

I grew up in a regular working family in China. Both my parents went to Guannan County, Jiangsu Province in their youth to “learn from peasants” during the *Culture Revolution* in the People’s Republic of China. My dad at the age of 15, who just started high school, and my mom at the age of 14, a 4th-grade drop-out, started their separate lives in the countryside, learning how to plant rice, dig ditches, and make bricks. There was no salary. Everybody worked to gain “work points,” which were then used in exchange for food and other goods. My dad, considered better educated, later became the accountant of his production team. Mom sewed various things to get by.

I entered the world near the end of the *Culture Revolution* under the One-Child policy. My parents were so poor at the time that raising me became an issue. They considered giving me up for adoption. But fortunately, it did not happen. We were allowed to return to our hometown Nanjing when I was about 3 years old. My parents were assigned to their jobs about 1 year later, my dad as an accountant in a subdivision of a park and my mom as a cleaning staff member at a state-run market. We moved quite a bit during my elementary school years but eventually settled down in an apartment near Lake Mochou. It was a tiny apartment for the four of us (my grandfather, my parents, and me), but at least it was more or less permanent and I could make friends.

I managed to pull myself to the top rank in my cohort of students in middle school and became the class president. That was probably my earliest memory of taking a leadership role. By the time of middle school graduation, I was competing for the Valedictorian spot and wanted to continue my education in a high school. My grandfather, as the head of the household and always financially concerned, was completely against the idea of my going to high school and then college. He insisted that I go to a trade school and get a job in typesetting, the career he retired from, to help support the family. My parents, various school teachers, and I were on the other side of the fence. We eventually convinced my grandfather to allow me to at least try the standardized High School Entrance Examination (*Zhong Kao*). To his surprise, I graduated as the salutatorian of the middle school and was admitted to the High School affiliated with Nanjing Normal University, one of the best high schools in the country.

Everyone in my high school was either the valedictorian or the salutatorian from their respective middle schools. Although the school did not give us a lot of pressure, the competitive atmosphere is beyond evident. Despite that, every student is required to participate in the cleaning of the classroom after the last class of the day. I was appointed as the class representative to maintain a cleaning schedule and to make sure the classroom was cleaned. Not everyone was willing to follow the schedule strictly, and there was a daily inspection of classrooms by school officials. I took the responsibility seriously and often ended up cleaning the classroom myself. I probably got that quality from my mom, who always believed in the greater good

of the group and did not care about who got the credit. It was an important leadership role that helped shape who I am.

Attending a top high school came with a benefit – the opportunity to be exempted from the College Entrance Examination (Gao Kao), albeit only a few spots were available for each cohort. I was afforded that opportunity to join the Physics and Education program at Soochow University, partially because of my academic performance and partially because my physics teacher Mr. Yang saw a teacher in me. Years later when I visited Mr. Yang, he admitted that he was hoping upon my graduation from college I would return to my alma mater to teach physics. Well, that never happened.

I took various student leadership roles in college, but the most memorable one was being the President of the Association of Science and Technology of the university. It afforded me opportunities to interact with people at various levels and to learn to do things I would otherwise have never thought of doing. Also worth mentioning was the role of the editor-in-chief of the student newspaper in the School of Physics and Technology. I spent many nights reviewing, editing, and typesetting articles submitted by my classmates. Although those were all in Chinese through an early version of the WPS system from Kingsoft, the impact on me was nevertheless long-lasting. It became an annoying habit of mine to quickly point out font mismatches, spacing errors, and other formatting anomalies in other people’s writings.

Near the end of my college years, while I was in communication with several high schools for a permanent teaching position, news came from Soochow University inviting me to join the master’s program in Material Science and Engineering with all the entrance exams exempted and tuition-free. They would hold the offer for me for 1 week before going to the next qualified person. I was also at the time preparing for the exams to get into the Child Psychology master’s program at a university in my hometown. There was no guarantee that I would be admitted – I took only one psychology course in college and taught myself the rest. I eventually decided to go with the engineering program – not what I originally planned but I didn’t want to kick myself later for passing a great opportunity.

During graduate school, while working on my thesis with minimal supervision, I was heavily influenced by two people from the same school, Xianfeng Chen and Qiang Xu, who were determined to further their graduate study abroad. We went to TOEFL and GRE preparation classes together in Beijing and encouraged each other during the exams and the graduate school applications. All three of us achieved our dreams: Chen is now a world-renowned professor in England and Xu is a US banking professional specializing in detecting and fighting cyber money laundering.

Around the time of my graduation in 2001, an Integrated Circuit Design company in Suzhou offered me a job that came with a great salary and attractive benefits. In the meantime, I received a letter from the Stevens Institute of Technology (Hoboken, NJ) offering me a full scholarship and a teaching assistantship (TA). I was again at a crossroads: take the industry job and get to stay with my girlfriend or spend the next 4–5 years 7300 miles away from home to complete my doctoral degree. I had a hard time deciding until one of my professors said to me, “If you have an opportunity to see the world, go see it!” At that point, my parents had little

to no understanding of what I was studying but decided to support whatever decision I would make. They gave me most of their life savings, \$2000, and sent me off to the United States on August 22, 2001.

I explored different research teams at Stevens before finally settling down in Kurt Becker's group. Becker was the department chair at the time and took an interest in me because of my experience in nonthermal plasmas in China. But Becker would not have found me without the recommendation of Jose Lopez, who later on helped recruit me to Saint Peter's. By the time I arrived at Stevens, Lopez was already a Research Assistant (RA) working for Becker. I was appointed as one of the two recitations TAs for the general physics course. Lopez and I had most of our interactions in the Graduate Commons of the physics department. Every day at lunchtime, Lopez would turn on "the Knight Rider," "MacGyver," or "Battlestar Galactica." We joked and laughed – it was quite enjoyable. To a large extent, Lopez was truly the person who introduced me to western culture. When Lopez was running for the Office of the President of the Stevens Society of Graduate Physics Students (SSGPS), he asked me to be his running mate (Vice President). He made the pitch in a local restaurant in Hoboken. After lunch, I asked him how much I owed him. He said, "You owe me nothing but friendship." That sentence stuck with me for years. Later on, when an RA position opened up in Becker's group, he thought of me and made an introduction.

Incidentally, by the time of my graduation in 2005, a research associate (postdoctoral) position opened up in the microplasma research group at the Frank Reidy Center for Bioelectrics at Old Dominion University. The director of the Center and Becker collaborated on research and knew each other for years. Becker recommended me, I flew over for an interview and was offered the position several days later – all before I got my diploma.

During the 2-year postdoctoral training, I met many new friends and worked with various colleagues from Germany, Japan, France, and the United States. Toward the end of that journey in late 2006, amid the chaos of my wife getting close to full term with twins and my father being diagnosed with stage IV liver cancer, I moved back to New Jersey to finish up my postdoctoral work in Becker's lab and started to look for a more permanent job in academia. It was probably the strangest period of my life: on one hand, we were about to have our first children and should be joyful but on the other hand, we were very sad that my father had only months to live.

By March 2007, I had two offers in hand: one from Millersville University in Pennsylvania and the other from Saint Peter's College. Millersville is part of the Penn State system and had a physics program with 40 majors and 8 full-time faculty members. Saint Peter's had one physics professor, Lopez, and a handful of undergraduate physics students. I chose Saint Peter's over Millersville for several reasons: (1) We didn't need to relocate; (2) I liked Saint Peter's mission; (3) Lopez and I worked well with each other in graduate school. We separately inherited equipment from Becker when he moved on to be a full-time administrator at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn. Working together meant we would be able to share the equipment and complement each other's work. I was thinking back on that

critical point many times later in my life. I do not doubt that I would have taken the same path if I were to choose again.

After I signed the offer letter with Saint Peter’s, I traveled back to China alone and spent my father’s last 40 days with him. I was so grateful that Becker kept me on his payroll so that I could continue to provide for my family. I don’t know how I had gotten through that period, and I rarely think about it. Perhaps, when I am ready to write a memoir at a later stage of life, I will reopen that memory box.

### **3 From Assistant Professor to Dean**

Saint Peter’s is a small liberal arts university located in the center of Jersey City, New Jersey. It enrolls roughly 3400 students in its many graduate and undergraduate programs. One of the 28 Jesuit colleges and universities in North America, the institution prides itself on offering an opportunity to first-generation students and various historically marginalized groups and educating “men and women for and with others.”

I began as a tenure-track assistant professor in the Department of Mathematics and Physics but later in 2008 joined the Department of Applied Science and Technology as a founding member. Despite the lack of financial support from the institution, I founded the Microelectronics and Microplasma Study (MEMPS) Laboratory in my first year and attracted numerous undergraduate students to work on microplasma research projects. In the same year, I established a collaboration with Peking University, one of the leading research universities in Mainland China. In the following year, I was awarded a seed research grant by the American Chemical Society. Lopez and I also secured research grants from the Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR) and federal earmark money to start a national center of excellence which we called the Center for Microplasma Science and Technology (CMST). I served as the co-Director of the Center and the Director of Research, overseeing all research activities, equipment, instrument, and technology acquisition and development. Both were leadership roles I did not expect during the pre-tenure phase but accepted without much hesitation. They allowed me to learn how to navigate the complex system of the institution, negotiate contracts, and hire talents. Most importantly, I learned how to interact with different personalities to maintain a balanced team and a collaborative working environment.

From 2007 to 2018, I coauthored 39 peer-reviewed journal articles, published two book chapters, and attended and helped organize numerous conferences. In addition to holding two US patents on plasma–water interaction, I am also a coinventor on six Chinese patents, spanning from plasma dental treatment to car exhaust remediation, to novel plasma devices for hard-to-treat surfaces. All of these were done with a 4-4 teaching load with minimal course release time.

I was immensely saddened by Lopez’s departure for a different institution in 2011. I had the opportunity to join him on a visiting professor basis until something more permanent became available there. At that time, I was 2 years away from my

tenure and promotion application. Although there was no guarantee for tenure, Saint Peter's was certainly the safer option of the two. I stayed. Lopez's departure led to two immediate consequences: (1) I became the only full-time physics professor in the department; (2) the activities at CMST dwindled and senior staff members moved on. It was a difficult period – I had to serve as the coordinator of the physics program, maintain the curriculum and all teaching labs, recruit majors, hire a new faculty, fight for resources, keep the research activities going, maintain all the research labs, continue publishing, and wrap up the no-cost extension of the CMST grant. I managed but not without struggles.

I was tenured and promoted to the rank of associate professor in June 2013. The chair of the department whose term happened to come to an end immediately approached me to pass the baton. I agreed to serve after my scheduled sabbatical leave in 2013. I served as the chair of the department from 2014 to 2018. Despite the department being small, as the chair, I still had to handle all the student cases – plagiarism, cheating, and complaints, in addition to managing the department resources, staffing courses, hiring and firing adjunct professors, mentoring junior faculty, and dealing with all the deadlines imposed by the dean and the university. My experience as the coordinator of the physics program was certainly helpful for me to transition into the chair's position.

In early 2016, one of my colleagues finished her term as the Vice President of the Faculty Senate and was ready to run for President. She wanted me to be her running mate. I was involved with the Senate as a department representative over the years, but I had never thought of becoming an officer of the Senate. I simply was not 100% sure it was the right time for me to take such a position. I was tenured for sure, but I wanted to continue working on my research, publish, and get promoted to the rank of full professor. Becoming an officer of the Senate would mean a lot more committee work, and the possibility of making enemies when key decisions are made – you cannot always make everyone happy! “What if those enemies happen to be on my promotion committee when the time comes?” I remember having that thought when evaluating the pros and cons of the situation. Then I remembered the words of wisdom – “When opportunity knocks on your door, always be willing to take a chance.” I took a chance and was elected the VP of the Senate in March 2016. After the election, a colleague congratulated me by saying, “You are the first colored officer in the history of the Senate.” He meant well, but it suddenly struck me – I am in a different color category! Strangely enough, that thought never crossed my mind in my years in the United States, at least up to that point.

The work at the Senate was not as stressful as I initially had feared it would be. It however allowed me to understand how “shared governance” works at the university level and demonstrate my working style in front of faculty representatives from all departments and the upper administration. I consider it a key step in my journey to become a full-time administrator.

Due to my solid publication and citation record, teaching evaluation, and service to the university, I was promoted to the full professor rank in 2018, 1 year ahead of schedule. Days after I received the news about my promotion, opportunity once again knocked on my door – I was asked whether I would be interested in serving

as the interim dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. By that time, my colleague had finished her term as the President of the Faculty Senate and I was elected the next President, without any surprise. Many changes happened that year on a personal level: we moved into a new house further away from campus; my wife found a new job; and the twins were getting into middle school. “I am a tenured full professor, and I can do the bare minimum and start enjoying my life. Do I need another big change in my life?” I knew I would have a lot of stuff to deal with as the President of the Faculty Senate, but at least there would be a rhythm: the Senate met every 2 weeks. I would still have my sanity in between. The dean would have more headaches to deal with daily. It took me several days to convince myself that I should give it a try. It is on an “interim” basis – I have an easy way out in a year if I don’t like it. If I do like it, with all the institutional knowledge, when I decide to throw my hat in the ring, I might have an advantage over other candidates. I also consulted a senior faculty member, whose joke helped reinforce my decision. He said, “It’s a lonely job, but even a trained monkey can do it.” Well, I am better than a trained monkey!

## 4 The Deanship

Becoming a dean involved a huge change of lifestyle. As a faculty, I was only obligated to be at school for a minimum of 3 days a week to fulfill my teaching duties, work on research, advise my students, and attend campus events that are of interest to me – it was quite flexible and predictable. A dean’s job is 8 plus hours a day, 5 days a week, 12 months a year, and sometimes weekends too! Often what’s going to happen during the day is unpredictable. Suddenly even annual wellness checkups needed careful planning. Perhaps because I was used to coming to school every day when I was the co-Director of the CMST and the department chair and was always working on something related to work even on weekends, this transition was not difficult. I enjoyed the opportunity to be able to look at the university from a different angle and solve problems that were considered unworthy or impossible by others. In May 2019, I was appointed the permanent dean of the college after a national decadal search.

The College of Arts and Sciences is the largest college on campus, comprised of 16 academic departments, 53 undergraduate major programs, 40 minor programs (many of which overlap with the major programs), 10 collaborative/articulation programs, and 4 graduate programs; 70 full-time faculty and 65 part-time faculty, 12.5 staff members, and about 1200 students. The dean’s office is comprised of the dean, one associate dean who handles mostly student cases, and two administrative assistants, one student-facing and the other faculty-facing. There was a lot to digest at the beginning for sure. I learned from almost anyone who was willing to answer my many questions on policies, procedures, point of contact, and people’s responsibilities.

I am a little bit embarrassed to say that despite having worked at Saint Peter's for over 11 years when I took over the dean's office, I did not know everyone in the College of Arts and Sciences. As a first order of business, I created a large poster-size org chart with all full-time faculty listed by their departments and "cyberstalked" everyone to get their pictures. It included their terminal degrees, most current titles, phone numbers, office locations, and departmental subject codes. That turned out to be a very meaningful project: by always having a visual reference of the College structure on my wall, I can quickly pair up faculty members for projects, or encourage different departments to cosponsor events. I update the chart once every academic year to keep everything up to date.

Many people thought that I would not rock the boat as the interim dean, but in a way, I did. When I took over the dean's office in 2018, the adjunct hiring process was rather clunky: it involved candidates filling out a stack of physical forms and submitting transcripts in person. The application package was then hand-delivered from office to office for collection of signatures before it eventually would end up in the Human Resources department (HR), occasionally making a stop at the Office of Finance, where it would be stuck for days. Depending on which department originated the hire, the instructions to candidates would be slightly different. In simple terms, there was no consistency. HR happened to be in the process of implementing a digital platform to streamline the hiring process. I asked HR to create a test position and used my personal email account to simulate the application experience. I then wrote a one-page, four-sectioned protocol for adjunct hiring. I must admit, writing the protocol and selling it to other deans, the Finance Office, and HR was not in my job description and involved stepping on multiple people's toes. It took 4 months but was worth it. The protocol is still being used widely on campus today. I also recreated the digital version of the Personnel Action Form along the way – the original was a crooked pdf scan of a physical copy and not digitally fillable.

Other than taking initiatives such as the ones described above, I had to handle many unexpected problems. I will mention two for the reader to have an idea. One week into the fall semester of 2018, right after I took over as the interim dean, news came that black mold had been spotted in multiple locations in the main science building. The building needed to be shut down immediately for inspection and remediation. The projected completion date was the end of September! 28 sections of labs, 3 classrooms, and 16 faculty offices were impacted. I remember the Provost came to me and said, "Please don't quit! It's not always like this." Faculty and lectures were fairly easy to relocate. But finding adequate space for all 28 lab sections to conduct labs as usual, was impossible; those biology and chemistry labs required special equipment, glassware, fume hoods, chemical storage, and waste management. I worked with the Registrar's Office to utilize every available space on campus, including some of the conference rooms which were typically not used as instructional spaces. I also convinced the Office of Student Life to let us use the



theatre since it has a taller ceiling and a better ventilation system, and convinced the science departments to re-sequence their labs or find alternative solutions. Unfortunately, the inspection and remediation took the whole semester rather than 1 month. The fact that the students did not get any physical lab time imposed another problem – the refund of lab fees. It required multiple layers of convincing, but I nevertheless managed to see it through.

I inherited the project to build a Digital Humanities Center (DHC) with a donation of \$200k from a benefactor. Before my joining, the project morphed from converting the university’s art gallery into the DHC with furnishing into a project that included the renovation of the common area outside the art gallery. I quickly realized that the amount of money available is not even enough for the construction, let alone the furniture, the computers, and the necessary software to make the Center functional. And there needed to be furniture for the common area as well. After carefully analyzing the situation, I made a detailed budget listing the funds available and funds that need to be acquired. I negotiated with the Library, the Provost’s Office, the President’s Office, as well as several humanities departments, and secured the remaining amount (~\$180k) needed for the project. The DHC project was completed in September 2019 and is now serving as the hub of the humanities programs at Saint Peter’s.

The day-to-day operation as the dean also includes fundraising, budgeting, running chairs and directors’ meetings, the reappointment of faculty, evaluation of tenure and promotion applications, management and distribution of resources, accreditation, and occasionally resolving disputes before they hit HR. Most student cases do not come to me directly, but some still get rerouted to me, sometimes with parents involved too. It may be the “dark side,” but there is never a dull moment.

## 5 Closing Remarks

Looking back on my journey to this point, I believe I took solid steps along the way and was ready when opportunities presented themselves. There are things I would have done differently today, but largely I do not regret making the decisions I made. I have been with the “dark side” for over 5 years. Luckily, there are no signs of horns growing out of my forehead, yet. I list below (in no particular order) several things that came to mind for future leaders to consider.

- *Read:* There are plenty of books and articles written by academic leaders in the US higher education system. Many situations described would be similar to the ones you will encounter, and you do not need to reinvent the wheel.

- *Speak with confidence*: Your prior training might not have included this but trust me, this skill can be acquired. Practice in front of a mirror or get a personal trainer if necessary.
- *Listen actively*: Apply the 80/20 rule (80% listening and 20% talking) to show your sincerity to the person you have conversation with and the content of the conversation.
- *Be organized*: Staying organized would help you quickly access information. Make a chart listing who/which office has what information. If you can afford to have someone to keep you organized, absolutely do so.
- *Put it in writing*: If possible, have things in writing. It largely avoids miscommunication or misunderstanding in a verbal setting. If certain agreements were made verbally, convert them into writing, even if it is for the record-keeping purpose only. But be sure to write as if your message will be presented as evidence in a courtroom one day.
- *Lead by example*: If you want your subordinates to do certain things, do them yourself first. “Actions speak louder than words.”
- *Be fair*: Upholding the same standard and providing an even playing ground will gain you respect.
- *Be curious*: If you did not grow up in the United States, likely, you do not have the cultural background to understand everything people refer to in a conversation. Always be curious and ask questions, or take mental notes of keywords, and search them up afterward.
- *Be creative*: The existing tools may not be able to provide you with a solution to every case you encounter. Sometimes, you may have to simply create something new.
- *Pay attention to small things*: Things such as someone’s interest in sports, a dog’s name, a daughter’s birthday, and so on would often come up in casual conversations. Take mental notes or write them down afterward. Change that short-time memory to a long-time one so that you can ask about them in the next conversations. This might sound calculated but is an important soft skill practiced by many successful people.

Other than the above, I suggest you develop a sense of humor. It takes time and a little bit of effort. But it is doable if you are willing to try. I developed mine slowly over the years from watching clips of various standup comedians’ performances and late-night shows. For example, I once wrote a funny auto-email response as my vacation message, titled “I am on Mars and will return soon.” The message went like this, “Thank you for your email. I am on board the USS Tesla, taking a tour of Mars. So most likely you won’t be able to reach me via email or phone. If your matter is urgent, please feel free to contact my administrative assistant. Rumor says she is a good friend of Elon Musk’s and might find a way to beam a message to me.” Everyone who received the auto-response had a good laugh. Many still ask me today whether I am going back to Mars any time soon.

I hope my story and suggestions would be of some help to you when you decide to join the administrative side of the academic operation.

See you on the “dark side”!



**Dr. WeiDong Zhu** is currently the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and a Professor of Physics, and a former chair of the Department of Applied Science and Technology at Saint Peter's University. He was also the co-Director and the Director of Research at the Center for Microplasma Science and Technology (CMST). He earned his B.S. in Physics/Education and M.Eng. in Material Science and Engineering from Soochow University in Suzhou China in 1998 and 2001, respectively, and his Ph.D. in Physics and Material Science from Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, NJ in 2005. Following his graduation, Dr. Zhu worked in the Center for Bioelectrics at Old Dominion University and at the Non-Thermal Plasma Science and Technology Group at Stevens Institute of Technology as a doctoral research associate from 2005 to 2007. He joined Saint Peter's University as a tenure-track assistant professor in 2007, was subsequently tenured in 2013, and promoted to the ranks of associate professor and full professor in 2013 and 2018, respectively. While at Saint Peter's University, Dr. Zhu served on various committees, including most notably the curriculum committee (as the chair in 2015–2018), the committee on graduate programs (as an elected faculty member in 2014–2017, 2018-present), and the faculty senate committee (as the vice president in 2016–2018). He was the advisor to the Saint Peter's Chapter of the Society of Physics Students (SPS) and Sigma Pi Sigma ( $\Sigma\Pi\Sigma$ ) – the honor society of physics students (2010–2018) and guided SPS in securing multiple student grants from the American Institute of Physics (AIP), as well as receiving multiple “outstanding chapter” awards from the SPS. He was an active participant in the American Chemical Society's SEED program and other high school outreach programs, opening his research lab to promising high school students to take part in research activities in the summer and regular semesters. Many high school students who worked with him received medals in local, regional, and national science fairs.

Professionally, Dr. Zhu is a world-renowned researcher in the field of microplasmas. His research is focused on the fundamental studies of atmospheric pressure nonthermal plasmas and their applications in biology, biomedicine, dentistry, and the environment, air pressure plasma devices, excimer light sources, and self-organized pattern formation in DC noble gas discharges. He served as PI and co-PI on numerous research projects sponsored by the United States Federal Government, the United States Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR), the National Science Foundation, as well as the American Chemical Society – Petroleum Research Fund. He coauthored more than 120 conference publications, over 50 peer-reviewed journal papers and two book chapters, and one encyclopedia entry, and he holds two US patents and six Chinese patents. Dr. Zhu is a senior member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) and a founding member of the International Society for Plasma Medicine (ISPM).

# Bobby Fong Remembered for His Many Contributions to Butler



Marc D. Allan



Photo credit: Butler University

The event began with a video tribute that looked back at his 10 remarkable years at Butler and ended with the crowd singing “Take Me Out to the Ballgame.” In between, speaker after speaker rose to celebrate the life of Bobby Fong, Butler’s 20th President, who died on September 8 in Collegeville, Pennsylvania, where he had been serving as President of Ursinus College for the previous 3 years. President Danko was among the speakers to honor Bobby Fong.

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“The secret to my father’s success is that he loved you,” Fong’s son Colin told an audience that included his mother, Suzanne, on September 28 at Clowes Memorial Hall. “He loved you all, just as he loved his own family, and lived to see you succeed.” Colin Fong was the last of nearly a dozen speakers, a lineup that included 21st President James M. Danko, former Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson, College of Education Dean Ena Shelley, Political Science Professor Margaret Brabant, trustees, and alumni. Levester Johnson, Vice President for Student Affairs, served as master of ceremonies; the Butler University Chorale provided musical interludes.

The speakers honored Fong’s achievements, which included balanced budgets, construction projects, and setting a warm, gentle tone for the University. They told stories about baseball and Oscar Wilde—Fong loved the New York Yankees and was an Oscar Wilde scholar. They praised his ability to connect with people in every walk of life and expressed appreciation for the ways he touched their lives. Former Trustee Albert Chen urged the audience to “raise your hands in the air and say, ‘Well done.’”

Here are some other comments from the event: James M. Danko: “His legacy of achievement, after 10 years of service on this campus, was remarkable. From academic excellence to facility improvements to higher levels of community engagement, Bobby Fong successfully led the transformation of Butler University from good to great and from a regional presence to a national one.”

Stephen Briganti ’64, who led the search committee that hired Bobby Fong: “The last candidate of the day was a man named Bobby Fong.... Bobby had a pad in front of him, and he told us what he thought Butler needed—before we had a chance to tell him what we wanted. And remarkably, what he said precisely matched the goals that we would challenge him with: 1. Balance the budget. 2. Raise the academic standards of Butler to higher levels. 3. Raise money. 4. Raise more money. Bobby then proceeded to interview us. And that was it. We had our president.”

Bart Peterson: “Bobby’s stated goals were to lift Butler University academically and financially, to enhance the quality of student life, and to integrate the University into the life of our city. This latter was the first thing that he said to me when he met. He did all of these things, of course.”

Ena Shelley: “When Butler University was approached by (Indianapolis Public Schools) Superintendent Eugene White to develop a partnership with Shortridge Magnet High School, Bobby immediately said yes.... When Butler was presented with the opportunity to open the IPS-Butler Lab School, Bobby once again immediately jumped at the chance.... He believed in my colleagues in the College of Education. He believed in all of us. He believed in me as the Dean. And most importantly, he believed that every child deserves the opportunity to a high-quality education.”

Margaret Brabant: “Waple Cumberbatch works in Butler University’s Building Services. She told me that the year she received Butler University’s Top Dawg Award that she and the other recipients of the award were invited to Bobby and Suzanne’s home for dinner. She said that he took the time to ask her what she wanted to drink and insisted that he be the one to bring her her drink. She said, ‘During dinner, he insisted that I sit right next to him—right next to him!—and he

talked to me throughout the dinner.’ And with lingering wonderment, she looked at me and said, ‘He treated me like I was someone special.’ Which, of course, she is.”

Todd Bolster ’05: “It’s very rare to meet someone with the innate combination of remarkable intellect and sincere kindness. I think that’s what I’ll remember Bobby for the most. It was as easy for him to talk about Mariano Rivera’s abilities as a closer as it was to passionately debate his views on the transformative power of education. He meant a lot to me as a friend, he meant a lot to me as a student, but I think as much as anything, I will learn and take away his ability to lead from within.”

Warren Morgan ’06: “I remember having a one-on-one with Dr. Fong during my sophomore year at Butler. I shared with him some challenges I was facing and asked him for some advice. After intently listening to my concerns, he gave me some advice that I still follow to this day. He said, ‘Warren, you are a strong leader. Do not allow the challenges to interfere with your destined success. Follow your chosen path, and be the best Warren and leader you can be.’”

Laura Michel ’08: “‘Personable,’ ‘visible on campus,’ ‘student-centered,’ and ‘forward-thinking’ are all phrases that describe the student perspective of Dr. Fong during his time at Butler University. Dr. Fong truly enhanced the quality of the student experience during his tenure at Butler. Dr. Fong was passionate about listening to student suggestions and ideas and strived to make decisions based on what the students and campus needed.”

**Reported by Marc D. Allan, News Content Manager, Butler University, on September 30, 2014:**

<https://stories.butler.edu/bobby-fong-remembered-for-his-many-contributions-to-butler/>

**To learn more:**

“From the Archives: Fond farewell from Butler helps send off Bobby Fong” by Dan McFeely: <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/education/2014/09/08/bobby-fong-butler-university-president/15277023/>

“Bobby Fong: Dean, President, Author”: <https://prabook.com/web/bobby.fang/2472789>

“Bobby Fong Award” an annual award that encompasses the Horizon League’s core values of integrity, respect, and stewardship. The award is presented to one current Horizon League student-athlete or team and is named for the late Dr. Bobby Fong, former Butler University President who served on the Horizon League Board of Directors from 2001 to 2011. <https://mkepanthers.com/news/2020/4/15/womens-basketball-fischer-named-2020-bobby-fong-award-winner.aspx>

Dr. Fong’s Written Address at the Inaugural CCADP Teleconference (i.e., First Mid-Year Conference): [https://www.ccadp.net/\\_files/ugd/db3a0b\\_6e3057bc8734414e9521ee679dc508ef.pdf](https://www.ccadp.net/_files/ugd/db3a0b_6e3057bc8734414e9521ee679dc508ef.pdf)

# C. L. Liu – A Leading Authority and Role Model in Sino-American Academia



Wei Zhao

Professor Chung Laung (David) Liu's life began in Guangzhou in 1934. Typical for that turbulent period, he moved to Macau as a child where he received his K-12 education. From there, he hopped over to Taiwan to pursue his undergraduate studies. The year 1958 was a turning point in his life when Professor Liu made a life-changing move to MIT, the pinnacle of science education in the world, where he subsequently attained his Master's and Doctoral degrees. Upon graduation in 1962, he was quickly recruited as a faculty member by his prestigious alma mater. He later moved to the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (UIUC), where he served on the faculty for more than 30 years, as well as Associate Provost from 1995 to 1998. In 1998, Professor Liu made a courageous decision and relinquished his

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**Fig. 1** Professor C. L. Liu



position at UIUC, leaving the United States for Taiwan to assume the presidency of Tsinghua University (Fig. 1).

Over the course of his life, Professor Liu cemented his reputation as an innovative scientist. He was best known for his outstanding achievements in Computer Science. His research contributions are second to none, pushing the envelope in many areas including real-time computing systems, computer-aided design, and so on. In these areas, his accomplishments are extraordinary and awe-inspiring.

It has been said that major scientific theories are known for their poetic simplicity, with the power to explain existing phenomena and predict the future. The best is usually the simplest! Many important scientific discoveries, such as Newton's Physical Laws, the periodic table in Chemistry, and the genomic sequence in Biology, all share this beautiful characteristic. It is my belief that the significant contributions made by Professor Liu in the area of real-time computing systems perfectly illustrate the simplicity and general applicability of great discoveries, with their remarkable impact on computing history.

Real-time computing systems are utilized in such vital industries as aviation, aeronautics, defense, and medicine. In these applications, computing tasks must meet stringent real-time requirements. However, the computer systems in these applications are notoriously complex. Many parameters (e.g., processor speed, memory size, amount and timing of computation tasks) are capable of triggering a "butterfly effect," resulting in the failure of real-time functions. Verifying and guaranteeing the real-time requirements in these computer systems then become a bottleneck in the deployment of these application systems.

When Professor Liu collaborated with NASA on a research project in 1973, he came face-to-face with this thorny problem. From his outstanding analytical skills, broad scientific vision, and crisp academic insights, Professor Liu derived the most



important theoretical results in the area of real-time computing systems. He rigorously and conclusively proved that real-time requirements could be met by properly controlling the system utilization. Specifically, if the utilization of a system is less than 69%, its real-time function can be reliably guaranteed.

This great discovery by Professor Liu is revolutionary in its impact: it has significantly simplified the design, implementation, and maintenance of real-time computing systems and has become the fundamental guideline of real-time system design and operation. This result laid the most important foundation for scientific research of real-time computing systems. Generations of scholars have been faithfully following and building upon his work, continuing on this work that has proven its brilliant simplicity over the last half-century.

The author and his team had been fortunate to be able to study Professor Liu's groundbreaking work in the 1980s. After much effort, we were able to extend this great discovery to locally and globally networked computer systems. When working with the US National Science Foundation, the author was privileged to work with the academic community (including Professor Liu) and generalized the concept of real-time computing systems into "Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS)." Remarkably, CPS is now a frontier research field that is receiving much appreciation and attention from academics and industry alike. Undeniably, without Professor Liu's discoveries, this new CPS research field would have never been what it is today (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2** Professor Liu (the first on the left) with James F. Kurose, Assistant Director of the US National Science Foundation (the second on the left), and Andrew Chi-Chih Yao, Turing Award Laureate (the first on the right) in the Academic Forum at the University of Macau in 2016

Professor Liu published this groundbreaking discovery in the *Journal of the Association of Computing Machinery* in 1973. In academic circles, citations have been a critical metric to measure the importance of academic papers. Normally, a paper is considered excellent if it receives 100 or more citations. It is rare for the citations of a paper to exceed 1000. Professor Liu's 1973 article reached a staggering 10,000 citations in 2016, prompting the University of Macau to organize an academic forum that year to celebrate this incredible achievement in the history of Computer Science. From all over the world, many friends and admirers of Professor Liu attended the forum, including his former student, the incomparable ACM Turing Award laureate Professor Andrew Chi-Chih Yao. At the time this chapter was written that paper had reached almost 14,000 citations, reflecting its continued enormous impact on the field.

Prof Liu was far from being a "one-trick pony." In other research fields, such as computer-aided design, his accomplishments are equally extraordinary, recognized by numerous awards including the CCF Award (Chinese Computing Federation) for Overseas Outstanding Contributions, ACM Karl V. Karlstrom Outstanding Education Award, IEEE Computer Society Taylor L. Booth Education Award, and the IEEE Millennium Medal, and being successively inducted as an IEEE Fellow, ACM Fellow, and Academician of Taiwan Academia Sinica, just to name a few.

It is quite remarkable that among the major awards he had garnered, at least two were bestowed based on Professor Liu's long-standing history as an educator par excellence. Many overseas Chinese scholars are beneficiaries of his brilliance as an educator, well-known for his affability as well as his valuable mentorship.

Those of us living overseas felt particularly fortunate to have known him as being available when needed. Very often, these colleagues turned to Professor Liu for words of wisdom. One of his famous statements was "after age 55, tenure meant nothing!" We all know that faculty positions within the American university system are governed by the tenure track: after working as an assistant professor for 6 years, one may be awarded tenure, after a rigorous evaluation process, meaning her/his position is secure from termination, barring some unusual or extraordinary situations (such as the closure of an academic program). A tenured professorship is thus considered an unbreakable "golden rice bowl." The tenure system intends to protect freedom of academic inquiry, as well as provide economic security. In a highly competitive job market, this kind of security is often seen as a specially valued benefit. However, as a famous Chinese adage says, "if a tree is moved, it may not survive, but if a person moves, he will thrive." In my opinion, many academics choose to give up opportunities in career progression for the security of a tenured position, resulting in missed chances for career or personal growth. Professor Liu is emphatically not one of them. This reminds us of the famous Confucian wisdom: "after turning fifty, one should know one's calling." For the first half of our lives, we have to work for a living, while for the second half, we should answer the call to taste the new and experience the excitement of the unexplored.

Professor Liu practiced what he preached. In 1998, his choice to assume the presidency of Taiwan Tsinghua University influenced many of us. I often wonder whether his example inspired his outstanding student Andrew Chi-Chih Yao to follow suit, giving up his tenured endowed chair professorship at Princeton University to join Tsinghua University in Beijing.

After his retirement, Professor Liu “professionalized” his specialty of mentoring and nurturing the younger generations. On a Taiwan radio, he created a talk show, “I love to talk, and you love to laugh,” a popular program with a large and loyal following. In this program, he touched on issues relevant to a wide range of topics covering literature, history, science, technology, education, and daily life. Often, he combined and compared cases in literature and history with science and technology, making his show not only informative but interesting. His talk was delivered in simple and plain words and phrases punctuated by humor or unforgettable quotes brimming with philosophical depth and wisdom. For example, in one program, he shared a parable about job interviews. A human resource (HR) officer asked interviewees what they would like to be in 10 years. The first one said that he would still work for the company, showing unswerving loyalty. The second wanted to be an HR officer as this seemed to be an important position while the third one wished to be a CEO. Professor Liu analyzed the situation and came to two different conclusions. In the first, the HR officer believed that the first interviewee’s main merit was his loyalty and so was invited to join the HR department, the second one seemed to be good at flattering and so was put in the marketing department, while the third one had a talent for bragging and so was assigned to the advertisement department. As for the second and different interpretation, the HR officer concluded that the first interviewee lacked ambition, the second one was born to rebel, and the third overestimated himself. Therefore, no one was hired. This is an example of how Professor Liu encouraged us to think outside the box and to view issues from multiple perspectives, including the positive and the negative.

By far, the most famous episode associated with Professor Liu concerns a tragic crime that occurred between two students. A female student, enraged over a failed love affair, killed another student at Taiwan Tsinghua University while Professor Liu was its President. She was sentenced to 18 years in jail. When this incident exploded in the media, President Liu met with parents, wrote to the public, held press conferences, established a special task force to investigate the tragedy, and promised to provide better psychological counseling services, while making the campus safer. And he did something else: he visited the convicted student in jail, bringing with him 19 sizeable books to gift her. He told her as the university president he was deeply saddened by the fact that two of his students would never graduate from the university: the imprisoned killer and the deceased victim. He encouraged the former student to look forward, to take the opportunity to read more books while behind bars, and to never give up on herself. This gesture of compassion demonstrated Professor Liu’s belief that human beings are born kind and good-natured, and that any deviation from this inborn goodness is curable. His action in response to this tragedy defined his presidency at the university, making a lasting impact on the leadership circle of higher education. A few months before he passed away, Professor Liu still talked to me about this tragic case, adding that he was delighted to learn that the student had subsequently become fully rehabilitated and was working in charity services after being released from jail.

In 2008, when I assumed the position of Rector of the University of Macau, I had many opportunities to meet Professor Liu on and off campus. By then he was a

venerated figure in the Macau community. He was bestowed an honorary doctorate by the University of Macau and served on the Macau Foundation of Science and Technology as a panelist on proposal evaluation and achievement awards. At my invitation, he also joined us as an advisor to the University and as a founding master of Lu Che Woo Residential College (Fig. 3).

In 2012, the University of Macau invited Professor Liu to give a keynote talk at the “Master’s Forum.” When I introduced him, I defined him as the one who had answered “Qian Xuesen’s question” (of why China was unable to produce Nobel laureates or other major international awards), pointing out that his famous student Andrew Yao had broken this curse by winning the Turing Award, often considered the equivalent of a Nobel Prize in Computer Science – the only Chinese to receive this honor in the history of the award. The title of his talk was “Poetry in the numbers and numbers in poetry.” In his talk, he showed an uncanny ability to connect mathematical principles with both Asian and Western literature. He quoted Shakespeare copiously when explaining artificial intelligence, drawing the unlikely connection between the poems of Microsoft’s avatar framework and the love letters of Mr. Bohu Tang. For all those in attendance, his moving and eloquent performance elicited astonishment.

Professor Liu lived an extraordinary life and touched the lives of so many along the way. As of the writing of this chapter, he has been gone for 2 years. I still miss him dearly and feel the void left by his departure. For those of us who were lucky enough to cross his path or join his charmed circle, it was truly a moveable feast for living. He was a giant in science with a noble heart and a generous soul, a rarity among humankind. He is one of a kind and deeply missed.

**Fig. 3** Professor Liu was delivering a keynote talk in the University of Macau



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## **Appendix: Biographical Timeline of David Liu's Life and Achievements**

- 1934: Professor C. L. Liu was born in Guangzhou.
- 1937: Professor Liu's mother brought him and his brothers to Macau to seek refuge from the Sino-Japanese War, i.e., the Second World War.
- 1952: Professor Liu came to Taiwan to pursue his university education. Based on his examination results, he was accepted into the Department of Electrical Engineering at the Tainan College of Engineering (the forerunner of National Cheng Kung University).
- 1956: Professor Liu received his college degree and successfully obtained admission to a graduate program in the College of Nuclear Science at National Tsing Hua University (NTHU). However, he was awarded a scholarship by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) at the same time and therefore chose to enlist in the army of Taiwan as a reserve officer. He served in the army as a sublieutenant.
- 1958: Professor Liu came to the United States to begin his graduate program at MIT.
- 1960: Professor Liu received his M.S. in computer science from MIT.
- 1960: Professor Liu received his Sc.D. in computer science from MIT.
- 1960–1972: Professor Liu served on the faculty of MIT first as an assistant professor and later as an associate professor.
- 1972–1998: Professor Liu served as a professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC).
- 1995–1998: Professor Liu served as Associate Provost of UIUC.
- 1998–2002: Professor Liu returned to Taiwan and served as the President of NTHU. He significantly improved and expanded the campus with his tireless fundraising efforts. Also, his leadership was recognized for the strong promotion of international student exchanges and the impressive rise in the academic standing of the whole university. He was held in high esteem and loved by students and the faculty.
- 2000: Professor Liu was selected as a member of Academia Sinica.
- 2003: Professor Liu became the Chairman of Trend Force Corp.
- 2005: Professor Liu became the host of "I Love to Talk and You Love to Laugh," a weekly radio show produced by IC Broadcasting (FM97.5) based in Hsinchu, Taiwan.
- 2010–2020: Professor Liu authored 17 books in Chinese on a variety of subjects including life coaching, popular sciences, and so on. He also served on the boards of numerous major technology companies based in Taiwan, such as MTI, Powerchip, FET, Accton, UMC, Macronix, UBI Pharma, and Geothings.



**Dr. Wei Zhao**, an internationally renowned scholar is currently serving as the chairman of the Academic Council for the Chinese Academy of Sciences Shenzhen Institute of Advanced Technology. He was the eighth Rector (i.e., President) of the University of Macau. Professor Zhao was also appointed the Chief Research Officer (i.e., VPR) of the American University of Sharjah, the Dean of the School of Science at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Director of the Division of Computer and Network Systems at the National Science Foundation, and Senior Associate Vice President for Research at Texas A&M University. He completed his undergraduate studies at Shaanxi Normal University, China, and received his MS and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He has been conferred honorable doctorates by 12 universities in the world and was inducted as a CCF Fellow, IEEE Fellow, and academician of the International Eurasian Academy of Sciences.

# Memories of Chang-Lin Tien



Henry T. Y. Yang



Photo credit: Dr. Tien's family

I remember first hearing about Professor Chang-Lin Tien's work and reputation when I was in my early 30s and Dr. Tien was in his late 30s. What I heard about was this young, energetic genius who had graduated from National Taiwan University at the age of 19, and finished his Ph.D. in thermal science at Princeton University in 2 years.

He was rising quickly through the academic ranks at the University of California, Berkeley. Everyone knew he was destined for great things. He went on to become

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the chair of UC Berkeley's Mechanical Engineering department, followed by vice chancellor for Research, chancellor, and finally University Professor. In the midst of his career at Berkeley, he took a 2-year detour to serve as the executive vice chancellor for UC Irvine from 1988 to 1990. His impact on the Irvine campus is still remembered and felt.

Dr. Tien was the envy of his colleagues for his unimaginable energy and incredible productivity. He was also well known for his passion for teaching, which extended far beyond the disciplines of thermal science and mechanical engineering. His lectures and seminars frequently covered topics in the social sciences, humanities, education, environment, technology, and society. At age 26, he became the youngest professor ever to win UC Berkeley's prestigious Distinguished Teaching Award. In 1999, the University of California system honored him as a University Professor, a rare title conferred upon faculty of the highest international distinction.

As UC Berkeley's chancellor from 1990 to 1997, Dr. Tien provided exemplary leadership while continuing to do vigorous research. This scholarly style set the tone for the campus. His personal warmth and high visibility also helped make him a popular and effective administrator. During the economic downturn of the late 1980s and early 1990s, he prevented deterioration in the quality of faculty by upholding the highest standards of faculty compensation and scholastic excellence. In 1995, a report by the U.S. National Research Council found UC Berkeley to have both the largest number and the highest percentage of top-ranked programs of any university in the nation.

There have been countless occasions when I have met UC Berkeley alumni, and almost every time, the Berkeley alum would ask me, "Do you know former Chancellor Tien?" I would answer with an emphatic, "Yes, very well." Then they would tell me how much they appreciated and admired him, with anecdotal accounts of his inspirational teaching, his accomplishments during his tenure as chancellor, and his impact on society. Of the hundreds of Berkeley alums to whom I have spoken, none has ever expressed anything but love and respect for former Chancellor Tien.

Professor Tien was a pioneer in his field, a fact amply attested to by the technical articles in this annual review. For over 40 years, he devoted himself to the research of thermal science and engineering with ever-increasing depth, creativity, originality, and vision. He is credited as the engineer who pioneered the field of microscale thermophysical engineering, which led to the creation of the new discipline of microscale heat transfer. His groundbreaking work in this area has had far-reaching effects on energy utilization and conservation, materials, and the semiconductor industry.

Dr. Tien received many honors throughout his career. There is an asteroid, Tienchanglin, named after him, as well as a Korean supertanker named Chang-Lin Tien. In 1981, he was awarded the Max Jakob Memorial Award – the highest international honor in the heat transfer field. In 2001, Dr. Tien was awarded the U.S. National Academy of Engineering's (NAE) highest honor, the Founders Award. This award recognizes NAE members who have made lifelong contributions to



engineering, and whose accomplishments have benefited U.S. citizens. Due to Dr. Tien's health, his son, Norman, received the honor on his behalf.

In addition to his impressive research accomplishments, Dr. Tien contributed greatly to the advancement of education at all levels, reaching all areas of the world. He served with distinction on the American Society for Engineering Education's National Advisory Council; the National Research Council's Commission on Physical Sciences, Mathematics, and Applications; the U.S. National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century; the U.S. National Science Board; and the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations. He was chair of the Asia Foundation Board of Trustees, and cochair of the Asia Society National Commission on Asia in the Schools.

Dr. Tien mapped the world with his work on educational outreach. He was also a strong advocate for diversity throughout his life. In 1995, when the UC Regents voted to ban affirmative action in the admissions process, Chancellor Tien implemented the Berkeley Pledge program. This was an ambitious campus initiative to help prepare disadvantaged students in California's public schools, from kindergarten through high school, to meet admission requirements at UC Berkeley. "We pledge to keep opportunity alive," he said. He helped kick off the program by donating \$10,000 of his own salary increase to the Pledge campaign. This was a very personal testament to his belief, as expressed in a 1999 editorial, that, "[The University of California] must prepare leaders to comprehend an increasingly complex society, including an understanding of those who are isolated or on the margins. Diversity, after all, is at the heart of America's exploration of democracy."

One of the reasons for Dr. Tien's great success was his unique talent for bringing people and nations together. He especially helped to strengthen ties for academic and cultural exchange between Asia, Europe, and the United States, and among Asian nations. For example, he was one of the four cofounders of the Association of Pacific Rim Universities. This association brings together the chief executive officers from 60 premier universities around the Pacific Rim – on both sides and in the middle of the ocean. It seeks to build connections between universities, and to create opportunities for collaborative teaching and research. This mission is a reflection of Chang-Lin Tien's own strong commitment to collaboration and cross-cultural exchange, which he so magnificently exemplified in his life and career.

Dr. Tien was one of the most visionary engineers of the twenty-first century. He was also a leader among leaders in higher education. He was a mentor and inspirational role model to so many, with his influence extending to every corner of the world where there is a Berkeley alum. His bold vision and passionate commitment to educational access and quality, as well as his dedicated work on behalf of social justice and the humanities, are his contributions to humankind's future. His legacy will always be with us.

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## Appendix: Chang-Lin Tien: Inspirational Educator, Renowned Engineer

UC Berkeley College of Engineering

Talk to any Berkeley alum from the 1990s, and they will likely have a story about Chang-Lin Tien, chancellor of the university from 1990 to 1997. Known for leading enthusiastic “Go Bears!” cheers at games and events, he was one of UC Berkeley’s most popular and charismatic administrators.

As the first Asian-American to head a major research university, Tien helped Berkeley weather the fiscal crisis of the mid-1990s when state funding was slashed by 18% in 4 years. In order to fill the void and keep the university competitive, Tien created “The Promise of Berkeley – Campaign for the New Century” in 1996. The fundraising campaign, the first of its kind for a public university, raised \$1.44 billion.

Tien joined UC Berkeley’s faculty in 1959 at the age of 24, the youngest assistant professor ever hired in the Department of Mechanical Engineering. He ascended quickly, becoming a full professor in 1968. He also served as chair of the department for 7 years, and from 1983 to 1985, was UC Berkeley’s vice chancellor for Research.

He was highly regarded for his thermal science research, and worked with NASA to design heat-shielding tiles for its space shuttles. As one of the youngest members of the National Academy of Engineering, Tien was awarded the NAE Founders Award in September 2001. He was also the first recipient of the UC Presidential Medal, and was named a University Professor by the UC Regents in recognition of his service.

Tien was an outspoken champion of equal access and opportunity in higher education, passionately defending affirmative action admission policies. “It would be a tragedy if our nation’s colleges and universities slipped backward now, denying access to talented but disadvantaged youth and eroding the diversity that helps prepare leaders,” he wrote in a 1996 *New York Times* essay.

For all of his accomplishments, Tien may be most fondly remembered for his tireless dedication to his students, making time to advise them, even if it meant an appointment at 2 a.m., and sometimes with pizza.

This year, to mark the 10th anniversary of UC Berkeley’s C. V. Starr East Asian Library and the Chang-Lin Tien Center for East Asian Studies, the library has curated a special exhibit that includes papers recently donated by Tien’s family. The materials include Tien’s mechanical engineering papers, lecture notes, photographs, newspaper clippings, congratulatory letters from world leaders, and more.

### To learn more:

- Chang-Lin Tien: Four Decades of Distinguished Service (*Regional Oral History Office*)
- Chang-Lin Tien, UC Berkeley chancellor from 1990 to 1997 and an internationally known engineering scholar, dies at age 67 (*UC Berkeley obituary*)
- Remembering Chancellor Chang-Lin Tien, Champion of Affirmative Action by Frank H. Wu (*Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, October 9, 2018)



**Dr. Henry T. Yang** is the chancellor of the University of California, Santa Barbara, and a Professor of Mechanical Engineering. He was formerly the Neil A. Armstrong Distinguished Professor of Aeronautics and Astronautics at Purdue University, where he also served as the Dean of Engineering for 10 years.

Dr. Yang is a member of the U.S. National Academy of Engineering and Academia Sinica. He is a Fellow of AIAA, ASEE, and ASME. He has been recognized for his research, teaching, and public service with the ASEE Lamme Medal; the AIAA Structures, Structural Dynamics, and Materials Award; the NAE Bueche Award; and 13 distinguished teaching awards, among other honors. He holds honorary doctorates from Purdue University, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, National Taiwan University, City University of Hong Kong, Chinese University of Hong Kong, West Virginia University, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and the University of Macau.

Dr. Yang currently chairs the Thirty Meter Telescope International Observatory Board, and serves on the Kavli Foundation Board. He was the chair of the Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU) for two terms, from 2010 to 2014, and served on APRU's steering committee as a founding member from 1997 to 2014. He is also a past chair of the Association of American Universities. He served two terms as a presidential appointee to the President's Committee on the National Medal of Science, and previously served as a member of the judging panels for the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Engineering and the Millennium Technology Prize. He has previously served on the board of trustees for KAUST, on international academic advisory boards, and on scientific advisory boards for various government agencies.

Dr. Yang's areas of specialty include aerospace engineering, aircraft structures, structural dynamics and control, transonic aeroelasticity, finite elements, composite materials, sensing and control of structures for wind and earthquake loads, health monitoring of buildings, machining processes (simulation and experimentation), intelligent manufacturing systems, bio-inspired structural sensing and control, bio-inspired actuator mimicking abalone shell, bone materials, chronic pain, and 30-meter segmented mirror telescope, as well as higher education leadership and education in general.

Dr. Yang has authored or coauthored more than 190 articles for scientific journals, as well as a widely used textbook on finite element structural analysis. He has guided 57 Ph.D. and 23 M.S. recipients. He continues to teach an undergraduate engineering course every year, and guide graduate students with support from National Science Foundation grants.

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