

Vision Statement and Leadership Philosophy

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A Dean of Agriculture and Life Sciences must have a vision for the College, must communicate the vision effectively to various stakeholders, and must serve as a strong advocate for the missions of the College. The Dean must provide leadership to accomplish the missions while effectively managing the human, physical, and financial resources of the College. The leadership and management experiences that I have gained as a Professor and Department Head at a major university have prepared me well to lead a College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. My leadership style as a department head is largely collaborative in nature in that I am a strong believer of committees and teams for planning and implementing programs. Faculty and staff are engaged in the development of strategic plans and are encouraged to share their knowledge and vision for determining programmatic directions. My knowledge and vision are shared when appropriate. I take committee input very seriously when making decisions, but I also understand the importance of clear communication when some decisions must be made sooner than committee deliberation permits. I am careful to protect faculty and staff time and appreciate the need to use their time effectively. As Dean, I envision my leadership style to be similar to the style I use as a Department Head. I anticipate delegating authority to the Associate Deans and Department Heads and giving them the necessary freedom to make decisions in their units; however, I would work with the Associate Deans and Department Heads as an 'administrative leadership team' where frequent communication would foster effective leadership and management of the College.

Some of my most rewarding leadership experiences have been to encourage, support, and reward faculty and staff. Faculty recruitment and retention has been among my top priorities because faculty members are the creative force for strong and innovative programs, and they are the long term investments that will help shape and fund the College for the future. We have strived to enhance the diversity of the faculty with new hires. We have also recruited new faculty members that appreciate the diverse missions of our programs. I have been aggressive to develop attractive start-up packages for recruiting new faculty and retention packages to retain highly productive faculty. I have been a strong advocate in providing bridging funds for faculty members so that programs and personnel can be sustained through short periods of extramural funding shortages. In my experience, use of bridging funds results in a huge return in terms of productivity, funding, and impact. I encourage faculty and staff to set high standards of performance and achievement. I try to identify strengths and weaknesses and to empower them in ways that they can use their strengths to achieve excellence. I recognize that the academic unit is a diverse collection of talent and that building on the various strengths of the faculty and staff while providing them with an environment that is conducive for success is a way to move the unit forward. As Dean, I would strive to provide the faculty and staff with a collegial environment in which to conduct their scholarly work so that the College continues to advance to preeminence.

Career opportunities for students majoring in programs of Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences are tremendous. Our challenge as educators is to provide meaningful educational experiences to students so they have the required knowledge base and the effective communication, interpersonal skills, and problem-solving skills to lead successful careers. We must also provide ample opportunity for students to explore and become more informed of the many rewarding careers. Students need a challenging education and should be encouraged to develop entrepreneurial skills through experiences on campus as well as off campus as they intern with firms that are developing technologies with commercial value.

The changing demographics of our students is often perceived as being a threat to our traditional programs, but I believe that these changes can improve our traditional programs and offer new opportunities. First, the interest of both traditional and non-traditional students results in a more diverse applicant pool from which to select outstanding students. Second, it offers an increased diversity among our student population which can have positive impacts on teaching, learning, and counseling. Third, it offers employers a more diverse pool of potential employees. For example, we have seen significant changes in the demographics of students in animal science departments. An increased number of students interested in companion animals and zoo animals and fewer students knowledgeable about opportunities in animal industry have forced faculty to be more effective in their counseling and teaching and have provided employers with access to students with different talents and interests. Such trends are not unique to animal sciences.

Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences continue to evolve to address the many interdisciplinary issues facing society. As our research programs become more interdisciplinary in nature, we will need to consider how to best educate our students in such an environment. Although many of our teaching programs have been organized traditionally around single disciplines, immersing students into an interdisciplinary environment, through interdisciplinary graduate programs, undergraduate courses, special research projects, and internships, can add value to the university degree. Encouraging students to pursue internships and study abroad programs where they can interact with individuals with culturally diverse backgrounds can prepare them better for the interdisciplinary issues of the future. This should be a high priority in the College.

A strong discovery mission is critical to the success of the College. The College leadership team must work closely with the senior leadership of the University to ensure an infrastructure exists that allows researchers to lead successful extramurally-funded programs. Interdisciplinary research and efforts to integrate research, extension, and education will become increasingly important in addressing emerging issues in agriculture. The success of interdisciplinary teams is critical to our missions, but we must make sure that barriers to carry out such work are removed and that success is rewarded. Large interdisciplinary teams composed of faculty members from other colleges and other institutions will be important as we look at ways to increase sponsored research funding. Because strong interdisciplinary teams result from the collaboration of faculty members from strong single-discipline programs, it is imperative that the home departments provide an environment with the resources for faculty members to be successful. Strong departments consist of faculty members that enthusiastically support the missions of the department.

I am a strong advocate of regionalization and multi-state activities to support our land grant missions, so I have been enthusiastically providing leadership to the U.S. Pork Center of Excellence. I am also on the Governance Board of a new Midwest Dairy Consortium. Both of these organizations have been formed to help meet stakeholder need, either in cases where resources have limited the abilities of individual universities to fully meet their need, or where more effective programs can be offered to our clientele. I believe that Colleges have more opportunities to combine their talents and resources and that these partnerships can help meet greater teaching, research, and extension needs of our diverse stakeholders. Partnerships involving multiple and even international institutions can benefit students by providing them with opportunities not available at their home institution, and can allow them to be exposed to the ideas and philosophies of a diverse group of students and faculty members. Stakeholders can benefit from regionalization and multi-state collaborations by having better access to research and extension education materials. The various instructional technologies that result can also be used to reach youth programs and teachers of K-12 programs.

A College of Agriculture and Life Sciences must remain very engaged with the external stakeholders in order to stay abreast of their immediate needs, to identify emerging needs, and to garner support for various programs. This engagement can occur through a variety of mechanisms. Fostering communication between campus and county extension faculty and staff can be very helpful in assuring that gateways to the College exist around the State. A State CARET group that works closely with the Dean can be very helpful in providing legislators with the personal examples and experiences of how federal funding of agricultural research, extension, and teaching is important for the health and well-being of their constituents and the economic development in communities around the State. An active alumni association is also an effective mechanism to engage alumni and to share the vision of the College. My interaction with alumni and friends of the university has been fostered by our College development team and has proven to be very rewarding programmatically and financially to the Department and College.