

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP ABSTRACTS

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G.R.A.C.E. Under Pressure



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As we welcome faculty, staff and students back to campus and implement the first weeks of classes and activities, we do so while facing one of the greatest challenges higher education has ever seen. The COVID-19 pandemic has completely disrupted nearly every aspect of how we teach, how we serve students and how students attend college. In just five short months, we have re-examined and adjusted all that we had relied upon in our professional and personal lives. And yet, we will come together, continue adjusting, and focus on how best to ensure we take care of one another while fulfilling our College's mission and vision. As Instructional Administrators, I challenge us all to use G.R.A.C.E under pressure.

GRATITUDE

The word "gratitude" has several different meanings, depending on the context. However, a practical clinical definition is as follows—gratitude is the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to oneself; it is a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation (Sansone & Sansone, 2010). The majority of empirical studies indicate that there is an association between gratitude and a sense of overall well-being. Despite the current pandemic which has resulted for many of us in school closures, declines in enrollment, furloughs and remote working conditions we still have so much to be grateful for. Below are a few simple ways to practice gratitude:

- Keep a gratitude journal.
- Notice the beauty in nature each day.
- Smile more often.
- Watch inspiring videos that will remind you of the good in the world.
- Include an act of kindness in your life each day.
- Avoid negative media and movies with destructive content.
- Volunteer for organizations that help others.
- Write a card to someone you haven't seen in a while and tell them something nice.

Dealing with the impacts of covid-19 daily is hard work and it is very easy to get into a place of frustration and disappointment. However, when you find

yourself thinking negative thoughts, take a moment to try to see the positive side in the situation. We transitioned courses to online formats in record speeds, we learned how to provide virtual support in areas that we did not think were possible and we worked across disciplines, departments and divisions to serve students. These are just a few items that Instructional Administrators have done over the past 5 months and surely there are more to come.

RESILIENCE

According to the Stockholm Resilience Centre, Resilience is the capacity of a system, be it an individual, a forest, a city or an economy, to deal with change and continue to develop. It is about how humans and nature can use shocks and disturbances like a financial crisis or climate change to spur renewal and innovative thinking.

Now more than ever we have all demonstrated forms of resiliency. Faculty have had to learn new technology in short periods of time, Instructional Designers have had to dig into their toolboxes and provide OnDemand training and support and Academic Officers have had to make hard decisions on classes that cannot be completed online. As administrators, we have had to be nimble, pivot and adapt in ways that no one could have predicted. We have demonstrated our strength, tenacity and more importantly our re-

silience. As we all continue to live through this unprecedented situation, let's remember that extraordinary challenges require extraordinary courage, trust, and empathy. In spring 2020, we saw firsthand what we could do when faced with what seemed to be an insurmountable hill, while it was hard, we each climbed over it and learned valuable lessons along the way.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Even though much has changed, certain things should remain the same. We should all still work to provide quality instruction to students and be effective leaders for faculty and staff. Covid-19 does not give us a pass to lower our expectations of others or ourselves. While we may have to teach and lead differently, we should still advocate for effective teaching by providing clarity and support for faculty as well as procuring the necessary resources to maximize teaching effectiveness.

Do not let the current situation contribute to the devaluing of an associate degree and instead utilize the situation to highlight the great work that our faculty are doing across all modalities.

COMMUNICATION

Communicating to all constituents is critical during these times. So much is changing so fast and it is important that we all remain informed.

We are hearing from many students and faculty that it has become impossible to hold classes at regularly scheduled times. Many faculty and students have new responsibilities, as a result of the closure of the K-12 school system, for example, that require them to work or learn at different times than they were able to commit to even as recently as a week ago. Remember that anyone

of us may be facing enormous logistical, physical, and emotional hurdles. Please try to always assume that everyone is doing the best they can under the circumstances. Together we can try to minimize the impact of this disruption on our own lives and on our families and communities.

EQUITY

We cannot let the current pandemic, minimize the inequities that are present in higher education. In fact, Covid-19 has illuminated them even more. So many of our current and future students and families are facing financial hardship. Colleges are extended deadlines, adjusting testing requirements and waving fees for students facing financial difficulties. In addition, we are providing access to technology, food and social services at rates unseen before.

I urge you to be an advocate for your students as many of them will not be able to complete their credential without your support.

Overall, one lesson from the current pandemic is that plans must stay flexible to adapt to global, national and regional changes. While many of us have plans for how we envision the fall experience at this time, we must understand that there may be a need for us to pivot our plan to maintain community health and preserve academic continuity while practicing G.R.A.C.E. under pressure.

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