

Presenters: Lead: Rachael Schmedlen, PhD, University of Michigan; Michele Grimm, PhD, University at Albany; Renata Ramos, PhD, Rice University

Topic: Entering Leadership Roles in BME Education

Panel Discussion:

- 1) What is your current title and role at your institution?
 - a. Michele Grimm – Dean of College of Nanotechnology and Science and Engineering at University of Albany
 - b. Renata Ramos – Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in School of Engineering at Rice University
 - c. Rachael Schmedlen – Split Appointment: Director of Academic Programs in College of Engineering (administrative appointment) and Teaching Professor in Department of Biomedical Engineering, University of Ann Arbor Michigan
- 2) What was your position just prior to that role?
 - a. Michele Grimm – creative engineering and endowed professor at Michigan State
 - b. Renata Ramos – Associate/Full Teaching Professor, Director of Undergraduate Studies in Bioengineering
 - c. Rachael Schmedlen – Teaching Professor and Associate Chair for Undergraduate Education in Biomedical Engineering Department
- 3) What experiences did you find to be most important to get to where you are today?
 - a. Michele Grimm – teaching professor routes didn't exist when I started, so most important thing was to take advantage of administrative work when they came up. I started it before I started my tenure track line.
 - b. Renata Ramos – different path, but took advantage of opportunities, network a lot internally and externally. Engage with a lot of service opportunities and committees on campus. It helped grow my network and opportunities to jump into positions and gave me a good network of people that I can call and ask for advice at any point within my institution. Having an external network to get advice was key. Early on, I got used to developing process and structures, such as project management activities, which helped create initiatives and start initiatives.
 - c. Rachael Schmedlen – I was coming on when there started to be teaching professor types of positions. I got my PhD from Rice, but they didn't have postings, so I sent out teaching philosophy and CV packets to institutions. I came to Michigan when the curriculum wasn't completely established, which helped me get involved in curriculum development. Also, being involved in committees to be able to work on initiatives and develop processes. Working on ABET helped, as it gave me good experiences and allowed me to leverage things like processes needed to do ABET. Since I knew so much about the curriculum, it helped me become Associate Chair, and then a college level position opened up that I applied for.
- 4) Leora Goldbloom-Helzner – I'm curious about networking as I'm finishing my PhD and looking to explore ways to network as an aspiring teaching professor, how did you go about doing the networking?
 - a. Michele – ASEE all the way! When I got involved it was a long time ago, and if you raised your hand you were serving on the board. It has people at all levels of their careers, ABET, and can help writing letters for you for promotions and awards
 - b. Renata – try to get involved within UC Davis, there's a center for teaching excellence, and there are faculty there familiar with ASEE and BED, and try to build relationships with them. It will be easier for faculty to call those already at your university to learn more about you.
 - c. Rachael – ASEE is fantastic as it energizes me with new ideas, and it right after the academic year and lets me spark ideas for the year ahead. It's a great therapy as they know what you're going through. If you have a center for teaching research at your institution, reach out to them. Don't be afraid to cold call even if they aren't looking. If you have colleagues or contacts at your institution as well as at ASEE BED, everyone is willing to help and get excited.

- d. Michele – there are times where teaching positions get funded really late and having your foot in the door as a visiting professor is very helpful for when these come up quickly
- 5) Neil Rothman – When you moved into your current position, what did you do to help whoever moved into your previous position or took over those responsibilities?
- Michele – as I went up, I provided an external harddrive with all relevant files. I met with whoever was taking on that role, and I was always there still as a point of contact for continuing communication.
 - Renata – most positions have been within same institution, so I'm still there, so it's easier to have a quick call with them. Handing out documents, software, or specific systems you use and share ownership to allow them to continue what you were doing.
 - Rachael – was on ASEE BED executive board and had documents for officer transitioning, and that sparked my role by documenting at my own institution and sharing them with the next associate chair. ABET was a big responsibility, so I reached out while I was still in the role to train the next person. Identifying folks that would be a good fit and coach them into the role helped give back to the mentorship.
 - Renata – I never really thought about in the faculty position, BED and their ability to have transition docs, so when I came in everyone was ready to retire. So it took me a few months in the position to create records of everything they did. I've been very aware of documenting everyone
 - Michele – if you want people to use the files after you leave, make sure your sharing settings are on correctly!
- 6) Sabia Abidi – What's been the hardest lesson you've had to learn in your new position?
- Michele – navigating campus and learning where and who everyone is. Figuring out how the system works when you go somewhere new. Sometimes you get a grace period to suggest or ask something that you don't know, but systems at each institution is very different.
 - Renata – being able to prioritize was important and learning what to say yes and no to. A hard lesson on how to prioritize what is worth fighting for. We all work in a system with a lot of exceptions, and I was used to the “why can't I” to get around the structure, and coming into an administrative position, I tried to fix and fight everything. It took a while to learn what is worth the effort and bandwidth, where can I invest time and be able to prioritize what will be fixed first. You can't make everything better all the time, and you need to select which fights are worth fighting for and which to put on the back burner later.
 - Rachael – when you go on the other side of administration, you are in a position to make decisions but you know why there is a need for the structure and what the constraints are. You want to balance the diplomacy of academic freedom and transparency of the structure and constraints we need to work under.
- 7) Tanya Nocera
- Michele – co-teach freshman zero credit “hey you want to be an engineering student” 8-week. There's no Department of Biomedical Engineering or Mechanical Engineering at U Albany, so there are no classes I could teach. With the new MAE program we're putting together I will be creating a new course on Design for Society and will be flipping it. But I will only be teaching 1 course per year, and rest of time on administration. Being able to decide exactly what I want to teach is very nice.
 - Renata – I teach 3 courses, one is an internship course (administration email and talking to faculty/industry advisors), intro to engineering (a lot of advising), and intro to bioengineering course (conservation principles, all PBL, heavy workload with significant advising as first core course) and all is taught in fall. Fall is crazy and has ABET visit and after fall I don't want to teach it anymore, but by spring, I miss it. I like administrative side because I have a bigger impact, but I miss and love being in touch with students. One of the hardest things is that you love doing that thing and when you move up you have to stop what you were doing before that you loved
 - Rachael – I enjoy my split. Now I'm half in BME, my teaching load went down (2 courses per semester to 1 course per semester) and I teach the yearlong capstone design course. I love the balance because I

enjoy interacting with the students. In administration, you work more for the faculty and staff. A lot of administrative positions don't require that you do any of the teaching, but if you don't do it, you're not in their shoes and don't understand the less of their side since you're on the ground and see the consequences of the students and faculty.

8) David O'Neill - Did you have any ability to define the position as it was created and/or how have you managed to shape the role since?

- a. Michele – in general no, I didn't get to define the role as Dean as you're told the role and responsibilities. But I approach it very differently from my predecessor, which has generated happiness on campus. Do what you think is important in the position you are in, and you can do this in any position you are in. Define what your priorities are even if it has a defined role for it.
- b. Renata – I was able to shape my position. The dean's office and the person that was in the prior position was there for decades and there was paper trails with everything that started. I was to look only at curriculum and students. In the times I've been in this position, I've gone through 3 deans, and each one came with a different mission and priorities and goals in regards to education. That allowed me to grow what I'm working on as they always came to me to help grow their missions. I was able to prioritize things I care about, such as teaching faculty and non-tenure track faculty. So I started creating mentoring, networking, evaluation, and reappointments in regards to non-tenure track faculty.
- c. Rachael – it's similar to taking over a new course, you have learning outcomes or things you need to teach and are established, but you can emphasize or try new things within that. When I was in BME department, I was first teaching faculty that took that role. I had lots of ideas about teaching and wanted to revamp the curriculum despite it being 20 years old. In my role now, I have a lot of oversight but I don't have a lot of power to hold people accountable. I am able to work with the associate dean to create a cohesive vision about what structures can better support our first year students. You have defined roles within current position, but you have flexibility to decide what impact you want to have and initiatives you want to go after.
- d. "oversight but no power for accountability"

9) How do you say no to the right things?

- a. Michele – be able to stick to your guns. I wasn't doing things to the level I wanted to do it in. I sat with my dean and told him I wasn't doing well enough and asked for something to be reduced. If you get that, stick to your guns and explain why you need to redistribute and what you can do if you are able to do that.
- b. Renata – those who are asking you to do stuff, they are usually people who do a lot of service and have been overwhelmed and in your shoes. If you explain that if you explain what you are working on and that you cannot put your time in it, they are typically okay with it. Other colleagues also say it's hard to say no in person, so you can ask them to email you about it later, and then you have time to think about it and explain no if you aren't able to do it.
- c. Rachael – I have a unique position with a split appointment with two bosses (Associate Dean and Chair of BME). I noticed in BME they wanted me to work on more things, and I have been middle man doing negotiations to explain that I have time doing other things at the other appointment. I am trying to identify faculty in the department that can do the legwork and I can guide.

10) Tanya – Do you have staff support in your admin roles?

- a. Michele – we have roles that are funded that we can hire for but we can't find people for because they work through the state system and are unionized. So right now I don't have support/admin staff. The person I want in this role, I need to wait for her to be promoted before becoming admin. My prior role as a dean I had an admin staff who was already there and new the system. It's hard having admin position to learn how to delegate, and if you butt heads, you need to figure out how to shift them sideways to a new supervisor or other role. Be open to talk about the conflict
- b. Renata – I have staff support, but it wasn't what I expected. They ended up retiring. Staff support is amazing but you're the person that helps them develop and find leadership positions or activities they

want to do and conflict resolution comes up to you. Having staff takes a lot of time and you need to manage up a bit. And investing time in them takes time. To help with the programming and roles, there's an admin assistant that helps me with my scheduling. I have to learn to be respectful of her working hours. The person is very good at what she does, but she has a lot of responsibilities for others in the office and I need to do things myself to respect her time and support their professional development.

- c. Rachael – there are a few staff that I inherited and one hire by committee. They are shared, and it takes time to cultivate that relationship and build that trust and report.
- d. Michele – if for example, was setting up an event, I was still there on the ground setting up and doing it with them. Making them aware that you view them as an integral part of the team and willing to do what you are asking them to do.
- e. Renata – being there is helpful and recognizing that your schedule will shift to be less flexible in an administrative position

11) What would you realistically like it to be in regards to bandwidth and prioritization? Tasks/projects occur on different timescales (fighting fires, month/semester long projects, and > 1 year even horizons). What is your balance between these?

- a. Michele – You have to be able to bounce between problems, fires, and things on the horizons to be able to make progress. You will always have fires, but you have to bounce back to the task you want to work on.
- b. Renata – my staff is better at keeping track of their time so I give them the main goals while I go put out fires. My what I need to do today vs next week vs next month. So I am able to put a few projects in intermittently. By giving my staff and task force projects that we need to get done as a team helps, as I normally put out the fires.
- c. Rachael – the staff have a regular schedule, and I meet them regularly. So when I meet with them, there's always some progress being made. So when fires come up, they still make sure that the main projects are still being discussed on the agenda

12) Opinions on roles at new institutions and moving institutions?

- a. Michele – I never thought I would move institutions, but I hit some roadblocks at Wayne State and went to NSF. In my second year, Wayne suggested I stay at NSF. So I took my position at Michigan State, and then had urban diverse institution for 20 years, but can say they got their dean from a big 10 institution. The new one is close to my daughter, which is a perfect opportunity. You need to evaluate how things are going, but you are going in with new opportunities. If your career is stalling, sometimes moving turns out to be the best
- b. Renata – one point in my career when I thought about moving, and that's when using my network really helped to determine next steps. When I felt trapped and didn't know where to go, networking helped. Moving teaching professors to leadership positions is new. If you are in a place where you won't get the opportunities where you are you can start looking out
- c. Rachael – when I wanted to go teaching professor path, I knew it would be challenging since there aren't many. When you go up next latter to administration, you are still challenged to show that you can go up since this is also new. It's a work in progress.