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Rethinking Preparation Program Leadership in Improvement-Oriented Contexts: Identifying New Work Demands, University Responses, and Persistent Challenges

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Abstract

Although there is considerable interest in promoting exemplary leadership preparation throughout the field of educational leadership, and particularly by UCEA, not much has been written about how leadership preparation programs are administered or led if such improvements are to be realized. Beyond a few notable exceptions (e.g., Hackmann & Wanat, 2008, 2016), there has been scant at- Shelby Cosner University of Illinois at Chicago Joanne Marshall Iowa State University 30 • UCEA Review • Fall 2016 www.ucea.org tention to what the leadership of preparation programs, a position often titled as program coordinator, entails. This is particularly true regarding preparation program leaders who are committed to the kinds of program change and improvement work necessary to produce an exemplary preparation program. Much of what we currently know comes from descriptive accountings of program improvement work that provide opaque images of this leadership (e.g., Cosner, Tozer, & Smylie, 2012; Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen; Jean-Marie, Adams, & Garn, 2010; Kochan & Reames, 2015; Merchant & Garza, 2015).

Disciplines

Educational Leadership | Higher Education | Higher Education Administration

Point/Counterpoint

Perspectives on Program Coordination in Educational Leadership Programs

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How many times have we heard someone say, "There are only so many hours in the day," and "Time is money?" There is much truth to this statement. When I was a doctoral student, I took a course on the economic evaluation of educational programs. It was an invaluable course that would later inform research projects that I have taken on as a university professor, including estimating resource costs of school levy campaigns and cost-effectiveness analysis of reading. Among other things, I learned the importance of looking beyond a school, district, or program budget. Budgets can serve as a great starting point, but a budget alone is inadequate in estimating the total costs (Levin & McEwan, 2001; Rice & Brent 2002). For one thing, it is difficult to determine the particular budgetary or expenditure items specifically related to a program or activity because budgets are typically reported on a line-item basis and do not reflect programmatic spending. The example that I have always provided to students is a photocopier in a school, district, or university. It may appear as a line item under "Equipment" on a school or district's budget, but the extent to which the annual cost of the machine is used for a specific purpose or program is unclear, unless the machine is set up to track photocopies for specific purposes or program. More importantly, budgets do not adequately reflect opportunity costs—those incurred when using resources for one particular purpose and not another.

So why all this talk about budgets and estimating costs when we are discussing the work of program coordination in educational leadership programs? Faculty members, regardless of their tenure status, stage of their career, or even whether they are serving as program coordinators, make decisions every day as to how they are going to use their time—and yes, time is indeed money. Time spent on program coordination is time not spent on research activities (i.e., grant-writing, empirical analysis) or instruction. Our time spent on research is time not spent on instructional preparation. You get the point. Faculty members are paid to undertake research, instruction, and service activities in support of their various degree programs and departments. Program coordination is, more often than not, lumped in with service, and there is wide variation among institutions as to how such service is incentivized (or not). The time we spend on one activity is at the expense of another—and this can include the time we spend at home with our families and friends.

Our contributing scholars are noted experts in their fields, and I thank them for responding to my invitation to contribute to this Point/Counterpoint.

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Education, Educational Management Administration & Leadership, the Journal of Research on Leadership Education, and Planning & Changing. Cosner has served as the Associate Program Coordinator and Academic Program Director for the University of Illinois at Chicago Doctorate in Urban Educational Leadership. In these roles she co-led program redesign and implementation over a multiyear timeframe. This program has received major national awards and recognitions for its program quality, including UCEA's 2013 award as an Exemplary Leadership Preparation Program (one of two programs nationally to receive this designation) and the 2012 Urban Impact Award from the Council of Great City Schools

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In this Point/Counterpoint, our two contributors discuss what program coordinator work entails and what it means to coordinate educational leadership programs at research universities such as those represented in UCEA. If educational leadership programs are attempting to become exemplary programs, how does this coordination work vary from that associated with noncertification coordination and department coordination? They go on to contrast this work and its related challenges through the lens of their respective institutions.

Rethinking Preparation Program Leadership in Improvement-Oriented Contexts: Identifying New Work Demands, University Responses, and Persistent Challenges

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Although there is considerable interest in promoting exemplary leadership preparation throughout the field of educational leadership, and particularly by UCEA, not much has been written about *how* leadership preparation programs are administered or led if such improvements are to be realized. Beyond a few notable exceptions (e.g., Hackmann & Wanat, 2008, 2016), there has been scant at-

tention to what the leadership of preparation programs, a position often titled as program coordinator, entails. This is particularly true regarding preparation program leaders who are committed to the kinds of program change and improvement work necessary to produce an exemplary preparation program. Much of what we currently know comes from descriptive accountings of program improvement work that provide opaque images of this leadership (e.g., Cosner, Tozer, & Smylie, 2012; Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen; Jean-Marie, Adams, & Garn, 2010; Kochan & Reames, 2015; Merchant & Garza, 2015).

We need more thorough accountings of the work of preparation program coordinators in improvement-oriented contexts, not only for those individuals interested in or currently occupying these roles, but also for the leadership of schools and colleges of education whose policies and actions can either support or dramatically impede this work. Gmelch and Burns (1993) wrote, "The university department chair represents one of the most complex, elusive, and intriguing positions" (p. 259). We argue that the same, *and more*, could be said about the coordination role for principal and other educational leadership preparation programs in general, but especially for the coordination of programs that are attempting ongoing improvement. This "and more" is generated from myriad distinctions between the work or working conditions of department chairs and preparation program coordinators in general, which are even further contrasted for those who coordinate improvement-oriented programs. Our perspective is that schools and colleges of education do not sufficiently understand these contrasts and consequentially enact policies and practices (Cosner et al., 2015; Crow, Arnold, Reed, & Shoho, 2012) that could discourage individuals from accepting program coordinator roles and from adopting an improvement-oriented leadership stance.

Recognizing this information need, we, along with several of our colleagues, held a conversational session at the 2015 UCEA Annual Convention for those leading or coordinating preparation programs. We used this session to begin a process of learning about preparation program leadership and coordination in general, as well as what such leadership entails in the face of a strong programmatic commitment to improvement. Near the end of this article, we return to this topic and discuss how we envision advancing and expanding these discussions at the upcoming 2016 UCEA convention. We hope that those providing preparation program leadership will look for and join this session. In the remainder of this somewhat nontraditional Point/Counterpoint, we begin to shed light on what program leadership entails as programs work to improve through redesign and as they face challenges that are somewhat unique to preparation program leadership. In doing so, we very modestly build on literature that identifies some of the complex challenges that must be navigated in the work of program improvement (Crow et al., 2012) by drawing attention to the work and challenges associated with program change and improvement from the perspective of the program coordinators.

To accomplish this task, we first identified program elements associated with exemplary leadership preparation, which reveal unique domains of leadership work that are likely to emerge for leaders of preparation programs committed to improvement. In the absence of empirical studies on the work of those leading preparation program improvement, we mined the existing literature for descriptions of such work in contexts of program improvement. Following these descriptions of streams of work that

are likely unique to those leading improvement-oriented programs, we offer examples of two approaches used to meet these new work demands, and we identify challenges to improvement-oriented program leadership from the perspective of our two research universities.

Considering Program Coordination for Program Improvement

In the last decade there has been an emerging understanding of the key elements of exemplary principal preparation (e.g., Crow & Whiteman, 2016; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Orr & Orphanos, 2011). These elements in turn provide guidance for and shape the work of those preparation program coordinators who are leading programs through processes of change and improvement. In addition to the typical work that is associated with program coordination (Hackmann & Wanat, 2016), new streams of work and new work demands are likely to emerge in settings committed to program improvement. However, even before leadership for program improvement is provided, principal preparation program coordinators are likely to face an array of work demands that are atypical for many other programs in higher education, largely resulting from external interface demands. Such interface is, for example, necessitated with state departments or boards of education from expectations related to program approval and reapproval processes and for issues related to the granting of principal licensure to program completers (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015; Hackmann & Wanat, 2008, 2016). Numerous other external connections are necessary to secure and enact internship experiences as a facet of the preparation experience (Hackmann & Wanat, 2008, 2016).

Beyond the additional areas of work unique to this role, other areas of work arise from program improvement. Based on our review of literature (e.g., Crow & Whiteman, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Orr & Orphanos, 2011) about exemplary principal preparation program elements, we highlight six areas of work for brief discussion under the purview of program coordinators: (a) cultivating and maintaining university–school district partnerships; (b) redesigning and enacting rigorous recruitment and selection processes; (c) redesigning and enacting robust programs including a program logic model, curriculum, instruction, and assessments; (d) redesigning and enacting quality internships; (e) developing and utilizing data systems and improvement processes that will inform program redesign and ongoing improvement; and (f) seeking and managing external funding to support improvement work.

District partnerships. Cultivation of district partnerships has been identified as a critical element of robust forms of preparation (Hitt, Tucker, & Young, 2012; Orr & Barber, 2006), and there is evidence that such partnerships are beginning to be mandated by policy in some states (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). Such partnerships create expectations for deeper liaison work by program coordinators with school districts, which can see dramatic leadership changes from year to year (Merchant & Garza, 2015). This work is likely to involve sustained attention to relationship building, negotiation and development of formal written partnership agreements, and an extensive commitment of time for regular meetings with multiple individuals within an individual school district or across multiple districts (Browne-Ferrigno, 2011; Myran,

Crum, & Clayton, 2010). A thorough accounting of the key areas of work can be extracted from the Partnership Effectiveness Continuum developed by the Education Development Center (King, 2014).

Redesigning and enacting rigorous recruitment and selection processes. Redesigning and enacting more rigorous recruitment and selection processes have been associated with exemplary preparation programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Young, 2015). Such work engages program coordinators in collaboration with various school district personnel as well as with ongoing communication to program graduates for the support of more targeted recruitment efforts and to secure district personnel for participation with selection processes (Hitt et al., 2012; Kochan & Reames, 2013; Merchant & Garza, 2015; Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, & MacFarlane, 2013). The creation and calibration of new candidate selection tools and processes, the design and enactment of training for individuals who participate in candidate selection, and the oversight of labor-intensive selection processes that involve in-person performance-oriented interviews require considerable time, coordination, and oversight demands (Gates, 2014; Hitt et al., 2012; Walker, 2016).

Redesigning and enacting robust programs. Exemplary preparation programs have been found to pay careful attention to the redesign of program curriculum (scope, sequence, courses) to align with leadership standards and an overall program logic model as well as with the utilization of instructional designs that emphasize active learning and stronger theory to practice connections (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Jacobson, McCarthy, & Pounder, 2015; Orr & Orphanos, 2011). New course and program-level assessments that are aligned with leadership standards and place greater emphasis on application and performance are also likely to be created (Hitt et al., 2012; Jacobson et al., 2015). Such work likely will engage many, if not all, of the program faculty and require levels of faculty collaboration atypical within most university programs. Thus, cultivating a culture of faculty collaboration and creating and enacting new faculty collaborative work routines are likely to be critical areas of leadership attention (Cosner et al., 2015). Such collaboration will, for example, allow faculty to collectively examine and make meaning of relevant literature, designing courses that allow greater understanding and key leadership practices to be cultivated over a series of courses (Cosner et al., 2015; Trujillo & Cooper, 2014).

Redesigning and enacting quality internships. Literature points to the importance of quality internships (e.g., Orr & Orphanos, 2011; Orr & Pounder, 2011), and there is growing evidence that state policies have set higher expectations for the nature and quality of these experiences (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). Enacting such experiences is likely to create a range of new work demands for those leading preparation programs. This may, for example, require additional and substantive collaboration with district personnel to gain support for new internship designs so that aspirants have greater access to clinically rich experiences. It is also likely to motivate oversight for the development of planned standards-aligned internship embedded assessments and work tasks as well as the creation of tools and routines to systematize and improve the quality of principal mentoring, supervision, and coaching as facets of importance to the internship experience (Cosner et al., 2015; Hitt et al., 2012).

Developing and utilizing data systems and improvement processes. Programs strongly committed to improvement will find it productive to develop and utilize data systems and processes of improvement (Carver & Klein, 2013; Cosner et al., 2012) to inform ongoing improvement work. Cultivating faculty expertise with work routines for using student work tasks and assessment to locate student and instructional problems is an example of an area likely to necessitate attention (Carver & Klein, 2013; Cosner et al., 2012). Designing and enacting data collection plans to find program problems or weakness and engaging faculty in this ongoing problem-finding work is an important area of leadership attention if areas of improvement are to be wisely selected (Cosner et al., 2012). Program leaders also may be faced with a need to oversee the selection of vendors who can design data storages systems as well as the design, population, and use of such systems (Cosner et al., 2012, 2015).

Seeking and gaining external program improvement funding. By scanning the accounts of program redesign efforts, there is ample evidence to suggest that seeking and gaining funding is likely to be a facet of the leadership work necessary if meaningful improvement work is to be enacted and sustained (e.g., Cosner et al., 2012; Danzig & Kiltz, 2014; Woodrum, Border, Bower, Olguin, & Paul, 2014). In particular, external funding provides resources that are largely absent for the kinds of deep and broad levels of faculty participation that will be critical for advancing meaningful program improvement work. Taking decisive actions to increase external program visibility, actively cultivating relationships with the local funding community, tracking local and national funding opportunities, crafting applications, and managing grants awards are streams of work that are important to note.

In sum, this very brief review suggests that the work of leaders in improvement-oriented preparation programs is likely to be considerably different than and more expansive in comparison to the leadership work associated with many other education programs or departments. Continuing to deepen our understanding of this work will be an important area for ongoing exploration.

Institutional Approaches and Persistent Challenges

Our two campuses—and we suspect, yours—could serve as case studies for how preparation program leadership in improvement-oriented contexts is actually being provided. In the section that follows we provide two brief narratives to share approaches that are being used within our respective programs in an attempt to meet the leadership needs that we detailed above. The approaches reveal several notable contrasts that are motivated by context. We also point to key challenges that we are experiencing in each of our settings.

Rethinking program coordination at Iowa State University (ISU). Traditionally at ISU, the program coordinator role is held by one individual, typically a tenured faculty member (if one is available) who receives one course release for this assignment in a manner consistent with other program coordinators throughout the college. The full range of work that Hackmann and Wanat (2008, 2016) detailed has historically been enacted by this individual. However, this work began to expand notably since 2013 when I (Joanne) assumed the coordination role just as a mandated state accreditation process began. Given the volume of work as-

sociated with this process, which necessitated biweekly liaising with our state department of education and considerable documenting, our university offered temporary support for me with two course releases, a summer stipend, and a graduate student. During this time, resources were also allocated for an assessment coordinator, an assessment staff member, and a new data-management system. In the fall of 2014, our program received approval through the accreditation process, which signaled to our college that all of the additional supports—including the additional course releases, stipend, and graduate assistant—would no longer be necessary until our next cycle of program review.

However, the review process had identified areas for program improvement, which further stoked our collective interests in long-term and sustained program-improvement work. At the present with a slightly larger faculty team, including three untenured faculty and two and a half clinical faculty, we are beginning to undertake this work. Thus in my coordinator role, I am also beginning to lead work across a number of the areas identified above: (a) redesigning and enacting rigorous selection processes; (b) redesigning program logic, pedagogy, and candidate assessment; (c) redesigning and enacting quality internships; and (d) developing and utilizing data systems and improvement processes that will inform program redesign.

Although this work will require organization, collaboration, and follow-through, we believe that joint leadership of this work—the kind that we work to foster in our own students as leaders and is identified for its utility for preparation program leadership (Hackmann & Wanat, 2008)—also will be critical for this work to be advanced. However, such leadership is especially challenging to enact in our current context, where we have seen the reduction of resources to support program leadership, and given that remaining tenure-line faculty are untenured. One the one hand, members of our program regard this improvement work as important. However, in our research-intensive context, this work is not the institution's priority—as evidenced in this reduction in the financial support of program leadership but also in an evaluation system that does not yet sufficiently recognize or value the expanded leadership work associated with improvement-oriented program leadership. Thus there is real tension between the good of the program and the good of the individuals in it, including the program coordinator.

Rethinking program coordination at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Over the last decade, UIC has taken several key actions that have generated the levels of program leadership essential for our sustained program-improvement work (detailed in Cosner et al., 2012, 2015)—work that has generated continued work demands in each of the areas identified above. As suggested in the literature (Hackmann & Wanat, 2008), UIC's program leadership has been increasingly distributed across a range of individuals, including both tenured and clinical. At the program's inception in 2003, two individuals provided leadership for the program, one tenured and one clinical. Shortly thereafter, this leadership was expanded to include me (Shelby) a tenure-line junior faculty member.

Over the years, as the improvement work has been expanded in breadth and depth, leadership has concurrently expanded to include tenured/tenure-line and clinical faculty, as well as individuals hired through external funding. At present, five individuals provide leadership for various aspects of the program (including all of the more traditional leadership responsibilities noted in the literature; Hackmann & Wanat, 2008) as well as the range of new work demands that are documented above. This leadership is provided by two tenured faculty members, two clinical faculty members, and one individual in an administrative role, hired by and housed in the Center for Urban Education Leadership. Of importance, this center was established in part to support the program and currently operates from a combination of university and external funding. Within the last several years, ad hoc leadership also has been tapped as particular improvement projects arise. For example, another member of the center staff, employed through external funding, played a key leadership role in relation to our recent work to improve our candidate selection process (Walker, 2016).

Even with a widely distributed approach to leadership that currently engages both tenured and clinical faculty as well as individuals who are externally funded, UIC's context is not without its challenges, which share some similarities with ISU and are likely to be fairly commonplace in research-intensive institutions. For example, dramatic disparities remain in the time and resource allocations provided to individuals performing leadership responsibilities at UIC. Although department chairs, regardless of department size, receive two course releases and a sizeable additional salary for their leadership work, there are no formal provisions for course releases or additional compensation for individuals who assume various program leadership responsibilities. Moreover, even though there has been considerable press for new faculty evaluation and reward systems that place value on program improvement and the leadership of this work (Crow & Whiteman, 2016), such revisioning has yet to happen at UIC. If these issues are not addressed, they are eventually likely to present real challenges to sustaining the long-standing improvement orientation that has been the bedrock of our program.

Looking Forward

ISU and UIC provide examples of the approaches and challenges associated with improvement-oriented program leadership. Adding to the work of Crow et al. (2012), these brief descriptions provide granular accounting of the ways in which the prioritization and allocation of institutional resources and the design of evaluation and rewards systems can complicate efforts at providing leadership for improvement-oriented programs. We believe that addressing these sorts of challenges will be critical if sufficient levels of program leadership are to be marshaled in preparation programs throughout the United States. Generating more and better information about the work of program leaders in improvement contexts is something that will be necessary. With this in mind, we invite participants at the 2016 UCEA Annual Convention to join us for another conversational session[1] where we expect to pilot a survey about the work of program leaders. Our goal is to generate new knowledge that can be drawn on by the field but particularly by UCEA in its ongoing work to promote program improvement and redesign throughout the United States.

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[1]UCEA 2016 Convention Session 147. *Continuing the Cross-Institutional Conversation about the Program Coordinator Role: Piloting a Survey.* Critical Conversation with Joanne M. Marshall, ISU; Donald G. Hackmann, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; Kyle Ingle, University of Louisville; Shelby A. Cosner, UIC. Friday, Nov. 18, 2:50-4:00 pm, Detroit Marriott at the Renaissance Center.

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