

# CREATING SOMETHING NEW

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## *A Leader's Perspective*

It is not individuals who determine curriculum or the institutional structure, it is the faculty and administrators as a whole community. When reforms are one-person projects, change is not sustainable.

Here is a central tenet of what constitutes real leadership: getting people to collaborate. Faculty and administrative leaders need to think collectively about linkages between the mission and the practices of the institution. They may be doing this in a time of budgetary crisis, and/or a time of decreasing public support for what we do. For reforms to succeed and be sustained, leaders have to figure out how to build an environment in which faculty are rewarded for working on problems that are educationally significant and of highest concern to the institutions.

Leadership to accomplish this at the local level requires a deep sense and knowledge of the external environment, of current issues in higher education, of disciplinary and faculty culture. It requires the capacity to connect, to make complex linkages between different spheres of action, at many levels in an institution. It requires the ability

to communicate across institutions, disciplinary and departmental borders, to speak the language of others in the community.

The challenge to leaders is to build an environment in which ideas can flourish, where risk-taking and the possibility of failure are acceptable, where the structure has the flexibility to accommodate new ideas, and provides regular opportunities for collective action. The challenge to leaders is to capitalize on the diverse strengths that different members of the community bring to the reform effort, understanding how senior and junior faculty each bring a particular perspective to the work of translating ideas into action. The challenge to leaders is to develop a culture that supports the free flow of ideas and the collective efforts of the community.

Our concern as administrators is a special one. We have the role of building communities of people on and off campus committed to improving undergraduate science and mathematics learning. These communities usually gather to work on a particular problem and try to bring about change through a novel idea. On a college campus most members of this community become engaged in reform efforts because of their commitment to the institution and to the students.

The object of the community's work in this process, individually and collectively, is to create a favorable climate for change, so that each step in the process is seen as inevitable—a logical next step to achieve institutional goals. An added benefit of an ongoing communication plan is the capturing of good ideas from unexpected quarters of the community about reforms in science, as well as the planting of seeds campus-wide about the value of hands-on, collaborative teaching and learning. Communities do not happen spontaneously. They are built intentionally and nurtured by leaders who understand how to give power and authority to the members of the community. The challenge ever present is to balance the diversity within the community with the vision that brings together people of good faith to create something new.