

# **First-year experiences of associate deans: a qualitative, multi-institutional study**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the first-year experiences of new associate deans at doctoral granting, Research I universities. Participants were 24 associate deans from various disciplines at three different universities who had been in their positions for five years or less. Findings show that the transition into the associate dean position is stressful and difficult, and that the first year involves a great deal of on-the-job skill acquisition, learning to navigate the broader organizational environment, dealing with significant changes in the nature of their interactions with colleagues from their previous departments along with a great sense of loneliness and isolation, and a need to establish new peer groups. However, nearly all report high job satisfaction and a desire to remain in administration. Future study is necessary to examine how these early experiences shape decisions to move into higher-level positions in higher education administration.

Keywords: Associate Deans, Higher Education, Administration, Research Universities, Leadership



## INTRODUCTION

Academic administrators typically begin their careers as faculty members within their respective academic disciplines before they eventually move into higher-level administrative positions (Buller, 2007). Administrators are thus likely to be trained as researchers and teachers rather than as professional administrators. The selection of college and university presidents has been the focus of several studies, some of which examine such factors as disciplinary backgrounds and job performance (i.e., Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001; Wessel & Kein, 1994; Del Favero, 2005, 2006a, 2006b). Other studies examine how deans adapt to changes in higher education (i.e., Sarros, Gmelch, & Tanewski, 1998) and to the difficulties and challenges involved in performing the various activities associated with dean-level positions (i.e., Gmelch, M. Wolverton, M.L. Wolverton, & Sorros, 1999; Montez, M. Wolverton, & Gmelch, 2003, M. Wolverton, M.L. Wolverton, & Gmelch, 1999). However, there is little research on how associate deans are selected or the processes by which a faculty member makes the initial transition into a higher-level administrative role from a faculty or department chair position.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of new associate deans at major research universities. Administrative positions typically entail a significant shift in job duties and expectations from activities centered largely upon research, teaching and service within an academic discipline to one that involves responsibilities such as personnel management, strategic planning, policy formation, budgeting, fundraising, curricular issues, and facilities management. The particular level of focus for this study is that of associate dean positions, both of which will be referred to as “associate dean(s)” for this study. This level of administration in higher education is important because this is the level at which there is a significant shift in both job function and identity from one of alignment and involvement with one’s academic field and department to that of an administrative level that oversees academic departments that may or may not be closely aligned with one another. This level of administration is also typically responsible for many of the broader administrative duties mentioned above, as well as for increased interaction with other units outside of one’s college or department. Applegate and York (1989) state that the role of the associate dean expanded into these broader administrative areas as a result of the transition of the dean into the role of a chief executive officer. This study explores the experiences of associate deans in the first year in the position.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The higher education literature contains an abundance of research about high-level administrators, particularly university presidents and academic deans. At the lower administrative levels, there is also a great deal of research concerning academic department heads. However, much less attention has been given to the positions of associate or assistant deans, which typically are directly above department chairs and directly below academic deans. In 2003, Jackson and Gmelch published a study in which they outlined existing research, finding only eleven research articles specifically addressing the role of associate deans. Of these, the bulk of the literature consisted of anecdotal representations of the associate dean position. Several others were not related to associate deans per se, but associate deans provided information as part of the study for the particular articles. Kile & Jackson (2009), for example, published a meta-analysis of the empirical research of administration in higher education, finding that studies related to “personal outcomes” were the second most prevalent category, after

institutional outcomes. The authors find that the studies tended to focus on administrators' daily activities, career development, stress, and role conflicts that they may experience in trying to balance faculty and administrative duties.

What are the roles of associate deans in higher education administration? As mentioned above, Applegate and Book (1989) suggest that the associate dean level arose when the role of the academic dean transformed from an academic role to that of chief executive officer. Thus they fill a gap in overall management responsibilities that were once conducted by deans. Ayers and Doak (1986) find that in the field of education, associate dean positions started to grow as the number of students expanded during the 1960s, continued to increase with the growth of the number of graduate students in the 1970s, and took on a greater role with higher education's increased emphasis on accountability and assessment during the 1980s. Ayers and Doak (1986) also found that associate dean positions were created that had responsibilities in one or more of the three focal points of higher education (teaching, research, and service) and were more responsible for management activities rather than overall leadership. There is much evidence to support the expanding role of academic deans (Del Favero, 2006a; Montez, Wolverton, & Gmelch, 2003; Wolverton, et al., 1999) and thus, by extension, the role of the associate dean. Jackson & Gmelch (2003) and Wolverton & Gmelch (2002) discuss the role of the associate dean position in relationship to that of the academic dean. They state that during the past few decades, deans' roles have expanded, and continue to expand, into both external and political arenas. While deans are more involved with central administration, fundraising, and with interaction with alumni and other constituents, many of the internal functions and operations of academic colleges have been delegated to associate deans.

The associate dean role consists largely of administrative activities and is quite different from the discipline-specific research, teaching, and service activities of a department head or faculty member. Why then do faculty members make the transition to these administrative positions? While there is much evidence showing the impact of identification of potential new leaders, one study (Snyder, Howard, & Hammer, 1978) shows that faculty who seek to enter administration in higher education are seeking a mid-career change that involves changes in specific job duties/expectations, but that the attraction to the promise of increased power and authority was the most salient feature for those actively seeking an administrative position. Those who did not seek an administrative position preferred their faculty role because of its relative autonomy and freedom.

Associate deans occupy a role at the nexus between the academic dean and other high-level administrators in higher education, and that of the faculty and academic departments within their colleges. According to Dill (1984), high-level administrators in higher education perform a wide variety of tasks that are very fragmented. In addition to fulfilling the management responsibilities once conducted by deans, associate deans are also responsible for carrying forth the vision and values established by the dean, and for assisting the dean in activities aimed toward external constituents. At the same time, associate deans often assume overall responsibility for activities related to the faculty and students of their college, including curricular development, research, faculty promotion and tenure, and issues concerning student affairs. Jackson and Gmelch (2003) identify negative drawbacks to the associate dean position, particularly those arising from the various roles they assume, some of which are competing. Thus, associate deans are leaders who interact with a wide range of constituents and who must navigate many competing demands.

Associate deans must also deal with their own professional identity as administrator versus faculty member. Whereas once they were likely a faculty member or department chair within a single academic department, associate deans are now in positions where they can no longer be aligned with a single department and instead are responsible for interacting with faculty across all departments in a college. In the role of academic administrator, they have thus stepped out of their role as a departmentally aligned faculty member. Jackson and Gmelch (2003) discuss the issue of role ambiguity and academic leadership. They conceptualize role ambiguity as the lack of clarity regarding role expectations and the degree of uncertainty about the outcomes of one's performance. For associate deans, role ambiguity arises both from unclear professional responsibilities in relation to the academic dean, and also from unclear boundaries and interactions with the faculty. They suggest that more research is needed in this area, particularly on the topic of the socialization process for associate deans. M. Wolverton, Gmelch, H.L. Wolverton and Sarros (1999) state that associate deans occupy a "pivotal" role at the intersection of academic and administrative functions (p. 166). In this role, Del Favero (2006a) states that associate deans must be adept at navigating both administrative and academic cultures.

Research also shows that role ambiguity between faculty and administrator is extremely stressful. In a study of academic department chairs, Gmelch and Burns (1994) find that the position is "plagued with inherent structural conflict" and that the amount of stress experienced by chairs is "monolithic" (p. 80). Stress factors include heavy workload, confrontations with colleagues, organizational constraints, and conflict with their faculty duties (Gmelch & Burns, 1993, 1994). The authors of this study surmise that the dual pressures of this ambiguous role are the most important impediments to attracting faculty into academic leadership positions. The literature thus indicates that role conflict and ambiguity are common in the experiences of academic administrators (Falk, 1979; Foster, 2006; Kile & Jackson 2009; Leon & Jackson, 2009; Pritchard, 2010; M. Wolverton, M.L. Wolverton, & Gmelch, 1999), and there is evidence that trying to balance these conflicting roles is one of the top concerns for new department chairs (Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt, 2005).

The traditional route for promotion to an academic administrator position is through the faculty. Strathe and Wilson (2006) state that faculty members often begin their administrative careers at the department chair level, not necessarily because they were driven to do so, but because it "was their turn" (p. 6). Administration is not usually a long-term goal for those who begin with faculty appointments (Zappe & Gerdes, 2008). Faculty typically have a narrow view of the academic institution, one that likely does not extend beyond their own academic department. Their experiences with academic administrators are equally limited, often to department heads. Strathe and Wilson (2006) state, however, that certain faculty demonstrate characteristics that allow them to be identified as future academic administrators: they are hard working, visible in the department, attentive, collegial and collaborative, successful at task completion, and have a positive outlook toward current administrators. In fact, one study shows that over eighty percent of current administrators had previously been identified by other administrators as potential leaders, indicating that this identification process is an important precipitator to the actual assumption of an administrative role (Bisbee, 2007). However, the preparation for academic administration is largely one of on-the-job training and mentoring since faculty typically do not come into the academy with existing managerial or leadership skills. This transition is likely different from any other selection process that a faculty member has experienced, and one that at first appearance may look deceptively simple (Palm, 2006).

The transition to associate dean involves further socialization and negotiation of personal and professional roles and a focus on how the associate dean navigates his or her role as administrator versus faculty member/scholar. Jackson and Gmelch (2003) have developed a three-phase process for the socialization of academic associate deans, a progression from 1) preleadership training to 2) induction into the position that leads to a phase of 3) ongoing professional development training. They argue that there are three “spheres of influence” that create the conditions necessary for the development of associate deans (p. 106). The first is that associate deans must come to understand leadership from a cognitive or conceptual point of view. This involves coming to an understanding of the various dimensions of the associate dean position, including its functions, roles, responsibilities, tasks, models and frames. The second sphere of influence is skill development. Associate deans need to formally learn leadership skills such as communication, conflict resolution, resource deployment, and coaching. The third and most critical sphere is that of reflective practice. They argue that leadership development is an “inner journey” that requires self-knowledge, personal awareness, and corrective feedback (p. 107). Thus, knowing the requirements of the position and the skills required are not enough for the successful professional development of associate deans.

There is also a personal growth process that must take place as associate deans come to understand themselves and their developing identity as associate deans. However, little is known about how academic administrators “ultimately reconcile their often conflicting identities as faculty member and as administrative leaders, particularly since assumption of academic leadership responsibilities frequently occurs without training” (Del Favero, 2006b, p. 278). Finally, there is also much evidence to show that the transition back to the role of faculty can be difficult. For example, Cyphert and Boggs (1986), in a study of administrators who return to a faculty role, find that there is a significant amount of anxiety and stress in this transition as well, stemming from such factors as concerns about being out of date in their academic specialties; concerns about teaching abilities; and acceptance by colleagues.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The sample for this project consists of 24 associate deans, 8 from three different research universities. Two of the universities were large public research universities and one was a large private research university. More than one university was included in order to eliminate organization-specific factors that might influence the findings. The participants included 18 newer associate deans who have been in the position for under five years, and 6 associate deans who have been in their position for five years or longer. Interviews were semi-structured and consisted of a series of standard questions. Participants were also asked to complete two scales: the first asked them to indicate whether they viewed themselves as a faculty member or as an administrator, and the second asked them to indicate whether they had more affiliation with their academic discipline or with their current institution. A demographic questionnaire was also used to gather data about the participants. The interviews for each were approximately one hour in length and took place in the interviewee’s private offices at his or her respective institutions. The data analysis process consisted of open coding procedures, written analytic memos, and the development and comparison of codes. The emergent themes are presented below.

This study identified associate deans by investigating institutional Web sites that listed their names and contact information. Searches of institutional Web sites were conducted in order to identify the dates of appointment, which was accomplished by both examining available

online CVs and by searching institutional news sources for news releases regarding appointment to the associate dean position. Interview dates, times, and locations were set up using email and telephone calls, often with the assistance of departmental administrative assistants.

The participant pool consists of 13 males and 11 females from from different academic colleges and disciplines. While the exact names and organizational structure varied by institution, the colleges/fields represented in the participant pool are listed in Table 1, with the number of participants listed in the right column. Job titles varied somewhat. Four of the participants had job titles as “Associate Dean for” a particular discipline (i.e., Social Sciences or Sciences). Three of these were at the private institution and one was at one of the public institutions. Of the other 20 participants, 8 held positions dealing with undergraduate education, while the others held positions with titles related to research, graduate education, or academic affairs.

All participants were at least 40 years of age, and 10 (41.67%) were 60 or older. Eight (33.33 %) were aged 40-49 and six (25%) were aged 50-59. Nearly all of the participants were white (n=23); one participant was African-American. In identifying potential participants, as discussed above, efforts were taken to set up interviews that included roughly equal numbers of males and females and with representation from different academic disciplines. However, there was not an attempt to identify participants by race or by age ahead of the actual interviews. Of the 24 participants, 23 were either married or living with a significant other. Ten had children under the age of 18 living at home, while 14 did not.

Of the 24 participants, only 1 was hired from outside the institution for the associate dean job. One of the questions on the demographic profile asked participants to indicate how many years they had worked at their current institution. Years of employment at the current institution ranged from 3 to 40, with an average of nearly 20 years (19.92). The range of years that a person worked at the institution before becoming an associate dean ranged from zero, for the one outside hire, to 33, with an average of about 15.5 years. Clearly, the participants in this study were typically long-term employees who had served as faculty for a number of years before assuming the associate dean position.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Interviews were semi-structured and consisted of a series of standard questions for all interviewees, as well as two scales that participants were asked to complete. Questions varied slightly depending on whether the interviewee’s appointment was temporary or if the associate dean was in the position for an undetermined amount of time. Participants were also asked to complete a 12-question demographic survey. Unstructured follow-up questions were used to elicit more rich responses or to delve further into specific subjects. The interview protocol was tested during a pilot study. Interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes, but the actual length of the interviews ranged from 34 minutes to 78 minutes, with most ranging between 45 and 55 minutes. Participants all granted permission to record the interviews as part of the interview setup, and all interviews were recorded using two portable digital voice recorders, both of which produced very high quality and usable recordings for all interviews. All interviews took place in the interviewees’ private offices at their respective institutions. As part of the initial interviews, memoing or note taking was employed in order to record notes and experiences about the interview process itself. Notes included information about the interview setting, as well as observations about the interviewee’s personal demeanor and characteristics, including such

information as willingness to share information, whether he or she was hurried or relaxed, whether he or she appeared happy or sad, and whether he or she was outgoing or reserved. Memos also included additional contextual factors, such as whether the interview was interrupted by telephone calls or by another person, such as someone knocking on the door, which happened during two interviews.

The interview recordings were transcribed within 7 - 10 days of each interview. Transcripts were read soon after the transcription, both to ensure that the transcript contained complete information that was free of typographical errors, and also to identify and delete any information that would be potentially traceable to the interviewee or to the institution. Information such as personal names, institutional names, reference to geographical locations or names, and names of professional organizations and grants were removed from each transcript. Once the transcript had been cleaned, copies were sent to each interviewee. This system of member checking ensured that participants were satisfied that their identities would remain confidential and that the transcript accurately reflected their intended responses. Out of the 24 interviews, only 3 responded with suggestions for removing some additional information that might be identifiable, and none had any changes to the actual content of their responses.

Once the interviews were conducted and the initial transcriptions were created, processes for constructing grounded theory as outlined by Charmaz (2006) guided the data analysis. The analysis of each interview began with open coding procedures as described by Strauss and Corbin (1994), including the development of process memos that outlined features of each interview and writing analytic memos to assist in the later development of emergent themes. The NVIVO qualitative analysis software package version 9.0 was used for the data coding (QSR International, 2011). An outside researcher trained in advanced qualitative research methods independently coded a subset (n=8) of the interviews, which were then compared to ensure consistency and the inclusion of all important codes. As the analysis progressed, codes and themes with earlier findings were compared in order to help synthesize the codes and to look for emerging themes (Van Maanen, 1979). Conceptual maps and diagrams also were employed to visually represent the themes and to assist in sorting themes and their relationships with each other. Throughout the interviews, codes and themes were compared with the findings of the prior interviews and with the pilot project through an iterative process that helped synthesize the codes and data, and provided insights into the relationships between the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

## **EXPERIENCES AND IMPACT OF THE ASSOCIATE DEAN ROLE**

This study finds that the first year in the associate dean position is a stressful and demanding time. The first year is largely a time of on-the-job learning involving processes of coming to understand the various activities and roles one is expected to do as associate dean while also learning about the broader organizational environment. There are significant time constraints and a corresponding loss of autonomy and control over one's calendar. Most of the participants report that the first year is an especially difficult time as they are facing many new situations and challenges that impact both their personal lives and also their ability to engage in their faculty pursuits of research and teaching.

The new associate dean role also entails a separation from one's academic colleagues and the move to a new work environment. As a result of the new position, most experience changes in the nature of their interactions with previous colleagues resulting in feelings of isolation and

loneliness. The move also entails a change in patterns of interactions with one's previous colleagues in order to avoid conflicts of interest or perceptions of favoritism. Other participants report that faculty colleagues treat them differently and suspiciously now that they have assumed an administrative position. Many new associate deans engage in the formation of a new peer group of other associate deans or administrators. As a result of these changes, the participants understand that others may perceive them differently and that there is tension between how others perceive them and how they perceive themselves.

The first year in the associate dean position is a time when the associate deans are not only learning about the job, but also a time in which they are gaining a better understanding of their own interests and challenges related to academic administration. This study finds common elements for each that are discussed more fully below. During this time, the participants also report on gaining a better understanding of the ideal qualities that leaders in higher education should possess. This knowledge serves as a framework for their own behavior and professional development as well as an understanding of how well their own characteristics match those of ideal leaders. This qualitative inquiry finds six themes that emerged as part of the early experiences in the associate dean role: 1. Professional and Personal Experiences; 2. Peers and Self-Identity; 3. Understanding One's Challenges and Interests; 4. Ideals about Leaders in Higher Education; 5. Managing Multiple Identities; and 6. Job Satisfaction and Impact on Future Decisions. These six themes are discussed in detail below and are summarized in Table 2.

## **PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES**

Due to the cyclical nature of the academic year, most of the participants had entry- and first-year experiences in which they found themselves in many novel situations in which they were required to make decisions in areas new to them. For example, all of the institutions in this study created their budget requests for the following academic year during the spring semesters, so the new associate deans participated in this activity that was new to them at that time. Participants generally described the first year as a learning experience. Six subthemes emerged as part of professional and personal experiences:

1. Coming to understand the role of associate dean
2. Navigating the complexity of a large organization
3. "Deer in the headlights"
4. Impact on time
5. Being able to continue research because it was in the pipeline
6. Impact on personal lives

The first general subtheme of the "professional and personal experiences" theme that emerged is that of coming to an understanding of the role of the associate dean and the various components of what they are expected to do in this position. In hindsight, many of the participants report that they entered into the position without a full understanding of the role and what it would entail. For many, interacting with the faculty in a different role brought a new perspective in which they learned new things about faculty:

"You find out things about people that you rather wouldn't know and sometimes they're your friends and that's not any fun. You find out some character flaws people have...it's

just that you have visions of how people are or who they are and they can sometimes be kind of ruined as a result of things you find out.”

For many of the associate deans, a challenge of the first year was a lack of knowledge about processes, such as budgeting, and a lack of understanding of how the broader organization operates. This is a time when associate deans face new areas of responsibility without a complete understanding of either the job functions or of the broader organizational environment. A second common subtheme in the “professional and personal experiences” theme is that of navigating the complexity of a large organization. Prior to this position, the participants had focused primarily on activities within their departments. Now, suddenly, they need to understand and operate within a much broader context. The first year as associate dean thus generally consists of many new experiences and the need to learn more about processes and the broader organization. Because of the cyclical nature of the academic year, many feel that the first year is a learning cycle in which the new associate deans are initially exposed to the different challenges that arise throughout the course of the academic year.

The third subtheme within the “professional and personal experiences theme” is that of “deer in the headlights.” The first subtheme of coming to understand the associate dean role shows that the new associate deans were starting jobs that encompassed new duties and a new, broader organizational environment. A common perception is related to more generalized personal feelings of stress or of being overwhelmed by the plethora of new responsibilities and the sudden changes that occurred in the participants’ personal and professional lives. “Deer in the headlights” and “into the fire” are in-vivo codes spoken by several of the participants to illustrate their feelings upon entering the associate dean position. When asked to describe his first three months in the associate dean job, one associate dean simply stated: “When I took this job last year it was overwhelming. I mean, I was a deer in the headlights all last fall.” Clearly, for many of the participants, the first few months on the job entailed many new experiences that they felt were overwhelming. These sentiments were common reflections on their early phase of the new associate dean position.

Many of the participants report that the entry into the associate dean position was overwhelming and stressful. Nearly all of the participants discussed the impact of the new position on their professional and personal time. In addition to encountering new job duties and responsibility for knowing the broader organization, part of the reason that they felt overwhelmed, or like a “deer in the headlights,” is related to the impact on time, the fourth subtheme under “professional and personal experiences.” The impact of time constraints on the professional lives of the participants was a ubiquitous theme. For all of the participants, the new associate dean role affected their ability to continue to conduct research, to teach, and to interact with students. The ability to continue a program of research, and the difficulties in doing so, was a common discussion item in these interviews. As a theme, research is especially important, given that the participants were all associate deans at large research universities. One quote sums up a common sentiment:

“I would say that as a consequence of being in this role, what it does displace is the...where you really take the hit, I think, is in your program of research, and to some extent your professional service that would be to the discipline, because there just is not the time for it. So I do continue to do research, but it probably is the case that writing has taken the greatest hit...the amount of time that I have to do writing.”

A fifth subtheme of “professional and personal experiences” that emerges is that some associate deans are able to continue research only because it was something already in the pipeline before they started their positions. The findings show that some new associate deans, already experiencing considerable time constraints with their new positions, are only able to keep up with research because their programs are continuations of projects already started, rather than new projects.

Other associate deans spoke specifically of their strategies for carving out research time. Prior to becoming associate dean, their research was a primary responsibility and activities took place around research. Now, these participants are finding that their primary responsibilities focus on administrative activities, and that they must schedule their research around these new responsibilities. A minority of the participants report not doing research at all, although they are conscious of the need to continue. Prior to assuming the associate dean role, several of the associate deans had attempted to negotiate time for research as a formal part of their jobs.

Many of the participants indicate that research activities are often regulated to “off-hours” or to evenings or weekends, a situation that has direct impact on the associate deans’ personal lives. Teaching is another area in which new associate deans are often unable to continue as they had previously. Some have reduced their teaching responsibilities, and others have given it up entirely. Making choices between teaching and research is also common, with many ceasing their teaching activities completely.

The new role of associate dean also has the effect, for many, of reducing the ability and time to interact with students. Many of the participants cite working students as the reason they are in administration, or is the part of administration that they most enjoy and embrace. Many examples from the interviews illustrate the importance of students and student interaction to the associate deans, but they also show how the nature of these interactions can change due to changing administrative responsibilities. For many new associate deans, however, the level of interaction with students is diminished as a result of their new positions. Many associate deans manage by cutting back on the number of students that they advise. The interaction with students is an important issue for associate deans. Many specifically cite interaction with students as a favorite part of their jobs and a primary reason for being an administrator. However, the nature of the job itself diminishes the ability for them to engage in these interactions.

The first year as associate dean has a significant impact on the ability to maintain research programs, teaching activities, and interactions with students. The interviews show many examples in which the new associate dean role enables these people to have a broader impact on these very activities, but diminishes their personal ability to continue to engage in these activities. The difficult decisions that these associate deans make in order to negotiate these activities are frequent themes in these interviews. The first year as associate dean is thus a pivotal year in which these administrators not only face significantly new and demanding jobs, but also have to cease or greatly reduce activities in research, teaching, and student engagement that are important facets of who they are as faculty and how they self-identify.

The sixth and final subtheme under the theme of “professional and personal experiences” is the impact of the associate dean position on the participants’ personal lives, especially the impact on spouses or partners, children and other family members, as well as their personal lives outside of academia. As discussed above, the first year results in significant time constraints, especially in the areas of research, teaching, and student interaction. As a result, many indicate the need to do more work in the evenings and weekends, causing an impact on their personal

lives. Many of the participants specifically discussed the impact of their new jobs on their families and children. There are several themes in the participants' narratives: loss of autonomy, loss of ability to engage fully in parental roles, need to rely on spouse, and a sense of the trade-offs that occur in these individuals' lives. Having a supportive spouse who can help take care of children and other aspects of their personal lives is important for many of the participants. Several of those interviewed spoke of tradeoffs and having to choose between a career and family, and that these choices have impacted their career status.

Many of the participants, however, reported that the associate dean job did not have a significant impact on their family lives or children because they do not have children at home. Even with children at home, some of the associate deans do not find this the job to be problematic in terms of balancing it with their personal lives. The personal effort to ensure quality family time is reported fairly often. Some of the narratives emphasize the importance of broad institutional support, as well as support from those within the management team of the college.

In summary, there are six general subthemes that emerged as part of the general "first-year experience" theme: 1. Coming to understand the role of associate dean, 2. Navigating the complexity of a large organization, 3. "Deer in the headlights," 4. Impact on time, 5. Being able to continue research because it was in the pipeline prior to taking the position, and 6. Impact on personal lives. The associate dean role can have a significant effect on personal and family lives, and associate deans often rely on spouses or others in order to fulfill the time commitments of their job. Many of the narratives discuss the loss of autonomy, the trade-offs that occur between professional and personal lives, and the importance of institutional support and support from within the dean's office. The first year is thus a period of adjustment to the new position, learning about the organization and the job duties and, for many, an experience that is overwhelming and stressful. At the same time, there is a significant change in one's research and teaching activities, as well as substantial time pressures related to one's personal lives.

## **PEERS AND SELF-IDENTITY**

The move to the associate dean role brings about significant changes in job responsibilities, including a new working environment and new types of administrative responsibilities. With their new positions, the participants in this study found themselves amongst a new group of coworkers as members of the dean's office, which is a physical and psychological parting from their old academic departments. As a result, most of the participants in the study report that their new position as associate dean also brought changes in their interactions with others, as well as changes in their self-perceptions as they moved into the new role. This section will address how the associate deans' peers changed, and how their interactions with colleagues also changed. For many of the participants, this was a period of personal and professional change that resulted in a new understanding of how they were perceived by others. They also had a heightened understanding of how they perceive themselves. The theme of "peers and self-identity" has three subthemes: loneliness, avoiding conflicts of interest, and the perception of crossing to the "dark side."

The first subtheme under the theme of "peers and self-identity" is that of loneliness, typically manifested as a loss of one's peer group, and a loss of daily or frequent interactions with one's old academic colleagues. Some of the participants focused on the loss of an old peer group and the development of a new peer group as a result of their move outside of their old

department. Others reflect on the loss of face-to-face interactions with disciplinary colleagues. The transition into the associate dean role can bring about a profound self-realization that the new position is going to also mean a change in the nature of personal relationships and friendships with colleagues, a situation that is often unexpected. Many of the participants report a sense of isolation and loneliness in the role of associate dean. The role of associate dean entails a physical move from one's previous department, resulting in a loss of daily interactions with colleagues. The new role, for many, involves the loss of one's peer group, changes in nature of collegial relationships and friendships, and the realization that one needs to find a new peer group.

A second related subtheme under the theme of "peers and self-identity," related to a feeling of loneliness or isolation, consists of a conscious effort to avoid conflicts of interest, and the need to avoid situations in which there is a possibility of a breach of confidentiality or other awkward situations. Many testimonials demonstrate that the move to the role of associate dean involves a change in the patterns of interaction with one's old colleagues. This is particularly important in dealing with sensitive or confidential issues, such as promotion and tenure. The narratives also show the importance of treating all faculty members equally and fairly, and of ensuring that one is not showing favoritism to one's old department. The formation of a new peer group is common, as described in some of the stories. The loss of one's old peer group and the formation of a new peer group is thus an adjustment for these participants, and a part of the process of dealing with their new identities as academic administrators.

A third subtheme of the "peers and self-identity" theme is the perception that faculty who move into the associate dean role have crossed to the "dark side," an in-vivo code spoken by several of the participants. This code indicates a common feeling or perception among faculty that administrators, generally speaking, are "evil" or the enemy of faculty. Others were similarly concerned about what colleagues would think of their move to this administrative position and how this would impact perceptions of them as researchers. Many of the testimonials demonstrate that they are aware of a perception that they have "sold out" or crossed to "the dark side" (Glick, 2006). Part of the adjustment to this new role, for many, is a process of understanding and coming to accept these negative perceptions from faculty, including old friends and colleagues. These testimonials also show the self-reflection that takes place as some of the participants ponder a future as administrator, versus a future as a scholar. However, these experiences were not uniform; several of the participants do not view the change in interactions with colleagues as a problem or issue. For some participants, the shift to a new job has more physical manifestations. Several report their feelings about "dressing for the role." Others speak about the demands of looking appropriate for an administrative position, and how this is different from a faculty member:

In summary of the theme of "peers and self-identity," new associate deans often have a significant parting from their old faculty lives. While a faculty member or department chair in a particular academic department, they were able to maintain collegial relationships with faculty in their departments and were able to engage in regular types of interactions. The move to the dean's office, however, often includes a parting from these kinds of collegial relationships. Because of the change of office location, which is often in another building, there is suddenly a dramatic decrease in the amount of daily interaction between former colleagues. At the same time, the associate deans are in a new working environment where there are few or no immediate peers. As the testimonials show, many associate deans report feelings of loneliness, isolation, and feelings of being treated differently by former colleagues. Further, many associate deans

deliberately change the nature of these relationships because of the need to maintain neutrality and confidentiality, especially about sensitive issues such as promotion and tenure. For others, however, these changes are not so dramatic. Some participants in this study are in the jobs for a fixed term, so these people can view the jobs more as a temporary assignment that will not permanently change the nature of their collegial relationships, or their identity as faculty. For most, however, this is a period of significant change in job activities, personal relationships, and time constraints around performing faculty research and teaching activities and, for many, around their personal lives.

## **UNDERSTANDING ONE'S CHALLENGES AND INTERESTS**

The first year in the associate dean position involves a period of intense change. Due to the cyclical nature of the academic year, there are certain job responsibilities that take place at different periods of the academic calendar. Therefore, many of the participants report that it really takes a complete year in order to experience all of the different activities for which one is responsible. After the first year, there is a period of settling in where the associate deans begin to feel more experienced with their job activities since they now have experience. By this time, they have also gained experience in handling faculty or student problems and have also learned more about the organizational culture and the workings of the broader institution. However, new associate deans should expect a first year with many new activities and responsibilities.

The participants are not only growing and learning more about the job responsibilities themselves, but they are also learning a lot about themselves, the challenges of the associate dean position, and what they like and dislike about these positions. One of the interview questions asked about the greatest challenges in the associate dean role, and the answers can be grouped into several responses. First, many of the participants spoke of the challenge of time management, specifically the volume of work, the number of meetings, the burden of email, and, more generally, dealing with bureaucracy. As discussed earlier, the impact of time constraints on personal and professional activities is significant, and several felt it was the most difficult challenge. Many, like one participant, state that the greatest challenge is: "Getting everything done in a timely way. The volume of things that need to get done can be overwhelming sometimes. And just staying just one step ahead of the curve is sometimes hard.... But the volume of work is really what gets me stressed out."

Many of the associate deans report significant time constraints as the greatest challenge and, as discussed earlier, is a situation that has direct impact on one's ability to continue research and teaching activities. Dealing with a complex organizational environment is another common challenge. One associate dean describes this as his greatest challenge: "It is dealing with the bureaucracy. People who come in as department chairs are shocked at the amount of bureaucracy. That is a huge issue." Other commonly reported challenges are those related to budget and personnel issues. Dealing with the budget, particularly budget cuts in a difficult economic climate, is a common challenge. Many of the testimonials describe that the budget and dealing with personnel go hand in hand and that handling and dealing with personnel problems is another commonly cited challenge.

The issue of fairness is another commonly cited challenge. As discussed earlier, there are changes made to personal interactions to ensure a perception of fairness. Associate deans are particularly careful with colleagues from their previous academic department. As discussed under the first-year experiences section, as part of their new role as associate dean for the college,

the participants are very aware of the challenge of being fair to their constituents. Working with faculty in a capacity in which one is making resource allocation decisions is a difficult challenge for many of the participants, especially since the associate deans feel they must simultaneously earn and maintain the respect of the faculty.

A final category of challenges relates to dealing with the broader organizational context or to the external environment in general. Some feel that keeping up with this information is a challenge. Others responded similarly to the challenges of working within a large, complex organization and being in a position of not having final authority. Several associate deans state that the greatest challenge is “not having the final say.”

In addition to the challenges discussed above, the associate deans in the study also reported on those aspects of the position that they personally like and dislike. Exploring this area is important in order to gain an understanding of how well the participants are suited for this position, how well they are adapting to the broader administrative role, how they have interpreted and are meeting the challenges described above, and whether they want to continue in this position or some other type of administrative position in higher education.

In discussing the aspects of the position that they most liked, the majority of the participants pointed to broad types of responses, such as “having an impact” or “advancing the college” or “making things better.” Many specifically talked about how they are able to help students and faculty. Many testimonials show that a commitment to students is a driving force for many of the participants, and is the area from which they derive the most satisfaction. Others also specifically mention working with faculty.

Being in a position that allows them to have a broad impact is another common source of satisfaction for the associate deans. Many of the participants state that what they like best about their job is the ability to make things better, to bring about positive change, to improve the college and academic programs, and to enact their own vision. For many of the associate deans, there is thus a sense of personal satisfaction about having a broad impact as well as affecting the lives of individual students and faculty.

Another common positive aspect of the position is the opportunity to learn more about the broader university environment or to gain a better understanding of the “big picture” beyond one’s academic department or college. Most associate deans find their ability to positively influence the student and faculty of the college or university to be the most satisfying aspect of their jobs. Many like being part of the “big picture,” understanding how the university works and being in a position to have influence and make decisions. One interesting finding is the lack of responses that might be construed as self-serving. While some indicated that the increased salary was a nice perk, this was not the primary reason given by any of the associate deans when discussing the positives of their positions. Likewise, other reasons such as personal power or status, were not mentioned either. In fact, several of the participants explicitly stated that these were reasons not to be in this position, or were qualities that would indicate that somebody would not be a good administrator.

In addition to identifying what they like about their positions as associate deans, their experiences in the job have also provided insight into what they do not like. These dislikes are not necessarily the same as the challenges described above; many of the challenges are also things that the associate deans enjoy. Dislikes, however, are important to discuss because they can sometimes lead to overall job dissatisfaction and potential desire to exit the position. They also provide valuable information for potential academic leaders, both in terms of preparing potential administrators, and in providing background about some areas of dissatisfaction that

might aid in recruiting and retaining future leaders. About one-quarter of the respondents specifically identified time constraints and the loss of autonomy over their own time or calendar as the thing they most dislike about the associate dean position. Some report that this is tied to having many more meetings. Others report similar feeling of being “on call” and the impact of loss of time on their personal life.

Dealing with difficult people, particularly faculty, is another activity that over one-third of the respondents dislike. Faculty misbehavior is specifically cited by many, as is faculty egocentricity. Managing difficult and demanding people is often cited as a source of frustration and dislike. Because the associate deans are now in positions where they must deal directly with faculty complaints or issues, they are not as insulated from these kinds of problems that they might have once been. Many participants mention a third category, that of dealing with the bureaucracy of a large organization. Related to this is the inability to implement substantial change.

The remaining aspects of their jobs that the associate deans dislike fall into a number of categories. Somewhat surprisingly, dealing with declining budgets or other resources was not cited as frequently as those discussed above. While the budget was specifically mentioned by a few, it was not the primary dislike for any. One participant did cite salary negotiations as the thing that he dislikes the most, but it was in the context of balancing salaries across faculty lines. Some of the other items mentioned were feeling less connected to students, office politics and gossip, loneliness, and being responsible for “cleaning up old messes” or problems created by someone else. There were also several who said “nothing.”

As discussed above, having a better awareness of the challenges, likes, and dislikes reported by the participants in this study provides a context for comprehending their experiences in these positions. This information is valuable to current administrators and can be used to better prepare those considering such a career move. For the participants in this study, gaining an understanding of the position requirements and how their own characteristics match with these requirements forms the basis for assimilating the new job responsibilities into their professional and personal lives. This understanding also forms the basis for their perceptions of ideal leaders in higher education, as well as the basis for their future career decisions. These areas are covered next.

### **Ideals about Leaders in Higher Education**

As part of their experiences and interactions with other academic leaders, the participants in this study typically spent a great deal of time learning about administration and leadership. Their experiences and interactions with leaders, good and bad, have led to the development of a set of ideal characteristics that leaders in higher education should possess. The perceptions of these ideal characteristics that leaders should have were evident in all of the interviews. This discussion is important because it provides a frame to examine how these participants view leadership in higher education, and also provides information that will serve to inform practice. For these participants, the development of a cognitive frame that contains ideal characteristics serves as a guide for their behaviors as associate dean, and also provides them with information about how well they themselves fit these ideals. Previous research has shown that successful academic leaders have been described in terms of various personal attributes and technical skills (Kaplowitz, 1986). Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989) summarize research on the specific traits exhibited by successful leaders. These include attributes such as intelligence,

having a strong work ethic, having persistence, integrity, and good judgment; having vision, good communication skills and humor; and being results-oriented and able to resolve conflicts. These closely match the findings from this study.

Being visionary (having vision, being a visionary leader, being able to work toward a vision) and being able to garner support for their vision were the most commonly cited characteristics of ideal or successful leaders in higher education. Vision was specifically mentioned by over half of the participants. Several participants also spoke of the importance of being a risk-taker in the context of being visionary. One participant states: “You have to be visionary. You have to be willing to take chances. You have got to actually have ideas and you have got to be willing to take risks.”

Some participants did not realize the importance of having a vision until they assumed the associate dean position. Others frequently cited that a characteristic of ideal leaders is the ability to make decisions and to have integrity. Communication skills, the ability to understand and work with people, respecting and valuing people, and listening skills are other important attributes are also frequently mentioned. Many of the participants discussed the importance of certain characteristics in the context of these interactions. Several participants specifically mentioned having a sense of humor. Being sincere or trustworthy are other common personal characteristics frequently mentioned. Trust is cited by some participants as a characteristic of those who are ethical leaders.

There are many adjectives used to describe the idea of being hard-working, having stamina, and being driven. The workload of the position has been discussed earlier in relation to time constraints, so the participants thus see these characteristics as necessary in order to be successful. Some describe stamina and drive in the context of perseverance and vision. A final category is that of being fair. One participant states that an ideal leader is “someone who is fair and level-headed...people who do not get worked up about things. So you have to be ...thick-skinned and leave the emotions to the side.”

In summary of the theme of “ideals about leaders in higher education,” as the associate deans gain more experience in their roles, they also continue to develop a better understanding of those general attributes or characteristics that leaders in higher education should possess. This is typically a part of their own learning process and often involves the observation of their role models. The awareness and understanding of ideal characteristics for leaders in higher education is important because it serves as a framework for associate deans’ behavior and professional development and, important for this study, how their own characteristics fit or match with these ideals. This process of gaining an understanding of these characteristics and an understanding of how well they fit into the role of academic leader contributes to overall job satisfaction. This also assists with decisions regarding their future career choices, a theme that is covered below.

## **MANAGING MULTIPLE IDENTITIES**

As discussed earlier, the move to the associate dean position typically results in significant changes in one’s abilities to continue research, teaching, professional service activities, and working directly with students. While the earlier discussion focused on how new associate deans realized that the new position had an immediate impact on their abilities to continue these activities, this section will focus on how the associate deans incorporated these realizations into their ongoing activities as they continued in the associate dean role.

In order to provide a context for the information derived from the narratives of the participants, each participant was also asked to look at two scales that ranged from 1 to 10, and to indicate where on the scale that they viewed themselves. The first of the two scales asked participants to indicate whether they viewed themselves more as a faculty member (more toward “1”) or more as an administrator or leader (more toward “10”). The second of the two scales asked participants to indicate whether they feel more affiliation with their academic discipline (more toward 1) or with their current institution of employment (more toward 10). According to researchers (Dill, 1982; Nisbet, 1971), faculty typically exhibit an orientation that is more individualistic and toward their discipline. Faculty members thus tend to identify more with their disciplines as opposed to their institutions. Academic leaders, on the other hand, play an important role in creating and maintaining the culture within institutions (Dill, 1982). The scales employed in this study were designed to provide information about how the participants perceived themselves - as faculty or administrators - and also whether they felt more affiliation with their discipline or with their institution. According to Dill (1982) and others, those who view themselves primarily as faculty should also have more orientation toward their discipline, while those who view themselves more as administrators/leaders should show more orientation toward the institution.

Table 3 shows the average ratings for both scales for all participants, and includes breakdowns for those with one year or less experience (n=6), two years or less experience (n=9), five years or less experience as associate dean (n=18) and those with more than five years of experience as associate dean (n=16). The first scale shows that all the participants generally view themselves as more “administrator” rather than “faculty member,” with an average rating of 6.80 and with a range from a low of “3” to a high of “10.” Ratings were slightly lower when analyzing only the responses from those with 5 or less years of experience (6.56). The range for this group is “3” to “9.5.” There is another slight decrease for those with two years of experience or less (6.39, with the same range of “3” to “9.5”). The rating for those long-term associate deans is higher (7.88). All of these figures indicate, not surprisingly, that the longer an associate dean stays in the position, the more they view themselves as an administrator as opposed to faculty. It is interesting that while those with one year or less view themselves in the middle (5.60), all new associate deans with two years or less of experience also view themselves more as administrators than faculty. In the context of this study, this is an indication that the participants are primarily coming to self-identify as administrators rather than faculty, and that this increases the longer one serves in the associate dean role.

The second scale gathers information on affiliation or orientation toward one’s discipline versus toward one’s institution. According to evidence from Dill (1982), discussed above, faculty should indicate more of an orientation toward their discipline while administrators should indicate more of an affinity toward their institutions. Given the findings from scale 1, we should find a similar increase in average ratings as the length of time spent in the associate dean role increases. Associate deans with 1 year or less experience indicate more of an orientation toward their discipline than to the institution with an average of 4.75, which supports Dill’s findings. But with just one more year of experience, this average moves to above the center and continues to grow with time in the associate dean position, indicating an increasing orientation toward or affiliation with the institution as length of time in the associate dean role increases.

The information from these scales, while not statistically powerful by itself, does provide a context for showing how participants manage faculty activities once they enter the associate dean role. While some attempt to continue some of their faculty-related activities, others begin

to do less and less of these. The themes discussed so far demonstrate how the associate deans have developed a better sense of their identities as associate dean, including how their administrative position impacts their collegial relationships. The changes that they experienced in their personal and professional lives have provided a context for better understanding their characteristics and interests, as well as an understanding of how these mesh with those who they perceive as successful leaders in higher education. For many of the participants, this is a time to establish priorities and to make decisions about their lives and careers. Before the final theme of job satisfaction and future decisions is covered later in this chapter, it is important to analyze this process of self-analysis and reflection.

Many of the participants indicate a desire to find balance in their lives and to maintain multiple identities as both administrator and faculty. This is consistent with research into multiple professional identities, which shows that individuals can have multiple role identities; that these multiple identities can sometimes conflict with each other; and, as in professional organizations such as higher education, there can be efforts to maintain and support these multiple identities (Johnson et al., 2006; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Russo, Mattarelli, & Tagliaventi, 2008).

For many of the participants, there is a desire to maintain these multiple professional and personal identities, and to find ways to balance these identities. As many testimonials illustrate, for many there is a continued commitment to roles as faculty members, a desire to continue research and teaching activities, while at the same time demonstrating a commitment to their role as academic leader and loyalty to the institution. Many also indicate that they still view themselves primarily as faculty, despite their job title.

In summary of the theme of “managing multiple identities,” the participants exhibit a range of identities as faculty or administrator. Some report maintaining multiple professional identities as both faculty and administrator. Others view themselves primarily as faculty, others as administrators. For some, there is a desire to continue keeping one’s “foot in the door” so that the option of going back to faculty is available, and to also prepare for the possibility that the associate dean position may end. For others, particularly the long-term associate deans, the sense of being in the position becomes more permanent, and some report a feeling of becoming more and more out of touch with their faculty lives as they become more entrenched in their role as administrator.

## **JOB SATISFACTION AND IMPACT ON FUTURE DECISIONS**

Previous research indicates that job satisfaction is related to future career decisions, including turnover intentions, which is defined as the intention to leave one’s job (Chen et al., 2011; Joo & Park, 2010). In order to ascertain level of job satisfaction, each participant was asked whether they regretted the decision to become an associate dean. Out of the 24 participants, only 1 stated that he regretted his decision and wanted to step down. Several of the participants stated that they had absolutely no regrets at all and were adamant about this.

A few participants report that they do not regret the decision to be an associate dean, but they do have some regrets about the impact on their professional or personal lives. Several others specifically discuss the impact on their own research when asked about regrets. A few others sometimes have regrets due to the impact on their families. Others describe periods of time or stress when they may experience feelings of regret.

The one participant who regrets the decision and intends to go back to the faculty is a long-term faculty member (30 years) who became associate dean and has been in the position for one year. It is clear that this participant is not happy with the changes that the position has had on his personal and professional life as a faculty member. Earlier in the interview, this particular participant had also talked extensively about the fact that he could no longer do research and the loss of autonomy that he felt in this job. This associate dean also has a child in high school, and he also reflected on how the position has taken time away from spending time with his child.

However, the great majority of participants stated that they felt no regrets at all and were happy with their decision to move into the position. Many found that they liked their positions so much that they want to continue in administration and are considering moving into higher administrative positions. A few report having been contacted by search committees or search firms, or having been invited to apply for dean positions. Some are also considering even higher administrative positions, such as provost or president. The majority of the others see themselves staying on in the position, with a subset of these planning on staying until they retire. A few others report that they will someday stop and return to being a faculty member. Overall, this study finds a very high rate of job satisfaction among the participants.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

This study examines the experiences of the associate deans in the first year in their position and includes examination of how they have come to gain a better understanding of the associate dean role, as well as a better understanding of themselves. Their experiences in this job have given them a broader perspective on their organizations and how they fit into them; a better understanding of the characteristics of good leaders in higher education; and a better sense of how they are suited to the role as associate dean, and possibly other administrative jobs. After the transition and early experiences in the associate dean role, the associate deans typically come to realize that they are in a significantly different role from that of their previous faculty position. This new role brings about changes in one's peer group, as well as in personal relationships with colleagues. It also entails an examination of the job functions, the challenges and changes of the new role, and a better understanding of how it impacts their personal and professional lives. As part of this understanding, the associate deans begin making decisions about how and whether they will continue the same research, teaching, and service activities as they did while they were faculty members. In their experiences in this role, the associate deans therefore undergo an ongoing process of evaluating their satisfaction with this role and whether they are willing to continue the role of university administrator in the future.

There are three primary thematic stories arising from the narratives in this study: 1. Difficult Transition; 2. Identity Tension; and 3. Job Satisfaction. First, the transition process is especially difficult. The transition into the associate dean role was, for most, an abrupt departure from previous professional activities. Administration was not a long-term goal for the participants, a finding that supports previous research (Strathe & Wilson, 2006; Zappe & Gerdes, 2006). The new position had a significant and stressful learning curve for many of the participants in this study. The first several months are especially difficult, and many report feelings of being overwhelmed, feeling information overload, or feeling like a "deer in the headlights." For most, the position requires acquiring a new set of responsibilities and learning to navigate the broader organization. There are significant time constraints, a new physical working environment with new colleagues, and a departure from one's previous department.

Almost all participants report entering the position without a full or realistic understanding of the role and the various components of what they would be expected to do in the position. This higher-level role in administration also entails working with a much broader set of faculty and others in the university community. The associate deans thus occupy a much different professional role than their previous position, one that includes many different and new activities and responsibilities.

Almost all of the participants reflect on the immediate impact of the new role on their professional and personal lives. All of the participants report that the new job affected their abilities to continue faculty activities of research, teaching and interacting with students. The impact on the ability to continue research is a common theme in the narratives. This is important, given their role as faculty in research universities. Others spoke of the reduction in teaching, and less frequent advising of and work with graduate students. Time is an important consideration, and time for these activities had to be carved out if they continued at all. Often, research and other faculty activities are done on weekends or “off-hours” time, which impinged upon their personal lives. Many discuss the loss of autonomy or personal freedom in their schedules. While there is very often a feeling of having greater impact because they are addressing research, faculty, student and curricular issues at a higher administrative level, there is at the same time a dramatic decrease in their personal abilities to engage in these activities. The participants report that the first year in the position is especially stressful due to the cyclical nature of higher education. For most, the entire first year was a new learning experience because different activities arise at different points in the academic year. In addition to the concept of professional role, which was discussed above, participants are also examining their personal and professional identities as faculty members and administrators.

There are several applications for professional practice that arise from these narratives. Having a better understanding of the position and the requirements prior to assuming the role will help those entering the position. Mentoring and professional development programs are also shown to assist in the transition to new professional leadership roles (Del Favero, 2006b; Flood, Johnson, Ross, & Wilder, 2010; Palm, 2006). Therefore, administrators, as part of their targeting or identifying future leaders, should begin preparing these people through mentoring and other professional development programs. Another possibility is to consider providing dedicated time for research or teaching. Several participants in this study had official percentages of time that they could devote to research or other professional faculty activities. While these arrangements did not always work out in reality, the persons with these generally expressed a greater ability to continue research and other activities since they were sanctioned as part of their positions. Those without these arrangements report being compelled to be full-time administrators, so that research and other activities were relegated to their own time. The transition of self-identification from faculty to administrator is often difficult and entails a significant break in one’s previous daily activities (Hall, 2004). Administrators can help to ease this transition by formalizing such arrangements that allow associate deans to maintain dual identities as both faculty and administration.

The impact on personal and family lives is also significant, and this study offers some practical implications for academic institutions. Several of the narratives demonstrate the need for broad administrative and organizational support to assist those with families and children. There were narratives that described deans who were supportive and provided more liberal time for family issues, and others report deans who did not. Sensitivity to these issues by the top leaders in the college and university is thus important. Others spoke of family-friendly policies

at their particular institutions. The importance of these policies has been described in previous research, particularly in research on female administrators in higher education (Collay 2002; Maranto & Griffin, 2010; Probert, 2005).

A second primary theme arising from this study is that there is tension between the perceived identities of the participants versus the reality in which participants largely view themselves as having multiple professional identities. In the course of their physical move to the dean's office, most of the participants report a psychological parting that involves a separation from their relationships with former colleagues. This entails a period of personal as well as professional changes as the participants gain a new understanding of how they are perceived by others. This prompts changes in their own self-perceptions.

Nearly all of the participants report feelings of isolation, loneliness and the loss of face-to-face interactions with their colleagues. Many reflect on feelings that they no longer have a peer group or that their new peer group of other associate deans does not physically surround them as their previous faculty peers did. In addition, for many, there is a shift in the nature of their previous personal relationships (Ruderman & Ernst, 2004; Sluss and Ashforth, 2007). Relationships shift from one of being faculty colleagues to one of supervisor and subordinate. Others report more adversarial types of feelings, as they are perceived as crossing to the "dark side" and are now enemies of the faculty. The realization that former friends and colleagues now view them differently is significant and, for many, completely unexpected. For the participants, this caused self-examinations of both their professional role as faculty and administrator and their personal and professional identities.

As the associate deans gain experience in their roles and as they interact with other academic leaders, they report gaining an understanding of effective leadership traits or ideals about leaders. The development of this cognitive frame around ideal characteristics for leaders serves as both a guide for their own behaviors and also provides them with vital information about how well they meet these ideals. The characteristics cited by the participants are: having vision; the ability to make decisions; having good communication and listening skills; being able to understand and work with people; humor; sincerity and personal integrity; being hard working; and being fair. These closely match the findings of previous research into ideal characteristics of leaders. An awareness of these ideals is important for practice because they help in gaining an understanding of how well a person might succeed as an academic leader, and can also be used in the selection process.

For current associate deans, this set of ideals also helps them to understand their fit and their identification as faculty, administrator, or both. This process of understanding is thus related to the concepts of professional role and identity. In order to gain an understanding of how current associate deans identify themselves, two scales were used. The findings from the first scale, asking whether the participants view themselves as "faculty" or "administrator", indicate that all participants self-identify more toward the administrative side of the scale. The results also show that participants view themselves more toward the administrative side the longer they had been in the position. This finding indicates an increasing self-identity as administrator the longer one stays in the position, but that all participants place themselves somewhere on the spectrum, rather than solely as administrator or faculty member. The scales and supporting narratives show that for all of the participants there is a simultaneous self-identification as both faculty and administrator, but with some feeling a stronger identification with one or the other. The second scale measured affiliation or allegiance to one's academic discipline versus one's current institution. These findings show that new associate deans, with

one year or less of experience, indicate more affiliation toward their discipline. But with one more year of experience, this shifts to a greater affiliation toward the current institution. This trend continues the longer one stays in the associate dean position.

The associate deans in this study thus report a range of identities as faculty and administrator. Most of the participants report maintaining multiple professional identities as both faculty and administrator, with some reporting that they feel more strongly as one or the other. This finding is in alignment with existing research showing the existence of multiple professional identities among those in professional organizations (Johnson, Morgeson, Ilgen, Meyer, & Lloyd, 2006; Russo, Mattarelli, & Tagliaventi, 2008). Recent research has also focused on the concept of professional role and identity (Chreim, Williams, & Hinings, 2007; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). According to this line of research, professional identity is an individual's self-identification as a member of a profession (Chreim, Williams, & Hinings, 2007; Ibarra, 1999). Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann. (2006) argue that there is an "interplay" in which one's work related activities leads to work-related identities which are then subject to social validation, which again impacts work and work-identity. They argue that when work identity does not match what one does, then one ought to either change their profession or change his or her self-perception.

Related to professional role research is a line of inquiry that examines how professionals in certain occupations may hold a stronger occupational identification with their professional organization or colleagues than with the organization in which they are employed. In higher education, Dill (1982) reflects that the growth of systems of higher education coupled with the orientation toward discipline-based careers has produced faculty who identify with the profession rather than the organization. Faculty, therefore, may feel a stronger social and professional identification with their professional colleagues at other institutions than with their own department or university.

Leadership development and identity is another form of professional identity research. The concept of "leader" may be thought of as an ambiguous personal identity characteristic that some individuals may incorporate and internalize as part of their own self-concept, while others do not (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; DeRue, Ashford & Cotton, 2009). Hiller (2005) describes self-identity as "the way that we think about ourselves as leaders and what we believe leadership to be" (p. iii). These beliefs thus serve as guides to subsequent thought and actions. Three primary influences on leaders' self-identity are: past leadership experiences; personality; and the self-matching of personal characteristics to those associated with leadership (Hiller, 2005). The development of identity as a leader is, however, an important predictor of effective leadership and career development, and is thus of importance to both individuals and organizations (Day & Harrison, 2007). Lord and Hall (2005) state that the development of a leader's self-concept or identity as a leader is an essential part of advancement as a leader, and that the leadership role merges to become part of one's self-identity.

According to Ibarra, Snook, and Ramo (2010), in recent years there has been an emerging perspective in the leadership literature that explicitly links leadership and identity. This body of literature examines the construct of a leader's self-concept and identity and how emerging self-identity merges with the roles and skills that he or she is developing as a leader. Day and Harrison (2007), for example, discuss the importance of incorporating the emerging identity as a leader into one's personal identity, if one is to be an effective leader. However, according to Ibarra, Snook, and Ramo (2010), while there may be agreement that leadership skill development is intertwined with the development of a leader's self concept, there is not yet

enough research showing the processes and moderating factors for this leadership identity transformation. The current study helps address this gap in the research.

There are changing requirements as individuals begin as leaders and then as they develop as leaders. New leaders must first master the basics of managerial responsibilities, while more experienced leaders continue to develop more sophisticated organizational and interpersonal skills (Mumford, Marks, Shane Connelly, Zaccaro, & Reiter-Palmon, 2000). Lord and Hall (2005) state that as leaders develop there is a shift in focus from that of personal work identity to that of a collective, and that this shift impacts the leader's own identity as well as the identities of others in the organization. They view this change as occurring at three levels, from the individual to the relational to the collective. During these shifts, the leader's emerging personal identity evolves to incorporate more and more of the leadership skills and roles that are developing.

As discussed above, professional identity refers to an individual's self-identification as a member of a particular profession. There is also a growing body of research that shows how professionals hold multiple professional identities that may include simultaneous identification with their profession, their organization, and with their specific workgroup (Johnson, Morgeson, Ilgen, Meyer, & Lloyd, 2006; Russo, Mattarelli, & Tagliaventi, 2008). According to Johnson et al. (2006), professionals may identify more strongly with their profession than with their employing organization, and thus may be more committed to their profession. This can lead to potential conflicts regarding expectations for behavior as well as the potential for greater turnover and fewer pro-social organizational behaviors (Johnson et al., 2006). Research has shown that this identification with one's profession holds true in academia. According to Dill (1982) and Nisbet (1971), faculty typically exhibit an orientation that is more individualistic and toward their discipline as opposed to their institutions. Other researchers have shown that some professionals also identify more strongly with their particular workgroup than with the organization as a whole (van Knippenberg & Schie, 2000).

The findings of this study support previous research on multiple professional identities. Participants in this study report a desire to keeping a "foot in the door" by maintaining research or teaching activities so that the option of going back to the faculty remains possible. These findings show that while there is a transition into a self-identification toward being an administrator and to an allegiance to the institution over time, that there is almost uniformly a simultaneous self-identification as both faculty and administrator and a continuation of allegiance to one's discipline, as well as to one's current institution. This indicates an unwillingness to shed identification as faculty or to lessen involvement with one's academic discipline even when moving into the associate dean role. This is an important finding which supports the notion that higher education leaders need to foster and support the simultaneous self-identification as faculty and administrator by associate deans.

A third primary thematic finding is that of job satisfaction. Despite the difficult transition period and struggles with their emerging identity, nearly all of the participants report that they did not regret their decision to become an associate dean. Only one stated that he did regret the move into the associate dean position and that he wanted to step down at the end of the first year of the job. Many were emphatic in their statements that they had absolutely no regrets. Several did not regret accepting the job per se, but did have regrets about some of the effects on their personal or professional lives. Nearly half, 11 participants, report that they liked their experiences so much that they either would like to be a dean or would consider the possibility. While nearly all recognize that it is difficult to look ahead, and that changing deans and other

circumstances can impact the future, the majority see themselves continuing in the position. A few who are near the end of their careers plan to stay until they retire. Thus, the participants have come to identify themselves in this professional role as academic administrator, even though most still simultaneously view themselves in the role of faculty, and possess positive feelings regarding career decisions about academic leadership. Further research is needed that examines how these experiences as associate dean shape decisions and processes regarding transition into higher-level positions in higher education administration.

These findings indicate that, for almost all participants, there is a feeling of job satisfaction in the position and a willingness to continue and to consider higher-level administrative positions. This is an important finding because, even though administrative jobs are challenging and can be difficult, it is apparent that these challenges and difficulties do not outweigh the positive benefits of the position for these associate deans. The experience, for many, is thus an incentive to move into even higher levels of administration. Previous research into the backgrounds of leaders and the influence of institutional factors and personal leadership development on professional identity and on future career decisions fit well with the results of this study. The research on managing multiple professional identities is especially relevant as the participants in this study self-identify as both faculty and administrator, albeit that length of time on the job does have an effect on the degree of identification.

This research study adds to the existing body of research on the development of academic leadership by filling a void in the literature about this important level of academic administrator. The existing research on associate deans was lacking in studies that analyze how they progress into these positions and how their experiences impact their identities and career decisions. This study helps fill this gap by demonstrating that there are some common themes for these associate deans. The importance of institutional support and mentoring, including the importance of a work environment in which research and other faculty activities can occur while associate deans are also engaging in their administrative activities, is a key finding. This study also provides findings that will serve as an important source of information for future associate deans or for potential associate deans. These personal narratives provide valuable insight into the personal and professional experiences of those who transition into this role, and will serve to better prepare those who are considering or are beginning a move into an associate dean position. A positive finding is that these positions can serve as motivation for future and higher-level administrative positions in higher education. Given the current and future difficulties in attracting qualified leadership to higher education, it is important to make sure that those in the pipeline are having personal and professional experiences that are favorable to continuation or advancement. This study confirms that this is largely the case for associate deans. This qualitative inquiry is important because it explores this critical juncture in higher education administration. The associate dean is largely responsible for the day-to-day operations and oversight of academic colleges and programs, roles of vast importance in higher education. The investigation provides insight into the perceptions and experiences of those occupying this role, and serves as a resource for faculty transitioning into this position and for those who seek to improve recruitment and development of future academic leaders.

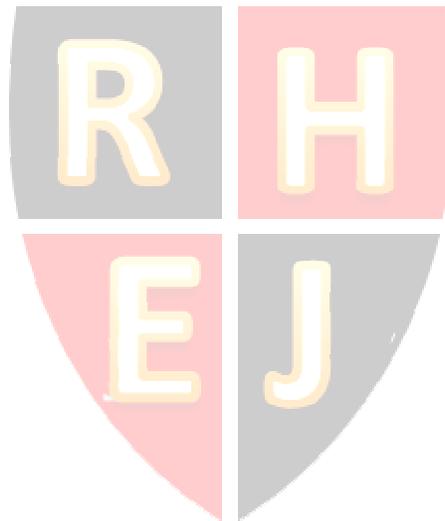
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**APPENDIX**

**Table 1 - Participants' Academic Colleges/Disciplines**

College/Discipline	Number of Participants
Business	5
Education	5
Arts/Architecture/Performing Arts	2
Liberal Arts/Humanities/Social Sciences	5
Science/Health/Engineering	7

**Table 2 - First-Year Experiences of Associate Deans: Themes**

**Theme #1: Professional and Personal Experiences**

Coming to Understand the Role of Associate Dean  
 Navigating the Complexity of a Large Organization  
 Deer in the Headlights  
 Impact on Time  
 Research Continuation/In the Pipeline  
 Impact on Personal Lives

**Theme #2: Peers and Self-Identity**

Loneliness  
 Avoiding Conflicts of Interest  
 Perception of Crossing to the "Dark Side"

**Theme #3: Understanding One's Challenges and Interests**

**Theme #4: Ideals about Leaders in Higher Education**

**Theme #5: Managing Multiple Identities**

**Theme #6: Job Satisfaction**

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**Table 3 - Average Scale Ratings**

	Scale #1 Faculty vs. Administrator	Scale #2 Discipline vs. Institution
All participants	6.80 (Range 3-10)	6.73 (Range 2-10)
1 year or less	5.60 (Range 4-8)	4.75 (Range 2-7)
2 years or less	6.39 (Range 4-9.5)	5.81 (Range 2-8)
5 year or less	6.56 (Range 3-9.5)	6.59 (Range 2-10)
More than 5 years	7.88 (Range 6-10)	7.2 (Range 5-9)

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