



Catalyst Paper #2¹

Leading in the UNH community:

Achieving common goals through shared leadership

Bruce L. Mallory²

Provost and Executive Vice President

University of New Hampshire

The purpose of this talk is threefold. First, I will ask you to join me in thinking about what the particular challenges and opportunities are with respect to the exercise of leadership in an academic institution. Universities share many similarities with other forms of large, complex, bureaucratic institutions. But we also have particular, some might say peculiar, characteristics that place special demands on leaders. Second, I will suggest some core values that I believe are essential to the practice of academic leadership. When I refer to academic leaders, I don't only mean those who are concerned with delivery of the curriculum and the pursuit of scholarship. I mean all of you who are here today—leaders whose work is critical to the fulfillment of the university's core mission, regardless of how proximal or distant you are from what goes on in classrooms, laboratories, studios, or seminar rooms. I will emphasize that a shared set of core values among all of us is necessary to sustain and advance our academic goals. Third, I will describe the principles of shared governance that we must honor and operate within if we are to collectively serve the university. I will advocate for the concept of shared

1 © 2007, Bruce L. Mallory

Copyright information: Readers are welcome to reprint or take excerpts from this paper, but please include the following language: "Reprinted with permission from the Democracy Imperative at the University of New Hampshire, a national network of scholars, academic leaders, and practitioners dedicated to strengthening public life and advancing deliberative democracy in and through higher education. Learn more at <http://www.unh.edu/academic-affairs/democracy>."

2Address at the Fall 2007 Leadership Advance, University of New Hampshire, August 30, 2007.

leadership as a means to achieving the sometimes elusive goals of shared, collegial governance.

What is different about universities?

Let's begin by reminding ourselves of those things that make UNH an *academic* organization, as opposed to a service organization like Home Depot, Bank of America, or Delta Airlines; a production organization like Microsoft, BAE Systems, or the New York Times; or a social welfare or cultural organization like Wentworth Douglass Hospital, the Hub Family Center, or the New England Educational Theater Tours. In contrast to service or production or social welfare organizations, we work first and foremost with people and ideas. Our goal is not to make a profit or produce a widget or deliver a package on time, it is to foster human development through the rigorous examination of knowledge received from the past and the critical creation and consideration of new forms and bodies of knowledge. Here I include not only knowledge embodied in text and numbers, but also knowledge and meaning found in performance and representative artistry.

Working with people and ideas rather than profits and products is really complex. Both people and ideas are plastic, in the sense that both change over time in response to new conditions, new data, and new feedback. At a university our purpose is to help people as well as ideas become more developed, more nuanced, more robust, more receptive to even newer conditions, data, and feedback. Thus, there are no simple, fixed rules for how to lead. We are a learning organization, always gathering new information and improving processes so that we can advance learning *and* advance the effectiveness of the institution. We do not operate according to formulas or recipes or immutable rules. We operate as best we can with thousands of individuals who come here every day to learn, to inquire, to discover, to probe, to create, to teach, to mentor, to problem solve, to make themselves and the world better. Each individual who works and learns at UNH does something particular and valuable, whether it is occupying a seat in a first-year Inquiry seminar, teaching the Inquiry seminar, serving as a graduate research assistant in a chemistry lab, buying the instruments that go in the lab, fixing the ventilation systems that vent the chemical fumes in the lab, running the budget numbers that are the basis for deciding if we can afford to pay the instructor and grad assistant and building mechanic, or designing the web pages that describe our curriculum and our laboratories and our facilities. There are 14,000 students at UNH, almost 1000 tenure track, research, clinical, and extension faculty and instructors, and some 3000 staff who are part of this learning organization. In this light, the challenge of leadership becomes daunting. In fact, the only path I can see to effective leadership in such a complex learning organization is that of *shared* leadership, which I will expand on in a few minutes. But let's get back to thinking about what is unique about a university.

First, we have multiple "customers"—students, their parents, employers, trustees, legislators, our scholarly disciplines, funding agencies (federal, state, corporate, private individuals), the general public, news media, and so on. Each of these groups believes it has a stake and therefore a say in how we operate, what our goals are, what we should charge for our services, how we should be held

accountable. And their respective expectations may conflict with one another. We cannot solve our problems by simply charging more to cover our expenses, like an airline might when fuel prices rise. We cannot measure our results very easily or succinctly, like a software manufacturer can. We cannot claim that we use our physical resources as efficiently as possible when our classrooms are occupied less than half the day-time hours each year. Yet the public, legislators, and trustees who hold us accountable often have very little experience in universities, at best 4-5 years of their own personal odysseys, which may or may not have been much fun or very productive. Our various stakeholders will apply traditional metrics from the kinds of organizations they work in to the university. Because our concern is with people and ideas, we have a hard time translating our results into terms that these stakeholders either value or can readily understand.

For leaders in such an organization, sometimes it feels like it is difficult to find solid ground to stand on, as we exercise leadership in an organization with “invisible” or at least tacit processes and products; where notions of accountability, outcomes, and goal-achievement are sometimes hard to grasp; and where the assumed good of what we do, the provision of *public* higher education, occurs in a context of social values that view that good as a *private* benefit. This pervasive belief, which has increased considerably in recent years among both federal and state policy makers, leads to a conclusion that the investment cost of higher education, that is tuition or state appropriations or federal subsidies, is to be borne more by individual beneficiaries and less by society as a whole. As leaders in a public university, we believe deeply in the social value of what we do, yet we receive many messages that key stakeholders outside the university do not share that value.

Lastly with respect to our differences, we govern ourselves quite differently compared to corporate or nonprofit entities. We function within the noble but only vaguely defined structures of shared governance, in which definitions are dynamic as both the organizational culture and the specific issues at hand change over time. We try to be both hierarchical and egalitarian at the same time. We recognize the authority of trustees, presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, program directors, yet we also try to segment the respective authority of each such that decisions are arrived at through consultation, collaboration, deliberation, and negotiation. This characteristic is especially vexing for observers who live in corporate worlds, where concepts like tenure, academic freedom, governance by committee, and peer review of performance are quite foreign. I will say that the University System Trustees, many of whom represent that corporate world, work very hard if not always successfully to understand this notion of shared governance and the protections provided by tenure and the principles of academic freedom.

What do we stand for?

Which brings me to the question, what is it that we stand for? What goals do we ask our leaders, all of you who are here today, to reach for? How do you measure your achievements in this complex learning environment? How do you hold the people who work with you accountable? How do you know they are working at their best and producing the desired results? I don't have answers to

these questions today, but I do want to explore with you some general principles that might help us get to those answers, at least provisionally. Let's begin by asserting what universities are about, in contrast to other kinds of organizations. "While businesses strive to make a profit, military organizations work to win wars, and nonprofit organizations pursue social good, universities exist to promote and sustain democracy by providing bright minds with an unfettered intellectual marketplace" (Ponder & McCauley, 2006, 211). I resonate with this definition because it recognizes the unique nature and purpose of universities, as I suggested earlier, and it locates the place of universities in the context of strengthening democracy, an ideal that I believe is critical and which is the fundamental tenet of a national network of scholars and practitioners which I and others are now forming, based at UNH and known as The Democracy Imperative. In many ways I am inspired by the words of John Dewey—"In each generation democracy must be born anew, and education is its midwife." This inextricable link between democracy and education offers a sense of higher purpose to the work that we do as leaders at UNH. There may be other notions of purpose that bring you to campus every day. Whatever your individual sense of what a university is for, as a leader you are called to act from that core conviction and to help others around you to realize that conviction as well.

The question of what we stand for as leaders in a learning organization begs questions about what we believe in, what the core values are that drive our commitment to the University, its students, its faculty, and its staff. Robert B. Young, in a book titled No neutral ground: Standing by the values we prize in higher education (1997, Jossey-Bass), identified seven values of the academy that promote scholarship as well as democracy, so this particular framing of values is useful to me. The first value is *service*. As Young writes, "All academic values, rights, and responsibilities are based on a value of service to humankind." (14) For me, the service that we offer is to assist learners—which means all of us who work here—to pursue understanding, insight, new truths, and the liberating effects of education for the individual. Service also means action that strengthens community. Service in this light is a transcendent process that benefits both the teacher and the learner, the academic and the public, the institution and the broader society.

The second value identified by Young is that of *truth*. On the walls of the Library of Congress, we find the inscription, "The truth shall set you free." This reminds us of the historical definition of a liberal education, in which individuals are taught and mentored in order to exercise critical analytic skills in conjunction with an informed conscience so that they can arrive at independent understandings. The individual is liberated from the oppressive effects of doctrine or group think or unexamined truths. That is, she is liberated from the tyranny of the masses and becomes an independent thinker and actor in the context of a democratic society. In this light, truth is constructed both from careful consideration of the empirical data available *and* our interpretation of competing claims about what is true through the lens of intellect, belief, and experience. That is, truth is found through both the objective and subjective processes of inquiry, interpretation, dialogue

Young's third value is that of *freedom*. If we are to learn fully and authentically, we must be able to explore, challenge, doubt, advocate, examine, and critique the core ideas or assumed truths of our disciplines, our institutions, and our society for the purpose of gaining deeper, more complex truths. We must be free to express our ideas no matter how controversial or even repugnant. We must be free to challenge the prevailing paradigms, not simply as a means to be provocative but as a means to discovering deeper, lasting truths that can guide our convictions and actions. And as we were reminded last year when UNH again made the national news as a stalwart defender of academic freedom, we must balance the dual nature of freedom that both secures rights and demands responsibilities. The responsible exercise of freedom is a core value in universities in general and at UNH in particular.

The fourth value that Young advances is that of *equality*. This value asserts that every member of the university is to be valued, respected, and affirmed regardless of status, position, authority, or level of education. Each person brings her particular skills, passions, and commitments to the work of the university. Each person has a right to full participation in the life of the university and to reap the benefits of that participation. Equality does not mean that we all hold the same level of authority or power, but it does mean that power differentiations are not used as excuses to exclude access or deny the voices of any member of the community. I might prefer the term *equity* then, to acknowledge differences in our institutional roles while not allowing those differences to marginalize or denigrate any one among us.

With respect specifically to our educational mission, Young asserts the value of *individuation*. By this he means the cognitive, social, and ethical development of our students and ourselves. Individuation is the basis of the "liberal" education I just described, in which the conscience matures and serves as a guide to our intellectual, social, and ethical actions. We become critical thinkers in the constructive sense. We no longer depend on parents, teachers, or bosses to tell us what to think and how to behave. We claim our own knowledge and values in order to distinguish ourselves from others. In the social context of a university, we co-create knowledge with others as well as seek the individual gestalt of insight and personal moral conviction. I recognize these as secular concepts, which itself generates its own controversy, but a public university especially is rooted in secular rather than religious notions of human growth and development.

The sixth value proposed by Young is that of *justice*. For me, this means several things. As educators we must attend to the social distribution of knowledge, or the extent to which knowledge is freely accessible to everyone—students and teachers in the traditional sense but also staff in the sense that each of us must have access to critical information necessary to do our work. I think that RCM (responsibility center management, implemented by UNH in 2000), for example, has served the purpose of justice by making available to anyone transparent information about the university's expenses and revenues. Justice also means assuring access to the educational experience itself, not simply through physical presence but meaningful participation through multiple means. Again, this is not just about student access, it is about all of us participating in opportunities to

advance our skills and become more effective members of the community. Justice also means the explicit reshaping of the experience of those who have not historically had access to higher education, affirmatively. Through our student recruitment, financial aid, faculty mentoring, and community strengthening processes, we make UNH a place that is inclusive and welcoming, a place that consciously protects the rights of each member of the community *and* educates our students to seek justice when they become citizen leaders in the future.

The last value proposed by Young is that of *community*. This is a topic that I think about a great deal, and that I have written about in my occasional letters to faculty. One way to think about this value is to ask the question, Is the University an archipelago or a commons? Are we a cluster of remote, even gated, neighborhoods that occasionally interact but typically keep to our own kind, inside the gates of our disciplines or divisions or districts? In some ways, this is how we function. But I also think there is a commons, and the common ground at the center of this commons is our commitment to the learning experience of our students, which is in turn enriched by the learning that our faculty and staff are constantly engaged in. We teach, conduct research, and become engaged with the external world in order to advance knowledge, solve problems, and improve the lives of others. These activities serve a common purpose--to broaden our undergraduate and graduate students' intellectual, moral, and social development. Thus, leadership is about learning, development, and enhancing the lives of the members of our community, which leads to a strengthening of the community itself. We **all** contribute to this value, no matter where we work in the University. As such we all have responsibilities as community members to behave towards others as we would want them to behave towards us. The well-being of our community requires a commitment to civil, respectful behavior everywhere and by everyone, in the classroom, the studio, the athletic field, the office, the residence hall, the machine shop, wherever we carry out our work. This is one way in which universities are not different from other organizations, even if sometimes our emphasis on freedom and individual growth can make us forget the common bonds and responsibilities we have to each other.

What does all this have to do with shared leadership?

Understanding the particular nature of a learning organization and bearing in mind core values such as these are crucial ingredients to the exercise of effective leadership. Leading an American university has been described as an "intellectual free-for-all" in which there is a radically decentralized culture shaped by the "tyranny of departments." (Thomas Hearn quoted in Ponder, K.M., & McCauley, C.D. (2006), *Leading in the unique character of academe: What it takes*, in Brown, D.G., (ed.) University presidents as moral leaders. American Council on Education Praeger Series on Higher Education. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers (211). Does this dramatic description apply to UNH?

From my perspective, UNH has a number of characteristics that effect powerfully how we exercise leadership. We are highly decentralized, conservative, risk averse, department-based (localized), relatively non-hierarchical but status-conscious (with respect to the lines that are drawn among staff, faculty, and

students), tolerant of deviance, rooted (maybe even mired) in our historical past, distrustful of authority, inclined to muddling through rather than radical change, parsimonious, and committed to transparency. Obviously this is a mix of positive and negative attributes, and you might each have your own adjectives to describe the UNH culture. As leaders, you need to have a sense of that culture and how it affects your ability to lead, the strategies you employ as a leader, and how to measure results.

The principles of shared governance that we aspire to in this complex culture require, I believe, an understanding of the concept of shared leadership. As leaders, we each operate with limited or incomplete data. And we only see the university from the particular vantage point of our department, college, or office. This means that we must join with others who stand at different vantage points to compare and aggregate data, perceptions, and theories in order to arrive at shared understandings and common purpose. It is through interactions among multiple leaders that we create workable, collaborative paths to effective actions and solutions.

Shared leadership requires what Ponder and McCauley have called “relational competencies.” In their view, these are the most critical skills of academic leaders. Relational competencies are defined as, “those skills, abilities, and mindsets that enable leaders to build trust, confidence, and fairness in their relationships with a diverse set of individuals and communities” (Ponder & McCauley, 2006, 225). Relational competencies involve a commitment to deliberation, more specifically to deliberative, participatory democratic processes and decision-making. Through our relationships with others, both within our local neighborhoods and in the commons, we negotiate the sometimes treacherous and shifting paths of reality, facts, perceptions, data, values, and ideologies.

This constant process of negotiating difficult and dynamic paths reminds us of the distinction between management and leadership. “Bennis and Nanus (1985) observe that management is about doing things right, while leadership is about doing the right things. Whereas managers administer, maintain, control, and imitate, leaders innovate, develop, inspire and originate. . . Shared governance [in this light] can be defined as a mutual recognition of the interdependence and mutual responsibilities among trustees, administration, staff, faculty, and students for major institutional decision making relating to mission, budget, teaching, and research” (cited in Gayle, D.J., Tewarie, B., & White, Jr., A.Q. (2003). Governance in the twenty-first-century university: Approaches to effective leadership and strategic management. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report, 30 (1). San Francisco: Wiley Periodicals, Inc (30-31). It is this interdependence among all of us at UNH—faculty, administrators, staff—that requires shared leadership. We must understand our interdependence, our respective and complementary areas of responsibility and authority, if we are to collectively lead the university.

A key ingredient of shared leadership is creating teams of leaders in our various offices, academic and non-academic, who are highly competent, bring mutually reinforcing skill sets, and share a sense of common purpose. At UNH, I think of places where these teams exist—in deans’ offices, in academic program

offices like the Discovery Program, in each of the vice presidents' areas, in our business service centers, in the Foundation office, and so on. The writer Jim Collins, known for his book on organizational excellence, From Good to Great, emphasizes how important it is to get the right people on the bus, as he calls it. In Collins' view, there is nothing more important than assembling the right mix of skills, personalities, backgrounds, and dispositions among the leadership team. And I would add that it is the ability of those on the bus to work together collaboratively that is the most essential component of leading in the context of shared governance as it is practiced in a university.

Let me conclude by summarizing some of my main points and offering a bit of advice. First, I have suggested the ways in which universities are particular, some might say strange, kinds of organizations. Our goals, our governance structures, our stakeholders, and our products are unlike those found in any other institution. Effective leadership in a university therefore requires shared allocation of authority across various segments of the community—the faculty who have responsibility for curriculum, academic standards, faculty appointments and promotion; administrators who have responsibility for resource development and management as well as long-range planning; trustees who hold legal and fiduciary responsibilities to make sure we fulfill our charter and remain solvent; and staff who oversee specific operational components of the university. Communication and collaboration across these segments is what knits the community together and keeps it from being simply a cluster of autonomous neighborhoods.

I argued that shared leadership begins first with some agreement about shared values and purpose. It is important that we share a core set of common values such as those I articulated earlier or those expressed in the UNH Academic Plan. Shared leadership respects the acknowledged division of responsibilities found in academic shared governance, with respect to faculty, administrator, trustee, and staff domains. Leaders who practice shared leadership understand the complex nature of a learning organization and are able to negotiate among competing perspectives about what is right for the university. Shared leadership depends on the formation of effective teams that have complementary, interdependent skills within the team and across teams.

Ultimately, leadership is an art more than a science, in my view. The art of leadership was captured for me on a beautiful Saturday morning a few weeks ago, when our new president invited me to spend some time flying with him in the single engine four-seater which he parks at Pease Tradeport. As I watched President Huddleston handle the multiple, simultaneous tasks required of a pilot, I realized that what he was doing was an excellent metaphor for institutional leadership. He was keeping an eye on multiple variables, processing data from several instruments at once, staying alert and focused while in a state of relaxed concentration, scanning the horizon for any unexpected problems that might require attention and action, constantly making subtle adjustments to our heading and altitude as we flew through the air at 140 miles an hour, planning well ahead for the next direction or speed change, reacting to shifting wind patterns, and so on. He did all this with obvious pleasure as well as seriousness of purpose. Occasionally he needed my help to read a dial, look at a chart, or confirm a sighting of another plane. He even

let me get my hands on the stick for a while, supporting my own development and feeding my enthusiasm, that is sharing both the responsibility and joy of the feat of flying, and teaching me something that was important to me at the same time.

I hope that you have found something useful in these thoughts. I hope that you have recognized yourself in my descriptions of effective shared leadership. You are all leaders. That is why you are here today. You all share a common purpose. You all are members of a community of teachers and learners. There is no better place to be. The work we do is hard, complex, sometimes frustrating and confounding, but ultimately it enables all of us to grow, to learn, to make a difference in the lives of others. From my heart, thank you for the work that you do everyday.