

LEADERSHIP DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN BECOMING AN ADMINISTRATOR

BY KELLY MATTHEWS

As educators, we often fall prey to the assumption that we need to move up a career ladder into administration to become leaders in our schools or universities. While many academic leaders clearly enjoy and excel in their roles, some of us as veteran or “seasoned” teachers fear that moving into administrative leadership would take us too far away from leadership in the classroom—and too far from the students we love to teach.

I have taught for over 25 years, the past 15 of those as an English and education professor at Framingham State University in Massachusetts. Having left the high school setting where I started my career, I find that as a senior faculty member, I enjoy my writing time (I have authored two books and co-edited a third), and I enjoy my time in the classroom with my students. I also enjoy my program coordination duties, which include one-on-one conversations with my advisees, many of whom are first-generation college students, as they grapple with the challenges that come their way. It is a great privilege to guide the decisions that will set them on a path to degree completion.

While I don't plan to climb the traditional career ladder toward becoming a department chair or dean, I continue to seek and serve in leadership

roles around my university and our city. Recognizing that I can be a leader while still remaining a rank-and-file member of the faculty has been a very rewarding aspect of becoming a more seasoned presence in my campus community.

For me, leadership within the ranks has meant co-founding a teacher residency program. The Framingham Teacher Residency AmeriCorps Program partners with our city school district to support student teachers, especially those who are bilingual or multilingual, by funding a one-year apprenticeship in which they are paired with an experienced mentor teacher (another fellow leader!) who guides their development as they implement culturally responsive teaching techniques with our increasingly diverse and multilingual K-12 public school population.

Leadership within the ranks has also meant co-organizing campus activism, as, for example, when Black students on our campus were targeted in a series of hate crimes in 2018. Although the perpetrators of racist graffiti scrawled across students' dorm room doors were never identified, it seemed imperative to me that as professors, we mobilize to show our students that such acts would not be tolerated in silence. I wrote an email to the faculty listserv inviting fellow faculty and staff to

come to an impromptu meeting where we brainstormed possible actions. From that discussion, we formed a grassroots group called “Faculty Against Hate” who penned a letter to our student newspaper—signed by nearly a hundred professors and staff members—and stood in a daylight vigil outside our campus dining hall, holding signs that said we were against racism and supportive of all students in our community. The number of students who thanked us, or stood with us, showed that these efforts made a difference in returning our campus climate toward a more balanced, welcoming atmosphere for all.

For now, I resist the pressure to climb a traditional leadership ladder, much though I value and appreciate colleagues who have decided to move in that direction. Recognizing that leadership roles exist in other modes and knowing that I still have a part to play in the life of my school community energizes me as I look forward to the next phase of my career.



KELLY MATTHEWS

(Framingham State University) is a professor of English at Framingham. A graduate of Harvard, Trinity College Dublin, Boston University, and the University of Ulster, Matthews

teaches English methods and supervises student teachers seeking the English 5-12 teaching license.