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Building Places  
of Promise:  
**Unlocking  
Student  
Success**

2025 Institute for Chief Academics Officers with  
Chief Student Affairs Officers and Chief Student Success Officers  
November 1–4, 2025 🗝️ JW Marriott, Indianapolis, IN

# Workshop for Experienced Chief Academic Officers

Presented by

**Lauren Bowen**

Provost

Juniata College (PA)

**Sarah Ferguson**

Vice President for Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships

Texas Lutheran University



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# Managing Down, Across, and Up: Working Across Multiple and Complex Systems



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# Overview

- Influence
- Teamwork
- Relationships



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# Influence and Teamwork

- Influence
  - A thoughtful way to persuade people to perform tasks or behave in a certain way. (indeed website)
  - A critical skill for the institution to meet and maintain their strategic plan.
  - A way to build, align, energize and guide colleagues (Barta and Barwise, 2017, McKinsey report)
- Teamwork
  - Working as a collective to solve problems and optimize opportunities
  - Influence that is open to adjustment
  - Open to various perspectives.
  - Helping others let go of their one approach to see other approaches
- All about building relationships that are based on communication and trust



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# Who do you need to influence?

- Director reports
  - Deans
  - AVPs
  - Directors
  - Others
- Colleagues – other VP's
- The President
- Faculty
- Boards and other Constituents
- External Partners



# The Intricacies of Influence – Direct Reports

- Supervisor directs and guides work
- Create shared understanding of goals and allow team to create their own strategy
- Consistent feedback loop
- Trust
- No surprises from you or from them
  - Cannot always tell them everything but can keep them apprised of overall context



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# The Intricacies of Influence – Faculty

- More complex relationship give the special role of faculty with administration and the nature of the shared governance relationship.
- Identify allies
- Continuous communication to allow individuals to question rationale for the change you want to see
- Be willing to listen to pushback
- Do not get pulled into fruitless arguments



# Table Discussion

- What conflicting goals might exist between the Provost, the faculty, and direct reports?
- How could staff play a role in this situation?
- What are useful strategies for influence with these two groups?



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# The Intricacies of Influence – Colleagues, other VPs, and External Partners

- Are you aware of their challenges and their constraints?
- Do they understand your constraints, i.e.. Faculty Governance.
- Identify solutions that address both of your problems?
- Timing, do not surprise them
- Be clear to ensure that everyone has the same goals



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# Table Discussion

- What conflicting goals exist between the Provost and other VPs, colleagues, or external partners?
- What are the challenges that may emerge?
- What are useful strategies for influence with colleagues?



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# The Intricacies of Influence – The President

- How do you solve their problems in a way that they can support publicly
  - If you want to challenge their approach, come with answers to the questions they might have
  - Never surprise them but be thoughtful about timing
- Plant seeds of ideas early?



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# Table Discussion

- What conflicting goals may exist between the Provost and the President?
- What are challenges in this relationship in our case study?
- How might the Provost influence the President to protect trust and faculty governance?
- How would the Provost repair relationships when trust or shared understanding has been challenged?



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# The Intricacies of Influence – Boards and other Constituents

- Check with President as to whether you can interact with the Board
- Build strong relationship with the Board. They can be an important network.
- Other constituents – outside community members. Build relationships but be sure not to promise things you cannot deliver.



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# Table Discussion

- How might the Board be helpful in this situation?
- What are challenges in working with the Board in this case study?
- What are useful strategies for influence with the Board?
- What does the Provost need to navigate with his President in their work with the Board?
- How would the Provost repair relationships when trust or shared understanding has been challenged?



# Vision, Program Planning, and Strategy: Managing Change



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# Overview

- Setting strategy and distinctives to drive decision making and resource allocation
- Case Example: University Program Planning Process
  - Participants
  - Mission, Market, Margins, and Student Outcomes
  - Academic programs and other revenue generating initiatives
- Small group discussion



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# What we need clarity on to face the changes in higher education.

- Institutional Mission and Vision
- Strategic Plan
- Distinctives
  - Clarity on what you do well and what you are known for.
  - Must be more than student centered and relational.
- Academic Program offerings and the mix of those offerings (Atkins)
- Other revenue-generating initiatives



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# Distinctives

- How are you supporting your community?
- Does your community need you to add a particular program
  - Seguin: Growing manufacturing
  - We cannot help with the skills for that work but how can we assist with upscaling? Skills such as management, accounting, coding, and critical thinking.



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# Resource Allocation

- Strategic Budgets that are sustainable
- Marketing allocation
  - How do you determine
  - How do we prioritize a limited resource
- Enrollment Projections
  - Realistic and achievable enrollment goals
  - Setting and achieving – work of the department chair
- Operating Budgets



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# Table Discussion

- How are you creating a strong academic program portfolio that supports the institutions mission and vision?
- What are the challenges to creating a strong portfolio and how might you address them?
- What do you want to do differently?
- How do you help prioritize resources (new faculty, marketing spends, equipment...)



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# University Program Planning Process

- Continuous program prioritization
- Participants
  - All areas involved – ensure that you are all moving in the same direction – everyone is on the same boat and rowing together to meet the strategic goals and mission
  - Faculty representation
- Start, Stop, or Grow? (Atkins)
  - Market
  - Margins
  - Mission
  - Academic Standards



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# Small Group Discussion (Groups of 2 – 3)

- Share with each other your institution is using vision, strategy, and distinctives to inform resource allocation.
- What might not be working? What do you want to do differently?
- What are the challenges from the following and how might you address them?
  - Faculty
  - Board
  - Other VP's
  - Alumni
  - Students
  - External Community



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# Big Takeaways

- Big takeaways from your discussion that you want to share with the larger group?



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**How Do We Instill Hope –  
And Not Just Optimism –  
In Our Teams and Ourselves  
in the Midst of Such Turbulent Times?**

**Lauren Bowen, Ph.D.**

**Provost**

**November 1, 2025**



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# Rethinking Higher Education

**“...(I)f we fail to explore – if we fail to go beyond superficial change and interrogate our most fundamental assumptions about how and what we teach, how and why we organize ourselves in the current way – we will have no one but ourselves to blame if the system as we know it shrivels to the point where it collapses from within or is painfully disrupted from without...”**

**Brian Rosenberg**, President Emeritus of Macalester College  
*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 2, 2021



# How has your job changed in the last year?

- Budget
- Enrollment
- Recruitment and Retention of Faculty
- Academic Freedom/Freedom of Speech
- Immigration
- DEI
- Federal funding
- Others



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# Case Study #2 – The BOT and the New Program

Dr. Jenny Wolf been VPAA for six years at Fern College, a somewhat selective liberal arts college in the mid-Atlantic. A rhetorician by training, Dr. Wolf was hired in part because of her measurable commitment to the traditional liberal arts and served as the Dean of the Honors College at her previous institution. Since arriving, she has successfully led some change initiatives including general education revision and an expansion in study abroad. She enjoys the reputation of being communicative and transparent with her faculty. She attributes his longevity and success in the role, right or wrong, to effective collaboration with faculty leadership and to having deft facilitation skills.

Still, during her tenure enrollment has steadily inclined. The faculty attribute the enrollment decline to a lack of resources being devoted to marketing their current complement of programs as well as too much turnover in the VP for Enrollment role. Moreover, the integrity of the liberal arts is getting lots of chatter among faculty. There is vocal opposition to adding any new professionally oriented programs.

The president calls Dr. Wolf to her office early in the fall semester to let her know that the board of trustees are concerned about the enrollment decline and think new program development is necessary. The board chair, an engineer and a member of Fern College athletics hall of fame, has pledged 8 million dollars if an engineering program is started – 6 million will be used for facilities, scholarships, and faculty. The remaining 2 million can be used to create an academic discretionary endowment, the interest from which can be used to support experiential education or faculty development or whatever the VPAA deems most needed. However, Dr. Wolf must get an engineering curriculum approved by the end of the academic year or the board chair will only contribute 4 million all of which will go to athletics.

The president is in her tenth year and enjoys the support of the trustees, her cabinet, and the broader community. Still, it is widely rumored that she is likely to announce her retirement at the end of the year with plans to retire in 2027. Dr. Wolf thinks she can be a most capable and effective president at Fern College and is eager for the opportunity.



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# Case Study #2 – The BOT and the New Program

## Questions for Discussion:

- How might Dr. Wolf engage key stakeholders in a productive and constructive discussion about whether it makes sense to pursue engineering? Who are those key stakeholders?
- What data will she need to evaluate the viability of engineering?
- Design a process that will lead to the outcome of having a civil engineering curriculum approved by year's end. What process can you imagine that would likely lead to the opposite outcome of not adding engineering. How much influence does Dr. Wolf have in shaping the outcome? What are the (dis)advantages of both outcomes? Is there a compromise?
- While Dr. Wolf and the president have a good working relationship, Dr. Wolf has observed the president's deference to the board chair on numerous occasions. Dr. Wolf thinks it might be possible to persuade the board chair to give you more time to make the best decision for the college. How should she proceed?



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# Roles of the CAO

- Visionary
- Strategist
- Budget Officer
- Recruiter
- Advocate
- Diplomat
- Pastor
- Teacher
- Scholar



# Sense of Purpose

- Why did you seek to be a CAO?
- What are your strengths?
- What gives you energy?
- What brings you joy?
- What are your most meaningful opportunities in this moment?
- What gave you pause about becoming a CAO?
- What are your gaps?
- What makes you tired?
- What are your greatest stressors in this moment?



# Instilling Hope

*“Agency – and the assumption of resiliency  
– is the key to hope.”*

*The Power of Hope:  
How the Science of Well-Being can Save us from Despair  
Carol Graham  
Princeton University Press, 2023*



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# Table Discussion

## Where do you have agency as the CAO?

- How can you lean into your strengths to reinforce that agency?
- To whom can you delegate to shore up what saps your energy?
- Name your networks. How can you rely on them to sustain your hope?
- What is one or two action steps from today that will restore your hope and help you instill it in others?



**In this new environment, higher education institutions that are less in love with tradition and more in love with their students will be the ones that thrive.**

Michael Sorrell, April 2020

**Restoring opportunities for a broad portion of society is the key to instilling hope.**

Carol Graham, 2023



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# Q&A



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# Thank you for attending this session!



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