

LEADERSHIP PHYLOSOPHY & STYLE

Department heads bear numerous responsibilities, and must possess a comprehensive set of leadership, management, and interpersonal skills. Their effectiveness relies on the capacity to articulate a shared vision for the unit, adapt to evolving circumstances, foster innovation and excellence, and inspire and mentor faculty, staff, and students effectively. Exceptional communication abilities are also indispensable for building trust and consensus, mediating disagreements and conflicts, and serving as strong advocates both within the department and in the broader institutional and stakeholder communities.

I am an individual who is naturally drawn to the process of learning and is energized by the journey from ignorance to competence. This personality trait enables me to thrive in **dynamic work environments** where I am asked to take on diverse project assignments and expected to learn a lot about the new subject matter in a short period of time. The outcome of the learning is important, but it is less significant than the “getting there”. The process of learning provides me with a sense of purpose and satisfaction, which are the fuel of my existence. This personal attribute is well reflected in my leadership approach. As a leader, I strive to model **lifelong learning** by staying informed about scientific advancements and industry trends, sharing insights with my team, and fostering discussions that encourage **critical thinking** and **innovation**. In my team, I create a culture of curiosity, exploration, pursuit of knowledge and skills enhancement, and I facilitate these initiatives by seeking out opportunities for professional growth and by allocating resources to support them. I embrace a **mindset of continuous improvement** as I believe that both leadership and organizations must evolve in response to changing circumstances.

Integrity is at the very core of everything I do as a person -the way I educate my children, conduct research, teach classes, mentor students and faculty, and carry-out all my administrative roles. Ethical behavior, transparency, and honesty are foundational to **earning the trust** and respect of others, and trust is the building block of any cohesive team. Because of this, I embrace **transparency** in my actions and decisions, and I am committed to **honesty** in all situations, even when it is difficult. By maintaining open, transparent communication, I aim to create a **culture of accountability** where everyone understands the importance of their role in upholding our shared goals.

Leadership is not about exerting authority and micromanaging people, but about **inspiring and empowering others** so they can unlock their full potential. I am an active and energetic person who is always pushing herself to seize new opportunities, take the lead, and who is not afraid to take risks. I rely on my instincts and my own judgement, and I am determined to set my own course in life, both personally and academically. Because of my focus on progress, I have a natural inclination to create a sense of forward momentum in the teams I am part of. I tend to be both expressive and self-assured, which helps persuade teammates to embrace my vision, jump on board, and get **excited about moving forward with me**. I consider this a key strength when implementing my leadership vision and one that would serve me extremely well in the role of Department Head. As a leader, I recognize that each team member brings unique strengths and talents to the table, and I want each of them to feel valued, engaged, and motivated to contribute their best work towards our common goals. I support their growth through **personalized mentorship** and by always providing constructive feedback. I empower people by delegating responsibilities, encouraging autonomy, and providing opportunities for professional development.

In summary, my leadership philosophy is anchored in integrity, inspiration, empowerment, and continuous improvement. I am dedicated to creating an inclusive environment where every team member has equal opportunities and is empowered to succeed. By inspiring and supporting others, I aim to cultivate an environment of continuous growth and collective success.

VISION FOR THE DEPARTMENT

As a faculty member, I value competent, consistent, transparent, and fair administration, and my approach to the role of Department Head in the Horticulture and Landscape Architecture department would be based upon these principles. My initial goals would include (1) getting acquainted with department personnel and other resources (staffing, equipment, and facilities), College and University administration, and with the most recent departmental review, (2) learning and gaining proficiency in navigating the CSU system, (3) determining critical gaps in core mission areas, and (4) starting the process of addressing unmet needs. Although not a comprehensive list, below are some of the areas I would focus on.

1. Strategic planning

I will work to unite the department behind a set of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goals that align with the College strategic priorities. This will be achieved by engaging the entire department community -faculty, staff, students- in strategic planning, a process led by a professional facilitator. I have participated in strategic planning both within my department and the College at OSU, and most recently as vice-president of the American Phytopathological Society, and I can speak first-hand about the value of this process. Beside developing a product (the strategic plan), the process will provide opportunities for members of the department to increase their awareness of the diverse interests across the unit, foster collaboration, and bolster cohesiveness around a common vision and shared goals. The strategic plan will be a living document that is potentially re-evaluated and refined annually. I will then work to align resource allocation with the strategic objectives.

2. Recruitment and development of people

Academia is a “people business,” and quality people support quality work. This applies to everyone in the department, from faculty to staff to students. An important responsibility of the Department Head is to support and guide people throughout their professional life cycle -from the time they are recruited to the time they leave the department. As a Department Head I will be dedicated to recruit, promote, develop, and retain good performers. I will develop a staffing plan that details the specifics of faculty and staff positions and will align it with the annual departmental goals. This will help develop a recruitment narrative that will explain to the candidates why they should join the department and where they fit. As part of my oversight responsibilities, I will ensure the performance of faculty and staff in terms of both productivity and professional behavior. I will set clear expectations in advance and perform fair evaluations against those expectations. To foster a culture of continuous growth, I will promote professional development initiatives for faculty, staff, and students, and will allocate resources to support them.

3. Investment in academic programs

As a faculty member and Extension professional I view teaching as pivotal to my role, and I am motivated to explore ways to improve the educational experience for all students. At CSU, I will continue to support the education and engagement of diverse audiences, from prospective students to agricultural stakeholders. As part of my assessment of the needs of the Department, I will work with faculty, staff, and students to identify potential gaps in the graduate and undergraduate curriculum and Extension programming, including teaching practices, and develop a clear plan for addressing them. As chair of the Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies committees at OSU, I have had a significant role in the redesign of our graduate curriculum. From leading focus groups, facilitating discussion sessions, developing course proposals, creating assessment plans, and moving the overall process forward, I have gained extensive experience in this area, and it is my goal to directly apply what I have learned. Given the budget model that the University operates under, the financial health of the department will be directly impacted by the continued success of its academic programs. I will work tirelessly to increase the visibility of the department’s majors by using alumni connections to facilitate promotion and referrals, and I will invest in increasing experiential-learning opportunities by connecting with pertinent industries and facilitating internships. By leveraging its connection with CSU SPUR, the department is already strategically positioned to succeed in this endeavor, and it will be my mission to continue investing in its development.

4. Advocacy and increased visibility

I will be the strongest advocate in advancing the interests of the department at the College and University level. I believe that a Department Head can play a large role in explaining the connection and importance of the work being conducted to politicians, alumni, farmers, and the public. To this end, I will interact regularly with internal and external stakeholders to ensure that they understand the value of what we do and its impact on their lives. I will open the doors of the Department through targeted outreach initiatives to increase its visibility, so that everyone who comes to learn will walk away with positive things to say about what we do. I will use every tool in my possession to promote our science and its connection to the land-grant mission.

5. Community & Inclusion

I am committed to foster a safe, nurturing workplace, that is open to diversity of thought, is inclusive, and where discrimination, bullying, and intimidation don’t have a place. A workplace that recognizes the value in everyone, where all have a sense of safety and belonging, and where disagreement is handled with respect and fairness. As Department Head, I will create a culture that promotes a sense of community, celebrates achievements, and ensures that everyone feels included and valued.