

A traditional model of leadership does not work in academia. Commonly, selecting a leader involves supporting the person with a clearly articulated vision that benefits you most. This vision may or may not be a product of community input. Once this leader is installed in power, supporters of the previous leader are often removed and replaced. Tenure makes this model ineffective. When administration employs this type of traditional leadership model, tenured faculty who did not support the leader's vision may feel disenfranchised or isolated and tenure-track or non-tenure stream faculty may feel pressured to support the new administration without question creating a toxic work environment.

Instead, I prefer to build a community. Growing up on a farm in rural North Carolina, my parents taught me the value of service and community which I carried into my professional life. As a master's student at North Carolina State University, participating in community engagement extension activities was a life-changing experience that I carried into my professional practice as a Landscape Architect and in academia as a professor. For over two decades, I have participated in community engagement efforts where I cultivated relationships with key partners and stakeholders, developed active listening skills, and helped people identify compromises. Essentially, community is at the heart of everything I do.

As a professor, I value mentoring students, creating a supportive learning environment where peers are resources and not competition, and organizing community engagement projects to provide meaningful experiences. As an administrator, I prioritize empowering faculty and students by granting them agency in the decision-making process. I regard faculty input, regardless of rank, as having equal weight in making decisions for the program, such as budget allotment, curricular changes, and strategic plan initiatives. I empower students to take ownership of their studio space and establish priorities in allocating scholarship funding. As an administrator, I prioritize mentoring faculty and students to find a resolution to conflict instead of ignoring the problem and letting situations fester. I act as soon as I am aware of any conflict. My position in conflict resolution is to assume that no ill intent has occurred; instead, I have observed that conflict tends to arise when there is a disconnect between intention and perception. I mentor faculty and students in finding more effective ways to articulate their intention. These practices have cultivated a level of trust among faculty, students, and me. They feel comfortable informing me of potential problems and conflict because I have created a space where these situations are handled timely, professionally, and effectively. Furthermore, I encourage faculty to share any student concerns, and we work together to formulate a strategy to support every student. While I support faculty governance and empowering students to make decisions, the leader sets the tone. Through demonstrating professionalism and respectful and civil interactions with colleagues and students, my actions set the tone for the program where we have built a strong sense of community and purpose. At CSU, I would implement the same techniques of community building and leading by example to duplicate our strong community we enjoy at OU.

Building a strong community within academia involves fiscal responsibility. We are experiencing a tumultuous period in university funding due to fluctuations over time in budgetary support from state government, loss of or reduced indirect costs from federal funding, and the evolving situation with college player compensation with NIL agreements and the recent House v. NCAA ruling. Considering the financial challenges facing universities, Departments need a strong strategy to weather these difficult times. At OU, I focused on building enrollment, credit hour generation, and fundraising to secure the

financial health of the program which may not be the best strategy at CSU. From reviewing the University's Strategic Plan, phrases, such as "intelligent growth" and "optimizing our space", highlight the university's commitment to implementing strategies where enrollment growth does not exceed space capacity. Therefore, growing student enrollment may be less of a priority depending on available building capacity; however, increasing credit hour generation and fundraising efforts are effective strategies to secure the financial health of HLA.

While the future of federal grant funding is unknown, Colorado boasts many funding opportunities within state-based organizations, such as Great Outdoors Colorado, Colorado Health Foundation, Gates Family Foundation of Colorado, Colorado Environmental Justice Grant Program through the Department of Public Health and Environment, Colorado Watershed Assembly, and Colorado Parks and Wildlife. From my work with community engagement, my students and I provide a valuable service to Oklahomans that they could not afford otherwise. Student work is used for fundraising, applying for grants, or supporting practitioners in applying for grants to install these projects. With CSU's mission of extension, these Colorado specific funding opportunities could transform community engagement efforts within HLA curriculum benefiting countless Coloradans. Building this library of projects that support community engagement and rural development aligns well with the University's Strategic Plan. As Department Head, I would encourage faculty to collaborate with faculty within the College and across campus on community engagement/rural development endeavors. Dr. Mengmeng Gu, Director of Campus Extension Programs and former HLA Department Head, would be a wonderful ally in facilitating this transdisciplinary work.

As an administrator, I deeply value building a community where people feel supported and valued. My 20+ years of experience in community engagement have served me well in co-creating this community. My strength in community engagement is evident in the culture I created within the Division of Planning, Landscape Architecture, and Design at OU. Furthermore, I received the Excellence in Service Learning (Senior Level) Award from the Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture in 2025 due to my community engagement efforts with students. I look forward to the challenges of changing from a College of Architecture at the Flagship University to a College of Agriculture at a Land Grant University and the commitment to extension.