

## Dossier Prepared by the Nominee

### 1. Educational Leadership Statement

**Finding a leadership voice.** For a long time, I didn't think of myself as an educational leader. I just loved what I did, worked hard to do it well, experimented with ideas until they worked for me and my students, and wrote and talked about my experiences as an exercise in critical self-reflection, perhaps mixed with a measure of self-consciousness, too. I believed that if I could explain what I did, how I did it, and why I did it, I would get feedback that would make me a better teacher and help me to refine my own methods. This gave me the confidence to speak with colleagues who were interested in the techniques I develop and use, and help a number of members of my own and other departments think about how they, and I, could become better teachers. I shared my grading rubrics, explained how group work was about more than attendance, propounded the benefits of modeling essay writing, and discussed the unique needs of adult learners. Along the way, I came to be relied on as a person who could give honest, spirited, and practiced advice about teaching, without dictating a single-model system or assuming that my own practices were somehow better than those used by others. Nobody would have been more surprised than me to find that all of this informal advice, mentoring, and dialogue—offered hurriedly before class or in long, casual, and engaging conversations, in the hallways, my office, or theirs—while I went about the task of just being a professor who loved to teach, amounted to educational leadership. I have always believed that as university teachers, it is critically important that we maintain a constant dialogue among our students, colleagues, and the public about effective methods – and the appropriate valuing – of teaching and learning.

**Improving historical andragogy.** First and foremost, as a professional historian, I feel it is important to provide educational leadership particularly with regard to the expectations of my own discipline. Historians are charged not only with the task of explaining the meaning of important historical events, but also with developing an appreciation for lifelong learning and the desire to participate actively in a society that relies on informed and advanced citizenship. This demands the use of a variety of tools designed to train adults (thus, andragogy rather than pedagogy) to think critically and abstractly, research and examine various bodies of evidence before arriving at conclusions, debate and engage with other informed parties, and articulate conclusions effectively in both written and oral communication. Thus, although it is important that educational leadership activities extend beyond one's discipline, many of my own leadership activities, and especially those earlier in my career, have been discipline specific because of my core belief that I have a fundamental responsibility to teach future historians and advanced citizens how to think, write, and act. This requires maintaining an ongoing dialogue with colleagues in History in order to help realize these common goals.

**Leading by example.** I believe that educational leadership is about setting examples to colleagues and students. To accomplish this, I believe that university teachers should be active in their discipline, see research and teaching as mutually reinforcing activities, and communicate their updated expertise and enthusiasm for the material. This philosophy goes beyond the classroom, where learning activities need to be modeled by professors who are also practitioners, and into the wider teaching community as part of an ongoing dialogue about effective teaching and learning. Thus, I feel that one of the most effective, though perhaps also the least formal, forms of educational leadership is to lead by example, by modeling to colleagues that teachers should not expect more of others than they expect of themselves. This process encourages a slow and steady cultural shift in how we approach teaching and learning.

**A common desire to be involved.** I believe that effective educational leaders share a common desire to help realize better teaching practices throughout the University community. In my experience, despite the diversity and expertise that colleagues bring to their teaching, those involved in educational leadership activities genuinely aspire to bring about important goals through a shared belief that teaching and learning can always be done better, which makes these experiences both self-reflective of our own practices and transformative of the practices of individuals and the University community as a whole. Similarly, I believe that educational leaders need to get involved where they are most needed, where they see room for improvement, and where they feel they can have the most impact on students, colleagues, and the post-secondary teaching culture. Put simply, this requires embracing the opportunities for educational leadership initiatives as they become available.

**Mentoring and being mentored.** I believe that educational leaders see value not only in mentoring others, but also in being mentored, thereby creating an organic, reciprocal relationship that is ultimately beneficial to teachers and students. When I came to Calgary in 2002 with very little teaching experience, I sought out an excellent mentor who provided me with some critical advice about classroom management, lecture organization, and University expectations regarding teaching. Even now, as a more seasoned instructor, I seek out mentors whose experience and advice I greatly value. Right now, most of this mentoring focuses on incorporating technology into my classes, including D2L training, which is also one of the reasons why I decided to get involved in teaching-technology committees. Being mentored also means being a mentor for both students (such as my Classroom Assistant program) and colleagues. This often works best when the mentee seeks out the mentor and when the mentee is actively involved in determining the mentoring agenda, based on her or his specific teaching needs. As a member of the new Teaching Academy, I hope that my role as a mentor can continue to develop among a group of like-minded colleagues.

**Remaining current in best practices.** I believe that educational leaders are most effective when they maintain currency in best teaching practices, including tried and true traditional methods (such as “chalk and talk” lecturing – a teaching method that I believe is still extremely valuable) and new practices, such as the use of small group interaction, creative expression, and digital technologies. This allows leaders to offer practiced and research-informed advice about teaching, while also recognizing that there is a great degree of diversity of teaching practices in the University setting. This diversity is the result of several factors that always need to be kept in mind: disciplinary signature pedagogies, the age and level of the students, and the learning outcomes of individual disciplines, programs, courses, and assignments. One of the advantages of working with a range of educators on committees and workshops, for example, is learning how others teach effectively using different methods than my own.

**The danger of complacency.** Finally, one of the reasons I believe that educational leadership is so important is because it is easy for university teachers to become complacent in their teaching, and to justify this on the basis of large teaching loads, high research expectations, and personal life events. But we have to ask ourselves if our students are really learning, and if we are really teaching? Teachers *do* have significant demands on their time; as a husband, a father of two young children, and a professor with an active research portfolio, I understand this as well as anyone. Balancing these various demands requires all teachers, and particularly those who have achieved success in the classroom and have experimented with various methods, to provide mentorship and leadership to others who find themselves impacted by these perfectly understandable challenges. Especially as an informal educational leader, I think it is important that we show each other how to continue to be effective teachers while balancing the additional demands of our professions and our lives.