Against All Odds: Transitioning from Academic Faculty into Administrative Roles While Maintaining Successful Scholarship

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Abstract: This narrative manuscript introduces and describes how we have maintained scholarship identities throughout (and beyond) our transitions from newly tenured academic faculty into program director roles in a school of social work at a private university in the U.S. Here, we present concepts relevant to how scholarship agendas can be maintained—refined, adapted—post-transition into academic leadership positions. Taking inspiration from Helen Sword's (2017) Behavioral, Artisanal, Social, and Emotional (BASE) writing tool, we present individual vignettes and reflections that illustrate the role that growth has played in being able to move our agendas forward. Our shared experience of doing so "against all odds" offers support to others for whom transitioning to leadership may threaten ongoing scholarly success (or potentially threaten to undo it). We provide several recommendations for weathering transition and creating leader-scholar productivity post-transition.

Keywords: administration, leadership, role transition, peer support, scholarship

While there is a pressing need for academic faculty to take on leadership roles within the academy, the process of transition itself may feel particularly challenging for those who wish to maintain previously developed scholarship agendas. Maintaining scholarly work like writing, research, and publication in the midst of—and following—transitions is no small feat. Leaders may be tasked with leading long-term projects such as re-affirmation and accreditation in professional academic programs, such as social work. They may also be struggling with other realities inherent to their new roles such as reduced control over their schedules due to more administrative obligations. Before long, cycles may become established. Fewer completed manuscripts leads to drops in both rates of publication and presentations. An overall drop-off in creative scholarship may ensue (Franz, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2003).

The maintenance of scholarship (scholarly work and interests) among academic faculty who have transitioned into leadership roles may be in particular influenced by their ability to reconnect with previously established work habits (Sword, 2017) and varies from academic leader to academic leader. Similarly, each leader's process may depend on their unique work situations and the degree to which they are able to adjust to their new conditions (and the end to which these are static) once they have assumed leadership roles.

The purpose of this narrative is to consider how scholarship agendas can be maintained, refined, and adapted after transitioning into academic leadership positions in baccalaureate, master's, and doctorate social work programs. Grounded in the review of the literature and informed by Helen Sword's (2017) Behavior, Artisanal, Social, and Emotional (BASE) theoretical considerations inherent to maintaining writing practices, we three authors consider how our BASEs have shifted as we transitioned from academic faculty into new leadership roles, and then as we performed that transition into leadership roles. The goal of our article is to describe the BASE that we created in order to maintain our scholarship agendas once transitioning into program director

roles at the University of St. Thomas School of Social Work, and how our experiences shall help inform subsequent transitions. An examination of the literature outlines some of the challenges of maintaining scholarship within leadership roles. Furthermore, exploration of BASE-related concepts helps explain how and why our ability to maintain scholarship while transitioning into leadership roles was successful. Throughout the article, we use vignettes to illustrate our key points (Sword, 2017).

Our Beginning: Academic Scholarship Pre-Transition into Leadership
Vignette 1: The Proposal

Part one of our four-part vignette illustrates how moving into our leadership roles was proposed, what we grappled with, and how we made our decisions to move into administrative roles.

Our respective transitions from academic faculty into administrative roles began during the winter of 2017. After we had enjoyed years of stability among a rather large faculty within a good-sized school of social work, suddenly change was constant. Though three rather recently tenured and newly minted associate professors, we agreed to move into doctorate-, master's-, and baccalaureate-level program director positions within weeks of each other.

When Catherine was asked to move into a doctorate program director role, she was enthusiastic about this possibility for professional development after returning from a one-semester sabbatical. Catherine was interested in leadership opportunities in the doctorate program because she had a strong interest in doctoral education and examining professional development in administrative positions. Although somewhat hesitant because of fear related to less scholarship activity, she agreed.

When Kari was asked to move into a master's program director role, short-term transition into leadership was far from her mind. Though hoping to move into leadership someday, Kari often pictured that day arriving years down the road. Her energy, at that moment, was directed toward planning her upcoming (first!) sabbatical. When asked, the first thing she said was, "Can I think about it?" Off to think about it she went. Later she returned and asked, "Why me?" Then off she went to consider the offer further. Finally, she returned. "Yes, I'll do it! After I come back from my sabbatical."

In the BSW program, a series of administrative changes (retirements, job transitions within the school) left the position open, with Katharine the most senior person standing. There were multiple discussions among BSW faculty about filling the role, and no one was interested in stepping forward at that time. At the time, Katharine's research and scholarly agenda was gaining some significant traction, and her teaching was a source of deep joy. Stepping into the BSW role, she recognized, would require that she significantly curtail her work in both of these areas. However, Katharine agreed out of a sense of loyalty to the program and her colleagues.

Scholarship Agendas Among Faculty Pre-Leadership

To date, little, if any, literature pertaining to maintaining and establishing a scholarship agenda

has looked at doing so *after* transitioning into leadership roles nor considered the impact of scholarship upon the longer trajectory of academic faculty careers.

Nevertheless, a small body of research is found within social work, specifically barriers and facilitators to scholarship engagement among social work faculty. Barriers include challenges related to balancing demands such as researching, teaching, and providing service in light of institutional obligations and priorities (Moriarty et al., 2015; Teater et al., 2018). Facilitators for engaging in scholarship include factors such as time (both finding it and protecting it) and support (from institutions, mentors, and peers) to make engagement in scholarship and research, teaching, and administration more possible (Teater et al., 2018).

Shifting from instructional culture in favor of greater support for faculty research has been identified as salient in helping faculty engage in scholarship and research given the difficulty of balancing academic roles (Freedenthal et al., 2008; Shera, 2008). Conference funding, reduction in teaching time via external funding, and grant writing financial assistance provided by social work programs also facilitate encouragement for faculty (Freedenthal et al., 2008). In addition to institutional provisions, it's recommended to establish and maintain school/department-level social work scholarship and research support centers for faculty as well as create research collaborations with community practice partners and other academic institutions (Shera, 2008). In efforts to help balance research, administration, and teaching loads, reducing the latter two aspects while promoting collaborative scholarship and publishing may help social work faculty (especially junior faculty) produce scholarship. Furthermore, they may be more equipped to aid in completion of research projects in light of less demanding teaching and administrative loads (Jones et al., 2009).

Faculty Roles and Responsibilities Regarding Scholarship

Research examining scholarship among leaders across academic disciplines has primarily examined intersections between role transition, scholarship productivity, and support that helps faculty meet scholarship expectations (Hotard et al., 2004). Faculty perceptions regarding teaching and scholarship responsibility differ within and between disciplines. Weighing variables such as institution size and teaching load given their influence on scholarship is important when considering how faculty maintain scholarly engagement—that is whether an institution is research-intensive or teaching-intensive, and its requirement for courses taught (Hotard et al., 2004).

The importance of productivity among faculty within research literature cannot be overemphasized. It has been documented among the most highly ranked criteria for tenure review (Rayfield et al., 2004). Productivity levels tend to be higher among tenured when compared to non-tenured faculty (Bland et al., 2006). Additionally, the level of productivity may be influenced by individual (autonomy and commitment to conducting research), group (positive group climate as well as departmental norms), and/or institutional (support considerations at the leadership level) factors (Bland et al., 2005; Bland et al., 2002).

Developing a Scholarship BASE

As tenure track academic faculty, we had developed a rhythm of scholarship quite suited to our respective preferences. We developed what we later learned Helen Sword (2017) refers to as BASE (Behavioral, Artisanal, Social, and Emotional) habits that, while different for each of us, contributed to our finding what worked (for each of us) scholarship-wise as academic faculty. *Behaviorally*, we had created routines that worked for us in terms of finding times (e.g., the same time each day; chunks of time) and places (e.g., home or office; coffee shops until deadlines approached) to write that fueled our academic writing preferences and habits. *Artisanally*, we sought mentoring and training support that further developed what we'd previously received and learned to further appreciate the process of writing for publication inherent to our respective research areas. *Socially*, we learned about what our aims of writing were (our audience); whether we liked to write *with* others (e.g., collaboratively) or more simply liked writing *around* others (e.g., in writing groups, writing retreats). *Emotionally*, we learned what habits helped us (e.g., were motivational) and what our thoughts about our writing were (e.g., whether we viewed it positively or negatively).

Preparing for Our Transitions
Vignette 2: Our Faculty (Pre-Admin) Scholarship BASE

Part two of our four-part vignette illustrates the established scholarship agendas we each had prior to moving into administrative roles.

As we transitioned into leadership roles, we began to contemplate whether maintaining our respective scholarship agendas would be possible if we agreed to shift out of primarily academic roles. As faculty who entered full-time academia as a second career within a year of each other, each of us had already developed strong roots—10 or more years each working at some capacity—within our respective scholarship areas. Catherine worked with Latina women who had experienced domestic violence. Kari worked with military-connected populations. Katharine worked in policy practice and program evaluation, particularly in the special education and child welfare systems. Prior to moving into our leadership roles, each of us identified as faculty members who valued and prioritized scholarly works. As Catherine noted, "From the very beginning, I both prioritized my scholarship activity because it was important for my own professional development and because it was important for tenure, promotion, and evaluation." As Kari noted, "During a time where developing support for military-connected communities has been particularly important, I was (and remain) very committed to scholarship, research, service, and mentorship." As Katharine noted:

> *I see my professional engagement as getting to be part of a national—or international—conversation about topics and issues that are of importance to me. It has been something I have prioritized because it is how I see myself being a changemaker and contributing to my profession and community.*

As assistant professors, we had thought about engaging and/or maintaining scholarship agendas in different ways. In her first year, Catherine recalled: "I established consistent scholarship

habits, including carving out at least one day per week to work, and by joining a writing group." Kari recalled, "Since I needed to complete my dissertation and establish a tenure track-worthy scholarship agenda, my motivation to engage in scholarship was extremely strong. I found support through writing groups and (eventually) found collaborators who shared/maintained my research interests." Katharine recalled thinking about her research in stages:

> *I was really focused on spinning out publications and presentations from my dissertation—and had that largely mapped out prior to starting in my role. But I also really had to think hard about what I wanted to do once that phase was done—what was the scholarly agenda that best fit my interests for the next five or 10 years?*

Role Transition: Transitioning from Faculty to Administrative Roles

Current literature highlighting academic faculty transition to administrative roles emphasizes optimal conditions for success as well as barriers associated with this shift (Allison & Ramirez, 2016; Clift, 2011; Dunbar, 2015; Gonaim, 2016).

Optimal Conditions

In terms of optimal conditions for successful transition into new administrative roles and their associated responsibilities, faculty benefit from peer and leadership support, mentorship, understanding of professional identity, and training (Allison & Ramirez, 2016; Clift, 2011; Dunbar, 2015; Gonaim, 2016). In one study, Gonaim (2016) discussed ample funding and available graduate students for administrators to continue engaging in scholarship activity after leaving teaching positions. Gaining an appreciation for taking on responsibilities of encouraging scholarship rather than engaging in it oneself is important for transitioning into administrative roles, in addition to cultivating the internal and external skills to invest in the new role (Harris, 2006). In another study, Palm (2006) explained that transitioning to administration often requires a sacrifice of academic career in favor of serving one's institution. Due to the changes in roles, it is necessary to provide ample training and mentorship for faculty members taking on administrative positions (McCarthy, 2003). In addition to role contrast, faculty need to be prepared to shift their professional focus from academic achievement to organizational matters including politics, fundraising, and personnel management (Foster, 2006).

Barriers

In terms of barriers, lack of mentorship was a key indicator. Findings indicated faculty members' personal experiences of moving from faculty to administrators were impeded by insufficient mentorship and preparation to take on the new role (Foster, 2006; McCarthy, 2003). Research suggests that declining productivity due to steep learning curves inherent to new administrative appointments, demands associated with managing a new program, lack of mentorship, limited institutional support, and limited internal support such as by dean and colleagues may be contributing factors (Moriarty et al., 2015; Teater et al., 2018).

Maintaining Scholarship Agendas After Moving into Leadership Roles
Vignette 3: Transitioning into Leadership Roles and Reconciling Our New BASE

Part three of our four-part vignette illustrates the challenges we experienced post-transition to our administration BASE.

The time had arrived. As we prepared to transition into our respective program director roles, we relished our final moments as newly tenured faculty who maintained robust scholarship agendas one last time. We had tackled the challenges of maintaining scholarship agendas while academic faculty, and now we turned toward the more daunting prospect of doing so within our new administrative roles. We each faced many unknowns as we entered our respective roles: Did we know what we were getting into? Would we be able to consistently carve out time to write or would we be engulfed in administrative duties 24/7? We had agreed to step up to become leaders, and the next step was to actually move into our new roles.

For Catherine, the biggest challenge was learning how to manage the new day-to-day administrative duties such as mentorship meetings with faculty members working on tenure and promotion materials, course scheduling, meetings with administration, and significant work on curriculum revisions during the first year. She was trying to figure out how to conduct scholarly activity (e.g., writing, analyzing current data, and working with community partners) with the new schedule. She quickly realized that persistence in scholarship projects and incorporating daily writing schedules was integral as she developed skills in managing a program, faculty, and staff.

For Kari, the biggest challenge was that her style of working under deadline vis-à-vis dedicated chunks of scheduled time was no longer a reliable option. Administrative fires and unplanned emergencies seemed to pop up at inopportune times, leaving little room—even during evenings, weekends, and summer months—for the uninterrupted periods of writing time Kari had relied on previously to complete and/or oversee substantial scholarship projects. After starting in her new role, she grappled with coming to terms that her administrative responsibilities were now her priority. While she hoped to someday learn to work and juggle both, her current reality was (in the interim) that her scholarship would take place more intermittently, sometimes even getting placed on hold.

For Katharine, the biggest challenge was time management and setting priorities. She had maintained a fairly active research agenda, working in several different areas and methodologies. With the time demands of the administrative position, she had to scale back on some projects, renegotiating her role in research teams and the amount of time and effort she could commit to each one. She also had to reframe what was most important to her in her various projects so that she could prioritize those areas when she had opportunities for scholarship. She was forced to have some honest conversations with her collaborators—and herself—about what was possible and in what time frame, given her new role.

Maintaining Scholarship and Research Post-Shift from Faculty to Administration

To increase scholarship and research productivity among faculty, it is necessary to recognize individual and institutional roles in facilitating scholarship (Franz, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2003). Findings from previous studies suggest elements such as a strong senior faculty presence within programs and willingness from them to mentor junior faculty; administrative support for research initiatives; defined departmental research priorities; research autonomy; designated teaching and research terms; and research collaboration with other academic institutions all provide an environment of successful scholarship productivity (DuPree et al., 2009; Gopaul et al., 2016; Kennedy et al., 2003; Meyer & Evans, 2003). Relevant for practice-oriented disciplines such as social work, DuPree and colleagues (2009) encouraged academic programs to educate future faculty within a scientist-practitioner model to prepare them to balance faculty responsibilities. Finally, Meyer and Evans (2003) offered insight into both what motivates faculty to engage in scholarship and several strategies institutions may utilize. First, administrators are moving away from universal productivity benchmarks (these create a culture of anxiety and negative reinforcement) and instead giving individual faculty members the opportunity to set their own professional and academic achievement goals (Meyer & Evans, 2003). Second, there is a move away from negative reinforcement to a more strengths-based approach, creating a system that incentivizes faculty productivity and professional development (Meyer & Evans, 2003).

Successfully Maintaining Scholarship: Post-Transition into Administrative Roles
Vignette 4: Lessons Learned and BASEs Built

Part four of our four-part vignette illustrates how we learned to manage challenges we initially experienced after moving into our administrative roles and how we continue to work on reconciling our post-transition to administration BASE.

Against all odds, we have each maintained our scholarship agendas post-transition into leadership. We have reflected upon practices developed as we have built our new BASEs. Overall, we view our continued BASE challenges post-transition to be reconceptualizing our concept of, and the realities of, our behavioral, artisanal, social, and emotional habits now that we're administrators.

Behaviorally, we have noticed (and the literature supports that) we're now less in control of our schedules than we were before our transitions. We have increasingly come to the realization that what used to work for us in faculty roles no longer reflects our realities. Catherine has reconciled this by committing to working on one scholarly project per semester, thus preparing a timeline of writing opportunities within a 15-week period (e.g., one hour of writing on two or three days during one week, and other weeks writing all day for eight hours). Kari continues to embrace occasional (fewer and further in-between) opportunities to write in her preferred (pre-administrative) ways yet has accepted she must be more efficient, strategic, and realistic habit-wise (her everyday habits, overall, she considers still good but uneven). Katharine has reconciled this by adapting her writing style to fit the available time and becoming more protective of the writing time she has scheduled. She also has learned to embrace the

spontaneous opportunities to write that may arise—for example, when her family members all make other plans on a weekend afternoon!

Artisanally, we have noticed that many aspects of honing habits are developmental and iterative in nature. Fortunately, what we've learned in our pre-administrative roles we carry with us today. For Catherine, her passion for scholarship projects and the recent publication of her Sí, Yo Puedo *curriculum motivates her to continue with writing habits for future publications. These habits are integral for effective leadership; role modeling for peers is important. For Kari, she is grateful that with regard to her craft of writing she remains confident in her ability to write clearly and well (time permitting) within her primary scholarship areas and comfort zones, and that she remains motivated to learn as she moves further into leadership and engages in writing in new ways. For Katharine, moving the focus of her scholarly work to areas that most closely mirror her practice expertise in political and civic engagement has helped to make scholarship feel immediate and integrated into her work.*

Socially, as we see ourselves as administrators who really, really want to maintain productive scholarship agendas, this area felt particularly important to us. The three of us are one area of support for one another—it is nice that we can encourage one another and appreciate the challenges that we have in remaining engaged. Catherine likes to spark conversations with colleagues or her interim dean about scholarship and writing projects (e.g., if colleagues are still revising a writing piece, or if they're almost ready to submit to a journal). She says,

> *By having these conversations, she creates an environment of social engagement grounded in scholarship, writing, and scholarly works. I find myself reflecting on what are the next steps post the publication of my curriculum during this administrative phase and I seek out support and advice from senior faculty members.*

Kari is aware that she wants to continue certain previously acquired social habits (e.g., writing in the presence of others, collaborating with others), while some of her social needs continue to shift post-transition as her career progresses (e.g., she benefitted from social support to work toward tenure early on whereas now she seeks out social support to grow within her leadership role) and as her needs have shifted. For Katharine, her strong relationships with co-authors and researchers have been enormously important. She has found that honestly renegotiating her role in research teams to reflect the realities of her administrative role has helped her to maintain relationships that support her writing and kept her engaged and moving forward.

Emotionally, we are trying to remain connected without getting overwhelmed—we must juggle our new and old roles, but also not lose sight of what we like about (and why we stay active in) our respective scholarship agendas. For Catherine, this means staying connected to colleagues in her field and checking in with Kari and Katharine about how they are doing. We try to have monthly breakfasts to check in about administrative duties and scholarship, as well as to support one another with our writing projects. For Kari, this means seeking out support (early and often) and trying to engage in self-care, both so that she can continue forward in the administrative role and so that she can stay engaged in scholarship post-transition. For Katharine, treating writing and research time as important and something to be scheduled and

protected is both productive and emotionally helpful—it feels like self-care as well as research productivity.

Further Recommendations

Based on our review of the literature, Sword's theoretical dimensions (2017), as well as our critical analysis of our own experiences, we have identified several additional areas that may support new administrators as they integrate scholarship into their new roles.

Supportive Environment

Our position on fostering a supportive environment for scholarship activity and productivity is similar to previous findings indicating a positive departmental culture, internal and external institutional funding support, and reduction in teaching time (Freedenthal et al., 2008; Shera, 2008) are significant factors for success. The importance of strong, extended supportive scholarship environments cannot be understated. Encouraging environments also include the ability to have connection with faculty members not in administrative appointments about current scholarship activities. These important conversations with faculty colleagues may take place in a variety of ways, such as during individual supervision meetings, faculty meetings, in between meetings, and seeing each other in passing (e.g., faculty kitchenette area or walking in the hallways).

Accountability

Accountability of scholarship activity among administrative peers is another important personal attribute for program directors. For example, the interim dean of the school of social work, faculty colleagues, and colleagues in writing groups are supports that have aided our successful scholarship activity. Additional strategies we now employ include maintaining ongoing relationships with research partners and writing groups to help build accountability and implementing interim deadlines for big projects. Each of us has found ways of staying motivated, connected, and committed.

Collaboration

Collaboration is another area that has influenced our successful scholarship productivity. We work with other colleagues across disciplines in the institutions and in national and international social work programs. Furthermore, we find partnering with faculty colleagues in research centers or sponsored programs and offices related to research in institutions fosters collaboration within a helpful environment (Freedenthal et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2009; Shera, 2008).

Institutional and External Supports

External institutional funding is another area of scholarship support. We have sought various grants and research assistantships, which aid us in making critical programming decisions in our scholarship and research projects. By having external institutional funding and research

assistantships, our research projects have become valued by our institution and helped us make progress towards publications and promotion. Over the past 10 years, we have each worked with several research assistants for an average of two years each.

Permission to Adapt Research Agenda and Goals to Fit New Circumstances

One final consideration is giving ourselves permission to adapt our respective research agendas and goals to fit our new circumstances. Each of us was clear-eyed as to our respective challenges maintaining scholarly agendas while meeting administrative role demands. While we all had different strategies, we learned to acknowledge the challenge of "doing both," and made adaptations as needed. We adapted our styles of scholarship (e.g., Katharine shifted her focus on what she most cared about), slowed the rates with which we conducted our scholarly work—while still maintaining a presence—and reconceptualized our work to better align with our allotted time, perhaps by bringing in new collaborators or different methods of analysis.

Conclusion

In this narrative, we have highlighted our efforts made to sustain scholarship activity after moving into (baccalaureate-, master's-, and doctorate-level) program director roles. Collectively, we have argued that successful scholarship productivity and scholarship activity remains possible after moving into administrative roles. We viewed our methods to maintain scholarship agendas prior to, during, and after our transitions by using and redefining what works for us informed by Helen Sword's (2017) BASE framework. By offering our personal successes and challenges to sustaining robust scholarly work, we hope that we have inspired confidence that scholarship *can* be maintained within leadership roles in higher education.

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