

Reflections on Service

Laura M. Grabowski

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I have taken on many different service roles in my time at SUNY Potsdam, as is expected of and necessary for faculty members. The amount of service and its potential impact have expanded through the years. I perform regular service at various levels, ranging from department-level service to service to the wider scholarly community.

As can be seen in my “Summary Narrative: Service”, I have been involved in a wide range of service activities while at SUNY Potsdam. I would like to highlight three of these activities, since they have the most impact on our students and the wider university community.

I took on the role of department chair of Computer Science in 2018. Our small department, individual faculty personalities, and internal dynamic of governing through consensus makes aspects of the chair role very easy. Our department does not suffer from the internal politics that so often plague university departments, and we can discuss any issue at hand and come to a mutually agreement about a course of action. We approach decisions like engineering problems: define what the problem is and address how it may be solved. Work the problem. I encounter the more challenging aspects of the department chair role when I represent the department to the outside, sometimes with students but most often with administration. The unusual times in which we live have brought a succession of challenges, mostly unexpected, and always needing to be addressed. The best analogy I have for the last four years of steering the department through those challenges is walking a tightrope with no net, a fire pit below and a sword above, while wearing a blindfold. In short, it has been precarious. My duty as department chair is to do my utmost to protect our students, programs, and faculty from the fire pit and the sword so that they can do their work to fulfill the mission of the department. I think that I have done a reasonable job thus far in fulfilling that duty. My contributions include navigating Computer Science through the academic realignment process during 2021-2022 and being the department’s voice in the curriculum approval process from School of Arts and Sciences through SUNY and SED, with strong support from administration. As a department, we have stepped up our efforts to recruit new students to our program, with consistent participation in Open House and Accepted Student Days as well as STEM recruiting events, notecard writing campaigns, and engaging our students in phone calls to prospective students. We continue to face challenges and pressures, including low faculty numbers and student numbers that remain lower than desirable, even with positive signs of recovering enrollment.

I am the connection between the Department of Computer Science and our Computer Science Board of Advisors. The board is important for our students, with its connection directly to industry and its commitment to giving back to the students. I maintain communication with the board leadership and members and coordinate planning the semiannual board meetings. Keeping the board members engaged is important and its own challenge. Not unlike the university and the department, the board has been undergoing a transformation in recent years, with long-time members retiring and more of the board membership consisting of newer members who had their undergraduate training from the three current Computer Science faculty members. I have made efforts to work more closely with board leadership to foster participation from as many board members as we can muster. We have also brought the board to a more active role in student recruitment, giving more visibility to the core excellence of the Computer Science program at SUNY Potsdam. Our board is also well known as strong donors to the university, giving their input a bit more weight in support of the department, its programs, and students.

The Faculty Senate is the most important university-wide organization for faculty. It is the collective voice of the faculty. I have served the Faculty Senate in some capacity almost every year that I have been at SUNY Potsdam. I served as department delegate beginning my first year on this faculty. In May 2020, I was asked by Dr. Blair Madore, the serving chair of the Faculty Senate, if I would consider running for the

office of Vice-chair. Think back to May 2020. It was what turned out to be the early days of the pandemic. The university had switched to virtual instruction mid-semester that March, and everyone was struggling to get through the semester, with little notion of what the road ahead was like. Many of us were stepping away from any new tasks or roles. Ultimately, I decide to run, and my colleagues thought it was a good enough idea that I was elected. As Vice-chair, I helped to run meetings and attended all meeting of the Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC). FSEC met nearly every week throughout my 2-year term, including summers and sometimes over breaks. There were many issues discussed by the FSEC and the Senate in that time, including academic realignment. I did my best to support the Chair of the Faculty Senate, contribute my thoughts to its deliberations when appropriate, and encourage strong, principled stances in the positions that the body took. Following my term as Vice-chair, I needed to step back from Faculty Senate for a year to devote my time to Computer Science's curriculum proposal. With that proposal well on its way in Spring 2023, I ran for membership in two standing committees of the Faculty Senate, Academic Programs and Curriculum Committee (APCC) and Business Affairs Committee (BAC). I am currently serving two-year terms on both of those committees.

One of the benefits of many service activities is the opportunity to work with and get to know colleagues outside of my department. The roles of department chair and Faculty Senate have paid great dividends in that area. I enjoy working with my colleagues from other disciplines and respect them all greatly. I look forward to more opportunities to serve them, the university, and all our students.