Administrative Philosophy and Department Goals

The administrative philosophy that I have developed over my time at Iowa State University resides on several fronts: be an active and engaged listener; provide the necessary resources to allow people to successfully do their tasks; and provide mentorship when it is required. Conversely, this also speaks to what I am not when it comes to administration: do not talk over people without listening; do not be a micromanager; do not have unreasonable expectations for someone when the resources have not been developed and made available; and do not expect that everyone can do everything without some guidance, as need be. In my role as Director of Graduate Education (DOGE) and owing to the fact that it involved a number of different departments that each had a different culture, it is important not only listen to everyone, but to also do so in an impartial, non-evaluative manner and serve as a moderator to keep everyone on task with the big picture and goals at the forefront.

The overarching goal for any department is to have the required environment and faculty in place to be successful, and be a department that embraces all aspects that a land-grant university strives to excel at: teaching, research, institutional service, and professional practice. For a Department Head, that starts with hiring the best faculty and mentoring them to be successful in their scholarship and service. The mentoring aspect is key, and can be accomplished directly by the Department Head, as well as utilizing well-chosen senior faculty in both the department and outside of the department. It also requires the Department Head to identify opportunities for all faculty to become engaged, and encourage activities that will foster both their development, as well as reflect highly on the department and university.

The current research climate at both the university level and at the funding level, particularly with federal funds such as NIH, is heavily weighed towards multidisciplinary, collaborative efforts. I have been involved in such efforts, not only as DOGE for an interdepartmental graduate program, but also as the lead PI on an internal grant that targets a team-building approach for conducting research. There are many hurdles and issues when it comes to building academic, research, and extension programs on a team vs. singular platform, but it is necessary in the current funding streams and one that can also be quite engaging and fruitful to all of the individuals involved. For academics, it is also important to identify collaborations across departments that may serve the needs of the students in terms of providing them with degree and career choices that they seek.

Certainly the role of Department Head requires being an advocate – an advocate for the faculty and staff; and advocate for diversity; and an advocate at multiple levels within the university. To do so, requires one to be very proactive in seeking out opportunities that support these goals. This includes taking advantage of initiatives as they present themselves; existing programs that support diversity; and empowering department faculty to engage in related activities. During my time as DOGE, the Graduate College and the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences presented programs and opportunities to support diversity, and it was one of my key responsibilities to make sure that our program took full advantage.