

Leadership and the Promotion of Collegiality: Rethinking the Roles of Professors at The University of Sydney

**Prepared by
The University of Sydney Association of Professors**

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This paper aims to review and propose a modest rethinking of the roles of professors in the University of Sydney, including professors' relationships with and place in university governance and management. It has been prepared by the University of Sydney Association of Professors (USAP), an informal association of professors of the University, following discussions and meetings with many professors including professors also serving as senior academic managers.ⁱ

In the context of significant changes not only to many disciplines but also to universities in general and the management structures of this University in particular, a revised statement of the roles of the professor is timely. By issuing this position paper, we wish to provide a basis for continued widespread collegial discussion within the University.

The fundamental role of professors

The professoriate of the University of Sydney is a diverse group of rigorously selected individuals. Professorial leadership is linked to a record of scholarly and professional achievements in the relevant discipline. For appointment to a chair, professors need to be recognised at an international level as leading authorities in their field. Professors are a critical resource within the University, possessing a range of skills and knowledge that can contribute significantly to the quality of the institution in a variety of ways. Professors take key roles in teaching within faculties, schools and departments, are prominent among the University's many researchers and visibly represent the University to interest groups in the wider community. Professors provide creative leadership in responding to change and in the implementation of initiatives as they arise. Many professors are shaping and reshaping their academic disciplines on the national and international stage. Many are also active in the governance and management of the University.

All of this activity follows directly from the duties of professors as set out in the by-laws and conditions of appointment. The University of Sydney by-laws (Chapter 7, Section 25) state that professors have distinctive academic responsibilities in the University:

ⁱ Parallel documents have been produced at other universities. The interested reader is referred to a discussion paper prepared at the University of Western Australia in 1996, available in the files of the University of Sydney Association of Professors.

“Professors, in respect of the field of their Chairs shall be responsible for initiating proposals for courses of study, for supervising and participating in teaching and examining and for promoting advanced study and research.”

The University Personnel Policy defines the relevant ‘general standard’ for Level E Professors as follows:

“A Level E academic is expected to exercise a special responsibility in providing leadership and in fostering excellence in research, teaching, professional activities and policy development in the academic discipline within the department or other comparable organisational unit, within the institution and within the community, both scholarly and general.”

The associated Guidelines set out the following criteria as conditions of appointment for professors at the University of Sydney:

“An international reputation for outstanding research/scholarship/creative works; outstanding achievement in the extension and communication of knowledge to students, peers and others; [and] leadership in the University and/or discipline and/or profession.”

The professors of the University of Sydney are very conscious of their responsibilities under the by-laws, personnel policies and conditions of appointment. It is anticipated that, as the University further adapts and restructures, professors will continue to be called upon to perform these leadership roles. Nothing less should be expected of those honoured with the title of Professor.

It is recognised in the Resolutions of the Senate and the University’s Delegations of Authority that those in governance and management also have responsibility for academic leadership. The Senate Resolutions (Section 20(2)) state:

“Subject to subsection (1) [the first quotation above] and to section 21 [the roles and responsibilities of departmental and school boards], the head of a department or school shall (a) submit to the faculty, college board or board of studies concerned proposals relating to courses of study and examinations in the department or school; [and] (b) organise the teaching and examining of courses of study as approved in general form by the faculty, college or board of studies concerned.”

The University by-laws and Delegations of Authority of the University also state:

“The Dean of a Faculty is the executive officer of the Faculty and, subject to Chapter 6 of the by-laws [re the Academic Board and Forum], is to provide academic leadership.” (By-laws, Chapter 9)

“The primary responsibility of Heads of Departments is to foster the academic and research purposes of the Department by effective leadership and management.”
(Personnel Services Policy – Roles of Heads of Departments and Schools and their Authorities and Delegations)

While academic leadership in the modern university is a shared function, we believe that the fundamental role of professors is to exercise a *special* responsibility and duty of care for their discipline and provide leadership and foster excellence in research, teaching, professional activities and policy development in the academic discipline of their chair. Professors are responsible for initiating proposals for courses of study, for supervising and participating in teaching and examining and for conducting, promoting and supervising advanced research and scholarship in their disciplinary area.

We further recognise that professors do and should occupy leadership positions within the University at all levels of academic management – from Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Pro-Vice-Chancellors and Deans to Heads of Schools and Departments – and in all sectors of the University: academic, research, administrative and community-oriented.

Internal structural change

Over recent years, changes in the higher education sector in Australia and throughout the world have altered many traditional understandings of the professorial role. Professors find themselves in a University that has significantly reorganised its line management and academic governance structures. It is acknowledged that these changes are yielding many of their intended outcomes, including the diffusion of line management power and responsibility, increased reliance on academic managers as decision makers, resource allocation by more open processes within academic units of like character, and the diminution and streamlining of academic governance structures. Most professors of the University strongly support this process of simplifying and streamlining the governance of the University and see a need for it to continue.

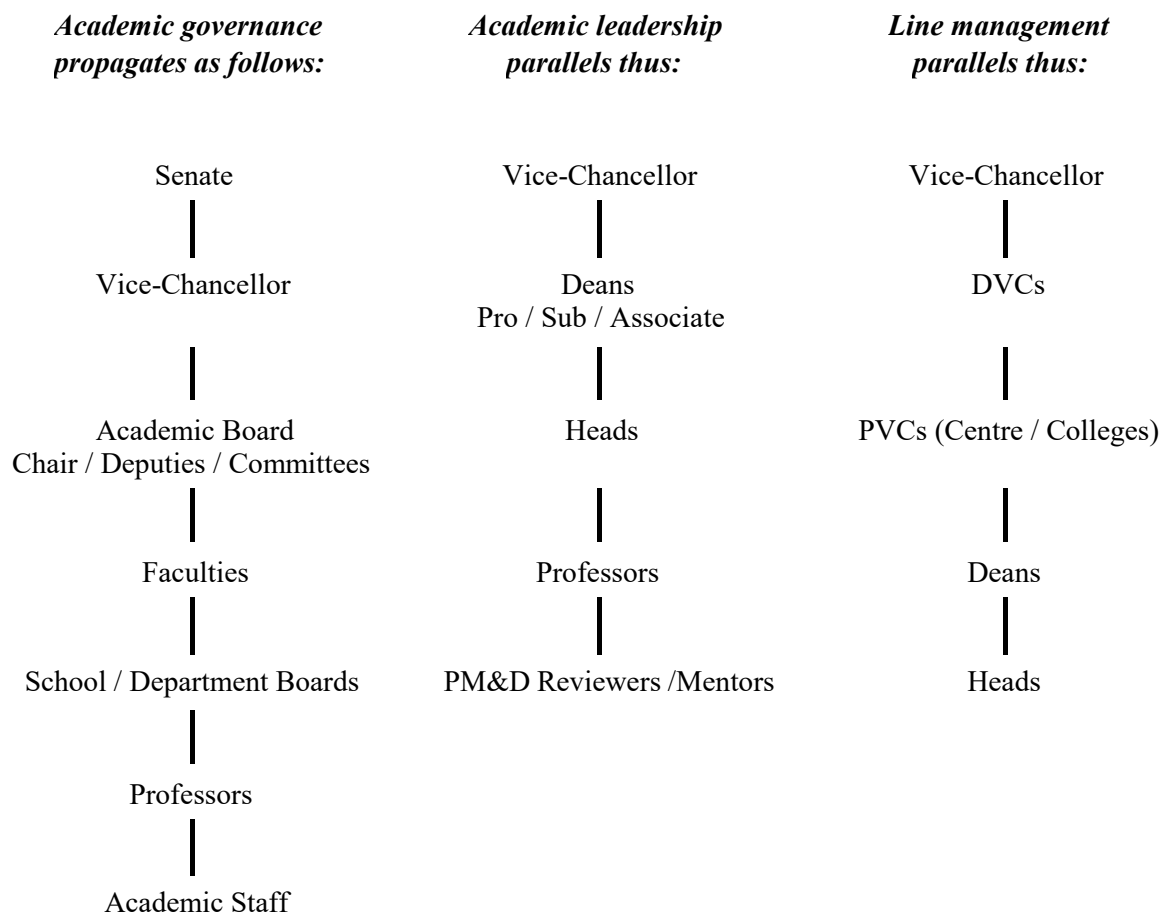
No matter how successful, large-scale structural changes can lead to undesired consequences. One aspect of internal structural change is the increased use of formula-based funding. This has the advantage of opening the University's decision-making processes to scrutiny, but reduces the opportunity for intelligent selectivity. Clearly, resources must be redeployed in response to undergraduate student enrolment and to support sound teaching in popular areas. There are also areas of research and scholarship where current strengths or desired growth may warrant extra resources. However, the University appears to lack mechanisms for dealing with the implications of changes to evolving degree programs and needs for substantial re-investments in research infrastructure. Professors are concerned that teaching and learning, research, scholarship and creative work, that is, the core functions of the University, are being eroded by managerial imperatives. In particular, there is an emerging situation where most senior academics, including professors, are being pressed to engage in increased administrative activity, often with an expectation of greater accountability and often to the detriment of attention to the core functions of research and teaching.

The key to addressing this problem would seem to be a clearer devolution of responsibility, authority and resources, appropriate to a high level of trust in the decisions made by professors. The matter of resources is particularly important. When professors take on administrative positions, focussed leadership is possible only when immediately available office-staff and access to enabling finances support it. To insure professors take on administrative and management leadership responsibilities, and to ensure that these roles are carried out effectively, a realignment of some of the University's central resources may be necessary.

Professors are uniquely positioned to mediate structural change, and to sustain new structures. They lead the academic work of the University, are strongly present in University management and are prominent on the committees and representative bodies that link the two. Professors are committed to the spirit of collegiality that is at the heart of all ideas – past, present and future – of the University.

Governance and management structures

The current pattern of academic and managerial governance in the University is not well understood. A sketch of the current structure it is presented below:



Most of the responsibilities of line managers, many of whom are professors, are defined in the Delegations of Authority. Academic governance and management is codified through the *University Calendar*, Faculty handbooks and similar documents. There has been a great deal of effort to streamline and simplify this with oversight from the Academic Board's committees. Some of the rewards of this effort are now apparent. There is, however, much more work to do of

clear away layers of administrative bureaucracy, unnecessarily intrusive scrutiny of academic work and overly complex requirements for accountability.

One way to better use the experience of professors in University governance is to seek the opinions and suggestions of the collective professoriate on matters concerning the University as a whole. The views of the professoriate, expressed through groups such as the Association of Professors, could complement those provided through the Academic Board, Academic Forum, faculties and other University organisations.

Professors and governance

The professoriate undertakes academic work that may be overlooked or undervalued by those having a high burden of pressing administrative duties. It is the task of professors to redress this by active promotion of their work to bring it to the notice of managers. There are many reasons why success in this venture will enhance the standing of the University, not the least being the value of professors' scholarship in helping to shape a singular and valuable image of the University. Professors are willing to take on all of the roles listed above under Governance and Management Structures including that of heads of schools and departments, and should be looked upon and called upon to assume these management roles.

When taking on administrative roles, professors would generally wish to see a reciprocal commitment from higher administration to streamlining processes, reducing complexity and emphasising the academic goals of the University. This would help justify time spent in administrative work. The structure of academic governance and line management at the faculty/school/department level should be examined with a view of the reduction in administrative complexity. This kind of examination cannot be done solely at the level of the Colleges because of the desirability of preserving common academic structures and processes throughout the University.

Response to external changes

External as well as internal changes are continuing to affect the University. Issues include tight government funding and its selective application, raised community expectations regarding the outcomes of undergraduate programs and demographic changes in national and international drawing areas. Their combined impact is leading to an ever increasing emphasis on undergraduate teaching and postgraduate coursework seen as training and preparation for identifiable employment rather than fundamental education for the future, and continuing, self-education. A comprehensive university seeks a productive balance between these two goals. Lack of balance has the further consequence that it detracts from research, scholarship and creative works. The professors urge the University to continue to position itself so that it offers attractive, demanding teaching and coursework programs based on its traditional commitment to quality education, which, in turn, derives from its strengths in research and scholarship.

In recent years, the disciplinary content of large sections of the University curriculum (in both the generalist and professional programs) has been revised, sometimes without the benefit of advice

from professorial experts, and sometimes without the appointment of professors to lead significant new areas of teaching and research. This is not only unfortunate; it is self-defeating. There should be a strong nexus between the disciplines included in the teaching and research programs of the University and the appointment of professors to support these disciplines. There is an additional benefit in that professors acknowledge that they have a responsibility, as leaders of their disciplines, to assist in the career development of the staff and students with whom they work.

Academic mentoring

Professors, as leaders in their disciplinary areas, also have an important role and responsibility to mentor other academic members of their discipline. This can and should take many forms. At its highest level, mentoring includes becoming a trusted counsellor, guardian and teacher. It includes informal, responsible advising and assisting of one's junior colleagues. And it includes collaboration with colleagues in research, scholarship and teaching, willingness to accept appropriate performance management and development roles, serving on promotion and selection committees, serving as external reviewers and referees and serving as PhD supervisors and examiners, among others.

Professors have an obligation to mentor those who are new to academe – young members of academic staff and those new to academic positions including those with considerable professional or industrial experience. Professors also have an obligation to advise and assist associate professors and others with extensive experience in academe, and to mentor and bring into intellectual networks those whom may not have had prior equal chance of professional networking.

Research, scholarship and teaching

The professors of the University of Sydney have an abiding interest in the teaching, scholarship and research associated with their disciplinary areas, as well as a broad interest in fostering academic values within the community. The advancement of knowledge through research and scholarship is an essential aspect of this interest.

Some professors are concerned that the effort being applied to the recruitment and teaching of undergraduate and coursework postgraduate students is being propagated at the expense of research and scholarship. The professors would like to see the University differentiate itself on the strength of its activities in research, scholarship and creative works. To do this, further changes will be required in the hierarchy of management structure, in the relationships among academic units and in the emphases of the University's public positioning, as well as in the application of resources.

It is important that adequate resources be directed to ensuring that the University's reputation for excellent teaching is well publicised owes much to the academic rigour and vitality fostered by strong research and scholarship. This kind of institutional positioning has implications for the management of recruitment, remuneration and non-salary resourcing policies as well as for community relations.

The professoriate is willing to offer advice as to the nature of the necessary changes, and as to how they might be managed. It is also willing to take a leadership role in implementing these changes, including the distribution of resources.

Conclusion

As a result of the operation of broad selection processes, and of their experience as teachers, researchers, administrators and advocates at the University, the professors of the University of Sydney reaffirm their readiness to serve both in academic leadership and in academic management. As a body of people committed to shared educational values, the professoriate is willing to work with all members of the University in facing the challenges of change. However, the full potential of their contribution to the University, their disciplines and the University's interest communities has yet to be realised. The present paper highlights some of the ways in which this might occur, and indicates how those who are expected to lead, and who stand willing to do so, might demonstrate the continued leadership which the University requires in the times ahead.

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