

“Why refuse to be a chair?”

David Notkin

Computer Science & Engineering

University of Washington

- Takes away from research and education
- Hard to gear back into research and education later on
- Too much politics (inside and outside the department)
- Don't want to pass the tin cup
- No skill set for managing staff, central budgets, etc.

Research & education

- It's true...for most of us, something has to go
- But not everything has to go: I gave up classroom teaching, but kept on with research and graduate advising
- Afterwards? Well, I'll see!
 - I anticipate being able to get back into classroom teaching reasonably easily
 - It would have been hard to start a new pipeline of grad students, write grants from scratch, etc.

Politics

- “University politics are vicious precisely because the stakes are so small.” –Kissinger
- I reject this
 - Politics arise where there are people – to be effective one must deal effectively with people
 - The stakes in academia are not small at all – if one believes that, one shouldn’t be an academic

Raising money

- It's a reality that chairs (and deans) spend much of their time doing fundraising
- “But I'm an academic, not a fundraiser!”
- I don't view fund raising as in any way inconsistent with our traditional missions of education, research and service

- Indeed, I'd say the opposite – it provides an opportunity where we must, in a highly effective way, articulate why we do what we do, and this seems to be a wonderful obligation
- I deeply believe in universities; we have a simple pair of goals – produce extraordinary people and fantastic ideas
 - Our people are students, post-docs, etc.; UW is judged more by the success of the people that leave the university than those of us who remain here
 - o Our ideas are conveyed in a broad set of ways, by papers, books, company formation, technology transfer, artwork and performances, and many others.
- Conveying the excitement and the value of our people and our ideas is the core of fundraising – and it's fun!

Never trained to be an administrator

- That's almost surely true
- Of course, you were probably never trained to be an educator or mentor, either
- If you have good staff, you can rely on them to do some (much) of this, and you can learn some on-the-fly, too

So why agree to be a chair?

- Is your commitment to yourself or to the broader community?
- Do you have something special to bring to your unit – improving diversity, increasing the focus on teaching and learning, developing centers, increasing interdisciplinary work, etc.?