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Boundary Spanning in a Complex System: Leadership Reflections of a Faculty Fellow
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Academic Leadership Academy Project, 2014-2015

Faculty Fellow Role & Graduate College
Faculty fellowships provide faculty members with unique opportunities to contribute to WMU in varied roles outside of their home department. Several units on campus employ faculty fellows and each fellowship is designed to meet the needs of the unit sponsor. My fellowship at the Graduate College focuses on student and faculty engagement and success.

The Graduate College, as the institution’s primary advocate for graduate study, promotes academic excellence by shaping graduate policy, assisting faculty in guiding and mentoring graduate students, and integrating services that support students in becoming accomplished and ethical scholars, researchers and professionals (WMU Graduate College, 2015).

Under the leadership of Dean Susan Stapleton, PhD, the Graduate College serves approximately 5,000 students (21% of WMU student population) (WMU, 2014). The services and resources of the Graduate College extend from students’ first days and weeks on campus to post-graduation careers.

Graduate College, Walwood Hall, East Campus

Faculty Fellow Biosketch
I’ve worked at WMU for 14 years as a professor in the School of Communication (SoC). My experience and satisfaction teaching graduate courses and mentoring master’s students inspired me to apply for the Graduate College faculty fellowship in 2013.

This is my second year as a fellow. The job is incredibly rewarding and complements my faculty role.

Here’s a sample of my Graduate College fellowship responsibilities:
- Developing online orientation content.
- Planning and co-leading graduate ambassador training.
- Coordinating university-wide graduate appointee training.
- Contributing to the Graduate Student Teaching Intensive.
- Creating workshops to enhance student socialization.

Julie Apker, PhD.

WMU: A Complex System
Organizational systems consist of an intricate set of interdependent components (departments, units, people), that work together toward common goals (Bertalanffy, 1969). WMU is comprised of multiple elements that must coordinate to achieve our mission, vision, and three pillars.

- Goal-setting: collaborating to set mutual objectives.
- Conveying goal measurement and results, following up on goal attainment.
- Feedback: communicating constructive critique and praise, conveying formative and summative assessment.
- Openness: sharing and receiving information, engaging in dialogue, soliciting input.

Boundary Spanning Communication
Boundary spanning requires interacting with others within your unit and between units of the university. At times, you are the main conduit of information seeking and giving between multiple parties. Below are two communication behaviors that I’ve found to enhance boundary spanning.

1. Active Listening
- Pay attention to what others say (and do) not only when communicating with you, but with others.
- Seek out opportunities to listen.
  - Attend staff meetings and other unit functions
  - Work mostly at the campus office
  - Initiate informal interactions
  - Follow up with others

2. Perspective Taking
- Learn and validate the perspectives of others.
  - What are their viewpoints, motivations, goals, challenges, frustrations, interests, rewards.
- Offer alternative perspectives based on your faculty member role.
  - The people you work with may lack such background, may have had negative encounters, etc.
  - You can offer unique insights helpful to unit decisions (e.g. the faculty point of view on...).