

## **Department Chair To President To Dean: Why That Pathway And How?**

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My career track was somewhat atypical, moving from department chair, to head of a state higher education system, to college dean. This progression was not entirely by design, but it has provided me with an exciting and rewarding career. My experience offers two primary lessons. The first is to prepare yourself. I was fortunate to have two formal administrative training experiences, one on-campus and one off-campus, and both for an entire academic year. In addition, I sought out other administrative opportunities wherever I could, with two goals in mind: broaden my experiences and be as helpful as I could. These two goals were not always compatible, in that sometimes I could be most helpful doing things that did not expand my knowledge or skills. But, overall the two goals served me well and provided me with a wide-range of experiences.

The second lesson that my career offers is to take advantage of whatever opportunities come your way. I was never much of a “planner,” but over two years time, I found myself assisting in and then directing strategic planning at two universities. Similarly, I never aspired to the position of state system head, in fact for most of my career would probably not have taken the job, if offered. But I did take the job and benefited enormously from the experience; and I believe accomplished a great deal for the state.

The latter lesson, take advantage of opportunities, however, must be tempered by good judgment and research. Most administrative positions naturally lead in some directions and not in others. For me, I realized that my system position would not facilitate moving to most major on-campus administrative positions. But I knew that going in, and planned accordingly. Others faced with unexpected opportunities would be well-advised to do their homework about the implications that any decision has for their career-track before saying “yes.”