

ISU ADVANCE

A Tale of Ten Departments: A Readers' Theatre Script

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Cast: Dean Steven Carsten, Drs. Jim Claude, Derik Reaall, Ken Standar, Roger Hallsey, Ron Ketchel, Kurt Ammon, and Sue Godfrey (implied but missing Drs. Alan Gilman, Joe Merritt, and Tom Worthen)

Scene: A Dean's Council meeting in a "conference room", with seven (out of 10 chairs) and the Dean present.

Narrator: "The following scene is a 'Reader's Theater' interpretation of a routine occurrence at Esteemed State University, a meeting of the Department Chairs within the College of Contemporary Sciences. Last week the Dean of the College (and some department chairs) attended a President's Council meeting in which research reports on faculty perceptions of departmental work climate were presented by ESU's ADVANCE program."

"After thinking about findings that were presented at that event, the Dean sent a message to the ten chairs in the College about the next Dean's College Council meeting. The Dean communicated to the chairs that he wanted the chairs to talk about their own departmental work climate, specifically about issues of collegiality and how to enhance it. We look in just as the group is assembling for their Council meeting...."

[The Dean is seating himself and organizing things at the "head of the table" as Chairs enter the "room"]

Banter amongst chairs as they enter...and get settled in. Jim is working with his blackberry, Roger is reading something intently, Ken has his laptop open, Derik has been having a side-conversation with the Dean...

Ken: Hey, Roger – have you been out on the course yet?

Roger: A little – want to get a game set up for next week?

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[Other chairs are visiting....create “buzz” as they find their seats...]

The Dean starts to pass out the meeting agendas and calls the meeting to order.....

Dean Carsten: *[clears throat..]* “Okay -- I know Alan and Joe are both in D.C. in meetings with NSF, and I’m not sure if Tom will be here, but I’d like to go ahead and get started so that we can have our topic discussion today. There are a couple of preliminary items that I have listed at the top of the agenda...does everyone have a copy of.....Ron?...okay..”

“So, first, for the budget update.....I’d like to thank you all for your work on the budget forms for your department, and I know it was extra work to prepare two versions. We are holding those in our office until we get some clearer signals - things are tied up at the capitol, and we expect the governor to request a special session in order to finalize. When we have a better sense of how that is going to sort out, we’ll contact each of you to schedule a second budget session, probably in the next couple of weeks.... we need to be prepared for budget realities... Hopefully, the latest revenue figures will lead to a little up-tick for us here...

[Department chairs alternately sigh, look resigned; exchange knowing glances, Derik is saying something in a very low tone to Ken who is nodding...]

Dean (continues) “Also, just two additional quick notes - on placement, which for this springs’ graduates is looking **very** good, so thanks to the folks who’ve been assisting with that; and second, on enrollment for fall, which looks right now like it will be a record for the college. I want to thank all of you and your departmental staff for strong recruiting efforts that are certainly paying off.”

[Sue looks like she is raising her hand with a question but the Dean doesn’t notice; Sue next looks at Ken who doesn’t look back...]

Dean: “I’ll send any other announcements or updates in an e-mail later today so that we can get to our discussion topic based on the President’s Council presentation....Derik, I think you had a question to start us off?”

Derik: “So, I’d like to ask if anyone here knows any more about that faculty survey – the COACHE thing - that was discussed, because I was there at the meeting but ...”

Roger: “Well, the information is gathered by researchers at Harvard and it looks like reliable data...”

Dean: “ Sure. But it made me wonder if there are things that can be done to make sure that our junior faculty will want to build their careers here at ESU, and specifically in our College. We **do** have to pay a lot of attention to morale and do our best to keep really good faculty...”

Ron: “One thing that was really important in those survey results had to do with performance reviews, and I think we are all doing a great job with those since we moved to the common template, and we are providing written summaries...” *[everyone nodding]*

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Sue: “I agree with Ron. But one area where I think we could really improve, I mean thinking of junior faculty, is by doing more to support them when their families are young, and maybe making sure that newer faculty who find it difficult to build a supportive community in Ames”

Ken: *[Ignoring what Sue just said]* “I’m sorry, but could we go back to the performance reviews? I’m just wrapping mine up, and I think it really took a lot of time to read all that stuff, and I wonder if other folks are getting any pushback from their faculty on the documentation....”

Derik: “Well, no, not pushback, but...”

Jim: “I think the reviews are fine, and that when everyone is used to them it will become more efficient. But what I think we really have to figure out is an approach to encouraging work/life balance for our junior faculty.”

[This is spoken as if Sue hadn’t said anything...so she is looking confused, but everyone else is nodding and taking notice like this is a great new idea].

“The data were clear about that being a real issue for us *[more nodding]*. I mean, I have a lot of young faculty, and four of my assistant professors have new babies, kind of a mini baby-boom in just one department!- and we really need to figure out how to support these junior colleagues.”

Ron: “I agree with Jim, that we really need to pay attention to the young family issue. I had a senior faculty member in my office a couple of weeks ago who was very distressed - she had overheard a young faculty member who was feeling pretty isolated because he was spending more time at home. I guess he was telling someone that he didn’t expect to receive any department support to travel to a conference because he just didn’t think he had enough “face time” in the department to really ...you know... to ask for travel funds. And, he was dealing with the perception on the part of his colleagues that he would be reluctant to travel, too....”

Sue: *[recovering from being ignored]* “Yes, but it isn’t just about things like travel funds...”

Jim *[again stealing Sue’s thunder and the Dean doesn’t seem to notice...]:* “It seems to me, based on what Ron is saying, that we should carefully think about resources in general, even though they are very limited right now, and we should be very intentional about checking in with those young faculty before we dole out funds to associate or full professors...”

Dean: “Okay, thanks, Jim – I agree, we should all take some time to think about that. Here’s another issue, a related issue, I think – and I wonder what you all think – about relationships among the faculty in your department. Are there certain faculty members who are more isolated? Are there other ways to decrease their isolation, especially for junior faculty?”

[Sue is raising her hand again, but before she can speak...]

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Derik: “Well, I have to say that, since my department is spread across four buildings to accommodate our labs and everything, and that’s not going to change-especially in the current budget situation - and we have faculty meetings once a month but some faculty don’t attend those..... And, some of the faculty that *do* attend them never say anything. So, maybe we’re different, I mean I don’t think my faculty have that as a priority, they seem pretty happy to just be left alone, and working in their labs, and not have me or anyone else bother them....”

Ron: “I’m not sure about that, Derik - one of the things that I think I have learned is that most everyone really does want to feel like they are a part of a community– and to have a sense that they are contributing something to the group, and most of them, junior or senior, want interact with their colleagues. But it is really hard to know how to help make that happen, I mean, in a structured way. There are a limited number of faculty that I can ask to even *serve* on committees, much less to *lead* them, although that would seem to be one way to encourage collegiality...”

Sue: “I agree with Ron – and I think there are several practices that we can use in our departments that will support that goal...I mean...” *[Sue gets cut off by...]*

Dean: Yes, speaking of practices - Kurt - you’ve been pretty quiet today, and since you lead one of our most diverse departments...

Kurt *[sarcastically]*: “Oh, great, I finally keep my mouth shut and I get volunteered anyway!”

Dean *[with a smile]*: “Well, we all knew you really wanted to say something! Anyway, I wonder what you **would** recommend – maybe you could send a quick email with your thoughts, since we are out of time for this week? Everyone could read your notes and do some thinking in preparation for continuing this discussion at our next Council meeting? Thanks everyone, for a good discussion - our next meeting is noted on the bottom of today’s agenda, I think it is set for May 5.

[Kurt is nodding, and the others are talking with each other and gathering their things, Sue is pretty discouraged and is putting on her jacket to leave without talking to others...]

Narrator: “That’s the conclusion of our Reader’s Theater – let’s give a thank-you to the Dean of the College of Contemporary Sciences and his Department Chairs...*[applause]*. The Dean and the chairs have agreed to stay after their Council meeting to entertain questions from all of you.....”

[Narrator facilitates Q and A with actors, everyone should try to stay “in character” for this segment. Can be up to 10 minutes.]

Narrator: “Again, let’s thank Dean Carsten and his Council...*[applause]*. Now, we want to invite you to work with your colleagues to further discuss the issues that have been raised by our ‘Tale of Ten Departments’. We want to give you all some time to think about and discuss both issues and solutions, so we are planning for you to have discussions at your tables for the next 15 minutes or so. You’ll find some suggested questions on the colored index cards at your tables, or you are welcome to discuss issues that occurred to you as you listened to the dialog of the Council. Please be sure to identify both issues and solutions, and we will be calling on you all to share your ideas after about 15 minutes.”