



APTA

Academy of Education.

A Component of the American
Physical Therapy Association

PROGRAM & PROJECT SUMMARIES

Fellowship in Higher Education Leadership

JULY • 9 • 2026 | PORTLAND, OR

ABOUT FHEL

ABOUT

The APTA Academy of Education Fellowship in Higher Education Leadership (FHEL) is a blended learning program intended for current and aspiring directors and leaders in physical therapy education programs. The Academy took over the FHEL (formally ELI) in 2023, making the 2024 graduating class the first cohort under the APTA Academy of Education.

The 52-week program is delivered across a 13-month time frame. This allows fellows to connect theory with practice and enables the direct application of knowledge learned through the Fellowship to their everyday work in physical therapy education.

The FHEL program provides mentoring by high-quality, experienced physical therapy education academic administrators, instruction by qualified content expert faculty, and peer networking and support to create a community of educational leaders.

The award-winning fellowship was first accredited by the American Board of Physical Therapy Residency and Fellowship Education (ABPTRFE) in 2012 and reaccredited in 2017 through 2027. With over 160 alums, the FHEL welcomed its 14th cohort for 2025-2026.

MISSION

The mission of FHEL is to develop a community of visionary, innovative, and influential directors in physical therapist and physical therapist assistant educational programs to advance the health of society.

PROGRAM GOALS

- Provide consistent curriculum delivery over time by recruiting and retaining quality faculty/mentors.
- Prepare graduates who provide advanced management and leadership skills in real-world leadership contexts.
- Offer a high-quality, contemporary curriculum and operations.
- Produce successful graduates.
- Establish a professional community whose members support each other's development after graduation.

GRADUATION

July 9, 2026

OPENING REMARKS

GREETINGS FROM
THE PRESIDENT

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

CONFERRAL OF PINS

CLOSING REMARKS



Teresa Brown
PT, DPT, PhD
FHEL Program Director



Vicki LaFay
PT, DPT, PhD
**APTA Academy of
Education President**



R. Scott Ward
PT, PhD, FAPTA
Keynote Speaker

2025-2026 FHEL Cohort

GRADUATES

Elizabeth Bartel PT, DPT, NCS
Alexandra Borstad, PhD, PT
Jen Brilmyer PT, DPT, DHSc
Dawn Sunshine Brown PT, DPT, EdD
Jeremy B. Crow PT, DPT, SCS, CSCS
David A. Doublestein PT, PhD, OCS,
CLT-LANA
Megan Flores PT, MPT, PhD
Daniel Flowers PT, DPT, PhD
Sharon Gorman PT, DPTSc
Nupur Hajela PT, DPT, PhD
Kai-Yu Ho PT, DPT, PhD
Amanda Koenning PT, DPT, OSC
Gauri MacDonald PT, DPT, PhD
Samantha Marocco PT, DPT, MS, EdD
Keshrie Naidoo PT, DPT, EdD
Chris Nichols PTA, CSRS
Whitney Osborn PT, DPT, PhD
Amanda Overbey PT, DPT
Ashley Parish PT, DPT, PhD, CRT, CCS
Jodi Sandvik DSc, PT, DPT, SCS, ATC
Bryant Seamon PT, DPT, PhD, NCS
Bradley Tragord PT, DPT, DSc
Suzanne Trotter PT, MPT, ScD
Brooke Vaughan PT, DPT, PhD

FACULTY

Sharon McDade, EdD
Evan Robinson, R.Ph., PhD, FNAP
Gail Jensen, PT, PhD, FAPTA
Emelyn dela Pena, EdD
Steve Milam, JD
James (Jim) Kemper, PhD, SPHR
Damon Braggs, MBA
Barb Sanders, PT, PhD, FAPTA
Kristin Greenwood, PT, DPT, EdD,
MS, FNAP

MENTORS

Amy Garrigues, PT, DPT
Ronald De Vera Barredo, PT, DPT,
EdD, MA, FAPTA, FACHE, FNAP
Peter Altenburger, PT, PhD
R. Scott Ward, PT, PhD, FAPTA
Leslie Portney, PT, PhD, DPT, FAPTA
Karen Huhn, PT, MS, PhD
Holly Clynch, PT, DPT, MA
Diane Heislein, PT, DPT

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Teressa Brown, PT, DPT, PhD



ELIZABETH BARTEL

FAULKNER UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Roles of a leader: I wanted to learn more about the roles and responsibilities of an official leadership position in academia.
2. Qualities of a leader: By the end of the fellowship, I hoped to develop and hone the skills essential to being a successful leader.
3. Collaboration: I wanted to understand the layers of collaboration needed for an individual to lead a successful DPT program.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Leaders are not always in "defined" positions of leadership. In fact, faculty and staff are leading by example and by how we teach everyday. Yes, there are the specific leadership roles, but there are many more levels to leadership than I had ever thought.
2. Leadership styles can evolve as our base of knowledge increases, as circumstances change and as individual leadership skills are honed.
3. Leadership development never ends.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Title: Do it for the NPTE - Opportunities for Improvement

As part of a developing program (CAPTE accredited in 2024), there is a desire among the faculty to make constant changes for improvement, but these changes were happening rapidly and often with short sighted intentions. With that in mind, the initial plan for my project was to develop criteria to meet before proposing curricular changes. However, with further reflection, it was established that there was a lack of curricular understanding amongst the faculty which led to this desire to continuously propose curricular changes.

With that in mind, the primary goal of the project is to help the faculty understand the curriculum as a whole to better understand: when material is introduced, developed and reinforced. To begin, I held an interactive meeting with the following goals: identifying and understanding what is needed to succeed (learning to fail, uncertainty, stress and resilience), review of the topics pertinent to summer semester (ensuring a smooth Spring to Summer transition) and establishing how to best prepare students to be generalist, entry-level physical therapists.

Next steps for project development include incorporation of curriculum review in small increments on faculty agendas, leading more meetings with the faculty each semester to work on continuity of material taught and to restructure the department curricular committee.



ALEXANDRA BORSTAD

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY-CASCADES

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Develop skills in the area of advancement to enhance Oregon State University - Cascades DPT profile in our community and create a fund to support student success.
2. Expand my network of friends in academic physical therapy who share a passion for our life-long learning and meeting the changing needs of DPT students.
3. Apply new knowledge in my role as Program Director in areas I am relatively naive to such as budgeting, legal, and human resources.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Regardless of your title, you will continue to have gaps in your expertise, which is why having a network of peers who face similar challenges is an important resource for leaders in physical therapy.
2. A mentor once advised us, "Don't get on the roller coaster." To me, this means pausing, staying calm, and taking time to consider all perspectives. It's about listening carefully while remaining grounded to offer the best support and decision-making you can when things get difficult.
3. Perspective taking is such an important leadership skill; it is one we can improve with practice.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

The focus of my leadership project during FHEL was to develop my skills in advancement to better support the needs of students and faculty in our growing DPT education program. Early in my new role as Program Director, I recognized a gap in my knowledge of how foundations, philanthropy, and other advancement activities could be leveraged to support physical therapist education programs and students. To address this, I sought mentorship outside of our profession and became more actively engaged in understanding departmental and foundation budgets and identifying events that could be promoted for fundraising.

As part of this work, I partnered to develop a new Catalyst Fund to support experiential learning for DPT students and strategically incorporated fundraising efforts for this fund into a series of advancement initiatives at our university, including a university-wide giving day. I also dedicated time to working closely with student leaders, advising, supporting, and encouraging their efforts to raise funds for their class goals.

The resources, education, and support I received from FHEL toward my project were outstanding. I also sought additional training in advancement to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanics of developing a culture of advancement within our program. Through this process, I learned the importance of building and sustaining long-term relationships with community partners to help them see the value of our program and recognize its contributions to the university and the broader community.



JEN BRILMYER

SETON HILL UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Gain a clearer understanding of my leadership style and ways to refine it.
2. Use the fellowship to build the competencies necessary for advancement into an academic leadership position within the next five years.
3. Expand my knowledge in higher education leadership, specifically including budgeting, curriculum development, and faculty support, to advance the growth and success of our new Doctor of Physical Therapy program.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Shift from a “fix-it” mindset to an empowerment mindset. Effective leadership is not about solving every problem for others. Instead, it involves providing resources, guidance, and support while encouraging individuals to take ownership of their responsibilities. Taking time to think through challenges and understanding where responsibility lies can foster growth and accountability.
2. Culture eats strategy for lunch. A strong organizational culture is essential for achieving strategic goals. Success depends not only on having a well-designed plan but also on cultivating trust, communication, collaboration, and shared values. As a leader, it is important to look forward to future opportunities, backward to learn from experience, and intentionally shape a culture that supports the organization's mission and goals.
3. Lead together. Leadership is not a solo endeavor. Effective leaders build relationships, leverage the strengths and talents of others, and create shared ownership of goals and outcomes. By avoiding triangulation, communicating directly, and trusting others to contribute their expertise, leaders can foster collaboration and achieve greater impact than they could alone.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My leadership project focused on developing and securing funding for an interprofessional education (IPE) course that brings together healthcare learners from multiple disciplines to engage in community service while learning from the lived experiences of patients and families. The project emphasized the importance of hearing patient voices and incorporating patient perspectives into healthcare education to foster empathy, collaboration, and patient-centered care.

To develop the grant proposal, I worked closely with our Director of Foundation, Government, and Corporate Relations and received valuable feedback from my institutional mentor, IPE coordinator, Provost, and other key stakeholders. The project included developing a detailed program description, creating a budget, and identifying opportunities for collaboration with community organizations to support course activities and community engagement. Through this process, I strengthened my skills in project development, stakeholder engagement, strategic planning, and grant writing. The proposed course aims to create a sustainable educational experience that enhances interprofessional collaboration, promotes community engagement, and prepares future healthcare providers to deliver more holistic and patient-centered care.



DAWN SUNSHINE BROWN

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. By July 2026, I will strengthen my leadership communication effectiveness by using clear, concise, and direct messaging in at least 80% of feedback and high-impact conversations, resulting in improved clarity, reduced need for follow-up explanations, and increased confidence and trust from the teams I lead.
(Communication and Navigating Resistance)
2. By July 2026, I will actively leverage my leadership network by facilitating at least three meaningful connections for others and seeking support/input from my network on three strategic initiatives, to increase collaboration and impact. (Social Capital and Leveraging Networks Effectively)
3. By July 2026, I will strengthen my systems-thinking leadership by intentionally stepping back to reflect before, during, and after key decisions at least once per month to evaluate patterns, relationships, and system-wide implications, resulting in more strategic, aligned, and sustainable leadership decisions.
(Systems Thinking Leadership)

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Leading up, down, and across requires a three-dimensional approach to leadership to intentionally influence superiors, empower direct reports, and collaborate with peers to build alignment, trust, and program effectiveness.
2. Applying multiple leadership frameworks strengthens decision-making, enabling me to approach complex challenges more strategically by integrating structural, human resource, symbolic, and political perspectives.
3. Effective leadership requires intentionally navigating and shaping program culture, while recognizing that resistance, norms, and unspoken expectations must be strategically influenced to successfully advance and sustain change.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Title: Strengthening Course Director Development Through Structured Onboarding and Leadership Frameworks at Northwestern Department of Physical Therapy and Human Movement Sciences

Overview: My leadership project focuses on strengthening Course Director (CD) leadership development within the Northwestern University Department of Physical Therapy and Human Movement Sciences (NUPTHMS) by creating a structured, sustainable onboarding and leadership framework. CDs at NUPTHMS serve as critical academic leaders, providing guidance, mentorship, and instruction within course teams while shaping the curriculum through course design, delivery, assessment, and team leadership. Variability in onboarding, expectations, and available resources, however, has led to inconsistencies in course management and faculty experiences.

To better understand these challenges, I conducted a two-part needs assessment examining both prior onboarding experiences and current needs of CDs. Findings revealed substantial variability in onboarding quality, with some faculty reporting strong mentorship while others experienced minimal or no formal preparation. Additionally, there were inconsistencies in clarity of role expectations, preparedness, and access to essential administrative and curricular resources.

DAWN SUNSHINE BROWN

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

Key Objectives

- Standardize CD onboarding and role expectations
- Enhance CD preparedness in course design, delivery, and leadership
- Create sustainable, scalable resources to support CDs
- Balance mentorship culture with formal structures and processes
- Improve consistency in course leadership and faculty experience

Deliverables

- Comprehensive Course Director Handbook
- Structured CD onboarding modules in Canvas
- Standardized workflows and tools for course leadership and management
- Resource repository (administrative, curricular, and leadership supports)

Project Phases

1. Needs assessment – completed in Winter 2026
2. Resource development (handbook, modules, tools) – Spring 2026
3. Pilot implementation and testing – Fall 2026/Winter 2027
4. Evaluation and iterative refinement – Spring/Summer 2027

Anticipated Outcomes

- Improved clarity of CD roles and expectations
- Increased faculty preparedness and confidence
- Greater consistency in course design, delivery, and assessment
- Enhanced collaboration across faculty course teams
- Improved student learning experiences and outcomes

Key Components

- Needs assessment of onboarding experiences and current challenges
- Structured onboarding framework with clear expectations
- Integration of leadership development (team management, communication)
- Alignment with accreditation, program, and institutional goals
- Balance of mentorship and formal infrastructure

Next Steps (Academic Year 2026-2027)

- Pilot and refine the Course Director Handbook and Canvas onboarding modules
- Gather and analyze CD feedback on usability and effectiveness
- Revise materials based on implementation data
- Expand adoption across NUPHMS
- Explore scalability to other departments within Northwestern University



JEREMY B. CROW

SPEAR

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Strengthen my communication skills to effectively navigate challenging conversations while fostering productive and collaborative outcomes.
2. Seek ongoing professional development opportunities to advance expertise in physical therapy residency education and faculty development.
3. Cultivate a culture of feedback that actively encourages, values, and incorporates comprehensive input from all stakeholders.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. The Bolman and Deal four-frame leadership model significantly broadened my perspective as a leader. It has deepened my understanding of the importance of dynamic teamwork. This framework has reminded me to continually reframe challenges and strengthen my ability to consider and integrate diverse viewpoints.
2. The importance of seeking feedback and empowering others has been reinforced throughout my fellowship experience. I have been reminded that effective leadership depends on listening to others, valuing their perspectives, and creating opportunities for shared responsibility and growth.
3. Emotional regulation is essential in leadership. A key takeaway from my fellowship is that challenges are inevitable, but remaining calm, composed, and solution-focused can support effective problem-solving and lead to successful resolution.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My fellowship project focused on addressing the need to provide additional professional development pathways for team members who applied to our residency programs but were not selected. The goal was to create a meaningful way to continue supporting their growth within the organization while fostering a stronger sense of inclusion and engagement. In response, I developed an initiative for team members who are interested in pursuing board certification but do not wish to complete a residency program.

This certificate-based program is designed to maintain engagement, support continued professional growth and provide a structured pathway toward board exam preparation. Participants are paired with peers who share similar interests and guided through a sequenced curriculum that includes orientation to MedBridge and exam registration requirements, a self-guided 3–4 months didactic curriculum outline, and ongoing support and feedback to promote confidence and success on the board certification exam. The curriculum is aligned with ABPTS exam blueprints and serves as a structured, self-directed learning experience.

The anticipated outcomes of this initiative include improved employee engagement, retention, and satisfaction, along with enhanced patient care and outcomes. In addition, the program is intended to foster a culture of mentorship and continuous professional development, ultimately creating more opportunities for team members to serve as mentors within our residency program.



DAVID A. DOUBBLESTEIN

A.T. STILL UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Develop proficiency within the political frame of leadership to establish collaborative partnerships that advance whole-person healthcare.
2. Cultivate a leadership identity grounded in conviction, stewardship, humility, and curiosity, with the aim of leading a mission-driven higher education institution.
3. Foster an interdisciplinary support network of leaders who champion servant leadership and whole-person care.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Leadership development is a pilgrimage built on conviction, self-examination, learning, and refinement.
2. The FHEL experience clarified how my leadership values align with my service, advocacy, and institutional work in policy development, student support systems, and outcomes assessments.
3. The FHEL experience reinforced the need for academic leaders to remain adaptable, observant, and contextually relevant.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

The Interprofessional Student Success Leadership Council (ISSLC) emerged to meet an institutional need for greater collaboration by uniting interdisciplinary programs to standardize policies and improve student progression, retention, and professionalism. As Director of Progression and Retention within the Doctor of Physical Therapy program at A.T. Still University, I observed the challenges of managing student affairs issues related to academic standing, remediation, professionalism, appeals, and attendance policies. These observations led to the development of a systems-oriented leadership initiative that would move beyond siloed programmatic approaches toward collaborative institutional alignment.

Initial development focused on identifying shared concerns among program leaders across disciplines, including physical therapy, physician assistant, speech-language pathology, and occupational therapy. The conceptual phase included defining the mission, drafting a council framework, identifying stakeholders, and clarifying the purpose of the ISSLC: "To serve as an advisory and coordinating body that brings together academic leadership and student-support stakeholders to address shared challenges affecting student success across residential, hybrid, and post-professional online programs."

The inaugural ISSLC meeting marked a significant milestone in transitioning from concept to operational reality. Early meetings focused on establishing shared language, identifying institutional concerns, and fostering a collaborative rather than regulatory atmosphere for interdisciplinary discussion. One of the council's first deliverables was to invite a guest speaker to discuss financial aid and current legislation reforms affecting higher education. The council also began developing a Qualtrics survey to gather interdisciplinary feedback regarding professionalism policies, academic progression standards, remediation practices, and academic integrity concerns, aiming to identify shared institutional challenges and support collaborative policy solutions while maintaining programmatic autonomy.



MEGAN FLORES

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. To better understand my leadership strengths and areas for growth as I consider current and future academic leadership opportunities.
2. To build a stronger understanding of higher education leadership (e.g., institutional decision-making, program development, governance, and financial considerations).
3. To develop meaningful relationships with mentors, peers, and higher education leaders to support continued growth, collaboration, and problem-solving beyond the fellowship.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Effective leadership requires intentional self-awareness. Through fellowship discussions and reflection, I gained a clearer understanding of my leadership strengths, areas for continued growth, and how I can continue to develop my authentic leadership style.
2. Leadership requires moving beyond a departmental perspective. The fellowship challenged me to expand my understanding of academic leadership beyond my own department, and I gained insight into the broader institutional structures.
3. Leadership is strengthened through community. The fellowship reinforced that academic leadership does not happen in isolation; trusted relationships with mentors and colleagues provide support, accountability, and perspectives during both routine and challenging situations.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My leadership project focused on developing a comprehensive proposal for a new interprofessional hybrid PhD in Health Sciences. The proposed program was designed as an interdisciplinary, research-intensive doctoral degree to prepare clinician-scholars for academic, research, and leadership roles across the health professions. The project arose in response to an institutional request from the Dean to explore the feasibility of expanding doctoral education within our college and provided me with an opportunity to examine program development from a systems-level perspective.

My final proposal included a needs assessment, environmental scan of comparable programs, curriculum design, admissions criteria, governance structure, faculty workload considerations, measurable program outcomes, and a 10-year financial model. A central focus was to address the national need for doctorally prepared faculty in health professions education while creating an accessible pathway for working clinicians who may not be able to relocate or leave professional practice to complete a traditional residential PhD program. The proposed interdisciplinary hybrid format and emphasis on research were intended to align with Baylor's strategic priorities and to support the development of future health professions faculty scholars.

Although institutional timing shifted during the fellowship year, the process of developing the proposal was highly valuable. It allowed me to apply leadership concepts in a real-world context, with consideration of the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic dimensions of academic change. Ultimately, this project strengthened my understanding of academic leadership and helped me clarify my own interest in future leadership roles within higher education.



DANIEL FLOWERS

LSU HEALTH SHREVEPORT

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Apply effective leadership principles to systematically realign our department to meet system and institutional priorities, while continuing to value critical human resources.
2. Expand knowledge based on accreditation, especially with regards to regional and professional accreditors for effective strategic planning and successful program development.
3. Exploring various organizational and funding models to effectively create functional organizational design and future sustainability.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Hard, decisive action early on will limit the number of more difficult decisions and negative consequences in the future.
2. Good leadership is measured by the quality of and manner in which decisions are made, not the speed at which they are made. Remain calm and do not rush.
3. Communicate directly, frequently, honestly, confidentially when necessary, and in alignment with system, institutional, school, and departmental values and goals.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

The purpose of my leadership project was to lead the restructuring of the Physical Therapy Program at LSU Health Shreveport into the newly established Department of Physical Therapy. Historically, the accredited residential physical therapy program in Shreveport was identical to the structural nature of the Program housed within the School of Health Professions & Sciences. The consequence of this was that the activities of the educational program (namely teaching and learning) were the primary focus of the physical therapy unit/program within the school.

With the addition of a newly accredited expansion program in Lafayette, the Department was established, with two CAPTE accredited DPT Programs, with varying delivery models (Shreveport residential, Lafayette hybrid), along with the consolidation of research and non-clinical service activities within the department. This change also occurred concurrent with the consolidation of five LSU campuses into a single "Flagship" statewide university, with increased focus on student outcomes, student retention, increasing the number of graduates pursuing careers in Louisiana, achieving a top 50 university ranking, and greater emphasis on increasing scholarship and research funding.

The primary goal was to align the newly minted Department with these system and institutional priorities through the development of current faculty, targeted faculty hiring, the accreditation and start of a new academic program, increased recruitment efforts to expand to two student cohorts, and achievement of excellence in research, teaching, and service.



SHARON GORMAN

SAMUEL MERRITT UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Develop systems that improve transparency, communication, and organizational effectiveness within a transitioning academic unit.
2. Increase my understanding of budgeting and fiscal planning to better align resources with program and student needs.
3. Strengthen my ability to understand and navigate college-level priorities and policies in order to communicate and advocate effectively.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. The Bolman and Deal framework helped me recognize that while I naturally lead from the Structural and Human Resource frames, major organizational change requires more intentional growth in the Political and Symbolic frames as well.
2. My initial leadership inventory identified several areas for growth, but the three that most closely aligned with this project were coordinating work effectively, creating effective organizational structures, and managing projects. The fellowship gave me a meaningful opportunity to strengthen each of these skills through a complex institutional transition.
3. I learned that successful restructuring requires both sound systems and intentional attention to people, relationships, and shared understanding. This experience helped me shift from carrying work myself to creating structures that support shared leadership and accountability.

SHARON GORMAN

SAMUEL MERRITT UNIVERSITY

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My fellowship project centered on leading the creation of a new Department of Rehabilitation Sciences within the College of Health Sciences through the merger of the former Departments of Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy. This restructuring transformed the two prior departments into programs within a newly established department and required leadership in organizational design, personnel selection, budget planning, and student support strategy. The project aligned closely with my fellowship goals around improving communication and transparency, strengthening fiscal understanding, and developing greater awareness of the broader college context in which departmental decisions are made.

This work gave me a direct opportunity to develop several of the leadership skills I had identified early in the fellowship. Because I had noted growth needs in coordinating work, creating organizational structures, and managing projects, the formation of the new department required me to strengthen those capacities in a very concrete way. I helped design the structure of the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences, supported the transition of Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy from departments to programs, reorganized the support staff structure, and hired Program Directors for each program to help establish leadership roles, accountability, and communication pathways within the new department.

A significant component of the project involved budget and resource planning. I explored the existing budgets of the former departments and developed a plan for merging these into the new Department of Rehabilitation Sciences budget while preserving separate program budgets for both Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy. This work directly supported one of my stated fellowship goal of improving my understanding of fiscal leadership and using that knowledge to make strategic decisions that support program function and student experience.

From a Human Resource perspective, the project also required close attention to people, role transitions, and support systems. In addition to hiring the Program Directors, I hired and launched a Student Success Coach focused on retention from acceptance into the DPT or OT program through deposit, matriculation, and the first enrolled term. This role was designed to provide proactive support during key transition points and reflects my continued commitment to building systems that are both student-centered and sustainable.

Throughout the project, I drew on my strengths in the Structural and Human Resource frames while also being challenged to grow in the Political and Symbolic frames. More than an administrative merger, the creation of the Department of Rehabilitation Sciences became an opportunity to build a more collaborative and sustainable structure for the future. It also reinforced that leadership is not only about creating structure, but about helping others feel supported within change. This experience also pushed me beyond relying on inherited structures and helped me grow more comfortable leading change that required both strategic planning and shared ownership.



NUPUR HAJELA

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO

PERSONAL GOALS

1. To strengthen my leadership capacity to build and sustain an interdisciplinary center that advances innovation, collaboration, and technology-enabled healthcare education and research.
2. To enhance my understanding of the Physical Therapy department and the organizational, fiscal, and political dynamics within higher education to support strategic growth, partnerships, student success and workforce development, and the long-term sustainability of the Center for Digital and Technological Innovation in Healthcare (CDTIH)
3. To develop leadership strategies that advance cross-disciplinary collaboration, strategic funding allocation, advocacy, workforce development, and community partnerships to strengthen healthcare systems and improve health outcomes across California's Central Valley.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Leadership requires systems thinking—successful innovation depends on aligning people, department, college and institutional priorities, partnerships, and resources toward a shared vision.
2. Sustainable change is strengthened through intentional collaboration, communication, and relationship-building across disciplines, administration, industry, and community stakeholders.
3. Effective leadership balances vision with execution by understanding fiscal, organizational, and sociopolitical realities while remaining responsive to emerging opportunities and challenges.

NUPUR HAJELA

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FRESNO

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My leadership project focused on founding the Center for Digital and Technological Innovation in Healthcare (CDTIH) at California State University, Fresno, — an interdisciplinary research and education center dedicated to advancing healthcare through technology, innovation, and collaboration. The Center brings together faculty across 5 colleges i.e Health and Human Services, Engineering, Science and Mathematics, Business, and Education to collaboratively develop solutions that improve health outcomes, strengthen workforce development, and promote regional economic growth.

The CDTIH serves as a hub for research, education, and community engagement in emerging areas including artificial intelligence (AI), virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR), telehealth, robotics, wearable technologies, and digital health. Guided by a systems-thinking approach and informed by the American Physical Therapy Association Academy of Education Fellowship in Higher Education Leadership, I developed a collaborative framework to align faculty expertise, institutional priorities, healthcare partnerships, and workforce needs. This strategic model strengthens the Physical Therapy Department, advances college- and university-wide priorities, supports student success and workforce readiness, fosters interdisciplinary research and external funding opportunities, and contributes to the university's R2 research aspirations by expanding scholarly productivity, innovation, and collaborative research infrastructure. In doing so, it positions the Center as a regional powerhouse in technology-enabled healthcare research, education, and community engagement.

This leadership project emphasized building sustainable relationships for interdisciplinary research and innovation, expanding digital health literacy, supporting technology-enabled healthcare education. The long-term goal is to position Fresno State as a national leader in technology-driven healthcare innovation while advancing healthcare access and workforce readiness across California's Central Valley.

Finally, Participation in the Fellowship in Higher Education Leadership (FHEL) was a transformative experience that strengthened my leadership through mentorship, systems thinking, and a human-centered approach. The program provided valuable tools to navigate higher education leadership with empathy, strategic clarity, and composure in complex environments. It deepened my understanding of leading across organizational levels—effectively engaging colleagues, administrators, and teams through collaboration, communication, and shared purpose. FHEL strengthened my confidence and preparedness to lead interdisciplinary innovation and institutional growth in meaningful, sustainable ways.



KAI-YU HO

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Through intentional communication and mentorship, improve my ability to navigate difficult conversations with empathy, transparency, and accountability.
2. By strengthening faculty engagement and participation, foster a collaborative departmental culture that supports trust, inclusion, and shared decision-making.
3. By integrating leadership theory, conflict management, legal guidance, and human resource principles, strengthen my effectiveness as an academic leader during periods of departmental growth and transition.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Difficult conversations are most effective when approached with preparation, empathy, and clarity rather than avoidance.
2. Effective leadership requires adapting communication styles to meet the preferences and needs of different individuals.
3. Mentorship, collaboration with institutional leaders, legal counsel, and the Ombuds office, along with clear agendas and follow-up communication, strengthen conflict management, faculty engagement, transparency, and shared accountability.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

As a new department chair, I quickly recognized that effective communication and faculty engagement are essential to successful academic leadership. Entering the role during a period of growth and transition, I faced challenges in navigating difficult conversations, balancing communication preferences, and promoting transparency and engagement in decision-making within the Department of Physical Therapy and across the institution. I also learned that leadership communication requires active listening, trust-building, conflict management, and adaptability beyond simply sharing information. This leadership project therefore focused on strengthening communication effectiveness, conflict management, and faculty engagement at multiple levels.

At the faculty level, I worked to build stronger relationships through intentional conversations, increased transparency, and individualized communication strategies. I recognized that some faculty members preferred verbal discussion and collaborative dialogue, while others valued thoughtful written communication and time for reflection. Adapting to these different communication styles became an important strategy for improving engagement, reducing misunderstandings, and fostering trust within the department.

At the departmental level, I implemented strategies to improve communication processes and encourage greater participation in departmental initiatives and decision-making. These efforts included creating clearer and more detailed meeting agendas, establishing more structured follow-up communication after meetings, and improving feedback mechanisms related to faculty concerns and departmental priorities. Through these efforts, I aimed to create a more transparent and collaborative environment that supported shared accountability and collective problem-solving.

At the school/institution level, mentorship and institutional collaboration played a significant role in my professional growth. Through guidance from the Dean and Associate Dean, consultation with the UNLV Ombuds office, Human Resources, and discussions with university legal counsel, I gained valuable perspectives on conflict management, faculty supervision, policy interpretation, and organizational communication. These experiences helped me better understand how to balance empathy with accountability while maintaining professionalism and fairness in leadership decisions.

Participation in the APTA Fellowship in Higher Education Leadership (FHEL) further strengthened my development as a leader. The fellowship provided structured learning opportunities focused on leadership theory, crucial conversations, student affairs, legal and policy considerations, and human resource management in higher education. Through FHEL, I developed practical strategies for navigating sensitive discussions, managing conflict more effectively, and approaching faculty engagement with greater intentionality and confidence. I incorporated these lessons into mentorship conversations, faculty evaluations, departmental meetings, and day-to-day leadership interactions.



AMANDA KOENNING

UT MD ANDERSON

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Strengthen my use of the structural frame by improving organization, attention to detail, and the ability to design and evaluate effective systems and processes.
2. Build greater confidence and trust in myself as a leader by addressing internal self-doubt and more fully owning my leadership voice and decision-making.
3. Advocate more effectively for the people, initiatives, and values I care deeply about by aligning them with organizational priorities and strategic goals.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Using structured tools such as SWOT analyses strengthened my ability to think strategically and view challenges from multiple perspectives. This approach helped me move beyond task-based problem solving to more intentional, system-level decision-making.
2. I learned that I have the capacity to lead effectively, even when self-doubt is present. Through the fellowship, I became more intentional about trusting my judgment and using my voice with greater confidence.
3. I learned that advocating successfully for initiatives I value requires intentional alignment with organizational goals and strategic priorities. Framing ideas this way not only advanced meaningful projects but also strengthened partnerships and trust with my leadership team.

AMANDA KOENNING

UT MD ANDERSON

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Title: Strengthening the Rehabilitation Continuum for Patients with Head and Neck Cancer

Rehabilitation services for patients with head and neck cancer play a critical role in functional recovery, quality of life, and survivorship outcomes. These patients often experience complex impairments requiring coordinated physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology services across the care continuum. Despite strong clinical expertise and evidence supporting early and consistent rehabilitation involvement, gaps in staff education, referral timing, and survivorship integration resulted in variability in care delivery and underutilization of rehabilitation services.

My leadership project focused on identifying structural and process-level opportunities to strengthen rehabilitation's role within the head and neck cancer care continuum. I developed a multi-faceted, systems-based approach to improve consistency, access, and alignment with institutional priorities by addressing staff education, referral workflows, and prehabilitation planning. At the departmental level, I worked to standardize educational content and clarify rehabilitation roles across PT, OT, and SLP disciplines. At the interdisciplinary level, I partnered with surgical and oncology stakeholders to align rehabilitation initiatives with existing clinical pathways and strategic goals. At the organizational level, I intentionally framed proposed projects in terms of quality, efficiency, and patient outcomes to build leadership engagement and support.

Accomplishments to date include:

- Development and implementation of standardized, evidence-based educational content to support onboarding and ongoing competency for rehabilitation clinicians caring for head and neck cancer patients.
- Identification and mapping of inpatient and outpatient referral workflows, reducing variability and improving clarity around timing and access to rehabilitation services.
- Advancement of prehabilitation discussions and improved interdisciplinary engagement around early rehabilitation involvement.
- Successful presentation of rehabilitation-focused initiatives to leadership by aligning proposed projects with institutional strategic priorities, resulting in endorsement and support for continued implementation.
- Strengthened interdisciplinary relationships and trust, reinforcing rehabilitation's role as a key contributor to survivorship care and long-term functional outcomes.

This project reflects growth across FHEL competencies, including strategic and structural leadership, communication, collaboration, and change management, while demonstrating my ability to advocate effectively, use metrics to support decision-making, and translate values into sustainable organizational impact.



GAURI MACDONALD

BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. To develop a clear understanding of my leadership style, leveraging my strengths while addressing areas for professional improvement
2. To develop a strong understanding of the broader higher education landscape and how current trends impact our institution's policies and students.
3. To build a strong professional reputation across the Division and College to position myself for future leadership opportunities.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Stepping into leadership revealed how much I still have to learn about leadership and institutional operations, teaching me the value of asking questions and continually learning.
2. Leadership roles don't always follow a linear path or come with a title; I learned to accept unexpected opportunities wherever they arose to expand my experience.
3. Leadership requires stepping out of my comfort zone and taking risks rather than letting the fear of a mistake hold me back.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

For my leadership project, I was tasked to serve as a Team Leader for developing and planning an on-campus clinic, in addition to labs, classrooms, and office space in a building recently acquired to house Physical Therapy and Speech-Language Pathology. I guided a team of faculty and staff in laying the foundation for this new academic clinical practice. This initiative involved navigating workload allocation, equipment selection, space layout, and collaborating with various campus offices.

A primary leadership challenge was balancing diverse perspectives to find viable compromises. This required navigating competing priorities between administration and faculty, specifically balancing the Dean's focus on financial viability and profit margins with the Division's commitment to community-based care and student learning.

To date, I have led the completion of a comprehensive business proposal for an occupational health clinic and am currently developing a second business plan focused on older adults and fall prevention. This project hopes to successfully bridge vital, unmet community health needs with expanded student experiential learning, and the space is expected to be ready for occupancy in Summer 2027.



SAMANTHA MAROCCO

CLARKSON UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Establish an expanding network of peers and higher education mentors for future collaboration and continued growth.
2. Develop strong negotiation skills to gain and maintain fiscal support for the professional development of the faculty on my team.
3. Strengthen my ability to approach complex challenges from multiple leadership frames.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. I've learned that you don't need to have all the skills listed in a job description to be an impactful leader. Instead, I now view leadership roles as opportunities for ongoing growth.
2. Leadership challenges are often multifaceted. While I tend to rely on the human resources frame, looking at these challenges through all four of Bolman and Deal's leadership frames provides additional insights and strategies. I've especially appreciated learning to lean into the political and symbolic frames.
3. Conflict is inevitable when teams face resource limitations. Being open to conflict can prompt innovation, improved efficiency, and authentic relationships.

SAMANTHA MAROCCO

CLARKSON UNIVERSITY

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Clarkson University's DPT program recently shifted from problem-based learning to a more traditional curriculum with a focus on experiential learning and metacognition. Several novice instructors have also recently joined the faculty. In addition, the program is currently completing the CAPTE self-study process and many faculty members are new to accreditation. For my leadership capstone project, I used the four Bolman and Deal leadership frames to address the need for faculty development in teaching and learning.

The goals for this project included fostering teaching expertise, promoting an understanding of the accreditation process among all faculty, prompting ongoing faculty development in evidence-based teaching practices, and negotiating fiscal support for training. This project aligned with my leadership career goals, my transformational leadership style, as well as Clarkson University's vision to provide students with a superior educational experience.

I initially approached this project through the human resources frame. I reviewed student and peer teaching evaluations and interviewed faculty to determine their development needs and goals. I then used the structural frame by investigating university policies and procedures related to faculty development and identifying faculty development resources offered by the university and physical therapy professional organizations.

Ensuring fiscal support for faculty development in teaching and learning required using the political frame. I negotiated startup funds to cover faculty attendance at educational conferences and faculty development workshops, as well as funding for a CAPTE accreditation consultant to guide the department through the self-study process and to send faculty to CAPTE self-study workshops. The political frame also helped with identifying budgetary adjustments that would accommodate ongoing fiscal support for professional development in teaching and learning.

The symbolic frame was also used to promote team development in teaching and learning. This included sharing information related to educational research opportunities, item-writing courses, professional teaching resources, relevant educational literature, and university faculty development programs. Discussions about teaching best practices were integrated into the faculty annual review process. Faculty were encouraged to conduct educational research, apply for teaching grants, and were offered mentoring. A teaching innovation minute was also added to bi-weekly department meetings.

To determine the impact of this initiative, faculty will be asked to provide a self-assessment of their development as part of the annual review process. Peer and student evaluations of faculty teaching performance will also be assessed. Finally, faculty will complete an evaluation of the program director, including their perceptions of support given for their teaching and learning goals.



KESHRIE NAIDOO

MGH INSTITUTE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Establish a network and community of leaders who will work to collaboratively address the challenges facing higher education in the years to come
2. Learn from established leaders about effective strategies for leading a large group of faculty and staff, and sharpen relational leadership skills
3. Leverage transformational leadership to support and develop faculty and staff

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Leadership is a skill that can be developed with consistent practice and self-awareness
2. To build trust with your team you need authenticity, empathy, and logic
3. Leadership should not be a lonely pursuit. If it is, it means you still need to build your network

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Defining and Measuring Academic and Program Excellence for Health and Rehabilitation Sciences Graduate Programs

Stepping into the role of Associate Dean of Academic Affairs for the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences presented both a challenge and a meaningful opportunity. The School had experienced substantial growth, welcoming new programs and Department Chairs. Yet with that growth came a structural gap: many programs did not have a consistent cadence for data collection or reporting. Instead, data needs surfaced reactively necessitated by approaching accreditation reviews, grant submissions or ad hoc requests from the Dean. Although an Office of Institutional Effectiveness exists, its data is limited in scope. Far richer and actionable data exists at the individual program level, although often not available in any unified system.

Recognizing this gap, my leadership project was built around three foundational goals. The first was to invest time in understanding each program's professional culture, its identity, and how program members defined and measured success. Rather than arriving with a predetermined framework, the approach was one of curiosity and collaboration. The second goal was to work alongside the Chairs to develop a standardized metrics framework, with clearly defined data points, designated responsible owners, and a predictable collection cadence. The third goal was to design and populate a data dashboard capable of capturing baseline outcome data across all identified metrics, creating a foundation for ongoing, informed decision-making.

The project was not without its obstacles. There was no predecessor in this role to provide a blueprint or institutional memory. Additionally, I was also leading my own department as a relatively new Chair with competing demands. However, this experience as a learner and collaborator rather than an expert fostered trust and a spirit of co-creation with the other Chairs rather than top-down implementation.



CHRIS NICHOLS

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS COMMUNITY
COLLEGE

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Establish cross-departmental collaborations (e.g., Student Affairs, advising, academic support) to improve student retention.
2. Strengthen my ability to advocate for resources and structural changes that support retention initiatives
3. Develop skills in data-informed leadership to identify and address attrition trends.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. One of the most impactful outcomes of this experience was gaining insight into the distinct and collaborative roles of Student Affairs, Student Success, and Counseling and Wellness. I developed a greater appreciation for the breadth of resources these departments provide to support both students and faculty. This understanding has strengthened my ability to connect students with appropriate services, promote holistic student support, and serve as a more informed partner in fostering student success.
2. I learned practical strategies to advocate for and implement more effective, timely student assessment practices within my role as faculty. Emphasizing early and ongoing evaluation allows for earlier identification of at-risk students, enabling more meaningful interventions during the semester.
3. The Fellowship also enhanced my ability to lead and support others within the institution. I gained a clearer understanding of how to effectively support fellow faculty and institutional leaders by fostering collaboration, communicating strategically, and aligning efforts with broader organizational goals. This experience has strengthened my confidence in contributing to institutional initiatives and in mentoring and supporting others in their professional development.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My leadership capstone project focuses on improving retention and graduation rates within the Physical Therapist Assistant (PTA) program through a comprehensive, student-centered support initiative. The project integrates data-informed strategies to identify barriers to student success and implements targeted interventions, including faculty-led small peer groups, enhanced academic support, and collaboration with Student Affairs and Counseling and Wellness. Additional components include peer mentorship opportunities and a shift toward more concept-based assessment practices. Collectively, these efforts aim to promote early identification of at-risk students, strengthen engagement and support, and create a more holistic learning environment that fosters student success and program completion.



WHITNEY OSBORN

SPRINGFIELD COLLEGE

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Improve the student and faculty experience by aligning the capstone projects with clinically and professionally meaningful deliverables, advancing both student dissemination and faculty scholarship.
2. Deepen my leadership self-awareness and collaborative skills as I work through this process with the many stakeholders involved, and within the departmental priorities and culture.
3. Develop my strategic thinking to guide the DPT capstone redesign, intentionally mapping the formal and informal structures, using data and perspectives to drive strategic planning, resource allocation, and change management in a way that inspires and empowers others.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. I didn't see myself as a leader when I began this journey, but rather someone who is passionate and wants to create the best learning experience for PT students. Throughout this process, and by listening to those around me, I have learned that this process is one of growth and development, sometimes fun and sometimes painful!
2. This experience cemented my values as a leader – with collective growth at the center, and recognizing the areas that folks can contribute meaningfully to the success of a department, as long as we can communicate effectively and honestly.
3. Sometimes slowing down is the best way to get things done.

WHITNEY OSBORN

SPRINGFIELD COLLEGE

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

DPT Capstone ReDesign

The Capstone project for the DPT program at Springfield College has been a strong and vibrant part of the curriculum for many years, and was last updated in 2022. As we know, however, evidence-based practice is dynamic, and the current process is no longer serving its original mission. Thus, my FHEL project focused on a redesign of the DPT Capstone Student Manual, and work with the departmental Research Committee, to improve the faculty and student experience in this area of the curriculum.

During the FHEL, I intentionally applied my learning to a curricular redesign project, with particular attention to how leadership themes influence communication and change management. I recognized that my default Human Resources and Structural approaches were not always effective with colleagues who operate more strongly from Symbolic and Political frames, and I adapted my communication strategies accordingly to build broader alignment and engagement.

In parallel, I evaluated faculty workload, as well as the organizational and administrative processes required to support sustainable course revisions. Using an evidence-informed and data-informed approach, I led revisions to course design and learning objectives across a three-course sequence, ensuring that updates preserved the program's historical rigor while enhancing both student and faculty experiences.

At present, the revised Student Manual has been completed and is pending Research Committee approval. Course objectives across the three-course sequence have also been rewritten. The Summer cohort will be the first to experience the redesigned thread, while formal alignment of course credits and sequencing, are being planned in accordance with institutional processes and timelines.

The overarching goal of this work is to create a more transferrable learning experience, while maintaining reasonable faculty and student workload, and avoiding increased costs.



AMANDA OVERBEY

ATU-OZARK

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Develop and implement a more organized and intentional approach to long-term planning for the PTA program by establishing clear goals, prioritizing initiatives, and strengthening processes for measuring progress and outcomes over time.
2. Increase delegation and collaboration within the PTA program by leveraging team members' strengths, distributing responsibilities more effectively, and fostering shared ownership of program operations and development.
3. Strengthen my ability to navigate and engage in institutional and professional advocacy efforts to more effectively support, promote, and advance the needs and priorities of the PTA program.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Successful program leadership depends on relationships. Running a program is not something one person does alone—it requires networking, collaboration, and drawing on the strengths and perspectives of others.
2. Leadership is often more challenging than it appears from the outside. Becoming an effective leader takes patience, self-reflection, and a willingness to learn from both successes and setbacks.
3. Leadership is a lifelong process rather than a destination. Effective leaders must remain adaptable, committed to continuous learning, and open to growth both professionally and personally.

AMANDA OVERBEY

ATU-OZARK

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My fellowship project focused on expanding interprofessional and intraprofessional learning opportunities for physical therapist assistant (PTA) students prior to their clinical experiences. Student survey data identified opportunities to improve readiness for entry-level practice, increase collaborative learning experiences, and strengthen understanding of the PTA role and scope of practice within the program.

To address these needs, I developed structured learning experiences that allow PTA students to learn alongside physical therapy (PT) and other healthcare students. I intentionally focused on incorporating authentic case-based discussions, collaborative clinical reasoning activities, and simulated patient scenarios into the learning experience. In these activities, students develop interventions, respond to changing clinical situations, and strengthen their understanding of professional roles, delegation, supervision, and patient-centered care. Interprofessional experiences were implemented during the spring semester, and intraprofessional PT-PTA experiences are scheduled to begin this fall.

This project is designed to better prepare PTA students for clinical practice by improving their understanding of professional roles and scope of practice, strengthening collaborative clinical reasoning skills, and building confidence as future practitioners. Additionally, the project highlights the value of team-based, patient-centered care and the importance of effective collaboration in achieving positive patient outcomes.

In early feedback, several PTA students shared that they had a greater appreciation for the roles and responsibilities of PTAs and other healthcare professionals, while also reporting increased confidence communicating and collaborating within the rehabilitation team. Ongoing assessment will be used to evaluate student learning outcomes and the effectiveness of the project, and to guide continuous improvement.

This project reinforced my belief that preparing PTA students for clinical experiences requires more than technical competence alone. Communication, teamwork, and professional collaboration are essential to both clinical practice and patient-centered care. Through this experience, I also strengthened my own skills in communication, collaboration, program development, and relationship-building with colleagues within my institution and across the state.



ASHLEY PARISH

UAB

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Deepen administrative and operational proficiency in areas such as budgeting, policy development, and the regulatory aspects required of physical therapy programs.
2. Build advanced skills in developing faculty and staff through feedback, mentorship, and coaching.
3. Strengthen ability to craft a vision and make data-informed decisions that advance program outcomes.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Effective communication starts with context. Always begin a meeting or conversation by explaining the “why” as it increases clarity, alignment and engagement.
2. Transformation within large, complex systems requires patience, persistence, and long-view mindset.
3. Leadership doesn’t have to be isolating. Having a leadership community to support you personally and professionally is a must!

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

As the newly appointed Director of Assessment in my department, my leadership project focused on building a unified, sustainable assessment system that integrates our DPT, BS, PhD, and certificate programs. The project began with establishing a culture of assessment by creating an assessment committee consisting of the program directors from each program. This collaboration now allows for reviewing data, discussing improvements, and maintaining alignment across programs. Together, we created a shared philosophy of assessment, clarified department goals, and created a yearly dissemination plan that standardizes how assessment findings are reported to faculty and used for quality improvement.

To support the broader department, I built a model within the DPT program that can serve as a template for others. This included a full reorganization of existing surveys to reduce redundancy, improve clarity, and ensure alignment with program-level, departmental, and institutional outcomes. A detailed map to CAPTE standards was created, giving faculty and program directors a clear, accessible way to identify where evidence is collected and where gaps may exist within the DPT program.

This work strengthened our department’s assessment infrastructure and created consistent, transparent pathways that support continuous improvement across all academic programs.



JODI SANDVIK

TRINE UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. To develop relationships with the key players in the university and understand how they can help my department politically.
2. To develop a better understanding of public policies and how they impact my department.
3. To develop conflict management skills that result in positive and productive outcomes.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. I have learned to reframe situations and look at situations from all 4 four frames from Bohman and Deal, which has given me a deeper insight.
2. That politics isn't always bad. Politics is knowing the key players and how they can help your program. I think of politics as "removing the rocks from the stream". (Sharron Dunn)
3. Overall, my confidence has grown because of the knowledge of the different areas, resources that I now have, and a new support system that I gained from this fellowship.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My leadership project was the creation and implementation of an onboarding program for new full-time and adjunct faculty at Trine University's Doctor of Physical Therapy program. This onboarding program aims to improve faculty satisfaction, enhance teaching practices, and foster a team environment amongst faculty and staff. The program is 16 weeks long for adjunct faculty and 6 months for full-time faculty. The new faculty will meet with the program director, co-associate directors, and a dedicated mentor. The dedicated mentor will help guide the new faculty member through the transition to Trine University.

The new faculty member will follow a structured sequence of topics that include the following:

- LMS resources
- University policies and procedures
- Departmental policies and procedures
- Curriculum
- Expectations for faculty
- Scholarship and Service requirements
- Faculty resources
- Professional development
- CAPTE accreditation
- Culture of the DPT program



BRYANT SEAMON

MEDICAL UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Develop proficiency in the implementation and management of core academic leadership functions, including finance, human resources and faculty affairs, student affairs, legal considerations, accreditation processes, and program assessment.
2. Analyze political, economic, and cultural trends in higher education and apply insights into strategic decision-making.
3. Cultivate a professional network of peers and mentors in higher education leadership to support ongoing professional growth, collaboration, and strategic development.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Values serve as a consistent foundation for decision-making, especially when facing new and complex challenges.
2. Effective leadership requires cultivating trust and effective teamwork through clear expectations, transparent communication, modeling core values, and proactively addressing conflict.
3. Strategic planning requires systems thinking and a deep understanding of the economic, political, institutional, and socio-cultural contexts in which decisions are made.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Rehabilitation professions, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology, continue to face a growing shortage of qualified academic faculty. The lack of clearly structured career pathways creates barriers for clinician educators to acquire expertise in teaching, scholarship, and academic leadership. My leadership project during the fellowship was to create an academic program to support faculty development for clinician educators.

Over the past year, I have conducted a needs assessment, developed a curriculum, and drafted a pro forma for the program. These experiences gave me the opportunity to apply the concepts I learned in the fellowship program directly. I gained new knowledge about accreditation, institutional policy, current political and economic considerations, and university finances. Furthermore, this project provided me with the opportunity to think strategically. I leveraged existing faculty certificate and residency models to design an adaptable academic program for rehabilitation clinicians across professions while simultaneously supporting departmental and college-level strategic growth initiatives.

Given the program's positive reception and financial feasibility, the next phase is to pursue Board of Trustees approval and accreditation. As this work continues, I will further apply leadership skills developed during the fellowship through securing institutional resources, establishing operational policies and procedures, managing admissions processes, and supporting program implementation and evaluation. While still in development, this initiative represents a meaningful step toward a sustainable career pathway that strengthens the workforce of clinician educators and advances academic leadership within rehabilitation professions.



BRADLEY TRAGORD

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT SAN ANTONIO

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Improve and prepare to lead effectively through institutional transition (merger) and student-centered program development
2. Strengthen professional awareness and individualized academic leadership to improve faculty development and program assessment
3. Advance strategic resource management and financial stewardship by developing a deeper understanding of budgeting, operational leadership, and external funding opportunities.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Leadership growth requires intentional self-reflection. The fellowship repeatedly emphasizes reflective practice and self-assessment. Using the requirement/recommended readings and self-assessment tools, I have seen tremendous growth.
2. Communication is the central leadership competency. Across the modules and especially the March intensive, I grew in my awareness and comfort in approaching difficult conversations and improving conflict navigation.
3. Sustainable leadership depends on institutional and community stakeholders. During the fellowship, I grew to appreciate the many institutional and external stakeholders. Coming into the program I would say that I felt that 'our program could operation autonomously,' however now have a much deeper appreciation of the professional community.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My capstone project focused on developing a strategic communications (STRATCOM) initiative for the University of Texas at San Antonio Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program through the creation of a video storytelling series designed to strengthen recruitment, program identity, alumni engagement, and clinical partnerships. The project emerged from a recognition that while the DPT program demonstrates excellence in teaching, research, and community engagement, its public identity and communication strategies had not consistently reflected the full scope and impact of the program. Additionally, the 2025 merger between UT Health San Antonio and UTSA created an opportunity to align the DPT program with a renewed institutional brand and vision.

BRADLEY TRAGORD

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT SAN ANTONIO

The project involved developing a four-part video series highlighting core pillars of the program: Teaching Excellence, Research and Innovation, Community and Clinical Engagement, and a Student-Led Program Tour. These videos were designed to serve as sustainable recruitment and branding tools that communicate the culture, mission, and strengths of the program to prospective students, alumni, faculty, and clinical partners. Beyond marketing, the project emphasized storytelling as a leadership strategy capable of strengthening organizational identity, pride, and stakeholder connection.

This capstone also became a meaningful leadership development experience through the lens of the fellowship focus on leadership theory, authenticity, and Bolman and Deal's Four-Frame Model. My leadership self-assessment revealed strengths in the Human Resource and Structural frames, reflecting my natural tendency toward collaboration, relationship-building, authenticity, and organizational structure. At the same time, the assessment identified Political and Symbolic leadership as areas of growth. This project intentionally challenged me to strengthen my political and symbolic leadership capacities in ways that felt authentic to my leadership style.

I learned that strategic communication requires more than simply delivering information. Politically, the project demanded alignment across multiple stakeholders, including faculty, students, university marketing teams, alumni, and clinical partners. Coordinating these relationships required advocacy, negotiation, influence, and the ability to build consensus around a shared vision. Rather than viewing organizational politics negatively, I began to understand political leadership as the ethical process of developing influence and aligning people toward common goals.

The project also strengthened my understanding of symbolic leadership. Through video storytelling, I recognized how communication can create meaning, reinforce culture, and inspire pride within an organization. Capturing the lived experiences of students and faculty helped communicate not only what the program does, but why the work matters. This experience reinforced my belief that leadership is deeply connected to communication, vision, and the ability to help others feel connected to a mission larger than themselves.

Several challenges highlighted the importance of multi-frame leadership. Structurally, the project required organization, workflow coordination, and timeline management. Human resource challenges involved maintaining engagement and collaboration across departments and stakeholder groups. Political challenges centered on institutional alignment and competing priorities, while symbolic challenges involved authentically representing program culture and identity. Working through these expanded my understanding of leadership effectiveness across all four frames.

Ultimately, this project strengthened my growth as a leader by helping me move beyond my natural relational leadership tendencies and intentionally develop greater confidence in political awareness, strategic communication, and symbolic leadership.



SUZANNE TROTTER

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Strengthen my ability to lead strategically at an executive level by improving my skills in organizational structure, policy development, conflict navigation, and decision-making.
2. Increase my effectiveness in building alliances, navigating organizational dynamics, and influencing change across teams and programs within our department.
3. Develop a more intentional leadership presence that inspires, coaches, and empowers others while remaining authentic to my relational leadership style.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Effective leadership is not choosing between empathy and accountability- it is skillfully integrating both.
2. Authentic leadership values relational connection paired with strategic communication to influence people toward shared goals and growth.
3. I am a leader who influences culture, develops people, and contributes to organizational growth with both compassion and clarity.

SUZANNE TROTTER

TUFTS UNIVERSITY

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

My leadership project focused on developing and piloting a coaching framework for clinical mentors participating in a formalized program at another campus location within my department, called EMPOWER, that supports students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

This initiative was motivated by several factors:

Student Support: Students in accelerated and hybrid health professions programs often benefit from structured relational support that promotes belonging, accountability, and professional identity development.

Faculty and Mentor Development: Clinical mentors frequently rely on traditional advising or mentoring approaches that emphasize giving direction rather than facilitating learner-driven reflection and problem solving.

Programmatic Growth: As the program continues to evolve, there was an opportunity to create a more intentional and scalable framework for mentor preparation that aligned with coaching principles and leadership development and could be modeled at other programs within our department.

As part of my Fellowship in Higher Education Leadership (FHEL) experience, I designed and implemented a pilot coaching curriculum for novice clinical mentors in the EMPOWER program. The pilot utilized a blended educational model that included:

- an asynchronous learning module introducing foundational coaching concepts and distinctions between mentoring and coaching,
- two facilitated virtual coaching sessions focused on reflective questioning, active listening, and goal-focused conversations,
- and application assignments allowing mentors to practice coaching strategies with their assigned mentees and reflect on their experiences.

Two novice mentors participated in the pilot experience. Preliminary feedback suggested increased confidence in utilizing coaching techniques and greater awareness of strategies that support learner reflection, autonomy, and growth. Mentors valued the opportunity to practice coaching conversations and discuss authentic mentoring challenges within a supportive environment.

This project also served as an important component of my own leadership development. Through this initiative, I strengthened my ability to lead organizational change through relational leadership, strategic communication, and systems-level thinking. This experience reinforced my belief that effective leadership integrates empathy and accountability while creating structures that support the growth and development of others.

Future direction includes:

- expanding participation to additional mentors within the EMPOWER program,
- developing more formal assessment measures related to coaching effectiveness and mentor confidence,
- exploring longitudinal outcomes related to student engagement and belonging,
- and creating a sustainable coaching development model that may be adapted across health professions education programs.



BROOKE VAUGHAN

OHIO UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL GOALS

1. Develop the skills needed to transition from being an individual contributor and problem solver to a leader capable of guiding people and organizations.
2. Gain a broader understanding of higher education leadership, including governance, finance, accreditation, and the institutional factors that influence decision making.
3. Build meaningful relationships with mentors and colleagues who could provide perspective, support, and challenge me to grow as a leader.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. Leadership is a distinct skill set. Success in teaching, scholarship, program development, or administration does not automatically prepare someone to lead people and organizations effectively.
2. The most complex leadership challenges are rarely technical problems. They often involve competing priorities, differing perspectives, and the need to balance the needs of multiple stakeholders.
3. During periods of uncertainty, leaders create value by providing clarity. Transparent communication, clearly defined expectations, and consistent processes help build trust and organizational alignment.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LEADERSHIP PROJECT

During the fellowship year, Ohio University was simultaneously responding to the Advancing Ohio Higher Education Act, implementing a new budget model, navigating labor representation efforts, and revising numerous institutional policies and procedures. Together, these initiatives created significant uncertainty regarding decision making, accountability, and faculty participation. As Department Chair, I recognized the need for a structure that could provide clarity while preserving meaningful faculty engagement during a period of rapid institutional change.

My leadership project focused on developing an adaptive governance framework for the Department of Physical Therapy. Drawing upon Bolman and Deal's Four Frames of Leadership, I examined how organizational structure, stakeholder interests, competing priorities, and departmental culture influence decision making during periods of uncertainty. The project resulted in the development of a governance model that established decision pathways for major departmental functions while defining faculty authority, administrative accountability, and shared responsibility. A central component of the model was a RACI-based decision matrix that identified who is responsible, accountable, consulted, and informed for decisions related to curriculum, admissions, assessment, faculty affairs, budgeting, and strategic planning.

While developed within a single department, the project addressed a broader challenge facing higher education leaders: balancing meaningful participation with increasing expectations for accountability and responsiveness. The framework has recently been implemented and provides a foundation for transparent decision making, clearly defined roles, and effective collaboration.



NOTES:

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

