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Transformative Leaders

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Transformative Leaders

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Monday September 26, 2022

By Eric F. Spina

University of Dayton students, more intent on making it to their early morning classes, didn't pay much attention as four deans lined up for a group photo in the Kennedy Union Plaza.

For the first time, the majority of our students now have a woman as their dean. While we may marvel at this change, this is their norm, and there is no reason it shouldn't become ours.

Deans Ali Carr-Chellman, Danielle Poe, and Gül Kremer have joined Kathy Webb, the longstanding, respected dean of University Libraries, as women in academic leadership roles in the School of Education and Health Sciences, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the School of Engineering, respectively. In quick measure, they're each developing reputations as energetic, influential, visionary leaders.

At the height of the pandemic in the summer of 2020, Dean Carr-Chellman embarked on an intrepid 2,600-mile, cross-country journey with her husband, three children, and two rescue dogs in an RV from Idaho, where she served as dean of the College of Education, Health and Human Sciences at the University of Idaho. As dean of UD's School of Education and Health Sciences, she's quickly made a name for herself as a transparent leader who values relationships and academic excellence.

Fast forward to this summer, when we welcomed two more female academic deans.

After a highly competitive national search, Dean Poe, acting dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, was elevated to the top position. Her more than two decades of experience at UD includes stints as associate dean for curriculum and academic outcomes, director of the humanities core program, and professor of philosophy with an expertise in the philosophy of peace. Her well-deserved promotion makes a statement to our women faculty that there is meaningful opportunity for advancement on our campus.

Dean Kremer, our newest academic dean, brings an extensive track record in collaborative sponsored research, engineering program development, diversity and inclusion as a strategic focus, and fundraising from her roles at Iowa State University. There, she served most recently as a named professor in interdisciplinary engineering and senior director of presidential projects in the office of the president. Her experience as a program director at the National Science Foundation will also provide great value to the School of Engineering and the University as a whole. According to the Society of Women Engineers, women make up roughly 20 percent of the total leaders of engineering universities and colleges in the country. By her very presence, Dean Kremer will inspire more women to enter the engineering profession.

Since 2006, Dean Webb has overseen Roesch Library, Marian Library, University Archives, and Special Collections with a tenacious, can-do spirit. Under her leadership, Roesch Library, which opened more than half a century ago, recently underwent a major renovation and now stands as an exemplar for digital and collaborative learning in higher education.

We still have much work to do in improving diversity, equity, and inclusion at UD, but it's undeniable that through the work of faculty and staff across Academic Affairs we have improved gender diversity in the highest ranks of UD's academic leadership. Thanks to the leadership of Provost Paul Benson, Associate Provost Carolyn Recker Phelps, and others in Academic Affairs and Human Resources, as well as the excellent work of our search committees, we've become much more intentional at creating diverse pools of talented, historically underrepresented candidates.

With a diversity of voices around the table, we are becoming a more innovative university — and we're living out our Marianist mission more fully. This is a place where we appreciate and benefit from the gifts of all.

