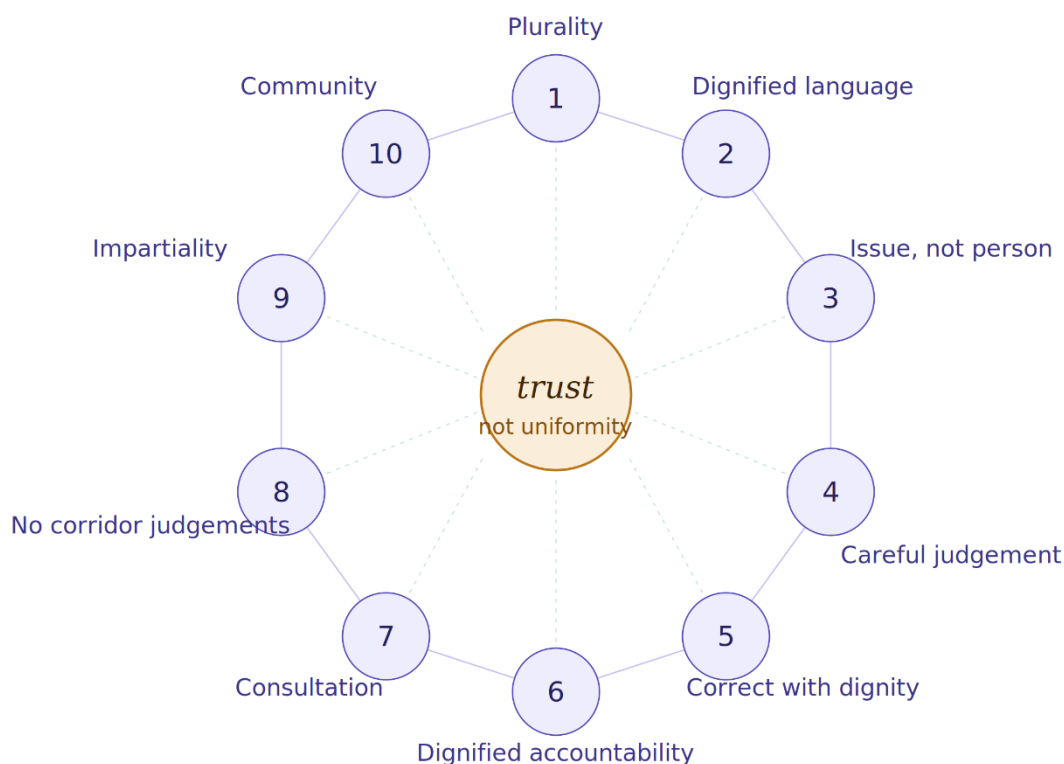


Ten Characteristics of an Ideal University Academic Administrator¹

with a translation note for colleagues from technology and science backgrounds

Ten characteristics, held together

A cultural premise for academic administration



An institution still being formed by what we choose to practise.

No.	Leadership and Cultural Premise	Guidance for Academic Administration
1	Recognise the plurality of academic work	RV University brings together colleagues with different strengths, academic backgrounds, temperaments, disciplines, responsibilities, and forms of contribution. Some colleagues may be highly visible in public events, committees, admissions, outreach, or institutional representation. Others may contribute more quietly through careful teaching, student mentoring, research, curriculum design,

¹ All interpretations, decisions, and final wording reflect the author(s) judgment.

Disclaimer: Personal opinions do not reflect those of our employer & drafted in my capacity as Vice Chancellor for internal use; shared here as personal reflection, not institutional policy.

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		<p>assessment work, academic advising, or behind-the-scenes coordination. Academic administration must recognise this plurality. A colleague should not be understood only through one visible role, one incident, one meeting, one delay, or one expression of disagreement. A mature academic culture recognises that institutional strength comes from many forms of work, including those that are not immediately visible. A deep academic culture recognises and rewards publicly invisible work. The academic administrators have responsibility to uphold plurality with fairness, patience, and respect.</p> <p><i>For colleagues in technology and science: In practical terms: just as a research lab depends on equally on the principal investigator, the postdoc debugging code at midnight, the student calibrating instruments, and the technician maintaining systems, a university depends on many roles whose value is not measured by visibility and so a colleague evaluated only on what is publicly visible (or visible only in social media) is being measured on incomplete data.</i></p>
2	<p>Use language that preserves institutional dignity</p>	<p>The language used by academic administrators in meetings, emails, review discussions, informal conversations, and written observations shapes the culture of the university. Language can either build confidence or create anxiety; it can clarify a problem or personalise it; it can support improvement or produce defensiveness. Academic administrators are therefore expected to use language that is precise, restrained, respectful, and constructive. Observations should focus on specific responsibilities, processes, timelines, documentation, communication gaps, or academic expectations. Broad statements about a colleague’s character, attitude, motivation, or commitment should be avoided unless supported by a careful and fair process. Offer of critical feedback even when it is necessary should be made with care, detachment, without sarcasm, or in any manner that could be construed as personally diminishing. Institutional dignity is preserved when language remains professional, measured, and focused on improvement.</p> <p><i>For colleagues in technology and science: Concretely: write about a colleague the way you would write a bug report say by specifying the observed behaviour, the expected behaviour, the context, and the gap, but do not write ‘the developer is careless’ when you mean ‘the test for edge case X was not included.’</i></p>
3	<p>Separate the issue from the person</p>	<p>Administrative concerns must be addressed clearly and firmly, but the concern should not become a judgement on the entire person. A missed deadline, delayed response, weak documentation, incomplete report, poor coordination, or procedural lapse should be treated as a matter for clarification, correction, and improvement. The colleague should not be reduced to that lapse. This distinction is central to humane and effective administration. It allows administrators to maintain standards without weakening trust. When the issue is separated from the person, colleagues are more likely to accept responsibility and work towards improvement. When the person is identified entirely with the problem, the result is often fear,</p>

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		<p>silence, resentment, or withdrawal. A humane administrator corrects the lapse while preserving the dignity of the colleague.</p> <p><i>For colleagues in technology and science: Operationally: treat each concern as a defect to be diagnosed and fixed, not as a verdict on the engineer who wrote the code and a missed deadline is a process failure to be analysed, not a permanent label to be assigned to a colleague.</i></p>
4	<p>Exercise careful judgement before reaching conclusions</p>	<p>Before forming an administrative view, it is important to understand the full context. Administrators should ask: What are the facts? What information is missing? Was the expectation communicated clearly? Was the timeline reasonable? Were there workload pressures, personal difficulties, coordination failures, procedural ambiguities, or conflicting instructions? Was this an isolated matter or part of a repeated pattern? Careful judgement protects both fairness and institutional credibility. It prevents avoidable misunderstanding and ensures that administrative action is proportionate. Universities are complex institutions, and situations are often more layered than they initially appear. Academic leadership must therefore resist premature conclusions and cultivate patience, listening, documentation, and context-sensitive judgement. Thus, administrators should strive towards gathering fuller facts and ask what information may still be missing. Before arriving at a conclusion regarding individual failures to meet expectations the administrator is well advised to ask if expectations were communicated clearly to the individual and whether the expectations were reasonable in the first instance.</p> <p><i>For colleagues in technology and science: In scientific terms: do not draw conclusions from $n = 1$ i.e., a single observation about a colleague is a data point, not a result, and acting on it before checking confounders, sample size, and reproducibility is the administrative equivalent of publishing without peer review.</i></p>
5	<p>Correct with dignity</p>	<p>Standards matter deeply in a university. Classes must be held with seriousness, assessments must be completed responsibly, students must be supported, academic records must be maintained, meetings must be honoured, and institutional responsibilities must be fulfilled. However, correction must always be made in a manner that protects dignity. The purpose of correction is improvement, not discouragement. Administrators should address lapses directly, but without sarcasm, public embarrassment, exaggerated language, or unnecessary severity. A respectful correction makes the expectation clear, identifies the gap, and indicates the way forward. It does not diminish the colleague's worth. Dignified correction strengthens responsibility because it allows people to improve without feeling personally attacked. The University academic administrators should address such lapses by identifying them clearly; speak directly and honestly— without sarcasm, public humiliation, without resorting to exaggerated language, or disproportionate severity.</p> <p><i>For colleagues in technology and science: Practically: think of correction the way you think of feedback on a student's code or experimental design: the goal is to make</i></p>

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		<i>the next version better, not to make the student stop coding; sarcasm and public embarrassment add no diagnostic information and only reduce the probability of improvement.</i>
6	Build dignified accountability	<p>Accountability is necessary for any serious academic institution. However, accountability should be rooted in shared academic purpose rather than fear. The purpose of accountability is to protect student learning, academic standards, fairness among colleagues, institutional credibility, and professional responsibility. Administrators should communicate expectations clearly, follow up consistently, document concerns responsibly, and support colleagues in meeting agreed responsibilities. Accountability becomes dignified when colleagues understand why a task matters and when they are treated as responsible professionals. It should not feel like constant policing or suspicion. A culture of dignified accountability combines clarity, seriousness, fairness, and trust. It asks people to be responsible because the work matters, not because they are being watched.</p> <p><i>For colleagues in technology and science: Concretely: this is the difference between version control that records changes so the team can collaborate, recover from errors, and trace decisions vis-à-vis a surveillance, which records keystrokes to catch people; both produce logs, but only one builds a working team.</i></p>
7	Encourage consultation and participation	<p>Administrators should create space for colleagues engage in meaningful and honest conversations without fear and undesirable hierarchical constraints. Thus, academic administration should create opportunities for colleagues to clarify, respond, suggest, and participate in institutional processes. Consultation does not mean lack of authority or endless delay. It means that decisions are strengthened by listening to the knowledge, experience, and concerns of colleagues. Colleagues often understand ground-level realities that may not be fully visible at higher administrative levels. When they are heard, decisions become better informed and more widely accepted. Participation also builds institutional ownership. Colleagues are more likely to cooperate with decisions when they feel that the process has been fair, that concerns have been considered, and that the final decision has been explained with reason and respect.</p> <p><i>For colleagues in technology and science: In engineering terms: a design review with the people who will implement the system catches failure modes that no individual architect can see alone. As a corollary: skipping the review does not save time, it only defers the cost to the implementation phase, where it is far more expensive to fix.</i></p>
8	Avoid informal reputational judgements	<p>Institutions are weakened when informal impressions (& rumours, gossip) begin to substitute for careful assessment. Academic administrators should avoid circulating broad characterisations of colleagues in casual, semi-formal, or public settings. If there is a concern regarding performance, conduct, communication, responsibility, or institutional contribution, it should be handled through appropriate channels, with clarity, documentation, discretion, and fairness. Informal reputational</p>

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		<p>judgements can travel quickly and become more damaging than the original issue. They can also create anxiety among colleagues and reduce openness in academic life. A responsible administrator protects the credibility of the institution by ensuring that concerns are addressed through process, not through casual opinion.</p> <p><i>For colleagues in technology and science: In data terms: corridor opinions are unverified, unsourced, often non-reproducible claims that nonetheless propagate faster than verified ones. Thus, treating them as inputs to decisions is an institutional equivalent of training a model on contaminated data and trusting its predictions.</i></p>
9	<p>Maintain professional boundaries and impartiality</p>	<p>Academic administrators must remain approachable to all colleagues while avoiding partiality, inner circles, and informal channels of influence. Keeping such professional boundaries protect the administrator and the institution from the accusations of partiality and builds a culture of trust. Collegial warmth is important, but it should not become preferential access. Decisions should be based on evidence, role expectations, institutional priorities, and fair processes. Colleagues should not feel that outcomes depend on personal closeness, loyalty, informal networks, or private influence. Professional boundaries protect the administrator, the colleague, and the institution. They ensure that fairness is not only practised but also visible. Impartiality strengthens trust because colleagues know that they will be heard and evaluated through transparent and principled processes.</p> <p><i>For colleagues in technology and science: Operationally: a fair process is one whose criteria, inputs, and decision rule could be written down and applied by another administrator to reach the same outcome if the result depends on who happens to be in the room or who had lunch with whom, the process has hidden parameters and is not yet a process.</i></p>
10	<p>Build community without forcing sameness</p>	<p>A university requires shared purpose, but it also requires individuality, disciplinary difference, disagreement, intellectual independence, and professional space. Academic administrators should build belonging without expecting uniformity. A mature university culture allows colleagues to cooperate without losing their distinct voice, to disagree without being isolated, and to be held accountable without being personally diminished. Community should not mean compulsory agreement or artificial enthusiasm or enforced sameness. It should mean shared commitment to students, academic standards, institutional growth, and mutual respect. The task of academic leadership is to hold people together through trust, fairness, and common purpose while allowing enough space for difference, thought, and academic freedom.</p> <p><i>For colleagues in technology and science: In systems terms: a robust system is built from heterogeneous components that interface through clear protocols, not from identical components forced into agreement in a university that demands uniformity loses the very disciplinary diversity that makes a multidisciplinary institution work.</i></p>