



The Gay Administrator

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My years at The University of Akron (1984-2018) coincided with a period of great social change regarding the “outness” of gay people. While I was surely not the first faculty member-turned-administrator who was LGBT+, I was one of the first who did not have to work under the dictum “don’t ask, don’t tell.”

In administrative posts ranging from the assistant department chair in English to associate provost to interim director of several schools and programs, I discovered quickly that nobody cared I was gay. I had jobs to do, I did them to the best of my ability, and the only thing anybody cared about

was results. Like most administrators, I had to say “no” at times; I made difficult decisions regarding everything from student complaints to budgets to personnel hiring and otherwise. At no time did my sexual orientation enter matters. I am known for camping it up on occasion; even that didn’t seem to hurt. If anything, people responded positively to my humor.

Although my hopes for a long-term and advanced career in academic life would be thwarted by chronic illness, I enjoyed the work and appreciated and appreciate the goodwill of my faculty, administrative, and staff colleagues. My situation was not without humor; I was asked more than once if the provost who hired me knew I was gay. I responded that one does not get to be provost of a large university by lacking all perception! I did get a chance to speak at training sessions for future administrators about hiring gay faculty and administrators, which I valued doing, stressing that we must look outside what we know for talented people.

Perhaps most significant of all was that I and other LGBT+ folks had no legal job protection from discrimination. Although The University of Akron had a non-discrimination policy about sexual orientation for most of my years there, in fact the provision had and has no legal teeth. To its everlasting credit, The University of Akron acted as if its inclusive policy for LGBT+ people was law. Even institutions can be virtuous when they don’t have to be but feel compelled to be.