

## Accept professional organization opportunities to enhance leadership experience

By Amelia Pavlik

“Am I going to help my friends?” That was the question Steve McLeod asked himself when he received an unexpected phone call asking if he would serve as president-elect of the Southern Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers.



STEVE McLEOD

“I was stunned. I never expected to be president-elect,” said McLeod, Associate Dean at the Harding School of Theology in Memphis. “I didn’t think I could leave SACRAO leadership for two years, volunteer to come back, and then be asked to be president. But my friends needed help, so the answer was easy — ‘yes.’”

McLeod has served 19 years as Registrar (and the last 11 years as Associate Dean) at Harding, which is a small branch campus of Harding University in Arkansas.

When he first came into the role, McLeod didn’t get involved with professional organizations, because he didn’t have much time or funding to do so. But with the implementation of a new student information system in 2003 came new funding to attend an annual conference.

McLeod also began to volunteer for committees as a way to network and meet colleagues. He served on the program committees for the 2013 and 2014 conferences, and then chaired the program committee for 2015 and 2016. But because of increased work obligations at Harding, he rotated off the executive committee for a bit.

“Last August, my schedule opened, so I notified my colleagues that I was available to return to serve in SACRAO leadership,” he said. “In mid-January, the SACRAO president asked me if I’d fill an unexpected vacancy for a vice president position on the executive committee, and I accepted. Then, I got the phone call about being president-elect.”

When McLeod accepted the position, he had no idea what the responsibilities would be.

“Fortunately, we have a presidential triad consisting of the president, the immediate past president, and me,” he added. “So when I’m stuck, the other two are there to help. I couldn’t ask for better friends to provide guidance and support.”

Currently, McLeod’s responsibilities center around planning the annual SACRAO conference for February 2020, including choosing the various sessions and workshops that will be offered.

“I end up needing to do SACRAO work practically every day,” McLeod said. “Right now, it means contacting speakers to let them know that their sessions have been approved and confirm that they are still able to present. A few weeks ago, it meant reviewing contracts for future conferences. It’s always changing.”

Once he becomes president (after the 2020 conference), McLeod will be responsible for giving guidance to the president-elect, signing contracts, and making final decisions affecting the association and its membership.

If you’re trying to juggle a leadership role in a professional organization with your full-time job, McLeod offers the following advice:

➤ **Plan.** McLeod keeps a spreadsheet in a calendar format that includes his duties. He revises it each August to prepare for the next year. “I designed it to remind me what I need to accomplish each month and to strategize the duties I should accomplish each week,” he said.

➤ **Delegate.** There are things only McLeod can do at Harding. And then there are things other people can do better. “I trust the people I work with to do their jobs and to do them well,” he said. SACRAO is similar. “I have the tasks that I really have to do, and then there are things like technology, database management, and dreaming up over 100 sessions for our next conference that I leave to others,” he said.

➤ **Adapt your attitude.** Several years ago, McLeod’s assistant, Ruth, retired, and he didn’t have the budget to replace her. “I was disgruntled and became rude and difficult with students, and with my co-workers,” he said. “But I didn’t realize what I was doing until I saw it in the graduating student surveys.” McLeod realized he needed to change his attitude. Now, the report from students and co-workers regarding McLeod is quite different. “I introduce myself by saying, ‘I help students graduate,’” he said. “To students, that lets them know that I am on their side and that I succeed by helping them to succeed. To my co-workers, that lets them know that I am a positive influence on campus, and that we are all on the same team.”

For more information, contact McLeod at [smcleod@harding.edu](mailto:smcleod@harding.edu). ■

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