

INSIDE PURDUE

Provost building team, momentum for Purdue's future

Mason relishing the challenge of enabling greater successes

Sally Frost Mason needed some convincing before she would consider interviewing at Purdue. She was in her sixth year as dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Kansas, and she wasn't looking to leave.

"I was a pretty reluctant candidate," Mason says, recalling the interview process that led her to become Purdue provost in July. "That was the hardest part - leaving the team that I had built there."

But Purdue University's stature and its possibilities swayed her, as did its new president, Martin Jischke.

"After I met Martin, I felt that we clicked," she says. "We are both optimistic people and integrity is the number-one thing for both of us."

"He is very direct and I like that because I am, too. And I believe in his vision for Purdue. He is not one who allows a lot of grass to grow under his feet and frankly, I like the pace."

Long before deciding to join the Purdue administration, Mason had been climbing the administrative ladder, stepping on each rung and gaining experience at each level. The climb was deliberate, but it wasn't slow.

Her first step, in fact, taken while in the Department of Physiology and Cell Biology at the University of Kansas, might have set a speed record.

"Just days -- literally days -- after I got tenure at the University of Kansas, my dean came to me and asked if I would be acting department chair," Mason remembers. "I said, 'Only if you call every single member of the faculty and ask them if it's all right with them.'" He did, and it was.

"I think it happened because my research cut across many different areas so I could communicate well with everybody," Mason says.

That same year, 1986, the University of Kansas Commission on the



Provost Sally Frost Mason is at Purdue to help shape and enact the strategic plan that the University will use to move even higher among the ranks of research universities. Mason had been an honored professor and the dean of liberal arts at the University of Kansas.

Status of Women named Mason as Outstanding Woman Teacher.

But the classroom and research lab wouldn't hold her. After her high-speed foray into administration, Mason hasn't looked back.

"You reach a point where you're consumed by the challenges around you," Mason says, explaining the evolution she went through in becoming a full-time administrator. "You're much less consumed by your personal interests. If your success is defined by how many awards you get personally, you won't ever be happy as an administrator. I really enjoy watching people succeed and building teams."

Mason is building her team to do the work of a provost's office -- coordinating and managing all Purdue academic programs and policies -- but she also will play a major role in the University's strategic plan, drafted to take Purdue to a new, higher level of excellence.

"First, I need to help sell it to the greater University community and beyond, and then implement it -- all of it," she says.

That effort, which begins this fall, will consume a lot of her time. Given her many responsibilities, she says she's lucky that she needs only six hours of sleep a night.

In addition to a great deal of energy, a provost needs experience, wisdom, and frequently patience.

Asked what makes her angry, she doesn't hesitate in answering: "People who abuse power. Abuse of staff, or the inability to treat students with respect. It leaves an indelible impression when you see it."

Asked what one thing she hopes her colleagues and co-workers take away from having worked with her, she offers another quick answer: "That I'll always be fair."

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