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ANNE CLARK BARTLETT: BRIDGING

PEOPLE,
CAMPUSES
AND IDEAS

By Kelsey Schagemann



Photo credit: Thomas Vangel

There's a cheery red sticker on Anne Clark Bartlett's office door with a message that perfectly encapsulates her personal and professional sensibilities: Keep calm and collaborate. As the special assistant to the provost for innovation and academic planning, Bartlett is the university's go-to internal connector. "I love bringing people together to meet each other and share ideas," she says. "There's just something electric about that process."

Bartlett, a scholar of medieval feminist studies and a longtime English professor at DePaul, is halfway through her fourth year in the special assistant role, a responsibility she eagerly accepted following an American Council on Education fellowship at Portland State University (PSU) in Portland, Ore. Although she selected PSU sight unseen, she felt an intrinsic kinship to the institution based on its DePaul-like motto, "Let Knowledge Serve the City." DePaul was always top of mind during her fellowship, a yearlong, hands-on course in university leadership and capacity building.

Bartlett returned to DePaul in 2012 armed with new ideas and plenty of enthusiasm. She laughs about her title, saying "It's a mouthful," but emphasizes that the wordiness is actually appropriate. "It might seem like a bit of an oxymoron," she says, "because you think of innovation as something that happens lightning fast, and you think of academic planning as a lengthy process, but in fact, if you want to innovate, you have to make sure things can be operationalized. You really do have to plan."

To that end, much of her role focuses on creating and enhancing opportunities to encourage innovation, especially from a collaborative standpoint. She was instrumental in launching the collaboration grants (see page 12) and the collaboratory, a flexible, technology-friendly workspace for faculty and staff that opened in the DePaul Center in October 2015.

Other initiatives include forays into digital storytelling, replicating collaborative teaching models and formalizing transdisciplinary affinity groups in topics such as health, data, Chicago, sustainability

and social impact. "It's about building on existing areas of energy across campuses," Bartlett explains. "I'm looking to communalize entrepreneurial energy."

Two new minors under development, one in climate change science and policy and one in mortality studies, exemplify this approach; both minors are supported by collaboration grants. As Bartlett ticks off the areas those minors may cover—philosophy, science, art, writing, business, health—she notes that curriculum design requires various back-end considerations: "How does this look to student records? How does it look in online teaching evaluations?" That's partly where the planning aspect of her title comes into play.

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-Anne Clark Bartlett

Although listening isn't inscribed into her official title, it might as well be. "This job is about posing questions, being available, reaching out to people," she says. "I like to ask faculty, 'What are some of the great ideas you've wanted to implement but haven't been able to?'" Her past stint as a two-term president of the Faculty Council helped prepare her for this role. "That was a really transformative experience—just being able to meet people outside my home college, understand their needs and find points of connection," she recalls.

As Bartlett shuttles between campuses, she never loses sight of her overall goal. "We have to keep growing and pushing the boundaries of our knowledge," she asserts. "That's what we do as scholars and intellectuals, even if we don't always explicitly call it innovation. I want to help us work together to be even better."