



## Faculty Lunches with the Dean (No. 36) (Willow Jacobson)

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Willow Jacobson attended the last round of Faculty Lunches with the Dean and she talked about her work with the [LGFCU Fellows Program](#). Each class includes local government department heads, supervisors, heads of special projects, fairly new managers of small jurisdictions, and assistant managers of larger jurisdictions. It is an intensive two-week program designed to provide leadership skills for local government professionals. The students graduate “with a deeper understanding of their individual leadership strengths, skills for improving their organizations, and a



renewed passion for public service.” The program has been supported generously by the Local Government Federal Credit Union, which makes it possible for the students to attend without paying tuition. Nearly 300 public officials have graduated from the Program.

The Fellows Program has the same distinctive focus as the School's other leadership programs. *What does it mean to lead and govern in the public sector?* In some ways the fundamental principles of leadership apply whether the setting is public or private, or a nonprofit agency. At the same time, however, leading in the public sector is different. It means providing “a grounding in the concepts of bureaucracy and democracy, what it means to be a public servant, and the value of being a public service official.” This year the program also has increased its focus on change management to help the Fellows be better prepared for external changes confronting their institutions.



Willow says the impact of the program remains consistent across four primary areas: (1) increased self-knowledge; (2) enhanced skills and competencies; (3) increased confidence and a renewed passion for public service; and (4) an expanded network of peers. Willow sees that the program “is helping to create public leaders who are better able to face leadership challenges with new skills, a new sense of confidence in their own abilities, and more enthusiasm about their work in the public sector.” From the outset Willow has worked hard to evaluate the impact of the training—and not just in terms of feedback at the end of the program. She has been struck by how the students actually use the things they have been taught after returning home, and how often they take back specific ideas for implementation.

Willow talked about another aspect of the Fellows Program that I find interesting. It is the idea that the program gives the students greater confidence and renews their passion for public service. Public officials don't get much positive feedback—to say the least. They face unfair criticism—sometimes from their own governing boards—and negative cultural attitudes about government cause them to feel beaten down.



# CELEBRATE PUBLIC SERVICE

Just being selected for the Fellows Program has a positive impact on the participants. I remember being in Hyde County to meet with the County Manager a few years ago, and she introduced me to a county employee who was coming to the Fellows Program the following week. The person was in tears as she told me how much it meant for her to be selected and to attend. Willow goes out of her way to provide small extras—special lunches, for example, and custom Fellows water bottles—to reinforce the idea that the students are important and that LGFCU and the School are investing in them. It is a part of creating a mental shift for the participants, a belief that they can take the next step and become elite public leaders. Those meaningful extras would not be possible without the funding from LGFCU.

Willow is thinking about adding more about resiliency to the Program. “[T]his year as I talked to participants about the challenges and secondary trauma they are facing I am thinking about how to expand the time and tools we give to help ensure they take care of themselves so they can effectively lead their organizations.”

Willow and others teaching in the program support the Fellows and honor their public service. A lot of our work focuses on providing officials with skills and information. At the same time it is worth remembering that validating the importance of their public service is another part of our work, especially at a time when few others are honoring it. Thanks to Willow for creating a terrific program, and thanks to LGFCU for their essential support. Coincidentally, another class of Fellows is in the building today.

