

## **Inside the Search for the Pieper Family Chair**

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Ripon College recently hired a Pieper Family Chair of Servant Leadership as part of a generous endowment from the Pieper Family Foundation. This is an insider account of the decision making process and challenges we faced while welcoming this new position to our campus.

In order to meet the needs of Ripon College while also being as innovative as we could to infuse the culture with servant leadership the position was decidedly meant to be a half time teaching position and a half time programming position working directly with the Office of Community Engagement and the Ethical Leadership Program.

Instead of arbitrarily choosing a department a request for proposals was sent to all faculty members. The RFP asked faculty members to articulate their vision for an integrative and collaborative position that focused on servant leadership.

The religion department, headed by Professor Brian Smith, submitted a proposal that both articulated such vision but also exemplified the tradition and innovation of servant leadership. Professor Smith has been with Ripon College for over 25 years and in that time has built a respected and solid comparative religion department. His writings in the RFP demonstrated not only a real understanding of servant leadership but also a personal commitment. He pointed to his service work with students in Panama and his own doctoral work in political science.

We formed a search committee and began discussing our hopes and hesitations about the position. One of our illuminating conversations centered around the notion of the Chair being housed half time in the religion department. We spoke honestly and frankly about our fears of having servant leadership paired with one religious tradition, or for that matter, only religious traditions. We took a long look at our student body and their responses to our search. Students wanted to learn about servant leadership as a concept first and foremost and then wanted to understand how world religion viewed servant leadership.

Armed with our own beliefs that servant leadership and a religious connection would hurt our endeavors as well as our commitment to understanding this connection, we continued with our search. We received an application from a candidate that shared our beliefs. Mr. David Scott's doctoral research combined an interesting mix of social history and comparative religion and ultimately focused on how traditional missionary work can unintentionally and/or intentionally impose religiosity on others. He also came to Ripon College with extensive experience in the nonprofit organization world working in a secular atmosphere. Mr. Scott's commitment to servant leadership and understanding of the precarious nature of servant leadership and comparative religion made him the unanimous decision for the Chair.

Through this process we were forced to focus on the relationship between servant leadership and religion, Robert Greenleaf's ideas and writing, our own culture at Ripon College and our visions for the future. Ultimately it was clear that there was no intention to pair religion and servant leadership and codependent core beliefs, quite the contrary. Through this process we learned a great deal about how servant leadership and the concepts therein are as individual, complicated and diverse as each of us and could never be placed within one tradition or teaching.