

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

For anyone interested in acquiring or polishing management skills, UL Lafayette President Dr. Ray Authement has been a walking textbook for more than three decades.

He has steered the university deliberately and confidently as it has advanced from a solid regional university to one worthy of national and international attention.

His list of major achievements is impressive, by any measure. Under his leadership, for example, the university:

- changed its name to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette;
- implemented academic admission standards;
- became the first Doctoral II university in Louisiana;
- has always competed in NCAA Division I, the highest level of collegiate competition;
- increased its gifted assets from about \$500,000 to more than \$150 million;
- weathered numerous financial crises caused by state revenue woes;
- helped diversify the economy by establishing 17 research centers;
- has been ranked in the



same research category as Baylor and Auburn by the Carnegie Foundation; and

- has constructed more than 30 buildings and facilities, and renovated or expanded more than 25 others.

Dr. Steve Landry, vice president for Academic Affairs, has professionally interacted with Authement on many levels. At UL Lafayette, he has been a doctoral student, faculty member and researcher, department head, center director and university administrator.

“It’s a very enlightening process to study an individual who has had so much success. I think there’s a lot for people to learn from him about principles of management,” Landry said.

Below is a brief look at some key aspects of Authement’s leadership.

MANAGEMENT BY WALKING AROUND

Dr. Ramesh Kolluru arrived at UL Lafayette in 1992 as a graduate student.

“I was so surprised to see Dr. Authement walk into the lab on a weekly basis, asking for updates, progress on my projects. I would tell him I was waiting for a part to come

in and that it would come in a week or 10 days. Sure enough, 10 days later, he would be back in the lab, asking me if the part had come in and how it fit into my research.

“It was amazing to me, that as a graduate student, he took such an individualized interest in my work. Here he was, the president of the university, with a million or so things to do on a daily basis. And yet, that essentially is what defines him.”

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

For more than 30 years, Authement has relied on the skills of Ovey Hargrave, UL Lafayette’s vice president for Business and Finance. Their diligence has kept UL Lafayette financially sound.

In late 1993, for instance, the university became debt free, when it paid what it owed on dormitories and other auxiliary facilities. “This accomplishment allowed us to contain our dormitory fees and meal tickets, in spite of escalating expenses,” Hargrave said.

And, every year, for the past 15 years, faculty members have received raises.

“Dr. Authement was able to make a lot of good decisions because he always knew exactly what our financial condition was,” Hargrave said.

PRIORITIES AND PERSEVERANCE

When Authement became president of USL in 1974, state revenues were limited. He decided to direct as much money as possible to the burgeoning field of computer science.

“I believed that if we were perceived as being great in one area, we would be perceived as great in other areas,” he explained in 1994. He was vilified at the time by some faculty and students who resented his concentration on one academic area. But USL became nationally recognized for its computer science program. As finances



Sherry Young, left, has been secretary to the president for 22 years. Administrative assistant Julie Leday, center, has worked in the president’s office for 16 years.

would allow, Authement turned his attention to other departments and programs.

He remained patient when striving to reach his goals. He pushed for almost 20 years to get USL’s name changed, for instance.

VISION AND PASSION

“Vision and passion have long been a winning combination for Dr. Authement and certainly for UL Lafayette,” said Julie Simon-Dronet, director of Public Relations and News Services for nearly half of Authement’s presidency.

“His vision is truly remarkable. Is it guesswork? No. He is a gatherer of information and has a methodical mind that, I believe, maps out game plans. He’s so driven by passion for moving this institution forward that he stays the course until it’s done.”

INTEGRITY

“Over the years we’ve experienced many challenges at the university and he has never asked me to do anything that I was

uncomfortable with or tried to mislead anyone to advance a cause. In crisis, we’ve been on the same page – truth-seekers,” said Simon-Dronet.

“He does not rush to volunteer information because that’s not his personality but when asked for information, you will get the truth.

“I believe that if you were to ask Dr. Authement what he would most like to be known for, it would be his integrity. I can only think of twice over the past 16 years that he was truly upset about something university-related. On both occasions his integrity was

wrongfully questioned. I know his integrity to be impeccable.”

ATTENTION TO DETAILS

Some critics accuse Authement of micro-managing. “My style is to educate myself on a daily basis about what’s going on in the university and what areas are moving forward. That way, you can better assist people in reaching their goals,” Authement said in a recent interview.

According to Landry, Authement’s ability to focus on details also enables him to prevent trouble. “You can handle a lot of things as little problems before they become big problems.”

And, attention to detail has been crucial in managing the university’s money, said Hargrave. “You have to know where your resources are coming from, where they are being spent. You set goals and you set priorities, but if you don’t manage your financial resources, then sometimes it’s hard to achieve your goals.” ■

1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1980	1981	1982	1983
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dr. Clyde R. Rougeou, president of USL, begins year-long leave of absence ■ Dr. Ray P. Authement becomes acting USL president 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Center for Louisiana Studies is established ■ First Lagniappe Day held on campus in the spring ■ Constitutional Convention creates new higher education governing boards ■ USL acquires Van de Graaf accelerator from NASA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stephens Memorial Library converted to a computer center ■ Authement reigns as King Gabriel XXXVI during Mardi Gras 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ USL hosts French President Giscard D’Estaing ■ Shuttle bus transportation system begins operation ■ Authement receives prestigious Order of the Palms from the French government for efforts on behalf of french bilingualism in Louisiana 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gumbo U established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Louisiana Legislature approves \$18 million for a new convention and assembly center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ College of General Studies established 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Offers first master’s degree in computing engineering in the Southeast ■ USL Foundation five-year endowment fund drive begins ■ Banks join forces to make biggest donation in university’s history, \$750,000 to be invested for academic enrichment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Only university in nation to offer bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering with telecommunications option 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Parking lottery begins ■ Recession begins/ Louisiana governor proposes budget cuts