

## **Rooted in Values, Open to Ideas: Reflections on Transformational Scholars**

This reflection highlights the work of Dr. Kimberly DeSimone, Dr. Ty Buckman, and Dr. Daniel Alemu—three scholars who exemplify values-driven leadership, intellectual openness, and community engagement. Dr. DeSimone utilizes her platform to amplify the voices of marginalized individuals and promote inclusive, rigorous scholarship. Dr. Buckman advocates for curiosity, civic involvement, and integrating academic and personal identities. Dr. Alemu brings a global perspective to educational leadership, emphasizing practical solutions and systemic change. Together, they model how research rooted in compassion, openness, and real-world relevance can drive meaningful transformation.

At first glance, Dr. Kimberly DeSimone may appear to be primarily a feminist. However, a deeper exploration of her work reveals that she is grounded in core values such as compassion, integrity, and wisdom. Her podcast, *Advancing Women*, which reaches listeners in over 150 countries, exemplifies how a true leader uses her platform not only to elevate her own voice but also to amplify the voices of others. It stands as a model for leveraging media to drive meaningful and inclusive change.

While her work often centers on women's issues, Dr. DeSimone clearly includes people of color and other marginalized groups in her advocacy. Her commitment to inclusion and diversity is evident throughout her work. Drawing from her experience as a member of Cohort 1 at Niagara University, she offered valuable insights into the importance of community and collaboration. She emphasized how the support and

contributions of her cohort played a crucial role in her journey toward earning a Ph.D. Her message encourages openness to insights from the margins and underscores the importance of documenting valuable ideas as they are encountered—ensuring they are not lost over time.

In her quantitative research, Dr. DeSimone presented her key findings in a clear, bullet-point format, making the core messages of her work easily accessible on a single page. She stressed the importance of mastering one’s literature—reading it thoroughly, understanding it deeply, and being able to recall it effortlessly. She also encouraged exploring alternative perspectives. For instance, she offered a reinterpretation of the biblical story of Adam and Eve, suggesting that Adam’s failure stemmed from his own will rather than Eve’s influence—prompting a reevaluation of traditional narratives.

Finally, Dr. Kimberly DeSimone exemplifies academic and professional success. She skillfully bridges the worlds of academia, corporate leadership, and public advocacy. Dr. DeSimone highlighted the importance of open dialogue. Engaging in conversations—even with those outside your field of research—can lead to unexpected and transformative insights. Listening, she noted, is a powerful tool for discovery. Writing academic papers is not just part of her work—it’s a genuine passion she deeply enjoys.

Similarly, Dr. Ty Buckman advocates for intellectual openness, especially when engaging with others’ ideas. As he puts it, “You don’t know what’s irrelevant until you dive into it.” He embraces institutional change and appreciates research projects for their flexibility—they can begin broadly, narrow in scope, and uncover valuable foundations for

further work. He also emphasizes the importance of respecting others' time and believes that leadership entails genuine responsibility. Understanding the people you work with is essential for making informed, empathetic decisions.

What distinguishes Dr. Buckman is his deep connection to place and community. Though firmly established in academia, he remains actively involved in local and regional civic life. From his base in Staunton, Virginia, he has consistently engaged in community affairs wherever he has lived, bringing that experience into his work at the Thriving Cities Lab at the University of Virginia. This strong grounding lends his work a genuine authenticity—rooted not just in theory, but in lived experiences with real communities and cultures. It's this perspective that shapes his leadership, making it both visionary and deeply human.

As I learned more about Dr. Ty Buckman, he struck me as someone who is both highly educated and down-to-earth. He earned his master's and Ph.D. in English Renaissance Literature from the University of Virginia and has extensive experience as a teacher and academic leader, including roles as an English professor and provost. He values tradition but also stays connected to modern culture and community life. One key lesson from his career is the importance of combining all aspects of yourself—being a scholar, a leader, and an active citizen—rather than keeping those roles separate.

Dr. Daniel Alemu brings a distinct and refreshing perspective to educational leadership. A graduate of one of Ethiopia's top universities, he combines a global outlook with grounded, practical work in school and organizational leadership. His research spans

various cultural and regional contexts, including Africa and the Middle East, where he explores educational leadership issues from diverse perspectives.

Dr. Alemu believes it's essential to connect everything you study to the central topic of your research. For him, research is either about deeply understanding a problem or finding its solution. Like many seasoned scholars, he emphasizes the importance of being observant, asking thoughtful questions, and managing time effectively—especially for success in a Ph.D. program. He also stresses the value of reading exemplary dissertations in order to write a strong one yourself.

On the topic of faculty mobility, Dr. Alemu notes that the reasons behind faculty movement are not always financial. Professors often move institutions due to a combination of “push” and “pull” factors. Sometimes, the academic environment simply isn't a good fit, making individuals feel like outsiders.

Overall, Dr. Daniel S. Alemu stands out as a scholar whose work bridges academic research, global awareness, and a commitment to applied leadership in education. His academic journey—from earning his bachelor's degree at Addis Ababa University to completing graduate studies at Eastern Illinois University reflects both deep cultural roots and a cross-cultural academic orientation. Currently at Russell Sage College, Dr. Alemu's research focuses on studies of teacher influence, organizational effectiveness, and faculty mobility. His work shows a strong concern not only for theoretical insight but also for real-world educational change. His career demonstrates that genuine impact often comes

through influencing systems, institutions, and human capacity—not merely through academic publication.

In conclusion, all three speakers emphasize the importance of maintaining an open mind when exploring new ideas in research. They share a common belief in the value of curiosity, intellectual flexibility, and thoughtful engagement with others in the scholarly journey.