



YEAR OF AWARD: 2017

Rachel Most

**Associate Dean for
Undergraduate Academic
Programs, College
of Arts & Sciences**

Professor of Anthropology

**Years of service at UVA:
1987-present**

Rachel Most, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Programs in the College of Arts & Sciences and a professor of anthropology, has devoted the better part of 28 years at UVA to enhancing the student experience, from advising students to implementing the Student Information System, known as SIS, to reforming the College's general education curriculum.

She oversees 12 Association Deans (which she once was) who provide academic advising for undergraduates in the College of A&S and helps oversee a staff of about 10. As a member of the Curriculum Planning Committee, she worked on reforming the General Education Curriculum for undergraduates – the first major overhaul in more than four decades. Working closely with ISO she

helped create and launch UVA Global First and more recently, with key partners from SCPS, helped to create UVA Launchpad and UVA Catalyst.

Most also advises about 100 student-athletes each year and teaches classes in archaeology that focus on how humans interact with their environment and the rise and fall of societies from around the world.

WHY DID YOU COME TO UVA?

I was a trailing spouse at the time that my former husband and I moved to Charlottesville. Today when academics take jobs, a lot of times they've married other academics and they want a job for their partner. When I came, it was made very clear if your spouse is in the same field, don't even ask us about a job.

So, when I moved here, I gave up a really great job at Arizona State University. I started over again. I taught through Mary Baldwin. I taught at Piedmont. I taught at UVA. I consulted at Monticello. I kept working for Arizona State University, doing archeology. I had kids. I was hired a little bit more regularly at UVA to teach some specialized courses that no one else in the department could really teach—a quantitative methods course in archaeology and a lab methods course in archaeology. I pieced things together.

And then a friend told me about the job of association dean, and that sounded really interesting to me. It sounded like a great combination of administrative work, which I enjoy, working with students, which I love, and teaching, which I also love. I applied for the one-year position and got it. It was very clear to me in the first couple of weeks that I had found something I really wanted to do. They converted the job to a permanent position in 1994, and I worked as an Association Dean up until 2014, when then-Dean Ian Baucom hired me to be an Associate Dean for the college.

WHAT WAS UVA LIKE WHEN YOU ARRIVED? HOW HAS IT CHANGED AND/OR STAYED THE SAME?

Just as human culture changes really slowly, it's hard to change the culture of an institution. Today, we definitely need more women in leadership positions at UVA. You don't do diversity for the sake of diversity. Diversity enhances everything we do because it provides us with different people from different backgrounds and different perspectives to work with. It's essential for creativity, progress and success.

There are times when I'm in a meeting with eight people and I'm the only woman. Or I'm in a meeting with eight people and they're all women. And, then I have to wonder why aren't men doing this work? I look around and wonder why there aren't more women chairs or directors, especially in STEM fields. So, there's still a lot of work to do. When you think about the history the University, women got here relatively recently.

I also don't think everything needs a task force to be studied for five years. That's another problem with academia. Some things take too much time and some don't take long enough.

HOW DO YOU THINK DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF YOUR IDENTITY, INCLUDING BEING A WOMAN, IMPACTED HOW PEOPLE RESPONDED TO YOU IN YOUR POSITION?

My mother always worked. She was a fashion designer and then she went to work with my father in his business (he owned beauty salons, a beauty supply company, and a beauty school). Most of her close friends were business owners and women who worked. So, I grew up thinking that's what women do: they work. My dad put me to work in his business when I was 7, so I've always had a kind of "binders on" attitude that it doesn't matter that I'm a woman; I'm in this job and that is that.

continued

In Her Words | Rachel Most

WHAT SUPPORT(S) DID YOU HAVE? WHAT KEPT YOU GOING IN MOMENTS OF ADVERSITY?

You have to have people in your professional life and your private life you can trust 500%. People who you can say anything to and won't judge you or repeat what you're saying because it is in confidence, but you need their advice. Having those people, both male and female, in my life has been essential for me. I hope I am that person for other people.

I also had an amazing mentor in graduate school, Sylvia W. Gaines. She was my PhD advisor, and I took classes with her. I mentioned her in my Zintl speech because I have kind of modeled my career on her. She was always very honest with me, very friendly, but clearly not my friend—not until much later. Sylvia was my advisor, but she didn't talk down to me or at me. She was the first woman to earn a PhD with a focus on archaeology from Arizona State University. I had not yet started writing my dissertation when I had my first child. And I thought, I'm never going to be able to do this. And at one point, when my son was about four or five months old, and it was three in the morning, and I thought, I just have to give up. I'm not going to be able to do this. But then I thought, no, you're not going to give up. You're going to call Sylvia tomorrow. You're going to see how to make this work. And I called her, and she said, you give me a schedule that works for you. I will do everything I can to help you finish this. I was already in Charlottesville (away from Arizona State University), and I did that. It took me another almost two years, and I finished. One of the male faculty members on my committee admitted that once I'd had my child, he wrote me off. And in contrast, she said, I never doubted you for a minute. That is the level of support that makes a difference.

I've always had a kind of “blinders on” attitude that it doesn't matter that I'm a woman; I'm in this job and that is that.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A WOMAN IN A SIMILAR POSITION TODAY? IS THERE SOMEONE YOU ARE PARTICULARLY PROUD OF HAVING SUPPORTED OR HAVE ENJOYED A MUTUALLY SUPPORTIVE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH?

My advice to all students is to always have a plan but don't stick so much to that plan that you can't veer off it when something else different, better, and more interesting comes along. I had a plan. I got my PhD in archeology and was going to do archaeology full time. But then things changed, and you just kind of have to follow where the road takes you, and also make a bit of a road for yourself. If you asked me, did you see

yourself in this position when you were 20 or 30? I didn't—I didn't even know the position existed to envision myself in it.

My other piece of advice is to do the things nobody else wants to do and make them better so that other people want to do them. That's honestly how I got my full-time job. I took the job of Association Dean back in the day when we used to send new students a paper book with key College policies and all the courses they could take in the fall. Somebody had to edit it and put it together. The person who was doing it said, "This is menial work. I'm not going to do it." And I said, "I'll do it!" And I had fun doing it, I learned a lot, I made it better.

You've got to be willing to take on some work that people don't want to do. And it doesn't ever behoove anyone to say, "That's beneath me." Take it and make it better.

I've worked with many students over the years who have really, really struggled to earn their degree. It's taken them years, including time off, and I am always so very happy for them on graduation day when they are finished and they have done it – they earned their UVA degree.

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED? WHAT LEGACY ARE YOU LEAVING THAT YOU ARE MOST PROUD OF?

I hope I would be remembered not for any one thing I did but as somebody who worked with others to help students, who helped make the College a better, more welcoming place. I hope my students would remember me as being helpful to them and getting them through to graduation. I'm in touch with students from 20 years ago – those are amazing friendships now.



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