



Mary Hale Tolar, Ed.D.

Mary Tolar serves as director of the Staley School of Leadership Studies at Kansas State University, working with faculty and staff to provide learning experiences aligned with the mission of “developing knowledgeable, ethical, caring, inclusive leaders for a diverse and changing world” for the 2500+ students involved in the school’s interdisciplinary academic and co-curricular programs.

Preparing individuals who can solve problems in innovative ways and who are flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances, she says, will be key to meeting the social, political and other challenges ahead.

For the past 18 months, Tolar stepped in as Interim Vice Provost for Student Success at K-State, providing leadership and support to recently restructured units and teams focused on the work of retention and progression of all students. In that role, she served as a member of the Provost’s leadership team working across the university to advance the university’s strategic enrollment management (SEM) goals and plans, set the stage for a permanent Vice Provost, and lay a foundation for future success meeting the changing needs of all of our students. Leading into that role, Tolar served as a member of the Provost Executive Team, Deans Council, and SEM Student Success Task Force, participant in the joint President’s Cabinet/Deans Council meetings, and chair of the successful national search for the Vice Provost for Student Success.

Prior to her role as the school’s director, Tolar served as interim director for approximately six months. Prior to that, she was associate director for civic leadership and directed the school’s community service, service-learning, nonprofit leadership and student civic engagement efforts. She also is an associate professor of leadership studies and holds the Mary Lynn and Warren Staley Chair for Leadership.

Before joining K-State, Tolar served as executive director of Kansas Campus Compact, a statewide member organization hosted by K-State that works with college presidents across Kansas to advance civic engagement and the public purpose of higher education. She also was deputy executive secretary and chief of staff for the Truman Scholarship Foundation in Washington, D.C.

Tolar is a Truman Scholar, Rhodes Scholar, founding member of the National Association of Fellowships Advisors and co-author/editor of “The Lucky Few and the Worthy Many: Scholarships and the World’s Future Leaders.” In 2007 she was honored with the Truman Foundation’s Staats Award, which recognizes significant contributions to the public sector and extraordinary service to the foundation. She has spent more than 20 years in higher education administration, serving five institutions in capacities ranging from scholarship adviser to development officer.

Her research interests include the art and practice of civic leadership development, women’s pathways to leadership in public service and higher education, and leadership development through service learning.

Tolar holds a bachelor’s degree in history from Kansas State University, and a doctorate in educational leadership also from K-State. In between, she read for her master of letters in modern history from Oxford University, UK.