(Sept. 6, 2016) When her director suggested Shannon McBratney apply to the inaugural Leadership Academy last year, McBratney said she had no idea what to expect. The senior records specialist in Advancement, who has been with the University for two years, was at first drawn by the prospect of self-discovery the program promised. As she learned more, she became intrigued by her sense that Leadership Academy might be something different than traditional professional development.

"Looking back, it was an interesting six months of work in a concentrated environment that you just don't find often," McBratney said. "It was a big time commitment, but it went far and above my expectations."

David Padilla, another Leadership Academy graduate, agreed that this isn't a generic program, where you're taught different working styles to learn how to navigate. "It will demand that you show up authentically; your current belief systems will be challenged," said Padilla, ERM specialist in Risk Management. He's also been with DU for two years, and in addition to being a staff member, is an alumus. He said he initially passed up the opportunity to apply, but "it kept popping up," until he applied, drawn by the concept of authenticity.

First-year academy graduates McBratney, Padilla and Carolyn Sommers, a career advisor in the Career Center, may have found their way to the Leadership Academy via different paths, but all came away with a better understanding of themselves, which is helping them form more and better work relationships. In an environment like the DU campus, where much work is done to be more open and inclusive, such "internal" work can have far-reaching benefits.
Sommers has seen the ripple effect firsthand. She was part of the Leadership Academy team that produced the "Fish Out of Water" event in May. Ten storytellers shared a 5-minute true story of a time when they felt out of their element. Through the power of storytelling, the event sought to build community by cultivating empathy, compassion and awareness.

"Our thought was to create space to share, as everyone's got a story," Sommers said. "We've already been asked to help groups put on similar events, and one person in the audience shared that they were inspired to reignite a passion they put on hold and start writing again after hearing a 'Fish Out of Water' story. I think we realized through this process that we are capable of more than we realize."

The first-ever Leadership Academy, sponsored by HR's People Development team, was held from January-June this year. The professional development program for DU staff and faculty puts emphasis on developing the leader from within. The program is limited to 15 participants, and starts with an application process that includes a statement of support from the applicant's manager. The application process for the 2017 Leadership Academy starts in October; sessions begin in January.

The program consists of half-day learning modules every three weeks, discussions and practical application of leadership principles with an emphasis on self-awareness. It includes pre-and-post work, presentations from leadership experts across the country, powerful activities and open discussion, one-on-one coaching and a group project.

What would academy graduates share with faculty and staff considering the Leadership Academy?

"Look at your personal goals for the coming year and see if you have the tools you need to figure things out on your own," Padilla said. "If the answer is 'no,' this experience will help."

McBratney added that the program can be beneficial to everybody. "Don't feel intimidated; be ready to get in touch with who you are, and have an open mind and no judgment. You won't be the same after this."

Sommers, who has been with DU three years, emphasized a "One DU" benefit. "It's easy to get stuck in your individual unit, but Leadership Academy completely expanded my scope for networking and building meaningful relationships across campus," she said. "Now I can draw on others to leverage our unique strengths to tackle important issues."

Learn more about Leadership Academy at this [website](http://example.com/leadershipacademy).