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5 Deans in 5 Years: Chairs Leading Through Change

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Session Description

The role of the department chair is often seen as a crucial link between administration and faculty. Often the chair interprets and communicates information and ideas in a reciprocal manner between faculty and the dean while maintaining the interests of students, faculty, programs, department, college/school and university. But what happens when there is chaos and transition at the level of the Dean? A goal of this session is to examine the experiences of department chairs at one university as they navigated several transitions in deanship as well as a broader context of changes at other systemic levels.

Effective communication between the department chair and the dean is the hallmark of a successful chair. Indeed, the dean of the college is likely in the most important position to directly impact the college and departments. It is also likely that a department chair will experience a change in leadership in the dean position. Presenters will share experiences and strategies used to navigate five deans/interim deans in a five year span. The literature is scarce about how to navigate ongoing transitions in leadership as well as their ripple effects. Presenters will share successful strategies that they developed as a result of these circumstances as they worked to lead their departments through these numerous changes.

For this interactive seminar, participants are invited to consider the challenges and impact of dean transitions and varying dean leadership styles. To contextualize this dialogue, available research on dean and chair effectiveness, chair leadership and management, and working within systemic contexts will be shared. Additionally, the four presenters, each representing diverse disciplines within the same college, will share their unique responses/perspectives of navigating dean transitions. Participants will review scenarios and case studies and identify and develop ideas for strategies and effective practice in leading through transitions. As a result of this presentation, participants will be able to: a) evaluate various styles of dean and/or chair leadership, b) examine the impact of leadership transition within a systemic context, and c) develop ideas for assisting chairs in navigating dean and administration transitions.

A few selected resources:

American Council on Education. *Words of advice from chairs and deans*. Retrieved (July, 2017) from: https://www2.acenet.edu/resources/chairs/docs/words_of_advice.pdf

Buller, J. L. (2006). *The essential department chair: A practical guide to college administration*. Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company.

Chu, D. (2012). *The department chair primer: What chairs need to know and do to make a difference* (2nd ed). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Nellis, M. D., & Harrington, J. W. *Beyond the Department: Building Effective Relationships with Deans, Provosts, and Presidents*. Retrieved (July, 2017) from: www.aag.org/galleries/education-files/HDNellisHarringtonFinal.pdf