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Developing Program Identity and Constituent Support Consistent with Institutional Mission

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Academic Chairpersons Conference Proceedings
Presentation Proposal
July 16, 2015

1. Primary Presenter: Thomas R. Webster
Thomas R. Webster is Professor of Music and Dean of the School of Communication and Performing Arts at East Texas Baptist University. He has served in higher education for 22 years and has 14 years' experience as an academic department chair and dean. He received his Ph.D. in Fine Arts from Texas Tech University, his Master of Music degree from Texas Christian University, and his Bachelor of Music Degree from Howard Payne University. He has made presentations and presented workshops at multiple academic conferences including the following: *Music Program Advancement and Audience Building through Partnerships with Community Arts Organizations* (National Association of Music Schools Annual Meeting, 2012); *Music Career Advising and Implications for University Music Administrators: A Dean's Perspective* (College Music Society, 2012).
2. Additional Presenter: Traci Ledford
Traci Ledford, Department Chair and Associate Professor of Theatre Arts at East Texas Baptist University, received her Master of Fine Arts in Directing as well as her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Directing and Design from Baylor University. In the interim between the two degrees, Traci served as the Education and Outreach Intern at the Dallas Theater Center before devoting nine years to teaching theatre in the public school systems of Texas and North Carolina. As a director, Traci has helmed over fifty productions where her focus has been to break down stereotypes associated with producing organizations and educational institutions to increase their audience base and critical reception. Publications include "Profile: Raymond Caldwell, Texas Shakespeare Festival" and "The Influence of Epic Theatre on the Work of Robert Lepage" both in the *Texas Theatre Journal*; presentations include "Women of Action: An Examination of Arthur Giron's Characterization of Women in *The Coffee Trees*" (Resonance Ensemble—Theatre Row, New York) and "The Influence of Epic Theatre on the Work of Robert Lepage" (Texas Educational Theatre Association).
3. Title of Presentation: Developing Program Identity and Constituent Support Consistent with Institutional Mission
4. Abstract: Presenters will discuss best practices for building constituent and administrative support for academic programs while simultaneously developing program identity that honors the mission of the institution it represents.
5. Keywords: Academic Leadership, Program Identity, Institutional Mission, Academic Freedom, Program Support
6. Presentation Topic Theme: Program Identity and Institutional Mission
7. Target Audience: All Department Chairs as well as other University Administrators
8. Type of Presentation: Best Practice Presentation
Additional Note: If the conference needs so dictate, the presenters are prepared to offer this session as an interactive workshop. Dr. Webster and Professor Ledford have case

studies and simulations specific to a variety of disciplines in the arts and sciences that can be utilized in small-group, problem solving activities.

9. Objective(s) of the presentation: Participants will:
 - a. gain an understanding of the need to build program identity consistent with the mission and purpose of the institution;
 - b. develop strategies for building support for academic programs from a diverse constituent group; and
 - c. determine ways of maintaining academic freedom and program excellence in light of public relations challenges.

10. Description of the Session (300-500 words)

Academic programs in all disciplines need and desire the support of a wide variety of constituents; however, the nature of many disciplines can create difficulties in generating that support with certain constituent groups. Student achievement, faculty work, program activities and outcomes are widely visible to the outside world. They are, therefore, vulnerable to a level of scrutiny by a wide variety of individuals invested in the success of the university, including university administrators, trustees, patrons, donors, and the public at large. Each group employs its own set of evaluation standards and expectations which affect the work of faculty and students in that program.

According to John Furedy in his *Seven Principles of Higher Education: A Primer*, “the central mission of the academic community is epistemological – the search for truth.”ⁱ Inherent in this search for truth are certain ideals and the overarching aims of higher education for centuries: academic freedom and critical thinking.ⁱⁱ As professors and scholars we rely on the right to free expression that continues to be upheld in the courts despite increasing challenges to that right. The complexities involved in balancing academic freedom and program excellence with efforts to engender program support are substantial.

The application of free speech in fostering critical thinking, associated with the rights and responsibilities of academic work, often encounters obstacles when faced with practical reality: supporting constituents must affirm the outcomes of academic programs in relation to institutional identity. This presentation will provide chairs information on how to turn this possible conflict between constituent groups and institutional mission into a positive dynamic for the program. Arts programs are consistently at the forefront of such issues. In these disciplines, potentially controversial material is presented publicly and, therefore, the opportunity for criticism and work restrictions abound. The presenters will use personal experiences to demonstrate how they have worked to establish healthy and desirable working relationships with all stakeholders while simultaneously preserving the institutional mission and academic ideals. Further, using research gathered from colleagues from various disciplines in both state and private institutions, chairs will see how these principles could successfully apply to their academic programs.

ⁱFuredy, John J. (2000). *Seven Principles of Higher Education: A Primer*. *Academic Questions*, 13(4), 44-51.

ⁱⁱMcCrae, Niall. (2011). *Nurturing Critical Thinking and Academic Freedom in the 21st Century University*. *International Journal of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education*, 23(1), 128-134.