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Leading Departments with Contingent and Tenure-Eligible Faculty: Strategies and Solutions

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Session Description:

Leading Departments with Contingent and Tenure-Eligible Faculty: Strategies and Solutions

Higher education organizations from the AAC&U and the AFT to the MLA and the UUP have published declarations on the subject of the rise in numbers and percentages of contingent faculty in recent decades. The popular press has followed suit, with articles coming from *Slate*, NPR, *Forbes*, and many others lamenting the dramatic shifts in employment patterns in our colleges and universities. Tensions between tiers of faculty caused by these well-documented shifts may be inevitable, as disparities in power, access, academic freedom, workload, and, naturally, morale, will follow. While department chairs can and do continue to advocate for better hiring practices, much of the decision-making about tenure-eligible hiring is above our pay grade. However, department chairs do have tools available to improve working conditions for contingent faculty immediately. Our session uses tools found in Doug Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen's 2010 *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most* to frame the discussion of three case studies that illustrate the problem-solving and communication habits needed to transform toxic cultures around contingent labor practices into healthier environments. The first case study involves a struggle over departmental voting rights for contingent faculty members. The second case study asks participants to consider how we might create a satisfactory—and satisfying—career trajectory for so-called contingent faculty who plan to stay with the department until retirement, when professional milestones are not built into the contingent model. The third case study focuses on the ways departments and institutions can value the contributions of contingent faculty without creating a false sense of security where none actually exists—a precarious but critical balance for department chairs to strike. Inspired by Liz Wiseman's 2010 *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter*, we close with strategies for involving more of the department in the transformation of this increasingly murky landscape.

Stone, Douglas, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen. *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. New York: Penguin, 2010.

Wiseman, Liz. *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter*. New York: HarperBusiness, 2010.