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Academic Leadership: Creating Successful (New) Leaders & Preserving Institutional Memory

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Title: Academic Leadership: Creating Successful (New) Leaders & Preserving Institutional Memory

Presenter Information:

Rosemary Fithian Guruswamy is Professor and Chair of the English Department of Radford University

Dan Woods is Assistant Professor and Director of the Secondary English Education Program of the English Department of Radford University

Robert Williams is Professor and Chair of the Personnel Committee (and applicant for the position of Chair) of the English Department of Radford University

Theme: Leadership and Management

Presentation Type: Best practice presentation (45 min)

Presentation Abstract: Participants will consider the following topics: identifying & articulating the primary responsibilities of a leadership position; preserving important institutional mores and memories during a change in leadership; developing institutional structures and materials to support new leaders in such transitions. Participants will leave with an action plan/checklist for supporting new leaders.

Key Words: Leadership Transitions, Institutional Culture, Institutional Memory, Continuity of Leadership, Successful Leadership Strategies, Leadership Transparency

Description of the Session

As academic leaders work within an institutional culture, accumulating experience and becoming familiar with the various duties, timelines, and general administrative expectations of the institution, they typically learn on the job, often painfully and at the last minute. So too, most new applicants for leadership positions, while fully aware of the public or visible duties of academic leaders, find themselves ill prepared to assume *all* of the duties concomitant to the job. From the bureaucratically mundane task of reviewing and forwarding time sheets of wage-employees to the tension-fraught task of reviewing and evaluating faculty performance, most new Chairs struggle to manage and successfully discharge all of the myriad minor and major tasks necessary to effective leadership in an academic institution. Recognizing this reality, the leaders of this presentation offer a primer—based in their own experiences—on developing and institutionalizing a structured culture of transitional awareness and preparation. In their own work, too, all three presenters have experience with transitions in a variety of models. From an unsuccessful, vaguely constituted mentoring model with no real structure, to an unstructured, just-in-time (or just-too-late) mentoring model, to a model with no real structure of any kind, the three presenters have lived the problems inherent in leadership change, and independently recognized the need for a more structured, systematic approach to leadership transitions. Such an approach, once instituted, creates by its very nature more transparency, more reciprocal awareness among administrative leaders and faculty and staff, and less friction among all the parties involved. Perhaps most importantly, an institutional culture of preparedness for leadership transitions creates stronger leadership overall. Finally, participants will leave the session with an action plan and checklist for structuring successful leadership transitions.

