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Leadership Development for Department Chairs: Learnings Across Three Approaches

Though department chairs have one of the most important and challenging leadership positions in institutions of higher education (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004), they typically receive little training for their leadership role (Allard, 2011). As many department chairs will attest, the process of becoming a chair is largely a process of self-education (Hecht, 2004); faculty leaders are often left to find their own support and development. On some campuses, faculty form learning communities or communities of practice (Blanton & Stylianou, 2009; Henrich & Attebury, 2010; Morgan, 2014), wherein faculty co-mentor each other as they engage in shared leadership practices (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). Other faculty seek out experienced chairs as mentors (Buller, 2011), or form a network of mentors (Lewellen-Williams, Johnson, Deloney, Thomas, Goyol, & Henry-Tillman, 2006; Wasserstein, Quistberg, & Shea, 2007; Zellers, Howard, & Barcic, 2008) who provide a “constellation” of supportive relationships (Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007). Though a small percentage (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004), a growing number of institutions provide formal mentoring programs for leaders. Such programs typically include workshop series on leadership knowledge and skills (e.g., the Academic Leadership Development Programs at Tufts University; the Academic Leadership Academy at Penn State University).

Across universities, thus, we see a continuum of informal to formal mentoring arrangements for academic leaders. Findings are mixed regarding the effectiveness of *informal* (self-chosen, voluntary, organic) versus *formal* (assigned, programmed) mentoring arrangements (McLaughlin, 2010). Some find that mentees, particularly women, receive more career and psychosocial support from informal mentoring (Allen, Day & Lentz, 2005; Caldwell, Casto & Salazar, 2005), whereas others contend that marginalized groups have a more difficult time establishing informal mentoring relationships (Ragins & Cotton, 1999) and thus benefit from formal mentoring.

The varying approaches described in the literature imply multiple avenues for leadership development. Absent an institutional strategy for leadership development, faculty and staff at our private, liberal arts university have pursued diverse approaches to leadership development, ranging from faculty-inspired and run groups to those led by the campus’ teaching and learning center. Each approach brings unique benefits and challenges.

The proposed presentation describes and shares insights from three approaches to leadership development pursued on our campus: a *co-mentoring group* for faculty leaders; a *community of practice for mentoring*; and a *leadership development cohort*. Looking across the models, the presentation will highlight: 1) the advantages and challenges to each approach to leadership development; 2) personal and institutional resources required to support each approach; and 3) learnings from each approach about effective leadership development for academic leaders. The presenters—both participants in and organizers of these groups—will synthesize insights and make recommendations for others interested in supporting leadership development opportunities on their campuses.

The presentation will begin with a discussion of participants’ experiences in and learnings from leadership development opportunities. Next, we’ll share our examination of the three models,

including recommendations for effective leadership development that arise from this examination. We'll end with a group assessment and revision of these recommendations.

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