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Evolution of Department Chairs – Analysis of Academic Chairperson’s Conference Proceedings

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“An age is a chaos while one is living in it, and the past would be a chaos also if it were not interpreted for us.” – Van Wyck Brooks

Ideas, concepts, evidence, and best practices have been shared in a collaborative forum at the Academic Chairpersons Conference with the intent of assisting Chairpersons in their academic journey for the past 34 years. Over 1000 presentations provide us with a body of scholarly work which sheds light on what is important to Chairs. Is government oversight new? Have recruitment efforts become a greater concern? What types of personnel issues are perennial? When did technology become an issue? These questions and more will be explored in this dynamic presentation which contrasts research findings and anecdotal views from participants.

This research presentation is based on a detailed analysis of all the presentations delivered at the Academic Chairs Conference over the past 34 years. The interactive presentation will demonstrate how the Chairs position has evolved over the last third of a century while exploring our perceptions of what is important to Chairs today. Themes examined will include the evolution of technology, program development and evaluation, distance learning, economic forces, personnel issues, pedagogy, competency based education, and governmental oversight. The authors will display themes, trends and issues that have dominated the chair landscape. Attendees will be invited to provide feedback regarding the themes uncovered through the research. Comparisons will be made between state and private institutions. Participants will also be encouraged to review their time as students, faculty, and Chairs. Those who have been in academia for more than 25 years will be asked to consider their thoughts on what it was like “back then.” Those who have been in academia for 10 to 25 years will be asked to reflect on the importance of current issues vis a vie when they started. Those who are new to the Chair position will be asked to share their perspectives on how they view the future “when looking in the rearview mirror.”

From this session chairs will increase their awareness of the stability and evolving nature of topics which impact us as Chairs. Attendees will gain an awareness of how their view of the chair position matches up to that of peers from 20 and 30 years ago. Participants will be encouraged to explore their perspectives on how the chair position has evolved with shifts in technology, academia, economics, personnel, and accreditation.