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PANEL: Changing Expectations from Department Chairs in the Dynamic Environment of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The dynamic environment of higher education defines and redefines roles of faculty and administrators. Department chairs have a unique position in colleges as they are part of the faculty as well as administrators. Expectations from department chairs include a long list of activities. They have to deal with a variety of tenured and tenure track faculty at different levels, such as instructors, senior instructors, assistant, associate, full professors, and per-course faculty (adjuncts). Students are another group for them to manage, including undergraduate, graduate students with different concentrations, majors and minors as well as transfer, study-away, study abroad students besides graduate assistants, work-study, and regular student workers. They also must interact with the staff in their department along with other departments or units in their college and other units of their universities. Most importantly, they have to get along and work with other administrators.

What's counted so far involve direct and indirect internal stakeholders. There are also external stakeholders that consist of corporate executives, small business owners and advisory boards that have numerous roles from internships, student placement opportunities, fundraising engagements, guest speaking, client projects, etc. While department chairs need to take all internal and external stakeholders into consideration, they have to perform many departmental activities from curriculum and program development and review, class scheduling, faculty, staff, student evaluations, to recruitment, enrollment and retention management, budgeting and control.

Furthermore, they are expected to stay transparent, diverse, collegial, and productive while managing these complex relationships for hitting multiple moving targets in a very dynamic environment. To further complicate the situation faced by chairs, many are finding that their paperwork and administrative responsibilities have proliferated. Indeed, while attempting to navigate the increasingly complex and multi-faceted environment discussed above, many chairs are faced with increasing paperwork and administrative responsibilities that can easily consume 20-30+ hours a week.

In conclusion, this panel will discuss best practices of becoming a department chair and sustaining that role over number of years successfully. Specifically, it will help benchmark best practices for department chairs in implementing their visionary leadership for data driven decision making without losing sight of human touch.

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