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Enhancing communication through Crucial Conversations® training: outcomes and best-practices

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Presenters: Dawn Bratsch-Prince and Rod Bagley

Title of presentation: Enhancing interpersonal communication through Crucial Conversations® training: outcomes and best practices

Presentation topic theme: Professional development for department chairs and other academic leaders in interpersonal and group communication with the goal of enhancing conflict resolution.

Target audience: All department chairs and other academic leaders

Type of Presentation: Best Practices presentation

Objective of the Presentation: The audience will be provided information on the utilization of the Crucial Conversations® training platform as a component of university-sponsored department chair professional development. Key information provided will be:

- Overview of Crucial Conversations® foundational principles
- Program budget
- Time commitment
- Cohort perspective and feedback
- Outcomes measures (how participants subsequently utilized the concepts in practical departmental leadership situations)
- Suggestions for on-going training in effective communication

Description of the Session: Effective interpersonal communication is a major challenge for most department chairs (see work by Chu, Lees, Higgerson, Gmelch, Crookston, Gunsalus, Leaming, among others). Concomitantly, chairs typically receive little to no formal training in effective communication strategies prior to their administrative appointment. As a component of professional development training for department chairs and other academic leaders at Iowa State University, the provost's office sponsored a 16-hour training program using the Crucial Conversations® (CC) platform. This model is based on principles established by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, and Switzler in their best-selling book and used widely in business and industry. One of the presenters (Dr. Rodney Bagley) is a certified Crucial Conversations® trainer who facilitated the formal training. Academic leaders at the departmental and college levels were invited to participate (e.g. chairs, associate chairs, program directors, associate deans).

To date, two cohorts of eight participants each have completed the program (Fall 2014, Spring 2015). We will present various metrics associated with these two cohorts including: cost; time investment by participants, trainer, and staff; program format; participant demographics; and feedback provided by the participants including their overall assessment of the program. The presenters will engage session participants in an analysis of a few case studies that resulted from our follow-up to the *Crucial Conversations* training for chairs. The presenter will share common administrative communication themes and challenges identified by our *Crucial Conversations* cohorts

and trainer; participants' success in incorporating the principles learned into their position responsibilities; and efforts to provide on-going programming in effective communication.

From this information, we will emphasize several universal themes in effective interpersonal communication including the human tendencies toward defaulting to either "silence" or "violence", and the need for "safety" and "mutual purpose" in effective dialogue. We will share and discuss the most commonly encountered communications dilemmas faced by department chairs and academic leaders. Finally, based on our experience and program assessment, we will provide a set of recommendations for the utilization of similar programs at other academic institutions.