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Crucial moments in the chair experience: A case study approach

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A tenured professor is pressuring a search committee chair to interview his protégé.

Long-time faculty members Carol and Ophelia had a falling out last year. Now Carol rolls her eyes and smiles at Jamal every time Ophelia speaks up in a faculty meeting. It appears that Ophelia is an inside joke between Carol and Jamal.

Students in the department want more online classes. Another group of students have asked for face-to-face classes specifically in the early morning three days a week. Only one faculty member agrees to teach online. All of the other faculty want face-to-face classes, but they want them in the late morning or early afternoon two days a week.

Department chairs face a variety of challenges in their day-to-day work on college and university campuses. As a result, they often find themselves pulled in a variety of directions trying to meet all of the needs and wants of various audiences (e.g., undergraduate/graduate students, faculty, college deans, provosts, and alumni). Chairs are routinely expected to make tough decisions on a wide range of topics, including personnel hiring and tenure decisions, department bullying/incivility, mentoring and coaching faculty at all stages, scheduling, curriculum, strategic planning, budget/resource creation and management, personal work/life balance, fundraising.

The purpose of this interactive session is to present specific, contextual situations (based on real life experiences) and to brainstorm possible solutions or outcomes to these scenarios. The presenters, all chairs of communication departments, will present the audience with a variety of case studies written by their administrative colleagues from around the country. All cases are left at a decision point to allow for interpretation, interaction, and discussion. The panelists will offer some specific recommendations from their own perspectives and experiences but are even more interested in learning from the collective experiences of attendees through open dialogue and discussion. Members of the audience should walk away with specific solutions to common departmental issues and the ability to critical analyze a given situation.