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Founding Chair, Meet New Chair: Collaborating Through Chair Successions

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“Founding Chair, Meet New Chair: Collaborating Through Chair Successions”

2016 Academic Chairpersons Conference

This interactive, solutions-based workshop will begin with the two co-presenters, who work as Associate Dean (and former founding chair) and new Department Chair at the same university, sharing their professional development stories and some of the challenges and opportunities that accompany their complementary roles. The presenters will describe some of their stylistic and philosophical differences, to which session participants will likely relate. The presenters will discuss how these differences have occasionally resulted in disagreements on day-to-day and higher-level departmental decisions, the implications for the life of the academic department, and how past chair and current chair can move beyond acknowledging these differences to using divergent viewpoints as a strength in creating a more successful collaboration.

Participants in this session will be invited to brainstorm solutions for common difficulties encountered between past and future department chairs, particularly when the former chair moves into the office of the dean or provost. Within the workshop space, the facilitators will review common cognitive biases and logical fallacies that can influence our thinking and threaten productive, critical dialogue. Case studies, role playing, and small-group activities will aid participants in recognizing and overcoming these common pitfalls.

A central component of the workshop will be examining the metacognitive aspects of academic leadership – i.e., thinking about our leadership thinking. The presenters will introduce a conceptual framework for recognizing and building support in the academic workplace. This framework has been adapted from and inspired by works by Block (1991), Covey (2005), and other experts in leadership development. Session attendees will work in pairs and small groups to apply these concepts to develop insights about the professional relationships and leadership styles of key individuals in their own academic departments.

The presenters will also serve as facilitators in creating small- and whole-group discussions in the workshop. This dialogue will help participants work through some of their own challenges with the help of fellow conference attendees and will simultaneously leverage the collective strengths and experiential wisdom of everyone in the room. An emphasis will be placed on active, engaged participation so that attendees enjoy and contribute to a highly interactive workshop.

As a supplement to the “New Chair Alliance” session (if offered again in 2017), this proposed session is intended to be of primary interest to both new and former department chairs who remain at the same institutions, as well as deans, but will be enriched by the active participation of all who attend. Session participants will be able to:

1. Analyze factors affecting the often complex relationships between incoming and outgoing department chairs.

2. Explain how stylistic differences between former and current chairs can be viewed as a strength rather than a source of discord or frustration.
3. Apply a variety of leadership concepts to their professional relationships within the academic realm.
4. Identify and seek strategies to overcome fallacies and biases to build consensus and sidestep potential conflicts in the academic workplace.