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The Dean-Chair Dyad: Developing an Effective Relationship with your Dean

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1. **Presentation Title:** The Dean-Chair Dyad: Developing an Effective Relationship with your Dean
2. **Presenter Information-Primary presenter CV/resume or biographical sketch:**

Craig Hlavac is the Interim Associate Dean of Arts & Sciences at Southern Connecticut State University. Prior to his current position, Dr. Hlavac was Associate Professor and Chair of the Music Department at SCSU for four years. He received Bachelor of Arts in Music and Bachelor of Science in Music Education degrees from the University of Connecticut, a Master of Music degree from Yale University, and an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Hartford. A frequent educational leadership clinician and presenter, Dr. Hlavac has delivered presentations throughout the Northeastern United States and across the country, including several presentations at the annual Academic Chairpersons Conference. Dr. Hlavac is also an advisory board member for *The Department Chair*, the premier department chair journal. Dr. Hlavac's research interests focus on the impacts of the organizational mission on the decision-making of educational leaders, the use of organizational and departmental missions to prioritize decision-making, and the utility of mission-based management in the administration of the contemporary university.

3. **Disciplines:** Education; Educational Leadership; Higher Education Administration
4. **Presentation Theme:** Leadership and Management
5. **Copyright:** CC BY-NC
6. **Target Audience:** All Department Chairs
7. **Presentation Type:** Interactive Workshop
8. **Objectives:** Participants will:
 - Learn and discuss the distinct roles of the department chairperson and the academic dean
 - Discuss stressors that many chairs face when dealing with their dean
 - Understand the pressures under which the dean operates that can influence the dean-chair relationship
 - Demonstrate an understanding of the potential conflicts related to the dean-chair relationship
 - Develop strategies for mitigating current conflicts and avoiding future ones
9. **Abstract:** The department chairperson must effectively relate with their academic dean in order to successfully advocate for their department. Financial resources, human resources, facility prioritization, and curriculum decisions are all contingent on the dean's approval. However, many chairpersons are unsure how to develop a trusting, collaborative relationship with their dean. This session will outline the distinctive roles of the chairperson and the academic dean and will present strategies for cultivating this important relationship. Ideas for resolving current conflicts as well as avoiding future tension will be discussed. The session will conclude with the review of common dean/chair scenarios for small-group discussion.
10. **Keywords:** Leadership, Role Conflict, Role Ambiguity, Conflict Resolution, Communication
11. **Session Description:**

Effectively managing the chair/dean relationship is one of the most important roles of the department chairperson. A working relationship built on trust and mutual respect is always beneficial for the

department and sought after by the dean. Unfortunately, many chairs report role ambiguityⁱ in their position, and deans report similar challengesⁱⁱ. When both stakeholders are unsure of their roles and expectations, stress and conflict can result. Adding to the problem is the reality that most deans and chairs are not formally trained when assuming their new roles and subsequently must figure out what skills and competencies are needed.ⁱⁱⁱ Clear, concise, and considered communication is critical to dean/chair success^{iv} but challenges such as job-related stress, feeling “caught in the middle” between the administration and the faculty, difficulty managing time effectively, and maintaining a work-life balance are issues that plague both deans^v and chairs^{vi}. One method for chairs to mitigate these stressors is to openly communicate with the dean and attempt to clearly define his/her expectations for the chair position.^{vii} Efforts to understand the roles and expectations of the dean with regards to the chairpersonship will inevitably help chairs meet these expectations. The result should be a more empathetic, effective relationship built on a mutual understanding of the challenges each face in their respective positions.

This session will begin with a concise review of the research defining the distinct roles of both the chair and the dean followed by common expectations from both perspectives. Next, strategies for building the chair-dean relationship will be discussed, including several suggestions for ameliorating conflicts, avoiding potential hazards, and reducing stress surrounding this important dynamic. The session will conclude with the review of common dean/chair situations for small-group discussion. Each small group will be encouraged to evaluate a given scenario, provide clear recommendations based on the presentation and their experience, and either act out a chair-dean dialogue or report their group’s suggestions to all session participants. Active participation throughout the workshop will also be encouraged.

ⁱ Hlavac, C.D. (2012). *Mission-based management in higher education: How do academic department chairpersons align decision-making with their organizational mission?* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Hartford, Hartford CT.

ⁱⁱ Wolverton, M., Wolverton, M. L., & Gmelch, W. H. (1999). The impact of role conflict and ambiguity on academic deans. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 70(1), 80-106.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gmelch, W. H., & Buller, J. L. (2016). Skill development for academic leaders. *The Department Chair*, 26(4), 25-27.

^{iv} Meyer, T. W. (2014). Working with people in conflict: Conversational strategies for deans. *The Department Chair*, 25(2), 26-27.

^v Reed, M. (2014). Regular challenges of the dean’s job. *The Department Chair*, 24(3), 5-8.

^{vi} Hlavac, C.D. (2012). *Mission-based management in higher education: How do academic department chairpersons align decision-making with their organizational mission?* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Hartford, Hartford CT.

^{vii} Rhodes, S. J., & Lees, N. D. (2016). What deans expect from chairs. *The Department Chair*, 26(3), 3-4.