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## Leadership Lessons from Navigating COVID-19

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## Abstract:

Chairs played a key role in navigating important university decisions and communication during COVID-19, a hypersensitive time when mortality salience was elevated. We will explore leadership styles, view brief excerpts of videos that were created to celebrate degree completion and improve retention. Participants will distill “lessons learned” from a challenging year.

1) Presentation Title: Leadership Lessons from Navigating COVID-19

2) Presenter Information CV/resume or biographical sketch:

Christopher Hirschler is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Health and Physical Education at Monmouth University. He is the former Faculty Director of Study Abroad at Monmouth University (2011-2016). A faculty member for 20 years, he teaches "Leadership, Public Health, and Higher Education" and faculty-led programs in Guatemala and Costa Rica, produces YouTube videos, blogs for One Green Planet, and is a Master Certified Health Education Specialist (MCHES). He is a frequent national and international conference presenter.

3) Disciplines: Health, Public Health, Educational Leadership

4) Presentation Theme: issues and trends in higher education

5) Presentation Type: best practice presentation (50 minutes)

6) Abstract: Presenter and participants will discuss leadership styles, strategies, and the best practices that chairs employed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent disruption to higher education.

7) Keywords: COVID-19, academic leadership, servant leadership, situational leadership

8) Creative Commons License: NA

9) Presentation Documents: Description of the Session (300-500 words)

In January 2020, a newly named coronavirus emerged that upended life as we knew it, including higher education. In March 2020, many colleges and universities abruptly switched to remote learning. Around the start of the fall 2020 semester (August 31), the United States had experienced more than 6 million COVID-19 infections and 183,000 deaths, 23.7% and 21.6% of global totals respectively (John Hopkins). In the interim, chairs played a key role in navigating recruitment, retention, advising, course delivery options, and messaging with students, parents, and faculty members.

The role of the chairperson is situated in a unique middle ground that empowers chairs to speak up for faculty needs while also representing administration (Jenkins, 2020). Leadership

inherently involves ethical issues, and how leaders respond, especially in a crisis like a deadly pandemic, is informed by their ethics (Northouse, 2019). Communication strategies will be examined that occurred between chairs and deans and between chairs and faculty in this hypersensitive time when mortality salience was elevated.

During the six months that followed the initial campus closures, protecting faculty, staff, and students became a high priority for chairs. Chairs across campus, from English to Music, focused on the health and well-being of their colleagues, and chairs were asked to contemplate the implications of the fall plan on the fiscal health of the institution.

We will explore leadership styles such as servant leadership and situational leadership that are effective for responding to a public health threat, and specific, effective strategies that were employed. Chairs had to adjust to remote recruitment and retention strategies that was even more important in an environment which imperiled many institutions of higher education (Kafka, 2020). We will view brief excerpts from YouTube videos that were created to celebrate degree completion, communicate advising details, to encourage perseverance and improve retention. We will discuss successful examples of remote recruiting sessions and how that can inform efforts post-COVID. We will have a breakout session in which participants discuss the strategies they utilized that were effective, and we will distill “lessons learned” from a challenging year.

Jenkins, R. (2016). [Your To-Do List as Chair. Here are the five core responsibilities you will face in leading your department.](#) The Chronicle of Higher Education.

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Northouse, P. G. (2019). Leadership: theory and practice. Eighth Edition. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Mikhalevich, I. & Powell, R. (2020). [The Misguided Rush to Reopen Universities.](#) Inside Higher Ed.

Sorrell, M. (2020). [Colleges Are Deluding Themselves.](#) The Atlantic.

[The Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.](#)

Thorp, H. (2020). [Colleges Lost the Moral Authority to Blame Students.](#) The Chronicle of Higher Education.