Abstract:
This presentation focuses on how behavioral strategies, data-based decision making, and a healthy dose of humility (and humor) can create a departmental culture that promotes faculty, staff, and student success. Discussions and activities will center on creating and communicating expectations, determining priorities, and creating a collaborative community.

Title: Building a Departmental Culture Using Data, Behavior, and Humility

This presentation will examine the intersection of behavior, data-based decision making, and culture influences the outcomes, systems, and practices in a department of teacher education. The presentation will begin with a review of behavioral principles and then provide examples of how those principles can apply to departmental leadership. Topics covered include setting expectations, encouraging faculty engagement, and increasing the likelihood of desired behaviors across the department for staff, students, and especially faculty.

When hired in 2017 to chair of a department of teacher education (where I'd been a faculty member for three years), I had a unique opportunity to apply a systematic, behavior-based approach to leading a diverse group of twenty-five faculty and staff. My background is in special education; I was a teacher for students with behavioral disorders and my university teaching and research have focused on training teachers to work with students with challenging behavior, classroom management, and positive behavioral interventions and supports.

As chair, I use practices from my behavior background to increase structure and consistency within the department. These practices include defining expectations in the context of routines (i.e., by using a matrix), increasing recognition for faculty engagement and "above and beyond" efforts, maximizing efficiency in the department whenever possible, and providing access to data (e.g., enrollment numbers, budgets) to increase the likelihood that all faculty and program-area coordinators will use data to make decisions.

Also, being mindful of culture and context is critical to the success of any PBIS implementation, including within a department of teacher education. This presentation will include examples of how (and how not) to make contextually-appropriate leadership decisions. I will share success stories, provide multiple specific examples of how I applied behavioral principles in my department, and discuss roadblocks I faced (and some of the solutions). Attendees will be able to ask about applying related principles in their own settings and how to encourage a similar approach if the current climate is currently oriented elsewhere.

After attending this presentation, attendees should be able to (a) identify the key principles of behaviorism; (b) identify how those key components can be applied within an academic department at the university levels; and (c) identify culturally appropriate, specific examples of how a behavior-based approach to leadership can be implemented when leading a department.