ACC Session Description

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All Chairpersons will eventually transition from their administrative role. Unlike other professions, it is common for academic leadership to relinquish leadership responsibilities and resume a former role as faculty. Some chairs make this transition of their own volition, while others are less fortunate. In either case, chairs typically move from their role in one of three ways; retirement, continue to administration or return to faculty. Research by Gmelch (2014) indicates 70% of chairs return to faculty upon conclusion of administrative service. With many chair appointments being rotational (3-6 years), this return is predictable. For those in non-rotational models, the time to transition is not as predictable.

Over the past 40 years, academia has steadily increased the support of faculty as they transition into the role of chair. Books have been authored, articles published, chair specific training manuals developed, and consultants hired. The Academic Chairs Conference is a strong example of how institutions now invest in the preparation of faculty as they transition into this critical middle management role in higher education. However, for all the efforts we undertake in support of faculty as they transition into the role, there is surprisingly little attention focused on this unique transition back to faculty.

Smith, et al. (2012) argue individuals who have served as chairs are a critical and talented resource that merit an institutions investment in continuing their careers. Yet, their findings indicate, support for chair transition back to faculty "appears virtually ignored by many institutions" (p. 60). If not managed properly, this transition can negatively affect the returning chair, challenging individual and institutional effectiveness (Firmin, 2008). Transition maladjustment of former chairs can lead to performance issues and underutilization of seasoned talent (Sale, 2013), loss of personal and professional relationships (Schwartzbach, 2019), feelings of inadequacy (Firmin, 2008) and issues related

to the resumption of teaching, research and service (Bailey, et al., 2016). Research indicates planning is an essential part of a successful return chair transition to full time faculty (Bailey, et al., 2016, Schwartzback, 2019; Sale 2013; Firmin, 2012).

This interactive presentation will explore chair transition planning back to faculty, upon conclusion of administrative service. Results from a qualitative, phenomenological study will be reviewed with a focus on the strategic planning components revealed by study participants. Attendees will share planning efforts currently undertaken at their institution, and their own thoughts regarding transition preparation. Former chairs will relate their transition experience, the institutional support they received, and discuss what they learned from this experience. The session will include planning tips and strategies addressing three phases of transition (pre-transition, in-transition and post-transition). Attendees will leave with an understanding of transition planning importance, regardless of where they are on the chair journey. They will also gather important activities, tips and planning methods, they can undertake to better prepare for the transition back to faculty for themselves, their departments and their administration.

References

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