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Academic Chairpersons Conference
Proceedings

32nd Academic Chairpersons Conference,
Austin, TX

Fostering Understanding Between the Provost's Office and Department Heads

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Recommended Citation

Brenner, Devon; Gilbert, Jerry; and Hodges, Julia (2015). "Fostering Understanding Between the Provost's Office and Department Heads," *Academic Chairpersons Conference Proceedings*.
<https://newprairiepress.org/accp/2015/Communications/1>

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Fostering Understanding Between the Provost's Office and Department Heads

Mississippi State University (MSU) has developed a variety of programs to facilitate communication between the Office of the Provost and Executive Vice President and academic department heads. As a first line of communication, the Office of the Provost uses electronic communication, including regular emails and a website, to disseminate information. Second, the Office of the Provost has developed formal *Academic Administrator Training* offered each fall semester since 2012. For this, administrators are invited to meet weekly for fourteen weeks to learn about policies, procedures, and resources. Training topics range from leave and evaluation policies to resources to support teaching and resource to advice on dealing with difficult faculty members. A third way we have strengthened communication is with the *Academic Department Heads Executive Council* (ADHEC). ADHEC membership includes one representative from each college who meets monthly to discuss issues of relevance to department heads. Following the meeting, the chair of ADHEC meets with the Provost to share a summary of the discussion and any potential action items. This structure provides a systematic venue for department heads to share with the Provost's office.

Other unique ways MSU structures communication are through *Coffee with the Provost* and an annual *Provost's Roundtable*. *Coffee with the Provost* provides a time for a group of five to eight academic department heads from different colleges to share a cup of coffee and more informal conversation. The *Provost's Roundtable* meetings are gatherings of all academic department heads and deans for conversation around a specific topic such as annual review or recent changes to the university Promotion and Tenure document. Together, these five opportunities foster communication between the Provost and Academic Department Heads in ways that vary in size, formality, and structure and that promote understanding and collegiality.

In this roundtable session, members of the Academic Department Head's Executive Council and the MSU Provost will share information about each communication program and their perceptions of each program. The provost will share information about the decision to implement and impact of the programs, and the department heads will discuss ways of making the most of these sessions. In particular, the department heads will share ways to prepare for meetings and follow up afterwards, how to raise concerns in ways that support further dialogue even when the topics are difficult, and how to use the various venues to build ties with other departments and colleges. Roundtable participants will be invited to share their experiences with similar communication programs from their institutions and to describe ways of interacting that support better communication and collaboration.