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Creating an Autonomous Chair Role

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Presenter Information

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Creating an Autonomous Chair Role

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Abstract: This presentation will describe modifications to the flat organizational model on our campus and the impact of those changes on department chairs. More specifically, we will discuss how a task force of department chairs developed an approach creating a more autonomous role for the chair.

Description of session:

This session is designed to promote dialogue and the sharing of ideas generated from leadership experiences of various department chairs at a small, private liberal arts university after two years of a flat administrative model. The role of department chair changed significantly over the course of the two years, and a way to continue the flat model was necessary. A new team-based approach to continue the flat model designed by a task force of department chairs will be presented.

This session is relevant to new and experienced department chairs as it will describe the reasons for the flat administrative structure, the advantages and challenges of this model, and the methods being employed to continue the flat model. The flat model was chosen to improve communication, efficiency and financial savings. There have been advantages of this structure to include increased departmental identity, financial savings, and a sense of equality across departments, while some challenges include some bottlenecks, incomplete reassignment of Dean duties, and unequal size of departments. A survey of faculty and department chairs was given at the end of the first year and at the end of the second year of the flat model to determine the efficacy of and feelings toward the new flat structure. The new team-based model that has been developed for the next academic year allows the department chairs to convene as a Chairs Council with a Chair of the Chairs and a Vice-chair of the Chairs to be the interface between chairs and upper administration. Chairs will be given more autonomy and be allowed to direct their own procedures, while a Dean of Academic Affairs will be the support for certain processes.

The audience will first be presented with the flat model including the advantages and challenges of the model. Then, results of the two surveys will be presented demonstrating these advantages and challenges. The new, team-based approach for continuing the flat model will be described along with the newly formed Chair of Chairs, Vice-chair of Chairs, and Chairs Council. A description of how these new entities will function within the administrative structure will be given along with how this new approach should provide clarity for division of administrative tasks. Following, a Q&A session will allow for audience input and inquiry.