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Finding Happiness as Chair: What the Buddha Said

Randel D. Brown

Texas A & M International University, brown@tamiu.edu

Diana Linn

Texas A & M International University, dlinn@tamiu.edu

Jennifer Coronado

Texas A & M International University, jcoronado@tamiu.edu

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This session will focus on using the Buddha's teaching about living a life in balance. This is not intended as a discussion about religion, but rather, looking at these ideas as a model for professional action, without any religious connotation. Few would argue that one of the most complex jobs in higher education is that of department chair. On the one side, administrators above the chair often consider the position of chair as a necessary evil to control and direct both faculty and students' actions and schemes. They see the chair as primarily a faculty member who has one foot in as chair and the other in as faculty. Often their perception of the role changes as their needs change. On the other side, the "rank and file" faculty member often considers the chair as a colleague who has succumbed to malevolent forces. In addition, students most often see the chair as their last hope to addressing a problem or their last stumbling block to getting what they want or need. The position of chair becomes confusing and complicated by the diverse views of those impacted by a chair's actions and direction and by those, whose actions affect the department chair. Buddha had a few simple points of advice for individuals with complex occupations that may lead them to equilibrium, a life and job in balance.

This session will describe the four basic truths and the eight step path offered by the Buddha that address the issues involved in making positive contributions when your position is a difficult one to balance. The four truths as they relate to the department chair are:

- The truth of imbalance
- The cause of imbalance
- The truth that imbalance can end
- The eight step path to remove imbalance

Many chairs find themselves in the midst of imbalance after a day of working in the complexity of getting tasks completed, advising students and comforting department faculty. Sometimes there is little energy left after a 14-hour day of cajoling, negotiating, reassuring, calming, cheering, consoling and sometimes upsetting your provost, dean, faculty, and several students. Surely, chairs are looking for a pathway for better survival skills in the workplace. They may even want to find a way to experience more satisfaction and happiness while working in a most difficult occupation. This discussion leads us to what the Buddha said about seeking happiness as department chair. In a nutshell, Buddha laid out an eight-point plan to removing imbalance and finding happiness as a department chair.

For the last 2500 years, Buddha's Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path have provided a guide to finding happiness in the complexity of everyday life for millions across the world. The life of a department chair may be filled with unexpected adventures, multifarious pathways, emergency undertakings, inventive contradictions, and exasperating individual interactions. This session is targeted at finding a passageway through the minefield of department chairhood. Buddha offers a simple pathway for finding happiness and contentment amid multiplicity.

The contents of this presentation were published in *The Department Chair*.

Brown, R & Linn, D. (2014, Spring). What the Buddha said about finding happiness as department chair. *The Department Chair*, 24, (4), 1-2.

The online version is available at:

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