PANEL: Changing Expectations from Department Chairs in the Dynamic Environment of Higher Education

Ismet Anitsal  
*Missouri State University*, ianitsal@missouristate.edu

Melek Meral Anitsal  
*Tennessee Tech University*, manitsal@tntech.edu

Michael Latta  
*Coastal Carolina University*

David J. Burns  
*Kennesaw State University*

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PANEL: Changing Expectations from Department Chairs in the Dynamic Environment of Higher Education

Ismet Anitsal  
Missouri State University

M. Meral Anitsal  
Tennessee Tech University

Michael Latta  
Coastal Carolina University

David J. Burns  
Kennesaw State University

ABSTRACT

The dynamic environment of higher education defines and redefines roles of faculty and administrators. Department chairs have a unique position in colleges as they are part of the faculty as well as administrators. Expectations from department chairs include a long list of activities. They have to deal with a variety of tenured and tenure track faculty at different levels, such as instructors, senior instructors, assistant, associate, full professors, and per-course faculty (adjuncts). Students are another group for them to manage, including undergraduate, graduate students with different concentrations, majors and minors as well as transfer, study-away, study abroad students besides graduate assistants, work-study, and regular student workers. They also must interact with the staff in their department along with other departments or units in their college and other units of their universities. Most importantly, they have to get along and work with other administrators.

What’s counted so far involve direct and indirect internal stakeholders. There are also external stakeholders that consist of corporate executives, small business owners and advisory boards that have numerous roles from internships, student placement opportunities, fundraising engagements, guest speaking, client projects, etc. While department chairs need to take all internal and external stakeholders into consideration, they have to perform many departmental activities from curriculum and program development and review, class scheduling, faculty, staff, student evaluations, to recruitment, enrollment and retention management, budgeting and control.
Furthermore, they are expected to stay transparent, diverse, collegial, and productive while managing these complex relationships for hitting multiple moving targets in a very dynamic environment. To further complicate the situation faced by chairs, many are finding that their paperwork and administrative responsibilities have proliferated. Indeed, while attempting to navigate the increasingly complex and multi-faceted environment discussed above, many chairs are faced with increasing paperwork and administrative responsibilities that can easily consume 20-30+ hours a week.

In conclusion, this panel will discuss best practices of becoming a department chair and sustaining that role over number of years successfully. Specifically, it will help benchmark best practices for department chairs in implementing their visionary leadership for data driven decision making without losing sight of human touch.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Ismet Anitsal**  
Department Head, Professor of Marketing and Dean’s Leadership Professor in Business at Missouri State University. His research interests emphasize customer productivity, customer value and service quality in services marketing and retailing as well as entrepreneurship, business ethics and online education. He also serves on the editorial boards of several scholarly journals.

**M. Meral Anitsal**  
Professor of Marketing, Tennessee Tech university. Her research interests include services marketing, consumer behavior, new product development, business ethics and online education. She serves on the editorial boards of several scholarly journals. Her teaching interests include marketing research, services marketing, design thinking and entrepreneurship.

**Michael Latta**  
Professor of Marketing at Coastal Carolina. He is primarily an applied researcher focusing on real-world problems in business that range from positioning a golf course to promotion strategies for pharmaceuticals and medical devices, as well as sales in a retail shop in a small museum. His teaching interests include Marketing Strategy and Advertising. He has authored an Ebook titled Fundamentals of Advertising: How to Create and Display Effective Ads.

**David J. Burns**  
Chair and Professor of Marketing and Professional Sales, Kennesaw State University. He has co-authored several books, published over 100 journal articles and book chapters, and presented over 250 papers. His research interests include retail location and atmospherics, ethics, and consumer culture. His teaching interests include retailing and other consumer-based areas, including Marketing and the Consumer Culture and Neuromarketing.