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Navigating Leadership in Academia through a Crisis

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Navigating Leadership in Academia through a Crisis

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The ever-changing landscape of academia in higher education presents numerous changes on a regular basis to directors, chairs, deans, provosts and college presidents. When you throw a totally unexpected global pandemic into the mix, academia becomes a mélange of chaos, fear, uncertainty and panic for many.

The number of changes that most universities faced from March 2020 to the present is likely seen as a first historically, at least in modern times. The abrupt change to moving all classes to a totally online format with virtually no time for faculty preparation was certainly unprecedented.

When we look at the upcoming year in higher education, we see many universities remaining totally online, others adopting a hybrid or “flex” plan and a few planning (at this writing) to maintain classes totally on-ground with just a smattering of hybrid and online offerings.

From a financial standpoint, declining populations in many cases have forced universities to significantly increase their “base”. Recruiting international students, non-traditional students, adding non-traditional courses of study and exploring new delivery methods are all part of the new “entrepreneurial” chair position. However, many universities will take a huge “hit” in enrollment due to the difficulty that many of our potential international students are experiencing in their struggle to get visas in countries that have been or still are under heavy quarantine and a fear among the non-traditional student that perhaps this college won’t survive the financial crisis.

In many cases, faculty have been or will be given the option to do all or some classes online. Others will adopt a hybrid delivery method and still others will strive to maintain on ground classes, if allowed. The students are typically being given the option of attending live or online as well in many universities. Sounds like chaos? Yes, for many faculties this will be extremely stressful.

My plan for the workshop is to set the stage with a variety of scenarios that highlight the success of the academic leader mentoring and preparing their faculty to engage in multiple training sessions, workshops, and discussions on how to best navigate through this crisis. The participants will be asked to share their experiences and the emphasis will be on how to maintain a positive and hopeful outlook throughout, particularly for new and relatively new faculty, many of whom will precariously plod through the crisis with the fear of job loss due to the financial difficulties that the pandemic has brought with it to higher education.

I maintain that this workshop will succeed well with a healthy mix of seasoned and new academic leaders.