



Deans' Institute

A Virtual Event — Tuesday, October 20, 2026 — 11:30 A.M.–4:00 P.M. EST

The ACAD Deans' Institute is designed to provide a supportive environment where ACAD members and other academic administrators can develop their leadership abilities while building meaningful relationships with peers who understand the unique challenges of academic administration.

This Institute draws on insights gathered from ACAD members and institute participants, who include deans, associate deans and provosts, and other academic leaders who are committed to the ideals of liberal education and dedicated to advancing higher education.

The goals of the Institute are:

- **Advancing Leadership Excellence:** Develop and strengthen the leadership capabilities essential for effective academic administration, with focus on practical skills that can be immediately applied in your role.
- **Sharing Critical Intelligence:** Access valuable insights about the current state of academic leadership, emerging trends, and innovative approaches being implemented across diverse educational institutions.
- **Learning from Transformative Leaders:** Engage directly with accomplished executive academic leaders and peers who have successfully navigated complex challenges and can offer proven strategies for institutional success.
- **Building Lasting Professional Networks:** Connect with a diverse community of academic leaders from across the nation, creating relationships that provide ongoing mutual support and collaboration opportunities beyond the Institute.
- **Accessing Ongoing Resources:** Join an alumni network with continued professional development through dedicated communication channels, ensuring sustained growth and peer connection.

11:30 A.M.–11:35 A.M.

Welcome and Introduction

Laura Best, Executive Director, ACAD

11:35 A.M.–12:30 P.M.

Opening Plenary

Information to come

12:35 P.M.–1:30 P.M.**Round tables I—small group discussions on issues in Higher Education**

Participants will be asked to pre-select their topics prior to attending the conference. Attendees will participate in two selections between opening and closing plenaries.

1:30 P.M.–2:00 P.M.**Session Break****2:00 P.M.–2:55 P.M.****Round tables II—small group discussions on issues in Higher Education**

Participants will be asked to pre-select their topics prior to attending the conference. Attendees will participate in two selections between opening and closing plenaries.

3:00 P.M.–4:00 P.M.**Closing Plenary: Making the Transition: Strategies, Challenges, and Lessons from the Provost Role**

Sarah Kirk, Ph.D., Provost and Dean of Faculty, Hobart and William Smith Colleges

What does it take to move from faculty and departmental leadership into one of the most complex roles in higher education?

In this session, Sarah Kirk will share her personal leadership journey and reflect on the transition from faculty member and academic administrator to Provost and chief academic officer. Drawing on real-world experiences, she will discuss the opportunities, challenges, and unexpected lessons that accompanied this shift in role, perspective, and responsibility.

Through candid stories and practical examples, she will explore strategies for establishing credibility, building relationships across campus, balancing competing institutional priorities, and leading through ambiguity and change. She will also share approaches that proved successful—as well as lessons learned from those that did not—offering participants actionable insights and honest reflections that can inform their own academic leadership journeys.

Sarah Kirk, Ph.D., is Provost and Dean of Faculty at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, where she serves as the chief academic officer and is responsible for the planning, development, and delivery of the Colleges' academic programs and services. Since joining HWS, Kirk has led several significant institutional initiatives, including the development of two graduate programs, a transition to a new accrediting body aligned with institutional assessment practices, the implementation of a comprehensive academic program review process, and a faculty-led redesign of the Colleges' General Education Curriculum.

Prior to her appointment as Provost, Kirk served as Associate Provost and Acting Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Williamette University. Throughout her administrative career, she has focused on strengthening the structures, policies, and practices that support faculty success across all career stages. Her leadership experience includes faculty mentoring and development programs, leadership training initiatives, and diversity and equity efforts, as well as substantial work reimagining shared and faculty governance.

Roundtable topics may include:

- So, You Want to be a Dean?
- Strategic Planning
- Crafting an Administrative Resume for your Job Search
- Thriving as an Assistant/Associate Dean
- Budget Basics
- Data and Analytics: Applying Business Models in Higher Education
- Survive and Advance Through the Administrative Job Search
- Change Management for People who Hate Change
- Academic Prioritization
- Generative AI
- Lessons to Lead by: Navigating Faculty Affairs