

Lisa Jasinski: Stepping Away: Returning to the Faculty After Senior Academic Leadership

In no other professional field—medicine, law, the military, business, public service, the clergy—do senior leaders habitually return to the rank-and-file workforce in the twilight of their careers. As a noted exception, former senior academic leaders, including university presidents, often conclude their careers by reprising the roles and responsibilities of a professor. Within the modern Academy, this professional transition is often characterized as “stepping down” and “returning to the faculty.” Beyond these well-worn clichés, little is known about how senior leaders experience these role changes or what their post-administrative lives look like. By examining the journeys of more than fifty senior administrators in the United States (ranging from presidents to assistant deans), Dr. Jasinski developed a constructivist grounded theory model to trace key decision-points and offer adaptive strategies. She demonstrates that rather than conceiving as *stepping away* as a demotion or from a deficit perspective, the process is marked by positive changes: individuals gain autonomy over their time, strengthen personal relationships, engage in rewarding professional pursuits, and savvy institutions continue to benefit from a former leader’s talents and gifts.