The Office of the Provost presents:
Survival Skills for Academic Leaders

March 29, 2011

12:00pm – 3:00pm
Dealing With Conduct that Exceeds the Boundaries of Acceptable Collegial Behavior

3:00pm – 5:00pm
Advanced Survival Skills

Academics who take on administrative responsibilities often feel inadequately prepared for dealing with difficult colleagues and conflict situations. This seminar on survival skills focuses on techniques for handling complaints from or about colleagues and then explores the complexity of dealing with difficult people in an academic environment.

Universities are designed to accommodate a wide range of creative styles and personalities; a person whose conduct exceeds the boundaries of collegial behavior can damage the productivity and morale of others in the environment. Explore where the boundaries are—or ought to be—and how to set and enforce those boundaries. Case studies and an open dialogue about problem situations you (or others you know!) might have experienced are an integral part of the learning opportunity.

Excerpts from an article by the seminar presenter*

On the subject of setting boundaries—
“…it’s also useful to develop a concept of topical boundaries. Be wary of confusing personal and professional roles.”

“…you will need to learn the boundaries of privacy and confidences. Unhappy people will sometimes tell you things you wish they hadn’t.”

“If your role requires you to act upon information you receive … tell the person that you will be unable to keep that information confidential. Say whom you must tell and why. Offer to protect the source only if that is truly within your abilities.”

“… never act after having heard only one side of a story. You can stress that you have no reason not to believe what the person has told you, but that you have an obligation to hear more before acting.”

“If someone threatens to sue you, the University and everyone you ever met, smile calmly and say, ‘You need to do what you need to do.’”


About the Presenter
C. K. Gunsalus
Illinois

C. Kristina Gunsalus is the Director of the National Center for Professional and Research Ethics, Professor Emerita of Business, and Research Professor at the Coordinated Sciences Laboratory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Prior to that, she served as Special Counsel in the Office of University Counsel and Professor in the Colleges of Medicine and Business. In the College of Business, she teaches Leadership and Ethics in the MBA program and is the director of the required Professional Responsibility curriculum for all undergraduates in the College of Business. She is a member of the faculty of the Medical Humanities/Social Sciences program in the College of Medicine, where she teaches communication, conflict resolution skills and ethics. She also served as Special Counsel in the office of University Counsel, and on the faculties in the Colleges of Law and Medicine.

Previously, for many years as an Associate Provost at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Gunsalus was responsible for a range of academic policy and administrative duties, including department head training/support and academic policy interpretations and revision. During that time, she was known as the “department of yucky problems,” with duties encompassing oversight of the discrimination and harassment grievance procedure, problem personnel cases and membership on the workplace violence team. Before that, her experience at the University included technology transfer, management of conflicts of interest, human subject protection, and long-term service as the campus Research Standards Officer with responsibility for responding to allegations of professional misconduct by faculty and students.

She has written books on survival skills for academic leaders published by the Harvard University Press entitled The College Administrator’s Survival Guide (2006) and is under contract for a book on ethics for the Press.