

Ad Hoc Committee on Chairs vs Heads

April 20, 2007 – Report

Heads

Preliminary Questions and Issues:

1. The Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate should determine that the Chancellor and Provost are serious regarding structural changes focused on clarifying the duties, selection and term of department heads and the interaction among Deans, department heads, and departmental/academic unit faculty.
2. There should be explicit recognition that “one size does not fit all.” Rather, the objective might be to develop several templates/plans regarding (1) above and related issues. Then each department/academic unit in consultation with its dean would be expected to determine the template most appropriate/suitable to it. Certainly, special licensing, accreditation, etc. issues may necessitate special adjustment to any one of the general templates. The result would be written department by-laws to be followed by the faculty, chair/head (hereafter, chair), and administration.
3. Some issues/questions to be considered: departmental structure, decision making, assignment of duties and responsibilities, process for faculty recruitment and appointment/reappointment, promotion and tenure, selection process for chair, term (and possible re-appointment) of chair, who (associate and full professors only?) is eligible to be chair, what if someone refuses to be chair?

Background Information

DEPARTMENT CHAIRPERSONS WERE ONCE UNIVERSALLY CALLED DEPARTMENT HEADS

Data

1. Very little research regarding chairpersons
2. A 1977 survey of 400 department chairpersons in Florida found that:
 - a. 68% had no prior administrative experience
 - b. the turnover rate was 15 – 20% per year
 - c. and the chairperson’s term of service was usually six years
 - d. 41% were elected by their colleagues
 - e. 44 % were appointed by their deans with faculty consultation
 - f. chairs hired in faculty oriented hiring systems (for example, elected by faculty or elected by faculty with approval of dean) remained for an average of 6.15 years
 - g. chairs hired in administratively oriented systems (that is, appointed by the dean or higher administrator without the suggestion of the faculty) remained almost three-fourths of a year longer than (f) in the position

Title/Name for Position:

1. Definition of Department: coalition of faculty with mutuality of scholarly interest in the welfare and prestige of its members and of the field on campus.
2. "The chairman as a *primus inter pares* within a department or division must, Janus-like, observe a kind of duality in the discharge of his responsibilities toward the members of a department, on the one hand, and toward the major administrative office to whom he reports, on the other."
3. All articles refer to as Chairperson:
 - a. based on system under which they were hired, individuals might be classified as faculty chairs and institutional chairs
 - b. someone acceptable to colleagues and sufficiently capable administratively to a point of communication with the dean must be in charge of each department
 - c. in most institutions person is called "chair" but a few use "head"
 - d. it is chair whether departments or divisions; the role of chair is significant and selection is of major importance

Term of Office:

1. Despite their claims to the contrary, most chairpersons receive enough satisfaction from being chairpersons to want to continue in the position for as long as possible. "The only thing worse than being chairperson of the sociology department is not being chairperson of the sociology department."
2. Tenure in office should be sufficiently long to permit individual to acquire perspective, but not so long as to let occupant become autocratic or apathetic.
3. Faculty move to chairperson is not intended as career advancement:
 - a. intend to continue with the substance of their faculty assignment
 - b. motivated by a sense of duty
 - c. typically return to faculty status at end of second term
 - d. come to chairperson role unprepared for what lies ahead
4. Division chairperson is 12-month function – suggestive that departmental chair is not 12-month function.
5. Occasionally very long service
6. Term of office most often three years; but, individual may be elected for additional three-year terms.
7. Chair holds office for a term in most institutions – central administration may stipulate this.
8. Rotation method – faculty members take turns being chairperson:
 - a. term of office typically two to three years
 - b. most often only senior faculty members are involved in rotation
 - c. guidelines and regulations have been established for governance of department that have been approved by the dean and/or institution

- d. might work well in small departments that have four to six faculty members with business conducted and decisions made by the entire department acting as a committee of the whole chaired by the chairperson
 - e. EVERY member of the department takes a turn with schedules usually drawn up in advance indicating whose turn it is and when
 - f. usually deflates importance of leadership turning the position into a kind of thankless and somewhat onerous task
9. Short term vs. long term appointments:
- a. in some departments chairperson appointed for an unspecified period of time as long as performance is satisfactory
 - b. may vary from department to department within the same institution ranging from two to five years with or without renewal possibilities
 - c. many small institutions have a standard period of appointment for all departments
 - d. by and large the average tenure for a department chairperson is from three to six years – report and audits of every kind have made the chairperson’s job less and less attractive to academicians
 - e. term appointments may create complications and problems under certain circumstances and yet, under different circumstances, may be the saving grace of a department
 - f. generally speaking, somewhere between six to ten years is the optimal length of the tenure of office for a department chairperson
 - g. lack of continuity can become a problem as a consequence of certain types of term appointments – continuity or stability in an academic department is a real necessity
 - h. the obvious compromise is the term appointment that is renewable once or twice for a maximum of about nine or ten year’s duration
 - i. best policy is one that gives the dean the ultimate amount of flexibility in the matter of appointment
10. Often the term is for three years and may be renewed consecutively once:
- a. two- to three-year term of office subject to reappointment is the most common among chairmanships
 - b. “I think the difficulties come partly from the fact that some institutions have given permanent tenure to department chairmen and have to let them live out their careers.”
 - c. chairperson is virtually marking time in his own field during the period of administrative service. If person goes back five or ten years later to teaching or research, that person is forever afterward likely to be penalized in terms of prestige if not of professional advantage
11. Probable that better candidates are available if terms are kept short – from 3 to not more than 5 years:
- a. 3-year term permits president to correct errors in selection with limited embarrassment

- b. longer terms give danger that the individual will become a professional administrator at expense of development as a teacher-scholar
- c. hold senior members to rotation in office of chair, if they are at all qualified, to reinforce the concept of cooperative management
- d. rotation may uncover a growing coziness and inertia in a department; long time chairman occurs at expense of gradual deterioration of departmental effectiveness
- c. with rotation, a university should buttress the office with non-faculty administrative support – provide semiprofessional or even professional department administrative assistant

Compensation/Pay:

1. Chairperson often carries reduced teaching load and, likely, extra compensation:
 - a. in a small department this may be only one course for one term
 - b. in a large department it may be half the usual assignments
 - c. more relief should not be necessary - if it seems to be, the institution should provide more high-grade office assistance
2. Teaching salary paid to a department head should not be more than that paid to professors in the same department:
 - a. “At a certain university where I was a staff member, there were a good many department chairmen whose salaries were lower than other members of the department.”
 - b. instead of increasing salary in recognition of the additional duties, many institutions lighten the teaching load of department heads sufficiently to allow them ample time for administrative duties
 - c. no relief from teaching would suggest that chairperson should work more than 100 % of the time, which is impossible
3. It is a mistake to recognize the chair’s administration by an increase in salary.
4. “Speaking of department heads, it shouldn’t be necessary to get an administrative title in order to get a higher salary or status in the university.”

Characteristics/Duties of a Department Chairperson:

1. “The chairman as a *primus inter pares* within a department or division must, Janus-like, observe a kind of duality in the discharge of his responsibilities toward the members of a department, on the one hand, and toward the major administrative office to whom he reports, on the other.”
2. Chairpersons wear three hats:
 - a. supervisor
 - b. faculty spokesman
 - c. shop steward

3. "As faculty transform into chairs, they typically shift from a focus on scholarship activities to a focus on fragmented meetings and interruptions; from a feeling of autonomy to pursue one's own interests to a feeling that both faculty and administration controls one's time, activities, and actions; from professing in the classroom to persuading in meetings and political arenas; from a solitary work type to social collective action; from receiving department resources to allocating resources; and from writing manuscripts to writing memorandum."
4. First lesson for chairpersons is that knowledge must be shared:
 - a. a department that is kept in relative ignorance about budget, programs, and personnel developments is a department mismanaged and unable to defend itself
 - b. on most campuses, faculty suffers from a chronic shortage of information – and hence understanding – about how the university really works. In part, this fact arises because university administrations have attempted to shield the faculty and the academic programs from the forces of economic, social, and technology change ranging beyond the campus
5. Chairperson is first line of defense for the department and the spokesman for the department in budget fights – wise chairperson makes sure that his or advocacy of a certain issue reflects the department faculty's consensus or at least has the support of the senior faculty members:
 - a. higher levels of university administration regard the chairman as a first-line supervisor responsible for interpreting and enforcing university policies and regulations and for making sensible allocations of budgeted resources
 - b. department members regard the chair as a colleague and as their agent in bringing to the department what it needs
 - c. in situations of conflict and scarcity, the chair cannot be totally satisfying to both forces all of the time
 - d. department chair is expected to be an articulate advocate of disciplinary interests and needs
6. Chairperson is responsible for:
 - a. the department's external communications
 - b. chairperson appoints departmental committees and establishes new committees
 - c. chairperson can and should have a strong influence on curriculum development and reform activities within the department
 - 1) recommends courses to be offered
 - 2) recommends the time schedule of the courses to be offered
 - 3) recommends, subject to approval of the dean or president, work offered and required for a departmental major of field of concentration
 - d. chairperson must be the conscience of the faculty members
 - e. allocation of resources within the department
 - f. assign courses and teaching loads

- g. extraordinarily influential role in matters of promotion and tenure
 - h. annual evaluation – dispassionate evaluator of each faculty member's performance
 - i. set or recommend annual salaries
 - j. department's chief planner – preparation and maintenance of the budget
 - k. fight for the department; however, sometimes the chairperson must be the advocate of the dean or the central administration
 - l. make recommendations to the president of persons to be employed as instructors
7. Responsibilities delegated to Departments: major emphasis should be placed upon curricular development and instruction.
 8. Role of leadership and not domination:
 - a. colleague and peer and not a superior
 - b. it is unclear whether department chairpersons are "supervisors" or "employees"
 9. Must be acceptable to colleagues, able to communicate with dean, able to represent departmental interests.
 10. Chairpersons have considerable managerial responsibility, but not a great deal of authority.
 11. Are managers but also faculty (teach and research) – leads to a dilemma
 12. Chairman cannot hope to do more than carry out administrative duties and whatever teaching he must do.
 13. A chair's ability to distribute tasks and rewards is an important feature of the chair's power.
 14. "Chairs suffer from more interpersonal conflict among their colleagues than with their deans or students."
 - a. chairs describe dissatisfaction with job: "Second only to bureaucratic red tape and paperwork were the chairs frustration with interpersonal conflict."
 - b. "The chair feels trapped between the pressures to perform as a faculty member and as an administrator."
 15. Chairs are perhaps, the only administrators who don't pass the buck because it isn't theirs to pass; although they must administer, they are often described only as "sub-" or "quasi-administrators" whose allegiance is left in doubt.
 16. Universities differ in the extent of discretionary power accorded the chairman and in the expected length of service:
 - a. more usual is frequent rotation among senior faculty – term two to three years with reduced responsibilities in course teaching
 - b. incumbent aware that shortly a colleague will take over
 - c. devolution of power: Rotation results in greater emphasis on the internal needs of the department than on concerns and pressures brought by higher levels of University Administration

17. Chairs devote only a portion of their time to departmental administration. Most continue to teach, and they are expected to maintain their scholarly activities.
18. Efficient handling of routine operations:
 - a. providing equitable work assignments
 - b. processing routine communications
 - c. providing needed information and support services for unit personnel
 - d. scheduling necessary meetings
 - e. providing required unit reports
 - f. creating effective interpersonal relationships
19. Elected chairperson provides leadership with business of department often run by an assistant chairperson and/or other well-trained support staff.
20. Faculty members tend to be individualistic, highly entrepreneurial long rangers rather than the team players required for management. They tend to resist strong, visionary leadership and firmly defend their personal status quo.
21. Faculty should become true participants in the academic decision process rather than simply monitors of the administration or defenders of the status quo.
22. Faculty expects to participate in decision-making but do not expect to make the decisions themselves.
23. Faculty expects fair and just decisions:
 - a. freedom from personal bias or personal benefits
 - b. deliberate weighing of alternatives with openness to consideration of the relative merits of possible courses of actions
 - c. existence of a fairly explicit value system upon which decisions are based
 - d. willingness to explain the rational basis for a decision based on widely shared values by the group
24. Faculty require communicative skill in administrators – effective upward vertical communication – a very real need of faculty implies largely passive communication skills of the administrator, such as openness and willingness to listen to faculty viewpoints on the part of a chair or dean with some evidence of feedback; downward vertical communication ordinarily requires a higher proportion of the more active communicative skills.

Selecting Department Chairpersons:

1. Chairperson most important person in a dean's professional life:
 - a. important for dean to devote time and effort to selection/appointment
 - b. survey of how chairs are selected: two most frequently reported:
 - (1) election subject to administrative veto
 - (2) administrative appointment after consultation (active) with faculty

2. How selected: At most colleges/universities members of the department are involved one way or another:
 - a. standard way: dean establishes a search committee to evaluate dossiers and present a list of candidates from which the dean selects one
 - b. another method frequently used is for dean to ask members of the department to suggest names of individuals who might be interested in becoming chairpersons - dean selects one
 - c. on rare occasions dean may appointment chairperson without requesting or receiving faculty consultation
 - d. other procedures used:
 - (1) election by faculty members of the department
 - (2) rotation method in which faculty members take turns being chairperson
3. No single standard method must be followed by every department in its search for and selection of a chairperson – method can vary among departments even in the same college within a university:
 - a. departments by self or in consultation with dean are permitted by some institutions to determine what selection procedures they wish to follow:
 - (1) procedures are included in departmental regulations and bylaws
 - (2) bylaws should be written at time separate from need to select or appoint chairperson
 - b. at small institutions, in which departments are not very different from each other, it is not uncommon for a single standard method to be prescribed for all departments
4. If dean establishes search committee – search committee must be given instructions on how to announce the vacancy, conduct the search, evaluate each candidate's documentation, acquire information about candidate from as many sources as appropriate, and then submit at least tow names for the dean's consideration. Also, dean gives careful instruction to committee including reminder of the mission and goals of the department, the parameters of the position and salary, the institution's and dean's perceptions of the issues and problems with which the new chairperson will be expected to deal, and so forth:
 - a. dean should not allow search committee to present only one name – unless, well in advance of the conclusion of the search, the dean, the search committee, and the general department faculty are firmly in agreement that there is only one candidate who is just right
 - b. if dean appoints chairperson without faculty consultation usually case of history of strife among faculty members who are never able to agree or need for drastic change in the department to bring it in line with existing or revised goals, or because dissident faculty members on their own would never agree

- c. if elected by departmental faculty a detailed set of rules and regulations:
 - (1) developed by faculty of department and approved by the dean - generally govern the process
 - (2) dean may still formally appoint
- 5. Behavioral differences: Appointed versus elected or rotated candidate (especially true at the beginning of term of office):
 - a. appointed by the dean:
 - (1) advantage: is someone likely to accept and dean trusts
 - (2) disadvantage: is possibility that messages coming the other way may not be either fully or accurately reported
 - b. elected:
 - (1) insures someone liked or at least respected by the faculty and trusted by faculty
 - (2) dean can be assured that messages are accurate readings of the department
 - (3) short-term serenity
 - (4) at first may be difficult for chairperson to make hard decisions affecting faculty members and after few years this difficulty may not go away
 - (5) voters are members of department who hold tenure rank (professors & associate professors) – this should be part of departmental by-laws
 - c. designation of the electors should be part of the departmental by-laws; typically, elected by members of department who hold tenure rank
- 6. It is difficult to administer and do research!
 - a. great scholar/researcher does not make a good academic manager because of scholar's qualities of introversion, intense concentration upon a single aspect of a single topic, jealous, almost selfish protection their time
 - b. great teacher has better change of becoming good academic manager because of qualities of empathy, enthusiasm, good organizational skills, rapport with colleagues and students, a public presence, and a willingness to work hard at repetitive tasks
- 7. Professorial rank and tenure:
 - a. usually no time to perform scholarly tasks to meet promotion criteria
 - b. being a good chairperson is seldom enough for promotion
 - c. decisions made by chairperson may be held against chairperson
 - d. chairperson of lower rank may be overly permissive towards senior faculty in giving assignments and evaluating performance
 - e. do not ask non-full professors to be chairperson
- 9. Election by the department is in reality a nomination to the dean and above – faculty may want a time for automatic reconsideration and graceful replacement.

10. Duties of chair are recognized but they are often resented unless all senior members take turns in performing them.
 - a. "in the collegial model the chair acts like a captain, selected by the team to embody their spirit and provide encouragement, focus and a voice at critical moments
 - b. In the industrial model the chair is like a quarterback, calling the plays, in charge by virtue of position, directing the team to success
11. Chairs move in and out of coalitions: Consensus among faculty cannot be taken for granted but must be seen as an ongoing accomplishment.
12. Should chair be appointed by the president or should the position be elected by the members of the department?
 - a. on balance, appointment by the president, after such consultation as he deems appropriate, appears to be the better alternative
 - b. chair needs the added authority
 - c. involves onerous duties that may not be desired by some best fitted to perform them – easier to avoid election by peers than refuse president
 - d. election appears to increase rather than attenuate the centrifugal forces in university organization
 - e. President may need freedom to select new leadership; freedom to select his own sub-leaders

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