# BEST PRACTICES FOR CHAIRS

## Learning Outcomes

- Identify strategies to improve advocacy skills with university administrators.
- Identify strategies to improve effective skills within the department.

## Who Wants to be a Department Chair?

- 30% of faculty state that they would like to be a chair (Gmelch, 2006).
- 60% of department chairs have no prior administrative experience (Hecht, et al., 1999).

## Leadership Styles and Perceived Effectiveness of Department Chairs (Peterson, 2004)

- **Directive** ~ gives instructions about tasks, expectations, and deadlines
- **Supportive** ~ attends to the well-being and needs of faculty

## I. Some Background on Department Chairs

### Self-Perceptions of Department Chairs

- 44% of department chairs primarily identify with faculty roles.
- 52% see themselves as both faculty members and administrators.
- only 4% see themselves primarily as administrators.
Leadership Styles and Perceived Effectiveness of Department Chairs (Peterson, 2004)

- **Participative** ~ invites colleagues to share in decision-making; integrates their suggestions into decisions
- **Achievement-oriented** ~ challenges faculty to perform at the highest levels possible

What Leadership Style Do Most Department Chairs Indicate That They Employ?

- **Selling** ~ this style is appropriate if followers are confident and willing to take responsibility but are unable to do so because of lack of expertise (Al-Omari, 2005)

Personality Characteristics of Effective Leaders (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994)

- **Surgency** ~ desire for advancement; readiness to make decisions
- **Emotional stability** ~ resistance to stress and tolerance for uncertainty
- **Conscientiousness** ~ hardworking, persevering, organized

Personality Characteristics of Effective Leaders (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994)

- **Agreeableness** ~ sympathetic, cooperative, good-natured, warm
- **Intellectance** ~ imaginative, cultured, broad-minded, curious

Some Background on Department Chairs

- Also, read ‘Seven Habits of Successful Chairpersons’ in Deryl L. Leaming’s *Academic Leadership: A Practical Guide to Chairing the Academic Department, 2nd Ed.* (2006).

Some Background on Department Chairs

- **Part I. Summary of Best Practices:**
  - Understanding your reasons for becoming a department chair
  - Gauge your preparation for the chair role
    - seek training to shore up weak areas
  - Identify your leadership style or what style works best for you and your department colleagues
II. Strategies to Improve Advocacy Skills with University Administrators

Improving Advocacy Skills
- Advocating for your unit is vital!
  - To leverage influence so that constituents begin to share the department’s goals, missions, vision and values (Leaming, 2007)
  - To widen your “circles of influence” (Covey, 1989)
    - from Seven Habits of Highly Effective People
  - To acquire resources for your program

Hecht, et al. (1999)
- The chair’s role is complicated by external pressures from:
  - central administration
  - accrediting agencies
  - state boards of education
  - granting agencies
  - state legislators
- Chairs must be familiar with these entities in order to address each of their particular challenges

Many new chairs have little/no experience advocating for anyone other than themselves

- How does one learn these skills?
- Some individuals have prior experiences with other administrative positions
  - graduate, undergraduate coordinator
  - directors of special programs (student affairs, honors, CTLT, etc.)

Transferable (attainable) advocacy skills and experiences
- Fiscal management
- General management experiences
- Development and cultivation of institutional networks
  - Provost, VPs, Deans, Registrar, Bursar, Treasurer
  - being a member of university committees:
    - Provost's or Dean's advisory committees
    - Faculty Senate
    - Graduate/Undergraduate Council
    - Human Subjects/Animal Review Boards
Improving Advocacy Skills

- Leveraging Influence and widening your circle of influence:
  - With alumni
  - With “publics”, i.e., professionals outside of the university
  - On-campus networking
  - With your Dean and other administrators
    - working with your Dean is not enough!

Working with Alumni

- Make contact with alumni
  - many alumni feel unwanted if not called upon
- Create an alumni association and association board
  - help to contact other alumni
  - assist in fundraising
- Honor your alumni
  - create a “wall of fame” of distinguished alums

Working with “Publics”

- To create, improve and maintain a positive image
- The chair is usually the liaison with external constituencies
- Chairs need to be adept at recognizing perspectives held by external publics and be able to structure department communication with them to enhance a shared relationship (Hecht, et al., 1999)

Working with “Publics”

  - Effective chairs not only answer all surveys and reports demanded by external constituents, but also
    - institute communication with them
  - Send department newsletters to external publics
  - Solicit press coverage for important events

On-Campus Networking

- Importance of networking with other professionals across campus
  - joint programming with other departments
    - special/regular education
    - handicapped services
    - student affairs
  - work collaboratively with the registrar, bursar, financial aid, student affairs and other offices that impact student success

Working With the Dean

- You must have a solid working relationship with your Dean (Lees, 2006; Learming, 2007)
  - you must be willing to work with (or cultivate a relationship with) your Dean
    - relationship built on trust and mutual respect
    - don’t talk behind his back
    - it is helpful if you like each other
Working With the Dean

- Set up regular meetings
  - informal or formal, depending on the Dean's preferences
  - talk candidly
  - air differences
- Think beyond your own agenda and department!

What Deans Do Not Want or Like (Lees, 2006)

- Late or inaccurate paperwork
  - may have legal ramifications
- Overspent budget accounts
  - you may not get bailed out
- Hearing department-level complaints
  - deal with problems yourself and promptly to avoid escalation
- Surprises
  - try to warn the Dean ahead of time

What Deans Do Not Want or Like (Lees, 2006)

- Being left out of the information loop
  - don't let the Dean hear about department business from "higher-ups"
- Continued requests for resources from chairs
  - there is a line between "justified advocacy" and requests "just because she got it"
  - make sure requests have solid planning and predicted, measured outcomes associated with them

What Deans Want (Lees, 2006; Leaming, 2007)

- Keep the Dean informed
- Keep lines of communication open
- Take responsibility for your decisions
- Meet deadlines
- Know university policy and follow it
- Be open, and share information, with faculty
- Be a strong advocate for your faculty and department

What Deans Want (Lees, 2006; Leaming, 2007)

- Solid strategic planning from the chair and the department
- Projects that coincide with initiatives of the Dean and the College
- External funding and gifts
  - overheads
- Recognition for their work and decisions
- Things they can brag about

III Strategies to Improve Effective Leadership Skills within the Department

- Understanding Faculty Priorities
- Enhancing Effectiveness of the Chair
- Being/Becoming a Future-Oriented Chair
- Evaluation of your Performance
10 Principles of Good Practice for Encouraging Multiple Forms of Scholarship (O’Meara, 2005):

1. Prepare faculty in graduate school for the variety of roles and types of scholarship in which they will engage.

2. Socialize new faculty to the broader institutional definition of scholarship.

3. Present clear expectations for scholarship in promotion and tenure.

4. Do not expect or reward the “overloaded plate.”

5. Assess the impact of scholarship on multiple beneficiaries and partners.

6. Provide useful feedback to faculty during evaluation.

7. Support pioneers with resources—structural and financial, training and development, political and symbolic.

8. Encourage scholarly contributions that build on strengths.


10. Resist increasing research expectations to enhance institutional prestige.

The most important characteristics of an effective leader are (Lees, 2006)

- Credibility
- Equity
- Honesty

These contribute to your “personal power” as chair!
Leadership Qualities
(Leaming, 2007)

☐ Have a sense of humor!
☐ Have vision
☐ Delegate responsibility
☐ Know your own strengths and limitations
☐ Be self-confident
   - don't be afraid to make mistakes
   - accept blame for failures and share credit for success

☐ Be sensitive and caring
   - don't be afraid to apologize

☐ Be self-confident and decisive

☐ Embrace change
   - provide ideas and be flexible

Securing Resources

☐ How do I become more effective at acquiring external resources?
   - The following suggestions apply to acquiring resources, but also to all things you do.
   - These tie in with ideas discussed earlier, related to advocating for the department

Specific Strategies
(from Sutherland, 2007)

☐ Target multiple actors
   - working with the Dean is simply not enough
   - the more access you have to other constituents, the better
   - get involved in important university committees
   - understand the players across campus who can help you be successful!
   - develop credible connections with key players

☐ Garner faculty support for funding initiatives
   - senior level administrators look for unit support

☐ Be knowledgeable of institutional priorities, faculty preferences, department programs and different revenue streams on campus

☐ Promote your Department
   - increase visibility across campus
   - it is helpful if administrators are knowledgeable about your programs

☐ Align proposals with available revenues, institutional priorities and departmental strengths
Being/Becoming a Future-Oriented Department Chair

Characteristics of Traditional versus Future-Oriented Department Chairs*  

Traditional Department Chair

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National stature and visibility</td>
<td>Prominence and distinction among peers nationally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment from a prestigious institution</td>
<td>Comes from an academic program that has a solid reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Track record in research</td>
<td>Recognized as a legitimate scholar with expertise in a particular field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation for teaching</td>
<td>Understands the educational and training needs of students at all levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets along well with others.*</td>
<td>Reasonable social skills</td>
</tr>
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* Source: Grigsby et al. (2004)

Future-Oriented Department Chair

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<th>Characteristics</th>
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<tr>
<td>Institutional orientation</td>
<td>Able to balance departmental affairs with institutional priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional competence</td>
<td>Self-aware and adaptive</td>
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<td>Resilience</td>
<td>Does not panic under pressure, but takes decisive action</td>
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<td>Fits with the institution’s values and guiding principles</td>
<td>Is a team player cognizant that her/his success is tied to the success of others</td>
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<td>Strong communication skills</td>
<td>Is a good listener</td>
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Future-Oriented Department Chair (contd.)

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Able to build and lead a team</td>
<td>Articulates a shared vision; removes obstacles to success, creates commitment, provides resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results oriented</td>
<td>Focusses on execution, sets clear expectations, and holds people accountable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develops others</td>
<td>Is able to shine in reflected light</td>
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Leadership Responsibilities  
(Lucas, 1994)

1. Leading the Department
   - team-leader
   - creates shared vision
   - empowers others
   - achieves goals together as a group

2. Motivating Faculty to Enhance Performance
   - create a climate that enhances ongoing faculty learning and accomplishments
   - create goals and provide feedback

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Evaluation of Your Performance

- What is expected of me?
  - Department Chairs have many duties too numerous to mention (Lucas, 1994)
    - prepare teaching schedules
    - ensure teaching effectiveness
    - manage administrative assistants and graduate assistants
    - personnel decision making
    - curricular revision
    - budget management
    - some of the tasks can be delegated

- As a leader, which functions are most important?
  - How can you be viewed as a strong, proactive leader?

- Lucas (1994) lists nine areas that help define strong leadership
  - she uses an evaluation matrix to help determine in which areas
    - chairs are functioning adequately
    - chairs need to improve

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Leadership Responsibilities

3. Motivating Faculty to Teach Effectively
   - create a culture to motivate effectiveness
   - make teaching excellence a high-priority goal

4. Handling Faculty Evaluation and Feedback
   - create an environment that encourages colleague mentoring and that values feedback
     - opportunity for sharing accomplishments
     - sharing effective teaching strategies
     - stimulating ideas for professional development

5. Motivating Faculty to Increase Scholarship
   - create an environment commensurate with your institutional missions
   - work with junior faculty and find ways to stimulate mid-career faculty

6. Motivating Faculty to Increase Service
   - depending on the role of the individual faculty member

Leadership Responsibilities

7. Create a Supportive Communication Climate
   - good listening skills
   - demonstrate respect for faculty and students
   - well-planned faculty meetings

8. Managing Conflict

9. Developing Chair Survival Skills
   - time management
   - stress management

Rating Responsibilities

- Raters may include
  - dean
  - faculty member
  - self
- The rater evaluates the nine leadership responsibilities in terms of:
  1. importance to the dept.
  2. degree of satisfaction with the chair’s current level of skill development
     - scale of 1 – 4 (1 is low; 4 is high)

Evaluation of Your Performance

Figure 2.1 - Leadership Matrix

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<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<td></td>
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Satisfaction with Skill Development

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Satisfaction with Skill Development

1 2 3 4
Evaluation of Your Performance

- Important to examine intersecting rankings in Cell A.
- Intersecting rankings in Cell B are useful for identifying opportunities for development.

Foundational Texts


Foundational Texts


Online Resources

- ACE Department Leadership Programs: http://www.acenet.edu/Content/NavigationMenu/Events/chairsworkshop/ DLOverview111.htm
- The Academic Chairpersons Conference: http://www.dce.k-state.edu/conf/academicchairpersons/
- Department Chair Online Resources: http://www.acenet.edu/resources/chairs/
- Academic Leadership: The Online Journal: http://www.academicleadership.org/
- K-State Department Head Resources: http://www.k-state.edu/academicpersonnel/depthhead/