Delegating and Using Committees

Delegating Responsibility

One of the first questions that a newly appointed department chair asks is, "How can I effectively fulfill all my responsibilities as chair and at the same time not reduce my teaching, research, and service activities?" Chairs who single-handedly try to carry out all their administrative tasks and simultaneously maintain their previous levels of professional activity are bound to find that the workload is impossible to manage. At some point they must decide to what extent they wish to retain their commitment to teaching, research, and professional activities. Some chairs give up most or all of their teaching and research in order to fulfill their administrative and leadership tasks. Others, by carefully delegating many administrative tasks to faculty members and department committees, manage to schedule sufficient time for some teaching and research. Then there are those chairs who continue to carry out all their customary teaching, research, and service activities, paying attention to administrative tasks only when absolutely necessary. Chairs usually choose the model most suited to their talents, abilities, and professional objectives.

Academic vice presidents and deans are not seriously concerned with the extent to which the chair personally carries out the department's administrative activities—so long as the tasks are carried out. Nor do deans or academic vice presidents apply pressure on department chairs to conduct research. Faculty members, however, often expect chairs to continue their research and scholarly activities even when administering the department. Some chairs who are no longer actively engaged in research complain openly about the difficulties and frustrations of the chair's job and indicate repeatedly to their colleagues that they can hardly wait to return to the classroom or laboratory. The sincerity with which these statements are made cannot be overlooked. However, we believe that well over half of all chairs currently serving their first terms would serve an additional term in the position if invited to do so. For those who envision a career in the area of university administration, the relinquishing of research activity may simply mark the beginning of a new career interest. On the other hand, many chairs try to maintain their earlier activities simply for the love of their discipline or in anticipation of returning to their former roles when their time as chair is over.

Some chairs are appointed by the dean, others are appointed by the dean from a list of candidates recommended by a faculty search committee, and still others are elected by their colleagues to serve for one or more terms. In some departments, the position of chair rotates among its members. By whichever means a chair assumes the position, he or she serves at the dean's pleasure. In many cases, chairs receive extra compensation and other perquisites, such as full-time summer appointments and more luxurious office space. The material and psychological rewards of the position are intended to compensate for frustrations encountered in the job, such as abrasive incidents with both deans and faculty members, longer hours, and reduced time for teaching and research. Occasionally the frustrations cause chairs to resign, especially when the dissatisfactions outweigh the benefits. The department whose chair serves a fixed term, usually three to five years, gives the chair an option to exit gracefully after a full cycle or two of experience.

Clearly the role of chair involves many tasks that are quite time-consuming. In their study of chairs at one state university, Gerald W. Mclaughlin, James R. Montgomery, and L. F. Malpass found that chairs consider the following tasks most demanding: providing informal leadership for faculty members; representing the department to the central

administration; allocating financial resources; maintaining faculty morale; encouraging organizational improvement; managing academic programs; planning for the long term; advising students and encouraging faculty members' professional development.

Even though these tasks were considered most demanding, they provided some satisfaction. Still other tasks were perceived as providing no satisfaction at all. These included maintaining student records, serving on college and university committees, managing facilities, and preparing and presenting budgets. Especially onerous were tasks governed by federal, state, and university rules and which require much detail work.

Incidentally, chairs in the study cited above reported that they worked an average of fifty-five hours per week. They spent an average of twenty-six hours on department leadership and administrative tasks, ten hours on teaching and student counseling, nine hours on research and professional development, and four hours on college and university activities. Several of the chairs polled had been in office for five years, and their schedules indicated the extent to which they had adapted their professional lives to their administrative role.

A national survey of chairs of medium-sized to large university departments, conducted by John C. Smart and Charles F. Elton and reported in their article "Administrative Roles of Department Chairmen," revealed that the types of roles that the chair assumed were related to the department's academic discipline. For example, chairs in the basic disciplines, whether the sciences or the humanities, spent more time in the "faculty role" than did those in applied sciences departments. They spent relatively more time recruiting, selecting, and evaluating department faculty members; encouraging their professional development and research and publication efforts; maintaining a healthy department climate by reducing conflicts among the faculty members; and providing informal leadership for the faculty members.

Chairs of social science departments—such as anthropology, political science, psychology, and sociology—spent more time in the "instructional role." They spent more time than others teaching and advising students; managing clerical and technical personnel in their department; and maintaining accurate student and department records.

Chairs of departments of pure and applied science—such as biology and agriculture departments—spent much more time in the "research role" than did chairs of the non-science departments, such as English, history, and communications. They spent relatively more time obtaining and managing grants, gifts, and contracts; recruiting, selecting, and supervising graduate students; and managing department finances, equipment, and grants. Chairs in this group also showed low commitment to the instructional role.

The "coordinator role" was not predominant among chairs of any particular discipline but was most often associated with chairs of educational departments. Those in the coordinator role spent more time than their colleagues soliciting ideas to improve the department, planning and reviewing the curriculum, and assigning teaching, research, and other duties to faculty members. They also spent more time coordinating department activities with external groups, representing the department at professional meetings, participating in college and university committee work, and interacting with university administrators on behalf of the department. Education chairs also spent less time in the faculty role. Perhaps this emphasis on coordinating is related to the fact that education professors spend a great deal of time supervising practical teaching and working with public

school personnel; this coordinator role may be carried over when the professor becomes a chair.

Whatever the reasons for favoring one of the roles described above, the chair must still attend to those tasks that are part of other roles. These tasks may be secondary, but they cannot be totally neglected. To chairs who complain of having insufficient time for filling all their roles, university administrators often respond by suggesting that they learn better time management skills. In fact, administrators often suggest that the busiest faculty member be chosen chair because busy people manage their time successfully. Many books offer valuable techniques for organizing and managing one's time, and these are helpful for those who are not skillful at getting tasks scheduled and accomplished. Effective time management, however, will not significantly reduce a chair's work; such a reduction is possible only if the chair learns to delegate tasks. The extent to which chairs learn to delegate tasks will determine the amount of time they will have available for teaching, research, and other activities of their choice.

Some chairs, as we have noted, continue to carry out all their customary teaching, research, and service activities, but they do this at the expense of administrative tasks; in effect, the administrative tasks are assumed only when absolutely necessary. The attitude that characterizes this kind of administration is that nothing deserves attention until a crisis erupts. The chair sees the job as a chore and never bothers to learn about either the intricacies of leadership or the techniques of organization and delegation.

The crisis-fighting approach to department administration leads to an accumulation of unopened mail, unsubmitted reports, missed deadlines, and unattended faculty concerns. The result is a department with low morale and an unfavorable work environment. Often, in the face of faculty disapproval or even rebellion, the chair assigns more and more responsibility to the clerical staff. The staff, then, may take on airs of administrative authority, thus further antagonizing faculty members. In such a case, the department chair is not really fulfilling his or her responsibility. If a chair wants to have time for teaching and research and still effectively lead the department, he or she must learn to practice the art of delegation.

How, then, does a chair become an organizer and coordinator of tasks and activities? By delegating tasks and responsibilities to staff members, to faculty members, or to committees. The ability to delegate functions, tasks, and responsibilities requires a trust and confidence in peers and staff members, a trust that occurs when there is consensus within the department about goals, objectives, policies, programs, and priorities. Delegation also requires a willingness to accept the results of the delegated effort, even if these results are not as extraordinary as those the chair might have achieved working alone. A chair who is compelled to oversee every detail and to operate with "zero defect" standards is often unable to do anything but micromanage which in an academic environment is the worst kind of management.

The chair's responsibilities for the completion of a certain task does not end once the task has been delegated. The work of others must be evaluated, checked, and occasionally endorsed. To evaluate something, however, usually takes less time than to do it. The chair, by careful delegation, can save between 60 and 90 percent of the time he or she might devote to a single task, especially if the instructions are clear and precise and if those delegated are in tune with the chair's style and thinking. Although not every task can be assigned to any person, many detailed but routine tasks can be easily relegated to secretaries, graduate student assistants, and staff associates.

Often, the chair can find faculty members who will willingly perform some administrative chores. Department tasks that provide growth and development opportunities are useful governance training for junior faculty members, and they should be given credit for service to the department. For example, these tasks could be made a part of the assigned workload, or the faculty members could be rewarded with some perquisite or a special title. A chair must be careful not to overload the unpromoted, untenured junior faculty member to the point that his or her career is threatened.

Senior faculty members who are having difficulty adjusting to the department's changing teaching or research goals or who are in an unproductive phase of their career might also welcome the opportunity to contribute to the department by assuming some delegated responsibility. In delegating tasks to senior faculty members, the chair must be sure that these persons are both willing to accept and competent to perform the assignment. Great tact and delicacy may be required in enlisting the efforts of senior faculty members.

Committee Structure

Department committees are useful to the chair because he or she can delegate certain tasks to them. They also help provide a logical order to the department decision-making process. Moreover, the faculty is more likely to accept the decisions that are made or recommended by a committee, especially if the process for selecting committee members has been approved by the faculty. Much of a department's work is accomplished through committees, and the chair should understand how they work and the various ways in which they can be organized.

The larger a department, the more committees it will have and small departments often operate, in their entirety, as a single committee. The size of a committee is clearly related to the tasks that it is assigned, as well as to the department structure. Large committees frequently occur in large departments that have formal subgroups, especially when each subgroup desires representation on those committees. For example, in a large psychology department, the clinical psychologists, not represented on the admissions committee, argue that the experimental psychologists, who dominated the committee, were rejecting many good applicants. Generally, committees consisting of three to nine members seem to be more productive than larger committees. An odd number of members will eliminate ties when voting.

There are two general types of committees—standing and ad hoc. A standing committee operates on a permanent basis. Although its membership may change, it continues to operate from year to year unless some administrative decree terminates its activities. Two examples of standing committees that operate on a permanent basis are admissions committees and faculty evaluation committees. Ad hoc committees, on the other hand, are formed for specific tasks and cease operation when their tasks are completed. Ad hoc committees may include search committees and others that respond to immediate needs. The frequency with which committees meet depends on the tasks assigned to them; some meet on a regular schedule, others on call.

Committee functions may logically be divided into three categories: developing policies, performing administrative activities, and providing technical advice. The policy-making function consists of developing rules, regulations, and criteria for governing certain department activities, such as evaluating faculty performance, admitting students,

determining equitable workloads for faculty, assigning space, and so forth. The administrative function consists of making decisions on specific issues or recommending positions to the department chair. These administrative functions, all based on predetermined policies and criteria, include reviewing the applications of persons seeking admission to a program and making a decision as to whether they should be admitted; evaluating the performance of faculty members; recommending equitable workloads for specific faculty members; and assigning space to faculty members.

A committee may be established for the sole purpose of developing policies and criteria to govern a single activity, and a second committee may be appointed to implement those policies. In some instances, a single committee is charged not only with developing such policies, procedures, and criteria, but also with implementing them. For example, a faculty evaluation committee may be required not only to develop department policies and criteria for evaluating the faculty but also to evaluate individual faculty members. Similarly, an admissions committee may be required not only to develop policies, procedures and criteria for evaluating admitting students, but also to act on applications for admission.

Committees that provide technical advice are usually ad hoc and are given assignments such as designing and planning new facilities, deciding what types of equipment should be purchased, developing core and specialized curricula for specified programs, and so forth.

Members of these committees may be appointed by the department chair, elected by the department, or chosen by a combination of both methods. Similarly, the committee chair may be appointed by the department chair, elected by the committee members, or elected by the department. In some cases, the department chair may also be the committee chair, a voting member of the committee, or an ex officio member, or he or she may not be a member at all. How these matters are handled depends on the department's nature and size and the tasks that must be accomplished.

The department chair must provide sufficient guidance and direction for the committee. The committee's charge should be clear and precise, and the committee should be apprised of its responsibilities, including what criteria must be followed, under what constraints it must operate, what its members can and cannot do, and what deadlines must be met. Most committees operate in an advisory capacity to the chair or to the department. Some committees, however, are perceived as having a decision-making responsibility. One example is the admissions committee, whose task is so important that wise chairs rarely overrule its recommendations. In any event, an advisory committee should know that it operates in an advisory function. For committee members to work hard on some problem and then have their work ignored or rejected is disheartening, especially if they think that they are part of a decision-making rather than an advisory committee.

Sometimes chairs do not give clear guidance to committees. When a committee is not given a specific charge, criteria to follow, or deadlines to be met, it often accomplishes little or nothing at all. Possibly this result is just what the chair desired. Occasionally, a chair is pressured to do something that he or she is reluctant to do. Leaving the matter to a committee without giving it guidance, direction, or deadlines—especially if the committee members are at odds with each other—will give the chair time to let things simmer.

Some department administrative tasks can easily be delegated to committees, especially when the chair is willing to accept a decision that is arrived at fairly. Sometimes, however, the chair wants the department to take a certain course of action, which, if he or she

proposed it, would arouse some opposition. In such a case, a chair could form a committee to recommend to the department that particular course of action.

Can there be any degree of certainty that a committee's conclusions will coincide with the chair's ideas? Some administrators use the following strategy. First, they discuss their ideas informally with individual faculty members to identify those who are or who might be sympathetic to the plan. These chairs do not use hard-selling tactics and are careful not to show undue eagerness to implement the action. Second, they select a committee of faculty members who are sympathetic to the plan and who also enjoy the respect of their colleagues. An appointed committee of this kind, properly instructed and charged, will usually come up with conclusions and recommendations that are consistent with the chair's original plan. If committee members or other faculty members suspect the Machiavellian nature of the chair's procedures, they may firmly resist adopting the intended action, regardless of its merits. Many faculty members consider machinations of this sort questionable; nevertheless, many chairs have been known to use such tactics. Our description of these tactics, however, is not intended to be an endorsement of them.

An elected committee may not be as predictable in terms of the recommendations it will make. If the chair wants an elected committee to recommend a certain course of action, he or she should talk to the committee members individually to gauge their feelings and attempt to persuade them to his or her way of thinking. If the chair cannot obtain the support of the committee, he or she might temporarily abandon the issue. Some chairs have been known to appoint two committees to work independently on the same problem in order to have a choice of recommendations. Faculty committees and departments as a whole almost always react negatively to a fresh proposal when it is introduced at a formal meeting, especially if the chair introduces it without having done any groundwork or having issued previous warning. And a negative reaction is not easily changed. A wise chair, therefore, will informally prepare committee members or department members before presenting a new concept at a formal meeting.

A department should, on occasion, examine the number and functions of its committees. Their value has been emphasized, but to overburden the faculty with a plethora of committees is counterproductive; only those committees that are necessary should be formed. Some large departments even have a committee to control the tendency of committees to multiply needlessly.

Following is a representative, though far from inclusive, list of department committees and a brief summary of the main functions of each. Few departments have all these committees, and some may not have any.

- *Admissions committee*—usually reviews applications of students for admission to the department and makes recommendations to admit or to deny admission.
- *Graduate policy and programs committee*—determines admission and graduation requirements and standards; monitors quality of graduate programs.
- *Student recruitment committee*—develops and implements methods of publicizing to prospective students the department's program and professional opportunities within the field.
- *Seminars and symposia committee*—arranges and publicizes lectures, seminars, and symposia for faculty members and students within and outside the department.

- *Governance committee*—at request of chair, considers the structure and functions of department committees; makes recommendations or advises chair concerning a broad range of department business.
- *Field liaison committee*—develops and monitors curriculum, including core and required courses.
- *Promotion and tenure committee*—reviews the records of faculty members eligible for promotion or tenure and recommends appropriate action; in some departments, establishes the standards and criteria for these decisions.
- *Faculty evaluation committee*—reviews records of faculty members for purposes of annual evaluation and merit increases; in some cases, establishes criteria for these reviews.
- *Faculty development committee*—develops, implements, and monitors procedures that contribute to the professional advancement of faculty members.
- *International students committee*—develops and implements proce-dures for meeting special needs of foreign students.
- *Faculty assignment committee*—schedules classes; develops and implements procedures for ensuring that the department's work is equitably divided.
- *Student advisory committee*—a student-directed and student-run committee, concerned with student welfare; nominates student members to certain faculty committees.
- *Search committee*—develops and implements procedures for recruiting new faculty members and recommends appropriate appointments.
- *Examination and grading committee*—sets standards for and reviews the grading system; administers qualifying and comprehensive examinations for graduate students.
- *Off-campus program committee*—recommends and supervises courses and programs offered off campus.
- *Placement committee*—develops and implements procedures for placing graduates of the program.
- *Planning committee*—assesses the department's future needs and develops short and long-range plans for consideration by the chair and the department; sometimes plans new buildings and facilities.

Well-organized departments sometimes develop rules and guidelines for the operation of their committees; other committees operate on the basis of unwritten rules. More energy is sometimes spent in developing bylaws for committees than in dealing with issues. Following is an example of committee guidelines that were adopted by a large department in a large university. This example is not offered as a model but only as and illustration for chairs interested in formalizing their department's committee structure. Note that the guidelines stipulate the committee's purposes and duties, describe how members are selected, outline operating procedures, and provide for a periodic evaluation of the committee's activities.

Appropriate guidelines could be drawn up for each committee within the department. The guidelines need not be lengthy or complex, but the charge should be clear.

GUIDELINES FOR THE FACULTY EVALUATION COMMITTEE

Purposes and Duties
1. To design faculty evaluation criteria and procedures for use within the department.
2. To communicate the evaluation criteria procedures to the faculty in a timely fashion.
3. To implement the evaluation procedures for department promotion and tenure, annual evaluation, and merit, and for master's and doctoral directive status.
4. To advocate, review and monitor procedures that contribute to professional advancement of untenured and junior members (e.g., to establish conditions suitable for research, writing, and publishing).

Committee Memberships
1. Each of the three degree programs in the department will elect three faculty members as representatives on the committee to serve for a one-year term.
2. The committee chair will be named by the department chair from among those elected.

Committee Procedures
1. The committee will meet as frequently as may be required to do its work.
2. All candidates for promotion, tenure, and merit, as well as candidates for master's and doctoral directive status within the department shall be reviewed by the committee.
3. The committee will make a brief report of its work to the faculty at the end of the spring term.
4. The department chair will explain and discuss with the committee the reasons for any action that is contrary to the committee's recommendations. The committee members will inform the faculty of such instances.

Review
The committee will be responsible for conducting a yearly review of its procedures. If necessary, the committee will propose recommended changes to the governance committee.

The many tasks that confront department chairs can be extremely time consuming. To avoid being totally consumed by these tasks and to find sufficient time for desired scholarly activities, chairs must learn to delegate some of their tasks. Some chairs cannot bear the thought of sharing their responsibilities with colleagues; they fear that other persons are unable to do the job as well as they themselves. Delegation, however, is the only solution to the chair's problem of finding time to do all that he or she must do or wants to do. Chairs who recognize this fact are continually looking for the right person or committee to whom some department tasks can be entrusted.

Questions

1.   List the five most time-consuming activities that you personally performed   during the past year in your capacity as department chair. Beside each activity that you list indicate:

    a.   which of these tasks must be performed only by you;
    b.   which could be delegated to a person in the department, such as a secretary, faculty member, student assistant;
    c.   which could be delegated to a committee?

If you think a task that you are performing could be delegated, write the title of the person or the name of the committee to whom it could be delegated.

    1._____
    2._____
    3._____
    4._____
    5._____

2.   Do you or do you plan to delegate tasks to committees, individuals?

3.   Which committees help you most with your administrative responsibilities?

4.   Does each committee within your department have a written set of policies   and procedures? To which committees are members appointed or elected? How is the committee's chair selected?

5.   How is the committee member's work evaluated?

    a.   on departmental committees
    b.   on college or university committees
    c.   on state or national committees

6.   What does a good department chair do when a conflict arises between a faculty committee of the department and the chair over a committee recommendation; e.g., the recommendation of that committee to hire a certain person?