

Briefly Noted
Mentoring Faculty Members into (and away from) Serving as Department Chair

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1. The positives about being a department chair:
 - a. You get to mentor new faculty members toward successful careers, including tenure and promotion and promotion to full.
 - b. You can have a significant, positive, long-term impact on a department and its programs, a larger impact than is possible as a non-administrative faculty member.
 - c. Your work as chair is central to the well-being of your discipline.
 - d. You get to develop opportunities for faculty and students.
 - e. You get to solve problems.
 - f. There's a lot of organizational work which can offer the satisfaction of accomplishing multiple tasks.
 - g. You can do great public relations for your department and your discipline with the college, the university, and the public.
 - h. You can support and encourage faculty scholarship and teaching.
 - i. You can help guide faculty in strengthening the quality of the curriculum.
 - j. It will be an adventure.
 - k. You get to build a larger professional network.
 - l. You develop and enhance your administrative skills and abilities.
 - m. You're part of a bigger vision.
 - n. You help students toward better lives.
 - o. You get free food and drink at the receptions you have to attend.

2. The negatives of being a department chair:
 - a. You work 12 months! (But you get annual leave, hopefully at least 24 days a year—almost five weeks!)
 - b. "At some point you will generate disagreement with almost everyone in the department" (Hess, 2013, p. 8).
 - c. You're responsible for everything, but
 - d. You may lack the authority to do what you need to do.
 - e. You don't have a lot of control over your time and agenda.
 - f. A lot of the organizational work is routine, and it takes a lot of your time.
 - g. Revenue generation/resource support has become a major driver, so you need to think in terms of recruiting students, offering more online courses, developing for-profit centers, selling coursebooks for multi-section courses, naming rights, and anything else to generate revenue.
 - h. Your relationships with some of your colleagues will change.
 - i. It will be scary at times.
 - j. You spend a great deal of time on personal issues.

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- k. Your research suffers.
 - l. You don't get to teach as much as you might like.
 - m. You can't make everybody happy.
3. Personal qualities that help with being a chair:
- a. You need to be able to set aside your interests because your concern is the department.
 - b. You need a thick skin to deal with problems, especially people problems.
 - c. You need to be good at organization.
 - d. You need to be flexible and good at multi-tasking.
 - e. "If you have a concern for the common good, an insightful sense of vision, a love of making things better, and tenacity in pursuing those goals in the face of obstacles, the chair's office offers a unique opportunity to contribute" (Hess, 2013, p. 8).
 - f. You need to have strong interpersonal skills, including the ability to deal with conflict.
 - g. You need to be able to work effectively with a number of constituents.
 - h. You need to have strong time and email management skills.
 - i. You need the discipline to make notes to file about every conversation every day.
4. Outcomes of being a department chair:
- a. "Your success as a chair is measured by how well you make your department and its members better" (Hess, 2013, p. 9).
 - b. Personally, you gain a broader understanding of how the department, college, and university work;
 - c. you will have a "new appreciation of the positive elements of faculty life,"
 - d. and you may develop "aspirations of an administrative career path" (Hess, 2013, p. 11).
 - e. You will garner skills to prepare you for other administrative positions.
 - f. You will develop a larger network to help your department and your career.
 - g. You can make people's lives better.
5. Preparation for becoming a department chair:
- a. The more you know about how departments/colleges/the university works the better.
 - b. The more contacts you have in the university the better.
 - c. The more contacts you have in the discipline the better.
 - d. **The more budget/financial experience you have the better.** If you don't have this going in, you need to start learning about it as soon as you accept the position. The budget enables not only your department's strategies but also faculty and staff happiness.
 - e. The more department service you've done the better.
 - f. The more college and university service you've done the better.
 - g. Conflict management training is extremely helpful.
 - h. The more you know about development/fund raising the better.

- i. The more experience you've had with assessment, program review, and accreditation the better.
 - j. Take advantage of any seminars/workshops/training offered by your discipline, your university/college, and other sources. (See 6.e.)
 - k. Experience on college/university P&T committees is highly desirable where possible.
 - l. Learn the names of the key staff persons in each administrative office. They may well be the key to campus success.
6. What can you do to develop/mentor someone into the chair's role?
- a. Involve good possibilities for becoming chair in meetings with the Development people so they begin to learn what a chair does in that area.
 - b. Encourage them to serve on College and University committees so they get the bigger picture.
 - c. Make sure they have experience on your Executive Committee.
 - d. Have them serve as Director of Graduate Studies, Director of Undergrad Studies, Assistant/Associate Chair, etc.
 - e. Send them to conventions/conferences/sessions that have department chair training. In addition to chair training through your academic discipline, a number of dedicated programs are available: The Academic Chairpersons Conference put on by Kansas State University is recommended particularly as being both high quality and reasonably priced. The American Council on Education (ACE) has a Leadership Academy for Department Chairs—more expensive than the Academic Chairpersons Conference and, according to some, not as valuable as it could be. The ACE's also puts on Regional Women's Leadership Forums; in Colorado, the Academic Management Institute for women is sponsored by the Colorado Network of Women Leaders, the ACE's Office of Women state affiliate. Higher Education Resource Services (HERS) has institutes for Women in Higher Education Administration which are more broadly based than just for department chairs but very educational and particularly strong on getting the broader, university-wide perspective on administration.

*A number of these ideas are from Hess, J.A. (May, 2013). The risks and rewards of serving as a department chair. *Spectra*, 49 (2), 8-11. Others come from the Colorado State University College of Liberal Arts department chairs and the National Communication Association Department Chairs Advisory Committee members.