

# Appointment and Re-appointment of Academic Department Chairs

---

## Background

The role of department chair is very critical to the well-being of the institution. “Institutional reliance upon department chairs as primary change agents and managers will continue to increase as institutions respond to external pressures for productivity and accountability... [T]he very reputation of the institution depends on the success of its department chairs in bridging institutional and departmental needs. Despite the anomalous quality of the position, chairs have immense potential to affect the future of their institutions... Chairs may be short on formal authority or positional authority. However, for those interested in affecting the future of his or her colleagues, there may be no more important leadership position than that of department chair (Hecht et al., 1999). The work of the department chair typically falls in the following areas: department governance, office management, and internal communication; overseeing curriculum development; faculty affairs; student affairs; communication with audiences external to the department (advocating needs, enlightening about successes, reporting to accrediting agencies, etc.); financial management; data management; and institutional support. The work in some of these areas may well be delegated to faculty committees or administrative staff but the chair is ultimately responsible for making sure that the work of the department is accomplished.

A model of selecting chairs from within the department and then having a rotation process whereby leadership is shared among the tenured faculty is common in higher education, especially in smaller institutions and smaller departments. A renewable three year term is also very common and has the advantages of allowing a chair to develop competence and confidence in their leadership abilities without assuming too much authority or power over their colleagues. The model also ensures stability of leadership while permitting changes in a timely and orderly manner when change is desired or needed.

## Procedures

The chair of an academic department should be a tenured member of the faculty. Interim chairs may be non-tenured, but may serve for a maximum of one academic year. Chairs will usually be appointed from within the department but may be hired from outside when the dean and provost, in consultation with senior faculty, determine that the department would be strengthened by a new hire or when a new department is created and there are no senior faculty to assume leadership. Chairs are recommended by the tenured and tenure-track (T&T-T) faculty but must be approved by the dean and provost. If not approved, the dean and/or provost will provide a written statement to the T&T-T faculty of their rationale for denial. Chairs serve in three-year terms and may be re-appointed in a process that requires the input of the T&T-T faculty. Chairs serve at the pleasure of the dean and provost and can be asked to step down from their administrative duties at any time. Additionally, when a minimum of 50% of T & T-T faculty believe that the department chair is not providing leadership for the department, they may bring such consensus to the attention of the dean and the provost who may ask the chair to step down.

Chairs receive compensation for their administrative duties in some combination of teaching release time, stipends and/or additional months of contracted work above the 9-month faculty appointment. Chairs generally follow a faculty schedule for holidays and academic breaks. However, chairs that are on 12-month contracts and thereby earn leave must follow the schedule of EPA-non-faculty and account for any vacation or sick leave taken when the university is open.

At the time when a new chair is needed, the dean solicits input on possible chairs from the T&T-T faculty and/or makes a recommendation of a T&T-T faculty member. The nominee's name is submitted to the T&T-T faculty for consideration. Faculty can either meet as a group and discuss nominees or send individual feedback to the dean. Recommendations may be made by open vote or secret ballot. The faculty and dean negotiate for a reasonable amount of time until a suitable candidate is identified and agrees to serve.

If the position of chair is to be filled from outside the university, the person identified for the position must be acceptable to the T&T-T faculty, be eligible for tenure on appointment, submit an application for tenure at the earliest possible time, and be awarded tenure within the first year. If not granted tenure, the chair is to be removed after the end of the academic year.

A contract for the administrative services is issued by the Provost and is generally for a three-year term. The contract will include stipulations about release time, stipends, and contract extensions.

At some point before the end of each spring semester, the dean will solicit feedback from faculty and support staff relative to the chair's administrative (leadership and management) skills. A standard instrument will be used to gather the information and if at all possible individual respondents should not be identifiable. This information will be shared with the chair in an annual evaluation conference in a manner that does not identify individuals.

During the 5<sup>th</sup> semester of a chair's tenure (i.e., 2.5 years after the chair's appointment), a determination needs to be made relative to the department chair transitioning back to the full-time faculty position or remaining for another three-year term. If the dean is comfortable with the chair's leadership and management and if the chair is willing to serve another term, the dean can submit his/her name to the T&T-T faculty for consideration. The faculty can also submit names. If the dean desires a change in leadership or the chair wants to step down, then someone else from among the tenured faculty is recommended and vetted. In either case, the faculty and dean negotiate in a manner agreeable to all parties until a mutually acceptable candidate is identified and agrees to serve.

As the chair serves at the pleasure of the dean and provost, at any time during a chair's term the dean may ask the chair to step down from the administrative duties. As with any appointment, the dean must work with the tenured and tenure-track faculty to identify a replacement.

Chairing the department is a service obligation of tenured faculty and thus everyone should at some point step up to serve. However, if it occurs that a suitable chair cannot be identified among the tenured faculty, then the dean's office will manage the department. This management might involve combining the department with another department under an existing chair.

## Reference

Hecht, I. W. D., Higgerson, M. L., Gmelch, W. H., and Tucker, A. (1999). *The Department Chair as Academic Leader*. Phoenix, Arizona: The American Council on Education and The Oryx Press.

## Faculty Senate Recommendation:

# Regulation of the Position of Department Chair at Winston Salem State University

Approved by the WSSU Faculty Senate on March 17, 2011

- 1) While having elements of both, the position of department chair is to be considered more a senior faculty position rather than a junior administrative position, meaning that while chairs are to transmit the policies of the administration and explain them to the faculty, they are also to convey the interests and needs of the faculty to the administration.
- 2) The manner of appointment for each Department chair shall be determined by mutual consultation between the Dean of the College/School and the tenured and tenure track members of each department (agreeing on appointment, election, or rotation\*). Departments and Deans may agree to renegotiate after new deans are appointed.

No matter how the chairs are selected, they continue to serve at the pleasure of their Dean. Unless removed early by the Dean, chairs shall serve three year terms. Unless the position of chair in a particular department is served in rotation, there is no limit on the number of consecutive terms which can be served.

- 3) The position of chair should be filled by a tenured member of the department. Interim chairs may be non-tenured, but may serve for a maximum of one academic year. If the position is instead to be filled from outside the University, the person filling the position must be eligible for tenure on appointment, submit an application for tenure at the earliest possible time, and be awarded tenure to stay in the position. If not granted tenure, that chair is to be removed after the end of that academic year.
- 4) Chairs must be evaluated by the tenured and tenure-track faculty at least once each year. Deans should take these evaluations into account when considering reappointment/continued appointment of chairs.
- 5) Deans should take into account the amount of work required of department chairs. Department chairs who are overburdened with administrative work should either have some of their duties shared with an assistant chair or the department should be split.

\*'Rotation of the chair position' would mean going to the senior tenured (and willing) member who has not yet served as chair for the next three year term.