

NOTES FOR CHAIRS

(June 2024)

While the role of department chairperson is slightly different for each department, the primary responsibilities are similar. Chairs are responsible for the academic integrity of their departments' curriculum. They are leaders and mentors for departmental colleagues, both junior and senior, the stewards of the department's annual budget, and point persons for departmental events. They are advisors to students. They are the supervisors for administrative staff and co-workers for staff who clean and maintain the building or hall on which one works. In this position, they have the unique opportunity to get to know departmental colleagues more thoroughly and to learn how other academic departments function as they attend Division meetings and Chairs meetings with the Provost.

During an Orientation Meeting, usually held before classes start in the fall, representatives from various offices (Provost's Office, Human Resources, Title IX Office, Payroll, et al.) present important aspects of their responsibilities to new chairs. Some departments also have their own guides and yearly calendars; others have a list of suggestions for new chairs. Past or present chairs or present AAs in the division can also be a valuable resource for information.

Chairs are encouraged to consult the many resources available to better understand their mission. One good example is Jeffrey L. Buller's *The Essential Department Chair: A Comprehensive Desk Reference* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012). The Provost's Office also has funds available for chairs (or soon-to-be chairs) interested in attending workshops for chairs at professional conferences. The Provost and Dean of the Faculty, as well as the Associate Deans of the Faculty, are always available for thought-sharing and advice.

Chair/Coordinator Appointment and Succession Planning

Chairs are chosen by the Provost after consultation with each member of the department or program. The length of service may vary somewhat according to the circumstances, but the norm is three years. The expectation is that the chair position rotates through the faculty in the department (and similarly, through the faculty of a program when selecting coordinators). When a chair goes on leave, the Provost, after consultation with department members, will appoint another department member as Acting Chair. Occasionally, owing to special circumstances, departments may have co-chairs or a chair and an associate chair. These details must be worked out with the Provost.

Yearly Conversation with Junior Faculty

The Provost and Dean of the Faculty asks that Department Chairs have a formal conversation at the end of each academic year with each pre-tenure and multi-year temporary faculty member about their professional performance. The conversation should allow both the faculty member and the chair to share their perceptions of strengths and concerns about the faculty member's teaching, progress in scholarship, community service, and department citizenship (e.g., attendance at lectures and meetings, dependability in advising, courteousness in working with colleagues and staff). Significant concerns that arise in any of these areas should be discussed with the Provost.

Yearly Questionnaires on Teaching Staff

In early September, the Provost sends Department Chairs a questionnaire about a number of staffing decisions that the department is anticipating; these include reappointment decisions of various sorts (tenure-track, non-tenure track, regular part-time, etc.), tenure decisions, possible promotions, retirements, recruitments requested for new appointments, faculty leaves, leave replacements, etc. Departments will use this form to request permission to search for leave replacements and other (non-tenure) instructional staff needs.

Chairs will also need to list all tenured faculty members in the department below the rank of full professor, indicating the number of years (including the present one) they have been in the current rank. They must also list the next year of leave eligibility for all faculty in the department. The form notes that "normally first consideration" for possible promotion from Associate to Full Professor "occurs during the 8th year in rank."

Tenure-line requests are submitted to the Committee on Education Policy (CEP), who will send guidance in the Fall semester. For more information on the role of CEP, see the *Handbook for Instructional Staff*.

At the end of the year, the Provost asks Chairs to submit a report that details how each member of the faculty fulfilled his or her (normally 4 course) teaching load. This report should list for each faculty member: courses taught, enrollment in each course, and, if fewer than four courses were taught, why (e.g., administrative assignment, use of banked course for previous administrative release or thesis supervision, family leave, sabbatical, etc.).

Faculty Hiring

As outlined in the previous section, department chairs are responsible for submitting tenure-line proposals to the Committee on Education Policy and all other instructional staffing requests to the Provost's Office. Once approved, the Chair will work closely with the Associate Dean of the Faculty for Diversity, Recruitment, and Retention to begin the search process. Chairs will attend a training meeting in the Fall semester on best practices for promoting diversity and excellence in their search. In addition, search committees, particularly for tenure-track searches, should plan on having the Associate Dean of the Faculty for Diversity, Recruitment, and Retention attend an early meeting to discuss the search process for their field. Information on conducting a search can be found on the [Faculty Diversity and Excellence](#) section of the Provost's website.

Planning For Faculty Leaves Schedules

The policies with respect to sabbatical leaves are noted in the *Handbook for Instructional Staff*. Leaves are normally planned on a regular cycle and announced as part of the sophomore paper advising materials, which project course offerings for two years. Sometimes faculty will not know for certain in advance whether they will obtain second-semester funding or not, so chairs will need to note the leave schedule as tentative. Requests by faculty members to change their regular leave patterns need to be made to the Chair and Provost in a timely fashion so that appropriate planning can be made.

Some departments are "staffed for leave" (they have been given in the past additional permanent positions in exchange for giving up leave replacements) and do not receive leave replacements. When an unusually large number of faculty are scheduled for leave in the same year, the chair may need to negotiate alternative leave schedules with some faculty and the Provost. In departments that are not staffed for leave, faculty replacements are often (but not always) hired for those going on leave. Such replacements may be full or part-time. Occasionally departments will hire a replacement for rotating leaves over a period of two to three years. All of the arrangements must be negotiated with the Provost.

Reviews for Reappointment, Promotion, and Tenure

Chairs are responsible for managing all instructional staff and faculty reviews within their department. See the annual memo from the Provost on [Preparing Tenure, Reappointment, and Promotion Dossiers](#). The Provost's Office will contact departments about upcoming reviews in the Spring semester of the year leading up to the review. The Associate Dean of the Faculty for Diversity, Recruitment, and Retention will hold a training session for chairs managing an approved review at the end of this Spring semester.

Annual Meetings with President and Provost

At the discretion of the President and the Provost and Dean, each chair meets with the President and Provost to discuss department issues in general and members of the department in particular. Department chairs are asked to collect updated CVs and a list of their colleagues' most recent professional activities and send them to the Provost's office in advance of the meeting. The Provost also asks that chairs meet with individual department members before the meeting so that they will have a current picture of their activities and also a sense of any concerns or information that they would like to have brought to the meeting. These conversations need to include the faculty members' plans for the future as well as a review of the previous year. Many chairs find it helpful to ask faculty members for a written summary of the year's activities and plans for the future before the individual meetings.

In the spring of each year, the chair meets with the Provost to discuss salaries for department members and staff for the following year. Usually, there are parameters set for each rank or staff grade. These follow the guidelines agreed upon by the College Budget Committee.

Retirements

Chairs should remember that there is no mandatory retirement age and that they should be careful not to assume anything about potential retirements, especially in conversations with senior faculty, which could be viewed as exerting pressure on faculty to think about retirement. The age-discrimination laws protect senior employees from any practice that has the effect of coercing retirement.

Faculty members themselves may initiate conversations about possible retirement with department chairs or with the Provost. The Provost normally negotiates possibilities such as early or regular retirement with faculty members in close consultation with the chairs. The policies for various retirement possibilities are noted in the *Handbook for*

Instructional Staff in the “Retirement” section (III.A) and “Early Retirement” section (III.B). There are many options that can be used; Faculty members interested in such options should consult with the Provost at the earliest opportunity.

Medical Absences and Leaves

Faculty and staff who need to request medical leave should consult the policies in Section III.B of the *Handbook for Instructional Staff*. Chairs need to consult with the Provost about staffing the courses of faculty who are on medical leave for any length of time over two weeks. Given the often unpredictable nature of medical illnesses, such arrangements will often have to be made on an ad hoc basis. If faculty are out for a class meeting or two, the students can be assigned to do reading on their own or the class may be rescheduled. Normally after a maximum of one week, the class should be taken over by someone else, either a Swarthmore faculty member or someone from outside the college. Chairs should be in touch with and the Provost will need to negotiate proper compensation for this.

Other Leaves

Chairs should consult with the Provost when faculty or staff want to take a leave of absence. A variety of leaves is covered by section III.B.5 in the *Handbook for Instructional Staff*. These include sick leave (including medical conditions related to pregnancy), parental leave, personal leave, leave for a death in the family, jury duty, and leaves for military reserve duty.

Evaluation of Staff

Chairs should communicate with staff on a regular basis about their performance, making clear to them their areas of accomplishment and areas of needed development. Chairs are also responsible for yearly evaluations of staff. It is recommended that chairs meet with each staff member early in the academic year to set goals for the year. Evaluations at the end of the year provide a good opportunity to have a follow-up conversation with staff members about goals and accomplishments for the past year, areas in need of change, and plans for the future. The final evaluation report can be accomplished through procedures set by Human Resources. Chairs should consult previous performance evaluations to gauge aspects that have improved, remained the same, or gotten worse. Performance evaluations should include staff input and the perspectives of all faculty who work with staff. Human Resources is available for guidance and advice about handling evaluations and with the Provost, who is the ultimate supervisor of departmental AAs and ACs.