Executive Summary

This briefing lays out a process for preparing a new chair to assume the leadership of an academic department. I review processes and considerations for the transition between department chairs, including using the transition period for acculturating new chairs to the job, providing them with useful documentation and information, giving them access to department rules and processes, having them shadow the incumbent chair, and introducing them to key personnel. I then address how preparation of the new chair, psychologically and otherwise, may be conducted during the transition period. The briefing then examines how the new chair may be alerted to and prepared for the different communication skills needed in transitioning from faculty member to department chair, including those involved in persuasion, negotiation, and running meetings. I also describe the documentation of the department’s activities that incumbent chairs should prepare for their successors. A table giving a sample chronology of tasks throughout the academic year with links to supporting documents is included. Finally, I consider the sensitivities associated with having the previous chair “return to the ranks.”

INTRODUCTION

The job of department chair is widely acknowledged to be one of the most challenging positions in academia. The sources of difficulty are many and complex, but attention to the transition between chairs can make the job considerably less overwhelming at the beginning and set the trajectory for a smooth administration.

While graduate school prepares students for many facets of academic life, the skills it fosters are often antithetical to those needed by effective administrators. Graduate school prepares us to be autonomous and entrepreneurial on behalf of ourselves and to focus almost exclusively on the development of our own research and teaching agendas. In many departments, this skill set is honed as faculty members move toward tenure. In research universities, faculty are often strongly encouraged to minimize their service commitments in order to develop the research program necessary for tenure. While communal involvement may be more pronounced in institutions with a stronger emphasis on teaching, nonetheless, the development of professional norms for a successful faculty member generally focuses on the development of an individual’s scholarly portfolio.

The author is grateful to Brent Ruben and the editors of Stylus for invaluable suggestions for this article.
However, as department chair one is responsible for, and beholden to, faculty, staff, undergraduates, graduate students, teaching assistants, adjunct faculty, and multiple administrative and other constituencies throughout the university and beyond. In addition, the chair must be responsive to the expectations and demands of the dean. Thus the individualistic tendencies learned by graduate students and educated and cultivated in faculty members are orthogonal to the collectivist and altruistic vigilance necessary for chairing a department. The transition to chair involves a complete overhaul of a faculty member’s priorities and orientation as to what constitutes successful progress and appropriate conduct.

The new department chair acts not on his or her own behalf, but rather on behalf of the collective—whether that is the department, the decanal unit, or the institution as a whole. When the person who is chair states opinions, these are no longer private opinions, but may be taken to represent the view of the department chair; they will be examined for their possible implications for the department, unit, or university. Even small actions like lunch with colleagues, the (perhaps inadvertent) failure to greet one colleague as warmly as another, or leaving or not leaving the office door open during a meeting, can take on symbolic value once a faculty member becomes the department chair.

While a great deal has been written about leadership in academia, not much of this literature addresses the transition process for the newly appointed department chair. While his or her colleagues may breathe a sigh of relief that it is not them (this time), the new chair may feel at a loss as to how to implement the shift from “regular” faculty member (Hecht, 2006).

In this article I offer guidelines for the transition, examining the planning responsibilities of the outgoing chair and the preparations that may help incoming chairs, whether they come from within or outside the institution. I offer a perspective on how the incumbent and incoming chairs can work together to assist the incoming chair in the transition to administrative life and the challenges to be faced in assuming the department leadership.

ACCULTURATION OF THE NEW CHAIR

While many new chairs simply move into the office on July 1, several things can be done with the assistance of the incumbent chair and other key administrators and staff that can make the transition smoother for all concerned; prevent the reinventing of roles, procedures, and processes; and preempt some of the overwhelming psychological stress that new chairs can experience. Many facets of the job of department chair are invisible to regular faculty members, and so part of acculturating a new chair involves rendering the invisible visible. This can be accomplished by various methods.

Documenting Useful Information

Some incumbent chairs use the transition period to document all aspects of the job during their last year in office and to compile or update already existing procedures, materials, guidelines, and timelines. In summarizing areas of responsibility for discussion with the incoming chair, incumbent chairs may
find that their work can be organized into categories such as the following:

- **Operations.** In this area, the chair has varying degrees of oversight for such things as staff supervision, meetings, committees, reports, course scheduling, websites, and listservs. Each of these requires attention of different sorts—some daily, some weekly, others each semester or annually.

- **Personnel.** The chair is responsible for such personnel issues as promotion and reappointment, annual reviews of faculty and staff, sabbatical leave, recruitment and hiring, orientation and acculturation of new faculty, management and orientation of part-time lecturers and teaching assistants, merit increases, awards, retention activities (e.g., out-of-cycle pay increases), faculty workloads, retreats, space allocation, etc.

- **Budget.** The chair has ultimate responsibility for all departmental budget issues, including operational expenditures, faculty travel, faculty equipment, and the management of departmental funds.

- **Policies and procedures.** The chair needs to ensure that all departmental policies and procedures are being followed. These may include admissions to the undergraduate major and to the graduate program; advising of prospective, current, and transfer students; curriculum assessment and development; and graduation and certification of majors. The chair is also responsible for overseeing the development of new policies when needed.

- **Collaboration with constituencies outside the department.** The chair needs to deal not only with the various departmental constituencies, including faculty, staff, part-time lecturers, and graduate and undergraduate students, but also with a variety of constituencies outside the department. These would include other department chairs, graduate school administrators, those involved in certificate programs in which the department takes part, and staff in institutional offices, particularly the dean’s. The incoming chair needs to learn how collaboration with these constituencies can impact such areas as recruitment and hiring, budget issues, and the arrangements for special events and conferences.

- **Development and outreach.** The chair may reach out to the alumni base of former undergraduates and graduate students as part of bringing the department’s work to the public and further developing a base of support for the department. In addition, the chair should forge links with professional, funding, governmental, and corporate constituencies for financial support and involvement in some departmental activities.

In addition to addressing each of these work areas and their applications for the department, part of the discussion with the incoming chair should include a review of the supporting documents that are available for each of these activities and the kind of staff support that the new chair should expect or require.

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The responsibilities of the department chair tend to change over time in an organic way, along with the various constituencies served and procedures of the university. Thus materials prepared to document the job of chair may need frequent updating, and those that were prepared for the current chair may not fit the job as it evolved under his or her tenure. In addition, different chairs may organize the job differently, or focus more on some aspects of the job and less on others, or organize the summary materials differently, so it is expected that the new chair will approach the timeline as a living document to be adjusted as necessary.
The timeline should lay out the day-to-day requirements of the job, what can be expected from staff support, and what decisions have to be made and when. It should also link each task to the documents that have been developed to support it. In presenting such a timeline to the incoming chair, followed by a full discussion of the details in it, the incumbent chair can prepare the successor for the daily activities of the position, convey expectations regarding workload, and indicate the level of assistance the new chair can expect to receive from staff and others.

Many documents used or distributed by chairs are reusable by their successors. If the chair is fortunate, many of these routine memoranda will be maintained and sent out by staff. Chairs with less diligent support may have generated a large number of such materials that can be passed on to the next chair. Materials of this kind can be hot-linked to notes on procedures documented in procedural summaries of the sort found in Table 1. It may be necessary for the incumbent chair to render some of the documents anonymous. The documents can then be put on a DVD along with materials summarizing the job for the use of the next chair. Table 1 presents an example of a chair's chronological timeline that could be added to and adapted to summarize the work of any academic department.

Understanding Rules and Processes

Some universities have strong support for the administrative leadership of the department. At Rutgers, for instance, the university-level Academic Leadership Program maintains a website and presents monthly workshops for administrators at the chair and dean level. In addition, the program maintains a website summarizing information about and links to many of the key resources for university administrators: http://academicleadership.rutgers.edu/index.php.

At most institutions, formal rules and procedures exist for such key activities as promotions, merit pay, faculty and staff evaluations, student disciplinary actions, etc. During the transition period, incumbent chairs should point new chairs to the resources they will need for these procedures.

The incoming chair should use the transition period to review as many of these procedures as possible. The new chair should at the very least know what is in these documents and how to find them before assuming office.

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While sometimes they may feel like an encumbrance, these procedures protect all concerned by routinizing processes. If regular meetings of administrators occur, incoming chairs should be invited to join them some time before officially beginning the job, as this will provide an opportunity to be introduced to others and begin to learn the institution's procedures and processes as well as to know the people who will help them to implement them.

Shadowing

An incoming chair who is already part of the department can be introduced to the many facets of the job over the course of the academic year prior to the start of his or her appointment. However, since both chair and faculty lives are invariably overwhelmingly busy, it is advisable to set up a regular weekly appointment for the duration of the year, and to target some key activities (e.g., course scheduling, promotion activities, merit pay, search, etc.) for which the incoming chair can "shadow" the current chair, to become familiar with issues that he or she will need to consider as chair. A chair who is coming in from outside the institution should consider communicating weekly with the current chair as a way of "distance shadowing."

MANAGING THE TRANSITION

While this may seem like a large investment of time, time spent upfront can help the chair enter the job psychologically and logistically prepared, and can save time in the long run, preempting troubles of many sorts that can result from decisions based on insufficient preparation or knowledge. Further, recurrent meetings of this kind will reveal to whom the chair goes for various forms of advice and resources. These approaches tend to become second nature, and therefore invisible to the incumbent over time, but knowing whom to go to for help and information is a crucial element of the job that can prove to be a deep mystery for the non-initiated newcomer.

Similarly, the shadowing process should enable the incoming chair to become familiar with the recurrent data and resources he or she will need, including such basic statistics as number of faculty and areas of specialization, amounts of grant funding and agencies providing the grants, number of undergraduate majors, number of course sections offered, number of students
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<tr>
<td>Regularly</td>
<td>Approve financial transactions. Usually when prompted by staff</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Local website</td>
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| Monthly                   | **Accountability report**  
Send reminder to faculty listserv on 12th of month (when prompted by Dean's Office)                                                                                                       | Chair                      | Monthly & annual accountability reports                                  |
<p>| Monthly, 2nd week of month | Remind faculty re. department meeting. Circulate tentative agenda, and solicit additional agenda items                                                                                             | Chair                      | Department meeting agendas                                                |
| Monthly                   | Meet w/ Financial Assistant to go over budget                                                                                                                                                    | Chair                      |                                                                         |
| Monthly                   | Meet w/ Graduate Director(s) to get updates re. graduate programs                                                                                                                                 | Chair, Graduate Director(s)|                                                                         |
| Monthly                   | Attend Academic Leadership Program                                                                                                                                                                  | Chair                      | Links to University Materials                                            |
| 3 times a year            | <strong>Course Scheduling</strong>—(Preliminary: Oct. for Summer; Dec. for Fall, April for Spring. Final: Jan. for Summer; early March for Fall; early October for Spring)                                            | Undergrad Director (implementation) &amp; Chair (policy) in collaboration w/ Grad Director(s)| Scheduling materials                                                   |
| 3 times a year            | About 1 month after the semester, read instructor evaluations, and pass on to Undergrad support staff member for filing &amp; distribution to faculty                                                                 | Chair, Follow up w/ undergrad director &amp; instructors as needed | Student evaluations distributed by Undergrad Support staff.             |
| Each semester, Jan/July  | Update listserv—department, faculty, teaching assistants, Ph.D. students, Master's students, summer faculty, part-time lecturers/adjuncts                                                                 | Faculty support staff prompted by Chair |                                                                         |
| Summer                    | Welcome new faculty (see below. May 15). Invite new faculty to part-time lecturer orientation                                                                                            | Chair                      | New faculty needs                                                        |
| July 1                    | Schedule all department meetings and annual mentoring meeting day, including tenure and promotion meeting(s) for September, and reappointment meeting(s) for January, and notify faculty and Personnel Committee | Chair w/ staff assistance | University calendar online—(avoid national conferences &amp; spring break) Meeting calendars to send to faculty in July |
| July                      | Performance evaluation meeting with Director of Undergraduate Studies                                                                                                                             | Chair and Director of Undergraduate Studies | Undergraduate Director job description                                    |
| July                      | Plan for new computers for faculty, roughly every 3 years                                                                                                                                         | Chair w/ Technology Dean | Timeline of faculty computers                                             |
| July                      | Update faculty handbook                                                                                                                                                                             | Chair                      | Faculty Handbooks                                                        |
| July                      | Allocate TA assignments                                                                                                                                                                             | Chair w/ Graduate Director | TA allocations                                                           |
| July                      | Check that websites have been added for new faculty, and updated for current faculty                                                                                                               | Chair prompts Faculty Support Staff member | Faculty website materials                                                 |
| August 1                  | Allocate travel allowance to faculty (as part of preparing budget)                                                                                                                                | Chair works w/ financial staff member. Notify Faculty Support staff, and faculty | Chair Handbook p. 59 Direct faculty to online travel reimbursement forms |
| August                    | Construct committees and committee charges. Set up schedules for committees                                                                                                                        | Chair                      | Committee materials                                                      |
| August                    | Book annual conference reception room and grad school open house. Decide “theme” or honoree for reception.                                                                                           | Graduate Director reminded by chair | Links to materials from prior years                                      |</p>
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<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Prepare <strong>new faculty introductions</strong> for first unit faculty meeting</td>
<td>Chair—solicit “blurbs” from new faculty</td>
<td>New faculty intros</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of August</td>
<td><strong>Part-time lecturers orientation.</strong> Send reminder to Dean and PTLs mid-August, and day before.</td>
<td>Chair and Undergrad Director</td>
<td>PTL Orientation materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1</td>
<td>Once tenure candidate’s materials (including letters) are in, assign 2-person <strong>reading committees</strong> (teaching, scholarship, service), w/ deadline for circulation of summaries</td>
<td>Chair and Personnel Committee</td>
<td>Tenure materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Update national conference <strong>promotional materials</strong> (poster, brochures), get duplicated</td>
<td>Chair and Graduate Director w/ Faculty or Grad Student Support Staff member</td>
<td>grad brochure &amp; poster health comm brochure Comm PhDs listed by year (back of flier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Develop conference party <strong>invitation &amp; update letter</strong></td>
<td>Chair in collaboration with graduate director</td>
<td>National Conference recruitment &amp; party materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td><strong>Send letter of notification</strong> to candidates for reappointment. E-mail candidate(s) timeline for submission of CV, summary form, and narrative</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Links to University Materials. Sample tenure narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-September</td>
<td>Hold <strong>tenure and promotion</strong> meeting. Complete requisite forms, circulate for revisions, and forward to Dean</td>
<td>Chair and Personnel Committee</td>
<td>Tenure &amp; Promotion materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Begin discussions with faculty re. sabbatical. Negotiate if necessary re. which semester, etc.</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Links to University Materials. Faculty teaching load, including when sabbaticals were taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Solicit nominations for <strong>Department Awards</strong> (teaching, research service, PTL &amp; TA)</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Awards records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td><strong>Merit process begins, prompted by Dean</strong></td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Merit materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td><strong>Welcome to the major</strong>—give new majors a brief introduction to the department—What faculty do, what you do, what your expectations are of them</td>
<td>Director of Undergrad Studies, Chair, and Peer advisors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct 15</td>
<td>Send out <strong>annual convention reception invitation and update letter</strong> to graduate student alumni. Distribute invitation to faculty for distribution (via e-mail and paper)</td>
<td>Chair and Graduate Director</td>
<td>NCA materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct/Nov</td>
<td>Solicit <strong>sabbatical applications.</strong> Usually prompted by Dean.</td>
<td>Chair or staff</td>
<td>Links to University Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1</td>
<td>Begin planning end of semester party—find location, etc.</td>
<td>Chair and host faculty member</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td><strong>Welcome to the major</strong>—give a brief introduction to the department—What faculty do, what you do, what your expectations are of majors, etc.</td>
<td>Director of Undergrad Studies, Chair, and Peer advisors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td><strong>Prepare brief narratives for department awards</strong> to be read at Dec. unit meeting</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Awards materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 7 (or before break if possible)</td>
<td>**Assign 2-person reading committees for reappointment materials (teaching, scholarship, service), and remind Personnel Committee re. meeting date</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Sample reappointment materials</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 15</td>
<td>Begin process of evaluating Ph.D. applicants for funding</td>
<td>Remind Graduate Director</td>
<td>TA materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 15</td>
<td>Begin student awards process (support staff will do the paper work once the awards are decided)</td>
<td>Remind Awards Committee Chair</td>
<td>Undergraduate Awards materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third or last week in January</td>
<td>Hold reappointment meeting. Complete and circulate Department narrative, and forward to Dean</td>
<td>Chair and Personnel Committee</td>
<td>Sample reappointment materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Begin to develop list of potential letter writers for candidates for promotion, and start forms for those potential writers</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Links to University Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Send 30-day notice letter to candidates for promotion</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Links to University Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Send sample narratives to candidates for promotion</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Sample narrative 1 Sample narrative 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Give deadlines for CV, narrative and packet to be sent out (May 15), and tenure packet (Sept. 1), to candidates for promotion</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Welcome to the major—give new majors a brief introduction to the department—What faculty do, what you do, what your expectations are of them</td>
<td>Dir. of Undergrad Studies, Chair &amp; Peer advisors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March/April</td>
<td>Begin to plan for following year's search—plan re: positions, appoint search chair, etc.</td>
<td>Chair with Personnel Committee, then Dean, then department</td>
<td>Department Search Process Documents Other search materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Construct space projections for next year</td>
<td>Chair w/ committee &amp; Associate Dean</td>
<td>Materials re. space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>Plan end of semester party</td>
<td>Chair, or appointed faculty member</td>
<td>Spring 06 Party invitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>Remind untenured faculty and Personnel Committee re. date of annual review. Solicit CV, summary form, and annual narrative from faculty to be reviewed. Solicit those tenured faculty who have been in rank long enough to be reviewed.</td>
<td>Chair</td>
<td>Annual review materials Regulations re. eligibility for promotion—Links to University Materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>Begin to close out Operating Budget. Work w/ Financial Assistant to determine which outstanding amounts can be reclaimed.</td>
<td>Chair w/ financial staff member</td>
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<tr>
<td>April/May</td>
<td>Allocate TAs to courses</td>
<td>Chair w/ Graduate Director and Undergrad Director</td>
<td>TA allocation materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 15</td>
<td>Start preparing for new faculty—get e-mail addresses, websites, offices, etc. Revise faculty handbook.</td>
<td>Chair and support staff</td>
<td>Things new faculty need Faculty handbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd or 3rd week of May</td>
<td>Attend awards ceremony, convocation, and university commencement</td>
<td>Chair and faculty (encourage faculty to attend)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>June 1</td>
<td>Renew national organization membership ahead of July 31 job ad deadline</td>
<td>Chair reminds staff</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Plan date for PTL orientation for end of August</td>
<td>Chair and Undergrad Director; check date with Dean</td>
<td>PTL materials &amp; orientation handout</td>
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served, number of students graduating each year, number of graduate students in Ph.D. and/or Master’s programs, and recurrent processes, such as travel reimbursement, funding for conferences abroad, administration of course evaluations, etc.

The shadowing process should crystallize the incoming chair’s thinking during the transition process in terms of the kinds of changes he or she might want to make:

- Does he or she want to place more emphasis on engaging junior faculty?
- Should more or less time be spent in meetings?
- Should the amount of documentation and/or assessment and mentoring (of faculty, teaching, staff, etc.) increase or decrease?
- Should meetings be more or less formal?
- Should the committee structure and functioning be adjusted?
- Should there be fewer or more committees?
- Will outreach and development activities increase or decrease?

As these questions occur to incoming chairs, they should use the transition period to discuss them in meetings or lunches with members of the faculty and staff and, if they involve resources or new directions for the department, with the dean.

**Key Personnel**

As part of preparing materials for the new chair, the current chair can construct a list of key contact personnel in the unit, university, and beyond. The nature of the relationship between the chair (as representative of the department) and these key external constituents should be specified. (These contacts should also be notified shortly before the changeover to the new chair, and furnished with the incoming chair’s start date, e-mail address, phone number, etc.). It is particularly important to provide the incoming chair with a clear understanding of the current nature of the working relationships with the key leaders in the department and unit, and the office staff, alerting him or her both to pending issues or actions and problems or successes in which they have been involved.

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**Office Staff**

The working and personal relationship between the department chair and the office staff can be crucial to the success of the new chair, but it is often underestimated by department chairs for whom supervision of this kind is new and difficult. Unless faculty have run large grants or research teams, they are often uncomfortable in, and unfamiliar with, the role of “boss,” but this is the role in which they will be perceived by the office staff. Being department chair is in some ways like being in a management position. The switch to the role of managing others, telling them what to do, helping them to organize their work, and sometimes correcting their mistakes is a significant shift for many faculty members.

Well-organized and effectively supervised staff can be motivated to be of enormous assistance to a department chair and in many ways can make the difference between an administrator who sinks beneath the weight of petty administrative details and one who is able to work on larger initiatives that will move the department forward (see Delmont, 2007). Paying proper respect to the importance of the work done by the office staff, setting clear expectations for job performance and goals, and establishing a strong relationship with staff members so that they feel able to share problems that they discern in the administrative operation of the department, should begin as soon as the new chair is selected.

Office staff should be included in those notified of the selection of the new chair, and the new chair should make a point of displaying early to the staff his or her regard for the importance of their job. The work done by the office staff in attending to paperwork, timelines, notification, room booking, meeting arrangements, etc., can assist chairs enormously in the management of their own time. The incoming chair should consider meeting with office staff individually after officially taking office to hear any concerns or advice they may offer.

In addition to hearing any concerns that staff members might express, meeting with staff during the transition period will give the chair-elect the opportunity to become more familiar with the details of their responsibilities. It is crucial that the chair have a full understanding of what each staff member does, with whom they work,
and who their contacts are, both in and out of the department.

In addition, the transition period provides a useful opportunity for incoming chairs to familiarize themselves with what is on file in the department office or offices, both so as to know just what records the department keeps and to be able to retrieve things as necessary. Knowing what is in the department files will also ensure that the chair does not attempt to reconstruct documentation that already exists.

The chair should also meet with the staff member responsible for the department budget. It is advisable to seek both the budget staff member's and the chair's perspectives on managing the budget. In addition, the incoming chair should meet with the unit's budget officer. Bringing together this variety of perspectives should enable the incoming chair to use the transition time to become familiar with the budget cycle, customary expenditures, usual financial demands from faculty, variety of accounts, etc. This preparation will assist the new chair in deploying the budget to the best advantage of the department and its members once he or she takes office, as the greater the familiarity new chairs have with the budget, the more they will be able to deploy these resources with flexibility and creativity. The transition time gives the new chair who understands the budget the opportunity to re-examine and, if necessary, prepare to adjust current department policies, such as those regarding how travel and research funds should be distributed.

PREPARING TO LEAD

In addition to providing the material support noted above, incumbents can assist incoming chairs by preparing them to lead the department, psychologically and in other ways. The current chair can assist the incoming chair by explaining expectations with regard to level of involvement, the climate and culture of the department, major material problems, issues and personalities (including "squeaky wheelism"); issues of confidentiality, and communication practices. We address each in turn.

Level of Involvement

Each department and unit has its set of expectations for the level of involvement of a department chair. In a small, established department in a stable unit with excellent staff support, the expectations for the chair's level of involvement may be low. It could be as little as expecting one day a week of hands-on chair work in the office, while most other duties are managed online. This situation is a rarity, however. On the other end of the involvement spectrum, chairs may be expected to be available and in their offices during regular office hours and beyond, five days a week, and available via e-mail with a very quick turnaround, even during weekends and holidays and while the chair is traveling. Many chairs carry wireless devices that allow them to remain in contact at all times.

While each chair will set his or own level of involvement, which may also vary according to time of year, the incumbent chair should convey a sense of the expectations of involvement from the different constituencies to which the chair is beholden, including the faculty and the dean. For example:

- Does the chair schedule the meetings for the year and notify faculty, or is this done by support staff?

It is not uncommon for the incoming chair to adjust the level of involvement relative to his or her predecessor, but this is best done with an awareness of the current level of expectation.

Incumbent chairs should also acquaint their successors with the department's and the dean's expectations regarding the chair's research program. Some departments make extra funds available to enable their chairs to maintain their research programs. The current chair needs to convey these opportunities along with suggested strategies for continuing research while running a department. These may include protecting one day a week to work at home and during the summer coming to the office in the afternoons only.

Climate and Culture of the Department

The incumbent should be explicit about the current climate and culture of the department, particularly as it pertains to such matters as how decisions are made and how resources are allocated. If department members have expectations that decisions will be made collaboratively, but the incoming chair favors more top-down decision making, the new chair may engender hostility, and the incumbent chair should make sure that he or she is forewarned. This consideration is important if the chair is coming from outside the institution or the department, but it is also crucial for a chair who is selected from the ranks, as he or she may be expected (even if unreasonably) not to make fundamental changes that violate the department's current sense of itself. The issue is not that change needs to be avoided, but rather that it cannot be
implemented without consideration of the department culture and the risks involved.

Incoming chairs should therefore be apprised of the political, intellectual, and social expectations of the department if they are joining it from elsewhere. What expectations do faculty have for involvement in the program and policy development of the department? Are there current plans for program development? What kinds of development and visioning have been under way during the incumbent chair's administration? When are colloquia ordinarily scheduled? Who is usually involved? What kinds of social events are the norm? Are graduate students included? What is the current status of the relationships between junior and senior faculty, between graduate students and faculty? Being aware of current sets of expectations will allow the new chair to adjust to them and to initiate change carefully and in the context of the current culture.

A new chair may be brought in specifically to revamp a department whose reputation or progress has declined. However, even a department that is successfully fulfilling its mission benefits from the vision of new leadership. Therefore, part of the appraisal an incoming chair makes involves assessing areas where his or her vision can contribute something new, or build on existing foundations to guide the department in new directions. The transition period affords the new chair the opportunity to investigate the culture and to develop a sense of what needs to be done to further the department’s goals and reputation.

In meetings with faculty members during the transition period, the incoming chair should raise questions about where they feel the department could do better and where there are opportunities for new ventures or for building on existing structures. In this way new chairs can fashion a vision for where they want to take the department to address its needs and opportunities. In addition, these conversations with current faculty could help incoming chairs to identify those with whom they might collaborate in leading the department forward with a new or revamped vision, including those who might take on a departmental leadership position in the new administration.

The incoming chair would also be well advised to raise these matters with the dean, specifically regarding the department's strengths and weaknesses.

"A new chair may be brought in specifically to revamp a department whose reputation or progress has declined. However, even a department that is successfully fulfilling its mission benefits from the vision of new leadership."

MAJOR PROBLEMS

Issues that the new chair will need to deal with or monitor should be made known during the transition period. These include, for instance, unresolved problems in meeting student demand for classes; a change in procedures for admission to the major; upcoming external review; financial issues; and private agreements made with faculty by the current chair for extra resources that extend into the tenure of the incoming chair.

There may also be ongoing personnel issues—for example, inappropriate sexual conduct, drinking, or inappropriate use of e-mail. While these matters are deeply private, if the current chair has had to deal with them, it is likely that the next chair will also need to, and if aware of the problem he or she may be able to take some steps to address it before it recurs. In addition, if any informal agreements, memos of understanding, or formalized legal documents have been generated, such as signed agreements with faculty or graduate students, or confidential memoranda of record after a problem has been addressed officially by the current chair, these should be passed on to the incoming chair.

ISSUES AND PERSONALITIES

The matter of private agreements with faculty deserves some attention, as they can prove to be a particular liability for new chairs. During the transition period, it is important that the incoming chair establish with the incumbent what agreements exist and what their nature is. Was an agreement made in writing? Was it specified that it was intended to be operational only during the tenure of the current chair? Was the agreement private, or more generally known among the
(senior?) faculty? Was it part of a hiring or retention agreement (in which case its status may be different, and should not be altered without careful consideration and consultation with the dean)? If the agreement involves money or teaching allocation, has the budgetary situation changed since the agreement was made?

Each of these has a bearing on the status of the agreement during the tenure of the incoming chair. The current and incoming chair should discuss any such agreements with careful consideration of their status during the new chair’s tenure, as there is much debate about the extent to which new chairs are bound by agreements entered into by their predecessors. Some of these matters may also require discussion with the dean regarding how to proceed.

*Squeaky Wheelism.* Most chairs say they hear a lot from some faculty members, whether it is to complain or to seek some special privilege, and little from others. It is not uncommon for a new chair to mistake frequency of complaint for importance of complaint. The incumbent chair should tell the incoming chair who to look out for in this regard, although it is possible that other faculty members will choose to test the new chair and begin to squeak.

*Confidentiality.* Different institutions have widely differing norms of confidentiality. Certain procedures, such as promotion and merit pay, may demand complete confidentiality from participants in some institutions, and no confidentiality in others. Incumbent chairs should make sure their successors understand the department’s rules and expectations for confidentiality. They should also inform them about how confidentiality breaches have been dealt with in the past.

*Communication practices.* One of the most difficult transitions for a faculty member who becomes a chair is learning the differences in the way one relates to colleagues, which requires a seismic shift in communication practices. During the transition period, the incumbent chair should watch for opportunities to share communication strategies with the incoming chair, while the new chair needs to prepare to operate at three communication levels at once: the interpersonal level, the institutional level, and the symbolic level.

> “The matter of private agreements with faculty deserves some attention, as they can prove to be a particular liability for new chairs. . . . it is important that the incoming chair establish with the incumbent what agreements exist and what their nature is.”

1. *The interpersonal level:* This is the level of everyday relationships, where caring about one another, being concerned personally for the person you are talking with, whether a student, fellow faculty member, dean, or prospective hire, takes precedence, and we attend to their personal well-being and our relationship with them. This is the typical way in which we interact as a colleague or friend.

2. *The institutional level:* When you interact in an official capacity, you must be mindful of the institution on whose behalf you speak and shape what you say accordingly. For chairs, the institution on whose behalf they speak is most often the department, although it could also be the school or university. The chair’s perspective in dealing with a student, fellow faculty member, dean, or prospective hire shifts completely when operating at the institutional rather than the interpersonal level. For a prospective new hire, at the interpersonal level, the chair may want to get them the deal that will make them happiest. However, what is friendly communication on the interpersonal level can be interpreted as favoritism on the institutional level.

Thinking institutionally, the chair needs to consider how communicating a special “deal” for a new faculty member would be perceived by others members of the department and what the larger implications of the deal might be on his or her ability to lead the department. The institutional level perspective therefore changes what may be the right thing to do for, and say to, the prospective hire. Throughout their interactions, new chairs must become accustomed to thinking institutionally and asking themselves whether what they plan to do or say, or are being asked to do or say, is in the best interests of the department, unit, or university.

Learning to think institutionally rather than personally, and to implement this thinking in actual interaction, can be a significant challenge for new chairs. It is a mindset they should develop before assuming the chair position.

3. *The symbolic level:* While chairs are working and thinking at the interpersonal and institutional level, they also need to bear in mind that their
conduct carries symbolic weight. If a chair cuts a special deal with a prospective hire, it may be seen to represent the view that their work is more important or valuable, even if the chair feels he or herself to be acting on the faculty’s mandate to do what it takes to hire the best candidate.

Simple actions have symbolic implications when one acts as a department chair. Starting and ending meetings on time shows respect for colleagues’ time; scheduling reasonable amounts of time for discussion of important issues reveals respect for colleagues’ opinions; showing up at an event may be understood to lend it importance; and the amount of time spent in the office may be read as emblematic of commitment to the job.

A corollary of the symbolic level of the chair’s communication is the matter of “face”—that is, the deference that the chair gives to and receives from another (Goffman, 1967). This has particular relevance when one gives or receives criticism. In everyday interaction, criticism is both hard to give and hard to receive, but this is even more true for the chair because of the symbolic value that this criticism carries. Therefore, if a department chair must confront a faculty member with some wrongdoing, it is particularly important for the chair to attend to the other’s “face” and show respect for the faculty member being confronted. Additionally, when the chair receives criticism, he or she should work hard to accept it constructively and nondefensively.

It requires a juggling act on a par with the other juggling acts that make up the chair role to bear these three levels of communication in mind simultaneously and to see beyond the seductive interpersonal level to which we are most accustomed. During the transition period, incoming chairs need to be thinking of these communication issues and how they will be handling them, and incumbent chairs can help by sharing their experience with the incoming chair.

In addition to mastering the skills needed to operate simultaneously at these three levels of communication, productivity of meetings. Careful planning of the goal of the meeting and the process for achieving the goal, including establishing norms for participation, will assist greatly in the accomplishment of the goal and the satisfaction and buy-in of department members. Faculty expectations will have been set during the administration of the prior chair, if significant changes are to be made, the transition may be facilitated by notifying faculty ahead of time if possible, or at the beginning of the first meeting.

Persuasion and Negotiation
Department chairs must often persuade or negotiate with colleagues and others to induce them to do tasks for the good of the department, unit, or university that they may not initially wish to do. This may include anything from taking on a new class to working on a time-consuming committee or heading a Search Committee or Accreditation Review Team. Chairs may also need to persuade their colleagues of the advisability of taking on a new initiative. Therefore it is crucial that chairs develop skills in persuading and negotiating with others.

Incoming chairs should observe colleagues who are excellent persuaders during the transition period, and they should also consult written resources regarding persuasion and negotiation. Examples of such resources include Fisher, Ury, and Patton (2003), and Lewicki, Barry, and Saunders (2006). Successful persuasion makes use of data (both historical and with future projections) to support the case being made. The research indicates that displaying an understanding of the interests and concerns of the people you are trying to persuade is also crucial. It is also often helpful to find a way to show
people how the decision you are promoting is in their interest, not just that of the department. A small investment of time in acquainting yourself with meeting processes and persuasion and negotiation techniques before assuming the position of department chair could make the transition considerably more manageable.

IMPLEMENTING THE CHANGEOVER
In the weeks leading up to the end of the last semester before the incoming chair assumes the job, several steps can be taken that may smooth the transition.

First, particularly if the new chair is a current member of the department, he or she may ask to address the faculty at the last faculty meeting of the year with a vision statement of possible future directions for the department. This gives the faculty the summer to adjust to a new set of expectations and goals. The incoming chair should also bear in mind that at this time gratitude may be expressed to the outgoing chair, and some sort of symbolic gift such as a plaque may be given. It often falls to the incoming chair, with staff assistance, to organize this gift.

While the new chair may be allowed to suggest a vision for the future at the last faculty meeting of the year, that meeting also provides an opportunity for the outgoing chair to express his or her gratitude to the department and to review what they have accomplished together. The agenda of this last meeting therefore requires sensitivity to both the outgoing chair and the incoming chair, because it is important to avoid making the incumbent chair feel that the department is eagerly anticipating moving on, while at the same time welcoming the new chair and giving him or her an opportunity to begin to lay the groundwork for the new administration.

Meeting with the Dean
The current chair should tell the incoming chair what it is like working with the dean, including the difficulties and successes he or she has experienced, and the dean’s working style. Toward the end of the semester prior to assuming office, the incoming chair might be included in meetings with the dean where discussions involve upcoming issues and concerns with which he or she will have to deal. Incoming chairs may also begin to meet on their own with the dean to discuss such issues and to begin to develop a working relationship.

“The research indicates that displaying an understanding of the interests and concerns of the people you are trying to persuade is also crucial. . . . find a way to show people how the decision you are promoting is in their interest, not just that of the department.”

Getting to Know Faculty and Staff
Chairs coming from another institution should make efforts to get to know faculty and staff members at the new institution during the transition period. If possible, the incoming chair can begin this process by attending one or more faculty meetings in the semester prior to becoming chair. If physical presence at the meetings is impractical, the possibility of attending remotely using iChat, Skype, or AIM videoconferencing via a laptop and webcam should be considered. The new chair, whether he or she is from the department or not, should consider using the semester or summer before the first academic year in office to meet privately with faculty and staff to hear their individual concerns. In such meetings small matters that are easily addressed may come to light, as will larger issues that will face the new chair and the department. These meetings will also provide the incoming chair with the opportunity to assess the need, and seek ideas for, a refashioned vision for the department’s development during the new chair’s tenure.

Incoming chairs may also be invited or ask to take part in conversations about decisions that would impact their first year in office, such as making teaching and teaching assistant assignments, planning meeting schedules for the upcoming semester, allocating travel funds, etc. This must also proceed with sensitivity to incumbent chairs to avoid making them feel redundant before the actual end of their terms.

Communicating the Change
In the final month before the transition takes place, outgoing chairs should write to all internal and external constituencies, expressing appreciation for their work together (and for their help and support as appropriate), introducing the incoming chair, and giving contact information. This note, adapted to different constituencies as necessary, should be sent to faculty (including adjuncts), staff, graduate students, undergraduates, institutional and administrative contacts around the university (including the dean), and other chairs and program directors with whom the chair has worked.

Incoming chairs may also wish to write to these constituencies, introducing themselves and noting the opportunities they see for the department and its future. If they have already decided
on changes in staff or have settled on other changes or initiatives that do not need further discussion with the department before being introduced, they might also announce them in this communication.

**ASSUMING THE POSITION**

Upon assuming the chair, the new incumbent should form committees and notify faculty of their assignments quickly (using the department by-laws and precedent as guidelines) and should consider announcing any significant changes in style or substance up front. New chairs often react against the administrative style of their predecessors, and departments often want them to do so, so that an overly consensus chair may be followed by an overly directive one. Incoming chairs are well advised to consider the style of their predecessor, the wishes of the department, and their own stylistic predispositions, in this context. In most cases, the best course is not to swing too sharply in either direction and to keep a balanced vision in leading the department.

A particular challenge for new chairs is assessing advice from others and finding appropriate mentors and advisors. If it is not already part of the department’s structure, new chairs can consider forming an “advisory cabinet” or Executive Committee that consists of key advisors. Often the chair solicits advice informally by soliciting multiple opinions. This carries some risks, however, as those who have been consulted may be disappointed if their advice is not followed, and the chair needs to be careful not to signal agreement with advice during or shortly after the transition until a course of action has become clear. The outgoing chair may continue to be a source of advice and support after the changeover has occurred, and can be a useful resource in assessing who can provide helpful advice on particular issues. Other department chairs can also supply advice and comfort.

**ACCOMMODATION BETWEEN NEW AND FORMER CHAIR**

A challenge for new chairs is establishing themselves in their own right, particularly when the former chair was well liked and remains in the department. The former chair should be sensitive to this issue and may need to exercise restraint during faculty meetings so as not to seem to “interfere” with the new chair’s ability to make decisions, develop policy, and implement changes. Outgoing chairs need to give new chairs “space” to develop their own leadership style and to refrain from seeming to criticize or undermine them. The former chair may also need to be forceful in directing faculty to the new chair should they approach him or her with “chair domain” problems or issues.

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**PREPARING FOR SUCCESSION**

If a previous chair has not constructed useful documentation of the chair position, the new chair would be well advised to construct it as he or she learns the job. As noted earlier, many aspects of the role become invisible as they become familiar. While the start of the new term seems to be a rather incongruous time to begin to prepare for succession, the new chair may find that documenting his or her experience in the form of a brief daily journal or set of notes will prove invaluable for the transition of the next chair, in addition to providing a useful mechanism for processing the ongoing experience. As the term progresses, the new chair may wish to cultivate faculty members who might serve as chair when his or her term is complete.
CONCLUSION

In this briefing I have reviewed processes and considerations for the transition between department chairs that are crucial for the success of new chairs, including the following:

- Selecting a new chair
- Acculturating the new chair via documentation, rules, and processes
- Shadowing
- Introducing key personnel
- Psychological preparation including setting expectations for level of involvement
- Climate and culture of the department
- Major material problems
- Issues and personalities
- "Squeaky wheelism"
- Confidentiality
- Communication practices comprising "levels" of communication
- Communication techniques such as persuasion, negotiation, and running meetings

While attending to each of these considerations during the transition period between chairs may be somewhat time-consuming for both the current and incoming chair, time spent preparing the new chair in these ways during the transition should provide the new chair with a solid material and psychological basis for assuming the new position, should serve the department well in terms of facilitating the smooth running of its operations, and should prepare the new chair to take the helm without being completely overwhelmed with the details of the job.

As with parenthood, being chair is different from the anticipation of being chair, and things don’t look the same from the chair position as they do from the position of onlookers. The guidelines and suggestions presented here should assist the transition of a new chair so that assuming the chair position can be less of a rude awakening.

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ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY


This book describes constructive techniques for negotiating and making collective decisions. It includes techniques for determining what other people want and for devising solutions that create a "win" for all parties.


This volume takes an experiential approach and explores the major concepts and theories of the psychology of bargaining and negotiation and the dynamics of interpersonal and intergroup conflict and its resolution. It contains approximately 50 readings, 32 exercises, 9 cases, and 5 questionnaires.


This book surveys, summarizes, and synthesizes a broad cross section of the contemporary writings on leadership. It organizes that literature into five broad competency areas, each comprising a number of themes, and provides a Leadership Competencies Scorecard Inventory that allows readers to assess their leadership knowledge and skills in 35 critical competency areas. The Leadership Competencies Scorecard is helpful in assessing and developing leadership skills, but it is also a tool for planning, developing, and implementing leadership development programs. The book includes the Leadership Competency Scorecard Inventory forms on CD.


The 2005 edition of the ASTD Team and Organization Development Sourcebook draws on the knowledge and expertise of 36 top consultants, team developers, and training facilitators. The book presents a comprehensive toolkit of the most important topics faced by many organizations, including academic departments: managing change, launching organizational initiatives, facilitating teams, goal setting and planning, creative problem solving, building cooperation and trust, and team development. The 40 games, exercises, learning activities, assessment instruments, handouts, tips sheets, and implementation guides are provided on an accompanying CD-ROM.


Tromp and Ruben offer a comprehensive approach to planning in the university environment. The Strategic Planning in Higher Education (SPHE) framework provides a process for planning a step-by-step approach that guides leaders on strategic thinking; helps them align organizational goals with the mission, vision, and values of the department or program, as well as the larger organization; and offers practical approaches for advancing each planning phase. The book addresses issues that are critical to the success of each phase, from understanding mission to measuring outcomes and achievements, and considers the importance of three strategic planning imperatives—leadership, communication, and assessment. Case studies and planning exercises for implementing the planning model are provided.