

Starter Kit

New to the Department Chair

**Everything new department chairs
need to know to be successful**

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Leading an academic department is a tough job. Most professors are ill-prepared to manage other faculty and lack the skills needed to make the switch to the administration (the “dark side,” as skeptics put it).

For those new to the department chair — and those professors who aspire to the role — this booklet is filled with advice and lessons from experienced administrators. It tells you what it takes to make the jump to the chair position and what to do once you’re in it.

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7 Questions for Would-Be Chairs

By ROB JENKINS

One characteristic that distinguishes academics from professionals in the corporate world is the former don't necessarily aspire to climb the management ladder. Many professors — perhaps most, and especially the tenured — are content to spend their lives focusing on teaching and research, with no desire to become a department chair or dean.

That said, some faculty members *do* want to scale the ladder of academic administration, the first rung of which is usually department chair. Others may not have pursued a management job but nevertheless find it extended to them. And still others may feel some obligation to “take their turn” at the helm, for the good of their department or simply to share the burden. Professors in all three of those groups, at some point, face the same dilemma: “Should I do this, or not?”

That question, by itself, is far too general and therefore probably unanswerable. Deciding whether a management gig is best for your career — and for you personally — will require a great deal of reflection and self-assessment. Here are seven questions you should be asking yourself before you start the climb.

Why would I do this? Exploring our own motives can be challenging, but before you seek or accept the role of department chair, it's important that you understand exactly why you want to do it.

Good reasons abound: You believe you have the organizational and people skills to be successful as a middle manager; you feel an obligation to your colleagues or the institution; you aspire to a higher level of administration; you're starting to burn out from years of teaching and change seems attractive; you could use the extra money (assuming there is any).

There's nothing inherently wrong with any of those reasons. Indeed, most faculty members who go into administration would probably cite all of them to some degree. Still, it's vital that you are

honest enough with yourself to understand your primary motivations. Only then can you answer the questions that follow.

Am I going to miss the classroom? Not everyone who goes into higher education does so because they enjoy teaching — but most of us do. Especially at community colleges, small liberal-arts colleges, and other teaching-focused institutions, the opportunity to work with students in the classroom is the main reason we get up and go to work every day.

How much chairs get to teach — or have to teach, depending on your perspective — varies widely by institution. On some campuses, chairs teach nearly a full load, with maybe a course or two of release time in exchange for fulfilling their managerial responsibilities. On other campuses, department heads are more like associate deans and don't teach at all. Instead they have other duties, like fund raising or community outreach, in addition to the usual administrative tasks. Most chairs are still considered teaching faculty and teach perhaps a course or two each year.

So find out how much you would be teaching. And if the answer is “not much,” then your next question should be, “Am I OK with that?”

Will I mind being chained to a desk? If you've never been an administrator before, you might not realize just how much of a desk job it is. In fact, perhaps the biggest difference between the life of a regular faculty member and that of a chair is that, outside of class times and office hours, the former has much more freedom. When faculty members are done with their responsibilities for the day, they can just leave campus. Often, they can even structure their schedules to spend entire days working from home.

Most department heads can't do that. Barring meetings and so forth (we'll get to those in a moment), one of the chair's main jobs is simply to sit in that office from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day — just in case you are needed. It doesn't matter if

anyone comes by, or if there's anything to do. You just have to be there.

How much do I hate meetings? No conversation among professors would be complete without some snide reference to the boring meetings that are so much a part of academic life. Yet most faculty members don't know the half of it.

Other than being available during business hours, a chair's other main obligation is to attend meetings on behalf of the department. Countless meetings. Large meetings and small meetings, important meetings and pointless meetings (sadly, more of the latter than the former). And whether you enjoy those meetings or not, you pretty much have to be there, because otherwise your department's interests won't be represented. Sometimes you can farm out the responsibility, but mostly you just have to go yourself. One of your biggest challenges as chair will be juggling all of those meetings with your other duties, such as preparing reports, scheduling classes, evaluating faculty members — and attending still more meetings.

How much do I value my work friendships? Another stark reality of becoming chair is that you can no longer be friends with other faculty members in the department. Of course you can still be friendly with them. And you probably do want to remain "friends" on some level, especially if you ever intend to return to the faculty full-time. (You certainly don't want to be enemies.)

But you cannot continue your former relationships while serving as chair. No more going out to lunch with your BFFs. No more hanging out in their offices shooting the bull. That sort of behavior will quickly be interpreted as showing favoritism — it's one of the surest ways to sow discord in a department. The first time one of your "friends" gets a plum committee assignment or a better annual evaluation than someone else will, at the very least, open you up to accusations of unequal treatment. Avoid that at all costs.

Yes, you can still have friends at work. You'll just have to find them outside your department — perhaps among the other chairs or people at the same level in student affairs. Your friends can't be people who report to you or over whom you might conceivably exercise any authority. If that's a problem — if you have friendships you value too highly in your department to give up — you might not want to be chair.

Where do I see myself going from here? Having some idea what you plan to do after your term as chair ends isn't essential but it can help determine how you behave while in that position.

I've always believed that a chair's primary duty is to support faculty members. That often means standing up for them, and for their interests, in the face of opposition — from above as well as below. If you plan to return to faculty life once you leave the chair, having a reputation as some-

one who had your colleagues' backs can certainly be advantageous. You will likely be accepted back into the fold with open arms.

Frankly, though, if you hope to keep moving up — to be a dean one day, or eventually a provost or a president — then a pro-faculty mind-set might be a political liability. Whether or not that's a good thing, it's simply a reality to keep in mind at many institutions. To be fair, it's probably possible to be pro-faculty and still navigate the political waters of upper-level administration, if you're savvy enough. But you should certainly be thinking about what kinds of compromises you might have to make as you climb the administrative ladder before you set your foot on the first rung.

Are the money and perks worth it? Let's be honest: At most institutions, the department chair's job doesn't come with a huge raise, if it comes with a raise at all. My first job as chair offered only release time from teaching — no salary bump. And even if you do get a raise, it might not be much more than you could make by teaching in the summer.

That said, most chairs do make more than regular faculty members. The position might also come with other perks, such as a nicer office, an administrative assistant, and a certain amount of respect.

Your answers to the other six questions here must be taken into account before you answer this one. If you hate everything about the chair's job — being chained to a desk, attending interminable meetings, giving up some of your best friends — will that be offset by an extra \$10,000 a year or so (if you're lucky)? If you're being honest with yourself, the answer is probably no — unless you really need the money, to the point that you're willing to put up with a less-than-optimal work life.

Nothing I've said here is intended to discourage people from becoming department chairs. Goodness knows, we need good people in those jobs; they're the ones who essentially run the institution. Moreover, there are plenty of good things about being a chair. If you do the job well, you can have a tremendously positive impact on the lives of faculty and students alike. For that matter, you might not have found anything I talked about above particularly objectionable.

If so, and if you think you have something to offer, then by all means, apply for the job — or accept the position that's been offered. Just be sure you know what you're getting into. If that sounds like something you can handle, you are ready for your new leadership role.

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4 Lessons Learned by a First-Year Administrator

By KEVIN GANNON

Two years ago, in the second-most significant event in my academic career (getting an espresso machine was No. 1), I moved into a position with a half-time administrative load at my university. In becoming the director of our teaching center, my role was defined as half-faculty, half-administrator — or “staffulty,” as a colleague suggested.

I had previously served three years as chair of my small department, but at my university — as is the case with many small institutions, I suspect — department chairs aren’t really seen as a group apart. We received release time from teaching (one course a year), and a nominal (really nominal) stipend. Chairs were signers-of-forms and go-betweens more than administrators in our own right.

In my new role as director of the university’s teaching-and-learning center, however, I am in charge of an entire unit in our academic-affairs structure, and many of my defined responsibilities are explicitly administrative. It’s a new world for me and I love it. Teaching, learning, and faculty development are true passions for me, and I still

teach two courses a semester. It’s an ideal blend for someone like me who wants to take on a leadership role, but not completely abandon teaching.

But it’s been a series of significant adjustments, for sure. It occurred to me this year that I am now squarely in that nebulous space known as “midcareer,” and that’s a weird realization. The academic job market in my field (history) is so hideous that, from grad school forward, I was more concerned with getting and keeping an academic position than anything else. To have arrived at this point, then, is akin to realizing I’ve reached the age that, as a kid, seemed really old — maybe almost dead.

How exactly did I get here, anyway? Yet, here I am, and I’ve learned a number of lessons in the last two years that have made me a better administrator, teacher, and colleague. Four, in particular, stand out:

NOT EVERY DISAGREEMENT IS A CALL TO ARMS.

Probably the most important adjustment has been in my sense of perspective. In an adminis-



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trative role, your primary responsibility is to your unit, but it's also incumbent upon you to see your office as one among many that support the institutional mission. There are advantages to this — you get a campuswide perspective that's nearly impossible in the weeds of one's own department (particularly when you're chair of said department). I work with faculty and a number of staff across departments and administrative units, and I get to see an amazing amount of creative energy devoted to teaching and learning around the campus. In this work, I get to see which issues are weighing on colleagues across the university, and are thus larger institutional priorities. Just as significantly, I get to see which issues don't rise to that level. Just because a handful of people have chosen something as the hill upon which they'll make their stand doesn't mean it's worth the attention that a more widely important matter requires. Time and attention — as well as barricades, pitchforks, and torches — are finite commodities; I have to be mindful about the ways in which I allocate them.

HOW, AND WHEN, I USE MY VOICE MATTERS.

As I see it, my job requires that I advocate for faculty and students, and for teaching and learning. Sometimes that means speaking truth to power, other times it means speaking truth to colleagues. Most urgently, I've seen — in a concrete and personal way — just how much work we have to do to overcome issues of gender and race, as well as academic bullying. Faculty of color and young female faculty face struggles and discrimination that I have never come close to experiencing. What I'd long known in the abstract has, in the past two years, become quite tangible as I've listened to, counseled, and sometimes just sat with colleagues. Structures of power and privilege are real, they're insidious, and they're all around us. We confront them in an academic sense in our classrooms, but as a whole, we are far less observant in our inter-faculty relations and governance. For those of us in a position to both observe the problems and call attention to the need for just and equitable solutions, it's a moral imperative to do both. If you're moving into administrative work, know your institution's policies on discrimination, bullying, and workplace harassment. If there aren't any, or if they're inadequate, advocate for something better.

Almost every project has multiple collaborators, and I frequently can't move forward with my work until someone else completes their bit.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR HELP.

When I was department chair, I oversaw a budget of under \$1,000. After we made copies and bought paper clips, there weren't really any more fiscal decisions to be made. Now I am the steward of a much larger budget that funds an array of initiatives and programming. In my entire academic career, I've had a total of perhaps 30 minutes of formal budgetary training. It was not an area of strength for me, and I knew I needed help. Even though an administrative post calls for a broad perspective, it also requires me to be detail-oriented. Managing multiple projects, keeping track of programming, juggling calendars — those things, much like budgeting, weren't areas in which I had lots of practice. Knowing that going in, I was more than ready to ask for help. And I found that

people were glad to offer it. I had to fight the instinct to “fake it until you make it.” No one likes to acknowledge weakness, but honesty is imperative, especially when you don't know something. As a teacher, one of the most powerful things I can say to my students is “I don't know,” because it shows them that I'm still learning, and it usually leads to us saying “let's find out.” It's just as important to acknowledge my limits in a position where mentoring and advising

are big parts of the job. It's better to admit ignorance, and then offer to find the answer, than to get something wrong and adversely affect a workshop's funding or a colleague's career.

BE GOOD TO PEOPLE (INCLUDING YOURSELF).

I'll admit that I often honor the rules about self-care and maintaining balance in the breach, but they're an important part of doing any job well. It's difficult to balance the central mission of the institution — teaching and learning — with all of the things that happen on a daily basis ostensibly aimed at fulfilling that mission. It's all too easy to let the minutiae detract from the larger goal. I may be on a committee to develop really cool learning initiatives, but if my work there detracts from office hours, or prep time for my classes, I'm robbing Peter to pay Paul, and there's no net gain. I'm not useful to anyone I serve if I'm overcommitted. Directly related to that point is the realization that I don't need to be involved in *every*

task force, initiative, or conversation. I've learned through experience (and mistakes) that leadership is more than talking loudly in every forum. Support, affirmation, and modeling collegiality are more important. For me, leadership has become a matter of knowing and respecting my colleagues all over the campus, appreciating the work they do, and letting them know it. Things are hard in higher education; we often forget that affirmation — honest and genuine affirmation — is really important. There's no daily quota on thank yous.

I won't pretend that this is an exhaustive list for the aspiring administrator, but these are the key takeaways from my initial foray into this new world. All of these points sound simple, but there's often a large gulf between "simple" and "easy."

Ph.D. training doesn't exactly prepare us to admit areas of ignorance or demur from participating in some conversations. As a faculty member, I focused primarily on my classes and my students. As a department chair, my perspective was bounded by my department's agenda and particular concerns. But now, my constituencies are across the entire institution. If you're thinking about — or have just begun the process of — entering into administrative work, you'll find that balance and perspective coupled with a commitment to keep learning will serve you well. Well, those, and an espresso machine.

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Your To-Do List as Chair

Here are the five core responsibilities you will face
in leading your department

By ROB JENKINS

The job of leading a department can differ greatly from one college to the next, and even from one department to the next on the same campus.

Some chairs are more like assistant deans — their jobs include fund raising as well as departmental oversight, and they teach very little, if at all. Other chairs are merely first among equals — meaning they continue to teach but may be granted some release time from classroom obligations to handle scheduling and other administrative tasks. Some chairs play a major role in hiring and evaluating faculty, while others do little more than manage the paperwork. Some oversee huge budgets, with a great deal of say in how the money is spent, even as others struggle to find a few dollars for dry-erase markers.

Regardless of the job description, however, if you're thinking about becoming department chair you will have to fulfill at least five core functions to be effective. Some readers might argue there are more than five. But having worked at seven different colleges and served as a department head at two of them, I have identified these five as the most universal and the most important of a chair's responsibilities.

ADVOCATE FOR FACULTY.

Chairs occupy a unique and sometimes ambiguous position between the administration and the faculty. To add even more ambiguity, many chairs

aspire to reach the upper levels of administration, while others view the position as a temporary tour of duty and look forward to returning to the classroom full-time.

If you fall in the former group, it's natural to think of yourself as primarily an administrator and to therefore embrace the party line on issues where the faculty and the administration might be at odds. But that is generally a mistake. In my experience, the most effective department leaders see themselves as faculty first and administrators second. Their primary role, as they see it, is to advocate for their department — for its programs and especially for its inhabitants.

Of course, faculty members are not always right, and the department's needs don't always supersede those of other departments or the college as a whole. Good chairs understand that and are prepared to make principled compromises where necessary. But a chair who is not seen, first and foremost, as the department's advocate with higher-ups will likely have a tumultuous and perhaps brief reign.

REPRESENT THE ADMINISTRATION.

It sounds contradictory but the fact is: Department chairs are administrators, even if they occupy the lowest tier. There will be times when you have to present some policy or decision to the fac-

Chairs occupy a unique and sometimes ambiguous positions between administration and the faculty.

ulty, on behalf of the administration, knowing it will not be well-received. In many cases, you will not be thrilled with the latest edict either.

In a perfect academic world, with shared governance, faculty will already have been involved in the decision-making process, so the chair won't be put in such an awkward position. But that ideal is hardly ever realized, and as chair, you will often find yourself charged with "selling" something to the faculty that you aren't entirely sold on yourself.

I've heard people say that chairs have a duty to get on board and support the administration, even if that means faking enthusiasm for some odious pronouncement. I disagree. I think it's fine for a chair to say, in essence: "Look, I don't agree with this either, but I don't have any more say about it than you do. We'll just have to make the best of a bad situation." That sort of candor generally earns the respect of the faculty (if not of the deans and the provost) and enhances the chair's effectiveness within the department. Your faculty members will appreciate knowing you are on their side, even if you are similarly powerless. At least you're powerless together.

In such difficult situations, you will have to use your powers of persuasion to help faculty accept and adapt to the new reality and to prevent morale from plummeting. You must strive to appear as positive and optimistic as possible: "This may seem bad, but we'll figure out a way to deal with it together." And you must be creative in identifying ways to respond to the new mandate without inconveniencing faculty or disrupting the work of the department any more than necessary.

BUILD CONSENSUS.

As chair, you will have very little control over whether your institution as a whole embraces shared governance. But typically, you will have a great deal of influence within your own sphere. You can employ the principles of shared governance within your department, regardless of what anyone else at the institution is doing.

That means, first of all, enfranchising all members of the department, including assistant professors, non-tenure-track faculty, and adjunct instructors. It means making sure the committee structure within the department exists not just to perform the necessary "scut work," like selecting textbooks and making adjustments to the curriculum, but also to serve as a vehicle for shared governance. It means ensuring that those committees are as inclusive as possible, with everyone who has a stake having a seat (or at least a representative) at the table. It means listening to those groups and taking their conclusions and recommendations into account. And it means seeking departmental consensus on any decision that will affect the entire department.

PROVIDE A FORUM.

Speaking of inclusivity, one of your most important roles as chair is to create a "safe place" where faculty members who feel that their voice is not being heard can speak out freely. That certainly includes adjuncts and other contingent faculty, who may feel — with good reason — that the only place they can be heard is at the department level. But it might also include tenured professors who feel totally disenfranchised at the institutional level — again, perhaps with good reason — and who rely on the department as a forum for offering their ideas (good and bad), expressing valid concerns, or just venting.

That forum might take the form of a departmental meeting. You should probably consider holding regular meetings whether you want to or not. When I was a chair, I didn't like meetings (I still don't) and was inclined to cancel or postpone them if I didn't think there was anything particularly important to talk about. I quickly learned, however, that just because I didn't think certain topics were important didn't mean others in the department had the same perception. Faculty members, even though they might not like meetings either, nevertheless need them occasionally. That might be the only place they have to raise an issue they are concerned about.

In addition to scheduling regular department meetings, you should also maintain an open-door policy, allowing faculty members to drop by at their convenience to talk about whatever is on their minds. Keep in mind: Their convenience isn't always convenient for you. As chair, your job exists primarily to serve faculty.

I've known chairs who closed their office doors for a couple hours each day so they could get some work done, but I've never believed in that. If I was in my office, my door was always open. (Of course, I was known on occasion to tell my administrative assistant I had a meeting, then sneak off to the library to slog through paperwork in some remote alcove.)

The end result of all this listening might be just that — simply listening, providing a sympathetic ear. Chairs can't necessarily do anything about the issues that concern faculty, especially when those issues are above your pay grade. But often you can take steps to make department life a little easier for faculty, and sometimes you can take their concerns to the people above you and push for change. Occasionally you might even be successful, particularly if you band together with other like-minded chairs.

And if just listening is the best you can do — well, at least faculty members will feel like they're being heard by someone, and that's often better than nothing.

PROVIDE VISION.

This is the crucial one. Over the years I've been amazed to observe that — no matter how independent-minded individual department members might be — the department as a whole tends to take its cue from the chair. A chair who is generally positive fosters optimism among faculty, whereas one who is negative generates pessimism.

Beyond that, you are responsible for imbuing faculty with a feeling of shared purpose and an understanding of their individual and collective roles. It's up to you and your department's faculty whether you want to draft a formal "vision statement." I've always thought of vision as something more abstract — implicitly understood rather than explicitly spelled out. But I know that some prefer to spell it out.

If your department does wish to create a mission statement, here are some important questions for the group to consider:

- What are our core beliefs and values?
- What are our most important functions?
- What do we want this department to be known for?
- How do we accomplish that?

- What are our professional standards and expectations?
- How do we fit into, and complement, the larger institution?

Note: That last one is especially important, as your department's vision must mesh — or at least not entirely conflict with — that of the institution.

Many have observed that the department chair's job is probably the hardest in all of higher education, caught perpetually between administration and faculty, neither fully one nor fully the other. I've certainly experienced that in my career. But it is also the most personally rewarding job I've ever held, in that I felt I had the opportunity to make a positive difference in people's lives, both faculty members and students, every single day.

Despite its inherent difficulties, the job becomes more manageable once you understand why, mundane tasks aside, you're there. And that is, ultimately, to serve faculty, students, and the institution — in that order.

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Stuck With Someone Else's Mess

What to do when you've inherited a problem department

By ALLISON M. VAILLANCOURT

A friend of mine recently accepted a big job and moved to a new campus. Before she began, she was excited. The president was supportive. Her advisory board included powerful and influential people. The department seemed strong, the budget was reasonable, and the community was described as welcoming.

But within a couple of weeks of her arrival, she had a sinking feeling. At the end of her second month on the job, she knew she'd made a terrible mistake.

The president was affable, but never all that interested in her work, or available to help. The advisory board was more honorific than actual, and its members were uninterested in offering advice, making connections, or supporting her fund-raising goals. The budget seemed large, but no one had mentioned upfront that it was insufficient to meet current obligations, much less offer a margin for new investments. And the department members? While they were gracious during her campus interview, they were surly and cantankerous after she moved across the country to join them.

During a late-night conversation — one in which I could hear her pouring a few glasses of wine — we talked about her campus interviews. We sought to retrace her steps to understand how her assessment of the opportunity could have been so inaccurate. Our conclusion: She had been intentionally misled.

- When she asked to meet with advisory-board members, the response was, "These are important people, and you aren't our only finalist."
- When she asked to meet with the finance

manager during the final interview visit, he was put on her itinerary. Yet when it came time to meet, he was suddenly unavailable because of a family emergency.

- She was never allowed to meet one-on-one with members of the department. Every meeting included at least three department members, thereby ensuring that no single individual could whisper in her ear about challenges she might face.

"You were played," I said after we reviewed her final visit. "But there were obvious clues you missed because you wanted this job so much. The question now is: How will you move forward?"

Several years ago, I faced a similar situation and learned some hard lessons about the dangers of excessive trust and optimism and the risks that come from failing to conduct due diligence. After inheriting a mess, I behaved badly and spent an inordinate amount of

time blaming my predecessor for leaving what I called "a file drawers of lies," and criticized the organization's leadership for handing me a rat's nest to untangle. I whined a lot.

"Don't make the same mistake I made," I said to my friend. "Behave better than I did."

What does that mean? What is the best way to respond when you have inherited a terrible situation?

You could take the lead of U.S. presidents and blame your predecessors, but that will make you seem weak and whiny. It is not a strategy that works all that well, and it can also suggest that the colleagues you inherited were complicit in creating the mess you're now trying to clean up. You will need their support to turn things around, so alienating them will only delay your progress.

If search-committee members deny your requests for information or limit your interactions on the campus, be prepared for an unhappy set of surprises once you arrive.

So what should you do instead? Here are a few strategies to consider:

- **Speak as “us,” rather than “you.”** As the newcomer, you may be tempted to distance yourself from the mess, but don’t. You now own it. Embrace your new organization and suggest that you are fully committed to turning things around.
- **Be clear about your values.** In times of crisis, your people need to know what matters to you and whether you view them as key to the organization’s future. Be explicit about your expectations and what it will take to be successful when working with you.
- **Acknowledge what’s working.** It’s important to be open about the many challenges facing the department. However, not everything is broken, so highlight points of pride.
- **Share the numbers.** It’s easy to dismiss the need for change when challenges are not obvious. Give your people the facts: “Our applications are down 12 percent.” Or, “15 percent of our graduates failed their board exams.” Or, “We have a \$2-million structural deficit.” Defining the problem is a key first step in solving it.

- **Describe the future you imagine.** Articulating a compelling vision offers a path forward and signals your optimism that things will eventually improve.
- **Don’t go it alone.** As quickly as possible, determine who on your team is hungry and who might be helpful because you will need both phenotypes to master your mess. The hungry will work hard to make a name for themselves during the turnaround, and the helpful will be instrumental in providing the quiet, behind-the-scenes support that you will need to move things forward.
- **Embrace your mess as an opportunity.** A sense of crisis can be a powerful bonding experience and can build long-term optimism and confidence by enabling organizational members to believe “We got through that, we can get through this.”

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A Letter to a New Chair

By BRUCE E. DAVIS

As the academic year closes, the reins of department chair will be passed to you. The position has been well recognized as the most difficult in academe, being neither fully a faculty nor administrative post, but typically the worst of both. It was certainly one of the most difficult and exasperating jobs I ever had.

However challenging your tour of duty, I'll bet that in a year you will look back and realize how much you have learned, and possibly changed, in that time. Here are a few thoughts and a bit of unsolicited advice, some of which is obvious and some of which I wish had been passed on to me ahead of time. Of course, everything is pretty much your decision in the end.

- It may take a full year for you to really understand the job, which is much more than paper management.

- The position carries much responsibility and too little commensurate authority. It has an ounce of cachet, none of the mythical eminence, and a ton of weight. There are high expectations from everyone, above and below you, to accomplish things big and small, but you will rarely have the authority to make convenient decisions. That may be your biggest challenge and a continuing headache.
- The chair's job primarily involves management; I'm not sure real "leadership" is possible. Most faculty members are engaged in their requisite responsibilities and have little, if any, room, time, or inclination for additional tasks or changes of direction. I don't recommend significant novelties from the chair, at least in the first year. Let the deans drive those things.



BRIAN TAYLOR FOR THE CHRONICLE

- You will catch way too much administrivia from above and will have to make decisions regarding how much of that information to share with faculty. I perceived that one of my major responsibilities was to serve as a filter, sparing faculty members from the trivia so they could attend to their primary duties. That means many tasks will stop in your office, with you doing the work. Don't even try to move some of that load to faculty members; they will resist, understandably, for their own survival.
- The job is a time sink. It is supposed to take up only 50 percent of your time, but if you do everything requested, demanded, and necessary, there will be virtually no office time left for your own courses, research, or other fun faculty stuff. You'll have to take home some administrative tasks and probably most of your teaching and research work—unless you don't mind staying in the office or lab late into the evenings. Expect your research productivity to plummet.
- You will no longer have the same freedom of time. You will be expected to be in the office during normal work hours, with your discretionary time severely limited. You will miss the good old days as a faculty member, although your scheduling skills will surely improve. Manage your time rigorously; otherwise, like the Blob, the workload will engulf you, slowly but surely.
- Some special family arrangements may be necessary. Your nights, weekends, and holidays may not be as free as you would like. Get used to it. Although family and health should come first, it can be difficult to avoid having work take over your home life. Good time management was something I struggled with constantly.
- Most of the work you do as chair will be (and should be) out of sight of the faculty. You will receive no recognition or credit for many of your labors nor for most of your successes (see the next point). That is normal and not necessarily a bad thing. It's just the way it is.
- You will do 99 things correctly and one thing wrong. Guess which you will hear about from above and below. Be prepared.
- Stay in touch. As a faculty member, I always appreciated open communications and information from the chair. The faculty need to be informed. Perhaps a brief periodic e-mail will keep everyone up to date and help to avoid unpleasant surprises, as well as preventing your own isolation, real and perceived. However, be careful in the quantity of e-mail and information you send out. We academics are a fickle lot who have wildly varying tolerances between too much of something and too little. Either way, you are sure to hear about it.
- You will attend numerous meetings, some of which may even be useful. I encourage you to report anything of potential utility or interest to the faculty. Professors may wish to be left alone, but they do not like surprises.
- Whatever your intended management style, I encourage inclusion of MBWA—management by walking around. That is a long-established, effective, and efficient means of staying in touch with the department in a personal way, both for giving and receiving information, requests, and suggestions. A few minutes spent in each faculty office periodically can be mutually beneficial.
- Your personal relationships with faculty and staff members may change a bit (not necessarily for the worse, just different). Because of your new position, some distance between colleagues and yourself will (and should) develop. That's normal. This isn't a "it's lonely at the top" warning (you won't be at the "top"), but you will be in a somewhat modified world. For example, you will make decisions now for the department at large, not based on personal relationships, and often without consultation with departmental colleagues. Typically you will need to keep your own counsel, or perhaps with other chairs and the dean, but you should consult friends in the ranks much less. To include a select few is to exclude the others; the consequences of doing so will be evident.
- Your most difficult task as chair is dealing with people. Much patience is required. You have to operate as a representative of the department and university, so you may not be able to express your own thoughts at times. Sometimes offering an instinctive personal comment will be useful, other times it will be dangerous. That will be something learned through trial and error.
- Now that you will have the inside scoop on personnel matters, you will be unable to share it with many people. When needed, get advice on the toughest problems from higher up in the administrative chain.
- Sometimes guidance from other chairs can be useful, providing that private information remains private. Remember that the departmental P&T committee is for evaluation, not for personnel management. Any leakage of private personnel information to faculty or friends who aren't directly involved in a case will damage your integrity and effectiveness,

and sometimes worse.

- As a chair, you are an easy target for all kinds of complaints, grudges, and agendas. Prepare to catch flack and grumbling from all sides, even for things not in your purview or things not entirely your fault (from the very small, e.g., hall displays, to the very large, e.g., program development). Whining is permitted, but it won't do you much good.
- A wise dean said that I, as the chairman, would be the fall guy, the villain, in any negative personnel matters. He emphasized, in one particularly sad termination case, "You won't look good in this regardless of what you do, so don't even try." Do your objective best, but expect criticism.
- For me, the department administrative assistant is more than a staff employee—he is a colleague. Treat those assistants as partners, and things will work rather well. They get things done, have plenty of initiative, have some insight into departmental workings, and will be an asset for you. Cut them some slack on the small stuff.
- Try to take all of your leave/vacation. You'll need it. It may not be entirely free time (unless you hide, in which case you'll catch double trouble upon emerging).
- When student complaints come to your attention, especially when presented to you in person, your initial position should be neutral. Don't take sides. Take complaints seriously, but don't immediately assume an instructor's guilt or innocence. High diplomacy is needed. Investigate and document what happened as best you can. Usually, my first question to students is to ask if they have talked to the instructor first. Complete the process thoroughly (particularly the documentation) before making decisions and taking action.
- It's difficult to say "no" to your colleagues. It will be accepted more respectfully if stated nicely. Some chairs can be overly autocratic, which seems counterproductive.
- Compartmentalize issues as much as possible. To ensure fairness and objectivity in matters, it is best to keep some events separate. If you are angry with someone about Issue A, don't let that carry over to Issue B unless the two are related. This helps your sanity as well.
- I quickly learned that effective communications are difficult to master but are the most important component of your success, and the department's. Sometimes the message you intended to send is not the one that is received. Listen to the heart and from the heart. The mouth often mangles what the heart wants to say.
- Try to keep an open mind. Confidence in your views is useful, but certitude in this job is not a strength; it can be detrimental to your success.
- Don't forget that you were, and still are, a faculty member. For balance, try to view your actions and decisions from that perspective.
- Be a proactive "agent" and representative for the department's progress and opportunities. Watch all events, politics, rumors, and meetings as they relate to the department (positive and negative). Speak up for your faculty. Some chairs are too timid in protecting and advancing their department.
- Try to have fun in this position. Despite all I've said here, it can be satisfying to achieve something for your department and the university. The job is worthwhile. Just keep a good sense of humor and stay optimistic. Keep smiling. Otherwise, you can be suckered into the Dark Side. Stay on the Bright Side and enjoy life as intended.

Bruce E. Davis is a former professor at Eastern Kentucky University who stepped down as chair of the department of geography and geology in 2004 and retired in 2011. He originally sent a version of this essay to his successor as chair in 2004.

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Tips for Managing Curmudgeons

By ALEX SMALL

I am a proud curmudgeon. Whatever hip new thing you're promoting, I'm probably uninterested. Whatever buzzword you might be enamored of, I probably hate it. And whatever bureaucratic activity you want me to engage in, I almost certainly think it's pointless.

Despite my complete lack of buy-in for whatever you're into, I'm also willing to work hard for my department and students, even if that means jumping through your hoops. I have worked successfully to move policy proposals through the governance system, I've overseen a curriculum overhaul in my department, I've coordinated class schedules, and I have spearheaded a successful effort to expand the number of majors in my department. In those efforts I've cleared numerous bureaucratic hurdles, generated enough paperwork to chop down the Amazon rain forest, and even worked a few buzzwords into some of the paperwork.

So if you're an administrator looking to get this sort of work out of your more curmudgeonly professors, let me offer you three tips on how to approach people like me.

Make sure the stakes are real, and meaningful to me. If you need me to engage in some reporting exercise because that's what you need to keep your boss off your back, and if you make it clear that I need to do this because you're my boss and you need it, I can certainly do it.

My report might not shine with passion for the latest initiative to link assessable outcomes to the strategic directions identified in the most recent master planning process, and it might not be the most insightful document ever produced, but it will be presentable, it will keep your boss off your back, and it will be delivered on time, because I do my job.

If, on the other hand, you tie this report to a tangible resource that I have a good reason to care about, I might pleasantly surprise you. I might dig deep into data, examine things from multiple angles, and produce a detailed evaluation of plausible scenarios.

Besides providing the right incentives, it also helps if you exhibit genuine interest in something other than the buzzwords that are currently favored in the latest palace gossip from the administration building. Instead, display concern for making things work, expressed in language used by faculty members (not just the jargon used by administrators and bureaucrats at Leadership Development Workshops).

Ask simple questions — like, “What will actually happen if we do this?” or “How will students respond?” or “Do you have enough people to do this for more than a couple years without burnout?” — and I am

likely to respond with thoughtful analysis and meaningful plans.



TIM FOLEY FOR THE CHRONICLE

Don't change the rules on me without warning. If you really think that “revamping statements of programmatic objectives in order to better align with a new universitywide initiative” is necessary in order to get our curriculum changes approved, fine, I'll produce the paperwork. That's not hard. It might not be a meaningful thing to do, but it also isn't hard.

However, next week, when I turn it in, don't tell me that you've moved the goalpost. Don't tell me that I'm not getting at the important issue.

Mind you, I understand that people sometimes come to important realizations only after a second look at a problem. It's fine to say (with an apology for not realizing it before I went off and revamped a thick document) that you have thought about it more carefully and you think that there are additional issues to deal with. If you act like a thinking human being, I will probably respond favorably.

Likewise, I understand that you have a boss, and that after our conversation of last week you learned that your boss would be more favorable to a document or plan that followed a different approach than the one that you suggested (in good faith) last week. I understand these things, and I will react in an understanding manner if you evince a bit of an apologetic demeanor when asking me to aim a document or plan at a somewhat different target.

If, however, you act as though the thing that you now want me to do is clearly something that should have been dealt with from the start, I will see you as disingenuous. This isn't 1984. There isn't a “memory hole,” and I am well aware that last week you said something entirely different.

Most important, don't try to win me over to your view. Understand that even though I don't

buy into your buzzwords and administrivia, I do, in fact, care deeply about students, about how much they learn, and about the future of my department. I'm willing to do what you need — despite the fact that I don't share your perspective — if I see some larger purpose. Just don't try to persuade me to see things your way.

One can care about seeing students succeed without buying into the fashionable lingo of the latest Student Success Initiative or whatever. One can work quite hard (and effectively!) at helping students learn while also thinking that most top-down assessment exercises are devoid of substance.

I am willing to produce a report full of fashionable jargon in order to persuade people to give us the resources we need to do things for students, but I will recoil if you try to get me to believe that the jargon is meaningful. If you tell me that it's a necessary evil, I will concur and do my job. But try to get inside my head and convert me to your mind-set, and I will resist.

Ultimately, we curmudgeons are straightforward people. We have concrete concerns and goals, and we see most of the jargon and processes of a modern university as obstacles and obfuscations standing between us and our goals. We are willing to do what is needed to accomplish our goals, and work with people who will help us get there — so long as we are treated as concerned and intelligent people who are willing to do good work in spite of not conforming to the herd mentality.

Alex Small is a tenured associate professor of physics at California State Polytechnic University at Pomona.

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The Administration Vacation

What faculty and administrators can learn from each other

By NICOLE MATOS

Although the higher education landscape offers an endless stream of issues to worry about — budgets, enrollments, degree completion, adjunctification — nothing in the current climate worries me more than the seemingly unbreachable chasm between many faculty and administrators.

That breach is so well known that it seems to require no explication or explanation, and can just be referred to in quick throwaway stereotypes: Administrators are soulless robots, faculty are entitled divas. Each side blames the other for being too pushy, too obstructionist, and too damned expensive.

There's plenty to be said about the 40-year history of how we got to this place, and the news does not lack for examples of (yes) bad administrators and (yes) problem professors. But the fact is, we are now a house divided. What many campuses could use, it seems to me, immediately and practically, is a program that introduces faculty members to the real work of administration (which is significantly less soulless than some faculty envision) and the individual humans that conduct that work (read about one such program here). Similarly, we need a program that puts administrators, at least occasionally, in the role of faculty — not just observing and evaluating teaching (which is comparatively easy), but themselves engaging in the labor that they'd purport to manage and judge.

When you don't know what to do, I believe you should do the next small right thing. And to me, the next small right thing — a low-cost, relatively easy to implement, drop-in-the-bucket-but-better-than-nothing solution — might be a two-part program I am calling "administration vacation."

The first part of the program would reward faculty members who spend two to four weeks shadowing an administrator on the job. The second part of the program would reward administrators

who teach a course in their discipline every three years. The comparatively slower pace of summer session could probably be used as the ideal time frame for both halves of this program — hence the "vacation" part of the deal.

While I don't claim "administration vacation" as a cure-all, I can testify to the positive changes that such a program could produce. Like many faculty members, I hadn't given much thought to administration beyond a vague, culturally embedded suspicion of it. Then my department's associate dean unexpectedly retired and an interim was needed. I applied for the job on a whim, joking that administration would make a good sabbatical. I had no idea how right I would be: A year in an administrative role was an excellent sabbatical, offering me many insights on the dynamic between the faculty and administrative camps.

Here are just a few of the things I learned by teaching, administrating, and then returning to teaching. Many of these lessons apply equally to administrators and faculty members, like a double-page translation, demonstrating that the two sides are not always as separate as each of us think:

- **Students, particularly en masse, can be aggravating.** Administrators most often interact with students one-on-one, when they come in with a complaint. In those situations, they are on their best behavior, and in single units, their requests (for extra time on a paper, for the right to enter class late, for the exception to some rule) seem reasonable to accommodate. But administrators need to remember: Professors see such requests by the dozens, and what could be accommodated for the "one" can set an unreasonable precedent for the "all." Be sensitive to that, and support faculty in the not-too-restrictive restrictions they put in place to manage a large group of students.

- **Faculty, particularly en masse, can be aggravating.** Faculty members each see themselves as a singleton, and in that context, our requests (for a different schedule, a different room, an exception to some rule) seem reasonable to accommodate. But — you can see where I’m going with this — administrators have the same large population challenges with faculty as faculty have with students. Sometimes the requests of the individual need to be subsumed to the needs of the group.
- **Treat faculty as indispensable.** There’s no greater disconnect, sometimes, between the extreme efforts the administration will take to make just the right new hire (poring over hundreds of CVs, all day wining and dining, hours of impassioned committee discussion) and the blasé attitude taken toward retaining (or even, if necessary, retraining) a faculty member. Your faculty is your talent base: They are all you’ve got. If you treat them like a logistical burden rather than a resource to be nurtured, your relationship will suffer.
- **Faculty: For God’s sake, be indispensable.** If you duck out of every service obligation, if you walk down a different hallway every time you see your dean coming, administrators are going to see you as replaceable, interchangeable, because they will have had to replace you with other, more reciprocal, participants.
- **Sorry, but neither party — faculty or administrator — have the lock on “works the most hours.”** My experience as an interim associate dean allows me to confirm that. In both camps, people work in different styles and in a different mix of hours. As an administrator, I would rue my life on Fridays; as a professor — facing a mountain of student emails and grading — I rue my life on Sunday afternoons. Both both jobs can be all-consuming and exhausting. There might be lazy faculty or lazy administrators out there somewhere, but they are more likely to be the exception than the rule.

In short, we as faculty members and administrators have to stop viewing one another as monolithic and antagonistic entities, and instead begin seeing ourselves as dedicated individuals and shared stakeholders working toward a common good.

We need more commitment from both camps toward solving the relational problems that bedevil our working relationships. My modest little proposal here is just one fumbling attempt at being part of the solution. If not an “administration vacation,” then we could all at least do with a vacation from objectifying and vilifying one another.

Nicole Matos is an associate professor of English at the College of DuPage.

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13 Tips From a Senior Administrator

Lessons I wish someone had taught me before
I became an academic administrator

By FRED SCHWARZBACH

When I accepted my first management post, 30 years ago, as a department chair, my orientation program consisted of about half a day of meetings with senior administrators on the campus. Mostly we exchanged small talk and pleasantries. I was told that I ought to figure out how to read a budget statement, but that no doubt my administrative assistant could teach me. That was the sum and total of my management training.

Since then I have served in administrative po-

sitions at two other large research universities. If my own experience is a guide, it would appear that many institutions assume that academic administrators don't really need any training as managers.

Unfortunately, as most of us in academe can attest from direct observation, more than a few appointees would benefit greatly from even a modicum of management training. Faculty members tend to rise into administration on the strength of their achievements as faculty members: They are good teachers; they are productive scholars; they are collegial and willing to work for the common



MICHAEL MORGENSTERN FOR THE CHRONICLE

good. But the life of a scholar-teacher typically does not include preparation for personnel, budget, or public-relations management, to name only a few essential areas that administrators are responsible for on a daily basis.

What follows, then, is a set of management lessons that I have learned the hard way — that is, by blundering into catastrophes that only good luck prevented from causing great damage. I've had the luxury of learning from those mistakes. So this is a digest of essential management training that I wish I had been given when I started that first administrative job all those years ago.

Learn how to listen. Professors are good at talking. We hold the stage, and we dominate it — even those of us who strive to create classrooms in which students participate as much as possible. We have strong opinions about many things, and we begin our administrative posts with an entirely appropriate desire to do things in new and distinctive ways. But what most faculty members and students want from an administrator — more than anything — is an opportunity to speak about what is important to them, and to believe that someone in a position of authority is listening. As boring as that may sound, you will learn a great deal about your own role and your opportunities to effect positive change just by taking the time to listen and respond thoughtfully.

Learn not to respond too quickly. A typical day for most academic administrators will involve at least one person seeking an immediate response to a pressing need or problem. Resist the urge to respond on the spot, and instead start asking pertinent questions. Almost every urgent request turns out to be not all that urgent. You risk nothing in closing the conversation by saying, "I need a little time to think about this, and I'll get back to you." Then go gather more information, test its quality, and think through your response. I say this from experience. All too often, my snap decisions have proven the old saw, "Decide in haste, repent at leisure."

Don't fixate on who gets the credit. Many of the most successful academic leaders are charismatic visionaries; they inspire us to work toward dreams we hardly knew we had. But most of us lack that level of charisma and must accept that we are not the center of attention. What's important is the success of your colleagues and students. So plant seeds: Put forward your best ideas infor-

mally, and if they are really good, people will get excited enough to turn those ideas into reality. Realize that you can get almost anything done if you don't care who gets the credit. A colleague's success is your success, even if no one fully appreciates the crucial role you played.

Steal good ideas shamelessly. Most of my good ideas have come from other administrators.

To appreciate a good idea requires that you pay attention to what people are saying, that you think carefully about the challenges, and that you adapt those ideas you borrow to present circumstances. And why not borrow a good idea? Administrative plans are not subject to copyright. At the same time, be modest about your own contributions — give credit where it is due. You'll be seen not only as effective but as generous in sharing the limelight.

Remember that the people you have to work with are the people you have to work with.

Faculty and staff at most institutions have some form of tenure, whether it be formal or de facto. In the private sector, supervisors have the privilege of firing people who don't perform (or don't perform as the boss would like), but usually that's not the case in higher education. As difficult as it is to work with difficult people, academic managers often have no choice. Still, you will find that many of those difficult people have unappreciated talents or skills. Try to motivate them to do their best, and some will surprise you by doing it. On the other hand, every department has its laggards (and worse, its snakes in the grass) who will never contribute substantially to the common enterprise. You have no option but to isolate them and keep them from doing harm. Learn to live with their constant complaints. Their laments are better to bear than the damage they do if they're given responsibility for important projects.

Never bring problems to your supervisor — only solutions. Not long after I first became a department chair, I responded to a valid auditing concern by cutting off faculty members' direct access to the photocopier. As you'd expect, all hell broke loose. They went over my head to the dean, and I went to him for help in putting out a brushfire that threatened to become a conflagration. He (gently) advised me on how to fix the problem but also urged me to move on quickly. Through his mentoring, I learned that your supervisors don't want to hear about or solve your problems — they'd rather you bring them a solution (or a

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choice of solutions). What every senior administrator wants is a team that can keep things off her or his desk. Over time, you will develop a keen sense of when you are out of your depth and need to kick a problem up to the next level. But that is best done rarely, and only after you've exhausted your own efforts.

It's the faculty, stupid. Leaders can go anywhere, but faculty members must be right behind. What administrators can and should provide for them is a broad perspective — essential contextual information about plans and problems affecting the institution as a whole, not just the particular needs of one person, program, or department. Nothing important will ever happen on any campus without the support of the faculty.

It's the students, stupid. Over time, we all take on the blinders of our particular job description and begin to think of our role as the most important in the university. A great deal of what we do as academic leaders will be to adjudicate fairly when special-interest groups — the faculty, or this department, or that faction — come into conflict about money or priorities. But it is good to remember what brings us together: our students and their needs and interests. Even at research universities, undergraduate tuition pays most of the bills. In any difficult decision, I try to ask myself: How will this benefit students? It's a touchstone that helps us cut through the clutter of administrivia and reminds us that our shared common goal is their education.

Teach when you can; remain active as a scholar. Administration is a time-and-a-half job. During the academic year, you'll spend 40 hours a week in the office and half again as much outside it attending early-morning meetings, dinners, and events. You will spend your summers doing the same thing. However busy you are, find some time to teach and write. Once every few years I teach a class, and I try to read as much as possible (and even occasionally write) in my field. It will be difficult to find the time, but your efforts in this regard will bring an immediate incidental benefit — respect from your faculty colleagues. More important, doing faculty work helps you retain your respect for the hard work done every day by professors and students. It's a good way to avoid becoming one of those administrators who has nothing but contempt for those who are the heart and soul of the enterprise.

When you make a mistake, own up to it. We are all of us prone to make mistakes from time to time, and most of us in administration can remember a whopper or two. Sometimes we get lucky: In my first administrative role, I assigned the same course to two faculty members, but luckily no students signed up, and it was canceled before anyone was the wiser. But dumb luck rarely comes to the rescue. When you do screw up, try to remember that there is no real shame in admitting an error, and if you fail to admit it, you run the risk of it being discovered by others. Your colleagues may or may not respect your honesty, but they cannot fault it.

Don't postpone hard decisions. Time and time again, I have been faced with difficult decisions that affected people I know and respect. Out of a desire not to cause unnecessary pain, I've tried to let people down gently when I've had to deny a promotion or even fire someone. But once I'm convinced that I'm making the right decision, the resulting disappointment is no less or greater for coming sooner rather than later. More to the point, I've never changed my mind about a difficult judgment, however long I waited to deliver it. More than once I've tried to support someone who was struggling in his or her work, only to have that person cause serious damage by remaining too long in the position. My best advice — though I confess I still ignore it from time to time — is to get the pain over with quickly and move on.

Expect the unexpected. A good portion of any administrator's time is devoted to what can't be planned, and generally that means human problems. Every time I have ever said to myself, "Now I've seen it all," the phone will ring or someone will walk into my office and prove me wrong. Human nature being what it is — particularly in the average 18-year-old — there is no limit to the difficulties that our students may create for themselves. Our colleagues often are no less foolish or fallible. As administrators, it's up to us to clean up those messes, to assess responsibility, and perhaps to mete out punishment. But it is good to remember that none of us want to be remembered only for the stupidest thing we've ever done. We need to temper our response to human error accordingly.

Know when to go. When I was a kid, I was a fanatical fan of the Yankees, and my hero was Mickey Mantle. One of the most painful memories I have is of Mantle's last season, when his

But it is good to remember that none of us want to be remembered only for the stupidest thing we've ever done.

knees were shot and he was an embarrassment to the team and to himself. Moral of the story: When you are no longer effective, you serve no one by hanging on. Some administrators are fortunate in having long careers, but for most of us there will be a point at which we have done virtually all that we can do, at least in our present position. Far better to leave while you still will be missed, rather than later, when your colleagues will wish you were gone but will be too embarrassed (or worse, too frightened) to tell you to your face.

Finally, a word of advice about life, not about administration: Have a hobby. Whether you do or not, you need a center to your life outside the office, so that when you finish for the day, you

can leave it behind, at least for a time. (My hobby, not that it matters greatly, is collecting ceramics.) There will always be sleepless nights — with luck, only a few — when the matter with which you are dealing is so important that you cannot stop thinking about it. But to remain objective, and to perform at a peak level, you need some way to turn off the office and recharge the batteries.

Your primary job, in fact, is to stay sane enough to respond to the madness on your desk.

Fred Schwarzbach is dean of liberal studies at New York University.

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Don't Cry for Me, Academia!

For some of us, administrative work is not just an obligation or a noble sacrifice — it's a calling

By KEVIN J.H. DETTMAR

The usual quips about academic administration are surely pretty familiar to this audience. Chairing a department is “like herding cats.” To move from the faculty ranks into administration is to go, Vader-like, “to the dark side.” Upon one’s appointment, colleagues wonder whether to offer “congratulations or condolences.”

Such sentiments pervade the higher-ed ecosystem — at research universities and liberal-arts colleges and, I presume, at two-year colleges as well.

To be sure, no one completes a Ph.D. (as op-

posed to an Ed.D.) in order to enter campus administration. But for some of us, at a certain point in our careers, administrative work is no longer something to dread or to apologize for. For some of us, serving as chair of a department or dean of a college comes unbidden as a second, midcareer calling. Too often, perhaps, it calls us away from the work we were destined to do, and those tend to be the stories we hear. But sometimes, taking on administrative duties is precisely the culmination and fulfillment of that scholarly work, allowing us, for the first time, to recognize our past as prologue.



ISABEL ESPANOL FOR THE CHRONICLE

In the summer of 2015, I finished (or thought I had finished) a successful seven-year term as chair of my department. I had a yearlong sabbatical waiting for me; and while no one was keen to fill the vacancy, one faculty colleague did volunteer to chair for a year (before going on leave himself), and another to accept a three-year term that would begin this summer. During my long-anticipated sabbatical year, I've been doing a lot of writing, catching up on some of what I'd had to set aside as chair — mine is an institution that does not award release time for chairing.

Recently, though, I was talking in my office with a junior colleague I'd helped to hire a few years ago. She surprised me by asking — apropos of nothing, or so it seemed to me — “Would you ever consider chairing again?” My answer, immediate and unambiguous, surprised me even more than her question: “In a heartbeat. I'd do it tomorrow.”

For — much as I was enjoying my protected time to read, write, and think — on some level I was also beginning to realize that I missed my interactions with colleagues, and my work on their behalf. I suspect that my friend sensed it, too: After all, who works in his department office while on sabbatical, never mind inviting colleagues in to chat?

One thing led to another, and when I tentatively asked the chair-in-waiting whether she was excited about taking over, she allowed that, in fact, like Bartelby, she “would prefer not to.” And so I will, again, starting July 1. Meet the new boss: same as the old boss. (And, of course, really no “boss” at all.)

We don't talk enough about this: That besides representing an obligation, or a noble sacrifice, academic administration can be a calling. That the work, rather than draining and distracting, can be incredibly rewarding. That while it requires training and accomplishment as a scholar to qualify one for such an appointment, success in it relies on a set of gifts that, for the most part, have nothing to do with those that sent us off to graduate school in the first place.

When the email went out to faculty announcing that I'd be back to chair in the fall, my closest friend in the department sent me a worried note. Was I being coerced, he wanted to know? Was I “taking one for the team”? Somewhat sheepishly, I admitted that, in fact, I was quite happy about this turn of events. And he wrote back: “You have the leadership gene. Strange and marvelous to me.” (He's a MacArthur Fellow; I fired back, “Well

you're a genius — equally strange and marvelous to me.” I guess I put him in his place. Many parts, one body, the Apostle Paul would say.)

David Damrosch touches on the perverse supply pipeline for academic leadership in his 1995 book, *We Scholars: Changing the Culture of the University*. “For the better part of a century,” he points out, “we have been selecting for certain kinds of alienation and aggression on campus. We need to reconsider the sorts of academic personality we encourage — and even create — through our extended rituals of training and acculturation. The progressive isolation we enforce on graduate students favors personalities who have relatively little need for extended intellectual exchange.”

That's putting it mildly. If no one seeks a Ph.D. in order to become a department chair or dean, so, too, everything about the graduate-school experience serves to quash any vestigial impulse toward social interaction. In graduate school, people who need people are the unluckiest people in the world.

But academic administration is abject: It requires gifts that one apologizes for possessing.

Administration is a category of academic work that faculty-reward systems refuse to recognize adequately. We're taught from early on how to value our accomplishments as scholars, and we choose mentors whose research has distinguished them in their fields. At most prestigious colleges and universities, good teaching alone won't suffice to

establish a distinguished career, but every institution worth its salt at least professes to care about teaching, and very publicly rewards it. It's easy enough, then, to feel good about being a good teacher, and it's certainly in that guise that an often hostile public likes us best.

But academic administration is abject: It requires gifts that one apologizes for possessing. I'm still vaguely embarrassed every time I send someone a spreadsheet as an email attachment.

I probably feel that way more acutely than most owing to the particulars of my situation. I'm something of a stowaway. Back in 2007 I was resigned to, if not excited about, spending the remainder of my career at the institution where I held tenure as a full professor, and where I had chaired my department for a three-year term. I'm proud of what I've accomplished as a scholar, but I'm not delusional: I know that my credentials wouldn't make me an obvious choice for the one or two attractive senior jobs that come open in my field in a given year.

So I was checking job listings not on my own behalf, but for two dissertation students, when I

stumbled upon the ad for the position I now hold. The department sought a senior scholar in any one of three literary fields (one of them was my field), with experience as a department chair. I'm not sure I would have had enough evidence in either Column A or Column B alone to seal the deal — but I did have enough in the two categories combined, it turned out.

Thus in the late summer of my career I got to make a move to an institution the likes of which I'd previously only daydreamed about. Almost literally: For this is the very college that I'd dreamt of attending when I was 17, only to be held back by my family's financial situation. I didn't get my position here because my name was on everyone's lips and my books in everyone's offices. No, I snuck in through the servant's entrance: as a department chair.

Being good at academic administration paradoxically makes one feel bad about oneself. Surely this is wrong. What I'm advocating here is not a prescription for every Ph.D. It's only a path for some of us. But for those few — having taught well, published our articles and books, and created a scholarly identity — the next challenge and source of career fulfillment lies in taking on the job of hiring and mentoring younger scholars, and devoting our experience to the task of clearing obstacles for them so that they might enjoy the same rewards and fulfillment as scholars and teachers that we have.

Consider: In the Harry Potter novels, Professor Pomona Sprout works primarily behind the scenes. We only learn in the epilogue to the final volume that her pupil, Neville Longbottom, has become professor of herbology at Hogwarts owing to Sprout's quiet support. In my career here at Pomona (College), I'm trying to take her as a role model.

There's a lot more to good chairing than just faculty mentoring, of course, even if that's the piece I most relish. It falls to chairs to provide

leadership and vision for a department, facilitating the discussion around questions like: What kind of department do we want to be? How might our curriculum change to keep pace with our evolving field and changing student population? What is our department's role in the larger college or university community? How might we provide intellectual leadership for the campus?

That's who I am now — a senior professor who has done scholarly work that I'm proud of (and will do more), and who deeply values his relationships with students, but whose most rewarding challenge these days involves facilitating the work of my colleagues.

Satisfaction in the chair's role requires measuring success in terms of people and relationships, not publications. Academe secretly runs on the quiet work of such people, the gift of service provided by those who recognize that they have been given much, and find they have much to give back. It's fueled by a kind of entrepreneurial generosity — a professional liberality actively in search of colleagues in whom to invest. As a friend and colleague commented on a draft of this essay, "Our system is premised on the notion of leadership by the faculty — and yet we devalue that leadership ... and then complain about lousy leadership after dissuading the majority of our potential leadership talent." As a community, we would be well served to find ways to honor administrative work and find it a source of pride rather than shame.

That's why I'm returning from sabbatical this fall to chair my department for a few more years. I couldn't be happier about it: We have a lot of work to do, and I'm keen to get started. And I count myself fortunate to be entrusted with such important work. For me, at least, congratulations, not condolences, are in order.

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