The Role of the Department Chair in the Teaching-Learning Process

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Overview

The department chair is a crucial player in the teaching-learning process in both visible and subtle ways. At times, the chair is out front in making things happen while in other cases, he or she may be doing activities in the background to encourage and support effective teaching and learning. What are specific roles that chairs have in insuring quality and continuous development in the teaching and learning process? This article describes the following roles: Being the Institutional Representative of Excellence, Providing Recognition and Rewards, Enabling a Strong Advising System, Encouraging Curriculum Development and Reform, Selecting Excellent Teachers, Keeping the Department on the Forefront of Innovation, Ensuring Effective Use of Personnel and Initiating Teaching Development and Remediation.

Being the Institutional Representative of Excellence

Chairs are selected because they are trusted to build and maintain excellence. Teaching is a high priority activity in higher education so chairs are expected to be knowledgeable about the process and to understand what is necessary to have teaching and learning at a high level.

Oversight. Chairs are charged with overseeing what is happening in their departments. They are expected to know who is doing excellent teaching and where are the areas that they should be strengthening. Deans and higher administrators expect the chairs to be on top of issues and to be problem solvers as opposed to bringing them problems without ideas for solution.

Keeper of Standards. A critical aspect is keeper of institutional standards. Chairs know what are the department and university expectations for teaching – both on an informal and formal basis. If someone is not meeting these standards, they are responsible for correcting the situation. For example, if a professor were not meeting classes or not evaluating students, chairs would be expected to step in to protect the institutional standards and reputation. There may be discussions and concerns among faculty and students about methods or styles so the chair has to decide which issues are about academic freedom and differences in how instructors work rather than a dereliction of duties. These are sometimes difficult judgments to make but in other cases they are clear cut. For example, if a faculty member is sexually harassing a student, the chair must act immediately or in many institutions they will be held responsible for knowing and yet not reporting it and taking some action.

Taking Teaching Seriously. One often hears discussions and questions about the importance of teaching. However, some professors suggest that teaching will never be taken as seriously as research unless there are comparable quality mechanisms. For example, it has been said that teaching is a very private act – one in which the professor can go into his or her classroom and not have to worry about a peer or administrator evaluating their teaching. Actually the only concern is student ratings at the end of the semester. The following are some activities that can elevate the status of teaching: (1) peer review of teaching (2) development and sharing of teaching materials (3) writing about research and development for teaching journals (4) rewarding faculty for their excellent teaching.

Without this kind of highlighting and peer review, teaching will continue to be seen often as idiosyncratic and non-replicable. The chair can encourage the use of the described activities in promotions and awards. They can also ensure that exemplenary teachers are visible and celebrated in the department and the institution.

Modeling. The chair is an important professional model in his or her teaching and interactions with students. In the chair's teaching, she can promote openness to discuss different methods and perspectives, invite others into the classroom to observe and discuss teaching and use various methods and resources (e.g. Teaching-Learning or Instructional Development Centers) for their own teaching improvement. Hopefully they are themselves excellent teachers who are on the cutting edge of their profession. If not, they may want to team with another faculty member who is at the top of his or her field.

Institutional Issues. There are a range of institutional issues that the chair is responsible for coordinating and ensuring quality. These involve academic products and services which in today's environment are often delivered to non-residential students and clientele. Let's look at some examples that can challenge the chair.

- Departmental Quality Indicators and Assessment. Chairs are responsible for overseeing the quality assurance processes such as accreditations and departmental program reviews. Such reviews usually involve departmental self-assessments, external reviews of student learning and other program quality indicators and projections for the future of programs. They are labor intensive efforts that require the accumulation of data and coordination of faculty efforts to present an integrated set of information. Not only does the chair coordinate the effort, but she also ensures the quality and accuracy of the effort as

well as the follow through to address the questions and suggestions raised in the reports.

- Relationships with other departments and external clientele. The chair oversees the development of relationships with other units within the institution and outside the organization to meet the needs of students and other users of services. A chair may initiate these relationships and also delegate this responsibility to others who may work more closely with the clientele. For example, many departments work with professions to prepare students to enter that occupation. Often the professions have defined professional competencies which must be met for students to gain entry. Usually what is required is passing some type of entrance exam. To be successful, courses and practical experiences must be geared to have the students demonstrate the competencies. Examples include many of the applied sciences such as engineering, nursing and education. In many cases in which practioners are not interested in a degree, meeting clientele needs has resulted in the development of certificates. Chairs are expected to ensure that the courses and other activities are of the quality expected of a higher education institution.

- Joint Programs and Degrees across Departments, Colleges or Institutions. Joint programs or degrees may be developed for a variety of reasons including financial savings, avoiding duplication or maximizing resources from separate sources. For the chair, these efforts require defining common expectations and standards. They also demand that the chair see that there is equity in the relationship being defined so that the department is gaining appropriate return on its investment. In some cases, the department may be a junior partner in the venture so then the expectations must be defined in lesser terms.

- Distance Courses. Many institutions are providing distance courses to non-residential students as well as developing degrees that may have a range of on and off-campus requirements. In some cases, the whole degree can be obtained without setting foot on campus. In others, there is a residency requirement for some portion of the degree experience. Initially there were concerns about whether the distance courses would be the same quality as the residential courses. I remember discussions

about a concern about "academic compression" when courses previously delivered over a semester were concentrated in a short, intense course. What we know now is that for some subjects this might be appropriate while for others it might require a longer period for students to master the content. Chairs are in a position to make sure that the decisions made do not compromise quality. They must ask the hard questions and ask for the evidence. If that evidence is not there, then it may be appropriate to pilot the effort and to carefully evaluate the result.

An example may be instructive. For years there was a controversy over whether students in distance courses were learning as much as those in residential courses. Numerous studies have demonstrated that there is no significance difference in measures that are applied. What distance students do indicate is that convenience is important in that they don't have to travel to and from class. Contrary to concerns expressed, they have also indicated that they have as much or more interaction with classmates and the instructor than many residential students. Certainly the 24/7 environment makes this kind of interaction possible at any time. Again, what this information suggests is that the chair must ask the questions and seek the data that indicates the basis of a sound instructional decision and not just convenience for either students or faculty.

Another large issue for the chair in this example is determining the level of preparedness of the faculty to initiate such an effort. It will require a core of knowledgeable and skilled teachers as well as the necessary instructional and technological support to sustain the effort. Quite often a few enthusiastic faculty will venture into the distance arena and be willing to commit large chunks of time to be successful. Typically other faculty are going to be more hesitant to do so and will expect support and reward for their efforts. For example in one instance in a college, the dean committed to providing $5000 per course and the assignment of an instructional developer to work with the instructor. However, after the initial development, the instructor was on her own. In that case, the exit of a crucial faculty member and lack of an ongoing support system nearly ended the program. Additionally in this case, an upper administrator made a decision that the revenue from the program would go to his office to be distributed so that the department incentive for the program was no longer in place.

Some questions to consider: (1) What is the attitude toward teaching in your department? (2) How often do you address the importance of having and meeting high teaching standards? (3) How is learning evaluated?

Providing Support and Rewards

Technology. Many faculty expect the latest technology in their teaching and many institutions are making large investments in distance learning which requires considerable technology. Chairs have to be knowledgeable to be sure they are providing what is really needed and not just providing the newest toy that a faculty member wants. Sometimes this requires that the chair not only do his own research but that he identify institutional experts who have their finger on the pulse as to what is really worth the investment and what is forthcoming that may be better or at least should be tested before making a large investment. Another role that chairs play is to mediate what individual faculty want and the institutional policies involving technology. For example, the institution may have invested in a particular platform which everyone is expected to use and the faculty member, who may be quite knowledgeable that another platform could be better, has to be steered toward the university expectations.

Professional development. Teaching and learning are fast evolving requiring continual professional development to stay current. This development can involve use of technology as well as new techniques and content updates. Some of the development may take place within the department (brown bag lunches on a variety of topics, classroom visitations) while others take place in Teaching-Learning Centers, at professional association meetings and teaching conferences. Many faculty see professional development opportunities as a reward for their efforts so financial support for these activities can pay dividends as well as reinforce the pattern of seeking improvement in different venues.

Providing Recognition and Rewards

Recognition. Chairs can personally recognize faculty for excellent teaching by sending notes, and giving acknowledgement in various department communications and institutional documents. They can also encourage others to recognize others for fine teaching. One of the difficult issues for chairs is that teaching rating scales often don't strongly differentiate between excellent and good teachers. Deans often ask what is the difference on a four point scale between a 3.70 and 3.80 – how can it differentiate excellence? Chairs are well served to determine some unique aspect (method, use of technology, problem solving process) the faculty member does that separates her from others. For example, I know a faculty member who became nationally and internationally known through his innovative use of technology before many others were involved in its use. Certainly he did receive very good student ratings. However much of his contribution was in helping others see the contribution of technology to teaching and how to use the technology. In many ways, his efforts can be compared to a researcher in his impact but in this case in the teaching field.

Another possible recognition could include becoming a member of a University-wide Teaching Academy or similar organization. Chairs can lobby and write support letters to help faculty achieve this status.   Not only does this recognition provide the individual visibility but it also increases the salience of the department.

Rewards. Institutions have various mechanisms for rewarding excellent teaching. First there is the formal salary structure in which faculty can be provided annual raises and merit based on teaching. Additionally promotion decisions affected by teaching performance result in considerable salary increases. Second, beyond the salary considerations, many institutions have teaching excellence awards which may be college or institution-wide. Many of these awards carry usually a one time monetary reward. To provide a case of high quality, these awards should be selective and not a matter of taking turns which cheapens the award's image. On many campuses this is a high status award.

Questions to consider: (1) How is teaching recognized and rewarded in your department? (2) How is teaching recognized and rewarded in the institution? (3) What can you do immediately to increase recognition and rewards?

Enabling a Strong Advising System

Student advising is a crucial aspect of the total teaching process. Advising is both an art and a science. To have a comprehensive program requires addressing the technical aspects of advising which ensures that students meet the course and credit requirements of the institution and the major. Often this is a matter of making sure that students take the required courses and, if required, take qualifying exams and meet other professional gate keeping functions. Certainly a number of students run into problems because they may not follow the suggestions (shared checklists often help) or may not receive consistent advising.

Beyond the technical aspects, there is a transformational aspect that involves different ways of student's seeing themselves or having an epiphany in terms of their image of the discipline or occupation. These transformations often require multiple and in-depth conversations. No one can say when, or if, it will happen but when it happens it is like lightning striking. In teaching, this is often described as the "teachable moment." The goal should be to have many of these moments and to seize upon them as they arise.

One of the challenges to the chair is how advising is delivered. Models used include: (1) all faculty are involved in the advising (2) centralized advising often with one faculty person overseeing staff and/or students. An all faculty involvement pattern does keep everyone involved and required to have an understanding of the process. Quality control across faculty is often an issue. For example, some faculty may only be interested in or capable of technical advising while others may emphasize the transformational. Ideally both would be addressed. The centralized set-up has the opportunity for greater quality control but loses the expertise and experience of faculty. One would expect that the technical aspects of advising could be managed better in the centralized situation.

Sometimes these advising systems are guided by the size of the department. Large departments may believe that they need a centralized set-up because of the numbers of students and an interest in freeing many faculty to perform other duties particularly time for research. Some departments have a history of faculty contact with students and advising is a part of that involvement. Often

they believe that no one else can do the advising at the level and with the knowledge of the faculty. This belief may be so embedded in the culture that it may be difficult to change.

Whatever pattern is adopted, the chair should ensure that students are gaining effective advising and connection to the department and its faculty. The advising process should be integrated into the department's structure and culture. Great advising involves transformations, gaining the needed background in the subject and preparation for work after graduation.

Questions to consider: (1) How does advising fit with your teaching program? (2) Who is doing the advising now? (3) Who would you like to be doing the advising? (4) What's the ideal system for your department?

Encouraging Curriculum Development and Reform

Current and relevant curriculum. Departments must have curricula that are up-to-date and relevant. Employers, accrediting bodies and societal changes require adjustments, sometimes whole overhauls, to attract students and meet employer's expectations. Chairs are important players in bringing these potential changes to the forefront and creating a sense of urgency about the change. Sometimes this requires providing data that suggests the curriculum is outdated or pointed feedback from employers and accrediting agencies indicating needed improvements.

Connected to significant developments in the fields. Chairs need to keep an eye on the future to make sure the department is aware of significant developments in the field. Since departments are composed of a range of sub-disciplines, this is a real challenge in which the chair should identify and listen to those faculty who are leaders in their field. They should also carefully observe what well regarded competitors are doing to stay on the cutting edge.

Maintaining a manageable curriculum. One of the issues in making adjustments in the curricula is the faculty investment in continuing to teacher their courses – often ones they developed and maintain that others are not qualified to teach or for some other reason should not teach. Chairs can develop a culture that suggests that no one owns the courses and that periodically courses will have

to be dropped in order to add new ones. The argument can often be made that because of limited personnel, a policy be adopted in which a course can only be added if a course is dropped. Another useful departmental strategy for a complete curricular review is to move to a zero based curriculum which says that the department is starting over from a new baseline in which none of the courses are sacrosanct. Faculty must make a case for why the course is needed in meeting student and employer needs. At least this process forces careful assessment of what should be in the curriculum and the justification. History, length of service or a host of other previous rationales are not sufficient.

Questions to consider: (1) What changes need to be made in the curriculum? (2) How will you make these changes happen?

Selecting Excellent Teachers

Selecting fine teachers is a challenge for chairs and their departments. Many candidates may know their subject matter or discipline but they may not be able to communicate it to others - particularly 18 year olds. With the budget difficulties of today which often requires greater budget flexibility, staffing is even more difficult and involves a range of options.

Today there is a greater emphasis on student learning as accrediting bodies and professional associations indicate they want to know what the students know and can do not whether they were exposed to the content. Therefore faculty must be more sophisticated in their assessments in the classroom to ensure that students are learning. Institutions can also aid in that they often have tests or activities that are geared to determining student learning. When faculty include examples of student learning outcomes in their teaching portfolios, these can provide important evidence of effective teaching and learning.

Identifying long-term faculty to be the core of departmental personnel. The previous model in many institutions was to have as many permanent, tenured faculty as possible (many institutions were 60-80% tenured). What this meant for institutions was often 85-90% of the budget was committed to personnel so there was little financial flexibility. Departments do need to maintain a core faculty who uphold the traditions and standards as well as carry a major portion of the critical workload but there needs to be a balance in types of personnel.

Finding non-permanent or term faculty. Departments spend considerable time identifying other faculty who perform various roles in the department. They are on term appointments which provide the flexibility to hire people for a defined period of time to meet new demands, address routine courses or meet increased demand for additional course sections. Excellent people can be found and often are known on the periphery of the department but sometimes finding high quality people, often at the last minute, is a challenge.

Selecting people. Regardless of the contract, faculty should be selected because of their demonstration of the required knowledge, skills and attitudes to be successful teachers. Extensive studies of teaching (Feldman 1988, Bain 2004) indicate that even though styles vary widely, excellent teachers are organized, know their subject matter and can demonstrate how to think in the discipline, have clear and high expectations of students, create an atmosphere conducive to learning and evaluate fairly and comprehensively (provide timely and effective feedback on assignments and class participation).

Chairs should avoid the trap of letting faculty posit that excellent teaching can't be evaluated. Candidates for positions, whether permanent or temporary, should be able to orally, in writing, and in demonstration teaching provide the rationale, based on the effective teaching principles stated above, for their teaching practices. Many institutions now require a teaching demonstration with students and a seminar with faculty. If this is the practice, candidate evaluation by each group should be geared to what they should be able to evaluate.

For example, faculty are in a position to evaluate knowledge of and ability to teach problem solving in the discipline. They can also assess interest in collaboration, attitudes toward students and commitment to continued development. If the faculty member is in highly specialized area in which none of the faculty is

knowledgeable then greater weight will have to be given to outside authorities. For example, in the department (which emphasizes leadership, communication and teacher training) in which I was head, we added a Tourism position. Although the faculty could assess communication and teaching knowledge and skills, the Tourism aspect with a strong natural science and specific nature-base tourism component, was assessed by reference letters and checks and colleagues in other areas (Hospitality and School of Natural Resources). Students, particularly undergraduates, are not in a position to assess content knowledge. Some studies have demonstrated that an enthusiastic presenter can fool students into thinking the teacher knows the content when they are just taken in by the enthusiasm. However students are capable of making judgments about organizational capability, ability to communicate the material, establish rapport with students, and determine enthusiasm for the content. Thus, a combination of evaluations in the context of the candidate's teaching philosophy and reference checks should provide a solid snapshot of who the candidate is as a teacher.

Beyond the onsite demonstration/s, the development of a teaching portfolio which many colleges and universities now require provides a comprehensive picture of the candidate's philosophy and samples of teaching activities, learning products and evaluation methods. Another important component is teaching experience which must be carefully evaluated. Does the experience demonstrate growth and development or does the record suggest the same pattern, products and processes repeatedly? Does the candidate demonstrate that he or she is willing to try new methods and play to student's strengths rather than focus on the aspects that either can't or won't be changed? What was the environment like in which the candidate was teaching? Did people share and critique their teaching? Did they have development experiences together (seminars, brown bag lunches, skill building sessions)? There may be a few people who are born teachers but most have to continually work to develop and perfect their teaching. It has been demonstrated through research on teaching development that many professors can develop their teaching capacity to at least an adequate if not high level. Unfortunately there are a few faculty who never develop their teaching because of either their motivation or skills or a combination of both. Chairs should look for signs that suggest a candidate doesn't see teaching as important or isn't committed to teaching excellence. Critical signs include: blaming the students, suggesting anyone can do the

teaching, indicating that teaching is just something one has to do in order to have the position to do other more important tasks or giving a rationale that one can only teach under ideal conditions. Certainly arrogance or other traits that prevent two way communications will also be major detriments to effective teaching

Since expectations do vary according to the kind of institution where one is a candidate, chairs should carefully examine the kind of institutional setting the faculty member is presently working. The chair should explicitly state what the teaching expectations at his or her institution are. At universities, permanent or tenure-track faculty, are expected to balance their teaching, research and service roles. One has to perform well as a teacher as well as develop a research agenda. Since universities are expected to be knowledge generators, the research agenda is an important part of securing and retaining a permanent position. However it is also true that many universities are creating other position classifications that don't require excellence in all three areas. For example, non-renewable, term appointments often for three to five years are common. Another option is the Professor of Practice position, often associated with professions such as education, medicine or engineering, which is a teaching position with a larger teaching load. If there are research expectations in this position, they are focused on research on teaching with an expectation that although she will not be doing original discipline-specific research, she will be expected to keep up with developments in the discipline (knowledge and techniques) which can be addressed through reading, discussion with colleagues and attending disciplinary meetings.

Whatever the hire, the chair should communicate the expectation that teaching is a high priority, open for discussion and always to be continually improved, rewarded and another form of scholarship. Since research is more of a national and international reputation, often with high visibility for grant dollars and specializations, such an explicit commitment of the chair and core members of the department will help to ensure that those with primarily a teaching appointment don't become second class citizens.

Questions to consider: (1) What is your present composition in terms of permanent and non-permanent faculty? (2) What is the ideal you would like to have? (3) What can you do to move toward this ideal?

Keeping the Department on the Forefront of Innovation

Teaching is a constantly changing enterprise with development of new methods and technologies that purport to, and in many instances, do improve learning. The new generation of students has greater expectations about the kind of learning environment they seek often with technological skills beyond the faculty capabilities. In some cases, the students will reject the faculty member as out of date because they are not using the latest technology even if the content skills may be on the cutting edge.

Decisions about technology investments. So the chair must make assessments of the importance and effectiveness of particular technologies and training. Usually there are faculty who have awareness and knowledge of whether these are serious trends that should be addressed or fads that really won't improve teaching and learning. Unfortunately there are also some faculty who easily jump on the bandwagon of the latest technology or just want to have the latest gadget or "bells and whistles" as a status symbol. The chair is expected to sort though and negotiate this entire scene keeping student learning as the primary goal and yet not alienating faculty. In some cases, it is performing a high-wire act!

What is essential, what's nice and what is unnecessary are important questions for the chair. Departmental budget decisions should support what is essential to student learning. This translates to the essential hardware, classroom setups and software to do the teaching. In most cases, the institution is providing financing and support for technological platforms (e.g. Blackboard), technologically sophisticated classrooms and training for use of accepted teaching technologies. Within departments, decisions may be made in adopting other technologies that may be discipline specific or of interest to the whole department. Sometimes departments can find institutional support from mini-grants or other support to pilot such programs or technologies. Faculty, individually and collectively, must also understand that they will have to reach out to find resources to support innovations in their teaching. Sometimes these are grant funds from outside agencies or they may be from technology companies that want to showcase their products and services. One of the roles of the chair is to know where the sources of outside funds are and to call these to the attention of the faculty.

Chairs also should continually ask faculty to consider what sources might be interested in this innovation or possibility so that they become accustomed to thinking in these terms.

Questions to consider: (1) How satisfied are you with the technology knowledge and use in the department? (2) What is the balance of institutional and departmental support for technology use? (3) What changes would you like to make?

Ensuring Effective Use of Personnel

An important role of the chair is to make sure that faculty have appropriate teaching and course assignments. We are all familiar with situations in which faculty were assigned courses in which they were not appropriate- content expertise, course level or course delivery (e.g. distance). For example, a person who has been teaching high level graduate courses and suddenly is assigned the beginning course is often set-up for failure. Students see the teacher as unable to relate to those unsocial zed in the discipline and may have overly ambitious expectations. Not only is it a bad situation for the professor, it has repercussions for the department as students may move away from the department and its other courses and majors. A common refrain from students is if that professor represents chemistry or whatever the subject area then I am not interested in that field. We may believe that students should be more discriminating in their assessment but particularly with students' early exposure to college courses; they may not choose to try again. In no situation should course assignments be used as faculty punishments – it has too many bad effects.

Chairs should also consider redirecting resources to more appropriate areas to make a better fit for faculty. This may require negotiating with others whose assignments will be affected. The chair has to work to create a culture in which these changes are expected and needs of the students and department are

placed first. If the chair continues to emphasize these goals, making the changes should become easier and become the norm.

Questions to consider: (1) What personnel modifications are needed to have faculty and students more satisfied? (2) What is needed to make these changes?

Initiating Teaching Development and Remediation

Chairs set the tone for an expectation of continued teaching development and openness to addressing teaching problems. We have all seen departments in which teaching is perceived as a private act in which another faculty, let alone the chair, would not dare to enter the classroom. In these situations which look like separate units, everyone does their own thing in the classroom and the only time there is any concern or conversation is if student evaluations are poor or there is a problem that comes to the chair. Contrast that to a department in which faculty regularly visit each other's classes and discuss teaching, established faculty mentor other faculty about their teaching and everyone understands that even the best teachers have issues that they address to improve. This modeling of excellence and the continual search for improvement is energizing and the kind of place faculty want to be.

Identify issues and address them. Beyond creating a departmental culture that embraces and encourages excellent teaching, chairs must address teaching issues that are detrimental to learning. Often chairs will entertain the thinking that if they just give the situation time (lack of experience, new teaching assignments etc.) the problem will resolve itself. Although many of these issues may be headed off through preventative measures (assignment of mentors, mid-term evaluations), when chairs become aware of teaching issues they should be addressed as quickly as possible. As described in the Academic Chair Handbook (2008), the chair may want to start with a colleague to colleague chat emphasizing that he or she is not there in their official role as the chair. In departments that have a high commitment to and collaboration on teaching, these issues will be more visible and faculty will be more inclined to ask for help.

However the chair learns of the issue, he or she should have a discussion with the faculty member and identify the problem to be addressed. Common issues particularly for new faculty include: organization, appropriate expectations for students, balancing workload (particularly enough time for research and not too much time on teaching), teaching new courses and having too many preparations. If the chair hears a faculty member saying that they are spending two hours preparing for a fifty minute lecture and they have three or four course preparations, it is clear that the faculty member will not be able to sustain that schedule and also spend time on their other responsibilities. Clearly they need help in how to be more efficient in their lecture preparation. Of course a whole other discussion may be that lecturing may not be the best way for the students to learn the material but that may have to take place at the end of the semester.

For more experienced faculty, common problems include: updating in terms of content, revision in terms of technology or methods, lack of enthusiasm about teaching the same classes or level of students, burnout, or lack of motivation to go beyond the expected.

Process to address teaching issues. Chairs interviewed as part of the development of the Academic Chair Handbook (2nd edition) suggested that once the problem or issue has been identified, a diagnosis needs to be made and then a mutually developed plan to address the issue. Thus the process would be: (1) identification of the problem (2) identification of what is needed to address the problem (3) mutually develops the plan (4) follow-up to the plan. Although the chair is initiating this problem solving process, the plan can involve others in the department and/or outside the department.

An example may help to explain how the process works. A new faculty member who has been teaching small graduate classes at another university is now expected to teach a large undergraduate course at your university. Four weeks into the class students are complaining that his expectations are unrealistic, that he does a poor job of explaining concepts and that his tests are too difficult. The chair realizes that if left alone things are not going to get better and likely to get worse. The chair knows this is a critical course for majors in the department and he can't afford to have students become disenchanted with the course and possibly with being a major in the department. He asks the faculty member to come see him.

When the chair sits down with the faculty member, the teacher becomes defensive about his teaching and complains about the student's laziness and how unprepared they are for his course. The chair realizes that the professor must move beyond this attitude to find a way to have the students be successful in the course. He suggests that the university has a Teaching and Learning Center which has experts who work with faculty to address teaching issues. He encourages the faculty member to make an appointment.

The faculty member makes the appointment and the consultant asks some questions about the faculty member's teaching and relationship with the students. The consultant suggests that she come and observe the faculty member and discuss the teaching-learning process. After the observation and some discussion, the consultant indicates that it might be instructive to videotape the faculty member and then both watch the teaching-learning process and discuss the videotape. The faculty member agrees to this intervention. Upon viewing the videotape, the faculty member notices that his communication flow is not easy or effective with the students. He still states that it is the student's responsibility to do what he asks and to change their attitude. The consultant suggests that based on her experience with a range of professors that she can suggest some strategies that can be more effective.

After considerable discussion, the faculty member agrees to try two strategies to improve organization and communication. The first is to provide a detailed outline to students ahead of the lecture. Then within the lecture, more examples are provided and an opportunity for students to submit questions regarding aspects or concepts they don't understand. After two weeks, the instructor is again videotaped and has a viewing and discussion with the consultant. Both agree that there is a difference in attitude and the nature of the discussion. The instructor commits to following these strategies the rest of the semester. He also asks the consultant to provide an update to the chair about his progress with the program.

Connect to other resources (e.g. TLCs). As the example demonstrates, a plan may well use institutional expertise in locations such as Teaching and Learning or Instructional Development Center. Consultants in these centers have skills in working with faculty to address specific issues or problems. The services are confidential so that only with the faculty member's permission can information

be released to anyone else. The faculty member can ask that a letter be sent to the chair and, if desired, to the Promotion and Tenure Committee indicating progress to address the identified issue.

Another possible teaching activity with a Teaching and Learning Center or other office with teaching development responsibility is to work with the whole department on an area to develop. With the emphasis on assessment, an instructional consultant or assessment specialist can work with faculty to ensure that the content from one course to another is coordinated and carefully assessed. This can help to prevent the blaming that can occur when instructors in higher level courses suggest that those in earlier courses are not preparing the students to come into their courses. It can also ensure that there is repetition of important constructs but not an overemphasis and that necessary concepts are taught at the appropriate time.

Chairs can encourage a range of activities that promote a teaching culture. Examples include: (1) collective or team planning and teaching (2) brownbag lunches focusing on various aspects of teaching (3) teaching demonstrations (4) visiting other faculty both within and outside the department (5) program and teaching assessment.

More intense and longer-term strategies can involve change-of-duty stations and sabbaticals. Land grant universities have had a tradition particularly of research faculty taking a change-of-duty station in which a faculty would travel to another faculty's laboratory to learn a new technique. These visits are usually from one to six weeks. The idea is the faculty member is doing his work but in another venue. There is no reason the arrangement can't be done with teaching or service. The important idea is to identify someone on the cutting edge of the field so that the faculty member will be gaining the best experience possible.

An even larger institutional commitment is use of the sabbatical leaves. Again many sabbaticals have been focused on research usually going to another site or sites for six or twelve months. Teaching can have the same kind of commitment with faculty addressing such issues as re-specializing in a content area, learning new methods and techniques, or developing new collaborations. Such experiences can further highlight and raise the profile of teaching and those doing the teaching.

Questions to consider: (1) What is the attitude toward teaching improvement in the department? (2) How often do faculty seek help in addressing teaching issues? (3) What can you do as the chair to encourage this improvement process?

Some Questions to Consider in Promoting Teaching Excellence

Asking key, focused questions is a guide to the journey to teaching excellence. Here are some questions to consider:

1- What is the culture in the department concerning teaching?

- Do people discuss teaching?

- Do faculty share ideas and mutually work on teaching issues?

- Do they celebrate successes and accomplishments?

- Do faculty see it as a highly valued in the department?

- What is the attitude toward teaching improvement and development?

- Are students enthused about coursework and the instructors?

2- What ongoing department activities are planned to address teaching improvement?

- Brown bag lunches discussing teaching

- Peer teaching observation

- Use of Teaching and Learning or comparable resources

- Department teaching project in which everyone can participate

- Use of Change-of-Duty Stations and Sabbaticals to improve teaching

3- What is needed to place a greater emphasis on teaching and teaching improvement?

4- Who are the champions of teaching and the journey to teaching excellence? Are they respected in the department?

5- How many ways do you as chair have to know the quality of teaching in the department?

6- How well do the faculty know the resources available to them? Do they use them?

Conclusion. The chair plays a critical role, both formally and informally, in teaching and learning in the department. On a personal level, he or she models effective teaching and a quest for teaching excellence. At a departmental level, she sets the tone for openness to collaborating and a commitment to a continual teaching improvement process. On an individual faculty level, the chair works with faculty to address specific teaching problems or issues. On an institutional level, the chair is the keeper of institutional standards and ensures that the department has the necessary resources to provide excellent teaching.

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