
TIPS FOR CHAIRS* AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-ROLLA

*These “Tips for Chairs” were generated by a group of about 15 experienced department chairs at the University of Missouri-Rolla on May 24 as part of a leadership development planning effort. They are designed to be general suggestions and advice to department chairs, particularly new chairs, who face a number of common issues. Most of the comments are “unfiltered” bits of advice to colleagues and should be considered as such. They are not intended to be formal guidelines or supplant the University’s policies or procedures.

General Tips and Suggestions

1. Regarding budgets - get summary report prepared so you can see an overall picture.
2. Learn to get along and communicate - - and to work with all types of people.
3. Lead by example - do your own teaching and research as well as administrative duties.
4. Establish credibility with your departmental faculty. Knowing your field helps establish credibility.
5. Know people in your industry area who hire your graduates. A skilled and experienced administrative assistant can respond to inquiries and work with employers too.
6. Establish rapport with faculty and students.
7. Get involved with students and student organizations.
8. Be a good listener - in some cases it is best to listen then say "I'll get back to you later".
9. Be impartial as you work with your faculty members.
10. Help students get to know each other - have meetings where they can interact.
11. Delegate to faculty members and students. It generates student responsibility and faculty members will know what's expected of them.
12. Stay focused on important goals for department - do what's important not what's in front of you.
13. Become interested in whole campus and how your department fits in.

Budget and Financial Issues

How to understand the department budget and the report sheets:

1. Budget forms are difficult to understand for new chairs and most will need assistance. Most get some form of summary report prepared by the administrative assistant.
2. Develop a chart of all your accounts (scholarship and others) with a description of each account and the amounts. Compare monthly spending to previous year's expenses.
3. Learn about your accounts
 - ?? What each fund can be used for (e.g. E&E, development, faculty travel, computer, support, development).
 - ?? How flexible can expenditures be?
4. Contacts for budget information are (in this order): Department secretary, Dean's administrative assistant, Dean. The institutional research office is an additional source for department and campus information.
5. Check list of helpful web addresses for budget information (e.g., www.umsystem.edu).
6. Go to the Dean for funds to hire non-regular faculty one year in advance and in conjunction with the registrar's request for the class schedule. Use the registrar's requests for revised schedules as a reminder to check with the Dean on your funding.
7. Regarding salary increases: have a well-known formula that is shared with the faculty and review it periodically - every 3 years. You may want to consult with other chairs to see what formulas are being used in other departments. Decide whether you will use a dollar-based or percentage-based system.
8. After the Dean approves a request for dollars, next go to the budget officer in the Dean's office and get the dollars committed.
9. Create budget flexibility:
 - ?? External funding and gifts
 - ?? Using proceeds from short courses
 - ?? Career faculty release time

Budget and Financial Issues – continued

How to develop budget flexibility:

1. This one applies universally. Encourage faculty to write some percentage of their time into grants and contracts. However, certain agencies are reluctant to allow this (NSF is one).
2. Encourage faculty to develop short courses and workshops. These can generate significant sources of income for the departments. It is important to establish a policy for distributing any income sharing among participating faculty and the department.
3. Phonathons are a wonderful way to solicit donations from the department's alumni. It is often easier if the campus conducts the phonathon and charges the departments for the expenses on a percentage basis.
4. Several of the departments on the UMR campus have developed an "Academy of...." While the Academy is primarily a vehicle to honor successful alumni, they seem to develop a loyalty and want to help the department with scholarships, equipment, etc.
5. Depending on the way developmental leaves are handled and the salary dollars are allocated, sometimes funds may be freed up when a faculty member takes a developmental leave.
6. Consortia are often a means of bringing funds into the department. Usually, the consortium consists of a group of companies that have common research interests and are willing to make annual contributions to a specific research group. This helps create a group of faculty who have travel and research funds and are not dependent on the department for travel, secretarial and other needs.
7. Endowed Professorships have the same impact as consortia in the sense that the funds do not come to the chair but the recipient of the professorship often is no longer dependent on the department for expense and equipment type of expenditures.
8. Sometimes fees can be charged for specific items such as computing and laboratory supplies. Check with the Dean or the Chancellor's office to see what charges are allowed.

Faculty and Personnel Issues

Recruiting and selecting new faculty:

1. Recruit faculty candidates from top schools - Big Ten, Pac-10, Ivy League, etc. Use the subgroups most familiar with the candidate's area to act as a filter.
2. Questions:
 - ?? Personality issues - are they aggressive versus passive? Do they have the "Fire in the gut" that is important.
 - ?? Interdisciplinary leanings - is it important in your field? It is the future for many areas.
3. Should you get student input?
 - ?? Biological Sciences and Chemical Engineering - use lots of undergraduate student input.
4. Is the new superstar a threat to existing faculty? Will the bar be raised when he/she comes?
5. Try to get faculty to be proactive in identifying prospective faculty members for open positions.
6. In addition to ads contact every similar department in the U.S. There are e-mail lists or you can send letters with the position description.
7. Network, network, network, with departments where faculty members have contacts.
8. Use web page to post openings.
9. In your ads, word them so you "will accept applicants until position is filled but resumes will be evaluated starting on" (list a particular date).
10. Look for candidates that provide diversity. Make ads flexible. List a range of academic ranks if appropriate, rather than a single rank. (e.g. rank and salary commensurate with experience and accomplishments).

Annual reviews for faculty (and staff):

1. Are important but time consuming.
2. One approach: benchmark faculty against averages of the other department faculty members.
3. Use annual reviews to help faculty members set goals.
4. Emphasize positives but cite or document weaknesses and deficiencies.
5. Remind faculty that the salary adjustment issue is broader than just the department. It is a campus or school-wide issue.

Faculty and Personnel Issues – continued

How to handle difficult faculty members:

1. Be candid - speak with authority.
2. You can't please everyone - be reasonable, but do not bow to all their demands.
3. Do prevention: consider work-style and the ability to collaborate with other faculty and to work with others as a member of a team when selecting new faculty members.
4. Don't bend over backwards to accommodate unreasonable demands. In many cases you will not make anyone happy by bending over backwards.
5. Communicate clearly what you do - without letting the conversation become hostile. If they are really loud - speak softly.
6. For some faculty members you will need to document everything. Talk to legal counsel for advice if necessary. Some faculty members will threaten legal action when there really is no case. Don't let threats intimidate good judgment.
7. Work to prevent problems. Help the faculty members see the larger department issues and see themselves as a part of a team. Communicate clearly - promote the notion of investing in faculty members and their investment in the department.

Faculty and Personnel Issues – continued

Salary adjustments and compression issues:

1. You might use a spreadsheet approach using performance indicators. Here are several approaches:
 - ?? Weights on teaching, research and service.
 - ?? Dollars versus percentages.
 - ?? Teaching/research/school/mentorship/service all factor in salary increases.
 - ?? Work on salary adjustments in conjunction with the Dean.
2. You can design a plan where increased teaching with good performance (e.g. student evaluations) can lead to average or higher percentage increases without research. Must be done up front.
3. Be aware of salary compression:
 - ?? Entrance level salaries advance faster than good young faculty salaries.
 - ?? Starting salaries move up slower than market.
4. Ask Dean to help in the first category above. Use unfilled position funds to help with salary compression issues. Faculty can do some “bench marking” against peers. Be careful to use actual “peers” and not those with higher status or rank.
5. If as a whole the departmental salaries are low enough that you cannot hire entry-level faculty the Dean or Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs or Chancellor must be responsible for taking action.
6. Chair should consider the negative impact of a faculty member’s salary being low compared to his/her peers.
7. Make sure initial salary is realistic in both directions.

Important Events and People

Contacts on campus (i.e. “who do I call about this issue?”):

1. Take time to establish credibility. Know someone in the Dean’s office who will help you get done what needs to be done.
2. Get to know someone in the personnel office. Find out what the barriers are. Find someone with the right chemistry who can help you work with the system.
3. Ask the administrative assistant who the important contacts are and build relationships with them - find out who the problem-solvers are.
4. Know who to contact and what they can do can make things happen - you don’t always have to do all the steps.
5. Establish contacts in Admissions and Registrar’s offices.
6. Get to know someone at the campus budget level. He/she can tell you if the information you are getting is accurate or not.
7. Get to know someone in graduate admissions - - but you should also be able to get more help from your faculty in this area.
8. Chairs in engineering meet once a week for lunch, just as a group, to get a better understanding of each other’s needs, build relationships, etc. They meet in each other’s offices and facilities. It’s a great way to learn who the folks on campus are who can be very helpful.
9. Institutional research can provide useful information.

Important Events and People – continued

The important projects and dates - so new chairs are not surprised:

1. Open house dates - October and April.
2. Chancellor's councils - 1st Tuesday of each month - go to them
3. Annual review requires one hour with each faculty member to discuss performance. Standard campus form is helpful but you may want to add your own components too.
4. April faculty activity reports and reviews - they take quite a while longer than you might think.
5. Regarding Tenure and Promotion: Meet with faculty in the spring to decide on a plan. The reference letters should go out in early summer with return letters by August 1st. Around the first of October they are due to committee.
6. The schedule for classes is due about one year in advance of offerings. Look at enrollment trends - over a few years. Use what was offered in the past as a start but modify it to fit current needs and interests.
7. Offering a new course requires lots of advance planning. Start six months before the schedule is due in or about 18 months ahead of the target semester.

Professional and Faculty Development

How to put together promotion and tenure portfolios:

1. The chair is an evaluator not an advocate. After positive decision is reached, chair becomes an advocate to the school or college level committees.
2. Should chair or faculty member or Promotion and Tenure committee initiate the promotion process? Work it out in your department beforehand.
3. Make the annual review a point where the faculty member's progress toward promotion and tenure is discussed.
4. The dossier must tell a story, not just be a collection of data.
5. The faculty member generates most of the dossier. The Chair provides the external letters of reference.
6. You must start requesting letters of reference at least two months prior to the due date of the dossier.
7. Send an e-mail note in advance to see if the external referee can respond in time.
8. Selecting external references:
?? Let candidate submit names
?? Chair or area coordinators augment list
9. Make mentoring uniform among candidates so everyone feels treated fairly.

Professional and Faculty Development – continued

Stimulating faculty proposal writing:

1. Reward proposal writing in salary adjustments.
2. Disseminate information about grant opportunities.
3. Build teams for major proposals.

Managing your own teaching and writing:

1. Set aside time to work on your own scholarship. Protect that time and schedule meetings around it.
2. Find a place where you can work with or prepare for your courses. Often the department chair's office is not a good place due to interruptions.
3. Promote good teaching and research by modeling good behavior.
4. Collaborate with other faculty members in the department or college to help push your research or teaching forward.

Relations with the Public

Recruiting and admitting new freshman and graduate students:

1. Find faculty members who are enthusiastic to talk to students. They can really make a huge difference.
2. Participate in campus-wide recruitment efforts, open houses, etc. Be a team player on campus recruitment.
3. On a second level - work with undecided students. You can't be overbearing when getting in front of freshmen, but make sure the information you present is interesting and up-to-date.
4. You can offer interesting activities for students to get them interested in your area of study. Show them the interesting aspects of your field.
5. Show students you care. Be involved with students, be genuine. They can tell if you are genuine.
6. Be willing to see drop-ins. Let them visit with people in the department, other faculty members, your administrative assistant, advanced students, etc.
7. Drop whatever you are doing to see new students. It's an important part of your job as a chair.
8. Summer internships often equal job offers at graduation - - the experience is really valuable. Encourage students to participate in internships.
9. Focus on placement; it's a big issue in recruiting. Establish relationships with employers.
10. The best student recruiters are those faculty members who are naturally warm and friendly. When you talk to them, you are the only person in the world.

Relations with the Public – continued

Public occasions such as open houses and homecoming events:

1. Open houses and homecoming events - go to them - they are very important.
2. Use students to help with public events. If you get a good student leader, the student group can really help the department. They can staff the labs on open houses or student visits, meet with prospective students, plan and staff barbecues, etc. Also it's a great way to recruit students for graduate programs.
3. Consider becoming involved in planning the campus activities. Ask for proof that the activities actually produce results so you can allocate time and money based on the results.
4. During homecoming you will have responsibilities such as:
 - ?? Academic contacts.
 - ?? Visiting with alumni.
 - ?? Very important to meet with former students and potential employers.

Work with student organizations:

1. Get involved with your department student organizations.
2. Give students responsibility for running the organizations.
3. Urge students to join organizations. It helps with student retention.
4. Support professional and honor societies and campus groups too.
5. Encourage involvement with other campus organizations.
6. Center for Personal and Professional Development is very helpful in several ways.
7. Tutoring is readily available and pretty well advertised. Transfer students may need help finding sources.
8. As students get involved, they stay at UMR. Work to see that the students get the help and support they need to succeed.

The Role of the Department Chair ... and the Dean

Who does what and why you do it:

1. Read the job description in the Collected Rules & Regulations (<http://www.system.missouri.edu/uminfo/rules/administration/20110.htm>).
2. Your power is often limited to teaching assignments, space, research travel fund, salary, and Promotion and Tenure decisions.
3. Coordinate with the senior clerical person in your department about “who does what”. Some suggestions include: list of questions related to who does what, weekly meeting with staff, how to be most effective, how to best use other support staff, etc.
4. Seek out the national group of department chairs in your area. It’s a great source of information (e.g. statistics of departments nationally) and a chance to talk with chairs in your area who face similar issues. Attending those programs should be a top priority.
5. Your daily schedule often will be out of your control - but don’t let it get to you.
6. You are “where the buck stops” for student complaints.
7. Resolve every problem at the lowest possible level.
8. You are the key public relations person for your department - for the campus and for undecided students. You need to be aware of the status of campus situations and represent your department in many different areas. The rest of the campus expects you to know the various details about your department.
9. You are evaluated annually by the Dean (in consultation with your faculty). Your department will be evaluated every 5 years by the campus and a report is submitted to CBHE.
10. Due to the nature of our position, some information you obtain will be highly confidential and should not be shared with other faculty. Find a mentor in another chair or a friend on another campus who respects confidentiality. Normally it should not be a faculty member in your department.
11. Hiring decisions and Promotion and Tenure discussions are critical for your department’s well-being; make them carefully. There are rules and regulations in place at the department, college, and university levels. Be familiar with these and follow them; your decisions will be reviewed by others.
12. If you go against the department committee on a Promotion and Tenure decision you had better have a very good reason.

The Role of the Department Chair ... and the Dean – continued

13. There are some reports that are really valuable and worth doing well - look for those involving dollars. You should develop departmental statistics for these reports, you can often reuse material from reports, and share this information with others.
14. Delegate when possible to faculty or faculty committees (examples: curriculum, course schedules, transfer advising, scholarships, career advising, and computers/labs/recruiting).
15. You can put answers to standard questions on a web page, information about new positions, etc. ABET may call you for information.
16. Network informally with your chair colleagues (encourage informal meetings).
17. In terms of interactions with your department faculty the majority of your interactions may be spent with the more difficult members or those with lower levels of performance.
18. Watch your use of e-mail. It can escalate quickly and folks will say things via e-mail they would not say otherwise.
19. Know the Dean's preferred modes of communication (e-mail, face-to-face, etc.). Go to the Dean:
 - ?? When decisions require his/her approval
 - ?? When what happens in the department reflects on the university (Dean's don't like negative surprises)
 - ?? To inform him/her of things that are likely to escalate to a higher level (e.g. inappropriate use of funds)
 - ?? On a regular basis because he/she will have information needed to make decisions regarding your department, both the positive and negative
20. When you receive special money appropriations for projects from the Dean, get it in writing and follow up to ensure it gets booked for that fiscal year.