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ABSTRACT

An important facet of governance and administration in a college or university is the role of the department chairman. This revised version of an address delivered at Memphis State University on 14 November 1973 directs attention to the wider role of department chairmen. The department chairman's primary duties should be: (1) representation of the department to the college or university; (2) representation of the administration of the college or university to the department; (3) exercise of leadership to provide analysis, options, and alternatives in the most important decisionmaking of the institution, that is, the selection and advancement of personnel; and (4) the persistent and careful sifting of departmental agenda, particularly items concerning program planning and effective performance. The author then presents some items for departmental agenda, including: (1) The department should clearly formulate its purpose as related to those of the institution; (2) Has the department considered its part in a 3-year degree program? (3) Is the department in a position to consider the advantages and possibilities of cooperative education? and (4) Is the department concerned about the literacy of its students? (Author/PG)

LEADERSHIP AND DEPARTMENTS

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THE ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT AND EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

This issue of *Management Forum* deals with an important facet of governance and administration in a college or university—the role of the department chairman. What follows is a revised version of an address delivered at Memphis State University on 14 November 1973 by David D. Henry, President Emeritus of the University of Illinois. The Management Division expects to direct much of its attention this year to problems of governance, and is happy to have this contribution on the wider role of department chairmen.

THE DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN

by DAVID D. HENRY

I doubt that there is a prototype of a "department chairman," for the duties, responsibilities, and effectiveness of the chairman will vary with the size and purposes of the institution, the size and expectations of the department, the personal capabilities of the chairman, and the style of administration expected in the particular department, college, and university. Hence, variations will be numerous, and allowances must be made for the inapplicability of generalizations to every department chairman in every institution.

It is likely that the role of the department chairman will change from what it has been in the past, but in some ways it has not and probably will not change drastically. It may be appropriate, then, to consider the traditional role of the department head, both as he or she ordinarily perceives it and as others perceive it.

More often than not, the department head has been considered by department colleagues to be a group chairman. Most people, whatever the structure and whatever the level of operation, do not make clear distinctions between policy and practice, between policy and organization, or between policy and its implementation or administration. The academic group members consider themselves to be peers in all these concerns; they grudgingly confine themselves to policy formulation and evaluation, reluctantly admitting that in other matters they should be advisers rather than peers.

The typical process by which a department chairman is selected makes the success of the chairman all the more notable when it occurs. Most faculty groups do not want a strong head; they want a submissive one. It is an adroit, patient, and unflappable individual who, in heading a department, subtly manages to make the members feel that they are full partners in administration in every aspect while getting on with the task of improving departmental efficiency and marshalling the department's intellectual and scholarly resources for the advancement of education and research.

Assuming that we have found our gifted administrator, who manages to keep morale high, to concentrate on important issues and decisions, to get the housekeeping done, and to plan for the future, we need to ask what are his or her primary activities? I think they are these:

1. Representation of the department to the college, to the university, to the inter-institutional academic scene, and to the public. In performing this function, the chairman reflects not only his or her own views on policy matters, but those of colleagues, even when there is not consensus within the department.
2. Representation of the administration of the college and university to the department. When this service is not adequately and fairly performed, an institution will suffer from dissension and immobility. The task is not always popular, pleasant, or easy. If a central administration is regarded as remote or distant, the fault is frequently the failure of the department head in this function of interpretation.
3. Exercise of initiative and leadership to provide analysis, options, and alternatives in the most important decision-

making of the institution: the selection and advancement of personnel.

4. Persistent and careful sifting of departmental agenda, particularly items concerning program planning and effective performance. The chairman must keep questions alive until a conclusive decision has been reached. A department cannot afford to drift.

These functions comprise the traditional role of the department chairman. What we may expect in the future is not so much a change in these functions as a change in the environment of their performance.

Clark Kerr, in the first David D. Henry Lecture at the University of Illinois (October 1972), stated, "Administration, defined as continuing arrangements for the conduct of affairs by organizations, is almost eternally much the same in appearance–the daily arrangements must always be made. The administrator sees people, handles paper, makes decisions, and all this goes on endlessly. The tasks look much the same but the mood and the tempo of the effort rise and fall. Higher education in the United States is a case in point."

That the climate in which higher education now operates has changed, and probably will change more, is acknowledged in all quarters. It seems to me that the department head must be familiar with these changes, with their cause and nature, for they both directly and indirectly affect departmental matters, from budgets to student attitudes, from academic freedom to external controls. While working with national organizations, commissions, and task forces (concentrating upon national forces and conditions which bear upon the welfare and effectiveness of higher education), I have been appalled by the indifference, ignorance, and lack of personal involvement reflected by faculty, including department heads. The gap is wide indeed between national leadership on educational issues as related to federal relations or national concerns and campus understanding, support, and informed criticism of these issues. Sensing virtually no response to public questions about educational issues at the local or institutional level, or at best receiving parochial, ill-informed, and sometimes self-serving response, public officials and politicians take the initiative and advance their own simplistic and often misdirected solutions to highly sensitive and complex problems. The effectiveness of organized higher education in influencing public policy is thereby weakened. The fault must be shared by the profession broadly.

It seems to me that the department chairman should be a student, if not a scholar, of the wide academic world and that he or she should manage in one way or another to bring his or her associates into a similar familiarity with the issues, trends, conditions, and forces that are today shaping higher education. Post-secondary education is moving from a high degree of mass attendance to a social expectation of universal access, a climatic change equal to any in the history of higher education, according to many observers. New institutions, new structures, new services, and new constituencies are in the making. Letting things drift in this situation is the worst possible posture for the college and university academic community.

CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

The movement for change is world-wide. The international challenge for change is rooted not alone in the public reactions to student disorder, to disillusionment stemming from the behavior of faculty activists, or to alleged administrative mismanagement; nor is the motive solely a resistance to increased costs that have assailed higher education as they have every other segment of life. The call for improvement is really a call for higher education to gear up to meet the social, economic, and cultural demands whose fulfillment is dependent upon the services of colleges and universities. The perennial goals are still sought, but they are sought in a context of urgent need for improved effectiveness now.

Administration, including particularly the department head, obviously has a key place in this process of change and a heavy responsibility for its initiation and continuing implementation. Indeed the degree of a department's effectiveness may determine the pace and quality of institutional response to the present concern with what is perceived to be the need for change.

The orderly process toward change has been disrupted somewhat by the new priorities for public expenditure. Sensing some change in public attitudes toward higher education, including opposition to a never-ending expectation of more income, local and federal departments have moved to limit, even to cut back, college and university financial support. Often the method of external evaluation has been heavy-handed, unfair, uninformed, and "penny-wise, pound-foolish" in consequence. The results in many instances have been devastating to morale, injurious to quality, and limiting for educational opportunity. The results will not be offset for years to come, long after those directly responsible have left their present position of power and influence.

The cost of the present state of finance includes both lost institutional opportunity and lost educational capital. Initially, innovations usually cost more, not less. Priorities cannot be shifted by fiat without disorder. Wrong moves can be expensive. The deadly business of salvage falls to administration in these days, and there is not much point in talking about real

MD ANNOUNCES...

A new publication! *An Outline of Concepts of Organization, Operation, and Administration for Colleges and Universities*, by John D. Millett. This is a brief synopsis of concepts and terms basic to management in higher education. Single copies may be obtained free by writing to the Management Division, Academy for Educational Development, 1424-16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Information! The Management Improvement Manuals described in the December issue of *Management Forum* have been delayed. The Management Division plans to distribute these only to persons on our regular mailing list–if you receive *Management Forum*, you will get the manuals. If you are not now on our list, write to the Management Improvement Program, Ohio Board of Regents, 35 East Gay Street, Room 310, Columbus, Ohio 43215.

reform unless administrators are released from total preoccupation with the salvage business.

The public may be asking for a re-evaluation of purposes, costs, effectiveness, and priorities, but it is not asking for the dismantling of the system. I think that public officials and legislators are missing this point. There is no need to assume that everything now in being needs to be thrown out and a totally new start made. To combat the difficulties, to change and to add new elements, what has been, and is, still working should first be subjected to the most careful analysis. If those charged with initiative in planning overreact or proceed with a lack of precision, with a lack of scholarship, and with an advocacy of change without well-rooted experimentation and analysis, much of what might be a solid foundation for future developments will then be destroyed. The word "innovation" should not be used without an adjective. Change by assertion should be rejected.

During the coming decade, as the feeling of urgency about solving social problems deepens, the challenges to these premises for change will be tremendous. Equal opportunity, the quality of the environment, health-related services, the energy crisis, urban affairs--these topics seem to expand in complexity with each month. If higher education is to contribute to the solution of such problems more than is now the case, it must be allowed to do so with the strengths of its own talents and resources as an intellectual and cultural institution and not as the victim of insensitive and inadequately informed external controls and imperious one-sided directives from political planners and inexperienced novices assigned to budget bureaus and task forces.

Beyond the administrative tasks involved in the current challenge for departmental and institutional goal-setting and for more careful balancing of top priorities, some other major problems will test the administrators of the next decade. Pressures for collective bargaining, more adequate cost control, program evaluation, improved effectiveness in the educational process, and dispersal of existing limited authority by structuring new relationships with students, faculty, community and user groups are but a few of the subjects that will precipitate change.

SOME ITEMS FOR THE DEPARTMENTAL AGENDA

1. Current professional discussion makes much of the need for clarification of the purposes of higher education and of its institutions. It follows that the department should clearly formulate its purposes as related to those of the college and of the institution, as well as to those of the academic world generally.

For example, what degree of emphasis will be given to graduate work, and to preparing undergraduates for graduate school? What are the department's obligations for general education? How should it meet the concern for improved "developmental" education of students? What is its commitment for continuing education, at what levels, in what modes, under what circumstances, and with what incentives?

The final report of the Carnegie Commission of Higher Education quotes Lionel Trilling as having commented upon "the growing intellectual recessiveness of college and university faculties, their reluctance to formulate any coherent theory for higher education, to discover what its best purposes are . . ." (p. 25). I am not prepared to support the Trilling accusation, but I think that it is the unusual department that has produced a recent definition of its purposes in clear terms for internal use in planning, as well as for external evaluation by students, college, and institution. "There has been no basic discussion of purposes, engaged in widely within higher education, for a century," says the Carnegie Commission final report. "There should be some new aspirations, some new visions" (p. 76).

2. Do the new appointments and the promotion of personnel within the department take into account the advancement of defined purposes?

3. How does the department evaluate its "education effectiveness"? The bibliographic review and promotional procedures usually tell the department pretty well how it is doing in research productivity. Most departments, however, have not approached the admittedly difficult question of measuring teaching effectiveness in similar spirit. Further, little thought has been given to the measure of education effectiveness reflected in overall student achievement. To what extent is the department concerned with these questions?

4. What are the departmental attitudes toward off-campus instruction, including relations with community colleges and other institutions and cooperation with high schools through advanced placement and curriculum consultation?

5. Has the department considered its part in a three-year degree program?

6. Is the department seriously concerned with the new technology of instruction, including computers, television, multi-media devices, and similar resources for instruction?

7. Is the department in a position to consider the advantages and possibilities of cooperative education?

8. Is the department concerned about the literacy of its students--speaking, writing, and reading?

9. Does the department encourage intellectual extra-departmental academic involvement on the part of its major students? Are advisers really informed about opportunities for cross-cultural education and interdisciplinary opportunities?

10. Is the giving of grades coherently administered within the department? Are the members uniform in their attitude toward values and practices in grading?

11. The role of the department chairman in collective bargaining is a confused issue. Is he or she "management" or "faculty" in such a situation? Has the department considered the administrative and organizational implications of collective bargaining?

12. How does the department chairman fit into the reward system of the institution? Can he or she receive academic promotion on the basis of giving academic leadership, apart from evaluation as teacher or researcher? The answer to this question may well determine the quality of departmental leadership in the years ahead. At the present time, in many institutions, the department head's contribution is not adequately recognized in the reward system, and he or she forfeits

position on the academic ladder by serving as a chairman. This policy in my view is unjust, unfair, and short-sighted in its impact on internal leadership.

13. How should the department adjust to the fact that more and more authority over higher education is being exercised by external authorities?

14. What is the role of student participation in departmental affairs? Has it been carefully considered and have appropriate provisions been made?

15. What plans does the department have for tenure appointments in the next decade? It is said that by 1985, we are likely to have 80% of full-time faculty members with tenure, if current tendencies continue, and over 90% with tenure in 1990. Should these trends be altered and, if so, how?

16. Has the department a plan for meeting affirmative action obligations? Has it considered balancing ethnic, racial, and sex backgrounds within the personnel of the department as important as balancing philosophical and professional differences?

17. Is the department organized to bring into its deliberations ideas and recommendations based upon studies of higher education in its broad aspects?

18. How does the department efficiently respond to new demands for program budgeting, information systems, and other quantitative measurement of departmental and professorial activity?

Impressive as they are in an inventory of this kind, the tasks identified here are the more formidable because of two overriding new conditions. They are described by Clark Kerr as:

1. A loss of consensus among the members of the higher education constituency, and among different constituencies related to the academic world, as to values, objectives, and methods; and
2. Along with the rest of society, a preoccupation with rights ahead of responsibilities and opportunities, and ahead of those values necessary for a well-ordered and civilized society which fall under "the domain of the unenforceable."

These issues and changes in the context of the administrator's work will greatly influence his or her performance in the seventies. The exact nature of that performance cannot be predicted, but that it will be different there can be no doubt.

I would add a third condition confronting academic administration, including the department chairman:

3. A central thrust must continue to be improving the public understanding of why the university is essential to a democratic society and the fulfillment of the historic as well as the new aspirations of the nation.

The public is now engaged in a crucial debate. Beyond the unsupported skepticism voiced by some public leaders, colleges and universities are being victimized by rumor and innuendo without adequate inquiry. The outcome of this debate may appear to justify reordering or limiting financial priorities for some immediate budgetary gains, but long-run educational and social damage, not now visible, may result.

Educators obviously should not direct their message to those who have lost faith in the idea of organized education or indeed in the very idea of progress. These are characterized by David Riesman as reflecting "a new vanity of believing that America is the worst among nations," as they search "to locate the worst villains within that worst America" (Commencement address, University of Pennsylvania, 1971). With all its problems and limitations, "its dilemmas and conflicts and impending bankruptcies," the university has a high destiny, most of us believe, as a central force for human betterment and a large influence in the national welfare.

Whether these hopes for universities are fulfilled will depend in large measure upon the confidence of the people, confidence in the merit of giving education the priority which it has had in the past, confidence in the leadership of institutions, in faculty and students, confidence in the total mission of higher education. With that public confidence, with the resources available, and with the momentum of an inspiring tradition, greater achievement can be anticipated. Any program for building that confidence must start at the departmental level if it is to be effective. It cannot be left to college and university spokesmen alone. The whole institution must be involved.

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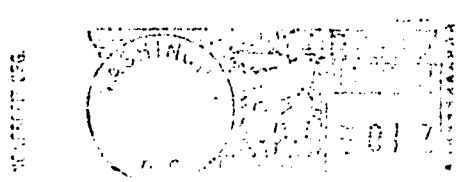

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