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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on findings of a multi-faceted preliminary study designed to identify the technical information needs of academic department chairpersons at a public urban university. Study methodology involved: (1) two 2-hour focus group sessions in which a total of 10 department chairpersons participated; (2) short written reports from the participating chairs (three responded) on the technical environment in their department, sources of their information, and particular tasks and problems they faced as chairs; (3) a running log of problems encountered by the author related to data implications; (4) a literature review on the role of the department chair and information resource implications; and (5) an interview with the Director of Institutional Research of the university concerning university and chair information needs and resources. The most significant finding was the importance given by the chairs to their non-technical information needs and to the lack of attention by the university to their training and development. Findings are reported, first from the identified needs of the small group of chairs, expressed through the focus groups and written followup, and then recommended changes suggested by those interviewed. (Contains 19 references.) (GLR)

WHAT DOES AN ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT CHAIRPERSON NEED TO KNOW ANYWAY?

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Jean Endo
Chair and Editor
Forum Publications
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WHAT DOES AN ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT CHAIRPERSON

NEED TO KNOW ANYWAY?

ABSTRACT

Results of a multi-faceted preliminary study to identify the technical information needs of academic department chairpersons are reported. Despite efforts by the researcher to keep the focus on technical information needs, chairs at a public urban university described their needs more broadly. The author concludes that this area of inquiry needs more attention by the institutional research profession. Recommendations for local institutional research directors, institutional executive officers, AIR and for further research are offered. Findings may be most applicable to large public universities.

WHAT DOES AN ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT CHAIRPERSON NEED TO KNOW ANYWAY?

INTRODUCTION

> Perhaps institutional research directors feel they need to service central administration to survive. On the other hand, if basic department decisions are not well informed the institution may not survive.
>
> (F. Craig Johnson, 1976, p. 77)

The major purpose of this study is to increase the attention institutional researchers are giving to the information needs of department chairs. A secondary purpose is to provide an approach for identifying the information needs of the chairs at their institutions.

The idea for this study was born when I was elected chairperson of my academic department in the Fall of 1992. I quickly realized that my previous experiences as an institutional researcher, in central university administration and in an academic dean's office, were inadequate preparation for this new role.

Over the past three or four years, my institution has changed its mission, implemented a strategic planning process and begun to apply total quality management concepts. The information needs of academic department chairpersons, however, have not been addressed in any systematic way. When problems arrive, as they did in a steady stream, and I looked for information to address them, the response was, "Data? What data?"

I decided to use the opportunity to become more familiar with the literature about "chairing" and to initiate a preliminary investigation of the technical information needs of department chairs.

One source of data used was an anecdotal log I kept over my first four months as chair. Here is an excerpt from the first entry (Kinnick, September 20, 1992):

> My major focus is to inform the institutional research and planning office about what we need and to help create a more responsive central administration. The real change stuff occurs in classrooms and

departments...so they should give us better information and help us use it!

THE PROBLEM

Higher education is being asked to change in fundamental ways, including demonstrating a greater responsiveness to the needs of its diverse clientele and more efficient and effective performance in its use of scarce resources. The position taken in this paper is that the academic department, as a mediator between institutional and individual faculty goals and objectives, is a pivotal player in this change process. The department can help or hinder the overall achievement of the institution's mission.

Allan Tucker (1992), a major documenter of role of the academic department chair, points to the importance of department chairs as a critical resource:

> The increasing complexities of operating institutions of higher education, along with shrunken budgets, have led deans and other university administrators to delegate more and more tasks to department chairs. (p. 28)

Gmelch (1992) indicates that while the role of chair has received much attention, "...most information has come in the form of anecdotal speeches, professional papers, popular journal articles, how-to books, with a few data-based studies interspersed" (p. 15).

Gmelch (1991) reports that nearly 80,000 faculty serve as department chair in U.S. postsecondary education institutions, and nearly one-fourth are new each year: "They come to the position without leadership training; without prior administrative experience; without a clear understanding of the ambiguity and complexity of their role..." (p. 45). He suggests that nearly 80% of our administrative decisions are made at this level (p. 45).

More than twenty years ago, Dressel, Johnson and Marcus (1970), in The Confidence Crisis, suggested that information resources can help departments but that these resources are in short supply:

> Despite complaints about the department's apparent indifference to university priorities and fiscal problems, it is usually true that the department is provided with limited information. Even information collected from the department is not fed back unless some administrator is complaining about small courses, low teaching loads, high costs, or the like. A fuller sharing of university data with departments and adaptation of these data to departmental concerns and needs might materially improve the total situation. (p. 14)

Discussions with several chairpersons, institutional research directors and with Dr. Walter H. Gmelch, director of the Center for the Study of Department Chair at Washington State University and a brief scan of the institutional research literature (Research in Higher Education, New Directions for Institutional Research and Professional File) suggest the absence of any recent attention to the technical information needs of chairs. No study was located that provides information about the extent to which departmental information resources have been developed and are being used effectively.

Fortunately, useful resource materials do exist that address major issues facing chairpersons including faculty workload (Yuker, 1984), curriculum (Toombs & Tierney, 1991), research performance (Creswell, 1985), program review (Conrad & Wilson, 1985), and managing faculty resources (Lozier & Dooris, 1989). Unfortunately, these sources provide little direct guidance about the kinds of information that systematically might be collected, analyzed and used by the chairperson to help shape a myriad of planning, management and operational decisions.

In recent years, the institutional research community has focused on responding to external requirements for information and on the decision making needs of central administration and other key policy making groups. Only one chapter in a 1976 monograph (Johnson, 1976) and one special report (Miyataki & Byers, 1976) were located that directly address the technical information needs of department chairs. More attention to the information needs of department chairs is clearly needed.

LIMITATIONS

This study involved a small group of individuals in one public urban university. Specific findings cannot be generalized to this institution as a whole or to other institutional settings.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Previous research suggests that role orientation of the chair is an important variable in understanding chair goals, satisfaction with the job and the importance assigned by the chair to various chair duties (Carroll & Gmelch, 1992; Bragg, 1981; Smart & Elton, 1976; McLaughlin, Montgomery, & Malpass, 1975). No research has been conducted that attempts to link department chair role to information needs.

Johnson (1976) linked the concepts of "role" (administrator, faculty colleague and student mentor) and "decisions" (requiring action in the form of initiating, processing or reviewing) to organize his discussion of the data requirements for academic departments. He provides a rich description of the kinds of data that would be helpful for each of the resulting nine combinations of roles and decisions.

The potential usefulness of "role" as an organizer for identifying and understanding the information needs of chairs is revisited and discussed in the final section of the paper.

PROCEDURES

This study addresses two specific questions: 1) What are the felt information needs of department chairs at a public urban university? and 2) What recommendations about the development and use of information resources can be offered to help department chairs better do their work?

The study site is a public urban university, located in the downtown of a mid-sized city, that enrolls approximately 15,000 students in bachelor's, master's and doctoral programs. The university is organized into seven schools and colleges and thirty-five academic departments.

A multi-method, multi-source research design was used employing qualitative methods. Information sources included: focus group interviews with new chairs and veteran chairs; follow-up short reports by several of these chairs about their information needs; a running log of problems encountered by the author/chair and related data implications; an interview with the director of institutional research; and a review of the literature about department chair roles and the technical information needs of chairs.

Since one of the purposes of this study is to encourage institutional researchers to initiate their own local studies of department chair information needs, the methods used in this study are presented in greater detail than would otherwise be the case.

Focus Groups

The provost, director of institutional research and planning and the interim dean of the largest academic unit at the institution were asked to nominate "veteran" chairs, those who "knew the ropes," were well respected and had a reputation for being "strong" chairs. By design, no specific criteria were offered for identifying these individuals. Those whose names appeared on at least two of the lists were selected to participate in a focus group. Four of the six invited participated in a two-hour focus group. All six chairs new for Fall 1992 participated in a second two-hour focus group.

The author served as moderator, and an education graduate student[1] served as assistant moderator. General procedures for focus groups as qualitative research were followed (Morgan, 1988).

Three major questions were posed:

* Think back over your experiences being a department chair. Is there one experience that stands out? Tell us about it.
* Each of you on your own think of one or two especially difficult tasks or problems you've had to deal with since you've been in the role of chair. Please make a note of these. Now, please tell us about the task or problem and what kinds of information, if any, was helpful in dealing with it? As a follow-up probe, they were asked what information beyond what they currently have available would be helpful in tackling this problem or task.
* What one thing could the University do, if anything, to make things here better for you in your role as chair?

[1] Betty Johnson.

Short Written Reports by Chairs

After the focus groups, the chairs were asked to take no more than one hour over the following week to respond in writing to three questions. They were asked to describe the technical information environment in their department (highly developed? not developed at all? etc.), where they get most of the information they work with (department generated? institutional research?), and to describe the tasks and problems they've faced as chairs indicating whether and what technical information helped them. To date, three of the ten have responded.

Running Log

Log entries by the author were kept over a four month period of time. These entries generated five broad categories of problems with information implications.

Interview of Director of Institutional Research

The director was asked: 1) describe the university in terms of the use of information resources as an institution, at the executive level, by deans and directors and by department chairs, 2) describe what information appears valued by chairs; 3) describe what information should be used more by chairs given the turbulent environment of higher education in the state and at this institution, and 4) offer recommendations about the information resources of department chairs at the institution.

Literature Review

The literature on department chair role was reviewed for information resource implications. Only two references were located that identified planning and management information needs at the department level (Johnson, 1976; Miyataki & Byers, 1976).

FINDINGS

Findings are reported in two parts. The first describes the felt needs of a small group of chairs at this institution, and the second offers changes those interviewed recommended to help chairs better do their work.

Felt Information Needs of Chairs

Perhaps most significant among all the findings was the attention given by the chairs to their non-technical information needs and to the lack of attention by the university to their training and development.

1. Focus Groups and Written Follow-Up

Very little attention was given by the chairs in the focus group interviews to technical information needs. Chairs were asked to talk about the problems they face and about the kinds of information that would help with these problems. They were not restricted to talking about "technical" information needs.

The overwhelming area of information need identified related to people issues, especially those related to classified staff and students. New and veteran chairs gave example after example of their lack of preparation for dealing with "problem" and well-protected (in terms of union contracts) staff members, unproductive faculty and with student complaints. They indicated little knowledge about formal policies and procedures affecting the classified staff and students when they became chair. Unless a dean or other special mentor had come along to help, they said they had struggled on their own (and some still were struggling) to understand what they could and could not do as chair and their expected role.

New chairs gave high attention to information needed about legal issues, union contracts, protocol for handling a myriad of problems, conflict resolution strategies and grievance procedures (student, staff and faculty). Major themes identified in these interviews are summarized in Table 1.

The veteran chairs recalled the first and last time they had come together as chairs: when a former President was embattled and fighting to remain as President. Chairs met weekly during the crises months. They described how they had "bonded" during this period of time, and they spoke of the subsequent long-term payoffs to themselves in terms of closer relationships and better networking.

The "vets" also talked about how much they manipulate data by hand and of the need to build their own local data bases. Data on Banner is too disaggregated to be immediately useful. Several indicated that information from the institutional research office is helpful. The way resources are counted centrally, however, focused on beginning budget information, is oftentimes not how departments need them counted and summarized for their purposes. Unless modified, the data are felt not to reflect their department's reality.

Table 1

Focus Group Interview Themes

New Chairs (n=6)	Veteran Chairs (n=4)
* Personnel issues	* Personnel issues
* Time spent on unplanned, non-productive activities (steady stream of interruptions)	* Time spent on long-range planning by different administrations--generally a waste of time in terms of direct pay-offs for departments
* Feeling unvalued	
* Feelings of isolation; no one to talk to; sink or swim	* Feelings of isolation, no real communication with administration; lack of communication between chairs
* Budget-unprepared to work with budgets; bizarre requests received from above for financial information	
* Information and support needed to do things in new ways (i.e., team teaching and interdisciplinary involvement and workload implications of these innovations)	* No initial training for chairs
	* Antiquated and inadequate information of all kinds (much must be done by hand)
* Calendar of upcoming tasks, deadlines	
* Referral information for use with student referrals	
* Chair rights, expectations about breaks, covering summer month when not paid	

New chairs, not surprisingly, identified having more of everything--problems and information needs. One chair reported "flying by the seat of my pants," having had no more than a half an hour briefing from a previous chair. Another indicated that "you're just thrown into the role and given very little information of any kind."

Veterans were more likely than new chairs to describe how they seek help from others, including deans or other chairs or other administrative officers on the campus. Vets were better networked and more assertive in seeking out help.

An overriding sentiment expressed by those in both interview groups was not feeling valued by the institution in their role as department chair. They cited the lack of attention to their initial training and to their on-going professional development needs. Several indicated that their professional associations held meetings especially designed for department chairs but that no support was available for them to attend these meetings. Travel monies are typically restricted to supporting those who present professional papers at conferences.

Three of those interviewed, one new chair and two veterans, representing three different School or College units, completed a follow-up request for a written summary of the problems they face and the kinds of technical information that can help with these problems. Two of the three reinforced the interview findings and talked about personnel issues and a life filled with a constant stream of interruptions to deal with student- and faculty-related problems. Two mentioned resource-related issues: staffing and protecting current resources.

A chair of a relatively large department, one that manages a variety of facilities, described how much must be figured out by hand. To do complicated course scheduling, try to save a faculty position and try to save teaching assistant positions this individual said: "No technical information was used in any of this, just a lot of thought, talk and persuasion."

Another chair, who makes extensive use of locally developed spreadsheets, said:

> Almost everything that we have to support our technical information environment has come out of our own pockets and hides. We have scrounged our own equipment and used salary savings to pay for network equipment.

This individual's pet peeve--"get me data bases: student records, enrollment data, faculty grant data, central budget data, course scheduling data..." This department had developed its own student data base, software to complete departmental purchase requests and record encumbrances, a way to compare budget files with dean's office budget records, a spreadsheet to track courses and teaching assignments, a system for manually entering hard copy enrollment data into its own spreadsheet for tracking and projections, a spreadsheet for calculating merit pay allocations and a spreadsheet for tracking and monitoring changes in student evaluations of instructor performance.

The one new chair described a department that is still very much in the process of developing its information resources and scanning to see what is available.

Technical information resources in these three departments range from highly undeveloped to moderately developed. Much of the managerial work of these chairs is accomplished by hand, and in one case, with support from a variety of spreadsheets. What data bases have been developed have been created by the chair, with help from available support staff.

2. Running Log

The running log kept by the author, herself a chair, deliberately focused on problems with technical information implications. Five major problem areas were identified over a four month period (see Table 2).

Table 2 appears to reflect several broader trends in higher education: growing attention to accountability to those being served--the student, scarce and diminishing resources (e.g., "do more with what you have" ... or "do more with less"), increased attention to student assessment and a renewal of interest in teaching.

Table 2

Running Log Results:

Problems Encountered, With Data Implications

1. Market programs and recruit students

   Data about student markets, current students, program competition

2. Respond to student complaints

   Data about incidence of complaints and complaint response

3. Increase faculty productivity

   Data about instructional productivity, incidence of course duplication, and alternative scheduling patterns

4. Assure program quality

   Data about extent to which accreditation standards are being met, what the students are learning, how good the programs are and how good faculty teaching is

5. Develop and reward faculty

   Data about match between "ideal" and "actual" faculty workloads and the extent to which merit and promotion and tenure procedures are judged to be fair, equitable

3. Interview with Director of Institutional Research

The director of institutional research was interviewed about department chair information needs and use. The office generates several comprehensive compendiums of institutional information, a Fall factbook and an annual statistical portrait. These reports are distributed to all department chairs. In addition, quarterly enrollment reports (course enrollments by faculty) are sent to deans, and annually, a student affirmative action report with detailed admissions, enrollment and graduation data is also sent to deans. The office accepts requests for information from any individual or unit on campus and is consulted often by off-campus individuals and groups.

The office keeps a log of every request for information made. In a quick scan of this log, the director said that most requests relate to the budget process, accreditation self-studies, and student recognition or scholarship eligibility. Other requests relate to grievance or lawsuit procedures (faculty teaching load information), merit and promotion and tenure reviews (faculty teaching load information), faculty productivity calculations (historical enrollment information), resource requests (historical enrollment information and comparative information from other universities) and course planning (historical enrollment information).

The director observed that more information requests come from veteran chairs. "By the time they [chairs] know what they need, they may be gone." She also observed that over the last several years, with a new group of central administrators, data use in the university has increased.

4. Literature Review

Finally, a review of the literature about department chair roles (Bragg, 1981; Carroll & Gmelch, 1992; McLaughlin, Montgomery, & Malpass, 1975; Smart & Elton, 1976) and their information needs (Johnson, 1976; Miyataki & Byers, 1976) was conducted. Carroll and Gmelch (1992) suggest that

> How individuals function in a specific role is a complex interaction of personal attitudes and social pressures from others within the organization. Role orientation is the basic unit from which to examine a variety of issues, not least of which is a description of what chairs feel is important in their positions. (pp. 1-2)

Their national study involved a sample of 800 chairs (with a 68% response rate) at 100 institutions in the Carnegie Research I and II and Doctorate Granting I and II categories. They investigated the relationship between roles and the relative importance chairs place on their duties. Their four role typology generally reflects the role types identified in earlier studies:

> Leader chairs: internal leadership includes solicit ideas to improve the department, plan and evaluate curriculum development, conduct department meetings, inform the faculty of department, college and university concerns; and external leadership includes coordinate departmental activities with constituents, represent the department at

professional meetings and participate in college and university committee work.

Scholar chairs: obtain resources for personal research, maintain a research program, and remain current within one's academic discipline.

Faculty Developer chairs: encourage professional development efforts of faculty and encourage faculty research and publication; mediate the relationship of faculty to the institution through providing informal faculty leadership, developing long-range department goals and maintaining a conducive work climate; and recruit and select faculty and evaluate their performance.

Manager chairs: prepare and propose budgets, manage departmental resources, maintain records, manage staff and assign duties to faculty.

The faculty developer and manager chair roles clearly have technical information implications. Interestingly, no mention is made in the typology of the relationship of the chair role to students.

Johnson (1976) attempted to define information needs based on an examination of chair role (administrator, faculty colleague and student mentor) with decision type (initiate, process, review). He provides examples of the kinds of information that might prove helpful with each type. Information is not always applicable. The addition of "student mentor" role is interesting and is not included in any other role typology. Information suggested for this area includes characteristics of students and their progress through the university, the quality of student advising, obtaining funds for and managing graduate assistantships and employment opportunities for graduates.

Miyataki and Byers (1976) developed a "how-to" technical manual for use by departmental units in planning and managing activities. The manual is organized around resources and information rather than roles or problems. The intended uses are as a management training tool, self-study tool, long-range planning tool, communication vehicle and short-range resource utilization tool.

The manual has six modules and describes how to obtain the information sets related to each: defining the unit's functions, academic demand information (including the concepts of instructional work load matrix and induced course load matrix), faculty resource availability and assignment information (that takes into account faculty capabilities and interests), physical resource availability and assignment information (including facilities, supplies and services), use of funds information and outcomes information (with a focus on student growth and development). Many of the examples given are adaptable to local data base development and spreadsheet applications at the department level. Most of the information resources described relate to the managerial role of the chair.

The Miyataki and Byers manual (1976) and the Johnson (1976) monograph chapter offer places to begin conversations with department chairs about the kinds of information that could support several of their key roles.

Recommendations about the Development and Use of Information Resources

The recommendations offered by study participants are provided as an example of what can emerge from a local study process.

While department chairs expressed the need for access to electronic data of all kinds, many other needs surfaced ahead of this one. One of their strongest felt recommendations was to provide a system for awarding merit to department chairs based on a set of criteria for use in judging departmental effectiveness. Specific recommendations of chairs to the university included:

* define and award merit to chairs for departmental effectiveness
* reduce chair's isolation; provide mentoring; provide support groups
* provide perks or incentives for being a chair; demonstrate that this role is valued
* provide opportunities for professional development, in planning, scheduling and budgeting, as well as staying current in our fields (curriculum developments, accreditation trends, etc.)
* clarify the university's expectations of chairs and develop realistic expectations and due dates

* solve the problem of the need to cover the department for 12 months while chairs are paid for only 11 months
* increase central administrator's accountability by having them treat departments as "customers" using TQM principles

Veteran chairs were especially vocal about the need for access to electronic data of all kinds. They also called for: a handbook with referral information (for use primarily with students), professional development opportunities and help with responding effectively to student complaints and cases that involve students with psychological problems. The chairs were especially vocal about how difficult and time-consuming some of these student cases can be.

A high priority with chairs is strengthening the networking and communication with other chairs. Their informal information networks need to be strengthened. Help as they start out in their new roles is described as especially important.

Echoing the recommendation that came from veteran chairs, the institutional research director called for an on-line information system, an MIS, that can integrate data sets. Such a system would be expensive, however, and would require an additional investment in department chair training. The director also recommended that chairs find out what information is already available. This could be accomplished through visiting the institutional research office, having a dean invite the director to a chairs' meeting, and convening chairs to share and exchange information about how they are currently using information. Also mentioned was the need for departments to maintain a library of information resources. Currently, when chairs are replaced, the out-going chair sometimes takes away all the information! Also, deans need to be sure to pass along to the chairs the information they receive from institutional research.

The problems identified in the author's running log (see Table 2) as well as in Johnson's (1976) article suggest that central data resources will meet only some of the technical information needs. Special data collection efforts will also be needed: assessments related to student markets, student complaint incidence and resolution, evidence that students are learning, faculty teaching performance, faculty workload preferences and total faculty workload patterns. In most cases, institutional research offices employ individuals with the skills and tools to assist chairs with these kinds of data collection efforts.

IMPLICATIONS

This study has implications for local institutional research offices, institutional executive officers, the Association for Institutional Research and for further research.

First, if they have not already done so, institutional researchers should gain administrative support to initiate local studies of the information needs of department chairs. There is likely no one template of information that can best serve all institutions or all departments at one institution. While chairs do seem to share broad role characteristics, these roles in and of themselves do not prescribe particular information sets. A consideration of the managerial and faculty development roles, though, offer a place to begin and suggest the kinds of problems for which information can prove helpful. In defining information needs, institutional researchers should start with roles and problems and not with data sets.

The study design worked only moderately well. Several changes are warranted. Have six to eight chairs, some new and some veterans, keep running logs or journals over a three to four month period of time. The one log available in this study was an especially rich source of information. Do not try to have individuals reconstruct the problems they have faced and the information they have used. They are already stretched thin, and the process offers them limited pay-off. Only three of the ten focus group chairs actually completed this post-focus group assignment.

The focus groups worked very well and were highly appreciated by those participating. One chair is planning to convene all chairs this coming Fall to discuss better ways to communicate and share information. Serve food and drink during these sessions to help create a relaxed, collegial environment.

More generalizable findings could have been obtained from holding more focus groups. Finally, the focus group experience itself may contribute to strengthening communication among the chairs.

The log of information requests kept by the institutional research office was very useful in gaining a quick overview of which information resources are in demand and for what uses. The director suggested that a forum be created at which chairs exchange information about their creative uses of information. Such a forum does not currently exist. Ad hoc requests are received and processed, some of them with innovative applications in mind. Other chairs, meanwhile, remain unaware of these applications.

Second, if they have not already done so, central administrators and deans should set as a high priority the training and development of department chairs and the development of an information and social infrastructure to support their development and performance. Central administration and deans should articulate clearly what is expected of these individuals and which roles are most valued. The orientation of new chairs and their initial training and development are especially critical.

Central administrators, the provost and deans, along with the chairs, need to clarify collectively what is meant by "departmental effectiveness" and on what bases chairs and their departments can be judged meritorious.

Third, the Association for Institutional Research should develop two kinds of professional publications, one for the Provost, dean and department chair audience and one for local institutional research directors. The first publication would be designed as a resource for the professional development of department chairs, providing information about chair roles, problems faced and information resources related to these problems. The second publication would serve as a kind of primer for institutional researchers about the department chair role in organizational life, the kinds of problems they face, how to study the local information needs of these chairs and the kinds of information resources that have potential for serving these needs.

Fourth, the Association for Institutional Research, working with professional associations serving the disciplines and professional schools, should develop special professional development opportunities for new chairs. These sessions could be organized around the faculty development, managerial as well as leader roles of chairs, the problems each role poses and the kinds of information resources that can help address these problems. Workshops might be co-sponsored and delivered at various academic association meetings.

Fifth, and last, further research is needed about factors that influence the use of technical information by department chairs. Here is a beginning set of factors that emerged from this study:

1. Characteristics of the department chair: new or a veteran; interest in data; facility with computers; assertiveness in seeking out the information needed

2. Characteristics of the department: size of department (i.e., those with multiple facilities, multiple sources of funds have more complicated course scheduling and budgeting processes); access to support staff to help input data and create spreadsheet and other applications

3. Characteristics of the information: extent to which there is flexibility to capture and manipulate the distinct data set needed by the department; the perception of centrally generated information as "accurate," reflecting the reality of the department

4. Characteristics of the institution: existence of a data-based budgeting process; existence of an organizational culture that views resource requests and policy proposals more favorably when data is used to support them; the availability of needed hardware and software resources; and, the investment by the institution in chair training and development.

This paper began with the question, "What does an academic department chairperson need to know anyway?" These preliminary findings suggest they need to know a great deal, some of which involves technical information. But they express much greater needs for collegiality, connectedness, valuing by the institution and formal training and development.

Chairs are potentially a major audience for the institutional research profession. My hope is that this paper will help to rekindle and accelerate interest by institutional researchers in the chairs role and their information needs.

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OTHER RESOURCES

Academic Leader, a monthly newsletter, published by Magna Publications, 2718 Dryden Dr., Madison, WI 53704-3086, (800) 433-0499 or (608) 246-3580. Includes feature articles, field reports, bulletin board of resources and report excerpts and guest expert columns; $69 introductory offer.

Center for the Study of the Department Chair, Washington State University, Pullman, Washington 99163-2136, (509) 335-9117. Director: Dr. Walter H. Gmelch. Affiliated with the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). The Center was founded in 1989 and ..."is built on the belief that the department chair is the critical leader in higher education who fosters faculty productivity, promotes program development, and builds a supportive academic culture" (p. 15, UCEA Review, Spring 1992). The Center has conducted two national studies and qualitative studies, all on research and doctorate-granting institutions. The Center conducts professional development workshops for chairs at UCEA.

The Department Chair, a quarterly newsletter of Anker Publishing Company, Inc., PO Box 249, Bolton, MA 01740-0249, (508) 779-6190. Issues include original articles by experienced chairs, data relevant to decisions chairs make, news and ideas, book reviews and lists of resources available; $69 per year.

The National Community College Chair Academy, 1833 W Southern Avenue, Mesa, Arizona 85202, (602) 461-7304. The Academy offers a certification program for community college chairs that involves participation in Chair Academy retreats, a one-year practicum and a period of follow-up.