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ABSTRACT

The Beginning Department Chair Study used qualitative methodology to examine the developing identities of 13 new department chairs at 10 public and private colleges and universities in eight states. Data were gathered during on-site semistructured interviews (approximately two per month) during the chair's first year and periodic telephone interviews. In addition, related material such as departmental memos, planning documents, newsletters, and program descriptions were collected. Analysis revealed that the beginning chairs experienced moderate to severe difficulty in making the transition into their new roles. Some of these difficulties stemmed from role conflict and/or role ambiguity experienced by the chairs. Two case studies are offered and analyzed to illustrate the six problematic role changes reported by subjects: (1) from solitary to social, (2) from focused to fragmented, (3)from autonomy to accountability, (4) from manuscripts to memoranda, (5) from stability to mobility, and (6) from client to custodian. The paper concludes that beginning chairs should be provided with support, mentoring, and time- and stress-management workshops. In addition, chairs should be encouraged to implement the following "balancing strategies": restructure the problem, purge unnecessary "adminstrivia," reverse the hierarchy, protect scholarship interests, and train for leadership. (Contains 37 references.) (DB)

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Becoming a Department Chair: Negotiating the Transition from Scholar to Administrator

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Becoming a Department Chair:
Negotiating the Transition from Scholar to Administrator

At some point in their careers, most faculty members in higher education consider, if only for a brief moment, the possibility of becoming a department chair. Even those who adamantly claim that they would *never* think of becoming a department chair have perhaps thought about how *they* would do things differently if they were in the position. Those who actually do make the transition from faculty member to chair soon realize that there are "drastic differences between the two roles of scholar and administrator" (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993, 14). The skills needed to be an effective department chair differ greatly from those required to be a successful faculty member. To make the transition from professor to administrator *and* professor, beginning chairs must learn to master a complex array of new, unfamiliar tasks. From effectively managing human and material resources, to building a strong, positive ethos within a department, to maintaining the research agenda one had as a professor, the demands on beginning chairs are many.

Though department chairs play a critical role in the governance and productivity of postsecondary educational institutions, most faculty members receive little training prior to making the transition from professor to chair. And, after assuming the position, they typically receive inadequate support and little mentoring. Since the department chair is viewed often as the most important administrative position in postsecondary education, a fuller understanding of how faculty make the transition from professor to chair will yield several benefits. First, knowledge of the experiences of those who have preceded them will be of obvious benefit to future beginning chairs. Second, an increased understanding of the transition process is needed to improve policies and practices that shape, at least in

part, the socialization experiences of new department chairs. And third, the more we learn from novice department chairs about how to make the transition from professor to chair, the better prepared tomorrow's postsecondary institutions will be to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Although several books and research studies have focused on various facets of *being* a department chair (e.g., Bennett, 1983; Bennett & Figuil, 1990; Burns & Gmelch, 1995; Carroll & Gmelch, 1994; Creswell, et al, 1990; Gmelch & Seedorf, 1989; Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Gmelch & Burns, 1993, 1994; Gmelch, 1995, 1991; Hickson & Stacks, 1992; Higgerson, 1996; Meridith & Wunsch, 1991; Moses & Roe, 1990; Tucker, 1992), little is known about how professors *become* a chair. What challenges are associated with the transition from faculty member to chair, and how do beginning chairs meet these challenges? In light of the dearth of studies in this area, the broad purpose of the current study was to examine the developing professional identities of beginning department chairs through an analysis of data from the Beginning Department Chair Study (BDCS), a qualitative study of 13 new department chairs at ten public and private colleges and universities in eight states. More specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is it like to move from the role of professor to the role of department chair?
2. Are there salient patterns and themes that characterize the experiences of faculty members who make the transition from professor to department chair?
3. What strategies do beginning department chairs use as they begin to establish their professional identities?

4. Are there commonalities among the critical events new chairs encounter, and what consequences do these events have for their ability to provide long-term leadership for their departments?

Developing Professional Identity

The new department chair's professional identity begins to develop as soon as he or she accepts a position as chair, and it continues to evolve as long as one remains in that role. However, the first year is critical to the formation of an adequate professional identity. What the chair says and does during that first year and how others interpret these behaviors gradually establish the chair's identity within the department and the broader culture of the college or university. As Figure 1 suggests, beginning chairs develop a view of self that reflects their actions and intended outcomes; at the same time, however, members of the chair's department and the college (or comparable unit) develop their views of the chair, as do central administrators with whom the chair interacts.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

How beginning department chairs meet the challenges of leadership in higher education varies from institution to institution, from department to department. While the particulars of this transition may differ, all beginning chairs must become socialized into their role. The socialization process has significant implications for the development of the new chair's professional identity—an image of the self as an effective, proactive administrator who can fulfill the four roles of the department chair identified by Gmelch and Miskin (1993): faculty developer, manager, leader, and scholar.

Socialization

According to Merton (1968), *socialization* refers to the processes through which an individual acquires the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to perform a social role effectively. *Organizational socialization*, on the other hand, refers to "the process by which one is taught and learns 'the ropes' of a particular organizational role" in a specific work setting" (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, 211).

At the current moment, little research, if any, has been done on the socialization of department chairs in higher education. The most relevant research is found in studies of the socialization of administrators (mostly principals) in K-12 schools. For example, in his classic ethnographic study of a new principal, Wolcott (1973) found that the principal was greatly influenced by central office personnel, peers, and administrative guidelines. Duke, Issacson, Sagor, and Schumuck (1984) described the socialization experiences of new administrators as intense, short, and informal rather than planned. Alvy (1984) found that new principals needed to adjust to alienation from faculty, develop patience and flexibility regarding the opinions of others, and acquire a broader perspective.

Using a self-reflective, analytical approach, Gussner (1974) identified five stages in the process of his socialization into the role of administrator: absorbing information, emerging personal concerns, establishing self-assurance, establishing the role, and becoming a true contributor. Gussner also suggested two salient dimensions of the socialization process: (1) learning to carry out routines, tasks, and responsibilities and (2) internalizing the newly emerging role.

Greenfield (1977a, 1977b) conducted a longitudinal study that focused on two phases of the organizational socialization of new principals: prior to assuming the new role

(*anticipatory socialization*) and after assuming the role (*situational adjustment*). Greenfield (1977b, 171) states that "As the individual moves through a variety of social situations, he [sic] learns the requirements of continuing in the situation, and of being successful in it." In a later study, Greenfield (1985, 100) examined the *moral socialization* of new educational administrators which he defined as "the attitudes, values, and beliefs required for adequate performance in the role." Greenfield (1985, 106-107) concluded that "a major outcome associated with the moral socialization of administrators is that individuals adopt and internalize a work-world orientation that places a strong positive value on organizational stability and the maintenance of regularities within the school." Concern for stability, he maintained, leads the individual to adopt a "custodial" rather than an "innovative" response to the role.

More recently, Parkay, Currie, and Rhodes (1992) documented the professional socialization of 12 first-time high school principals during the 3-year period following their appointment to the principalship. Using data they gathered through an in-depth, multiple-case study design, Parkay, Currie, and Rhodes developed the Professional Socialization Hierarchy (PSH). According to the PSH, the professional socialization of principals may be viewed as consisting of five stages: *Survival, Control, Stability, Educational Leadership,* and *Professional Actualization.*

The Beginning Department Chair Study (BDCS)

During the 1995-96 academic year, the Center for Academic Leadership (formerly, the Center for the Study of the Department Chair) at Washington State University assembled a team of researchers at seven universities and launched the Beginning Department Chair Study (BDCS). The BDCS built on the results of the Center's 1992 national survey study

of department chairs in which chairs with less than one year of experience were compared with those who had been in the position for more than one year. The aim of the BDCS is to provide more in-depth information about the experiences and challenges that seemed to distinguish novice department chairs in the 1992 study from their more experienced counterparts. In addition, the qualitative focus of the BDCS allowed researchers to identify keys to success that seem common to the beginning chairs interviewed. This information can then serve as a base line that informs another, broader-based, statistical study that is more generalizable to beginning chairs as a population.

Participants

Participants in the BDCS consisted of 13 beginning department chairs (seven females and six males) at ten public and private colleges and universities in eight states that represent the major geographic regions in the country; (see Table 1 for descriptive data on the beginning chairs). The seven members of the research team were assigned to one or two chairs during the 1995-96 academic year to observe and to document the chairs' first year. Data were gathered during on-site semi-structured interviews (approximately two per month) and periodic telephone interviews. In addition, related artifacts such as departmental memos, planning documents, newsletters, and program descriptions were collected.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Data Analysis

The analysis of BDCS data occurred in two phases. In the first phase, interviews with the chairs, documents, and field notes were analyzed according to the qualitative

methodology known as grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hutchinson, 1986; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Spradley, 1979). This phase involved the identification of patterns of experience and perception that were unique and those that were common. The second phase of data analysis was based on Yin's (1994) multiple-case-study design and involved writing brief case studies for each chair in light of the previously identified patterns. Yin (1994, 52) describes the approach as the "multiple replication" of an experiment: "Each individual case study consists of a 'whole' study in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the case; each case's conclusions are then considered to be the information needing replication by other individual cases."

Results

The analysis of BDCS data revealed that the 13 beginning chairs experienced moderate to severe difficulty in making the transition into their new roles. Some of these difficulties stemmed from the role conflict and/or role ambiguity the chairs experienced. Role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964) occurs when an individual is ". . . confronted with situations which require them to play a role which conflicts with their value systems, or play two or more roles which are in conflict with each other" (Gmelch et al., 1993, 4). Role ambiguity occurs when "the role or roles administrators must perform [are] not . . . clearly articulated in terms of behaviors or performance expectations" (Gmelch et al., 1993, 4).

The role conflict and/or ambiguity experienced by the BDCS subjects reflected, in a pronounced manner, six of the nine role changes that Gmelch and Miskin (1993, 14-15)

found are characteristic of the "metamorphosis" of the beginning department chair.

According to their taxonomy, beginning chairs must adjust to the following role changes:

1. *From solitary to social.* College professors typically work alone on research, teaching preparation, and projects. [Chairs must] work with and through others. For example, department goals cannot be achieved alone, they must be achieved in concert with . . . faculty.

2. *From focused to fragmented.* While professors must have long, uninterrupted periods to work on scholarly pursuits, [the work of department chair] is characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation.

3. *From autonomy to accountability.* Professors generally enjoy control over their time and the feeling of autonomy of activity and movement in their working environment. [Chairs] tend to lose this sense of autonomy and become accountable to upper administration and the faculty for [their] time and accessibility in the office, as well as for [their] actions and activities.

4. *From manuscripts to memoranda.* The scholar and researcher labors over a manuscript for a long period of time. [Department chairs] quickly must learn the art of persuasion and precision through memos.

5. *From private to public.* The professor may block out long periods of time for scholarly work while [chairs] have an obligation to be accessible throughout the day to the many publics [they] serve. In essence, [they] move from the privilege of a "closed door" to the obligation of an "open door" policy.

6. *From profession to persuading.* In the academic profession, the professor is disseminating information in a manner that will meet the learning objectives of others. [Chairs] profess less and practice more the art of persuasion and compromise.

7. *From stability to mobility.* While always growing and exploring new concepts and ideas, faculty generally experience movement within the stability of their disciplines and circle of professional associations. [Chairs] also attempt to retain [their] professional identity but must become mobile within the university structure. In order to be at the cutting edge of educational reform and implement needed programmatic changes within, [chairs] must be more mobile, visible, and political.

8. *From client to custodian.* In relation to university resources, the professor is a client, requesting and expecting resources to be available to conduct research, classes, and service activities. [Chairs, however,] represent the custodian and dispenser of resources and are responsible for the maintenance of the physical setting as well as providing material and monetary resources.

9. *From austerity to prosperity.* While in actuality the pay differential between professor and chair may not be significant, the perception of more control over departmental resources creates the illusion of greater prosperity as chair.

The preceding role changes may be viewed as in Figure 2, which Gmelch and Miskin (1993, 15-16) describe as follows: "The professor is characterized in this inner [oval] as focused, autonomous, private, stable, solitary, austere, and a client of the department. The metamorphosis transforms these professorial inner traits into an other-oriented (outer [oval]), creating an administrative profile [that is] social, fragmented, accountable, public, mobile, prosperous, and custodial."

Insert Figure 2 about here.

To illustrate how the BDCS subjects adjusted to the six problematic role changes that characterized their "metamorphosis" into the beginning department chair (solitary to social, focused to fragmented, autonomy to accountability, manuscripts to memoranda, stability to mobility, and client to custodian), the remainder of this paper presents the "stories" of two participants in the BDCS—"Frank" and "Madeline."[1] As they experienced conflicts and ambiguities related to these six changes and as events (some anticipated, others unanticipated) unfolded during their first year, they continually reflected upon their complex roles, the needs of their departments, and how to respond to a seemingly endless stream of new challenges.

"Frank"

Frank is associate professor and director of a school of communication at a Carnegie II state university in the Midwest. The school, which has 11 full-time faculty and about 300 students, offers B.S. and B.A. degrees in public communication (advertising, public relations, organizational communication, and interpersonal communication), visual communication (broadcasting, photography, film, and digital imaging technologies), and journalism and mass communication. In addition to the full-time faculty (three full professors, five associate, and three assistant), the school has two emeritus faculty who teach half time and eight part-time adjunct faculty. The school places about 40 students annually at newspapers, television stations, advertising agencies, public relations firms, and other organizations on and off campus.

Frank, who is of Polish descent and in his early forties, is tall and dresses informally, though fashionably and in good taste. As one might expect of a professor of communication, Frank presents himself well—he is personable, poised, and articulate. With his short, neatly trimmed goatee and rugged good looks, Frank is a distinctive figure. The recipient of a master's degree from a theological seminary and a Ph.D. from a Big 10 university in the Midwest, Frank came to this university in 1984 and received tenure in 1987.

The School of Communication faculty includes three women, one of whom is a member of a minority group. The assistant professors are in their late 20s to early 30s; the associate professors in their early 40s to early 50s; and the full professors in their late 40s to early 60s. Those at or above the rank of associate professor have tenure, while the assistant professors are non-tenured. The adjunct faculty, who teach a significant

proportion of classes, are on "contingency contract," though Frank hopes to secure them permanent lecturer status at the university. According to Frank, "there is really a gross inequity going on here" since the adjuncts make about $700 a credit and regular faculty make about $1,100.

Frank's previous experience in leadership roles includes two years as vice-chair of the faculty council and various leadership positions in national organizations. In 1989, the School of Communication hired a director through a national search, and Frank reports that "he was really quite awful. He spent between ten and twelve thousand dollars on himself for travel, but would tell us that there was no money for our travel. He was very self-serving, and he left after one year." After that individual left, an internal candidate was chosen as director, and he held the position until retirement.

Recalling the disappointing results of the last national search, Frank reports that "we voted again to do an internal search, and I was the only candidate to apply. So it was like an old Soviet election; there was one party, and I was it. But I had good support internally, and people knew that I was willing to do it [serve as director]."

"Madeline"

Madeline is research professor and chair of a department of curriculum and instruction in a college of education at a large Doctoral I urban university in the Northeast. The university has an enrollment of more than 33,000 students, 34 percent of whom are minorities. The university takes pride in its college of education—for example, the university's WWW home page points out that the college has prepared three of the last eight State Teachers of the Year. The college has six departments, the largest of which is the department Madeline chairs. The Department of Curriculum and Instruction has 25

full time faculty, six of whom are non-tenured. Five faculty have the rank of full professor, and Madeline is the only female full professor. About 1,500 students are enrolled in the department's 25 degree programs and 5 certification programs. According to Madeline, the department "brings in well over a million dollars in external funding annually."

Madeline, in her late fifties, received an Ed.D. from a Big Ten university in the Midwest and has been a faculty member in the department for 20 years. Before her appointment to research professor three years ago, she spent four years as assistant professor, nine years as associate professor, and four years as full professor. Madeline, who describes herself as "too New York, too Italian, too brusque, too whatever," received her college's Outstanding Faculty Teaching Award a few years ago.

Madeline was selected as chair through an internal search that was conducted after an external search failed to yield an acceptable applicant. Two external candidates whom Madeline says had "spectacular credentials" were brought in to interview for the position. One, a male, was "awful," she says, and "the faculty was almost outraged at the search committee that we would even bring in such a jerk. The faculty was just horrified by what he said and how he presented himself to us." While the female candidate was "received more positively, she was just in the middle someplace; nobody was really excited about her."

In spite of Madeline's perception that "this department has chewed up department chairs in the past" and her belief that the department "would chew [her] up," Madeline decided to apply for the chair's position. Her decision was made after the dean informed the search committee that "we are going to do an internal search, and you *are* going to

find a chair. If you don't find a chair, we'll collapse the department with [another department in the college]." According to Madeline, once she made a decision to apply for the chair's position, "It was all over—I was committed. I knew that's what I wanted to do, that I was going to go after it in a big way, no turning back."

Madeline reports that there was "behind the scenes jockeying going on" during the process of identifying those interested in the position. The only other viable internal candidate from Madeline's perspective was a full professor whom she describes as a "very strong male." Two other possible choices for chair, she maintains, were "weak men who had expressed an interest, but they are weak. They're perceived as weak, but they don't think that, of course." Eventually, the "strong male" sent Madeline an e-mail note informing her that he had decided not to apply and that he would support her "all the way" in her quest for the chair's position. After receiving that note, Madeline felt that "I'm ready now, and all the other strong people [are] on my side."

In the end, the department had a choice between one of the "weak" males and Madeline—a choice Madeline believed amounted to "do nothing" and "do something," or "competence and lack of competence." As part of the selection process, both applicants made presentations to the faculty. Madeline's presentation went very well—"I had all kinds of props, all kinds of data . . . [and] I think the group was pretty impressed with the work I'd done and the way I presented myself." According to Madeline, the other candidate came in for his presentation and "he just kind of sat down and said 'Well, you know, what do you think?'"

Having established herself as the only strong, credible aspirant to the chair's position, Madeline won a clear majority of departmental votes and was offered the position by the

dean. Madeline accepted the position, but only after extracting from the dean a commitment that he would no longer treat the department unfairly.

> This department has just been kicked around awfully badly because we haven't had leadership, and there is a unit within our department that has been battered by the dean. There is a long history. So, this is what I said to the dean, "The very first thing I want from you is a promise that you are not going to talk about this department in negative terms, and you are not going to talk about the people in this department in negative terms. If there is anything that you've got to say about this department, you say it to me, to my face first, and you give me at least a year to work out the issues in this department." And he said, "Fair enough." (August 24).

One of Madeline's first "tests" as department chair came only three days later; at this time, she had to remind the dean of his commitment:

> At the first chair's meeting, he said very negative things about the [unit in the department] in front of the chairs, and I later said privately, "Okay, you've just broken your promise, and you need to remember that. You are not going to do this anymore to us." [So], things have changed very dramatically over the last two months. He treats me with a great deal of respect, and I do him also, and this negative talk has stopped. I've said about the [unit], "we are not dead yet, stop putting dirt on us. We are going to rise up and do good things, so get out of the way and facilitate things" (August 24).

Making the Transition

The absence of training prior to becoming a chair (a theme that characterized the transitions experienced by all of the BDCS subjects) required that Frank and Madeline "hit the ground running" immediately after assuming their new positions. Their comments about the transition phase are similar and reflect what several BDCS subjects described as a "sink or swim" approach to becoming a chair.

> It's been rather frustrating because the dean's office has jumped right into a conversation assuming I know exactly what they're talking about, but I don't understand the language they're using—throwing out abbreviations with regard to budget lines. They've just been throwing that stuff out.

> I've received no transitional instruction or orientation or anything (Frank, August 24).

> No one came to offer me help. I don't think there is any sense that new chairs need any help. There is no sense about that at all. There is no information that is given. I mean everything from schedule to budget—nobody from the dean's floor has come to me. It's been an interesting transition (Madeline, August 24).

Solitary to Social

At the start of their new administrative assignments, Frank and Madeline recognized that they must learn to work with and through their colleagues. Frank emphasized the importance of developing positive social relationships as part of his new role, though he was keenly aware that his colleagues of 12 years now perceived him differently—he had become an administrator.

> In a sense, everybody sort of thinks, 'that's the boss.' So there's less stopping in and just chatting; when I was upstairs [as a faculty member], people just popped in to say 'hi.' If they come in here [his office], it's more like being sent to the principal's office (September 7).

According to Frank, the social distance he experienced between himself and his faculty was a natural consequence of the culture in higher education:

> The administrative class that's emerged on campuses really is a distinct class. It's insulated from faculty who teach and conduct research. It insulates the administrators to the point that they don't even know what's going on any more. Basically, what we're doing is creating a professional class like doctors, lawyers, and so on (August 24).

Throughout his first year, Frank continued to experience conflict between his obligations to function as an administrator and his desire to develop professional, collegial relationships with faculty. Though he believed the barriers between administration and faculty were an inevitable part of life in higher education, he worked diligently to overcome those barriers and to foster positive interpersonal relationships

within the School of Communication. In part, Frank used humor to deal with the conflict he experienced between being a chair and an administrator, as he noted in the following:

> There seems to be a wall; there's sort of a management-labor split, even though I've been their colleague for 12 years. There are little jokes about the "Grand Wizard Poobah" and stuff like that . . . which I encourage. I mean I don't like the class system. I'm not into hierarchical notions of management within the academy (September 7).

In addition, Frank knew that he no longer had the luxury of working alone as he did when he was a professor; his new role required that he develop and maintain cohesiveness within the School. To do so, he had to remain "connected" with faculty, even if that left less time for the myriad tasks of being director.

> You can't become friends if you are always at a distance doing your own thing. I try to get up as much as I can, speak with them [faculty], just to try to keep the contact going. It's real easy to get lost in working on the computer and talking on the phone and the rest of it (September 7).

Like Frank, Madeline realized that in her new role she needed to "connect" with her faculty—even those whom she would have previously ignored as a professor.

> Before, as a faculty member, there were some people on the faculty that I didn't like or respect for whatever reason. I didn't spend much time with them and kind of discounted them. But at the beginning of the summer [when I became chair], I told myself that each person was capable and creative, and maybe somebody wasn't working up to capacity, but we didn't have anyone stupid on board (September 28).

In spite of her determination to view each faculty member in her department as "capable," Madeline found it challenging to maintain that perspective; for example, at the end of her first semester she observed: "Sometimes I think I need a shrink on my shoulder to whisper in my ear how to deal with each of these

faculty members." Moreover, connecting with her faculty in a meaningful manner, Madeline soon realized, required enormous amounts of time and energy.

> Now, I've set up meetings. I spent all of July . . . you should see my calendar. My plan of action was to connect with . . . people. It just about burned me out. I was exhausted. And I still am. But I met with every faculty member in this department one-on-one for at least an hour, in most cases more (August 24).

Focused to Fragmented

In their new roles, Frank and Madeline no longer had uninterrupted blocks of time to devote to their scholarship. Instead, they experienced myriad tasks "on their plates" and had to learn to address multiple tasks simultaneously. Their experiences clearly illustrated the "brevity, variety, and fragmentation" that Gmelch and Miskin (1993, 14) use to describe the work of a department chair.

> I have about five major things all due next Friday—the position description [for a vacant faculty line], the time schedule, and so on. So, those things will occupy the rest of the week (Frank, September 7).

> There was a week when everything was flying, everything was due. It was during advising. I had students lined up outside the door, so every time I didn't have a student in a time slot, I'd close the door and work on the grant (Frank, April 23).

> Items on my list range all the way from getting silk trees [for the departmental office] to programmatic directions and initiatives. Scheduling is a horror. Budgets are a horror. There are so many things that nobody's been paying attention to (Madeline, September 28).

By the end of the first semester, Madeline's professional life had changed dramatically. In August, just before assuming the chair's position, she reported that "I love my life as a college professor. I love what's on my table." At the beginning of February, however, she reported that "I'm feeling more exhausted now than I have in a long time. I don't know how to deal with the dean. I don't

know if I can survive for three more years . . . .No one has any idea what my life is like."

Frank and Madeline experienced additional frustration and stress because many of the tasks they had to complete deprived them of time to work on research or on other tasks they believed were more important.

> Right now, between 60 and 70 percent of my time is administrative; probably 20 percent in teaching; and the rest is just service and "clean-up" and real mundane duties. I've not been able to do anything with regard to my research directly. I'm still writing a little bit, a few articles, magazine articles and things like that, but not my serious research—I don't have time to do that. I haven't started anything new since I stepped in [to the director's role]" (Frank, September 7).

> Once people start coming into the office, it's just continual meetings, short-term problems. The day continues, and it's all people stuff and problem solving; there is no breather for lunch or time to sit quietly. There have been a couple of times when I've had a deadline, when I have things that need to get to the dean, and I've closed the door a couple of times to get this stuff done (Madeline, September 28).

Autonomy to Accountability

One of the biggest adjustment new chairs must make is to recognize that, compared to being a professor, their new role makes them more directly accountable to an expanded array of stakeholders—from faculty, to students, to the dean, to fellow department chairs, to central administration. For the most part, their high-profile position does not provide chairs with the degree of autonomy they enjoyed as professor. Frank, for example, believed that he had a responsibility to maintain faculty morale, be visible and accessible, and keep faculty and students "happy."

> I think my faculty are kind of enthusiastic. My big challenge will be to fulfill expectations. Expectations are high, and enthusiasm is high, and I just have to capture that and maintain that and not begin to let them

> [faculty] get discouraged with details that drive them down; I've seen that happen here (Frank, August 24).

> I'm in my office from 8:00 to 6:00, and I pretty rarely ever get out. I'll eat my lunch in here, and so I'm spending a lot of hours in this space. I recognize that's not good for the years to come, but that's sort of what I'm doing right now, recognizing that's a visible symbol of being here" (Frank, October 17).

> It all boils down to are your faculty and students happy with what's going on. If students are all disgruntled, then it's gonna be miserable for this office (Frank, April 2).

Like Frank, Madeline recognized that she was accountable to a broader, different array of stakeholders. For instance, she experienced tension between the need to develop a positive working relationship with the dean and still be perceived by faculty as their advocate, someone willing and able to challenge the dean to obtain resources.

> I've got to keep on the good side of the dean up front so I can get resources. I don't want him penalizing this department, so I've got to kiss ass. I've got to try to influence him in other ways, and I can't let the faculty know because I don't want the faculty thinking I'm not getting resources (Madeline, February 1).

Manuscripts to Memoranda

As nearly every professor knows, writing high quality professional manuscripts requires large blocks of uninterrupted time. Of course, not all of this time is devoted to actual writing—an important part of the writing process for professors is the reflection that occurs prior to, and at various stages during, the preparation of a manuscript. Also, a professional manuscript is usually targeted to an audience of one's peers and addresses an area of research interest; as a result, writing (and completing) a manuscript can be very intrinsically satisfying. Not so with memoranda, letters, reports, and other writing

required of a department chair; these other forms of writing often must address issues that are mundane, compared to a chair's passionate research interest. Moreover, if the chair is to keep his or her "head above water," departmentally-oriented writing must be completed quickly, and it must be concise, persuasive, and well organized. Frank and Madeline expressed frustration at adjusting to the type (and quantity) of writing required of a department chair.

> We are basically being asked to function like low paid clerical staff, just basically shuttle memos back and forth to the dean. The dean shuttles them to the provost, and then we get the "yes's" or "no's," and then we can do things. We are ridiculously high paid clerks (Frank, August 24).
>
> You write him [the dean] a memo, and he'll maybe scribble on yours. You do not get a memo back from him with any details or anything. This is an English professor, and he doesn't like to write memos (Frank, August 24).
>
> I've been flashing memos back and forth to the dean about a couple of searches we want to do right away (Frank, September 7).
>
> [After meeting one-on-one with faculty], I started to write letters to them kind of summarizing what we had said, and any plans we were making . . . and then I fell behind on doing those follow up letters. I got the first layer out, and next week one of my goals is to finish that all up (Madeline, August 24).
>
> We have all this [accreditation] stuff that's coming up in the spring. We have 23 programs that lead to certification that have to be written up, and we are talking about 50-page documents on each of these programs. Someone has written up this before, but it's just garbage . . . I've had to document this stuff. Some of this [accreditation] stuff is so mundane, and I have little patience for it. If there weren't so many other programmatic issues that have to get done [sigh] (Madeline, September 28).
>
> There is some correspondence I need to do myself, and there just isn't enough time. I'm going to try to use a dictaphone and see if that works. Short messages could go into a dictaphone (Madeline, September 28).

From Stability to Mobility

In contrast to one's "previous life" as a professor, the new chair "must be more mobile, visible, and political" (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993, 15) within his or her institution.

Indeed, the need for mobility and visibility often extends well beyond academe, as Frank noted:

> There're things I would like to see us move toward—visibility in the state, relations with state media people. The reputation of the school is not strong within the research environment here; people involved with the hard sciences and federal grants have the high visibility. One of my hopes is to make the school much more visible, much more of a presence than it is now (Frank, August 24).

Throughout his first year, Frank was effective at being visible in the university community. One of his greatest "successes" was a School of Communication newsletter he launched just after becoming director. As he noted at the end of his first year:

> Every week I get comments from somebody in administration about [the newsletter]—the president, the provost, the dean. I mean everybody has said something about it. The whole university is talking about it, and I'm suddenly seeing departments now publishing newsletters that never published anything before (May 7).

Though Frank proved to be effective at interacting with other administrators on campus and making his unit visible, he was concerned at the beginning of his directorship that "a big challenge for me will be dealing with the administration and the administrative style "on the hill" [i.e., central administration]. As the following comments indicate, he continued to experience role conflict between the politics required to "play the game" and his view of himself as a task-oriented professional:

> I think there's just such petty politics that go on at a university, and there's so little of consequence that arises from the game [of politics]. It's mostly

> ego. Here, you have people who are not doing their job, and they like to play politics (Frank, October 17).
>
> When I look at what goes on at a university like this and I look at the dean that I'm working with and some of the other administrators and I go, you know, this isn't that tough in terms of the administrative stuff. The dealing with petty egos and the personnel problems is a pain in the neck and very frustrating. There are people who want to be promoted to the next level of bureaucracy, and I don't want to do that. I don't want to just keep climbing the bureaucratic ladder (Frank, May 7).

Like Frank, Madeline was effective throughout her first year at being mobile and making her department visible; however, unlike Frank, she expressed no distaste related to the need to operate in a highly political environment.

> I set up appointments with the associate dean in charge of budgets, the one in charge of undergraduate programs, and the dean for graduate studies and research. I also connected with people in academic assistance. This department has never connected well with them. So I connected with them. I just connected with everybody. And set up all kinds of e-mail systems (August 24).
>
> We have been doing a lot of networking with the arts and sciences people because we have to get them on board. So my networking has intensified 100 percent since the end of the summer (September 28).
>
> I've done a lot of connecting. I've met with all the academic assistance people. No one had ever done that before . . . I need to be sensitive to these types of connections and be on top of them. It's multi-layered—disciplinary, school people, state department. The chair's job is to build these relationships and be sure that their voices get into the decision making. And be responsive to people. Every time you need to make a decision, you have to ask who do I need to bring into this (December 13).

Client to Custodian

To meet their obligations to teach classes, conduct research, and provide service to various constituencies—and to be rewarded for such activities—professors expect to receive institutional resources. In this regard, professors are "clients" or "consumers"; they request, and then consume, all-too-scarce resources in higher education (Gmelch &

Miskin, 1993). Department chairs, on the other hand, are the "custodians" charged with obtaining, and then dispensing, material and monetary resources. In this role, chairs must be seen by their faculties as representing their interests in a manner that is at once aggressive, creative, and fair.

One of Frank's notable "successes" during his first year (in addition to creating the School of Communication newsletter) was obtaining salary increases for the School's eight part-time lecturers.

> A big accomplishment in the battle I had with the dean and the powers that be on the hill [i.e., central administration] was getting approval for salary increases for the lecturers. Their salaries went up almost 60 percent (January 23).

By winning this "battle," Frank proved to his "clients" that he could argue effectively on their behalf.

Madeline, too, had to prove that she could be a strong advocate for more resources for her department. As she stated just after taking the position of chair: "The dean and the other department chairs have perceived us as being fragmented, as being weak, as being without a voice. The strong things we've been doing, nobody knows about because there is nobody to represent us—nobody to capture resources for us." To demonstrate convincingly to faculty that she could garner resources, Madeline chose to focus first on departmental facilities, which she claimed "are the kinds of things that really set faculty off. They are demoralizing [and] they send symbolic messages." In the following, Madeline described her strategy for securing resources to enhance the department's facilities.

> This place looked awful physically because we were one of the first departments to move into this building, and we had a weak chair who got no resources for us. Our carpet is filthy, it's disgusting. If you were to travel on the elevator to the 8th floor, the 9th floor, the 10th floor, and now the 5th floor is getting redone—all of these were strong chair departments. Now the guy on the 4th floor and me, we're the ones without the resources, and so we have good reason to band together. The dean is now appropriately embarrassed. This carpet out here on the 6th floor is the worst, it's worse than poor (August 24).

Surprisingly, a factor that made it even more difficult for Frank and Madeline to secure resources was their continuing inability to obtain a clear picture of what resources their units actually had. In this regard, both relate similar stories.

> We ended up with, as we discovered after I took over, about a $7,000 deficit last year in budget. Part of the reason that happened is we've switched over, as a university, to this new banner system which is not up yet. Nobody knows what's going on. The assistant dean who's in charge of all the finances for the college sent out a memo saying "Please tell me what your current budget status is." He should know what's there, and he can't find out (Frank, September 7).

> We just have these goofy things going on [with the budget]. It's completely out of my control, and it's real frustrating because we had a great opportunity to do good things with that extra money from salary savings . . . I'm still learning this new system of accounting; even [my administrative secretary] doesn't have a clue as to where we are financially. We just received the books the other day, and they're unintelligible. The new system shows a deficit of $34,000 in an account that's zero budgeted—there's not supposed to be any money in there. It's just random numbers. We have no idea of what we have. We don't know whether we're running a deficit or whether we're running a surplus, and that could mean a swing of $15,000 or more. Until we find out exactly where we stand financially, I don't know whether we're in great shape or whether we're on the edge of disaster (Frank, September 21).

> Money has slipped through this budget because we have all this external funding here, but the proper paperwork hasn't been done in a number of cases to draw the proper money into the department. We've been over-billed on our telephones for the two years we've been in this building to the tune of $300 per month. And nobody's caught it. Just case after case after case where there has been no stewardship of the resources (Madeline, August 24).

Conclusions

As the cases of Frank and Madeline illustrate, they were confronted with many challenges, both internal and external, as they learned to function in their new role. With few exceptions, they had to learn "on the job" how to meet the complexities and ambiguities of those challenges. And, most importantly, perhaps, they received very little help. Frank and Madeline had to learn *on their own* how to become a department chair—as Madeline said at one point: "No one knows what my life is like."

Noticeably absent for Frank and Madeline as they responded to the "shock" of becoming a department chair were support, mentoring, and, if needed, assurance that they were doing "o.k." At the beginning of the second semester, for example, Madeline presents a lonely, almost heroic, picture of herself trying to cope with the pressures of being a department chair:

> I now have swelling in my leg and foot, I've gained weight. I'm having trouble sleeping, and I'm having chest pains. I have a high tolerance for pain, and so I'm very concerned and think that it is time to take care of myself. I need to get a new senior secretary and faculty help. I need to find some new efficiency methods (February 1).

While he may not have shown the physical symptoms of stress that Madeline exhibited, Frank's adjustment to his new role seems to have come at some cost to the sensibilities he brought into the position:

> It has been such an unusual semester with so many major problems to deal with. But you get to the point where it feels like . . . well, that's just the way it is. I'm like the soldier who didn't like the bloodletting I was seeing at the beginning, but now I'm just . . . there's another dead body . . . gee (December 5).

Support for Beginning Chairs

If the transition from professor to department chair is to become less traumatic for those who chose to make the move, meaningful ways to support beginning chairs will need to be found. The findings of the BDCS suggest the need to provide support programs for beginning department chairs to help them "work through" the complexities and ambiguities of their new role. Several practices have the potential for developing a strong foundation of support for beginning department chairs. First, beginning chairs should be provided with opportunities (and time) to receive leadership training and skill-development workshops related to the myriad short- and long-range tasks that characterize the work of a chair. These workshops (designed and led by experienced department chairs and central administrators) could also model effective conflict resolution skills and stress management techniques.

Second, experienced department chairs could serve as mentors to beginning chairs and provide much-needed support and suggestions. As Frank suggested, "One thing they [central administration] could do would be to encourage more contact with senior administrators or more experienced administrators . . . once a week or every other week." Mentors would also serve the valuable function of a sympathetic "listener" or "confidant" to help beginning chairs work through problems and issues. Mentors acting as objective, impartial "listeners" could serve as a catalyst for growth-enhancing self analysis and self reflection. In fact, a serendipitous finding from the BDCS was that periodic interviews with members of the research team provided much-appreciated support for the new chairs. As one BDCS subject stated, "Participating in this study has given me a sympathetic listener—an objective person to help me work through the challenges and

frustrations of becoming a new chair. Just talking with you [the researcher] was helpful." Similarly, Frank observed that "It's been good . . . you [the researcher] coming here has been, in some respects, therapeutic because it forces me to reflect on things. But the university does nothing in that respect."

Third, time- and stress-management workshops could provide beginning chairs with much needed "survival skills." In this regard, Gmelch and Miskin (1993, 161) suggest a "department chair action plan" to address stress that is related to time, administrative tasks, academic endeavors, and personal expectations. Their plan divides

> stressors into two categories: (1) those internally controlled and (2) those externally beyond one's control. Those within your control should be managed at the cause level by self-management techniques. Those beyond your control should be attacked at the symptom level with stress absorbers such as relaxation, nutrition, exercise and coping attitudes.

Lastly, if institutions of higher education are to respond effectively to the "leadership crisis in higher education" (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993, 183) central administrators (from the dean's level and up) must make substantive, good-faith efforts to enable chairs to act on the following "balancing strategies" that have been recommended for department chairs:

> **Restructure the Position**
> Work with your dean to reduce the expectations of the position to a half-time assignment. Negotiate proper support to manage the key . responsibilities of the position. Beside secretarial support, request a research assistant to the office management team to conduct the necessary reports for the university, state agencies and outside constituencies.
>
> **Purge Unnecessary Administrivia**
> Related to restructuring the position is the need to reduce the amount of paperwork and requests for reports rarely read. Since the highest stress on chairs comes from overload, concentrate on your department's high pay-off activities rather than respond to the urgent, but sometimes not so important. Each request should be measured against its contribution to the department's mission and goals.

Reverse the Hierarchy

Traditionally and structurally universities are top-down hierarchies. Chairs serve at the pleasure of, and for, the dean. You might ask why deans exist. In part, the answer should be to provide support and leadership for department chairs. Be proactive and seek your dean's help . . . .

Protect Scholarship Interests

[Chairs] need more time for their scholarly pursuits and personal interests while serving departments. If your time for keeping current in your discipline and research is not protected, you may become dissatisfied and more reluctant to continue as chair. Blocking time for research, maintaining a separate research office, and seeking support for a research assistant while serving as chair will produce a work environment conducive to productive administration.

Train for Leadership

It is well known that few chairs receive training to prepare and maintain their skills in leadership. The value of leadership is too great not to invest in the most critical unit in the academic institution. Both managerial skills and leadership perspectives are needed to meet the challenges facing higher education.

Note

[1]In addition to using pseudonyms for "Frank" and "Madeline," selected descriptive details about their institutions and departments have been changed to ensure anonymity; however, the descriptions provided are intended to portray as accurately as possible the milieus of their respective departments.

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Figure 1

Three Perspectives on the Beginning Chair's Professional Identity

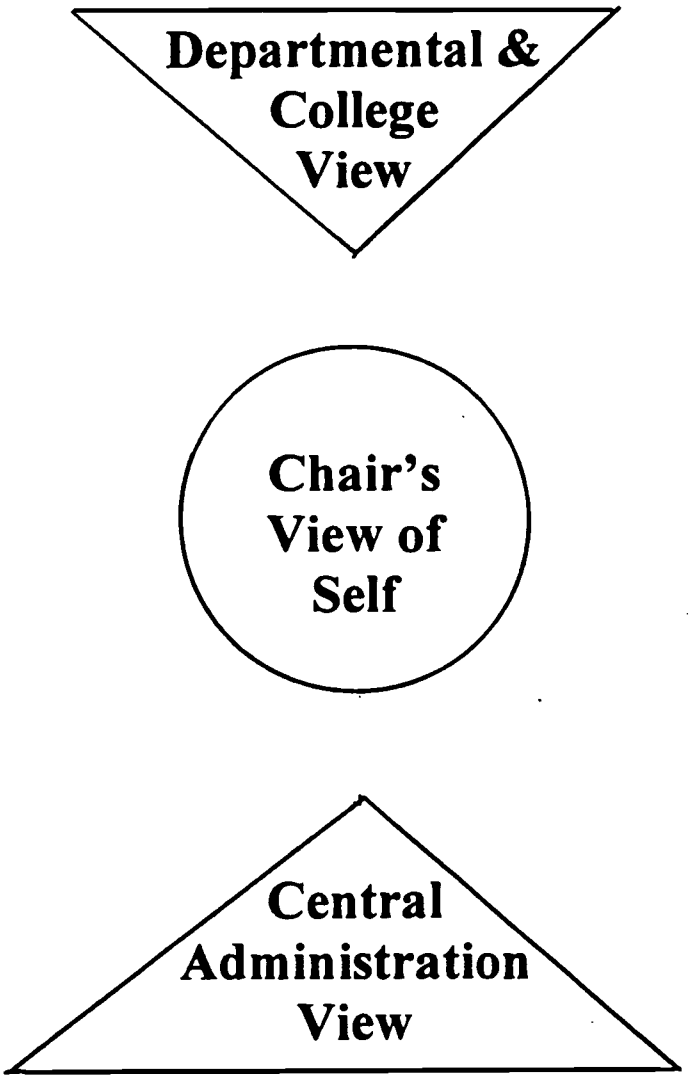
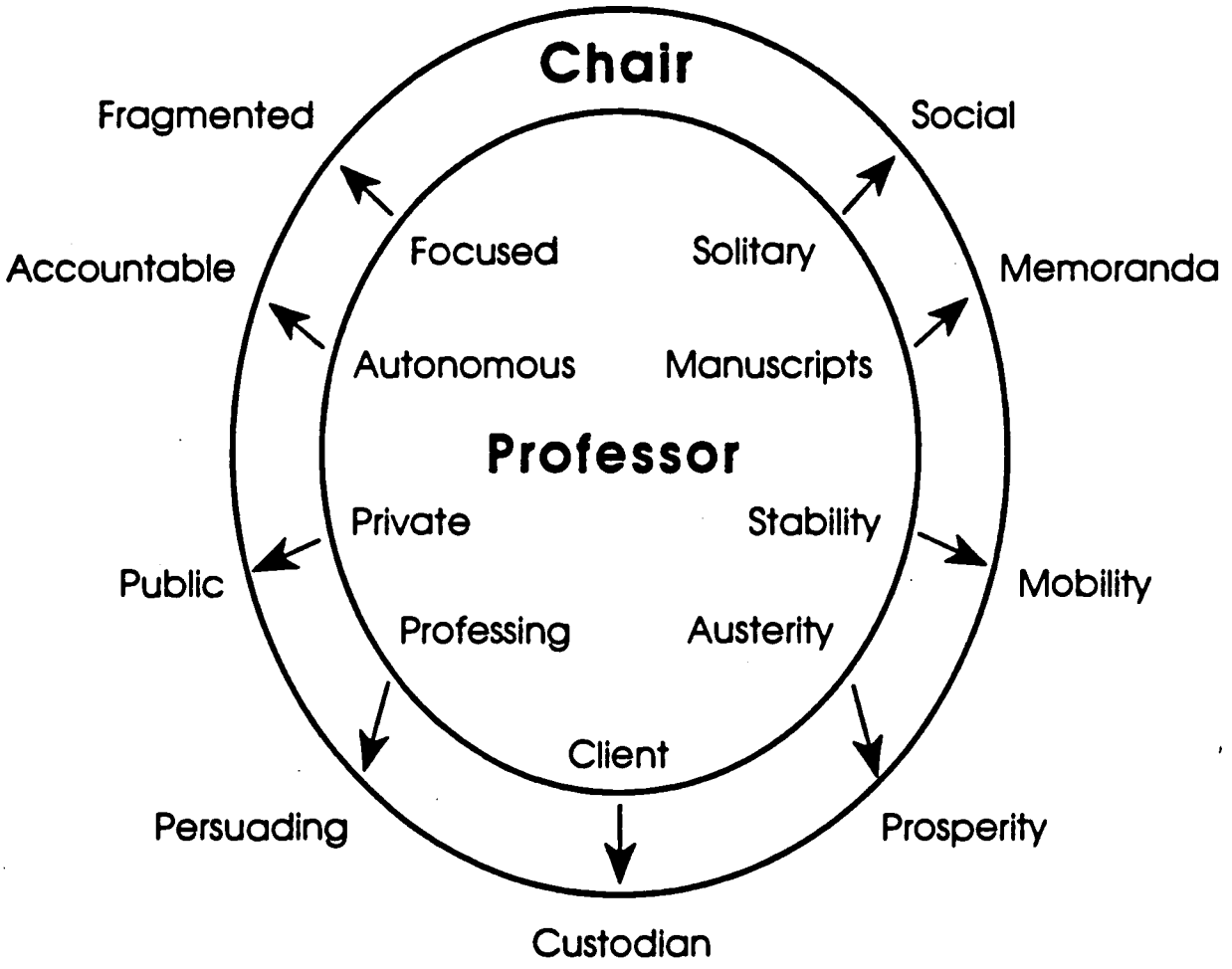


Figure 2

The Transformation from Professor to Chair



Source: Walter H. Gmelch & Val D. Miskin, *Leadership Skills for Department Chairs.* Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, 1993, p. 16.

Table 1
Descriptive Data for 13 Beginning Department Chairs

*Name**	*Ethnicity*	*Department/Unit*	*Type of Institution*	*Carnegie Classification*
Frank	White	School of Communications	Land-grant university	Research II
Rita	African American	Department of Teaching & Learning	Land-grant university	Research I
Nancy	White	Department of Mathematics	Urban state university	Doctoral II
Carl	White	Department of Environmental Studies	Urban state university	Doctoral II
Jim	White	School of Social Work	Mid-size state university	Master's I Comp.
Scott	White	Department of Biology	Land-grant university	Research I
Mary	White	Department of Special Education	Regional state university	Doctoral I
Claudia	White	Department of English	Land-grant university	Research I
Madeline	White	Department of Curriculum and Instruction	Urban state university	Doctoral I
Bill	White	Department of History	Private religious university	Master's I Comp.
Jane	White	Department of Political Science	Private religious university	Master's I Comp.
Dave	Asian	Department of Management and Systems	Land-grant university	Research I
Katherine	White	Department of Theater	Regional state university	Research II

* Names used are pseudonyms.
** *Research I* universities are committed to graduate education through the doctorate, give high priority to research, award more than 50 doctoral degrees, and receive $40-million or more in federal support annually. *Research II* universities meet Research I criteria, except their annual federal support is between $15.5- and $40-million. *Doctoral I* universities are committed to graduate education through the doctorate and award at least 40 doctoral degrees annually. *Doctoral II* universities meet Doctoral I criteria, and they award at least 10 doctoral degrees in three or more disciplines or 20 or more doctoral degrees in one or more disciplines. *Master's I Comprehensive* universities are committed to graduate education through the master's degree, and they award 40 or more master's degrees annually in three or more disciplines.

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