

DEPARTMENT CHAIR CHECKLIST

A Guide to the Role and Responsibilities

Areas Covered

- A. Developing and advancing the department vision
- B. Communicating and sharing resources
- C. Fostering a safe, inclusive, and collaborative environment
- D. Nurturing careers
- E. Fulfilling the teaching mission
- F. Attending to your own professional development

A. Developing and advancing the department vision

1. Organizing and running periodic department meetings and an annual planning retreat.

Gathering the department members together to discuss their perspectives on department issues and plans is essential. The aim of a chair is to gain department consensus about important decisions through a highly consultative process that echoes the shared governance structure at UCR. Establishing consensus differs from unanimity but typically represents a clear majority. An annual retreat provides an opportunity to both celebrate accomplishments from the past year and plan at a higher strategic level where and how the department should be trying to go in the years ahead, including for example, curriculum reform and hiring needs. Retreats are also a suitable time to mark anniversary and significant awards/achievements of individual department members.

2. Organize and lead the efforts for academic plans, strategic plans, and program reviews.

From time to time the department will be asked to produce these types of documents. The chair needs to divide the responsibility for collecting data and writing about the different areas of the department. Ultimately the chair is responsible for seeing to it these documents are prepared and should be ready to shoulder more of the burden than any individual faculty member in the department. The chair should also be responsive to college/school and campus requests for updates on milestones and metrics related to the strategic plan and program reviews.

3. Develop connections to department alumni.

Maintaining connections to graduate of the program cements the good feeling that students depart the campus with. Aside from keeping UCR on their minds when talking about college options with future prospective students, the ongoing relationship sometimes pays dividends later when they think about helping UCR with their time and gifts. One wonderful way to stay in touch with students is to host alumni mixers at conferences. Chairs are encouraged to use electronic newsletters and other creative ways to engage with department alumni.

4. Work on fund-raising opportunities for the department.

Chairs should develop a relationship with University Advancement so that faculty can be called upon to help pursue gift opportunities that are on their radar. In the same way, through relationships with alumni and other benefactors, chairs can help Advancement sort through options to present to potential donors.

5. Work with faculty to communicate major accomplishments to campus via news articles and press releases.

Chairs should play the role of publicist for their faculty and department news. Ways to do that include reaching out to college, RED, and/or APO newsletter editors, the UCR communications office, and The Highlander editorial office.

6. Strategize ways to enhance department visibility on the campus, in the community, and across the nation and globe.

The profile of a department can be elevated by supporting faculty members' work in areas such as editorial positions, officer positions within professional societies, and very importantly, being nominated for awards and special honors. It is also important for chairs to be responsive to requests for nominations for faculty awards and to nominate their faculty whenever appropriate. Chairs are encouraged to be proactive about suggesting service and leadership roles for their faculty, and then supporting them with appropriate resources.

B. Communicating and sharing resources

1. Review of key campus offices such as Ombuds, DEI, Compliance Office, Research and Economic Development Office, Academic Personnel Office, VPAR, Campus Counsel, and Student Conduct.

Helping faculty understand the purpose of these offices will be the first step to providing them direction on who to talk to about challenges that may come up in the course of their work. Getting advice from an informed source is often the key to keeping small problems from growing into large problems.

2. Discuss the role of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) in research planning.

It is beneficial for faculty members to be versed in the role of the committees, irrespective of whether an individual engages with the committees, because they may be able to help explain the roles to other faculty, students, and other academic employees that do need these services.

3. Discuss with the Senate faculty the Faculty Code of Conduct (APM-015), the role of the VPAR, the Senate Committee on Charges, and the Senate Committee on Privilege and Tenure in the Senate faculty disciplinary process.

It is important for faculty to understand the expectations around scholarship, teaching, and collegiality that are defined in the Faculty Code of Conduct, and the process by which faculty can be held accountable for violations in the Faculty Code of Conduct.

4. Discuss with Senate faculty the grievance process (senate bylaw 335) and the Faculty Code of Conduct (APM-015).

Senate faculty members have rights and privileges, in exchange for adhering to the Faculty Code of Conduct. If they feel their rights or privileges have been denied, they can file a grievance about the situation and seek an administrative resolution. The grievance process is a tool that should be transparent to all faculty members so that they understand the protection it affords.

5. Understand and communicate that for represented non-senate academic appointees the grievance process is through their respective bargaining contracts, and with the unrepresented non-senate academic appointees the grievance process is through APM-140.

Faculty members can supervise academic employees such as Lecturers, TAs, GSR, Postdocs, and Academic Student Employees. Chairs can help these faculty members by explaining to them how the grievance process works for this population of academic employees.

6. Review key policies with the department including SVSH, Bullying and Abusive Conduct, Research Misconduct, Performance Management of Staff and non-Senate Academic Employees, Conflict of Commitment, and Conflict of Interest.

Often the difficulties encountered by faculty members arise because they were not well informed about proper rules and regulations. The Chair is relied upon to present multiple opportunities for faculty to acquire the information that is available that can help prevent mistakes that can have profound consequences.

7. Assure that campus/college information and announcements are promptly communicated to the department as necessary, including explanations and interpretation of the impact of these announcements on the department.

Faculty members do not always keep up with policy announcements around academic personnel and/or human resources. Chairs should follow these announcements closely, and as appropriate, discuss them with their faculty.

8. Be prompt and responsive to all questions from students, faculty, and staff.

Chairs work on behalf of their faculty and need to adopt a workstyle that is responsive to all inquiries from all sources. Following through on action items and commitments is imperative.

9. Understand and communicate about campus issues that affect the department such as hiring strategies, budget issues, and administrative changes.

Often the chair serves as a two-way messenger, bringing news and items to the department and sharing news and items about the department to college/school and campus administration. As the chair serves as the face of the department, this ambassador role should be managed with a great deal of diplomacy.

10. Sometimes 'No' needs to be an answer, and sometimes it will be necessary for you to support and implement campus or college/school decisions with which you may not agree.

Do some reading on how to deal with difficult relationships and/or have difficult conversations with students, faculty, and staff. Each year APO offers a series of workshops for department chairs, and these topics are generally covered. Chairs are required to attend all APO chair leadership events.

C. Fostering a safe, inclusive, and collaborative environment

1. Set the tone for safety-conscious department culture and provide oversight of delegated authority.

Reviewing and ensuring compliance to safety protocols is of paramount importance. The effectiveness with which this is done by a chair will be central to reducing incidents and to the investigation of mishaps that do occur.

2. Annually review bylaw 55 with thoughtful discussions.

Voting privileges, as articulated through bylaw 55, must be reviewed annually. The chair should engage the department with respect to revisiting the motivation for the existing bylaw 55 relative to the evolving culture of the university. Benchmarking the department's view of bylaw 55 with other departments on the campus will be an informative exercise.

3. Uphold the responsibility to nurture the department climate, paying special attention to the paths of junior faculty, women faculty, and faculty of color.

Chairs play a leading role in paying attention to the climate in the department. When they see things that are inappropriate, they should act accordingly, escalating the response if necessary. Side conversations that call out inappropriate behavior can sometimes be sufficient to resolve the problem. Use the Office of the Ombuds as a resource for help. In more trying circumstances, it will be necessary for the chair to engage with the Dean and/or Vice Provost of Administrative Resolution to curb the behavior or bring justice to egregious transgressions.

4. Be a champion for equity in the department with respect to service and TA assignments.

Chairs should be conscious of how service load is distributed. While it can be comfortable to assign service roles to faculty that always deliver, this can unfairly impair their opportunity to flourish in teaching and research. Chairs need to be particularly sensitive and accommodating to the hidden service undertaken by female faculty and faculty of color who may be giving generously of their time in informal mentoring roles and who may also be overburdened with committee service for the diversity they bring to the composition of committees.

5. Review critical training and reporting requirements including SVSH training, cybersecurity training, search committee training, and COI/COC reporting.

Some training and reporting activities are absolutely required, and faculty members need to understand potential consequences if they are found to be out of compliance. Chairs need to explain the motivation for required trainings as much as possible, so they are not looked upon as an undue burden.

D. Nurturing careers

1. Discuss with the faculty the role of the Academic Senate committees.

Helping faculty understand the role and structure of the Academic Senate will provide them an opportunity to get involved. Senate service on our campus can be an important element of faculty advancement in their careers at UCR. Our goal is for every faculty member to understand that the opportunity exists, and then they can decide what to do with it.

2. Refer faculty to the Office of Research for early and frequent advice concerning IP issues and/or forming companies.

Faculty members need to know that if they are thinking about becoming involved with a start-up company or starting their own company, they need to consult with the Office of Research before doing so. This is true even if the work is thought to be confined to the summer months or unrelated to their work at UCR.

3. Connect the department with campus faculty mentoring programs and/or develop a customized department-based program.

Mentors for faculty members can be an important part of retention. Chairs should proactively develop a procedure for facilitating mentoring relationships for faculty in the department.

4. Schedule annual reminder conversations with all faculty members about The CALL and APM-210.

Chairs should have at least one conversation at a department meeting early in the academic year around the changes that were made to the new CALL. For new faculty, a more in-depth conversation about the CALL should be included in a 1-1 orientation offered to the faculty member.

5. Help to ensure on-time submission of M/P files to other review entities according to published schedules.

Chairs should actively encourage all faculty members who are submitting M/P files to prepare the efileplus materials as soon as possible. It will help minimize delays in completing reviews and announcing outcomes if files could be completed earlier. Delays in submitting files to deans' offices and in responding in a timely fashion to requests for clarification or revision have the detrimental impact of delaying the decisions to be communicated to faculty.

6. Discuss with faculty options for accelerations, decelerations, additional O/S, career reviews.

Chairs should have 1-1 conversations with all faculty members who are eligible to submit an M/P file, offering informal advice on what actions might be considered, but also encouraging the faculty members to seek other points of view as appropriate.

7. Provide feedback to faculty on student evaluations of teaching.

When chairs receive the student evaluations of teaching, they should reach out to their faculty members, acknowledging what they see in the data, and as appropriate scheduling a discussion on how apparent challenges might be overcome.

8. Work with underperforming faculty to help them get back on track, but also understand the role of APM-075 in managing department turnover.

Faculty members who have slowed down or become dis-incentivized present a potential opportunity for chairs to have a positive influence on those persons (and the department) if they can help them to rejuvenate their engagement with the department. Absent that possibility, chairs should understand the role of APM-075 as a tool for addressing untenable situations.

9. Oversee the onboarding process of new faculty.

Special attention from the chair for new hires is important to the fast assimilation of the new employee. Being attentive to all the questions that may arise around procurement, outfitting of space, navigating IT systems, and the preparation for teaching is key to helping reduce the anxiety of getting their career started. Social interactions with department members will also help the new hire become comfortable with their workplace and community.

10. Establish a departmental awards committee for internal and external faculty awards.

Creating and maintaining an active awards committee is helpful to faculty at all levels. For junior faculty, even modest awards are paving stones for more significant awards later. For senior faculty, awards can provide a welcome boost to the recognition and visibility of their career. Major awards are noted at the campus level and promoted as such to bring recognition to our campus.

E. Fulfilling the teaching mission

1. Be the final decider on teaching assignments, subject to department consultation and norms.

Chairs can keep in mind that Assistant Professors will often benefit from teaching a particular course more than once. Limiting the number of different courses taught in the earlier years of appointment helps the faculty member have time to fully launch their scholarly activities. Equity with regard to the size of assigned classes, the times that classes are offered, and the balance with respect to undergraduate and graduate classes offered should be holistically considered when making teaching assignments.

2. Be responsible for formulating, reporting, and making use of the annual assessments of learning outcomes as requested by the Office of Evaluation and Assessment within the Office of the Provost.

Departments need to engage with learning outcomes and to use the information from the assessment of those learning outcomes to improve the efficacy of the department teaching mission. The chair needs to champion the pedagogical imperative and utility of this important effort to reduce the perception that it is merely an administrative obligation for faculty.

3. Discuss the possibility of new undergraduate majors and master's degree programs, perhaps in coordination with other departments.

Developing inter-departmental programs requires mutual trust, attention to detail, and good coordination between the inter-disciplinary planning committee. The chair should seek out opportunities for such programs, discuss the possibilities with the department, review the available resources to support such an effort, and then oversee the formation and successful work product of the planning committee.

4. Establish departmental awards for students.

Including departmental awards for scholarship, service, and helping with the teaching mission are important to our students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

5. Engage in departmental activities surrounding commencement.

Having a department celebration for graduates can be as simple as a lawn picnic. Chairs should take the lead on organizing even a modest event, which far better than no event, to celebrate the achievements of the graduates and to launch them into their new roles as alumni.

F. Attending to your own professional development

1. Read APM-245 for a broad overview of the role and responsibilities.

APM-245 describes how the academic merit and promotion review for a department chair is handled and includes a high-level list of administrative duties.

2. Understand the impact that the timing and duration of being a department chair can have on your own career.

It remains important to have evidence of continued productive involvement in scholarly activities despite the additional administrative workload brought on by being the department chair. On the other hand, career options in higher administration can be facilitated by good performance as a department chair.

3. Sharpen your own time management skills by learning from experienced chairs how to deal with the workload in efficient ways.

The benefit of mentoring and orientation programs extends to chairs, both seasoned and new. Seek advice from experienced chairs when navigating opportunities and/or challenges for the first time and pass on your own wisdom as you acquire. Consider organizing and/or participating in a chair support group.