

DEPARTMENT CHAIR HANDBOOK



THE UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO

Office of
the Provost

qres=
catSci
entia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
Being an Effective Department Chair.....	4
Department Chair Responsibilities.....	5
Department Governance and Meetings.....	6
Goal Setting.....	6
Relationship with Faculty.....	7
Academic Recruitment and Hiring.....	7
Renewal, Promotion, and Tenure Reviews.....	8
Other Academic Appointees.....	8
Postdoctoral Researchers.....	9
Faculty Mentoring and Support.....	9
Departmental Staff.....	10
Students and Curriculum.....	11
Fostering a Diverse and Inclusive Department.....	12
Budgets and Finance.....	12
Recognizing Faculty, Students, and Staff.....	13
Difficult Situations.....	13
Additional Resources.....	13

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your willingness to serve as a department chair at the University of Chicago. This leadership role is critical and presents many challenges, along with great opportunities. Whether you are new to the role of department chair or have held this position for some time, I hope that this handbook will help you navigate the administrative responsibilities that come along with the position, including recruitment, operations, mentoring, mediating, and more.

This handbook was developed by the Office of the Provost in consultation with faculty across the University. We are especially thankful to the Division of the Social Sciences for its contributions to this handbook, which is intended to act as a supplement to other unit-specific chair development materials. Should you have questions about the material in this handbook or anything else related to your role as chair, I encourage you to reach out to your dean for assistance. The Office of the Provost also offers an Academic Leadership Series designed to support department chairs. For more information, contact Susan Popa, Assistant Vice President, Leadership Development and Strategy, at spopa@uchicago.edu. Thank you again for your dedication to our academic community, and please know that you will have ongoing support throughout your tenure as chair.

Sincerely,
Ka Yee C. Lee
Provost
The University of Chicago

BEING AN EFFECTIVE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

Department chairs, together with their deans, are responsible for maintaining and enhancing the highest standards of scholarly excellence and for setting intellectual, academic, and curricular priorities within their departments. Chairs serve as the intellectual and administrative leaders for their department's faculty, other academic appointees, postdoctoral researchers, administrative staff, and undergraduate and graduate students. Chairs also play critical roles in connecting the department to the broader division and to the University. Chairs serve as liaisons along with the division's dean and the master of the collegiate division, representing the department to the central administration and the rest of the University. Chairs are also advocates for their departments within the division and the University, and they in turn represent the perspective of the division and the University to the members of their departments. They are expected to exhibit fidelity to University policies, including those that support compliance with laws and regulations. Finally, they have a unique opportunity to create departmental conditions that position people for success, particularly junior faculty and students.

The commitments that chairs make to faculty, other academic appointees, postdoctoral researchers, students, staff, and job candidates (among others) can be interpreted as binding upon the institution. Therefore, it is essential that chairs work very closely with their dean and other administrative bodies during critical processes. Chairs are responsible for managing department finances, overseeing academic programs offered by the department, and implementing departmental governance procedures. Chairs have access to confidential information, and they must maintain confidentiality in all personnel matters related to salaries and annual raises, disciplinary issues, negotiations in recruitment and retention, and more.

This handbook outlines general duties of department chairs throughout the academic year. Additional responsibilities and resources are specific to certain departments, and not all duties outlined here will be applicable to all departments or in all academic years. This handbook should serve as a basis for further conversations about roles and responsibilities with the dean and with the department.

Chairs may want to consider these additional things when acclimating to their new role:

- **Delegating responsibilities.** Each University department and division has its own culture; however, chairs may identify specific tasks that can be delegated to other faculty or administrative staff.
- **Seeking counsel.** Deans, current department chairs, and former chairs are all valuable resources to reach out to if you have questions or need advice. A number of administrative units can also offer important counsel to chairs in addressing issues with faculty, other academic appointees, postdoctoral researchers, students, and administrative staff. A list of key contacts is listed in the Additional Resources section of this handbook.
- **Developing skills.** The University's Academic Leadership Series offers programs specifically designed to help chairs navigate the various aspects of their role.
- **Conducting a departmental review.** A formal departmental review including a self-study and peer review (internal and external) can help departments identify current strengths as well as potential challenges, setting an agenda for change. Some divisions already have an established schedule for departmental reviews. If not, a chair might work with their dean to initiate one. While very useful, this process can be quite time consuming, so chairs should take that under consideration before beginning a review. Some areas to address during a review include scholarly focus and standing, undergraduate programs, graduate programs, diversity and inclusion, and mission.

DEPARTMENT CHAIR RESPONSIBILITIES

Department chairs need to see the big picture—understand the needs of their department, realize how the department fits into the larger University, and also be mindful of the needs of faculty, other academic appointees, postdoctoral researchers, students, and staff. While this handbook describes the more procedural aspects of the department chair role and links to related resources, the University has also identified this more complete set of responsibilities of the department chair.

- Develop and articulate goals for the future of the department and engage faculty and other stakeholders to plan for realizing those goals.
- Understand the various recruiting, promotion, and tenure processes and resources at the University and know how to conduct inclusive and compliant searches.
- “Manage up” to the dean’s office in a diplomatic way, representing and advocating for department interests and priorities. Understand how to navigate the University and utilize resources.
- Engage academic colleagues by running efficient and inclusive meetings and forming effective academic committees with clear expectations and goals.
- Mentor and support junior faculty and encourage senior faculty to engage in these efforts.
- Address conflict and be willing to have difficult conversations with an understanding of different parties’ positions and interests.
- Manage administrative staff effectively with a clear understanding of University policy and how staff’s expectations and experience differ from faculty in terms of feedback, performance management, development, and career paths.
- Create an inclusive and productive department culture.
- Negotiate effectively in hiring and retention cases and other matters, such as competing requests for resources.
- Understand overall economic levers for the University and their relationship to the department budget. Provide financial oversight of the department budget.
- Identify external trends and challenges facing higher education and those specific to their discipline. Be able to take account of these trends in future plans for the department.
- Be accessible and responsive to their department; which requires balancing these additional administrative responsibilities with their own scholarship, teaching, and personal demands.

DEPARTMENT GOVERNANCE AND MEETINGS

Department chairs have primary responsibility for managing and facilitating the department's decision-making and governance. Each department has its own formal procedures and informal customs in this regard, and typically the chair works within these systems, though periodic review and revision of procedures and norms are sometimes needed. Incoming chairs may consider meeting with each faculty member individually to learn more about their specific ambitions and challenges. Additionally, each chair will take their own approach to their role, which may also affect department culture and warrant discussion in one of the first department meetings they oversee.

Chairs run faculty meetings (scheduling, setting the agenda, preserving and distributing minutes, maintaining order during discussions, ensuring all voices are heard, etc.), and follow department procedures for staffing standing committees and appointing faculty to administrative roles (e.g., directors of graduate and undergraduate studies). Additionally, chairs act as leaders—bringing opportunities, pressing questions, and issues of concern to faculty; recommending appropriate courses of action; and working to build agreement on the directions the department will pursue. Critical to all of these responsibilities is the chair's ability to foster communication, negotiation, and common purpose among faculty. Chairs also have a responsibility to listen and respond to the needs of students, which may at times require acknowledgement of other points of view or requests that cannot be accommodated.

GOAL SETTING

Chairs facilitate the long-term development of their department and the University. While deans work with chairs to articulate information about broader divisional and institutional goals, chairs have an opportunity to participate actively in the goal-setting process for their departments. Certain department goals may already be in process when a chair assumes their role, but they can and should define strategic goals and priorities, both for their departments and themselves. Department goals should be developed in partnership with faculty. When developing goals for instructional programs, chairs should consider whether and how to engage other academic appointees, postdoctoral researchers, and students. In consultation with faculty, chairs should determine how best to communicate about department goals with key stakeholders and decide how to measure progress against each goal.

RELATIONSHIP WITH FACULTY

When assuming the role of chair, individuals temporarily hold an administrative position in addition to their faculty position. During their tenure, chairs are required to manage faculty who were previously their peers and likely will be again once the chair's tenure is through. Chairs may even find themselves leading faculty who previously served as a department chair or a mentor. These designations may occasionally result in tension, and although many difficulties can be resolved through one-on-one conversations, chairs are encouraged to consult their dean as soon as possible should a serious situation arise.

Additionally, chairs will likely find that junior faculty have different needs than tenured faculty, although all faculty may need assistance at times. Regardless of rank, all faculty will benefit from encouragement and support from their chair. Chairs may serve a mentoring role with junior faculty, but can still support tenured faculty, such as by offering to review works-in-progress or encouraging faculty to attend conferences. Career development of recently tenured members of the faculty should be a priority.

ACADEMIC RECRUITMENT AND HIRING

The process of recruiting and hiring new faculty and other academic appointees occurs in close collaboration with the dean. The chair typically begins discussions in faculty meetings to identify the immediate and long-term needs of the department. Chairs then bring the department's recommendations to the dean in the form of a written hiring request, typically submitted during the Spring Quarter. When setting hiring priorities, faculty should consider not only the immediate needs of the department, but also the evolving shape of the discipline, and the potential contributions of the proposed recruitment to the division and the University. Chairs must also ensure that search committees take the appropriate steps to generate a broad and diverse applicant pool of excellent candidates.

Authorization for searches is typically provided in late spring or early summer. If a search is approved, the chair then:

- Appoints a search committee (following University and departmental practices)
- Ensures that the job announcement is prepared and disseminated appropriately
- Informs the search committee of departmental and divisional guidelines and deadlines
- Oversees the decision process in identifying candidates for interviews
- Assists with arrangements for candidate visits

The chair also meets with each candidate if possible and arranges for meetings with the dean as appropriate.

As with all department decisions, the chair oversees the process through which the search committee's report and recommendations are discussed and the hiring decision is voted on by the faculty.

Oftentimes, a unit's human resources team or other staff can be of great value to chairs in helping to learn about and navigate these processes. Do not hesitate to seek advice from people who are knowledgeable about these procedures.

Additional recruitment and hiring resources for chairs include:

- [Academic Searching and Screening Policy](#)
- [Office of the Provost recruitment tools](#)
- [Equal Opportunity Programs](#)
- [Searching for Excellence trainings](#)
- [Faculty search support videos](#)
- [Faculty Recruitment Innovation Fund](#)

RENEWAL, PROMOTION, AND TENURE REVIEWS

Chairs oversee the process for renewal, tenure, and promotion reviews. Recommendations for promotion are reviewed on a rolling basis throughout the year. The timing of reappointment or promotion recommendations for untenured faculty are specified by the terms of the faculty member's contract. Action is required when untenured faculty enter into the final year of their contracts. Chairs should check with their dean to confirm their department's specific process and deadlines.

In some cases, promotion and tenure reviews occur outside of the timeframe established in the faculty member's contract either because the review is undertaken ahead of schedule or because the faculty member has made use of the opportunity for a one-year "stop the clock" tenure review extension. Departments should have procedures in place for deciding when to take the exceptional step of putting a case forward early.

Additional renewal, promotion, and tenure review resources for chairs include:

- [Office of the Provost Promotion and Tenure website](#)
- [Department or divisional wikis](#)

OTHER ACADEMIC APPOINTEES

Many departments engage academic personnel in non-faculty positions to support teaching needs and/or individual faculty research projects. Generally, the position and rank follow from the rationale for appointment. Other academic appointees (OAAs) include lecturers and senior lecturers who contribute to an instructional program.

Chairs oversee the appointment and review processes, which includes managing recruiting and making offers. As with other appointments, chairs send their recommendations for the appointment or renewal, along with the relevant dossier materials, to their dean. Following the dean's review and approval, the case is sent to the Office of the Provost. Cases are reviewed on a rolling basis throughout the year. Recommendations must include a memo from the chair describing the rationale for the appointment along with the candidate's CV. Other requirements vary according to appointment type. Departments should consult with their dean's office early in the process to determine whether a search is required and what materials must be submitted with the appointment recommendation.

Additional resources on OAAs include:

- [Handbook for Academics: OAA Guidelines](#)
- [Office of the Provost recruitment tools](#)
- [Department or divisional wikis](#)

POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHERS

Postdoctoral researchers enhance the University's academic programs and scholarship and are valuable assets to departments. Oversight of these positions is managed by postdoctoral researchers' faculty mentors and their respective dean's offices.

Additional resources on postdocs include:

- [Postdoctoral Researcher Policy Manual](#)

FACULTY MENTORING AND SUPPORT

Most departments have procedures in place for supporting faculty during various stages of their careers, and chairs are critical to this effort. It is strongly recommended that departments have a mentoring system in place for junior faculty: forming mentoring committees, assigning individual senior faculty mentors, etc. Departments may also have set procedures for providing mentoring on teaching (for example, by having mentors visit classes), or other specific areas of professional development. Chairs oversee these mentoring arrangements, monitor their effectiveness, and revise them as needed. In addition, chairs should also make themselves available to their faculty, particularly junior faculty.

Chairs are uniquely positioned to help junior faculty identify campus resources that can advance their scholarship and pedagogy. It is equally important, and in some ways more challenging, for chairs to support faculty development post tenure. Chairs can play instrumental roles in helping faculty formulate and launch ambitious plans. They can also direct academics to the University's Faculty Development Program, which offers a variety of workshops, trainings, networks, and other resources designed to help scholars thrive at all levels of their career.

Additionally, chairs are in a position to know when faculty careers are not thriving, and to offer assistance as appropriate. Each department should have a plan in place detailing how faculty share information about their scholarly work, professional contributions, and other accomplishments with chairs, both formally and informally. Meeting with each faculty member at least once a year to discuss their scholarship, pedagogy, and service can be a useful practice.

Chairs also form a critical link between faculty and the broader University. Chairs are often highly attuned to, and first to learn of, the challenges faculty encounter in their daily work and across a range of matters. Chairs are instrumental in being able to identify key resources across campus that can better support faculty and the overall quality of academic life in their department.

Additional resources related to faculty mentoring and support include:

- [Faculty Development Program](#)

DEPARTMENTAL STAFF

Highly skilled administrative staff are essential to the successful functioning of each University department. Long-standing staff members can also serve as invaluable sources of institutional memory and wisdom. In most departments, chairs supervise staff and are responsible for working with staff to ensure that the department's administrative needs are met. Many chairs are also responsible for conducting annual staff performance evaluations and merit raise recommendations. All chairs should deliver frequent feedback to staff about what they are doing well and how they can improve.

Unlike most faculty who have worked in their fields for a long time and who generally share similar professional goals related to the tenure pathway, staff may have more diverse professional backgrounds, experiences, and aspirations. They may have held many positions prior to joining the department, and also have different levels of experience working in academia. Staff likely have professional career goals that include other areas of the University and external opportunities. It is important to note that staff may have different expectations from faculty in terms of their career development.

Chairs are encouraged to learn about their staffs' backgrounds and professional development goals through annual performance evaluations and ongoing conversations in order to help them succeed. Chairs should also familiarize themselves with the University policies and procedures for staff. The human resources staff in each division can offer guidance on performance management, giving feedback, and addressing performance concerns.

Additional resources related to departmental staff include:

- [Human Resources website of forms, policies, and guides](#)
- [Human Resources performance management tool](#)
- [Equal Opportunity Programs](#)
- [University Resource Groups](#)

STUDENTS AND CURRICULUM

Chairs are involved in organizing all aspects of departmental teaching and advising. They work with the department's director of graduate studies and director of undergraduate studies, as well as with department committees, to plan course offerings and faculty teaching schedules; periodically review and revise curricula for majors, minors, and graduate programs; and ensure excellence in the department's teaching and mentoring.

Chairs usually oversee the annual review of doctoral student progress and the preparation of annual student review letters. They also assist, when needed, if problems arise in a student's progress or placement. Chairs may also collect, review, and report annual data on doctoral admissions and student progress (years to candidacy, completion, job placements, etc.), as well as information on faculty engagement in teaching and mentoring College students.

Chairs oversee doctoral admissions in their departments and work closely with their division's dean of students on fellowship offers and admissions procedures. They may oversee the assignment of doctoral students to teaching assignments and submit an annual budget request for teaching assistantships, lectureships, and other support for undergraduate teaching. In addition, chairs are in contact with the directors of divisional master's programs regarding admissions plans, coursework, and advising arrangements.

Additional resources related to students and curricula include:

- [Report of the University of Chicago Committee on Graduate Education](#)
- [Mentoring at UChicago](#)
- [Handbook for Academics: Supporting Students](#)
- [Equal Opportunity Programs](#)

FOSTERING A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE DEPARTMENT

Department chairs are uniquely positioned to contribute to the University's [Diversity & Inclusion Initiative](#) by ensuring that activities are inclusive of members of the departmental community. A number of steps can be taken to improve a department's efforts in these areas, such as:

- Leading the development of a departmental diversity and inclusion plan
- Ensuring that faculty and staff searches, along with student recruitment efforts, attract a diverse applicant pool
- Implementing strong mentoring programs for students and junior faculty
- Encouraging faculty to incorporate inclusive teaching practices in their classrooms

Additional diversity and inclusion resources for chairs include:

- [D&I Planning Toolkit](#)
- [Faculty Search Support Materials](#)
- [Inclusive Pedagogy](#)
- [Search Training](#)

BUDGETS AND FINANCE

Chairs prepare and monitor the department's annual budget for operations, gifts, and endowment accounts, and submit an annual budget request to the dean's office each year. Additionally, chairs communicate to their dean about the department's need for larger resources, including lines for faculty hires, doctoral student support, staff positions, and physical infrastructure. Chairs may also prepare annual budget requests for teaching assistantships, lectureships, and other undergraduate teaching resources.

Chairs also convey faculty salary recommendations to the dean and should consider several factors when making salary recommendations, including scholarly accomplishments, teaching, and intramural and extramural service. Many factors over time may affect the growth of faculty salaries. If chairs note a disparity, such that a particular faculty member's salary is below the level commensurate with his or her accomplishments, there may be opportunities to correct the imbalance in discussion with the dean and Provost. Faculty salaries and related information must be kept absolutely confidential. After the division approves final salaries for the year, chairs typically send a letter to each faculty member with information about the salary increase and additional context as appropriate.

RECOGNIZING FACULTY, STUDENTS, AND STAFF

Chairs are in a unique position to nominate faculty, other academic appointees, postdoctoral researchers, students, and staff for awards or other opportunities for professional recognition, or to encourage others to do so. These recognitions include teaching awards for faculty and doctoral students, dissertation fellowships for doctoral students, and service awards for department staff.

Staff may also be nominated to participate in various professional and leadership development programs. For more information, contact Susan Popa, Assistant Vice President, Leadership Development and Strategy, at spopa@uchicago.edu.

DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

Chairs often need to act as mediators when problems arise between and among faculty, other academic appointees, postdoctoral researchers, students, or staff in the department. It is important for chairs to recognize the legal and professional obligations that their role encompasses, including obligations to keep certain types of information confidential (e.g., salaries) and obligations to report immediately certain kinds of allegations and problems to others within the University (for example, allegations of sexual misconduct) and, in some cases, outside the University (such as child abuse). When a serious issue involving personal or academic misconduct arises, chairs should seek advice from their dean's office, and possibly (with guidance from their dean) from the Office of the Provost, Office of Legal Counsel, and Office for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support.

Chairs will likely encounter difficult situations that do not involve legal matters but can affect the collegiality and climate in the department. Chairs are encouraged to speak to their dean, former chairs in the department, and chairs in other departments to share ideas on how to handle these issues.

A delay in addressing difficult situations typically makes the situation worse. Additional resources for helping to deal with difficulties and conflict include:

- [Office of Legal Counsel](#)
- [Equal Opportunity Programs, including the Office for Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Support](#)
- [Policy on Academic Fraud](#)
- [Human Resources Staff and Faculty Assistance Program](#)
- [Inside Higher Ed: Conflict Management Toolkit](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Here are some additional resources to take advantage of during your tenure as chair:

- **Academic Leadership Series:** This program offers a variety of trainings and other support for department chairs. For more information, contact Susan Popa, Assistant Vice President, Leadership Development and Strategy, at spopa@uchicago.edu.
- **Faculty Development Program:** This program features numerous workshops, trainings, networks, and other resources designed to help academics thrive at all levels of their career.