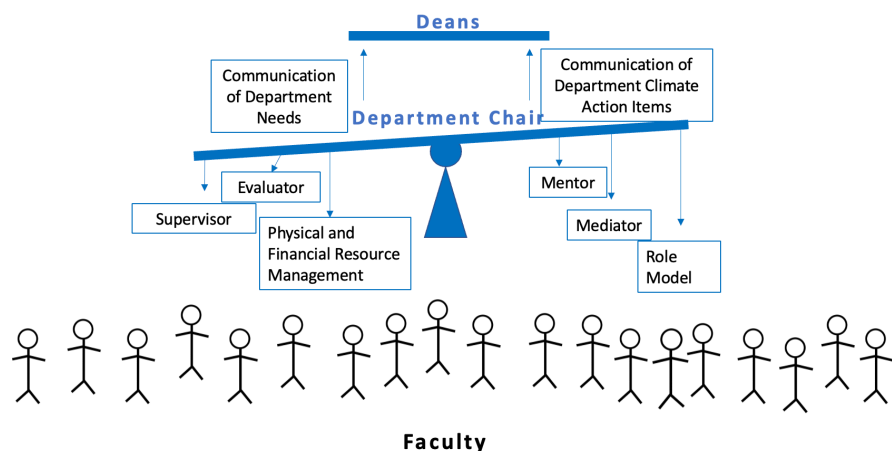UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
ADVANCE INSTITUTE

FOSTERING INCLUSIVE DEPARTMENTAL CLIMATES

Chairs Have Many Roles

Faculty

Arising out of discussions at workshops with chairs, facilitated by UD ADVANCE and motivated by the COACHE faculty climate survey, several issues came to the fore as significant challenges for department chairs and to departmental climate. Along with these challenges, the chairs discussed and shared strategies that they have used to address these challenges. In this document we summarize the ideas gathered from the workshops.

CHALLENGES

1. Managing the interaction between different groups/ranks/factions so everyone (students, staff, CT and TT faculty) feels valued.
    - Bullying/Power differentials
    - Gender dynamics
    - Different communication styles among some faculty

2. Surmounting fixed historical patterns and (senior faculty) attitudes (acceptance of different types of faculty roles and contributions, P&T changes, budget changes, comments on how we used to do it years ago).

3. Balancing research/service/teaching workloads, differentials, and reward structures (e.g. addressing perceived inequities in service load).

4. Getting a variety of viewpoints, particularly at meetings and in general decision making - from junior faculty, less vocal senior faculty.

5. Navigating instances of trauma or personal change (e.g. COVID, work-life issues, health issues).

DESIRED RESOURCES

1. Space. Both community space within the department and general space for faculty to meet within the university.

2. Time. Additional staffing or other resources to allow chairs time to better attend to the many competing priorities.

SHARED STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING DEPARTMENTAL CLIMATE

GENERAL

1. Don't over-use Zoom. Encourage face-to-face meetings. Regularly check in informally with faculty. Go out to them – **Management by Walking About** (MBWA). People value these informal relations and when these are formed, talking about difficult (pejorative) topics becomes less stressful.

2. **Communicate clearly** – especially with respect to faculty evaluation, resource allocation, and decision making (process & outcome).

3. **Recognize your mistakes** and apologize as necessary.

YOUR MEETINGS

4. **Be welcoming**. Watch out for side-bar/potentially exclusionary conversations which leave you clustered with a small group and leave others feeling isolated. Draw everyone into conversation.

5. **Set your meeting context and goals**. Clearly stating the purpose of the meeting, the background information, and following an agenda, makes it less likely for matters to be derailed.

6. **Be sure to address disrespectful behaviors.** These may show up at any time or place, so be prepared to nip them in the bud. Think through possible "disaster scenarios" and some strategies to address conflict/bad behavior so as to avoid being surprised in the moment.

7. Recognize that **junior faculty** might feel vulnerable and **be deliberate about injecting their voice into discussions**.
    - One chair shared that with faculty meetings by Zoom, and break-out rooms by rank, having junior people report first has proved to be a useful way for those voices to be heard more clearly and decrease perceived "bullying" by seniors.
    - Another shared that thoughts on discussion topics were requested ahead of meeting time. This allows quiet people to process and discuss with other faculty beforehand.

8. **Share and celebrate everyone's achievements (good news)** – for grants, publications, etc., and for signal family events too! Be inclusive about this.
    - Recognize that there are persons who may not want to self-promote. Chair can request information from individuals when meetings are advertised and announce at faculty meeting.
    - Periodically allow faculty to talk about what they bring to the unit. This allows people to be informed and have an appreciation for various forms of scholarship, teaching, and service.
    - Wall space in department for "good news" (grants, publications, etc.) of faculty/graduate students.

9. **Include staff** in your discussions as much as possible. They can be great allies and /or conduits for department issues.

FURTHER IDEAS FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY

10. Encourage/Initiate **informal social gatherings** – e.g. coffee hour, take a few persons to lunch every so often and change the invitees all the time, etc. Everyday interactions are important for collegiality.

11. Ensure your **departmental seminars are seen** as **community building opportunities**. Convey the importance of these seminars to the department.

12. **Set some expectations for faculty engagement** with each other.
    - One chair shared that a set of Department Operating Principles was developed out of a retreat on climate issues and is posted in the department. Members of the department seek to uphold these.
    - Another requests faculty members to identify their expectations of the chair, and of faculty for each other. This document is visited annually with faculty.

13. One chair shared that **a DEI Committee of faculty, staff and students** was formed in the department. Persons address concerns to any of these committee members. This has proved helpful.

14. **Getting people to "pitch in"** can be difficult. Find some leadership roles (within or outside of department) for those who do not contribute. Some strategies: -
    - find out what the constraints are. What can this person lead and how can chair show him/her the advantage in taking on this role?
    - praise achievements of individual, then suggest a specific role for which he/she "would definitely be most suited"
    - share your perceptions of equity and contributions and rotate/distribute committee assignments
    - involve difficult people in strategy-for-department conversations. They often "come round".

15. After much effort, a **community space – a break room – was created within a department** and has shown positive results.

16. **Must we use the language "diversity hire"?** That term is widely used across all levels at UD and could be constraining and unpleasant. Watch for institutional messaging. Framing matters. Perhaps we could change that to **"Target of opportunity hire"** which covers every scenario and does not focus narrowly.