

Chairing an Academic Department/Program at Kenyon

Role of the Chair

All members of departments and programs share responsibility for sustaining a culture that is visionary in curriculum, imaginative in pedagogy, rigorous in scholarship, and collegial in spirit. As convener of the department, the chair is responsible for leading colleagues toward the fulfillment of these responsibilities. The chair also serves as chief departmental representative to all other offices of the College.

Although these core responsibilities are common to all chairs, the manner in which they are accomplished varies considerably depending on departmental *structure*, *resources*, and *culture*. Structural factors include faculty size and distribution across ranks, curricular complexity, and the existence of special appointments or programs. Departmental resources vary with respect to budget size and complexity, available administrative assistance, and the spatial arrangements of faculty offices and other facilities. Departments differ culturally as well; some favor distributing administrative duties across all faculty, while elsewhere these responsibilities are assumed exclusively by the chair. All of these factors must be considered in selecting a chair and organizing departmental duties.

Selection and Appointment

Rotating the chair among the faculty benefits both individuals and departments by enhancing general understanding of departmental affairs and acquainting faculty with various administrative offices. As a general rule, faculty should be expected to assume the role of chair at some point in their Kenyon careers. But a good chair must possess several qualities including leadership ability, organizational skills, and the ability to work well with a variety of individuals. It is reasonable to expect that some individuals are ill suited to the role and should not be selected as chair.

Department chairs and program directors are appointed by the President on recommendation of the Provost, in consultation with the department's faculty. Except in extraordinary circumstances, chairs are selected from among the tenured faculty and serve a three-year term. Chairs may serve successive terms. Chairs typically are given one course release time (two courses for very large departments) to be able to fulfill their administrative duties. At the request of the individual serving in this role and with the approval of the Provost, such administrative work can be factored into their next Faculty Performance Review evaluations more heavily than is usually allowed by faculty evaluations guidelines. If a department chair becomes unable or unwilling to serve, or in cases where conflicts within a department become irreconcilable, the Provost may appoint a new chair or make other temporary arrangements for departmental leadership before the expiration of the term.

Duties of the Chair

The chair takes the lead in and coordinates the full range of departmental activities, including the following:

Administration

- Attend chairs meetings called by the Provost.
- Administer the department's budget.
- Conduct and report on an assessment of general education goals.
- Conduct and report on an assessment of goals for the department major.
- Meet with students as needed to address issues that an advisor may not be able to resolve.
- Represent the department to other offices within the College.
- Prepare the department's annual final report.
- Conduct external reviews of the department every eight years.
- Encourage the department to reflect on the processes it uses to do its work.
- Evaluate requests from community members for Affiliated Scholar status and make recommendations to the Provost.
- Manage the expenditure of department speaker's funds and honoraria, and organize visits of scholars/artists to campus under the department's auspices. Prepare departmental requests for Faculty Lectureships Committee.
- Develop and manage department's off-campus study policies. As relevant, manage department's off-campus studies program in cooperation with the Office of Global Engagement and individual directors.

Personnel

- Supervise and evaluate the work of the administrative assistant and/or other support staff.
- Promote regular conversation among departmental colleagues concerning the quality of the department's teaching, research, and other contributions to the College.
- Work with the Provost's office to maintain a coherent department pattern of leaves, reviews and sabbaticals.
- Oversee faculty reviews as defined in the *Faculty Handbook*
- The latter two responsibilities entail updating and planning for staffing (reviews, leaves, sabbaticals, retirements) for about five years.
- Communicate college expectations regarding promotion and tenure, consult at regular intervals with colleagues concerning their teaching and research agendas and performance, and support colleagues in their pursuit of appropriate opportunities for development of both teaching and scholarship.
- Participate in mentoring program for new faculty, typically serving on the mentoring committees of all newly hired faculty members in the department.
- Work to identify and maintain relations with a pool of part-time and visiting faculty to whom the department might turn periodically.

Curriculum

- Oversee departmental preparation of the course catalog, monitoring a coherent system of prerequisites, course rotations, etc.
- Develop a schedule of courses based upon departmental obligations to general education, interdisciplinary programs, and the major, balanced against teaching interests of individual faculty, as well as leaves and sabbaticals.

- Negotiate on behalf of department with Registrar over teaching times and places.
- Stimulate discussions that review at regular intervals the nature and quality of departmental offerings and requirements.
- Seek opportunities for the department to support college-wide programs when developing its course offerings and staffing plans.
- Oversee the assessment of the department's contribution to general education.
- Oversee the assessment of departmental outcomes.
- Oversee the development of policies for and approve individual studies.
- Advocate forms of research and off campus studies that enrich students' academic experience.
- Oversee administration of senior exercise and Honors Programs.
- Approve students seeking to declare a major and assist them as necessary in finding a faculty advisor in the department
- Act as *de facto* faculty advisor for those majors whose advisors are on leave, sabbatical, etc.

General tasks often required of the Chair

- Sign and assign advisors for new majors.
- Sign and advise students going on off-campus study. Meet OCS program directors.
- Open and channel department mail.
- Distribute/circulate materials sent to the department via the chair.
- Approve requests for audiovisual and library materials and computing equipment.
- Approve payments for bookstore, market, etc.
- Update department files.
- Maintain department web site.
- Post notices (e.g., graduate schools, conferences, faculty development resources).
- Keep current on correspondence (e.g., requests for information from Kenyon offices and other institutions).
- Counsel students, staff, and faculty as the need arises.
- Communicate with the administration on behalf of the department.
- Bring student petitions and other appropriate business to department.
- Attend chairs meetings and report to department as appropriate.
- Make preliminary judgment concerning plagiarism cases and other incidences of suspected academic dishonesty.
- Review and mediate grade appeals brought by students.
- Aid the admissions office (e.g., student visits, high school counselors, letters).
- Prepare reports on departmental activities for campus publications.