



Climate Matters: Department Chair Leadership Program

Virginia Commonwealth University

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Part I

- What is culture?
- What is climate?
- Why do they matter?

Culture

*“The way we do things
around here”*

Schein, E.H. (1992). *Organizational Policy and Leadership* (2nd edition). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Culture is “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein 1992, p. 12).

- Artifacts: the overt and obvious elements
- Espoused values: the declared set of values and norms
- Underlying assumptions: the source of values in a culture and what causes actions. Organizational **assumptions** are usually “known,” but are not discussed, nor are they written or easily found. They are comprised of unconscious thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, and feelings

For departments at VCU, organizational culture pertains to a unit’s shared basic assumptions; beliefs; behavioral norms; perspectives; routines; sense-making; and values.

VCU seeks to understand how these things evolve in the context of a unit’s adaptation and implementation around diversity, inclusion, and engagement initiatives.

Distinct Cultures for Faculty

Keep in mind that faculty experience four distinct cultures

~~ Academic ~~

~~ Institutional ~~

~~ Disciplinary ~~

~~ Departmental ~~

Why culture matters

- ▶ **Faculty working conditions are student learning conditions.**
- ▶ **Thinking we can attract and retain students, and see them through to completion, without addressing faculty issues is foolhardy.**

- ▶ **When faculty feel misaligned with culture, they:**
 - ▶ **Have higher levels of job-related stress**
 - ▶ **Have less overall satisfaction**
 - ▶ **Spend less time teaching**
 - ▶ **Produce less scholarship**

- ▶ **When faculty feel a sense of “fit” they:**
 - ▶ **Stay longer at their job**
 - ▶ **Are more satisfied with their position**
 - ▶ **Are more committed to the institution**



Climate is a...

- “surface manifestation of culture” (Schein 1990, p. 109).

Schein, E.H. (1990). “Organizational culture,” *American Psychologist* 45(2): 109-19.

- “ubiquitous cultural force that can make a group member experience an array of feelings from welcomed, included, and respected to tense, excluded, and singled out” (Trower 2012, pp. 123-4).

Trower, C. (2012). *Success on the Tenure Track: Five Keys to Faculty Job Satisfaction*.
Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

- “the atmosphere or ambiance of an organization as perceived by its members. It is reflected in its structures, policies, and practices; the demographics of its membership; the attitude and values of its members and leaders; and the quality of personal interactions.”

<https://fas.columbia.edu/improving-department-climate-tools-and-resources-departments-and-department-chairs>

Climate at the departmental level

Climate pertains to day-to-day attitudes or perceptions about a unit's cultural norms and value systems.

Climate:

- is particularly pronounced in the department, where faculty spend most of their time
- can influence decisions a new faculty member makes about taking advantage of certain “sensitive” institutional policies and practices (e.g., family leave, stop-the-clock)
- can be a positive force and motivate high performance
- can turn negative when faculty disagree on departmental goals and priorities or when factions pit faculty against one another or when some faculty feel like “outsiders”
- is most shaped by the chair and senior faculty

Discussion Questions

What single adjective comes first to mind when you think of the climate in your department?

What would you like that adjective to be?

Multiple studies show that faculty from underrepresented groups feel the department climate to be more hostile and unwelcoming than their majority counterparts.

You might have been thinking this way, but if you weren't, would your adjective change if you think from the perspective of those in the minority in your department?

What makes a climate hostile?

Common climate problems that faculty often cite are:

1. Lack of respect and/or politeness
2. Faculty's lack of influence on department matters
3. Lack of support for work-life balance and unwillingness to support family and childcare responsibilities
4. Low sense of community and insufficient communication
5. Lack of mentoring
6. Insufficient access to important university and department information
7. Unclear tenure and review processes
8. Excessive service/mentoring/committee duty assigned to underrepresented faculty
9. Illegal behaviors and use of problematic language and behaviors

<https://fas.columbia.edu/improving-department-climate-tools-and-resources-departments-and-department-chairs>

Primary components of departmental culture and climate

More constant (culture)

1. A sense of intellectual community and engagement (about research, teaching and service / shared governance) (norms)
2. Formal (written) policies (artifacts)
3. Support for work-life integration (values)

More fluid (climate)

1. Fair and transparent evaluation processes
2. Informal (unspoken) practices
3. Ongoing open and supportive communication
4. Open and collaborative opportunities for development and support

Why intellectual community and engagement matter

- Maintains and protects academic traditions and advances knowledge
- Encourages a willingness to share with colleagues and students without concern for competitive advantage (or win-lose)
- Expands the academic dialogue and reveals possibilities for scholarship, creative work, and enhanced teaching
- Opens opportunities for collaboration
- Fosters collegiality which in turn increases productivity
- Improves faculty sense of agency (something that gives one a sense of power over their work)
- Provides positive model for students

Why effective formal (written) policies matter

- ▶ Written policies are a physical manifestation of culture (artifacts).
- ▶ Help guide a shared sense of purpose among department members.
- ▶ Well documented policies and decisions ensure and illustrate equity and fairness in the treatment of all faculty.
- ▶ Transparency through written policies is especially valued by women, faculty of color, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Why support for work-life integration matters

- The ability to balance work and personal life has a strong affect on faculty job satisfaction throughout an academic career.
- The ability to balance work and personal life increases a faculty member's sense of agency and self-efficacy (an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments).
- Faculty feel more focused and motivated toward their professional goals when they perceive their department as more accepting of work-life balance.
- The ability of an institution to attract and retain the best faculty depends on a culture that values and supports work-life integration.
- Helps students visualize work-life integration for themselves.

Why fair and transparent evaluation matters

- ▶ Assures improvement of the academic planning process and the performance of faculty members and research teams.
- ▶ Provides a basis for salary adjustments, retention, and promotion and tenure decisions.
- ▶ Junior faculty say performance evaluation is essential to their career progress.
- ▶ Transparency helps with equity.

Why informal (unwritten) practices matter

- ▶ How people are treated in practice according to unwritten and unspoken norms affects climate and performance dramatically.
- ▶ Informal relationships lead to mentoring and networking.
- ▶ One person's autonomy is another's isolation.
- ▶ Those in the minority often feel excluded and isolated.
- ▶ The norm too often is that women and minorities bear the brunt of extra mentoring, advising, and service (that does unrewarded).
- ▶ Sexist, racist and/or homophobic language and behaviors – microaggressions – add up (death by a thousand papercuts).
- ▶ These informal practices lead directly to the revolving door for faculty and students.

Why ongoing open and supportive communication matters

- Critical in retaining and promoting faculty.
- Fosters the generation of knowledge by introducing new ideas for research, teaching, outreach and service.
- Supportive conversations strengthen bonds between faculty and administrators and remind faculty of their importance to the institution.
- Importance of mentoring as a vehicle for communication (mentored junior faculty tend to have higher job satisfaction).
- Models supportive environment for students.

Why open and collaborative opportunities for development and support matters

- ▶ Not all faculty need the same things at the same stage in their academic careers, so they need an open environment to seek development opportunities as needed and in ongoing fashion.
- ▶ Fosters *mosaic mentoring* where faculty can look to peers, to the chair, or to others for what they need when they need it.

A mentoring mosaic brings together a wide range of individuals in a non-hierarchical relationship, where each member is expected to bring something of value to the network from which others can continuously learn and grow. Mosaics allow for a diverse range of opinions, experiences, and culture, and place an equal value on each individual contributing to the mosaic.

https://diversity.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/mentoring3_mosaics.pdf

Benefits of Mosaic Mentoring

- Reduces pressure on mentor to be “ideal faculty member” in research and teaching
- Makes the most of small pools of mentors and mentor time
- Is equally successful for women, men and minorities Reduces issues with solo status by providing a sense of community; psychosocial support from peer and senior mentors
- Reduces issues with cross-gender and cross-race mentoring
- Reduces personality conflicts and mentor-protégé mismatches
- Beneficial for exploring cross boundary or novel concepts (e.g. interdisciplinary studies, active learning classroom techniques)
- More effective than single or no mentoring
- Can lead to learning new techniques, stimulate innovative research and teaching, and improve climate
- The give-and-take of skills and experiences is empowering of protégés



Part II

- COACHE (Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education) Survey Data
- VCU Organizational Culture & Climate Survey Data

Department collegiality correlation coefficients for females and males

	Females	Males
Satisfaction with my department as a place to work	0.719 (1)	0.689 (2)
Departmental colleagues “pitch in” when needed	0.672 (2)	0.695 (1)
Departmental colleagues are committed to diversity and inclusion	0.617 (3)	0.598 (3)
How well you “fit” in your department	0.614 (4)	0.585 (4)
I would recommend my department to a faculty candidate	0.608 (5)	0.582 (5)

COACHE Data: ~20,000 Full-time tenure-track and tenured faculty
Public research universities

Department satisfaction correlation coefficients for females and men

	Females	Males
Department collegiality	0.76 (1)	0.75 (1)
Would recommend my department to a faculty candidate	0.73 (2)	0.71 (2)
Sense of "fit"	0.70 (3)	0.68 (3)
Would choose this institution again	0.65 (4)	0.65 (5)
Department leadership	0.63 (5)	0.66 (4)
Appreciation and recognition	0.62 (6)	0.64 (7)
Department quality	0.61 (7)	0.65 (5)
Satisfaction with the institution as a place to work	0.58 (8)	0.63 (8)

Department collegiality correlation coefficients by race

	URMs	Asians	Whites
Department colleagues “pitch in” when needed	0.69 (1)	0.75 (1)	0.68 (2)
Satisfaction with my department as a place to work	0.69 (1)	0.73 (2)	0.70 (1)
Department colleagues are committed to diversity and inclusion	0.61 (3)	0.68 (3)	0.59 (3)
How well you “fit” in your department	0.59 (4)	0.65 (4)	0.59 (3)
I would recommend my department to a faculty candidate	0.58 (5)	0.63 (5)	0.59 (3)

Department satisfaction correlation coefficients by race

	URMs	Asians	Whites
Department collegiality	0.79 (1)	0.79 (1)	0.75 (1)
Would recommend my department to faculty candidates	0.72 (2)	0.73 (3)	0.72 (2)
Would choose this institution again	0.69 (3)	0.75 (2)	0.64 (4)
Department quality	0.65 (4)	0.67 (7)	0.62 (6)
Appreciation and recognition	0.63 (5)	0.69 (5)	0.63 (5)
Department leadership	0.63 (5)	0.72 (4)	0.64 (3)
Institution as a place to work	0.62 (7)	0.69 (6)	0.60 (7)

VCU Correlation coefficients > .60 (for all faculty and staff)

Recommend VCU as a good place to work & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.83
Satisfied with your job & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.77
Satisfied with your job & recommend VCU as a place to work	0.72
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & recommend VCU as a good place to work	0.69
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.68
Overall quality of the work done by my unit is high & workplace productivity is high	0.67
Recommend VCU as a good place to work & see myself still working at VCU in two years' time	0.60
We frequently develop innovative programs and solutions in my unit & workplace productivity is high	0.60

VCU Correlation coefficients > .60 (for female faculty)

Satisfied with VCU as a place to work & recommend VCU as a good place to work	0.81
Satisfied with VCU as a place to work & satisfied with your job	0.74
Satisfied with your job & recommend VCU as a good place to work	0.69
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & recommend VCU as a good place to work	0.67
Overall quality of the work done by my unit is high & workplace productivity is high	0.67
Strong sense of belonging & satisfaction with VCU as a place to work	0.65

VCU Correlation coefficients > .60 (for Asian faculty)

Recommend VCU as a good place to work & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.84
Satisfied with your job & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.82
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & recommend VCU as a good place to work	0.73
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.72
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & satisfied with your job	0.70
We frequently develop innovative programs and solutions in my unit & workplace productivity is high	0.66
See myself still working at VCU in two years' time & my job security is satisfactory	0.65
Quality of work done in my unit is high & workplace productivity is high	0.64
Recommend VCU as a good place to work & see myself still working at VCU in two years' time	0.63
My work unit's customers are satisfied with the quality of our work & the overall quality of work done by my unit is high	0.60
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & workplace productivity is high	0.60

VCU Correlation coefficients > .60 (for URM faculty)

Recommend VCU as a good place to work & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.80
Satisfied with your job & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.71
Recommend VCU as a good place to work & satisfied with your job	0.69
Overall quality of work done by my unit is high & workplace productivity is high	0.67
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & recommend VCU as a good place to work	0.66
Recommend VCU as a good place to work & see myself still working at VCU in two years' time	0.62
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.62

VCU Correlation coefficients > .60 (for white faculty)

Recommend VCU as a good place to work & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.83
Satisfied with your job & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.78
Recommend VCU as a good place to work & satisfied with your job	0.72
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & recommend VCU as a good place to work	0.70
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & satisfied with VCU as a place to work	0.69
Overall quality of work done by work unit is high & workplace productivity is high	0.67
Strong sense of belonging at VCU & satisfied with your job	0.64
We frequently develop innovative programs or solutions in my unit & workplace productivity is high	0.62

Part III

Socialization, life in an academic department, the importance of the chair, and best practices

Socialization

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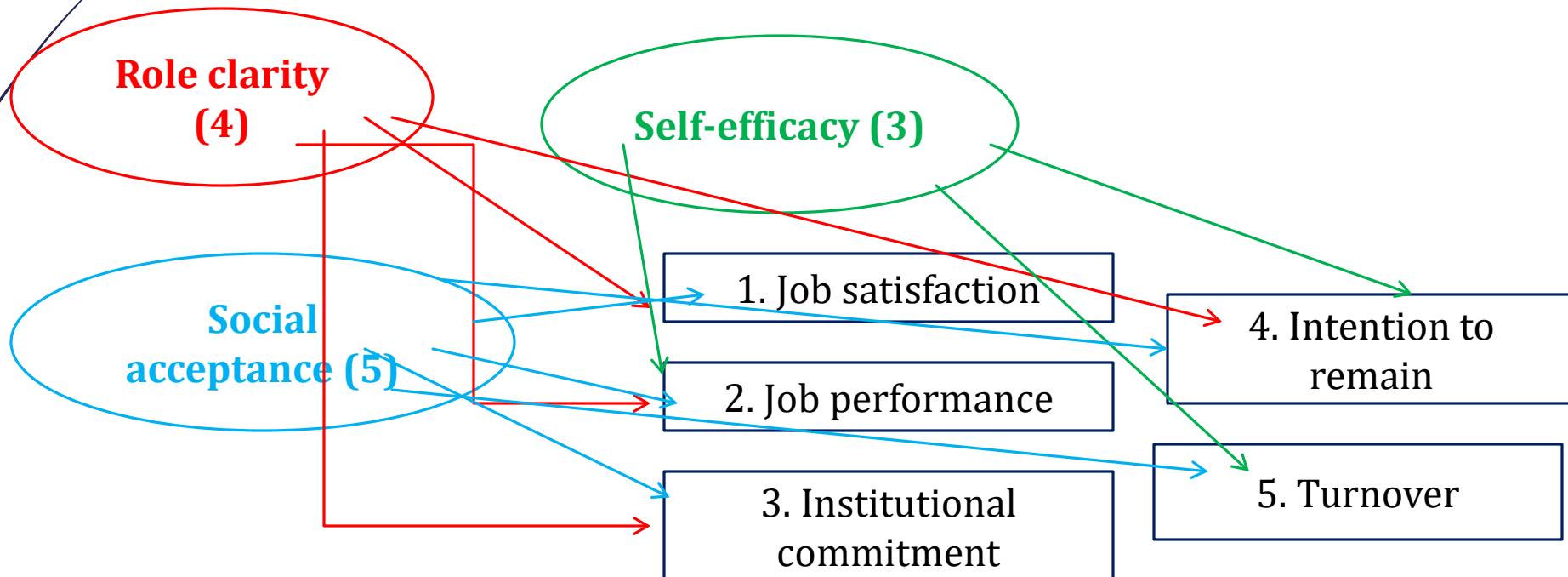
- ▶ “A process over time that enables a new faculty member to understand the norms, attitudes, and beliefs of a group” (Trower 2012, p. 125).
- ▶ For newcomers, socialization facilitates an understanding of departmental expectations and customary behavior within the department.
- ▶ Begins to occur in graduate school, but mostly socialized to research, not teaching or service.

Trower, C. (2012). *Success on the Tenure Track: Five Keys to Faculty Job Satisfaction*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

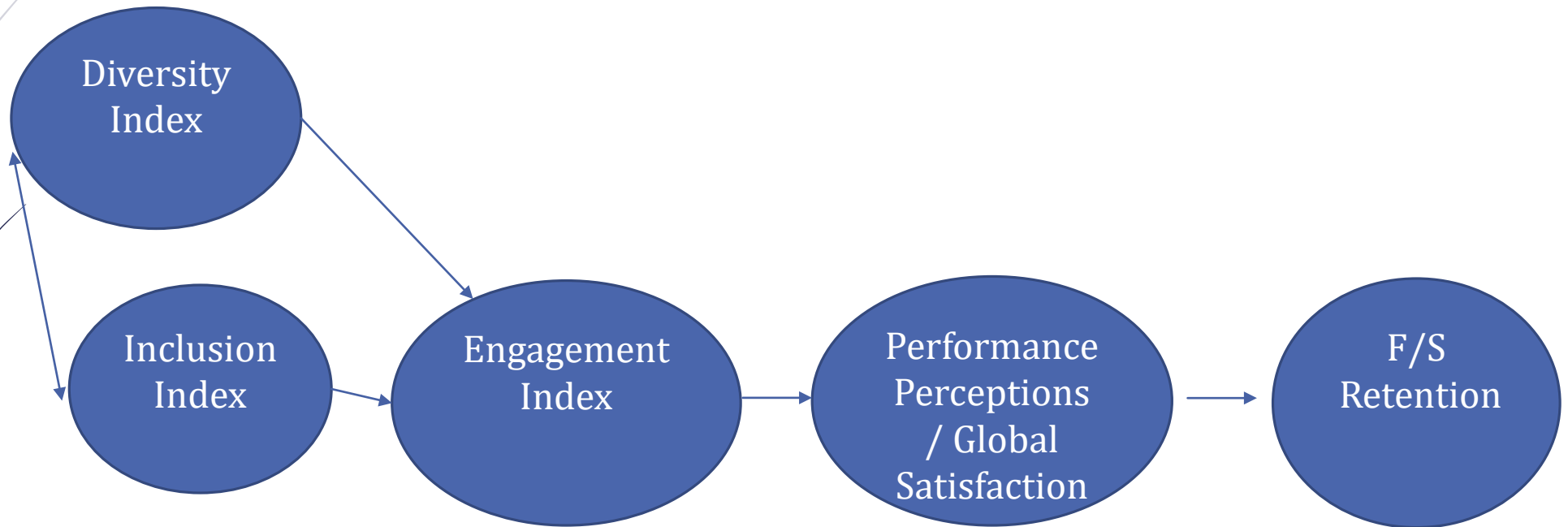
Socialization: the process by which newcomers transition from being outsiders to being insiders.

Newcomers must learn to adapt through uncertainty reduction.

Bauer, T.N. and Green, S.G. (1994). "Effect of newcomer involvement in work-related activities: A longitudinal study of socialization," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 79(2): 211-223.



VCU's Predictive Model



Importance of Chair Leadership

- “The chair’s job is to make sure their faculty are as productive as possible. Productive faculty are satisfied faculty.” (Trower, 2005)
- Sound leadership is the key to effective and successful socialization.
- Leaders must be intentional in their efforts to understand and improve the experience of newcomers.
- The department chair plays the most pivotal role in setting the tone and determining departmental climate.

Trower, C. (2005). “Gen x meets theory y,” *The Department Chair*, 16(2), Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company.

Importance of Chair Leadership

- The department chair bridges the two spheres that influence department climate: organizational policies and practices, and individual conduct.
- In this way, the department chair plays an important role in shaping the department climate. While a department's climate is not created by any one individual, the tone and boundaries of interpersonal interaction within the department are maintained by the chair.
- As a symbolic figure, the way a chair treats members of the department is often modeled by other members of the community. As the head of the department, the chair is responsible for communicating and enacting policies and practices and maintaining academic ethics and boundaries for collegial interpersonal behavior among department members.

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The Department Chair

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Climate is the chair's responsibility.

The chair...

- Is a model of departmental expectations
- Serves the faculty and the students
- Should work transparently

It's a big job and
not easy

The chair should be:

- Objective
- Equitable
- Respectful
- Humble
- Open
- Positive/upbeat
- Inclusive
- Credible/trustworthy
- Knowledgeable

Principles for a Positive Department Climate

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<https://fas.columbia.edu/improving-department-climate-tools-and-resources-departments-and-department-chairs>

Waltman and Hollenshead (2005)...provide a useful framework for considering department climate and three principles that support a positive climate for all faculty:

Transparency – Making all kinds of information available and easy to find.

Uniformity – Leveling the field and dealing equitably with all faculty

Assistance – Attending to the needs of faculty; offering mentoring and other types of help.

These three principles...are organizational strategies that a department chair...should employ when dealing with all members of the department. To these we add Respect, which is shown at the interpersonal level, from one person to another, and also at the organizational level in the way that information, resources, work and rewards are distributed.

Respect – Acknowledging and valuing contributions to the department; welcoming and including all department members in the community.

The four principles of a positive climate...are simple and straightforward, yet often taken for granted by those in positions of power and privilege. Neglecting these principles contributes to the phenomenon frequently found by climate surveys, where the majority group experiences a significantly different kind of departmental climate than minority group members.

Research studies...have shown that department chairs often have different perceptions of the climate than faculty members.

Since department chair and faculty members' perception of climate may differ, it is important that the chair finds a way to assess the department climate, possibly through individual meetings with all faculty members, discussion during a faculty meeting, or engaging the department in a department climate survey.

ADVANCE @ Northeastern

From: Graham's Corner/Chair's Corner -- August 2013-volume 4, issue 12
Graham Jones, Chair and Professor of Chemistry & Chemical Biology, ADVANCE Co-PI

As I reread chapter one of "Why So Slow?", I was reminded it is my responsibility to show value for everyone's comments in a meeting and ensure everyone has equal 'voice' whether a small group meeting or a larger departmental meeting.

I can do this by making a follow-up comment, by asking for comments from those who have not yet contributed, and/or giving credit for ideas to those who originally gave them (not necessarily the one who reiterated them later in the conversation).

I have this responsibility as chair, but each member of the faculty also shares this responsibility in every group meeting.

Rereading social science research seems to increase my understanding over time.

Valian, V. (1999). *Why so slow? The advancement of women.*
The MIT Press.

Effective practice: Tenure process clarity

- Make sure your department has clearly documented criteria.
- Provide sample dossiers of successful tenure bids.
- Provide clear, written policy for tenuring joint appointments.
- Establish three- and five-year work plans with each faculty member.
- Provide clear annual evaluations of pre-tenure faculty that include strengths and areas for improvement.
- Ensure that the midterm review is on target, clear, and is provided in writing.

Effective practice: Time management

- Tell faculty when they should hold off on developing new courses to focus on research.
- Talk to new faculty about which committees are worthwhile; give them permission to “blame the chair” when declining.
- Allow new hires a year off before they start to teach.
- Tread lightly with new faculty around their first sets of teaching evaluations.
- Schedule department meetings for Fridays at noon (and provide lunch), rather than early mornings or evenings.

Effective practice: Mentoring

- Initiate formal or informal mentoring and opportunities to form networks and collaborations for tenure-track faculty.
- Ensure that senior faculty mentor junior faculty in positive fashion. Do not tolerate bullying.
- Have faculty develop mentoring mosaics where they take an active role in deciding where they need help and who can best provide it.
- Invite a tenured faculty member from outside the institution, but from the same field as a pre-tenure faculty member, to campus.
- Encourage junior faculty to attend conferences.

Effective practice: Building community and a culture of support

- Keep an open door.
- Lunch with junior faculty monthly; meet each individually once per semester.
- Signal the acceptability of requesting resources or asking questions.
- Hold sponsored social events.
- Invite guests and visiting scholars.
- Encourage collaborative course teaching, joint grants (Co- PI), joint publications.
- Provide faculty professional development opportunities.
- Raise a small amount of money to fund projects important to junior faculty.
- Develop a chair to succeed you; foster other leadership.

Effective practice: Work-life support

- Do not schedule meetings during times when faculty parents may need to drop off or pick up children.
- Be aware of all campus policies and procedures.
- Strive to foster a supportive departmental climate for the work-life needs of all.
- Beware of supporting faculty parents at the expense of burdening child-free faculty.
- Be mindful of caregiving relationships other than that of parent-child.
- Encourage conversations between faculty about the challenges of dual careers, childcare, elder care, and juggling demands.
- Implement policies equitably, fairly, and consistently.

Effective practice: Teaching expectations

- Hold discussions with all department faculty about how teaching assignments are made and ensure that assignments are transparent and equitable.
- Share syllabi and course notes on core courses with new faculty.
- Pair senior with junior faculty to team-teach a course during the first year on campus.
- Review exams for appropriate level of difficulty.
- Offer to observe junior faculty who would like you to do so in order to provide feedback.

Effective practice: Research expectations

- Encourage new faculty to apply for awards, requests for proposals, and other grant opportunities that come to your attention.
- Offer to lend equipment and supplies.
- Read manuscripts and research proposals; provide constructive criticism.
- Petition publishers and academic presses on behalf of pre-tenure faculty.
- Sponsor substantive brown-bag sessions on such topics as writing an effective grant proposal, supervising graduate students, and managing a lab.
- Ensure equitable lab space.

Part IV

Lunch & Discussion

Table talks during lunch

1. What did you learn?
2. About what are you most excited?
3. About what are you most concerned?
4. What are two things you plan to do?
5. What could stop you? (Hurdles? Resistance?)
6. What might propel action? (Enablers?)
7. Accountability is essential!
 - To whom are you accountable? For what?
 - Who will you hold accountable? For what?