

7

This chapter examines aspects of the life of the chair after the person returns to full-time service as a faculty member.

The End of the Reign: Department Chair No More

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In America I have seen the freest and best educated of men and circumstances, the happiest to be found in the world; yet it seemed to me that a cloud habitually hung on their brow and they seemed serious and almost sad even in their pleasures. The chief reason for this is that they never stop thinking of the good things they have not got. It is odd to watch with what feverish ardor the Americans pursue prosperity and how they are tormented by the shadowy suspicion that they may not have chosen the shortest route to get it.

A. de Tocqueville (1969)

In a very unscientific survey of several outgoing department chairs, one of whom whose place I had taken after twenty-one years as a department chairperson, one would think that the prevailing sentiment would be, as we hear stated over and over, "I am glad to be out of here!" Yet this is not the case.

All five of the outgoing chairs I spoke with over the past several months felt that they had made a difference in their respective departments (three social and behavioral sciences departments and the other two from the sciences), and clearly two wished they had more time to remain in the position. These views helped me to better understand the complexities of writing about outgoing department chairs.

This chapter addresses several of the critical issues that influence outgoing university department chairs. Although different colleges and universities use a different title for the person in charge of the department, throughout the chapter the term *chair* will be used in reference to those individuals who are the chief executive officers (CEOs) in charge of curriculum,

hiring new faculty and staff, all matters pertaining to department personnel, the budget, and other matters pertaining to their units who have as the main responsibility the education of students.

The leadership and membership in higher education administration as a tribute or payback for dedicated work has a lot to do with how department chairs are chosen and how they see their expanded duties and opportunities. In the myriad of difficulties that institutions of higher learning are facing currently, the time is propitious to be discussing the role of university chairpersons. One way to begin is as follows.

Department chairs are giving individuals. They give of their professional acumen to their colleagues—their expertise not only in subject matter but also in advice, ranging from establishing a work ethic to home purchases. They give of themselves to the department, college, and university where they are employed. Yet most of all, they give of their time (see Table 7.1).

Department chairs have no time for themselves. The reason is that they gave their time away, and this giving of time is one of the crucial criteria for the position. Those who seek to be successful department chairs had better be prepared (or become a quick study) on working day in and day out without time for oneself, personally and professionally.

Life after the chairmanship should be a well-planned goal, with a return to teaching, research, and family.

For many faculty who ascend to the position of department chair, this is the most important and time-consuming feature of their professional lives. When they leave altogether or take a lesser role within the department, the exit is often very difficult. In this chapter, I reflect on research and experiences about the exit from the department chair position, hoping to arrive at the conclusion that leaving the chair may not be the social death it has been portrayed as. That is, the transition out of the chair may not be as detrimental as is often assumed. It could be that this assumption about social death has more to do with the transition into the position, where there is such fear. As is the case for new incoming chairs, it is the same for outgoing chairs: there is no mechanism, no systematic process, to introduce new chairpeople into their positions or help and assist those chairs who are in the process of exiting the position. Using one's "sociological imagination," the chair position takes on a life cycle, similar to how the human life cycle works (see Table 7.2).

What is known, though, is that the satisfaction and acceptance of the exit from the chair depend mainly on the individual who is leaving that position. We must add to this that it is also the experiences that they had while they were in the position. That is very important. What needs to be understood is that the willing exit from the department chair position can be a successful transition into a new phase of professional life for former department chairpersons.

Research pertaining to the exit from the department chair is scarce. What does exist often concludes that the transition out of the position of

Table 7.1. Administrative Duties of the Chair

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- Oversee the development of annual program goals.
 - Call various meetings on a regular basis.
 - Prepare the department's annual report.
 - Respond to (or assign for response) all departmental correspondence from both within the university and outside the university.
 - Keep records of advanced placement credit, class enrollments, and majors, and follow up on majors' graduate study and employment.
 - Develop and manage the departmental budget.
 - Ensure that the departmental Web site is current and accurate.
 - Receive textbook selections from the faculty, and place orders.
 - Edit catalogue material.
 - Collect annual reports from each faculty member.
 - Meet with prospective donors, the departmental advisory board, and graduates.
 - Oversee program and curriculum changes.
 - Oversee long-range planning. Prepare materials for periodic program reviews, accreditation reports, and other external reviews.
 - Hire the departmental support staff, and make recommendations concerning salary adjustments.
 - Recruit undergraduate and graduate students to major in their particular departmental program.
 - Meet parents and students about the majors offered by the department.
 - Determine that the requirements for graduation are met by undergraduate majors and that graduate students have met the requirements for graduate degrees.
 - Supervise the hiring process of new faculty.
 - Oversee the promotion and tenure process for faculty.
 - Oversee faculty development.
 - Appoint all committees in order to have a fair distribution of the departmental workload.
 - Construct the teaching schedule for each semester and summer school while giving consideration to appropriate teaching loads.
 - Serve as a liaison between the department and the administration by being an advocate for a fair share of resources; support faculty efforts to obtain grants, research support, and leaves from the university; and nominate faculty members for awards when appropriate.
 - Work with faculty on an individual basis.
 - Lead by example with his or her own performance as a faculty member.
 - Host departmental social events.
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department chair is not a smooth one. In fact, like the social gerontologists who study aging across the life span, social scientists and educators should begin to see the position of department chairs as one that has a built-in life cycle that is unique; that is, instead of seeing the exiting chair as moving off to some form of social death, it should be seen as a part of the life cycle of the department chair. The disengagement theory that social gerontologists use to speak of the life cycle helps in this instance as well, especially when we understand that disengagement is an inevitable process where individuals (that is, department chairs) begin to reduce the number of social roles that they play in academe. In fact, if the retiring department chair is ending his or her career totally, then this is not a problem at all. When chairs leave the institution, they are doing what so many other professionals in the

Table 7.2. Comparing the Human Life Cycle with That of the Department Chair

<i>Human Life Cycle</i>	<i>Department Chair Life Cycle</i>
Born	Appointed or elected
Infancy	Trial and error
Early childhood	Period of repeated mistakes
School age	Growth in the position
Adolescence	Maturity
Young adult	Seamless and effective administration
Adult	Tiring and boredom (restlessness)
Older adult	Exit from position
Elderly status	
Death	

United States do each day: they retire. Where problems may exist, they are situated in the context of the retiring chair moving back into the department or unit that he or she has been in charge of anywhere from three, to eight, to twenty years.

The Nature of the "Discipline"

While Table 7.1 is a more formal presentation of some of the duties and responsibilities that engage the time of department chairs while they hold that office, it is also important to point to a few items that may not readily become apparent to those not very familiar with the position. Department chairs must be, more than anything else, strong advocates for their departments. They also must be positively eccentric and must have great fortitude as well as a lot of overall strength. Finally, they must possess the visceral strength to accept all types of unending criticism, from matters of style to matters of decision making.

The chairperson must be able to work at consensus building within the department but also must maintain good relations with the students in the department, as well as the dean and provost, in addition to attending to the mundane tasks of maintenance in the unit (for example, making sure the toilets are working, the burned-out lights are replaced, the broken chairs and tables are replaced, and worn chairs and sofas are cleaned when necessary).

The administrative responsibilities of chair do not make this service a discipline in the strict sense of the term. It is and will remain an administrative position usually carried out within the context of the more formal academic disciplines (for example, physics, history, education, biology, and sociology).

Since the position of department chairperson is an administrative one and not a discipline—but usually connected to a discipline—this is problematic. The problem, stated clearly, is that the position, regardless

of where it is housed, is ill defined (Gmelch and Miskin, 1995). Furthermore, the position is problematic in that chairs are still the major link between higher administration and the faculty. This continues to be a problem since chairs also are the only administrators on campus who have the similarly situated position of being a member of the faculty (even if they have a reduced teaching load) and, in addition, having to live in a unit with other faculty on a day-to-day basis while still carrying out the myriad of duties associated with the position.

These relationships become more problematic as chairs have to make hard decisions in times when the budget ax is wielded, as it has been in almost every institution in the United States, from Stanford to Harvard, for all of the few years that make up the new century. This reality of a negative budget picture has been especially true since September 11, 2001.

Theory of Exit

Thanatology, or the study of death and dying, has been one of the main theoretical approaches applied to the study of retirement. This concept of social death usually is offered to describe a professional who is alive but may be isolated socially or ostracized by other individuals as a consequence of his or her exit from an established position. The concept has been used or applied to the detachment from the department chair's position and that the individual so exiting faces or suffers an unusual adjustment process into a new phase of professional career.

Furthermore, the concept often is associated with an involuntary exit from the position of department chair and usually is discussed in negative terms. One of the problems here is that the theory portrays retirement or exit as almost a total termination, while in most cases, exiting department chairs are returning to their faculty role.

While socialization into the faculty chair's role is not uniform across all types of institutions, it is very common that faculty who are sent to the role of department chairperson have been involved in the academic life of a department for a lengthy period of time. Since they have been involved in academe for that amount of time and have been socialized to the norms of academic life, at the end of the term or terms of office as department chair, desocializing will not be as difficult as it would be if the faculty member were not involved in academic life for such a lengthy time frame. All of this makes sense.

The chair's identity, experiences, and the vast array of relationships that she or he will develop, not only with the faculty in the department but with administrators across the campus, with staff in various offices such as the bursar's office, the housing office, and the registrar, make the transition from the chair to full-time service on the faculty much easier than originally thought. It stands to reason, then, that we must begin to see that the transition from the chair is a very individualistic process.

There are many determining factors that can affect the transition out of the department chair. One that usually can generate a successful exit from the chair's position is the attitude of the chairperson. A person who has a strong sense of self, that is, someone who is more likely to understand his or her place within academe, would have less of a difficult time in the transition from the position. That person would not see the transition out of the position as the inevitable end to an academic career. Well-informed and well-prepared department chairs encompass a number of skills during the time they hold the position, and in fact early on they will begin to anticipate the transition from the position of department chair.

What I emphasize is that during the term of chairmanship, the person holding the position who does not continue to see herself or himself as a member of the faculty will have the most difficult time in handling the transition from the position. Why? That person would have a very difficult time returning to the three-pronged role that most academics play: teaching, research, and campus and community service.

Conclusion: What Is to Be Done?

While it is somewhat easy to speak to the problems that exist, and especially the transition to the faculty for department chairs, it is much harder to speak to the needs that are in short supply to make the transition happen. It is, overall, a "What is to be done?" question. What needs to be done to save, elevate, and build in the appropriate transition from the administrative post of department chairperson, regardless of whether the former chair is going back to faculty, moving up further in academic administration, or retiring?

For one thing, there needs to be a national organization of department chairs that is similar to the many organizations that exist for other academic professionals and administrators like deans, vice presidents, and presidents. These department chairpersons need a well-planned forum to be able to talk with one another to develop scenarios, describe their issues of concern, and strategize over their own professional research projects, or develop ways to reintegrate into serious, systematic research, meaning more than just reflecting on having been a chair. That is, the research issues of outgoing or former department chairs must be engaging and robust so that the full reconnection can be made to a level of original scholarship that is both professionally and personally rewarding.

At more traditional liberal arts institutions, former chairs must be introduced to new teaching methods and technologies that have been developed over the past five years that are geared toward enhancing what is done in the classroom (Breneman, 1994). For this to work, the reintroduction also must include addressing the new legal challenges of, for example, copyright materials that are used routinely in classroom reading assignments and

often are included in the popular reading packages that professors make available to their students.

Department chairpersons need more formal power. According to several sociologists (Weber, 1966; Domhoff, 2001), power comes in several different packages. Hence, the power that I write of here is the ability to know where the source of power is located, where the lines of authority begin, and where the line of power in the position ends. This is important. Being able to make decisions that are not overturned by committee is central to my understanding of power in the position of department chair.

Mentioning this issue of power in the final section of the chapter is deliberate in that many chairs across their tenure in the position often lament the fact that they "have no power" and are thus frustrated over what they can do and what they cannot accomplish for their faculty and departments. This large-scale frustration may be critical in the decision to leave the position prematurely.

I conclude by observing that the role of institutional norms, belief systems, and formal rules must be clarified as these pertain to the department chair position. Institutions of higher education and learning must make it clear in their operating procedures and administrative flowcharts that university department chairs have a place among the administration (it is already understood that as faculty, chairs have a place on the faculty) since this is not always made clear at some institutions.

The research needed to fill the void should also delve into the second career options that outgoing chairs are making. Like so many other professionals (for example, corporate CEOs and professional athletes), outgoing chairs who leave their position after having planned not to remain in it forever will be of an age where they can still find meaningful employment and postretirement satisfaction. Good empirical research is needed to find out exactly what some of these options are.

Probably the most important variable affecting the success in the transition from the chairperson position has to do with the external factors that may occur simultaneously with the exit. These can be of a variety from family health matters, children, and grandchildren moving far away or being too close, and other personal issues.

Finally, for as long as there is retirement, there will be some negative connotations associated with it. I hope I have shown that retirement from the position of department chairperson need not be considered social death.

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