



New Chairs & Directors Forum Wednesday, May 26, 2021

FA Executives: Lynne Marks (President); Chris Bose (Chairs & Directors Portfolio Holder)

Panel Members:

Catherine Caws, Former Chair, French;
Michael McGuire, Chair, Electrical and Computer Engineering;
Ulrich Mueller, Chair of Psychology;
Jean-Paul Restoule, Chair of Indigenous Education.

Notes

Opening Remarks – Lynne Marks and Chris Bose, FA Chair and Director Portfolio

- Pre-certification, the FA didn't do anything for Chairs. Now, The FA provides twice yearly forums for chairs and hosts the Chair and Director Portfolio.
- For a long time the main message Chairs got was from the administration was that Chairs are part of management, with the expectation that chairs should follow all of the admin's directives and policies, and as necessary, convince their colleagues to do so as well
 - You have to do at least some of this, to survive, and for your department to thrive, but that is only one side of the Chair's job.
 - The other side is to advocate as much as possible in the interests of your department, and its members
- The best chairs recognize that they are crucial advocates for their departments (both faculty and staff) – in hard times you may have to advocate particularly strongly, and also strategically to get anywhere
 - If department members recognize that Chairs have their back – and are advocating in their interests – you may get more support from the members of your department, making it possible to bring in important changes – which can be the most exciting part of being chair
- Also important to recognize that now the FA is here for you – if you are having problems with admin, or conflicts with members of your department – we are happy to provide all the support we can through the Chair and Director Portfolio – as well as frequent Forums where Chairs can talk among themselves
- All chairs have challenges, but no chair has said it was all bad. There is a lot of satisfaction to be found, even amongst the difficult challenges



Panel Discussion:

1. Balancing your job as chair or director with your own career/family (J.P. Restoule)
 - Block off an entire day in the week for your own research time. Consider having a unit-wide research and writing day, where no department or committee meetings can be scheduled so that everyone shares the benefit.
 - Don't be afraid to pick courses that make the most sense for you, in terms of time commitment.
 - Balancing with family – stick with calendar times. Say you aren't available after 5pm, for instance. Set aside your own time.
 - Delegation is also really important.

2. How to say 'no' (C. Caws)
 - Never say "yes" right away. Listen, be empathetic, and let them know you care and that you will investigate and come back to them. You will get unreasonable requests. Ask them to do some investigating of their own and come back to you. It may happen that once thought through, the request was withdrawn.
 - Important to say no to Administration as well. It is okay to ask if something is necessary, and if so, why.
 - Be clear and transparent – especially with the budget.
 - You don't need to be answering emails all the time. Set boundaries. Don't respond to anything right away that makes you hesitant.
 - Decline meetings/workshops you can't make time for!

3. Assigning service jobs in your department/school (M. McGuire)
 - Getting people to do them can be difficult. We want an equitable distribution.
 - One danger: service jobs go to the same group over and over again. Leads to overwork and/or favouritism.
 - Assistant Profs shouldn't be doing as much service – as chair, you need to protect them.
 - Do informal hourly calculations of expectations but keep in mind that some faculty are more efficient than others with administrative tasks, so don't penalize them!
 - Alternative Workloads are possible rewards for workload heavy positions.
 - Teaching Stream Faculty can be very good in Undergraduate Advisor role. But, protect their workloads!
 - Balance internal/external service. Senior faculty members should be thinking about internal service along with professional/UVic/regional/national service.



4. Faculty evaluation (U. Mueller)

- Need clear policies. Need to be transparent in your processes.
- Have regular meetings to check-in with faculty. Twice/year is fine.
- In advance of progress review, ask faculty to report on their last year and plans for the next. Be constructive in your feedback.
- Provide clear feedback in your evaluation and how they can improve.

5. Academic integrity (M. McGuire)

- Need a culture of integrity that is appropriate for students in your discipline.
- Prevention works better than punishment.
- Begin at orientation sessions & core classes: “Here’s what plagiarism is to Engineers and why it’s so bad.”
- If there is a possible infraction: keep all notices and communication formal. Follow all process and guidelines.
- In meeting with student: You, as chair, are gathering evidence. You should not have made a decision at that point. Explain process clearly to student.
- Do not contact the Registrar about priors before you have completed the internal investigation and made a determination. Otherwise your decision could be challenged as biased.

6. Special challenges for smaller units (C. Caws)

- Some advantages, too.
- One challenge that can also be a good thing: You know your colleagues really well. But, you need to establish boundaries. Be willing to delegate!
- Suggestion: Hold meetings with each member and ask them about their expectations. Could help clarify distribution of workloads.
- There is a tendency within the administration to make decisions according to metrics that do not apply to smaller departments very well, or leave out important context. You need to be willing to push back against this.

7. Working with Indigenous faculty in your unit (J.P. Restoule)

- Suggestion: a consensus-based decision making process. Avoid Robert’s Rules approach. Consensus doesn’t mean everyone agrees necessarily, but that everyone is heard.



- Providing clear guidelines on what counts as scholarly activities and what counts as service.
- Watch out for additional work Indigenous faculty can be expected to do, i.e., mentoring, community service; committee work.
- Look at what is available in other Unit Standards and at other Universities.

8. Faculty (and staff) hiring best practices (U. Mueller)

- Worst decisions are made quickly. Do not rush.
- Consider the specific needs of the position.
- Get clear vote from department to have a preferential search/search focusing on equity seeking groups.
- Study procedures carefully.
- Search committee members can be in conflict, you will then need to intervene.
- Make responsibilities clear.
- Replace any members with conflicts-of-interest.
- Set clear deadlines for decisions & negotiations with successful applicants. Do not let them drag on too long.
- Be active in staff hiring & day-to-day issues. You need to work with these people every day.

Q&A Session:

Q: What do we do with staffing issues?

A: Go to your HR rep and speak with them if there are issues. Staff problems are not uncommon. They can cause huge problems for morale. There are a lot of collective agreements to navigate, and HR can help with that. Bring chocolate! Staff take a lot of pride in their work – pay attention to their needs and show recognition to them. Attend staff meetings.

Q: Can you clarify what Unit Standards are?

A: With the most recent CA, your Unit Standards dictate the expectations for Faculty members for salary evaluations – what counts as exceeding, meeting, or failing to meet expectations. The same goes for promotion as well. University policies and Faculty Standards are higher-level documents; the Unit Standards are the most detailed and discipline specific, and are required under the Collective Agreement.

Q: Chairs and directors play a peculiar role; it seems like it can be isolating. Do you have any guidance or feedback on what might be missing for them? What kinds of formal mechanisms might be available for chairs/directors to receive feedback from their faculty or their dean?

A: Prior to COVID, we were doing potluck dinners amongst the chairs without the dean (who thought it was a great idea!) That was useful – it became more human and less about meetings.



Trying to connect with other Chairs on campus – like these forums with the FA – can be super useful.

Q: Any advice on running constructive retreats?

A:

- These can be very scary, but remarkably productive. They can be difficult to schedule.
- There are UVic resources that can provide help with this free of cost. I can share that info.¹
- Have a clear topic in mind. Should be something that genuinely impacts everyone, so that everyone has something to say. Keep it focused on this topic. Bring good food!
- Keep it tightly focused on the topic so it doesn't go sideways.

¹ A good contact for this is Sarah Hood, Director of Organization Development, Human Resources, x-5446, hoods@uvic.ca