

## Department Chair Resource Document

### *Building an Equitable Department Where Faculty Want to Work and Stay*

This document contains a synthesis of reports from the [Department Enhancement Program \(DEP\)](https://www.advance.iastate.edu/initiatives/dep), an Iowa State University ADVANCE initiative. An innovative action-oriented program suited to improving departmental climates, this initiative featured a systematic method for collecting and analyzing data from department chairs and faculty about department work climate. To learn more about this effort to transform university structures, cultures, and practices and the means to promote a diverse, highly qualified, and cohesive faculty, visit the DEP website at <https://www.advance.iastate.edu/initiatives/dep>. In this document, we outline practices for cultivating transparent, inclusive, and equitable department cultures.

### Be Transparent

<i>Possible Faculty Concerns</i>	<i>Proposed Departmental Considerations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of transparency and equity causes friction among faculty and affects their morale and department engagement.</li> <li>• Decisions made by university and department leaders without an explanation of how and why.</li> <li>• Decline in morale when decision-making processes do not consider faculty input.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Areas for greater transparency include teaching buyout/loads, procedures and criteria for assigning teaching assistants, resource allocation, tenure and promotion expectations, budget, space allocations, and hiring process.</li> <li>• Transparency increases faculty sense of belonging and work productivity, cohesion, morale, and engagement.</li> <li>• Transparency decreases faculty stress levels, myths, and misconceptions.</li> <li>• The limitations of transparency, such as confidential matters, e.g., personnel decisions and performance evaluations, should be acknowledged.</li> </ul> <p><b>Opportunities to increase transparency:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demystify the promotion, tenure, and advancement processes through frequent and regular communication with faculty.</li> <li>• Seek faculty input in decision-making processes.</li> <li>• Communicate the rationale for decisions and outline challenges and relevant factors.</li> <li>• Solicit input from affected faculty before change(s) are implemented to obtain buy-in and proactively address potential resistance and challenges.</li> </ul>

## Be Clear

<i>Possible Faculty Concerns</i>	<i>Proposed Departmental Considerations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of consistency and clarity in communication.</li> <li>• Lack of documentation of departmental practices and governance.</li> <li>• Lack of specific details around promotion, tenure, advancement, and evaluation.</li> <li>• Faculty work does not match position responsibilities statement (PRS).</li> <li>• Inconsistency in promotion, tenure, and advancement expectations between department, college, and university.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide departmental guidelines on and expectations for position responsibilities in the promotion, tenure, and advancement process.</li> <li>• Hold open discussions with faculty to promote understanding and address myths, misunderstandings, and varying perceptions about the meaning of scholarship and productivity.</li> <li>• Offer constructive feedback, including faculty assessment of strengths and weaknesses in evaluations and throughout the promotion, tenure, and advancement process.</li> </ul>

## Be Inclusive

Inclusion means feeling connected to and accepted by colleagues as well as feeling satisfied with professional interactions in the department. Elements of department climate include collegiality, respect, cooperation, support, equity, fairness, and inclusiveness (see University of Massachusetts/Amherst ADVANCE Program. 2020. Inclusive Community Findings [Report](#)).

<i>Possible Faculty Concerns</i>	<i>Proposed Departmental Considerations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unequal distribution of workloads</li> <li>• Heavier workloads hinder research productivity and promotion.</li> <li>• Inequity that arises when faculty do not follow through on commitments, resulting in disproportionate workload for others</li> </ul>	<p><b>A. Workload Equity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workload equity, including faculty productivity, retention, satisfaction, sense of fairness, and sense of inclusion, is associated with positive outcomes for the department.</li> <li>• Improve transparency in the workload distribution process (e.g., how courses are assigned) and interactions (e.g., who is asked).</li> <li>• Be clear about workload as well as the varying amount of time and effort required.</li> </ul>

<i>Possible Faculty Concerns</i>	<i>Proposed Departmental Considerations</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examine whether the workload distribution systemically disadvantages groups (e.g., women teaching more undergraduate courses versus men teaching more graduate courses).</li> <li>• Speak up about the department’s commitment to equity and raise awareness of implicit bias in the workload distribution process.</li> <li>• Create clear standards and criteria and a differentiated crediting system to reward heavier workloads, or a rotation system for time-intensive roles.</li> <li>• Reward faculty work activities that contribute to the department, college, and university missions and strategic priorities.</li> <li>• Share faculty workload activity data with the department organized by faculty rank (e.g., average number of courses or students, average range of research publications or grants, committee assignments, mentorship activities, etc.).</li> <li>• Acknowledge that not all work activities are equal in terms of career progression to faculty (e.g., promotion, advancement)</li> </ul> <p>(Adapted from <a href="#">The Faculty Workload and Reward Project, University of Maryland</a>)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disparate allocation of resources may be perceived as favoritism.</li> </ul>	<p><b>B. Resource Allocation Fairness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss how to ensure department procedures support faculty work and fair resource allocation.</li> <li>• Develop criteria and guidelines for appointing student assistants (e.g., graduate, undergraduate, teaching, research) and communicate a standardized procedure to request support.</li> <li>• Discuss ways to resolve unequal distribution of faculty assignments.</li> <li>• Develop and communicate a standard departmental process for allocation and assignment of office and lab space.</li> </ul>

<i>Possible Faculty Concerns</i>	<i>Proposed Departmental Considerations</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not feeling valued for their work.</li> <li>• Certain types of work being more valued than others.</li> <li>• Outlined and stated position responsibilities only being valued by some departmental faculty.</li> </ul>	<p><b>C. Value Different Skill Sets and Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value and appreciate the different strengths, skill sets, and academic expertise of faculty.</li> <li>• View diversity in different departmental areas as a strong component of the unit’s identity.</li> <li>• Acknowledge publicly the value of the department’s various missions (e.g., research, teaching, extension, professional practice, etc.).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perceptions that the department chair supports some faculty, but not others.</li> <li>• Hesitancy to attend social events and build camaraderie.</li> <li>• Newly appointed faculty have little to no interaction with other departmental faculty.</li> <li>• The department’s use of space is distributed across multiple buildings, which hinders faculty interactions, collaboration, and the ability to communicate about each other’s work.</li> <li>• Unproductive interactions among departmental faculty cause worry and create a negative working environment.</li> <li>• Faculty do not engage because they do not feel supported, included, and valued.</li> </ul>	<p><b>D. Create an Inclusive and Supportive Culture</b></p> <p><i>Interactions with the Chair</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask faculty about needs in annual evaluation meetings.</li> <li>• Provide resources and support to help faculty in their work.</li> <li>• Listen to faculty concerns and take actions to assist them.</li> <li>• Show genuine interest in faculty work and accomplishments.</li> <li>• Seek faculty input on major department decisions and ensure their voices are considered.</li> <li>• Know about faculty activities and goals across their position responsibilities.</li> <li>• Take action to support faculty work-life integration.</li> <li>• Give faculty appropriate levels of autonomy and trust.</li> <li>• Ensure fairness in decision-making processes and be open to input and feedback.</li> <li>• Value faculty strengths, skills, and competencies.</li> </ul> <p><i>Interactions with Colleagues</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster a communicative and collegial culture in which faculty know their peers are supportive.</li> <li>• Host departmental activities that bring together faculty to allow them opportunities to learn what their colleagues are working on.</li> </ul>

<i>Possible Faculty Concerns</i>	<i>Proposed Departmental Considerations</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set expectations for support staff to be helpful and responsive.</li> <li>• Identify ways for faculty who are located in separate buildings to come together, collaborate, and network.</li> </ul> <p><i>Faculty want the department chair to...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a work environment in which everyone is included and has a sense of belonging.</li> <li>• Focus on faculty strengths and provide constructive feedback rather than criticism.</li> <li>• Provide support for promotion, tenure, and advancement (e.g., reducing teaching loads, service responsibilities, identifying new funding sources, encouraging flexible faculty programs).</li> <li>• Create opportunities for faculty working in different program areas to converse and interact.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Senior faculty and/or the department chair are inconsistent in their guidance to faculty.</li> <li>• Faculty find it difficult to collaborate because they are not familiar with each other's strengths and scholarly activities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>E. Create a Collaborative Culture</b> <i>Senior faculty and/or the department chair can...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect potential collaborators with junior faculty members.</li> <li>• Invite faculty to collaborations and opportunities.</li> <li>• Be available and accessible to faculty colleagues.</li> <li>• Invite underrepresented faculty to network with you over coffee or a meal.</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have regular gatherings (e.g., coffee, lunch) with pre-tenure faculty to listen and respond to their questions about promotion, tenure, and advancement.</li> <li>• Build a database of successful grant proposals that is readily available to faculty to examine good models.</li> <li>• Encourage faculty to attend workshop sessions regarding promotion, tenure, and advancement in order to learn about process and expectations.</li> <li>• Provide a department-level orientation for new faculty.</li> <li>• Create opportunities that will allow faculty to learn about their colleagues’ scholarly activities (e.g., 5-minute talk for faculty to highlight activities and points of pride).</li> <li>• Match faculty to mentors with similar interests, such as research interests and commitments.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underrepresented faculty feel the need to make an extra effort to be seen as an authority and given respect in the classroom.</li> <li>• Faculty perceive gender bias to impact the hiring process as well as promotion, tenure, and advancement decisions.</li> <li>• Teaching assignments appear to be unequally distributed between faculty who identify as male or female.</li> </ul>	<p><b>F. Recruit and Retain Faculty Who Identify as Female or Persons of Color</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validate the experiences of underrepresented faculty. Aim to understand the challenges they face and remove barriers to their work.</li> <li>• Leverage one’s privilege to speak up for faculty colleagues and call out questionable behavior and decisions.</li> <li>• Ensure everyone is supported, included, and valued.</li> <li>• Be sensitive to cultural differences.</li> <li>• Actively address and provide avenues to discuss diversity, inclusion, and equity.</li> <li>• Enhance awareness about diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as strategies to advance this work for all faculty.</li> </ul>

<i>Possible Faculty Concerns</i>	<i>Proposed Departmental Considerations</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of underrepresented faculty in the candidate pool</li> <li>• Increase awareness of and take action to address implicit bias in faculty hiring, promotion, tenure, and advancement.</li> <li>• Increase awareness of and take action to address insensitive comments that might make others uncomfortable.</li> <li>• Increase awareness that underrepresented faculty might be asked to take on an uneven share of service.</li> <li>• Improve retention for underrepresented faculty and provide dual career resources, where relevant.</li> <li>• Assess equity in teaching assignments according to gender, race, etc.</li> <li>• Educate others to respect, appreciate, and embrace diversity.</li> </ul>

Wei, M. (2021). Department Chair Professional Development Workshop Resource Document. Available online: <https://www.advance.iastate.edu/initiatives/dep>