



Department Chair

Handbook

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Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to provide the Department Chairs (particularly incoming Department Chairs) with some guidance on how to manage the numerous duties that attend the position. This handbook is designed to complement the *Los Rios Community College District Collective Bargaining Agreement with Los Rios College Federation of Teachers* (hereafter referred to as the “Contract”) which outlines some of the duties that Department Chairs are obliged to perform. This handbook rests on the premise that the Contract is the legitimate point of reference for any and all discussion about what duties formally belong to a Department Chair. The Contract defines some Department Chair duties in language that is clear and precise. However, other passages of the Contract define Department Chair duties in language that is more flexible. For this reason, there is considerable variation among the Department Chairs in the range of duties that they assume. It is not the purpose of this handbook to add more duties to those performed by any Department Chair or to encourage a Department Chair to accept more responsibility. Rather, the purpose of this handbook is to help Department Chairs manage those duties that they are contractually obliged to perform, and to help them handle those tasks that they assume at their own discretion within the boundaries of the Contract.

The idea for this handbook was initially proposed by SCC’s Office of Instruction and subsequently supported by the Department Chairs Council. This handbook has been reviewed by members of SCC’s management and by representatives from the Los Rios College Federation of Teachers.

Department Chair Duties

Section 2.2.4.3 of the Contract outlines the duties of the Department Chair. The language in this section regarding some duties is flexible. For example, the Contract stipulates that Department Chairs “advise” and “assist” in such matters as scheduling and hiring, but does not grant to the Department Chairs the direct and final responsibility for these duties. The purpose of such language is twofold: first, such language grants the Department Chairs some measure of discretion in accepting certain responsibilities; second, this language reserves final authority for some matters (like scheduling and hiring) for the appropriate Area Dean. For this reason, it is very important that a Department Chair have a clear understanding with his or her Area Dean about the tasks that the Department Chair will manage. Indeed, section 2.2.4.7 of the Contract requires that managers meet with their Department Chairs “at least annually at a mutually agreed upon time to review the Department Chair’s responsibilities and performance expectations for the following academic year.” It is highly recommended that incoming Department Chairs meet with their respective Area Deans to discuss these responsibilities before they begin their term of service as Department Chairs. A Department Chair is not necessarily obliged to handle all of the duties performed by the previous Department Chair, nor is a Department Chair obliged to assume a responsibility imposed by a campus committee or someone other than the Department Chair’s Area Dean, unless the Contract clearly requires the Department Chair to do so.

In so many ways, the Department Chair is the “voice” of the department—someone who represents the department to the college and the community. In practice, this means that the Department Chair is frequently contacted by campus groups, campus committees and members of the community who seek information and/or action from the department. Because the Contract and the college recognize the Department Chair as the principal contact for certain campus matters, the Department Chair will be obliged to tend to these matters promptly and efficiently. On other occasions, however, the Department Chair might be contacted to handle a matter that is outside the scope of the Department Chair’s authority. For example, if a student approaches a Department Chair with a formal complaint about a faculty member, the Department Chair will need to refer that student to the appropriate Area Dean. On these, and other, occasions, Department Chairs are advised to acknowledge the limits of their authority and to understand which issues reside within the purview of the Area Dean. The Contract clearly grants the Department Chair the authority to organize and to participate in some college *processes*, where the Department Chair is obliged to represent the interests of his or her department, but the Contract grants to the Department Chair no supervisory authority over *faculty*. The Department Chairs are faculty, not managers.

Department Chair Calendar

What follows is a general timeline of when certain tasks need to be performed. Because the deadlines for the performance of certain tasks vary slightly from year to year, Department Chairs should always consult the appropriate parties (such as the PRIE Office, the Instruction Office or the Area Dean) for precise information about these deadlines.

This is not a list of duties incumbent upon all of the Department Chairs, but rather a schedule that Department Chairs are advised to follow if they assume responsibility for some of the duties listed below:

August

- Advise and assist the Area Dean on the spring schedule.
- Identify faculty who would be available to conduct performance reviews of those faculty who are scheduled for evaluation in the fall term. This requires checking faculty schedules to see who is available for specific assignments. Provide the Area Dean with a list of potential evaluators that the dean may then pass along to the Academic Senate President for approval.
- Review curriculum course proposals and edits. All programs, certificates and courses going through the process of Program Review will need to be submitted for review by the Curriculum Committee.
- Review courses, certificates and programs submitted by the sister colleges through the SOCRATES system. Chairs will receive email notifications from the SOCRATES system whenever a department chair's signature has been requested. If there is a concern with the curriculum proposal, kindly notify the faculty developer at the sister college. If the curriculum proposal is acceptable, sign off on the proposal through SOCRATES.
- Meet with faculty in department to develop (or review) a schedule of courses that will have SLOs assessed in the upcoming year. Enter this information in the "Departmental SLO Assessment" grid and give this information to the individuals who have agreed to serve as the department's SLO Reporters. Following the "Best Practices" guidelines, the department's SLO Reporters will work with the Area Dean to monitor the timely submission of all course SLO reports.

September

- Organize and supervise a discussion with department faculty regarding a request for a new full-time hire. After the Academic Senate announces the deadlines for the hiring process, Department Chairs organize a meeting with faculty, who then decide if the department wants to request a new full-time hire.
- Unit Plan discussions with faculty.

October

- If the department decides to request a new hire, make sure the position profile is in order and has been reviewed by Area Dean and department faculty. The Chair typically presents the case for the new hire before the Academic Senate in October or November.

November

- Finish work on department's Unit Plan for following year. Check with the PRIE office for submission deadline to Area Dean.
- Advise and assist Area Dean on preparation of summer schedule.

December

- Finish all staffing for spring term.
- Submit first draft of summer schedule.
- Submit first draft of fall schedule.
- Chairs meet with their respective Area Dean to help determine division priorities for the Division Unit Plan.

January

- Identify faculty who would be available to conduct performance reviews of those faculty who are scheduled for evaluation in the spring term. This requires checking faculty schedules to see who is available for specific assignments. Provide the Area Dean with a list of potential evaluators that the dean may then pass along to the Academic Senate President for approval.

February

- Program Review Reports due to Instruction Office (if the program is scheduled for review this year).
- If the department has received a new full-time position for the following year, the department will typically begin organizing the interview committee in February. Department Chairs typically serve on all full-time hiring committees.

March

- If a program is scheduled to go through Program Review the following year, Department Chairs will be required to attend a meeting to receive information about the Program Review process.

April

- Continue participation on full-time hiring committee.
- Unit Plan end-of-year outcome achievement plans due to PRIE.

May

- Advise and assist the Area Dean in the preparation of the first draft of spring schedule for the next year.
- If a program is scheduled to go through Program Review the following year, organize a department meeting for the purpose of delegating certain courses to the faculty members who will review them.

Useful Links

Los Rios Community College District Collective Bargaining Agreement with Los Rios College Federation of Teachers. <http://lrcft.org/resources/1/LRCFT%20Contract%202011-2014.pdf>

Office of Planning, Research and Institutional Effectiveness. www.scc.losrios.edu/prie

Development Schedules.

FALL: www.losrios.edu:8080/scc/fall

SPRING: www.losrios.edu:8080/scc/spring

SUMMER: www.losrios.edu:8080/scc/summer

Results of Department Chairs Survey

In the spring of 2013, the head of the Department Chairs Council distributed a short survey, asking the chairs to provide some comments on their experience as chairs. Eighteen chairs responded to the survey. Their responses to each question are collected below.

Question 1: In your view, what are the most important tasks that you perform as a Department Chair?

“Unit Plan. Schedule.”

“1. Communication with the Dean. 2. Communication with fellow colleagues. 3. Keeping up with latest events impacting the department. 4. Attending appropriate meetings and committees.”

“Communicating to faculty in my department events and issues they may not be aware of.”

“Scheduling. Unit planning and Program Review.”

“Semester scheduling; program review; curriculum revision initiation; unit plan; unit plan accomplishments.”

“Scheduling, hiring, PEC appointments, department meetings, voice of faculty concerns to deans/admin., assisting faculty with curriculum, SLO assessments.”

“Scheduling classes and other day-to-day activities that are imperative to keeping the department functioning.”

“Scheduling and recruiting adjuncts.”

“Advocating for my department with my dean when decisions are being made.”

“Building faculty consensus around departmental issues. Coordinating departmental administration with the division dean (including scheduling, unit planning, hiring, faculty evaluation, curriculum development, etc.)”

“Scheduling, planning and communication between management and the department.”

“Managing class schedules; FTE, times, assignments, rooms, etc. Working with my Dean to maximize effectiveness in this process. Leading and facilitating department meetings and obligations (including Department programs, SLOs, Program Review, Unit Plan, curriculum, etc.)”

“Unit Plans, program review, scheduling, department meetings.”

“Scheduling.”

“Being a participating part of the team and knowing what can be changed and what cannot be changed.”

“Unit planning, scheduling, acting as a conduit of information for other faculty in my department.”

“Working on the class schedule; Orienting adjuncts and supporting them; Advocating for our department with the Dean.”

“Scheduling. Handling the paperwork that is required of a large public college such as ours. Making sure that our department has a good pool of adjunct instructors so that we always have our classes staffed. Making sure that all departmental decisions are handled fairly and appropriately, so that none of the faculty feel as if they are shut out of the decision-making process.”

Question 2: What do you regard as the biggest challenges you regularly confront as a Department Chair?

“Making all the various meetings and increased paperwork.”

“Finding time to fulfill the responsibilities. Doing the reports such as quarterly, unit plan and program review.”

“Understanding the requirements of being Chair.”

“Scheduling. Especially the number of ‘hands’ that have to touch the schedule before changes are made.”

“Sometimes it depends on the semester. Program review is an obvious challenge; sometimes scheduling can be challenging.”

“Scheduling with limited FTE or cuts to FTE.”

“The time to complete all of the tasks well. This has become an especially problematic area as more reports/tasks are being added to departmental workloads (which usually fall to the chair) and the time to complete them has not been expanded.”

“Budget limitation.”

“Dealing with the top-down administration in place at our campus, the lack of shared governance between faculty/staff and administrators (they operate independently with little accountability), and the feeling of powerlessness and lack of engagement that comes from the two previous points.”

“Maintaining effective communication with middle and upper-level management. Managing increasing workload due to external accountability demands such as SLO documentation.”

“Continued push back from faculty who don’t like any decisions made by management.”

“Although the Department is supposed to have control over curriculum, the FTE distribution and room assignments are often problematic with the Dean and other chairs in my division.”

“Getting faculty involved in committees.”

“Workload creep.”

“Deadlines given on short notice.”

“Time to accomplish tasks and attend meetings.”

“The class schedule, especially the timing always being at the end of the semester. Also I was always frustrated by the Unit Plan when it came time to prioritize it for the division. The dean already knew what would be prioritized, which was fine, but it made you wonder why you did a Unit Plan.”

“Balancing my duties as a chair with my duties as an instructor. There are plenty of days when I seem to spend most of my time dealing with departmental matters, which leaves little time for me to work on new lessons for my students. Even when I am thinking about new classroom activities, departmental business sometimes intrudes to sidetrack me.”

Question 3: What advice would you give to new Department Chairs?

“Regularly talk with the past Dept. Chair.”

“Be flexible.”

“Talk with those who have been chair, not only in your dept., but more importantly actually, other departments.”

“You will not have enough time to do a 100% thorough job with each item you are tasked with. Do your best within the amount of time you have. Do your best to keep perspective; it can feel like a ton of pointless “hoop jumping” but there is a reason for each “hoop.”

“Keep a calendar for deadlines; keep hard copies and electronic copies of reports, minutes, scheduling history and information; ask questions—the dean and/or other current or former department chairs.”

“Do not take on additional tasks that an administrative assistant can do or that you feel should be handled by the dean; remember you are a faculty advocate....NOT a mini dean; faculty do not supervise faculty; you are a faculty colleague who is in leadership.”

“Ask preceding chair of your department and other chairs for help. It is a helpful and knowledgeable group.”

“Expect to spend at least twice the time you think it will take.”

“Don’t let the mounting paperwork get you down!”

“Learn how the decision-making process works at all levels. Develop good personal relationships with as many administrative, faculty and staff decision-makers as possible.”

“Get clear expectations from your Dean then share those expectations with your department to make sure that everyone understands what your role is. The role varies from Dean to Dean.”

“Utilize your email for record keeping. Include yourself in the cc, send an email after a face-to-face meeting. Seek information often (rather than assume). Hold regular department meetings, communicate with your faculty often, incorporate their input/assistance in all facets. Attend division and campus-wide chair meetings. Don’t bring chair issues into the classroom setting....enjoy the teaching.”

“Don’t just ask for volunteers when something needs to be done (e.g. SLOs); create a list of tasks and assign someone to each. CC the dean so that you don’t have to be the one policing colleagues who tend to procrastinate, hoping the dept. chair will pick up the slack.”

“Don’t agree to do scheduling.”

“Relax....Prioritize....Students First....Know your required reports.....Make a friend of the dean...KISS=keep it simple Smart.”

“If you need help, ask.”

“Develop a timeline so you can check off what you have done; get a list-serve for all your adjuncts and faculty; keep copies of everything...particularly the schedule because it does strange transformations. Get the priority list from your Dean for adjuncts.”

“Accept the fact that serving as chair will challenge you in all sorts of new ways. You will often have to put aside your own notions of how things ought to be and find ways to compromise with others who have a different point of view. The college doesn’t always operate as smoothly as we would like, so be patient with your classified, administrative and instructional colleagues. If you take a deep breath and look for a solution to a problem, you will find one. Also, think about how you can work with your colleagues and get your department to do new things that will help our students. The faculty here are an incredible resource. Try to find ways to mobilize their creative and intellectual energies and you just might wind up doing some amazing stuff.”

Question 4: *How would you reflect upon your term of service as a Department Chair?*

“I actually enjoyed the opportunity, did better than I anticipated.”

“I have learned quite a lot. I have especially liked the collegial atmosphere of the chairs during our DCC meetings.”

“It is good to rotate chairs. If you stay in that role too long you begin to feel burned out.”

“It’s been a two-year learning curve for me, which is why I volunteered to remain chair for another term. I’ve enjoyed what I’ve learned and feel much more knowledgeable about a variety of processes, e.g. curriculum, SLOs, degrees and certificates as related to our department.”

“In the end many of the tasks ‘assigned’ to the chair are important to the smooth functioning of a department. That stated, after being chair for numerous terms over the years it is still apparent that SCC has strides to make regarding chair duties and compensation.”

“Great experience.”

“I tried to do what was best for the students in our program. Unfortunately, I don’t believe the top brass has the same priority.”

“In the physics department it has and continues to be a joy, because of the incredible people in my department.”

“I enjoyed the planning but I don’t ever want to do it again because of the self-serving decisions of faculty.”

“Awareness and availability have been my strengths. I have sought to be proactive, rather than reactive, in potential problem areas. I try to tell my faculty how much I appreciate their support and assistance in all facets.”

“I learned a lot about how the college is run. It was extremely informative. However, as chair of a small department, I didn’t get any release time. I had to teach a full load and do all my dept. chair duties. With a small department, it meant fewer people to delegate to. I did most of the work, and it was too much.”

“Frustrating but informative.”

“Long with few rewards but full of opportunity to be part of an important tool that helps to keep our tribe functional and up with change.”

“Though there is a good deal of work, I feel the work has given me better knowledge of how the College and District function as a whole. That knowledge is indispensable.”

“I enjoyed being chair except for schedules. The way we do them seems inefficient and full of errors. I don’t like redoing things four or five times and that seems to be how we build the schedules. I would like the schedule and room assignments to have more efficiency and logic. If you try too hard to do that a faculty member who wants a particular room at a particular time can really mess things up. I loved helping my adjuncts and have built a strong pool of them. I like being able to help them be good teachers and feel like part of our department.”

“The job has its frustrations, but overall, serving as chair has been a wonderful growth experience. I’ve learned a lot about how the college works and this, in turn, has given me a new perspective on how I do my job as a teacher. I’m glad I did this.”