

# The Help Department Chairs Want Most:

(Based on the input of 3,000 American academic chairs)

by

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## Summary

In June of 2009 a survey was sent to 38,485 of America's academic chairs. They were asked to select ten of twenty tasks, and seven of fourteen attributes for which they would most appreciate information or help. There were 2,987 (8%) who identified tasks and 2,749 (7%) who identified attributes. Summary results are provided in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

- **“Dealing with problem faculty” was the hottest issue (selected by 68%)**
  - This concern was essentially a stand-alone (9% more interest than the next issue).
  - Ten percent more female chairs (74%) selected problem faculty than did male chairs (64%).
- **“Guiding department change” was the #2 issue (selected by 59%)**
  - No difference between male and female respondents.
- **“Effectively managing time” was the #3 issue (selected by 59%)**
  - No difference between male and female respondents.

There were interactions between issues like “Dealing with Problem Faculty” and “Nourishing Department Climate,” or “Effectively Managing Time” and “Being Healthy & Balanced.” These will be addressed in follow-up publications.

**Table 1. Tasks for which department chairs wanted help or information.<sup>1</sup>**

<u>Survey item</u>	<u>Total % Selecting</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Number of Comments</u>
1. Deal with Problem Faculty .....	68%	64%	<b>74%*</b>	25
2. Guide Department Change .....	59%			66
3. Evaluate & Review Faculty & Staff .....	57%			32
4. Nourish Department Climate .....	56%			172
5. Manage Conflicts .....	55%	52%	<b>59%* (#3)</b>	38
6. Mentor & Develop Faculty .....	52%			169
7. Lead in Vision/Mission Development .....	49%			162
8. Collect & Use Data/Records .....	39%	36%	<b>45%*</b>	17
9. Represent Department Externally .....	37%			218
10. Oversee Teaching .....	35%	<b>37%*</b>	33%	92
11. Manage Department Budget .....	31%			48
12. Navigate Legal Territory of Position .....	30%	28%	<b>33%*</b>	13
13. Lead Department Meetings .....	29%			125
14. Manage Department Operations .....	27%	<b>28%*</b>	25%	30
15. Oversee Terminations .....	26%			4
16. Manage Department Resources .....	25%	24%	<b>28%*</b>	52
17. Oversee Promotions & Tenure Decisions ...	24%			61
18. Oversee Hiring .....	21%	<b>23%*</b>	19%	61
19. Determine/Recommend Salaries .....	20%	<b>22%*</b>	17%	9
20. Oversee Scholarship .....	16%			20

\*Significant difference between men and women

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**Notes:**

- a. Survey participants were allowed to select only ten of the twenty items. Priority of selections across respondents was thus assured. That is, 68% of 2,947 respondents included “problem faculty” among the ten (or fewer) items for which they wanted help/information; 16% included “scholarship.”
- b. There was a sizeable gap between item 1 and those below (especially for women chairs) and again between item 7 and those below. All tasks in the top seven are people-interactive and involve situations where a chair could feel somewhat isolated or individually responsible. With some exceptions (notably #9) the people-interactive tasks in the bottom twelve normally tend to involve the participation and contribution of others. Suggestions from survey participants for dealing with the top seven tasks were very often: listen to, and involve, others.
- c. There were some significant (95% level) differences between the responses of chairs serving for two years or less versus six years or more; newer chairs selected items 2 and 19 more often, and items 6 and 13 less. Chairs with ten or fewer faculty in their unit selected items 3, 6, 10, and 18 more often; and items 1, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 15, and 19 less often, than chairs with 21 or more faculty. Compared to institutions offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees, chairs from undergraduate-only institutions selected items 3, 6, 8, 10, 13, and 18 more often, and items 7, 15, 17, 19 and 20 less often.

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<sup>1</sup>Results of a national survey sent to 38,465 U.S. academic chairs in June, 2009 by R. Kent Crookston, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. [[kent\\_crookston@byu.edu](mailto:kent_crookston@byu.edu)]. 2,987 (8%) of recipients responded to this section; 60% males, 40% females.

**Table 2. Attributes department chairs wished they were better at or knew more about.<sup>1</sup>**

<u>Survey item</u>	<u>Total % Selecting</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Number of Comments</u>
1. Effectively Manage Time .....	59%			94
2. Be Politically Adept .....	56%	53%	<b>62%*</b> (#1)	39
3. Be Aware of/use Power .....	49%	46%	<b>53%*</b>	61
4. Be Healthy/Balanced .....	47%	42%	<b>54% (#3)</b>	69
5. Be Proactive .....	43%			80
6. Be Effective in Decisions .....	43%			189
7. Be Skillful in Communication .....	40%			392
8. Accept/Embrace Role of Chair .....	36%	34%	<b>41%*</b>	66
9. Be Competent.....	31%			16
10. Be Collegial .....	20%			90
11. Be Credible .....	18%	<b>20%*</b>	14%	73
12. Be in Harmony with Institution .....	18%			19
13. Be Humble .....	14%	<b>15%*</b>	12%	89
14. Be Trustworthy .....	13%	<b>15%*</b>	11%	171
*Significant difference between men and women				
15. Be Transparent/Open				223
16. Be an example				103

**Notes:**

- a. Survey participants were allowed to select only seven of the fourteen items. Priority of selections across respondents was thus assured. That is, 59% of 2,789 respondents included “manage time” among the seven (or less) items for which they wanted help/information; 13% included “be trustworthy.”
- b. There were some significant (95% level) differences between the responses of chairs serving for two years or less, versus six years or more; newer chairs selected item 3, 5, 6 and 8 more often. Chairs with 10 or fewer faculty in their unit selected item 5 more often; and item 14 less often, than chairs with 21 or more faculty. Compared to institutions offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees, chairs from undergraduate-only institutions selected items 9 and 10 more often.
- c. Items 15 and 16 were not included in the survey. Numerous participants indicated their importance, and several suggestions were offered. It is obvious that these attributes would have been selected by a considerable percentage had they been included on the original list.

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**Table 3. Where chairs find help<sup>1</sup>**

<u>Survey item</u>	<u>Total % Selecting</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Comments</u>
1. Other chairs .....	72%	70%	<b>74%*</b>	see note c
2. Experience prior to being chair .....	59%	<b>60%*</b>	56%	
3. Workshops and/or seminars .....	28%	24%	<b>32%*</b>	
4. Books .....	10%			
5. Journals such as <i>Department Chair</i> ..... or <i>Academic Leader</i>	5%	4%	<b>7%*</b>	
6. Other .....	17%	16%	<b>19%*</b>	

\*Significant difference between men and women

**Notes:**

- a. Survey participants were allowed to select only three of the six items. Priority of selections across respondents was thus assured. That is, 72% of 2,795 respondents included “other chairs” among the three (or fewer) items that they found to be the most helpful source of information on chairing; 5% included “journals.”
- b. There were some significant (95% level) differences between the responses of chairs serving for two years or less versus six years or more; newer chairs selected items 1, 2 and 4 more often, and items 3, 5 and 6 less. Chairs with fewer than ten faculty members in their unit selected items 2, 3 and 5 less often than chairs with 21 or more faculty members. There were no differences between institutions offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees, compared to undergraduate-only institutions.
- c. There were 241 comments volunteered about where chairs found help. These varied from the survey items somewhat and were tallied as follows:

<u>Source of help</u>	<u>Number of comments</u>	
<b>Mentoring by university personnel (total)</b> .....	<b>95</b>	<b>39%</b>
Former or fellow chair (some serving as negative examples) .....	52	
Senior trusted colleagues including dean and experienced staff .....	43	
<b>Experience (total)</b> .....	<b>93</b>	<b>38%</b>
On the job (mistakes) .....	35	
Outside University (community, church, industry, prof. organization) ..	28	
University committees, senate, etc. ....	24	
Military .....	6	
<b>Self Development (total)</b> .....	<b>53</b>	<b>22%</b>
Studying leadership on my own/books .....	31	
Attending leadership/chair workshops .....	22	

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