

The Art of C.Y.A.: Documentation for Department Chairs

Abstract

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Session Description

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In academia today, department chairs and other administrators are often in the crosshairs of legalistic challenges. Whether it’s constructive criticism offered on an annual review or documentation to support a termination decision, administrators know they will be questioned and therefore depend on accurate records. And while tomes of advice have been published for department chairs, very little has been written about the details of good record keeping.

Though not to be construed as legal advice, this presentation aims to model an effective method of documenting departmental incidents as a means to “cover your assets.” Here are a few questions that will be addressed:

- Why is proper documentation important?
- What types of events and incidents need to be documented?
- What does good documentation look like for a department chair?
- What is a “memo for record” and how can it be utilized?
- When should the records be made?
- Who sees departmental records and when?
- What is “papering” and why is it important to avoid it?
- How can a department chair fairly document events without appearing to target certain faculty?
- In what situations will these records be potentially used?

After establishing the basics of good documentation and the art of “C.Y.A.,” several case studies will be presented for discussion. Though fictitious, these “inspired by actual events” scenarios will encourage critical thinking and application of these techniques. Finally, session attendees will be invited to share their own anecdotes describing times when good record keeping became important, as well as suggestions for their colleagues.

This presentation is ideal for newer chairpersons who might be overwhelmed by the thought of documenting every single noteworthy event in their department. However, experienced academic leaders might also benefit from the discussion as they work to improve their record keeping acumen.