Given the rising challenges and constraints of universities, the role of department chair can seem daunting, particularly given its complicated, sometimes ambiguous nature[i] that has only increased in difficulty in recent years.[ii] Chairs are asked to manage budgets, evaluate faculty, and market programs, but yet do not receive sufficient training[iii] on how to lead these tasks effectively. As a result, fewer faculty see the department chair as a desirable position, leaving the department facing a difficult decision when the current chair steps down.

Leadership is recognized as being complex, formative, and developmental,[iv] which requires an experienced leader to facilitate this complex process for aspiring leaders. As leaders, department chairs should utilize their expertise to identify and develop their successors to ensure continuity of departmental knowledge and practices for the stability of the department.[v]

For this interactive session, I will introduce the following applied cyclical model for developing, empowering, and encouraging faculty within a department to not only consider the role of department chair, but also be ready for the role when the opportunity arises.

- Development: Leadership is not always a natural or comfortable skill for everyone, but this does not mean that the capacity for leadership does not exist. Chairs can begin the development process through dialogue with faculty to assess interest and readiness,[v] then engage those identified through deeper dialogue, modeling, and supervised practice of a variety of leadership skills within the department.[vi]

- Empowerment: Once leadership skills begin to develop in the faculty leaders, it is time to apply those skills through the sharing of department tasks and decision making. This is a good opportunity for the chair to model shared leadership in the department by delegating meaningful tasks to those who are ready for those tasks, while assuming a more coach/mentor role[v] in the observation of task implementation.

- Encouragement: Inevitably, the strain of balancing faculty and chair tasks while learning to be a leader will emerge,[vi] so the chair will need to be supportive when this strain arises. Again, dialogue will be important to help the faculty leader sort through the challenges, manage time, and reflect on the successes and opportunities for further learning. The chair should also encourage the participation in leadership development training to further hone skills.

Discussion of the model will include specific strategies for implementation, including systemic support structures needed from deans and other university academic administrators to encourage internal leadership development. As a new chair, I will also share my experiences within this model over the last two years, including lessons learned. Opportunities will be provided for participants to discuss the presented content with the presenter and other attendees.

---

[i]Craig, C. (2005). Leading from the department chair. *The Community College Enterprise, 11*(2), 81-90.

[ii]Czech, K, and Forward, G. (2010). Leader communication: Faculty perceptions of the department chair. *Communication Quarterly, 58*(4), 431-457.
[iii]Chu, D. (2006). *The department chair primer.* Bolton: Anker.
[iv]Nohria, N., and Khurana, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbook of leadership theory and practice.* Boston: Harvard Business Press.
[v]Rayburn, W., Grigsby, K., and Brubaker, L. (2016). The strategic value of succession planning for department chairs. *Academic Medicine, 91*(4), 465-468.
[vi]Gmelch, W. (2015). Building strategic chairs. *The Department Chair, 26*(1), 3-6.