TO: President Kern Alexander  
Vice President Robert Haynes  

FROM: Ad Hoc Committee to Study Departmental Governance  

SUBJECT: The committee's report and recommendation  

DATE: November 11, 1986  

This Ad Hoc Committee to Study Departmental Governance was charged to:  

- study the advantages and disadvantages of chairs and heads,  
- recommend the approach that seems most appropriate for Western,  
- suggest policy revisions required if we change from heads to chairs, and  
- describe the functions of a chair and indicate, if a change is made to chairs, how a chair should be selected and the period for which the chair should serve.  

We were asked to complete our study, if possible, by January 15, 1987. The report would then become "the basis for subsequent exhaustive discussion among our faculty."  

After considerable study and extensive discussion, we are pleased to submit the attached report. It recommends that Western Kentucky University change from the head to the chair form of departmental governance.

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Western Kentucky University established academic departments in its earliest days, primarily for convenience in listing courses, and someone was more or less in charge of them. But some early catalogs did not even list the heads, and in the era of a strong paternalistic president and weekly faculty meetings, the role of the department head was limited. Heads were selected by the president, who consulted with anyone or no one as he saw fit, and routinely approved by the Board of Regents. A strong head, respected and trusted by the president, had a considerable degree of autonomy, but some areas were considered to be outside his or her purview. Gordon Wilson, one of the most respected heads, did not have an English departmental budget until after the mid-1950's, nor did he know until then the salaries of the members of his staff. Faculty members were sometimes employed after little or no consultation with a department head.

Department heads whose performance was satisfactory retained their positions indefinitely. A.H. Stickles, Head of the Department of History, occupied that position from 1908 to 1954 when he retired at age 82. In 1966 the Board of Regents adopted a policy that required all administrators to be given a change of assignment at age 65, although they could be continued on a year-to-year basis.

The selection process gradually changed in the 1960s and 1970s and a faculty search committee became the usual first step in making a selection. The university policy after 1976 called for three names to be
submitted to the president. In actual practice the faculty search committees have sometimes ranked candidates after the screening process, and the college deans and the Vice President for Academic Affairs have sometimes submitted a single recommendation to the president. But there was no formal statement of the duties and responsibilities of the position of department head or its relationship to the faculty and the administration.

In the absence of established policies, departmental governance has varied widely. Some departments have operated on such a democratic basis that except for the indefinite term for the head, they essentially followed the chair concept. In some cases, however, departments have been run as little kingdoms. Since most deans and other university officials were often reluctant to intervene, unpleasant departmental situations sometimes developed that were solved, if at all, by palace revolutions or resignations.

In 1983 the Board of Regents adopted a policy for the Annual and Periodic Evaluation of Academic Units/Administrators. Under this policy academic departments and their heads are evaluated in two ways: first, through an annual opinion survey of the departmental faculty; and second, through a more comprehensive review on a five-year cycle which involves a formal review committee and an outside evaluator.

II. Definition of "chair" and "head."

In the interest of conciseness and brevity, "head" and "chair" concepts in departmental governance are defined as follows:
A chair is an agent* for the departmental faculty and serves at the pleasure of the faculty, while a head is an agent* for the administration and serves at the pleasure of administrators.

(*Agent is defined as a power that acts, a moving force: one who acts in the place of another, by authority from said other.)

This definition may be further elaborated to define "chair" as a group leader selected by the faculty of a department, whose leadership implies collegiality and consensus, and whose primary responsibility is to convey and to execute policies determined by the faculty.

"Head" is further defined as a line superior in a pyramidal hierarchy of governance, selected by administrators, whose leadership implies authority and whose primary responsibility is to convey and to execute policies of the administration.

III. Potential advantages and disadvantages of the chair and head forms of departmental governance.

Advantages and disadvantages of either form of governance depend greatly upon circumstance as well as upon leadership style and traits of the person occupying the position. Such oft-cited problems as lack of continuity in limited terms of office, lack of preparation for the role, etc., may be applicable to either head or chair forms.

A comparison of advantages and disadvantages of governance forms:

Advantages of chair form:

More sharing of knowledge and responsibility

More commitment by faculty to departmental goals when they share in setting these goals
Better decisions resulting from collective judgement on problems and policies

Enhancement of faculty development through greater involvement in departmental and university affairs

Change in leadership is made easier

Disadvantages of chair form:

More time and involvement is required of faculty members (some may wish not to be involved)

Decision-making may be slower and more difficult (sacrifices efficiency)

Responsibility is more difficult to pinpoint when accountability is vested in a group rather than in one person

Advantages of head form:

Efficiency and speed in decision-making

Less time and involvement required of faculty members

Existence of a clear line of authority and responsibility, with accountability more easily determined

Disadvantages of head form:

Too great reliance on administrative authority and not enough on collective judgement

A situation implying power over others rather than power shared with others, i.e., veto power on promotions, tenure, appointment, etc.

More opportunity for arbitrary and capricious behavior

Change in leadership can be difficult, often eliciting hostile acts which result in departmental strife
IV. Recommendation to move to the chair concept

We recommend that Western Kentucky University change from the head to the chair form of departmental governance. While we realize that the change will not be a panacea, we believe that it should enhance faculty collegiality and promote academic democracy. Most of the universities we would want to emulate use the chair system.

We also believe that there should be opportunity for variation among departments in their use of the chair system. Some departments may prefer to make extensive use of faculty committees while others choose to entrust more responsibilities to the chair. The essential point is that the department should be free to decide upon the route it deems best for itself.

V. Roles and responsibilities of the chair

Academic departments at Western Kentucky University occupy a central place in carrying out the university's teaching, research and service missions. Effective leadership and governance of departments is therefore of critical importance. The responsibility of the chair will be that of initiating policies within the department for faculty discussion, approval, and implementation in all of the department's activities. Further, it will be the responsibility of the chair to encourage the faculty to assume both responsibility for departmental decisions and the consequences that result from those decisions.

It is clear that all of the roles and responsibilities of the chair must occur with appropriate faculty consultation, both as dictated by codes and governance procedures and also through informal discussions in
departmental meetings or through personal interaction.

(Adopted from University of North Carolina at Charlotte)

A. Academic Leadership. The ability to exhibit leadership is of fundamental importance to a successful chair. Four areas in which or through which this leadership is required are these: faculty quality; statesmanship; instructional programs; and student affairs.

1. Faculty quality:
   a. Recruiting, hiring, and orienting of new faculty.
   b. Encouraging and facilitating professional development through activities such as suggesting funding sources, discussing research ideas, urging attendance at professional meetings and workshops, providing opportunities for faculty to participate in governance and administration, and continual evaluation of faculty with appropriate recommendations.
   c. Creating a forum in which faculty can express ideas freely, thus promoting healthy discussions among the departmental faculty members.
   d. Making informed documented recommendations concerning faculty retention, promotion, tenure and annual salary increments, the outcomes of which will serve the best interest of the department as a whole.
   e. Encourage university and community service activities appropriate for faculty participation.

2. Statesmanship:
   a. Providing a communication link between and among the
faculty and the other levels of administration. Accurately communicating university and college policy and reasons for policy to the department faculty.

b. Acting as an intermediary, buffer, and critic between faculty and administration.

c. Being the spokesman for and yet the strongest critic of the faculty and the department.

d. Representing the department both within the university's administrative and governance structures and externally with professional and community groups.

e. Maintaining personal professional competence in order to set a good example in teaching or research, so creating and maintaining a position of stature both on and off campus.

f. Initiating policies within the department for discussion, approval, and implementation since these provide the guidelines and operational aspects for all departmental activities.

g. Enforcing faculty responsibilities while at the same time protecting faculty rights and privileges, and helping delineate between these.

h. Establishing effective relationships with the non-academic portions of the university.

3. Instructional programs:

a. Articulation of program-related goals.

b. Developing with the faculty strong and attractive curricula.

c. Developing and revising the learning experience.
d. Developing methods of improving instruction.

e. Coordinating the academic offerings to provide programs that are pedagogically sound and that use available resources maximally.

f. Encouraging cooperation with other departments, colleges, or institutions whenever this is appropriate.

g. Initiating and implementing program ideas.

h. Adjusting teaching loads in a fair, flexible, and productive manner.

4. Student Affairs:

a. Supervising student activities and student organizations.

b. Dealing with student problems that are not the appropriate concerns of the faculty.

c. Arranging with faculty for academic counseling.

d. Disseminating information of interest to students.

e. Responding to student grievances and requests.

f. Recruiting good undergraduate and graduate students.

B. Administrative leadership. A successful chair must be able to handle the routine and not-so-routine administrative details which make the office function efficiently, professionally, and effectively.

1. Budgetary:

a. Preparing the department budget.

b. Administering the department budget.

c. Adhering to the procedures established by the Business Office.
d. Allocating funds in a manner consistent with the goals of the department.

2. Programmatic:
   a. Preparing teaching schedules and assignments.
   b. Maintaining faculty files.
   c. Approving students' degree programs.
   d. Coordinating the use of instructional facilities.
   e. Generating proposals for funds to support the academic program.

3. Office Organization:
   a. Coordinating support staff activities.
   b. Arranging for and assigning departmental space, facilities, and equipment.
   c. Coordinating the reports that go to the registrar and other service areas.
   d. Implementing administrative policies.
   e. Maintaining continuity.
   f. Providing or coordinating clerical support.
   g. Developing a system of records.
   h. Preparing agenda for, convening, and chairing departmental meetings.

VI. Responsibilities of the faculty member.

The primary responsibility of the faculty member is to commit sufficient time to departmental affairs to:
Be fully informed regarding matters about which decisions must be made.

Participate actively in the decision-making process.

Permit a decision that has been made to have the opportunity to succeed or to fail in practice.

Support decisions that have been made jointly, make any needed corrections, and live with the consequences.

VII. Implementation of the chair form of departmental governance.

A. Qualifications

Tenured faculty members and those in tenure track positions are eligible to become the chair and to participate in the selection process.

B. Affirmative action policy

Appropriate affirmative action procedures will be followed for both internal and external selections of a chair.

C. Selection process: internal appointment.

The department, through an elected committee, will arrange for an orderly selection process. The department will submit to the dean of the college (or other appropriate administrator in non-college situations) the name of the person who received a majority of the votes of the total number of eligible voters in the department. If the dean concurs in the choice, the dean will make the appointment. In what should be rare instances of non-concurrence, the dean will present objections in writing and then discuss them with the department. If an agreement ...
is not reached, the Vice President for Academic Affairs will act as a mediator to resolve the issue.

D. Selection process: external appointment.
When an external search is undertaken, the dean and the department will cooperate in conducting the search in accord with usual university procedures. The dean, with the concurrence of a majority of the department members eligible to vote in the selection process, will make the appointment. All appropriate affirmative action procedures will be followed.

E. Term of office.
The chair will be appointed for a five-year term with no restriction on re-election. The term will correspond as nearly as possible to the five-year cycle of Council on Higher Education degree program and institutional administrative unit reviews. The selection should be made before the May commencement. The chair should have a twelve-month appointment and an appropriate teaching load reduction. If a change in the department chair takes place, the conversion from twelve-month to nine-month or nine-month to twelve-month status would normally take place on August 15 of the transition year. In order to ensure continuity and to provide an adequate training period, the incoming chair will begin work as chair-elect on July 1. During this six-week transition period, the chair-elect will be paid a special stipend based on the summer term compensation schedule.
F. Evaluation of the chair.

The chair will continue to be evaluated annually by each member of the department. These evaluations will go to the dean who will discuss them with the chair. An extensive evaluation will be conducted during the first semester of the chair's fifth year.

G. Removal of the chair.

A recall petition, stating the reasons for dissatisfaction with the chair's performance, must be signed by a majority of the departmental members eligible to vote in the selection of the chair. Within two weeks after receiving the petition, the dean will convene a departmental meeting at which the chair, who has been given a copy of the petition, may respond to the charges, either in writing or in person or both. After a "cooling off" period of not less than two weeks nor more than four weeks, the dean will supervise a departmental vote by secret ballot. A two-thirds majority of the eligible voters will be required to remove the chair from that position. The removal of a chair does not in itself affect that person's faculty rank and status. When a chair is removed, the dean, after consulting with the department, will appoint a temporary chair who will serve until the established selection process is completed and an appointment is made for the remainder of the unexpired term.

H. Substitute chair.

The chair may appoint an acting chair for an anticipated absence of one month or less. For a longer absence, the dean will appoint an acting chair after consulting with the department.
VIII. Other recommendations:

A. That the Faculty Senate be requested to use departmental governance as the topic for discussion at the 1987 Tom G. Jones Symposium on Faculty Governance.

B. That each college arrange for additional discussion of this recommendation prior to April, 1987.

C. That a faculty vote be taken in April, 1987, to determine if the change to the chair concept should be submitted for official approval.

D. That if the chair concept is accepted, the necessary changes be made as soon as possible, with departmental elections beginning the next semester following approval of the change by the Board of Regents.

E. That a definite pay scale be developed for department heads/chairs so that a faculty member will know the financial changes involved in becoming a head/chair or in leaving that position.

F. That the Faculty Handbook be revised to reflect recent changes in policies and procedures and to anticipate possible legal actions based upon the Handbook's contents.