Most often, the chair for a single-discipline department will be a person whose expertise is in that specific discipline. This seems to work best, as the chair will understand general issues and problems that might come up regarding the subject area. However, some colleges have small departments or disciplines and group several related subject areas together for one person to chair. Because a chair in that position may not have as much expertise in every discipline within the department, the chair may face challenges that differ from those of a single-discipline department.

Four main areas may present special challenges: hiring adjunct faculty, evaluating adjunct faculty, student/faculty problems, and recommendations for budget requests.

**HIRING ADJUNCT FACULTY**

If part of the job description of department chair includes hiring adjunct faculty, then the chair of an eclectic department may need to secure the assistance of faculty members who have expertise in a specific discipline. Without a background in the area in which the position is open, the chair may not be able to evaluate clearly whether the applicant has all the necessary qualifications. Also, the chair may not readily know if the applicant has the correct focus for a specific course. In the interview, the chair may neglect to ask some important questions. Therefore, the chair would need to involve other faculty in the decision-making process, either while gathering information, examining the applicant's vitae, or conducting the interview itself.

**EVALUATING ADJUNCT FACULTY**

If part of the job description of department chair includes some sort of classroom observation for evaluation, the chair of an eclectic department may need to ask for help from faculty members who have more expertise in that area. Recommendations from faculty members of what to observe—actual course content and accuracy of information—would be useful. Even with this input, the evaluation may focus more on teaching styles than subject content and information accuracy.
STUDENT/FACULTY PROBLEMS

When students have a problem with a faculty member—either a grading issue or a personality issue—the chair may have to take extra care to understand the nature of the course or discipline before any action is taken. Actually dealing with personality differences often is not the issue; those differences would be handled the same for any discipline. The challenge comes in understanding how a subject is taught: Is it a lecture? Is it a performance? Is there something different in how the course information is presented, evaluated, and/or delivered that has a bearing on the problem? If so, the resolution might be different in the chair's area of expertise from that of another discipline.

Sharing information from different perspectives can also help resolve a problem or potential problem. From different disciplines come different strengths.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUDGET REQUESTS

Oftentimes, the department chair is asked to present budget requests to the administration. Along with some uncertainty as to the needs of different disciplines within the department comes the challenge of prioritizing money and equipment requests. The process may require all faculty members within that department to play an active role.

Taken together, these challenges may require the chair to spend more time sharing information, learning different viewpoints and perspectives, gathering faculty input—activities that involve other department leadership. It also requires more time and involvement from department faculty.

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