

Department Chair Leadership and Management Competencies

Background and Methodology

This competency model provides a concise foundation for department chair development. It should be reviewed periodically to reflect evolving expectations for academic leadership, including inclusive leadership, digital and hybrid work, data-informed decision-making, shared governance, student success, compliance, change leadership, and effective people management.

The model is organized into six leadership and management domains and 18 specific competencies. Each competency includes targeted knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) associated with effective chair performance.

Domain I. Managing budgets and resources—Managing and understanding the financial realities and needs of the department while knowing how to apply for and access internal and external sources of funding.

Competencies

- 1. Managing department funding** – Effectively understanding where and how to pursue external funding opportunities to grow the resource base for the department. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:
 - a. Acquiring external funding for the department or program.
 - b. Knowledge of policies and procedures for obtaining external funding.
 - c. Knowledge of internal and external sources of funds.
 - d. Stabilizing funding for the department.
 - e. Gaining fair allocation for the department from the dean.
- 2. Managing department budget** – Identifying and interpreting the key components of the department budget and managing the department’s budget and related finances. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:
 - a. Reading and interpreting budget reports.
 - b. Skill in preparing and managing department or program budgets.
 - c. Setting priorities for new equipment and use of travel funds.
 - d. Allocating resources to faculty fairly during difficult times.

Domain II. Developing faculty strengths – Understanding the needs of faculty, staff, and the office as a whole, which includes helping faculty develop their careers, regularly evaluating their performance, providing mentoring and teaching advice, as well as encouraging research.

Competencies

3. Enhancing faculty performance – Providing faculty with constructive and developmental evaluations and reviews of their performance and encouraging them to search for external funds for research. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Encouraging faculty grantsmanship.
- b. Providing honest feedback and evaluation at least once per year.
 - i. Dealing with unsatisfactory faculty performance and providing clear, constructive feedback.
 - ii. Working with faculty who receive poor reviews to correct problems.
 - iii. Making salary recommendations based on annual review.
- c. Encouraging innovation and risk-taking.

4. Supporting faculty teaching—Understanding faculty curricular needs and providing guidance and support in curriculum development. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Encouraging curriculum development and improvement; make sure all is submitted on schedule.
 - i. Planning for both short- and long-term curricular needs.
- b. Developing and following procedures to assign faculty to classes, labs, studios, etc.
 - i. Working with dean's office to resolve enrollment management issues.
 - ii. Assigning teaching loads, which do not need be identical across faculty, but are consistent with agreed upon performance expectations for individual faculty members and in the best interest of the department.
 - iii. Rotating teaching and service assignments when appropriate to broaden experience, prevent stagnation, and balance departmental needs with faculty development.

5. Hiring and promoting – Attracting talent to the department, promoting faculty and staff, and assisting tenured-track faculty in their career success. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Knowledge of procedures pertaining to promotion and tenure of faculty.

- i. Understanding when faculty appointment, hiring, or retention issues may involve immigration or visa considerations, and coordinating with the appropriate institutional offices to ensure timely, accurate guidance.
- b. Helping faculty manage tenure clock.
 - i. Conducting progress-toward-tenure reviews.
 - ii. Conducting intensive pre-tenure reviews.
- c. Recruiting faculty.
 - i. Designing a job announcement that provides candidates with clear expectations of the role, including your department and institution's mission statement and expertise desired.
 - ii. Selecting a search committee that represents the internal and external interests of the program.
 - iii. Developing an efficient screening system with guidelines and criteria for reviewing applicants' folders.
 - iv. Informing candidates of expectations, timing, and process.
 - v. Negotiating the offer.
 - vi. Writing an offer letter that will be appropriate for many years.
 - vii. Maintaining recruitment efforts instead of waiting for a vacancy to fill.

6. Handling grievances – Utilizing tools to navigate, reduce, mediate, and prevent office conflict. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Knowledge of policies and procedures concerning faculty grievances.
- b. Reducing, resolving, and preventing conflict among faculty.
 - i. Mediating conflict between faculty members.

Being discrete about faculty issues.

7. Promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging—Understanding how differences in identity, experience, discipline, background, and perspective shape participation and opportunity within the department, and developing an inclusive culture in which faculty, staff, and students are respected, supported, and able to contribute fully. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Recognize how implicit bias, stereotype threat, microaggressions, and exclusionary practices affect participation, evaluation, and advancement.
- b. Use inclusive leadership practices that ensure meaningful participation in discussions, decisions, service roles, and leadership opportunities.
- c. Apply equitable and transparent processes in hiring, mentoring, workload assignment, annual reviews, promotion, recognition, and access to resources.
- d. Create psychologically safe spaces where concerns about climate, belonging, bias, or inequity can be raised constructively.
- e. Respond promptly and appropriately to bias, disrespect, exclusion, or harassment, consulting institutional offices when needed.

- f. Use inclusive meeting practices, mentoring, sponsorship, climate feedback, and department-level data to strengthen equity and belonging.
- g. Demonstrate cultural humility and ensure DEIB work is distributed fairly.
- h. Communicate DEIB as central to academic excellence, student success, faculty development, and departmental effectiveness.

Domain III. Promoting a high functioning department culture – Setting the tone for the department by encouraging a respectful, ethical, and supportive workplace culture, as well as advocating for faculty and staff to higher administration and communicating institutional and administrative needs to faculty and staff.

Competencies

- 8. Setting boundaries and expectations** – Establishing clear expectations for faculty, staff, and students; addressing problematic behavior early; documenting agreements and decisions appropriately; and using fair, consistent processes to prevent small concerns from becoming recurring conflicts. This competency is composed of the following KSAs: clarifying roles and responsibilities; communicating expectations early and directly; distinguishing preferences from policy requirements; maintaining appropriate professional boundaries; and consulting institutional experts when issues involve legal, personnel, or compliance risk.
- 9. Creating a healthy workplace climate** – Shaping a functional, respectful, and ethical department climate for faculty and staff that includes opportunities for faculty and department staff to voice concerns constructively and for employees to grow in their discipline. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:
 - a. Developing a mentoring system for faculty.
 - i. Providing individual recognition and encouragement, long-range career planning, and opportunities for collaborative projects.
 - b. Creating an ethical, principled work environment where diversity is encouraged, supported, and valued as a measure of departmental success.
 - i. Inviting debate through "constructive contention" and encouraging faculty to express their views on issues.
 - ii. Scheduling and leading regular departmental meetings.
 - c. Respecting faculty, advocating, and matching faculty strengths with departmental needs.
 - d. Shaping the department mission.
- 10. Communicating effectively** – Relaying messages from the institution to the department and practicing flexibility in communication needs to best foster a learning-goal orientation culture. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Communicating department needs to the dean and interpreting university decisions to faculty and staff.
 - i. Regularly attending the college meeting of chairs.
 - ii. Working effectively with faculty, staff, and administrators across campuses, departments, and virtual or hybrid work settings.
 - iii. Visiting department members at distant locations.
 - iv. Keeping in contact with network members.
- b. Adopting different communication and interaction styles to fit varying situations.
 - i. Communicating in a positive and optimistic manner with departmental faculty and staff.
 - ii. Promoting collaboration and joint exploration of issues, with decisions that are built on solid, evidence-based deliberation.
 - iii. Managing discomfort in adaptive work situations (where all participants are engaged in problem-solving) to stimulate reflection and creative thinking without generating anxiety.
 - iv. Willing to take on leadership roles, and give them up, as the situation dictates.
- c. Being available and accessible to all department faculty and staff.

11. Motivating and boosting morale – Awarding positive performance, encouraging participation in team-building activities, and assisting faculty and staff in creating attainable goals. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Building and maintaining faculty morale.
 - i. Nominating faculty and staff for college and university awards.
 - ii. Nominating faculty and staff, when appropriate, for leadership development.
 - iii. Organizing team-building/development departmental activities (e.g., retreats, social gatherings).
 - iv. Recognizing performance improvements.
 - v. Giving rewards in a timely manner.
- b. Constructing clear, attainable goals.
- c. Making decisions under ambiguous circumstances.
 - i. Entertaining fresh questions and trying on perspectives from others.
- d. Helping/mentoring faculty manage their time to be most effective in their scholarship, teaching and service as well as achieve healthy work-life balance..
- e. Allowing faculty to say no to extra opportunities when overloaded.

Domain IV. Balancing role as faculty member and administrator –

Maintaining identity as a researcher and remaining current in discipline while collaborating with junior faculty and graduate students.

Competencies

12. Balancing chair and faculty roles – Allocating time appropriately to maintain balance of personal life with multi-faceted career in order to remain dedicated on all platforms. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Creating balanced work-life environment.
- b. Remaining current in discipline.
- c. Promoting sustainable workload practices and healthy work habits that support well-being, resilience, and effective performance.
- d. Teaching
- e. Engaging in a learning-goal orientation.
 - i. Collaborating with junior faculty and/or graduate students.
- f. Separating work and non-work activities.
- g. Finding the humor in the situation.

Domain V. Managing student issues – Managing students in the department from program requirements to student needs and grievances.

Competencies

13. Understanding student policies and procedures – Understanding the procedures in place to handle student issues, such as transfer credits and course substitutions, to student grievances about grades or conflict with faculty. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Knowledge of policies and procedures concerning student grievances.
- b. Cataloging information preparation in accordance with deadlines.
- c. Approving course substitutions, accepting transfer credit, waiving program requirements for individual students.
- d. Selecting and supervising graduate students.
- e. Being aware of cultural differences among various populations of students.

Domain VI. Managing the administrative needs of the department –

Energizing long-term department initiatives, understanding and implementing staff policies and procedures, acting as liaison between the department and department alumni, collecting department data, and handling legal procedures to address matters of sexual harassment and issues of confidentiality.

Competencies

14. Maintaining department-level initiatives – Developing goals within the department and for the department at an institutional level. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Developing and implementing long-range initiatives.
 - i. Managing the department's external accreditation efforts.
- b. Developing an office internship program.
- c. Developing and sustaining multiple disciplinary programs in strategic plan.
- d. Identifying annual department priorities.
- e. Relating department goals to each element in the vision/mission statement.

15. Implementing staffing policies – Managing non-academic staff regarding promotions and turnover, and implementing yearly evaluations. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Knowledge of policies and procedures for promoting and terminating staff.
- b. Knowledge of policies and procedures for evaluating staff.
- c. Supervising non-academic staff.

16. Communicating outside institutional walls – Engaging with community members, maintaining contact with alumni, and collaborating with external agencies and institutions. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Acting as primary spokesperson and advocating for the department with the public.
- b. Acting as liaison with external agencies and institutions and processing department correspondence and requests for information.
- c. Encouraging research collaboration with the community.
- d. Being open to interinstitutional links.
- e. Maintaining meaningful contact with alumni and their families.
- f. Building effective linkages with related departments.
 - i. Remaining current with neighboring disciplines.

17. Keeping records of departmental data – Managing what data is collected within the department, how it is collected, and how it is disseminated. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Overseeing the department's record-keeping system.
- b. Determining what data is collected and disseminated in support of the department.

- i. Compiling information about the status of the department relative to comparable departments within the university and in other universities.

18. Understanding of legal procedures – Identifying legal issues within the department and keeping a working knowledge of legal policies within the institution to keep faculty, staff, and students safe. This competency is composed of the following KSAs:

- a. Knowledge of procedures for dealing with sexual harassment.
- b. Knowledge of procedures concerning confidentiality, privacy, records retention, and appropriate information sharing.