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Chairs Checklist for Shared Decision Making

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Chair's Checklist: Creating Equitable Shared Decision-Making in Departments

UMass ADVANCE [survey results](#) indicate that women faculty are less clear on personnel processes than men, and women faculty members from underrepresented racial minority groups are the [least clear](#) on tenure and promotion processes. This checklist is for department chairs/heads to assess departmental shared decision-making and create equitable practices that will support the inclusion and retention of women faculty and faculty of color.



Time to Check In: How equitable and inclusive are your departmental shared-decision making practices? What's working in your department, and what needs to be improved?



What Should You Look For?

Warnings – Signal Need for Change

- Overactive rumor mill exists
- Bitter arguments or disparaging comments made among colleagues
- Many faculty are disengaged and do not speak at or attend meetings
- Women and BIPOC faculty self-censor more than men and white faculty
- Confidentiality is often breached
- Department meetings are not held on a regular basis

Standby – Signal Being on the Way towards Equity

- Better representation in meeting attendance and more faculty are speaking at meetings
- Accessible bylaws
- Some faculty are willing to serve in leadership positions

Go—Signal the Stage is Set for Equity

- Colleagues trust the process for conflict resolution enough to respectfully dialogue about challenges
- Bylaws are living documents that accurately reflect practices
- Department norms emphasize support and inclusion
- Senior faculty mentor and guide all new faculty in norms and formal policies
- Pre-tenure faculty and lecturers learn the ropes on personnel committee but are not burdened by workloads

STEPS FOR DEPARTMENT CHAIRS/HEADS TO SUPPORT EQUITABLE DECISION-MAKING:

- Familiarize yourself with the [bylaws](#), reference them during meetings, and revise them as a department regularly to ensure they match how things are done.
- Create opportunities for all faculty members to have a voice in decision-making, both formally and informally.
 - Do not make decisions without consulting the faculty.
 - Do not insist on a binding vote the first time an issue comes up.
 - Offer opportunities for anonymous voting.
 - Allow faculty to submit feedback through online surveys and summarize information for all faculty to know how their colleagues feel.
 - Discuss issues one on one with colleagues, particularly if an issue appears contested.
- Establish transparency and equity in workloads.
 - Spell out the responsibilities of each service role and corresponding expected time commitment.
 - List teaching, service and mentoring responsibilities and expectations by rank.
 - Recognize that workload equity means that everyone shares in the work of the department but does not mean that everyone does the exact same thing.
 - Formally recognize the invisible labor of faculty, including peer mentoring, emotional labor, and student mentoring, in annual review comments, promotions and through awards.
- Establish transparency around new faculty hiring at every stage of the process, from writing the job advertisement to submitting a choice of candidates to the appointing authority.
- Provide mentorship around tenure and promotion, including for associate professors around promotion to Full professor and lecturers for NTT promotions.
- Be an active bystander when you hear disparaging comments about faculty. Discourage such behavior verbally and immediately when you hear it.
- If you hear rumors of harmful behavior such as harassment, look into the facts behind it.
- Discuss equitable departmental decision-making with colleagues through case studies.

Case Study: The Chair who Wants Change

You are starting your second term as department chair. You want to start a new transparent assessment of service effort among faculty because when you ask colleagues to “step up,” you notice that women, and particularly women of color, are doing more service work than other colleagues. Yet, you know that many of the department faculty, particularly the full professors who are mostly white men, prize faculty autonomy and minimizing service work. These faculty members do not see a problem, thinking that the people who care about an issue can pick up the workload. Yet, as chair, you recognize that many colleagues are doing the work because the work simply has to get done. You know that to change the status quo of service allocation in your department you must convince some of these faculty members, many of whom are highly respected. Their opinions will influence the vote, and you want their buy-in for this new transparent assessment of service effort among women and men faculty.

Discuss the following with your colleagues:

- How should department chairs/heads address backstage or informal decision-making?
- How might faculty respond when they recognize inequitable processes of decision-making are happening?
- How might conversations about decision-making improve transparency and provide more faculty with a voice?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- Catalyst’s [Are You an Empathetic Leader? Quiz](#)
- UMass ADVANCE [Shared Decision-Making Best Practices](#)
- UMass ADVANCE [Equitable Peer Review Panel Templates](#)
- Mass Society of Professors (MSP) [Union Faculty contract at UMass Amherst](#)
- Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research, [Lab Meeting Facilitation](#)
- The [Transformative Academic Facilitator Toolkit](#) TAFT tool
- UMass Faculty Senate [Rules Committee](#)
- [Creating Inclusive Department Climates in STEM Fields](#) (Misra et al. 2022)

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