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An Examination of Academic Department Chairs in Canadian Universities

DOCTORAL THESIS RESEARCH
SUMMARY AND HIGHLIGHTS

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Five core questions and a variety of subsidiary questions frame the research focus and shape the research design and methodology:

1. *Research question:* **What are the roles and responsibilities of academic department chairs in Canadian universities today?** *Subsidiary questions:* Does the chair's job differ according to the discipline? Does the university – its type, size, age and/or location have any influence on the job?

2. *Research question:* **Who occupies the position?** *Subsidiary questions:* Are chairs career academics from within the university system? Are they business managers from outside the academy who may or may not have graduate school credentials? Are they professionals from outside the academy with academic credentials and/or accreditation related to the discipline? Do their backgrounds and/or aspirations differ according to the discipline? What are their career paths leading to the job of chair? Is there a typical trajectory? Is the job a stepping stone toward the deanship or other senior administrative position in the academy?

3. *Research question:* **Do institutional policy documents and/or collective agreement provisions address the department chair function at the university?** *Subsidiary questions:* Are they general or specific? Descriptive or prescriptive? Do they cover appointment procedures, applicant qualifications, reporting lines, length of office, duties and/or compensation? If so, do the requirements on paper match daily practice?

4. *Research question:* **Has the department chair's job changed in status and/or accountabilities over the past 25 years, particularly entering the new millennium?** *Subsidiary questions:* If so, what are the changes? Are they discipline and/or institution specific?

5. *Research question:* **Are professional development and training available for new and continuing department chairs?** *Subsidiary questions:* If so, is this preparation helpful? What makes the chair's job rewarding? What makes it

difficult? What would make it easier? Do the challenges and groundwork differ by discipline and/or institution?

2. RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

Two interview excerpts help to set the stage for an overview of the rationale and the purpose of the study. The first quote is from a chair completing a three-year term at the time of the interview, at a medium-size, Central Canadian university in an urban environment. The second quote is from a chair in a second term at a smaller Western Canadian institution in a rural setting, having first served as chair in the same department within the past 10 years.

Chair 1: *"I did not want to be chair. I had my arm twisted by the dean. I thought I was 'hot' in the research to which I was contributing. I was concerned the chair would be a significant diversion. It was a selfish reason. But I had tremendous respect for the dean. There were many other senior people. It wasn't 'my time'. If people 'took their turn', it wouldn't have been me. But if you get the wrong chair, the department can stagnate or take a wrong turn that is not visionary. We have a lot of competition between and among departments and universities. The whole department could decline."*

Chair 2: *"I was reluctant to take on the job for three reasons: One, my inclination – I am not interested in administration at all. Two, I knew I am not good at it. And three, I know it involved certain stresses such as personnel matters. It was only after I took the job that these became clear. I knew a little bit about the nature of the job from the previous chair who had done it for eight or nine years and had seen the department through some tough times. But I really did not know on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis what it involved. This is my second time as chair and I certainly would not have done it again, but I had no choice; there was no one else willing or able to do it, being too junior or with very heavy research work. Do my colleagues*

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understand my role? To a degree they do, although until you do the job, you don't really know. But people know enough about the job to know it's going to have an impact on their research and no one wants that."

These thoughts echo the common sentiments expressed by active and former chairs, including individuals who are now deans or who have retired from the academy.

On the surface, the university department chair is a job apparently people don't want and don't understand, a job that deals with tricky people problems, a job that hampers research, a job that depends on arm twisting and taking turns, a job that takes an academic to the "dark side" – administration, a job that does not seem to change much in approach and expectations over time.

One survey participant, a current chair at a large Western Canadian university, asked why the position needed study: *"It's not broken. What is there to fix?"* However, the majority said they wanted *"to see what you are doing"* and *"to be heard"*.

The rationale for the study is anchored in five basic arguments:

1. **The academic department chair operates at the core of the university, and there is not enough broadly-based research on university department chairs in Canada relative to their importance to their institutions.** Much of the discourse is informed by references from abroad.

    Higher education scholars agree that chairs are positioned at the heart of a university and are directly responsible for its vitality (Petty, 2008). They "occupy front-line positions of leadership" and are "the voice for how what is desirable meshes with what is feasible" (Higgerson & Teddi, 2007, p. v). They are "at the front line for all constituencies: students, faculty, outside communities, other departments, central administration" (Straley, 2005, p. xviii). An anachronistic description, still cited today, refers to the "foreman in higher education – the person who sees that the work gets done" (Brann & Emmet, 1972, p. 5).

2. **Moreover, the university department chair has not been studied widely in the context of academic management in Canada relative to other**

jurisdictions, notably, the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia, where the research has been more sustained although it is also not extensive.

While the function is gaining more prominence in Canada, the research tends to focus on specific aspects such as the influence of chair leadership on teaching and learning in specific disciplines (Saroyan & Hua, 2008) such as geography (Vajoczki, 2008), chair leadership styles on departmental outcomes (Saroyan & Arcuri, 2005), leadership expectations for and use of authority by chairs (Jones & Holdaway, 1996), role conflict and role ambiguity related to chairs in occupational and physical therapy disciplines (Shaffer, 1985), and faculty unionization and its impact on administration, including department chairs (Penner, 1978, 1994).

The Canadian research has also traditionally targeted single institutions on subjects that include stress (Lazaridou, Athanasoula-Reppa, & Fris, 2008), preparation for the job of chair (Soroka, 2002), budgetary cutbacks (Arnal, 1999), and the impact of gender, nationality and academic discipline on faculty perceptions of the chair's role (Watson, 1979, 1986).

3. **The university department chair's job is not just understudied but it is universally not well understood – sometimes by the incumbents themselves, by their faculty peers and by senior administrators.** This lack of understanding, or misunderstanding, may be a function of the lack of study.

4. **The university department chair's job is becoming increasingly complicated in response to a volatile operating environment shaped by social, demographic, economic and information technology and communications shifts.**

The existing body of empirically-grounded Canadian knowledge needs to be developed further to provide more "just in time", practical assistance to university department chairs in Canada where it may be needed. Again, much of the guidance is informed by non-Canadian scholarship, the majority being

American references. While many principles are generic and cross national boundaries, certain legal, regulatory, social and demographic factors require a different information base and a modified orientation for the Canadian university operating environment.

5. **The university department chair's job in Canada is not studied sufficiently in a chronological sequence and with a holistic perspective.**
Few historical antecedents and broadly-based studies can be found for the Canadian context that capture the essence of the roles, responsibilities, selection criteria and conditions, required backgrounds, knowledge, skills, personal traits and attributes, across a large range of universities, disciplines and fields of study. Indeed, a comprehensive view of the job – across time and in relation to university type, size, age and location, and bodies of knowledge – is difficult to find in any context.

An opportunity exists to enrich the theoretical discourse on the subject from a purely Canadian perspective, in one source reference, that documents the progression of the chair's job over time and that captures the trends and issues that shape the function at present. Ultimately, this discourse can illuminate university policies and practices that serve to enhance the effective and efficient operations of the institution and its departments.

Informal discussions at academic workshops and seminars with department chairs from various universities across Canada have revealed some frustration with increasing accountabilities in the job without the preparation and authority to be able to meet responsibilities, more paperwork and less time for planning, and a need for guidance that is specific to their institution, especially in handling matters related to people and application of relevant Canadian legislation and regulations dealing with issues such as intellectual property rights, human rights and privacy.

Some chairs have also expressed concern with the selection process and the decreasing pool of eligible candidates in their respective departments, largely as a result of senior faculty members retiring and a growing number of contract faculty members for

whom the job of department chair is inaccessible and untenured faculty on the tenured track for whom the position is premature. Some of the more senior faculty members say they end up extending their term beyond the renewal period or scheduled retirement or assuming the position again within a few years – not necessarily to their liking.

This study responds to these concerns, from a distinctly Canadian standpoint, in a progressively challenging higher education environment, especially in the context of an ongoing international debate over the notion of "new managerialism" (also known as "new public management) and the creeping professionalization of the academy, its governance and administration (Amaral & Goedegebuure, 2007), as academics argue that management processes and procedures are being adapted from the business sector.

Note: In the process of developing the literature review, I prepared an extensive directory of resource materials for chairs – books, newsletters and periodicals – useful as self-help guides evaluated as primary and secondary readings on a wide range of subjects, including handling of personnel issues, conflict management, communication and leadership. It was first published in 2008 and was updated June 2009. It is posted on the website of the Office of the Vice-President and Provost at the University of Toronto: http://www.provost.utoronto.ca/link/administrators.htm. *This resource is also available on the website of the Canadian Council of University Biology Chairs:* http://www.ccubc.ca/chairs.html .

3. RESEARCH PARAMETERS

In terms of the research parameters, this inquiry is different from other explorations of university department chairs, particularly in Canada, as it is holistic in scope, historical and contemporary in scale, "tribal" and "territorial" in focus, theoretical and practical in context and outcomes.

Holistic, historical and contemporary: The study explores five core dimensions that are featured from five perspectives. The five aspects are: (1) the chair's roles and responsibilities as they are found to exist today, (2) the chair's personal background and skills, (3) institutional policies and practices relative to the expectations and duties of a chair, (4) changes in the position over time as documented in institutional materials and

revealed through lived experiences, and (5) personal preparation and institutional support for the position, as conveyed by (a) current chairs, (b) former/retired chairs, (c) current deans to whom chairs report, (d) current deans who were once chairs and (e) retired deans who were once chairs.

The chairs and deans, current, former and retired, represent a diverse range of 43 predominantly English-language public universities classified according to four variables: (1) type: urban, rural and frontier – which refers primarily to an institution's student demographics, population and types of programs offered and not the location *per se* (for example: a university such as Nipissing in North Bay, for this study, would be classified as frontier, as it draws a large number of students from Northern Ontario, particularly remote and under-served areas); (2) size: small, medium and large – which reflects student population size and the number of programs offered; (3) age: established (that is, incorporated before 1945) and new (set up after 1945); and (4) location – referring to three geographic regions: Western, Central and Eastern Canada. In this study, all 10 provinces are represented. The classification labels are specific but sufficiently broad to protect the identity of participants, particularly those who were interviewed.

"Tribal" and "territorial": Moreover, this inquiry covers a wide spectrum of 24 academic disciplines and 10 fields of study categorized as hard and soft pure and applied, with a specific focus on eight clustered disciplines represented by the input of chairs and four clustered fields represented by the input of deans.

The disciplines and fields were chosen for more detailed analysis of specific "managerial" factors – including a focus on financial inputs and planning – on the basis of the highest number of participants from each of the disciplines and fields. The disciplines are: biology and chemistry; mathematics; architecture and engineering; medicine; anthropology, criminology and sociology; classics, cultures and languages; business; and education. The fields are: science; dentistry and medicine; arts, humanities and social sciences; and education.

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4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

While seeking to describe the position and incumbent characteristics as they relate to roles, responsibilities, requirements and changes over time, this study also examines the relevance of two theoretical constructs to department chairs in the Canadian university setting – "new managerialism", and "tribes" and "territories".

"New managerialism": An evolving body of literature on the academy focuses on "new managerialism", which is defined to feature cost-effective and efficient delivery of public services; decentralized management to align more closely authority and responsibility; provision of greater choice for customers through competition within public sector and non-government organizations; and accountability for results and risk management processes (Keating, 2001).

"Tribes" and "territories": "Tribes" are defined as disciples of disciplines – academic cultures embracing values, attitudes and ways of behaving, typically embodied in the professoriate. "Territories" are the disciplines, typically embodied in departments, schools and faculties. Biglan (1973), Becher (1989) and Kolb (1981) are noted scholars in this domain.

It was noted earlier that this research covers a wide range of disciplines and fields. For this study, they are categorized according to the models established by Biglan, Becher and Kolb and as followed by other scholars and cited in the literature. They are: hard pure (also called "abstract reflective") such as biology and mathematics; hard applied ("abstract active") such as engineering and medicine; soft pure ("concrete reflective") such as classics and sociology; and soft applied ("concrete active") such as business and education.

5. RESEARCH DESIGN, METHOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

This is a baseline, population study. Calculating sample size and determining sample characteristics in the development of the database for the survey mailing are not considerations for this study. The entire population of active chairs and deans, across all of the predominantly English-language universities in Canada as listed in the AUCC directory, comprises the database.

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The research design is mixed methodology: quantitative and qualitative, secondary and primary. The analysis approach is descriptive, not inferential. While inferences can be drawn from the results and generalized across the non-respondent populations, the overriding objective is to describe the phenomena revealed in the responses.

Four sources generated data: (1) web-based questionnaires, targeting all active department chairs and active faculty deans at 43 predominantly English-language public universities in Canada as listed in the *2008 Universities Telephone Directory* published by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada; (2) telephone interviews with selected active and former/retired chairs and deans who have been chairs and/or to whom chairs currently report, to amplify survey responses and to explore more substantively issues such as "new managerialism"; (3) publicly-available institutional policy documents and faculty association collective agreements where they exist; and (4) the *curricula vitae* of survey and interview participants who voluntarily supplied this information as opposed to direct web retrieval in order to ensure up-to-date, complete and accurate information.

A review of the backgrounds of deans, many of whom have served as chairs, is integral to this inquiry, as one of the objectives is to trace the career path of chairs.

For this study, a department *"chair"* is defined as the individual responsible for the programs and personnel of an academic unit, covering faculty, staff and students, anchored in teaching, research and service.

"Active" refers to incumbents assuming the position on a full-time basis following formal selection protocol, as opposed to "acting", that is, being appointed to the role temporarily without due process. Acting, endowed/named research chairs, program directors/coordinators and school directors are not the focus of this research.

"Public universities" are defined as institutions receiving some form of operational and/or capital funding from government. Denominational, private, for-profit, non-degree granting, government-run, First Nations and Métis, and special purpose institutions are outside the scope of this review.

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6. RESPONSE RATES

The empirical research was undertaken from May through July 2008. Close to 1,400 active department chairs and 300 active deans and individuals who assumed these positions in the past were canvassed for their views of the department chair function, Policy documentation and personal academic profiles were also analyzed, from September through December 2008.

The web-based questionnaire for incumbent chairs generated replies from 511 email recipients, representing 38 per cent of the 1,333 individuals in the population approached (accounting for elimination of 87 entries from the initial mailing list due to directory listing errors and departure/sabbatical notices). They represent all 43 universities in the targeted population.

The separate survey for incumbent deans, which sought their views of the chair function, drew the participation of 79 email recipients of 269 prospective contributors (accounting for elimination of 18 entries due to listing errors and absence notices), signifying a 29 per cent response rate. They represent 36 universities in the targeted population.

Forty-five hour-long telephone interviews were conducted with 30 chairs and 15 deans (active, former and retired) from across Canada, representing 35 universities in 10 provinces as reflected in their cumulative experiences over the course of their respective academic careers. In selecting the participants, I aimed for (1) a balanced representation of the disciplines; (2) a fairly even accounting for institutional types, sizes, ages and locations; (3) a mix of experiences in the academy; and (4) a comparison of perspectives of chairs and/or deans, active and/or retired, from the same university. It was not the intention to cover in the interviews all 43 institutions captured by the survey.

Fifty-eight institutional policy documents and faculty association collective agreements were located on the Internet, and *curricula vitae* were received from 134 chairs and deans (active, former and retired).

7. MAIN FINDINGS

Following are highlights of the not so surprising, the more surprising and the eminently surprising, from thousands of data points in the multiple source databank and cross-tabulations of key variables focusing on "managerial" and "tribal" and "territorial" nuances.

OVERALL

Not So Surprising

- **The findings confirm the longstanding tradition of the temporary nature of the chair's job, irrespective of institution and/or discipline.** The most common term of office is three to four years, although five to six years is the cited experience of more than a third of the survey respondents, and a third of the interviewees said that a second consecutive term was an implied expectation from the outset when they first assumed the office.

- **Chairs generally lack preparation and training**, which they gain largely from prior committee involvement at departmental, faculty and university levels and from active involvement with the faculty association.

- **Chairs remain members of the collective bargaining unit where the faculty association is unionized during their term of office** and typically deem their ability to lead professorial peers with authority constrained as an equal.

- **The main tasks do not appear to differ among institutions and/or disciplines. What changes is the load.** The bigger the university, the more work there is and the more administrative support may be available. But the fundamental requirements such as handling personnel matters – hiring faculty and other staff, managing the tenure and promotion process, and evaluating faculty and staff performance – engaging in departmental planning, and championing unit interests, seem to be common across academic bodies of knowledge and the academy.

- **The majority of chairs are middle-aged and male.** In support of this point, close to half of the chairs who identified their age bracket in the survey are between 46 and 55 years of age, the largest group of respondents to the age question. Two-thirds of chair

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survey participants who identified their gender said they are men. In the interviews, the gender mix was two to one, two men for every woman – 30 men and 15 women altogether, although gender was not a selection criterion for any interviews. Age was also not a question in the interviews. However, based on a review of the *curricula vitae* and the time periods and experiences referenced in the discussions, it appears the vast majority, at least 35 of the 45 individuals interviewed, are beyond age 40.

More Surprising

- **No one age group dominates any one discipline.** In this study, the youngest chairs, under the age of 35, are found in (1) anthropology, criminology and sociology; (2) music; (3) architecture and engineering; and (4) classics, cultures and languages, although the latter two groupings also record the highest ages in this study.

- **The age demographic does not appear to have an impact on the rating of key roles for the chair.** In this study, all age groups across all disciplines rate "spokesperson" as the most applicable chair role and "leader" as the second most applicable role. Some differences are notable in the rating of chair activities as reflected in the age variable. For example, "mentoring faculty", typically associated with experience, is rated as "not important" or "somewhat important" by the majority of chairs under the age of 35 and as "very important" by all chairs over 65.

- **The gender factor does not have a measurable impact on the survey results associated with the key variables.** Both men and women rate roles and responsibilities, changes in the position over time, and requirements for professional development and training in the same proportions, according the same ratings across the spectrum in every Likert-scale question.

- **The majority of chairs say they have a job description**, but it is usually inaccurate, vague, over-simplified and incomplete.

- **As to institutional policy documents, just over half of the 20 reviewed in this study have been revised in the past 10 years. Furthermore, a number of them at various universities use the same language – the <u>exact</u> wording – to describe the chair's roles and responsibilities.** The phrases recurring most frequently are:

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"generally responsible for communication, organization and administration in the department"; *"provides academic and administrative leadership in the department"*; and *"provides academic and administrative leadership in the department consultatively"*.

However, a number of these documents vary widely and substantively in their prescriptions for and expectations of the chair. Some go as far as to specify the chair's duty to report to the dean dissention on decisions within the department and to devise ways to minimize conflict.

- **Despite the rhetoric in the literature generally, the notion of non-academic professionals from outside the university setting occupying the chair role appears not to be evident in practice in Canada.** In fact, this notion is typically viewed by chairs and deans with disdain, across institutions and fields of study, be they hard pure and hard applied such as science, engineering and medicine, or soft pure and soft applied areas such as arts, business and education.

- To reinforce the above point, **almost all chairs surveyed are tenured (96 per cent of respondents). Moreover, more than a third of survey respondents have been in the faculty ranks at their current university between 11 and 20 years, and another third for more than 20 years.** Movement from one university to another appears to be most relevant to chairs in medicine (close to a third of survey respondents), although more than two-thirds of interview participants have been with more than two universities over the course of their academic careers.

- **All interview participants, chairs and deans, are career academics, although several have moved outside the academy to assume management and research positions with public research organizations sponsored by governments in Canada and abroad. All are tenured, although several current and retired chairs admit they were not tenured at the time they first assumed the chair's job**, a situation they do not advise. An untenured chair is untenable for the incumbent and her/his track toward tenure.

These findings overall – and they are just the highlights – while somewhat surprising, do not significantly disturb pre-conceived impressions or descriptions in the literature of the university chair's job. But there are some surprises in other areas.

<u>Surprising</u>

- **The notion of a business-oriented approach to departmental administration, emphasizing strategic planning and fundraising, for example, is emerging as a phenomenon linked to an institution's size and its culture rather than its location, age and type**, and to specific hard applied fields of study, notably, medicine (which is less surprising). The president/principal is found to have a significant influence on the culture and the institution's direction.

- **The concept of the chair as *primus inter pares*, inscribed in several institutional statements documenting the chair role, generates conflicting reactions as to whether the term applies more appropriately to university presidents and deans.** Many chairs and some deans are adamant that the chair is a "first among equals", but more chairs than deans are clear in their view that this label is a barrier to their effectiveness in being anything more than a "gopher" for faculty wants and needs. This subject generated some of the most heated reactions in the interviews. Several diametrically opposed comments serve to illustrate the controversy. Among the more pointed observations are the following:

> Chair in agriculture/veterinary medicine: *"I think department heads are, should be, leaders. I see myself as 'first among equals'. I want to lead by example. A 'leader' walks in front of the pack."*

> Chair in engineering: *"I take issue with the 'first among peers' stuff. This is entirely wrong. We are all peers here. That's the strength of academia. We are all scholars and students and colleagues. Calling a chair a 'first' is a subtle way of saying the chair is somehow above the group the chair is actually serving. I don't think we are. Students*

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and faculty members are the top tier and chairs are their servants. The chair has a foot in both camps. I facilitate, I don't dictate.

Dean in medicine: *"One sometimes hears the term 'first among equals' in relation to chairs and/or the notion they are peers of those in the department, therefore, how then can they lead? Well, you don't have to lead from the front. If you can evoke a vision among 100 or more people, with a little fine-tuning on navigation, they will run in that direction. The quarterback stands behind most of the team. You don't want to be upfront, you can get shot!"*

Chair in sociology: *"I think chairs are 'first among equals', for sure. A dean has to be removed, because the dean is not equal. But the chair is not exactly equal, because he or she is given a reduced teaching load, a stipend, extra time toward the sabbatical, secretarial support, larger offices, and so on. So, we are not exactly equal but we are equal in the sense that we are faculty members in our department."*

Chair in business: *"At this university, a chair is described as a 'first among equals', which means the chair has no authority over the department."*

- **The most surprising results relate to financial aspects of the chair's job** and in some of the discrepancies between deans and chairs in the prioritization of specific chair responsibilities and accountabilities. The remainder of this paper will focus on a discussion of these outcomes, particularly on the financial considerations, and suggestions for further inquiry therein.

FINANCIAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

From among 19 roles listed in a survey question that asked participants to rate each role, mentioned earlier, "spokesperson" generated the highest overall rating. This is followed by "leader", "champion", "administrator" and "teacher". At the very bottom are "fundraiser" and "revenue generator", rated by more than half as "not important".

It should be noted that for this question, the roles were not defined and there is a measure of subjectivity attached to the labels and individual attributions to these labels. However, the second part to the question allowed for an expansion of roles, and participants spelled out 66 other roles, including, most commonly, "mediator" between administration and faculty, and "middle person" between students and faculty". Several wrote "servant", "slave" and "babysitter". A few respondents incorporated expletives that will not be repeated here but are telling of how these particular chairs feel about their job. There are probably many more like them but they are more circumspect and less candid. Deans were not asked to rate roles.

Correspondingly, "fundraising" and "revenue generating" are also found at the bottom of an extensive, 45-activity listing that survey participants were asked to rate. Both chairs and deans were asked this question in their respective surveys. Chairs in medicine and in architecture and engineering rated these two activities more highly than chairs in other disciplines but still low relative to the other 43 activities on the list. Deans of medicine were also ahead of deans in other fields in their rating of fundraising although slightly behind deans of education on revenue generation.

Two tables (on pages 19 and 20 of this document) provide an overview of these results, comparing input from chairs and deans and charting the outcomes according to discipline types.

TABLE 1 Top and Bottom 5 Chair Responsibilities as Viewed by Chairs and Deans

CHAIRS	N[1]	%[2] of Respondents	DEANS	N	% of Respondents
1. Participating in department committee meetings	431	91.9	1. Maintaining morale	64	100
2. Recruiting faculty and other staff	430	90.7	2. Encouraging good teaching	63	96.8
3. Implementing departmental plans	433	90.5	3. Recruiting faculty and other staff	62	95.2
4. Championing the unit within the university	432	90.3	4. Implementing departmental plans	65	95.3[3]
5. Maintaining morale	432	89.6	5. Participating in department committee meetings	64	93.8
41. Developing, marking, participating in graduate exams	419	33.7	41. Consulting/coaching	63	42.9
42. Assigning faculty-student advisors	424	31.8	42. Developing, marking, participating in graduate exams	60	33.3
43. Developing departmental revenue-generating initiatives	430	31.4	43. Administering and monitoring scholarships, prizes	65	32.2
44. Community volunteering	430	29.8	44. Fundraising (building relations with alumni, foundations, other donors)	64	28.1
45. Fundraising (building relations with alumni, foundations, other donors)	431	28.1	45. Community volunteering	63	14.3

The first chart shows how chairs and deans compare in their ratings of a chair's work overall – highlighting the top five and bottom five priorities. It also reveals how low these financially oriented tasks are placed relative to other activities and responsibilities. The more pedestrian – prescriptive – task of preparing and implementing budgets, a

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[1] The N columns show the number of respondents to each of the 45 branches of the survey question.

[2] The percentages represent the aggregate of "important" and "very important" on the four-point Likert scale in the question according to the degree of significance accorded each item by respondents.

[3] While the aggregate percentage is marginally higher for this activity, it is ranked below "recruiting faculty and other staff" because the latter reflects a stronger percentage for the top category of "very important" (66.7% versus 64.5% for this item).

financial activity, is found in the top half of the lists (number 16 among 45 for chairs; 25 of 45 for deans [not shown here]) – still low relative to other administrative matters.

In terms of the general orientation, chairs appear to place more emphasis on administrative activities such as meetings, hiring and planning than do deans, who put departmental morale and teaching ahead of the more institutionally-grounded tasks.

TABLE 2 Fundraising and Revenue Generation by Discipline/Field of Study

Activity	CHAIRS	Response[4]	Type[5]	DEANS	Type	Response
Fundraising	1. medicine [6]	40 (23/57)	hard applied	1. dentistry and medicine	hard applied	36 (4/11)
	2. architecture and engineering	38 (8/21)	hard applied	2. arts, humanities and social sciences	soft pure	31 (5/16)
	3. mathematics	33 (9/27)	hard pure	3. science	hard pure	27 (3/11)
	4. biology and chemistry	29 (9/31)	hard pure	4. education	soft applied	17 (1/16)
Generating revenue	1. medicine	48 (27/56)	hard applied	1. education	soft applied	67 (4/6)
	2. architecture and engineering	43 (9/27)	hard applied	2. dentistry and medicine	hard applied	45 (5/11)
	3. business	38 (10/26)	soft applied	3. arts, humanities and social sciences	soft pure	35 (6/17)
	4. biology and chemistry	32 (10/31)	hard pure	4. science	hard pure	27 (3/11)

The second chart reveals differences in responses between chairs and deans on "fundraising" and "generating revenue" specifically, and illustrates how the hard applied disciplines and fields of study are more strongly focused on these activities than the other disciplines and fields under the microscope for this study.

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[4] The numbers show the percentage response rate based on the number of respondents relative to the total population of respondents to the particular activity branch of the Likert scale in the question for both chair and dean surveys. For example, for "fundraising", 40 per cent of chair respondents (23 of the 57 who answered) representing medicine give this activity the highest rating among the 45 listed activities in the question.

[5] According to the Biglan, Kolb and Becher taxonomies.

[6] Based on internal response rates conflating the "important" and "very important" categories on the Likert scale associated with these activities.

In the interviews, the majority of chairs and deans indicated that "fundraising" and "generating revenue" are becoming increasingly important in the work of a chair but not at a level that is demanding or demanded of them – although several said this is "coming". In the survey, chairs indicated that these two activities are among the lowest sources of change in their work, making either "no difference" or a "small difference" during their current term as chair. However, "financial matters", covering budgets, are rated second in the list of 10 specified changes in the current term, following "departmental planning" and ahead of "cost-efficient and effective delivery of programs, research and services".

A surprising outcome related to financial matters concerns business chairs, the majority of whom rate these activities the lowest relative to most other disciplines being analyzed more closely. In the survey, less than a third of chairs of business[7] report "fundraising" skills. In the interviews, one business chair reported not having active input in the budget process. Six other chairs in other disciplines interviewed reported a similar situation. Two business chairs reported marginal involvement in the business management of their own units.

"Fundraising" and "generating revenue" also scored lowest in importance as areas for professional development and training – the last two of 16 listed subjects in the survey. Less than 10 per cent of all chair respondents said they are "important" activities. The most important areas are "handling faculty, staff issues", "leadership" and "handling student issues".

Moreover, "financial management" was rated the lowest by chairs among a suggested list of 10 required skills, traits and attributes. About a quarter of survey respondents said this know-how is "important" to their work.

And "financial management and budgets" is rated as only "moderately demanding" by less than half of chair survey respondents (about 40 per cent) asked to evaluate the areas of difficulty and challenges of their job.

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[7] They represent 50 per cent of the total business chair population. Fifty-eight chairs of business across 43 universities were sent the survey, 29 responded.

Several factors may be at play in these results that are not identified in this study. One has to do with institutional fundraising activity, which was not a subject of any survey or interview questions. Another relates to macro economic conditions having an immediate impact on the institution's operations, including student enrollments; amount and type of research activity and financial support; faculty and administrative staff recruitment, retention and attrition; infrastructure improvements and academic program expansion. Also not known are the financial situation of the individual universities, their grant/tuition structure and flow of government subsidies.

On the first point, it is not known whether the universities were in a fundraising mode at the time the survey was administered and the interviews were carried out, as active campaigns have a tendency to raise awareness of the financial imperatives – and constraints – guiding the university-wide crusades that are typically widely promoted across the faculties and schools and the community at large.

Second, the data were collected over a period of continued economic growth in the spring and summer of 2008, and completed just at the cusp of a dramatic economic downturn, although it may be argued that the decline began to take root and signals were evident early in 2008. Nevertheless, were the same questions to be asked two years later, say, would the outcomes be similar or different? What is the impact on the department chair of the severe financial stresses brought on by the global recession materializing in full force in early fall 2008? In particular, would "fundraising" and "revenue generation" move up as priorities – that is, as mandated and measurable obligations of chairs in all the disciplines and fields across all the universities included in this study?

8. FUTURE RESEARCH

It would be instructive to know whether the acute fiscal strains emerging after this research was completed have any bearing on the chair's roles and responsibilities and if so, how the chairs are preparing to meet the new obligations.

Ultimately, a blunt question must be asked: In the difficult financial circumstances that have characterized the academy for several decades and more currently amid a massive economic meltdown and escalating uncertainty worldwide, can

universities in Canada continue to rely on well-intentioned amateur, albeit intellectually gifted, administrators to operate what is commonly viewed as the university's heartland? In other words, it is better for a chair to be an academic who knows more about the field of knowledge than about administration, or for the chair to be a professional manager who knows little about the specific field and more about the job of department chair?

9. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ten recommendations for change in seven categories are proposed as a result of the study. Following are the key proposals:

- Combining compatible disciplines in like fields headed by one unit chair and providing professional administrative support for technical matters requiring paperwork related to compliance with regulatory reporting (financial, programming, planning, and so forth), among other administrative tasks.

- Connecting administrators to build trust, notably, among the university president/principal, vice-presidents, deans and chairs through regular informal gatherings that inspire genuine dialogue in a setting that is comfortable and easily accessible and at a time that is as mutually convenient as possible, ensuring that this does not become another imposition or chore.

- Embracing chairs in the university's formal structure typified by a posted organization chart. These schemas usually do not include chairs and sometimes do not even include deans.

- Building buddy systems that provide collegial support through discipline-specific groupings that include chairs from all universities where the field is practiced. Certain disciplines already run such organizations. Institutionalizing formal mentoring systems within a university is not widely favoured by participants in this study.

- Encouraging universities to canvass all of their chairs and deans to determine specific preferences for professional development and training. Custom tailored, "just in time" workshops on critical issues appear to be favoured by study

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participants, a large number of whom consider training support run by human resources generally to be onerous and time consuming.

- Ensuring seamless transitions by identifying potential candidates for the chair's job years in advance of the need to replace an incumbent, not simply at the time the selection process kicks in, typically, a few months before the current chair's term ends.

10. CLOSING COMMENT

The study generated thousands of pieces of data, hundreds of individual items for analysis, and numerous suggestions for change in a variety of areas, in particular, to improve the selection process and support for chairs. The intention here is to explain the purpose and the unique features of the study, to highlight the main findings and to focus on the more surprising outcomes. The full dissertation – 540 pages – will be available online through ProQuest Dissertations and Theses and Theses Canada Portal (Library and Archives Canada) early 2010.

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