Mapping Technologies’ Impact on a Professional Program Chair’s Workload

Randy Howe
rhowe@fitchburgstate.edu

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Objective(s) of the Presentation: Participants will:

Participants to this brown bag lunch will:

a) provide feedback to a concept model of chair and faculty duties
b) share experiences with other chairs and administrators as to where the chair’s time is being spent today
c) offer opinions on how to prioritize a department chair’s time
d) speculate on the future of the chair position

Description of the Presentation
The “ivory tower” stereotype often associated with higher education appears all but irrelevant today with department chair practices emerging as more open, assessed, and accountable to its publics than ever before, a shift that appears to be driven in-part by the demand for need it now information made possible by mobile technologies and improved data gathering systems. In this brown bag lunch presentation, a concept model built under the guidelines of Brown¹ will be presented (a segment is shown below) to reflect on an effort that seeks answers to the question of whether or not advanced procedures, data collection, reporting techniques, structures, and technologies have lived up to the hype of reducing department chair workloads; making respective administrative tasks easier while enriching scholarly lives. Because of perceived negative responses of department chairs to the additional work created by these advances, a null hypothesis is explored. This is to say that the advent of such tools such as course management systems, instituting a Dean reporting structure, enhancing advising systems, creating seat management and classroom allocation systems and so on has done little to make the chair role simpler, but in fact has raised the complexity of their work, hypothetically limiting the time that they have for tasks more closely related to the department’s subject matter.

For the record, the model for review works outward from a faculty role circle, a role of which the chair is a part, to the roles and technologies of the past, rippling outward to the present with speculation on the future. It is created with the aid of other chairs and their recollections of the work environment in addition to data gleaned from the literature. The impetus comes from a personal initiative of the presenter to make procedures more efficient for future department chairs, thereby making the position more attractive for those who could fulfill the role. In this the current chair has assembled a full list of yearly activities with links to procedural information as job aids in the course management system Blackboard (see below).

This task list will be provided with the concept model as handout. Discussions will be limited to only a few strands based upon participant preference. Possibilities may include processes for student portfolio review, course advising, assessment, self-studies, day-to-day work, faculty evaluations, links to the field, and teaching. Attendees should be able to respond nostalgically while considering where we are and where we are going. The promise of new academic program models that are more diligently and expeditiously aligned to professional fields, bringing faster knowledge transfer between faculty and field, such as blogs, social networks, and professional learning communities, are possible discussion points. A key question however is whether or not expanding administrative expectations drag this down. Participants will be asked to describe how specific changes have or have not advanced their ability to manage their department’s effectively without losing sight of the larger picture.