



**TASK FORCE ON
DEPARTMENTS AND CHAIRS**
Recommendations

MARCH 2022

Report of the Task Force on Department and Chairs

The Viability and Rationale for Returning to a Chair/Department Structure at Kean University

Spring 2022 Semester

Task Force Membership


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Introduction

This Task Force was charged with the responsibility to review the question of whether Kean University would be best served by returning to a university leadership structure that is prominent in most universities in the U.S. and abroad, the structure of Chairpersons elected by colleagues in their respective departments for a specified leadership term. We offer this preliminary report to be as transparent as we can with the larger Kean Community about our process in the consideration of changes to academic leadership and structure. We seek to assure all that we take this charge very seriously and understand the importance of any recommendation(s) we may make at the end of this process.

In [2010](#), Kean University was reorganized, and the position of Chair was eliminated and replaced by a unit leader with the title of Executive Director. The term “department” was also mostly replaced by the terms “program” or “School.” This reorganization was applied to almost the entire University, with a few exceptions (Department of History, Department of Occupational Therapy, Department of Counselor Education, Department of Educational Leadership. The aforementioned maintained chair models apart from the School of Health and Human Performance which had an Executive Director and an Assistant Chair*). 

This reorganization removed the collegial department administration and mentoring system provided by Chairs, who were elected by their department peers to this post for a specified term, and replaced it with Executive Directors (EDs), who were exclusively management and appointed by the administration. Executive Directors were solely administrators; some were former Kean Chairs, while others were recruited specifically from the outside for this management position. Some EDs had faculty rank, while others were not offered faculty rank. A review of current EDs will show significant disparities in experience, degrees, and scholarship. The Task Force recognizes with appreciation the commitment and tireless efforts by our Executive Directors to further the mission of this institution over the past twelve years. As the Task Force has been working on this proposal of returning to Chairs and Department structures, we have been assured by the administration that, in transitioning individuals from the Executive Director title, no one will lose a position at Kean University.

With the advent of a new President, a new Provost and a new leadership team at the University, a Full Professors group over the 2020-2021 academic year began to discuss what changes would help to move the University forward to help realize the goal of achieving R2 status. One of those

changes, a return to the Chair and Department structure, became a [suggestion](#) offered to the President and Provost for consideration, with the belief that such a structure would provide for increased faculty mentoring, more emphasis on scholarship and grants, and a renewed commitment to excellence in teaching, all necessary elements as the University works to achieve R2 status. At the heart of this recommendation is faculty mentoring and the provision of formative guidance. The current ED/School model does not include specific guidelines for mentoring faculty as part of the responsibilities inherent in this management schema.

Administratively, the A328 process, which occurs every 5 years, is the only process currently where faculty teaching, research and service is evaluated holistically, beyond the student course and instructor evaluation which takes place every semester. So, if a faculty member could benefit from mentoring support focused on scholarship, or research, or teaching, or service, such support would not occur formally in a timely, reflexive, or systematic manner. In the current structure absent Chairs, this kind of mentoring would have to come from the Dean of a given College or a respected colleague.

The strength of the Chairs model is that mentoring is collegial, ongoing, and may provide a summative review at the end of each year for each department, reflecting on scholarship, teaching, and service as a means of establishing individual and departmental goals for the following academic year. In reviewing the resource materials about the role of the Chair, several models acknowledge that the Chair's role includes components of evaluation and mentorship.

Should the Chair's role be that of a rating officer, that would require conversations with the KFT and the development of a Letter of Agreement that would be informed by consultation with key constituent groups on campus.

Further, as we prepare for accreditation visits and an effort to reach R2 status, our current organization with Executive Directors and the absence of departments, is significantly different from most comparative peer institutions; this can have a significant impact on how we are viewed by outside agencies.

As we look to hire up to 50 new faculty per year, systematic mentoring in a collegial department environment is the key to their success and retention. Chairs should be engaged in providing mentoring and formative guidance (as indicated in the Provost's [tasking document](#)). While the role of the Chair is complex, it is so much more than managing the administrative process (see Chairs Task Force website with varied readings on the [Role of the Chair](#)). The role of "collegial mentor" and department "cheerleader" is what has been seemingly lost over the past twelve years. Restoration to departments and election of Chairs would give faculty an added level of investment and "voice" in how their academic home, and more broadly this University, is managed.

Task Force Scope of Work

The [Task Force](#) met and selected three Co-Chairs (two experienced full professors with Chair experience and an experienced administrator from the Office of Academic Affairs) at its first meeting on November 15, 2021. A recommendation to return to the Chairs' and Department structure would require detailed inquiry in the following topics:

- the viability of returning to a Chair/Department structure
- the role of the Chair with respect to scholarship and mentoring of faculty, lecturers and assigned staff.
- the election of Chairs, qualifications necessary to be a Chair, and rules governing the term of service.

- the assessment of current school and program structures to determine effective transition to departments and to make recommendations with respect to transitions. including number of faculty in a given department, number of students served, program coordination, resources, and providing the necessary training apriori for Chairs to be successful.
- preliminary discussions with the KFT and CWA on an array of issues that a return to Chairs and Departments would require.
- the creation of a [resources depository](#) that collects readings, guides, and manuals from other universities relative to each of the areas of inquiry.
- Finally, if a return to chairs and departments is recommended by the Task Force, a timeline for implementation of this initiative should be provided, along with wider recommendations that address the unique differences across colleges, programs and accreditation requirements.
- These areas of inquiry come directly from the Provost's charge in our initial meeting on November 15, 2021 and the [tasking document](#) that the Task Force received from Dr. David Birdsell on February 18, 2022. As a result, we established and organized working groups to address these issues.

Task Force Working Group Assignments and Members

Working Groups began meeting in early January, and the Provost asked that we provide recommendations on the possible return to Chairs and Department structures by the end of March 2022. The Working Group assignments and task force members who signed on to these tasks are as follows:

Working Group 1 – to identify pros and cons of returning to chairs with respect to department administration (enrollment growth, sustainability, curriculum development, student success, budget, institutional visibility, administrative coverage during summer months, etc.) and to make an initial recommendation to the larger group.

Group 1 Lead: Joy Moskovitz
Member 1: Marshall Hayes

Member 2: Jessica Adams

Working Group 2 – to consider the responsibilities of the chair with respect to mentorship of faculty, lecturers, staff, and other department members (such as scholarly productivity, grant development, teaching effectiveness, service, ARTP membership, etc.) and to discuss this with the task force.

Group 2 Lead: Susan Polirstok

Member 1: Roxie James

Member 2: Craig Donovan

Working Group 3 – to consider the length of the elected term and rules governing election of chairs (including minimum chair requirements) and re-election and make recommendations; to consider evaluation of chairs and the process that should be followed.

Group 3 Lead: Brid Nicholoso

Member 1: Verneda Hamm-Baugh

Member 2: Ed Johnston

Working Group 4 – Assess current School and program structure to determine effective transition to departments (considering enrollment) and suggestions for parameters that would lead to an Assistant Chair position (and other administrative resources). To assess existing faculty membership within current structures to determine if appropriate representation exists to fill any upcoming Chair position (with consideration for current Executive Directors and appropriate pathways within the institution). To make recommendations regarding when the new structure should go into effect, and what training should be provided to newly elected chairs prior to the start of the elected term.

Group 4 Lead: Laurie Knis-Matthews

Member 1: Tom Lateano

Member 2: David Hogsette

After the initial working group meetings, it was recognized that additional focus was needed for Wenzhou-Kean University (WKU) recommendations and planning. Academic leadership at Kean USA and WKU agreed to consider a different approach and/or different sequencing for the two campuses. As a result, a similar (though separate) body for WKU will be established after the initial recommendations by the Task Force are reviewed by the Provost.

Task Force Actions Post Data Review Prior to Recommendations Being Made

As the Task Force continued to do its work, many faculty, Executive Directors, and staff reached out with questions. The Task Force clearly understands the anxiety that this discussion of new structures and leadership may engender. Given this, the Task Force scheduled a [Virtual Community Meeting](#) to discuss our process, request feedback, and to hear any questions and concerns from faculty, staff and current EDs. The Community Meeting took place on Thursday, February 24th, from 3:30-4:30 p.m. The Task Force also set up an electronic form where

additional questions from the campus community can be posted at any time. Please see this [link](#) for the list of questions and comments related to the Task Force's work. Participation in the Virtual Community Meeting included 120 faculty and staff members. The Task Force was very pleased to have this level of participation from the campus community and recognizes just how important shared governance and collegiality is to the campus community. Further, Task Force Co-Chairs reached out by email to each Executive Director to offer an opportunity to speak with each one of them regarding any questions, concerns or feedback they would like to offer. Preliminary discussions also took place with the KFT, CWA, faculty, Assistant Chairs, and former Chairs individually and in small groups.

The ongoing work of the Task Force has given rise to a list of topics that would require discussions with the KFT about changes in roles. This list is being carefully developed and will be shared with the KFT to begin the necessary conversations about our shared vision for Kean University and about how to bring about such structural changes. For certain, already negotiated agreements regarding the size of ARTP Committees and faculty participation on University-wide Committees will offer some guidance on the minimum number of faculty required to constitute a department.

The University Senate has a consultative role to play with respect to any changes to academic structure . It is anticipated that one of the charges of the recommended Implementation Task Force will be to bring substantive academic structural changes to the Senate for discussion, recommendations, and approval as one of the many constituent groups on campus that will require consultation prior to implementation ([University Curriculum Committee Manual, 2017](#)).

Duties of the Chair

The duties of the chair have been drawn from research articles and handbooks which have been gathered by the Task Force and appear in our resource [folder](#).

- According to Iris Berdrow (2010), the role of the chair is described in 6 categories of duties. Among these categories are “Operations/Administration, Communication/Representation, Climate Enhancement, Student Development, Faculty Development and Catalyst/Innovation” (p. 505). In another model proposed by Weaver, Ely, Dickson, and DellAntonio (2019), a different set of categories are proposed that include Department Governance, Instruction, Faculty Affairs, Student Affairs, External Communication, Budget and Resources, Office Management and Professional Development. Finally, Jones (2011) suggested yet a different set of labels including: Administrator/Supervisor, Instructor, Trainer and Teacher, Mediator and Negotiator, Representative and Politician, Communicator, Motivator, Developer and Planner, Evaluator and Assessor, Recruiter, Manager, Problem Solver, Facilitator, Leader, and Survivor.

While the language is different in all three models highlighted, the roles and responsibilities are consistent and overlap. To be effective in the Chair’s role, there has to be close communication between the Chair and the College Dean, to ensure that agreed goals and objectives for the Department are being met and resources are adequate to accomplish targeted goals. The Dean is the direct supervisor of the Department Chair, providing guidance, evaluation and mentorship/support to ensure effective leadership of the department and achievement of University goals.

Using the Berdrow (2010) categories with overlays from the other two models, this is what the chairs’ duties would entail:

- Operations/Administration (budget, evaluation, recruitment, reports, resource allocation, scheduling, office and staff/office management, student administration, & governance). To this category, the Task Force would like to add data management and analysis as per the American Council on Education (ACE), as the growing volume of data will require someone with analytic skills.
- Communication/Representation (communications link between the department and others, represent the department within the college and across the university, manage flow of information in the department)
- Climate Enhancement (build department culture, crisis and conflict management, monitor day to day life of the department, meet leadership needs, motivator, evaluator, developer and planner, facilitator, leader, & supporter of campus wide initiatives)
- Student Development (advising, conflict mediation, outreach, recruitment)
- Faculty Development (mentor faculty, support scholarship, support teaching, provide professional development, help to set yearly goals for the department as a whole and individually for each faculty member). It is this important component of faculty development and mentoring, of formative guidance, which sets apart the difference between a managerial process and a collegial process, missing at Kean since the inception of the Executive Director model.
- Catalyst/Innovation (lead departmental administration of college mission, mobilize departmental resources, link faculty internally and externally, stimulate curriculum, develop possible grant projects, and other innovations)

The duties of the Chair, as detailed above, are best understood in the context of:

- 1) current language used at Kean to describe the roles of both Chair and Executive Director; and
- 2) how these roles are characterized across comparison New Jersey Institutions (see tables below).

First of all, the detailed language previously applied at Kean to [both positions](#) indicates a substantial degree of overlap in terms of articulating job responsibility and function. The link above references the language that we have historically used at Kean, and word-by-word comparisons of the roles and responsibilities suggest that almost all of the core language was retained after the 2010 transition, likely for reasons of consistency, continuity and convenience. The wording of the respective roles and responsibilities of Chairs and Executive Directors, as described in Kean documentation, are similar, if not identical in some places; however the implementation of these roles were markedly different. Furthermore, an emphasis on faculty mentoring and the establishment and maintenance of a collegial working environment - two targeted objectives that are highlighted in the present Task Force report - are noticeably lacking in both sets of Kean position descriptions. At institutions across [New Jersey](#), the language used to describe the roles and responsibilities of Chairs, Assistant Chairs and Executive Directors (as applicable) varies widely. We examined documents that are available online from Fairleigh Dickinson University, Montclair State University, Rutgers University, Stockton University and William Paterson University and aligned specific language with the modified Berdrow (2010) framework from page 9 of this report. Of the six duties and responsibilities referenced in that framework, it is apparent that, across the board, our collective academic language tends to neglect the themes of Climate Enhancement, Faculty Development and Catalysis/Innovation when describing Chair roles and responsibilities. To our credit at Kean, the language that we use to describe Roles and Responsibilities of Chairs is comparatively detailed and specific, particularly in the context of Operations and Administration, relative to the language used at other institutions. Nonetheless, referring to the roles that the Chairs should play in promoting Climate Enhancement and Faculty Development, such wording is clearly absent from those Kean documents used in this comparison. In the context of our current initiative, the implication is

that these two themes should be considered unrealized priorities as we work to redefine the duties and functions of Chairs moving forward.

Duties of the Assistant Chair (if applicable)

The Task Force reviewed [assistant chair qualifications and responsibilities](#) across other Universities (Stockton University, Appalachian University, West Liberty University, Kent State University, Southern Utah). The roles and responsibilities of assistant chairs were difficult to locate due to the vague or incomplete information listed on many of these websites. The six universities were identified in terms of the reporting structure, how appointed, term limits, teaching loads, administrative responsibilities, and qualifications. Common to all these six assistant chair positions are term limits and tenure ranking.

Assistant Chairs at Kean University

There are currently three contracted [assistant chairs](#) at Kean University. Two of the three assistant chairs do not have a chairperson in their department. All assistant chairs have different rankings including assistant, associate and full professor; some have earned tenure. According to the KFT, most assistant chairs have between three- six credits of released time based on past practices, or are compensated by overload credits, as the union has not formally negotiated this position.

Recommendations:

The Return to the Chair and Department Structure at Kean University Effective 7/1/2023 for Fall 2023 Implementation

In response to the inquiry process undertaken by the members of the Task Force on Departments and Chairs, the task force has determined that the return to Department and elected Chair

structure is in the best interest of the entire University. This recommendation is based on the belief that moving from a managerial structure to a collegial structure will pay dividends in terms of faculty mentoring for promotion and tenure success, design of innovative curricula and grant projects fostered by increased collaboration, and presentation of Kean University in the pursuit of accreditation and R2 status using a design and a structure broadly familiar to academia and accreditation/review teams. “The position of Department Chair enables a leader to work with faculty not as a lined supervisor, but rather as a senior colleague, helping to develop goals and implementation of plans regarding all aspects of teaching, research/creative works, and service. The special relationship between the chairperson and faculty members is formative and serves to provide development and mentorship especially for junior members” (See [Full Professors’ Letter to the Provost](#) dated August 2, 2021).

The recommendation to return to a Department and Chair structure includes:

- The creation of a department should consider many factors, which in turn should drive the number of faculty, with the intent to create parity across the Colleges. The creation of departments will allow Colleges to prioritize the needs of all encompassed programs, encourage discussion by faculty, staff and students, and may lead to reorganization.
- To be eligible to run for Chair, a faculty member must have reached at minimum, tenure and promotion to Associate Professor. The experience with both the tenure process and promotion process are essential to mentoring junior faculty.
- A return to Chair and Department structure with chairs elected by Department members to a 3-year term. No more than 2 consecutive elected terms should be permitted. In special circumstances, an additional term could be granted by the President. This term limited proposal is recommended to encourage leadership to develop broadly across the department over time.

- The duties of the chair would extend to 12 months, especially if a professional accreditation requires 12 month appointments. Chairs, as faculty, would receive salary for 10 months and then receive additional compensation for duties during the summer. In the event that a Chair is unable to serve in this role during July and August, a department representative could be appointed for designated summer hours and compensated for that service.
- Consistent with past practice at Kean University, Chairs would receive 6 credits of released time for their duties each semester. Should there be reasons for additional released time based on the criteria listed in the chart linked [here](#) or other such considerations, additional released time would have to be negotiated with the KFT.
- The proposed timeline includes Colleges to make recommendations based on faculty, staff, and student feedback by the end of the Spring 2022 semester. The Implementation Task Force would begin its work as soon as possible and during the summer of 2022. Possible pilot programs may be initiated beginning the Fall 2022 semester with full implementation for the University beginning Fall 2023 (noting resource needs and considerations for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2023).

Key Factors for Consideration in Design of Departments, Provision of Resources, and Implications for Reorganization

A new administration and new leadership should usher in different decision-making processes, a willingness to examine past patterns and decisions concerning the distribution of resources, and the extent to which reorganization should be considered.

Here are some questions pertinent to department redesign and resources: How large should a department be? What is the minimum size for a department to be viable? Should this be a “one size fits all” approach? Do different department disciplines operate more productively with larger numbers of faculty? Smaller numbers of faculty? What productivity measures for departments

should be in place? Who should these criteria be developed by? At what size/point should a department have one or more assistant chairs? Should some larger departments have more than one Assistant Chair? How do program coordinators factor into this department design? A [chart](#) has been developed by the Task Force to assist in consideration of these factors.

These department redesign decisions are very complex, especially in programs and schools that operate in a structure that have no Chairs or Executive Directors presently. Based on the age of newly developed programs and schools, some have very few tenured faculty and an array of professional programs managed by program coordinators. In this structure, program coordinators report directly to the Dean and Associate Dean and must ensure that accreditation standards by different accrediting bodies for each of these distinctive programs are met. Clearly determining how to redesign this unit structure will require a great deal of thought about establishing a Chair's role, or whether appointing an Assistant Chair would be justified, and whether the limited, untenured, junior faculty in programs like this can be elected to a chair's position given that the Task Force is proposing that to be elected as a Chair one should have achieved tenure and the rank of Associate Professor.

It is precisely this level of complexity that has prompted the Task Force's recommendation that design of departments needs to come directly from each College's faculty, staff and students to ensure that the uniqueness of programs, schools, and/or departments be carefully considered by faculty, staff and students who will be directly impacted by these decisions.

Engaging Colleges in the Design of Departments

Rather than recommending a centralized administrative approach to the questions raised above, the Task Force believes that every voice is important and there should be an opportunity to drive these changes not in a "top-down" fashion, but in a "bottom-up" process that embraces the entire

University Community and demonstrates the true spirit of “shared governance.” The Task Force suggests that at the end of the Spring 2022 semester, each college’s faculty/staff and representative students (who have been educated on the expectations), be asked to discuss these important questions and propose a department structure and design that will work best in that College based on the [data gathered](#) for this report for formal implementation in Fall 2023. Engaging all faculty, staff and student voices in the discussion of re-establishing departments is essential to implementing change that will be transformative for each College. Matters of accreditation must be carefully considered in establishing these new structures in professional programs to comply with standards and requirements governing these programs. The Task Force was grateful for the opportunity to meet with representatives of these programs and created this abbreviated [table of relevant standards](#) for reference in planning.

As departments and programs typically experience faculty and leadership changes as part of the ebb and flow of academic life, there may be opportunities to implement a Chair/Department structure sooner than Fall 2023. Where there are leadership vacancies or programs that volunteer to serve as pilots, the University may choose to support these early transitions and gather preliminary data.

The return to the Department and Chair structure will require a comprehensive and systematic plan for training new incoming Chairs. As implementation of these recommendations gets underway, a detailed outline of the duties of the Chair must be carefully specified and training needs to be provided by a recognized national organization. Some organizations that can provide this training include: [The Chairs Academy](#) , [The American Council on Education \(ACE\)](#), and [the American Association of University Professors \(AAUP\)](#). Additional support will also be available through the developing Kean University Center for Teaching and Learning.

The final recommendation of the Task Force involves next steps. We strongly recommend that a new Implementation Task Force be created (building on the existing constituent group representation to also include CWA, students, and other identified groups) and to begin working as soon as possible, once each of the colleges (and programs) have had a chance to submit their recommended department design.

The Task Force appreciates being able to represent our respective Colleges, organizations, and offices, and the opportunity to work collectively with numerous groups across the Kean community to voice opinions and suggestions on this important matter in the spirit of shared governance. We look forward to transitioning our work and serving as a resource to the next Implementation Task Force.