Leadership Roles of Department Chairs

Key Points From Workshop

1. A 2-way communication link maintained between departments and Human Resources will make it easier to manage many of the issues department chairs face.
2. If a department chair sees something inappropriate or illegal, they need to become involved. Issues cannot go unaddressed in the hope they will just go away.
3. Department chairs should regularly conduct evaluations and document concerns. Beyond standard reviews, other mechanisms for documenting issues include letters of expectation and the use of e-mail to confirm what was discussed in individual and group meetings.

Other Points

- Department chairs need to have a willingness to address employee and student concerns. Some key words that department chairs must immediately act upon include discrimination, harassment, and accommodation.
- Department chairs should be familiar with evaluation processes for their department and college as well as any safety policies specific to the department.
- In investigations, the issues surrounding the incident are outlined. Information is then gathered on the location of the event, the supervision that had taken place, and the activities performed.
- Department chairs are not supervisors under PERC (PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS COMMISSION), BUT Civil Court Title VII (related to harassment and discrimination) permits department chairs to be considered as a supervisor. As a supervisor, department chairs become an administrator and the university becomes liable.
- Central Washington University will provide for the defense of a department chair in a lawsuit provided their activities were within the normal course of university business. Some examples of conduct falling outside this area includes stopping for a beer at a bar on a field trip with students and other types of egregious behavior.
- Department chairs currently have the responsibility and authority to evaluate on-line teaching practices (such as location of instruction, where faculty/student interactions such as office hours occur, etc). A university policy is currently being developed.
- When working with students on field trips, in research labs, and in machine shops, it is important to ensure sufficient training is conducted for participants to minimize liability issues. There are no university wide forms used for these trainings. Available resources include working with Faculty Relations and Environmental Health and Safety.
- The student code of conduct pertains to on and off campus events, hence there is no requirement for additional guidelines governing the behavior of students during field trips, conference travel, and off-campus university travel. Additional guidelines can be used in conjunction with the student code of conduct, such as in travel authorizations and course syllabi.
- Disability accommodation. Advise sending individuals to disability services who document, evaluate, and facilitate accommodations for all employees and students.