

The Department Head Role Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do we determine who the department head will be and what if no one is willing or appropriate for the role?

Department heads are jointly appointed by the regional director and the local partner based on the recommendation of the regional director. The regional director determines the process used to engage colleagues in making the recommendation.

2. Newer educators may not have a full understanding of the political environment, historical knowledge of an issue or have the relationships in the community to fully understand and explain the broader issue to their program office. What happens if the program office provides advice to an educator in the office regarding an issue, but does not seek out additional information from the department head?

The “Great Start” effort should provide the foundation to mitigate these potential conflicts. Through the “Great Start” effort the department head and program area liaison are encouraged to work together and stay in close contact as the new colleague progresses, thus allowing for a collegial resolution to the issue.

3. What happens if the department head role becomes primary and educational programming becomes secondary? Will academic department and program office understand?

At times the department head role will become primary especially when addressing a budget or performance issue. The work will ebb and flow. If the balancing is becoming challenging and the department head is not able to meet expectations in programming and/or leading the office team, it is important to work with the academic department, program area and the regional director so alternatives can be developed.

4. Who does the department head report to?

The department head reports primarily to the regional director who conducts the annual performance review.

5. If the department head is having an issue with another educator’s performance, who do they go to--the regional director or Human Resource Development?

As the hiring authority for all colleagues in the region, the regional director is the first point of contact. It is better to approach the regional director as soon as issues begin to appear so that support for a colleague’s success can begin right away. Depending on the situation, the regional director will coach the department head on possible strategies and resources to engage. If performance is not satisfactory or behavior is an issue the regional director, program area, academic department and Human Resource Development will work together to discover

contributing factors and sort out various courses of action which may include professional development, performance improvement or non-renewal.

6. If a department head is having an issue and seeks the advice of a regional director, will this be held against the department head during the Regional Director's annual performance review of the department head?

The regional director's role is to coach and support department heads and come to a course of action they can agree on. In this situation, performance is based on the department head's implementation of their duties under the agreed upon action plan.

7. What happens if a department head disagrees with the course of action of a regional director? Who does the department head go to- dean, associate dean, HRD, another regional director...?

Building the relationship with the regional director who represents the Dean is an important role for the department head. Hopefully discussions on courses of action can be collegial and the relationship will be one of give and take. Concerns over the actions of a regional director should be directed to the associate dean.

8. What type of reporting mechanism should there be from the department head to the regional director? Is no news good news or should there be periodic updates provided? In what form should this take?

Ongoing updates should be part of the department head and regional director working relationship. Periodic updates are encouraged and the form these take should be worked out between the department head and regional director.

9. How are performance issues with the department head dealt with? Is there a Performance Improvement Process for department heads?

Support for performance is provided to all colleagues. Depending on the nature of the situation the regional director will work with the department head and office team to support successful performance. The regional director responds to concerns by listening, seeking information and working with the department head and/or office team to implement action plans to improve the situation. If expectations are not met, individuals can be removed from the department head position.

10. If the county administration contacts the regional director or the dean's office directly regarding an issue in the county extension office, how is it handled? How will the department head be notified? What is the procedure and is it consistent across the regions? What happens if the issue is the department head?

Concerns regarding local extension offices are taken seriously and regardless of where the concern was originally directed, the regional director will first seek to understand. Depending on the concern, the regional director may choose to meet with local officials to better understand the issue and eventually determine how best to address the concern. In all likelihood the department head will be engaged by the regional director regardless if the issue is with the department head specifically or another colleague in the office. The regional director's goal is to be responsive and to strengthen the effectiveness of the office.

11. What happens if a county staff member in the office calls the regional office directly regarding an issue in the office? How is this handled?

Here again the regional director will seek first to understand. Depending on the issue, the regional director will coach the colleague on how they may resolve it and engage the department head. They may also be referred to the peer support network.

12. In Extension, you can ask the same question to five colleagues and get five different and sometimes conflicting answers. Whose advice should the department head follow?

This is a dilemma all Extension professionals eventually face. It is the responsibility of the Extension professional to make the best decision based on a multitude of factors. If it involves the functioning of the office and the expectations of the department head, it would be important to discuss the course of action with the regional director.

13. Does the department head have to follow the advice of the regional director? What happens if they don't?

The department head and the regional director will work to develop a relationship where honest discussions about the strengths and limitations regarding potential courses of action take place. It would also be wise to raise this question with the regional director before embarking on a plan of action that is not supported by the regional director. As an Extension employee, the department head should follow the established chain of communication and use the resources at hand to problem solve (peer support network, Human Resource Development, Life Matters, etc.).

14. What happens if the department head has an issue with a county employee in the office and the county is unwilling to do anything about it?

Bring the issue to the regional director and see if there is an alternative course of action.

15. What happens if there is a department head that does not operate in an inclusive environment and does not seek input from office colleagues? How is this monitored?

Office environments are monitored through the annual office environment survey, through observations by the regional director and through discussions between colleagues and the regional director. As regional directors we use these information points to help department heads pursue opportunities for growth.

16. Should the department head stipend be the same for all counties or should offices with larger staff get larger stipends?

This is a question we need to answer as a group. For most offices the stipend is the same.

17. What are the core competencies needed to be an effective department head?

Refer to the core competencies for department head document:

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/employeeresources/documents/Department%20Head%20Core%20Competencies%20and%20Performance%20Measures.pdf>

18. What happens if there is strife in the office and the department head is unable to handle it? Who do they turn to?

The regional director is the point of contact for issues in the office. The regional director can help develop a course of action and identify resources to help resolve the issue.

19. Is there peer support for department heads? Who is it?

There is no formal “peer support” for department heads though there are department heads on the Peer Support Network. A UW-Extension Google+ community exists and Department Heads are encouraged to ask questions and share resources via this page.

20. Where do department heads get information regarding 133 contracts and fringe benefits?

The Budget Office through Howard Fenton is the resource for 133 contracts and budget issues.

21. What type of professional development support is there for department heads? Is there funding available? Who do they ask?

There is support for department heads professional development through the regional office. Colleagues should explore their specific professional development goals with the regional director through the annual performance review process. In addition, participating in the annual County Leadership Conference sharpens and updates leadership, management and administrative skills.

22. What happens if two educators in the office do not get along? Who does the department head turn to?

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