

## FACULTY-DEPARTMENT CHAIR TRANSITIONS: A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF STRESS EFFECTS

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### ABSTRACT

Given that 80% of university decisions are made at the department level, the role of department chairs is extremely critical and important for the success of an educational institution. However, the chair position has frequently been described as stressful, demanding, challenging, and ridden with conflict and ambiguity. Faculty, who are primarily academics and not trained as administrators, face unique challenges as they move (or are forced) into department chair positions. Transitioning *into* the role often involves reframing relationships with long-time colleagues. Transitioning *out* of the role also impacts not just relationships with colleagues but readjusting to the primary focus of the faculty position – teaching and research. The objective of this paper is to come up with a set of testable propositions pertaining to stress experienced by faculty as they transition into and out of the department head position. Drawing upon existing research we posit that the stress could be of

two kinds, administrative and academic, depending upon the source of such stress. We argue that faculty will experience different levels of these two types of stress depending on the career path they plan on following.

We propose that compared to full professors, associate professors who serve as department chairs will experience higher levels of administrative and academic stress. Also, compared to chairs who plan to stay in administrative positions indefinitely, chairs who plan to revert back to full-time academic appointments will experience higher levels of administrative and academic stress. Finally, for limited-duration chairs, there will be a positive correlation between tenure (as chair) and academic stress and a negative correlation between tenure (as chair) and administrative stress. Implications of these propositions and directions for future research are discussed.