THE INTERNAL CONFLICT EXPERIENCED BY
PUBLIC COMMUNITY COLLEGE ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

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DISСERТATION
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Organization and Leadership
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2010

Urbana, Illinois

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Abstract

The focus of this research is the conflicted nature of the lived experience of public community college academic department chairs. In many colleges, department chairs are faculty chosen by colleagues and/or administration. Once selected, chairs assume supervisory responsibilities. The duality of this colleague-supervisor role has the potential for internal conflict. Also, in fulfilling responsibilities to departmental faculty, administration, staff, students, and the wider community, chairs have increased likelihood of experiencing internal conflict. This study explored the essence of department chair internal conflict, also its manifestations, chair tasks that generate it, and how chairs perceive and describe themselves.

This qualitative study used the methodology of phenomenological human science inquiry. Through analysis of organizational plans of Illinois public community colleges, department chairs representing the phenomenon of being faculty-colleagues elevated to the chair role were identified. Six participants were selected from four colleges. Data gathered from the six participants through a series of four topical-guided one-on-one in-person interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Data interpretation followed the procedures of phenomenological human science inquiry blended with qualitative interview analysis. Results confirmed that one of the effects on chairs of their being chairs is the experience of internal conflict, which can emerge during the process of living the chair role. Internal conflict for chairs was determined to be the clash of daily tasks and requirements against the goals and intentions of chairs for themselves and their departments; and the essence of this internal conflict was found to be the chairs’ lack of
decision power and authority to control resources that would make it possible for them to fulfill their responsibilities according to their standards.

The study also uncovered themes of the chair lived experience, descriptions of tasks that generate internal conflict for chairs, behaviors by which chairs reveal the presence of internal conflict and attempt to cope with it, and chairs’ perceptions and descriptions of themselves. The study concludes that it is not likely that all internal conflict for chairs can be or should be eliminated, and it discusses implications for modifying the chair experience to reduce the negative effect of internal conflict.

This research contributes to the field of higher education by deepening researchers’, practitioners’, and policy makers’ understandings of department chairs’ lived experience. Resulting information will be useful to higher education administrators, to prospective or aspiring chairs contemplating the personal cost of chairmanship, to training planners aiming to equip neophyte chairs, and as comforting encouragement to distressed chairs struggling to understand and resolve daily internal conflicts.
To my Parents who taught me to love and respect others,
To my Husband and Sisters who encouraged me to complete this task,
To my Faculty for giving me the magnificent opportunity to serve them,
To my Sons for inspiring me, And to Jason
Acknowledgements

When a writer concludes a work such as this one, the sigh of relief that one feels is swiftly followed by an overwhelming sense of gratitude that the work is done. When the restful moments that follow permit reflection on the entire process, one realizes how much help and support one has received and how that support was absolutely essential to the final result. I need to thank so very many people.

I will begin simply with my wonderful teachers over the years who made learning a joyful adventure for me. They provided rigorous instruction in atmospheres that challenged and encouraged me. Where I excelled, I was praised; where I faltered I was supported to ultimately experience the courage that taught me that a fear confronted is a fear overcome. Also contributing to my growth, and the quality of this project, have been the thousands of students and colleagues whom I have had the privilege to serve during the years that I taught in and chaired my department at Harold Washington College. I learned many lessons of leadership, perspective, negotiation, and restraint through myriad situations that required my best efforts.

The adventure of this doctoral study has been to me an explanation of my professional life in the community college and an opportunity to reflectively appreciate its meaning and significance. For that magnificent experience and for all their instruction and guidance, I thank all of my professors in the Community College Executive Leadership Program. Also, the personal growth that I have achieved has been possible in part because I had a wonderful cohort of enthusiastic classmates who taught me to rely on them, as they could rely on me. Among them, Kelly and Wendy were particularly supportive at critical moments.
At home I have been encouraged and supported by my dear husband Hulon, who is probably even more excited at my concluding this effort than I am. Having travelled this doctoral road before me, perhaps he was just eager for me to experience what he had found to be special personal and professional rewards of very special work. When I was fearful or angry or depressed or disgusted, he gave me comfort, direction, and space; and when I made intermediate strides, he congratulated me and encouraged me to continue to the next task.

My sisters have been my cheerleaders in the entire effort. They have urged me forward from the very beginning. Glorianne was always sure that I could do anything that I decided to do. Marilyn helped me especially by reading and criticizing my work, explaining to me in ways that I could understand precisely why I had to do as I was being directed. Our parents, Theodore and Eileen Greene, would be so very proud that we three have continued their legacies of love, academic progress, social commitment, and graceful living.

Lastly, I want to thank my committee, especially my advisor and dissertation director, Dr. Debra Bragg. I appreciate deeply their careful reading of my work in so many iterations and the patience with which they have guided me through the process of concluding this work. I see now that I can repay these debts of gratitude by holding high the torch that has been passed to me.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Academic department chairpersons occupy a position of trust and responsibility in the organizational structure of most colleges. Whether the setting is a small liberal arts or technical college, a large public or private university, or a community college—the focus of interest for this study—department chairs perform a unique service that is fairly similar from one institution to another (Duryea, 2000). When information must be communicated to faculty, the chair acts as conduit. When new college policy is to be explained and/or implemented, the chair mobilizes support and leads the initiative. When students seek redress of grievances (real or imagined) they turn, or are directed to, a department chair. Thus, in receiving assignments from above the position of faculty and from below it, the department chair wrestles with issues, seeks solutions, and negotiates terms for the betterment of the college, the department, and the students; and in the process of performing required tasks, the faculty member who becomes department chairperson may experience tension, stress, and internal conflict.

It is important to clarify the meaning of internal conflict as used in the context of this study. It is used here to denote the most intense of feelings on a continuum from tension through stress to internal conflict. Tension is understood as ordinary, appropriate, temporary oppositional force that creates energy necessary for human or physical action (Drucker, 1993). Extending beyond simple tension, stress is understood to be a feeling of imbalance resulting from unresolved tension that does not abate when the source of tension is removed, in humans becoming internalized as persistent stress (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; May & McBeath, 1993). Conflict, the most extreme of the feelings on this
continuum, is taken as a persistent internal struggle within the person of the department chair among opposing goals, inclinations, aspirations, and purposes—all entities to which the chair has committed him- or herself—resulting in what is identified in this study as internal conflict. This study assumes that academic department chairs, specifically community college academic department chairs, experience this internal conflict based on their status described by Tucker (1981) as “first among equals” (p. 4).

The department chair is a faculty member; but for the majority of academic matters in the college, he or she is the interstitial tissue that connects theory to practice, policy to performance, goals to outcomes, as it has been determined that 80% of all administrative decisions in higher education are made at the department level (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Gmelch & Miskin, 1993). As leaders of their departments, department chairs impact the quality of academia and American higher education.

**Context of the Problem**

The primary function of department chairs is to perform the role of **departmental leader**. Chairs are first among their peers. They represent their peers. If a phalanx of department members were spread horizontally and they directed all their professional energies toward the center of the line, the energy moving closer and closer to center would create two powerful forces that would meet in the center, not to clash or explode, but to propel the person in the center out of the plane of the line and forward. This one who emerges can be seen or taken to represent the department. Imbued with the collective professional energies of his or her colleagues, this is the chairperson, whose role it is to lead the department.
The many tasks and responsibilities of department chairs will be highlighted later in this discussion, but it is appropriate here to consider the meaning of leadership as it relates to the role of department chairs. Burns (1978) defines leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations—of both leaders and followers” (p. 19). Here leadership does not prescribe a condition or status, but describes a process of voluntary participatory engagement between leader and followers, such that common goals are achieved. This denotation of leadership as process is key to understanding its function in an academic department, where the leader’s first responsibility is to set, define, and articulate a departmental vision and then work to help faculty become more productive in actualizing that vision (Gardner, 1990).

For a definition more closely related to a college setting and details, Leaming (2007) takes a more practical approach than Burns (1978) and defines leadership as the ability to motivate others to take certain courses of action, to persuade others that prescribed tasks must be done on time and in a particular way, and to gain and retain the respect of others, especially those with whom one works or associates. (p. 31)

Leaming further describes other general leadership assignments for department chairs as (a) orchestrating change and planning for the future; (b) obtaining and allocating funds; (c) caring for the curriculum; (d) supporting research and development activities; (e) working with students; (f) mentoring faculty and serving as a role model; and (g) making the department a pleasant workplace. Leaming’s stated focus here is a university setting; yet community college chairs are responsible for each of these categories, including research. Community colleges are increasingly being encouraged to provide research-based curriculum (Morest & Jenkins, 2007).
The definition of leadership by Kouzes and Posner (1995) is quite succinct and points clearly to the main tasks of department chairs: “the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations” (p. 30). The words in this succinct phrase vibrate with meaning. The meaning could be expanded and dramatically expressed as follows. Leadership is an art, a somewhat indefinable mystery. Others, the followers, will be mobilized, to function as an army, sometimes under attack. They will struggle voluntarily, unselfishly working beyond reasonable expectations. All will aspire, breathing as one until the work is done. This expanded definition of leadership could be taken as verbal expression of ideal department chair functioning, regardless of task, setting, or circumstance.

Within their departments, academic chairpersons need to be sensitive to and responsive to the goals, priorities, and expectations of several opposing forces. Whereas there is general agreement that the primary purpose of a college is the education of its students (Bennett, 1998), the various constituencies who make up the college—administration, faculty, clerical, staff, and students—see the institution from different perspectives and attach differing and varying ranges of value to the many elements essential to college functioning. While some institutions may be fairly egalitarian in their functioning—decisions being achieved primarily through democratic process—other institutions and community college districts function through a more bureaucratic, heavily hierarchical process. In such bureaucratic, hierarchical environments, numerous (frequently opposing) constituencies turn to department chairs for assistance in carrying out constituent agendas (Goldenberg, 1993; Tucker, 1992). This hierarchical environment
is the presumed setting for this study, and the examples below demonstrate how each constituency becomes a potential source of internal conflict for the department chair.

College presidents and their administrative teams exert pressure on department chairs. College administrators are responsible for implementing policies set by governing boards and making decisions to ensure that set policies are not violated (Westmeyer, 1990). Administrators provide leadership in creating and carrying out institutional missions; they secure, allocate, and manage resources; and they maintain viable relationships with constituencies inside and outside the institution (Green & McDade, 1991). Also, all too often, administrators are called upon and accept the challenge to manage an institution at levels of efficiency and efficacy that demonstrate, not singularly-purposed academic development of students, but the latest business-oriented management systems and processes (Birnbaum, 2000). To function successfully in such political climates, administrators often follow principles of economy that wring from every dollar the greatest amount of visible, sometimes specious, appreciated good (Stone, 2002). For such administrators, high enrollments, good public relations, and zero controversy are supreme values. Regardless of the effect of these management practices and policies on student academic achievement, these administrators expect department chairs to cooperate fully in achieving their political goals (Miller, 1999). Thus, department chairs absorb the competing goals and may experience internal conflict.

College faculty, who seek to awaken in students an excitement for a chosen academic discipline, have primary interests that often conflict with those of administrators and pull department chairs in yet another direction. For example, some faculty expect chairs to eschew business pressures and to champion academic causes
Faculty who feel obliged to tailor inquiry to the talents and preparation of particular students lobby their chairpersons for small classes because in small classes individual student needs can more easily be determined and incorporated into instructors’ work, as well as supported in class discussions (Bennett, 1998). However, smaller classes require more sections, more classrooms, more faculty, more materials—all of which run counter to the administrative urgency for fiscal economy. Thus, chairs are pressured by faculty to defend the wishes of faculty, even as faculty prove themselves vulnerable to their characterization by administration as “self-interested, unconcerned with controlling costs, or unwilling to respond to legitimate requests for accountability” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 7).

College staff and clerical personnel have still other priorities in colleges, and they too exert pressure on department chairs. College staff and clerical personnel expect department chairs to assume responsibility to support day-to-day college operations, and they hold chairs responsible for faculty compliance with operations-related details of the college (Bennett, 1998). For example, in matters dealing with student registration, reporting of grades, and student entitlement programs, academic and clerical entities in a college each have urgent and essential tasks to perform that cannot be accomplished without collaboration. Large numbers of students, especially in community colleges, depend on Federal student aid programs for tuition payments and other expenses (Breneman & Nelson, 1981). Often, student attendance in classes must be verified by instructors to keep students eligible for financial support. In these and other matters, college staff and clerical personnel put pressure on chairs by expecting department chairs to maintain discipline among faculty such that faculty respond to practical demands
(submission deadlines for forms) and comply with operations requirements, even when faculty are disinterested in such mundane details and are otherwise preoccupied with academic pursuits.

Students also exert pressure on department chairs (Green, 1988b; Tucker, 1992). Students’ expectations of department chairs often run the gamut from chairs being their personal one-stop academic information resource to on-call fiduciary agent. When a student has a problem registering in a class, for example, he or she often assumes that a department chair can fix the problem, even when the real issue is student failure to pay library fines. Or when a student earns a less-than-auspicious grade on a class assignment, he or she often complains to the department chair, who frequently accepts the challenge to create an atmosphere that encourages the student to confer with his or her instructor. Sometimes, even on the first day of classes, students exert pressure on department chairs with the complaint that they feel that a new instructor isn’t interesting or seems not to like them.

As department chairs serve these varying college constituencies, there is the possibility of conflict when problems arise because the immediate solution of one individual’s problem often violates the rights or legitimate wishes of another. Standing in the nexus between teaching faculty on the one hand and various iterations of college administration on the other, and having reason and responsibility to identify with and respond to each (while also championing the rights of students), department chairs accept challenges and take blows from both sides, as they are expected by each to generate meaningful solutions to myriad daily problems. Presented below are examples of department chair responsibilities relative to each of their constituencies.
From the perspective of faculty members, the department chair is responsible for developing, articulating, and maintaining the standards and professional identity of the department; for selecting and supervising persons who will perform tasks in and for the department; for creating faculty teaching schedules; for providing leadership in the professional development of department members; and for maintaining collegial discipline among a group of creative, frequently individualistic professionals (Bennett & Figuli, 1993; Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Leaming, 2003). Gmelch and Miskin (2004) discuss these tasks as existing within the four major roles of the department chair: as leader, as scholar, as faculty developer, and as manager.

Department chairs may also be teaching faculty. Young’s survey of Illinois public community college department chairs (2007) reveals that approximately 68% of public community college department chairs in Illinois are teaching faculty. As such, they prepare and present instructional lessons for and with students; they administer and grade assessments of student learning; they keep records of student attendance and academic achievement; and they are required to participate in departmental and college-wide committee activities. The result is that department chairs, characterized by Tucker (1981) as faculty-scholars, take on a role that, according to Tucker, requires extraordinary behaviors. As “first among equals” (p. 4), chairs live out the paradoxical inconsistency of simultaneously operating both within and above their departments. This dual existence, according to Gmelch and Miskin (2004), is most perilous for the chair as relates to the chair as scholar: the identity most damaged in the daily life of the academic department chair is that aspect which was at the center of his/her academic professionalism.
From the perspective of administrative and supervisory college personnel and standards, the department chair is responsible for receiving and resolving student complaints against faculty, for ensuring that faculty perform their teaching duties fully and in a professional manner, for evaluating faculty and others who serve the department, for establishing and maintaining department records, and for representing the department in professional and civic activities within and outside the college (Hecht, Higgerson, Gmelch, & Tucker, 1999; Tucker, 1992). Chairs hold ultimate responsibility for the success of all department activities: they certify that established standards are met, and they are responsible for instituting corrective measures when standards are not met (Hecht et al., 1999; Tucker, 1992).

The method by which department chairs are selected contributes to the duality of perspectives experienced by them (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990; Hecht et al., 1999). In some colleges, department chairs are appointed by a dean or other academic officer. In other colleges, the faculty of departments recommend to college academic officers the individual they would like to have as chair, with the expectation that that individual will be appointed by the administration. In still other colleges, the department chair is elected by department members, with faculty frequently taking turns at the position (Hecht et al., 1999). Regardless of the method for selection, the result of these practices is that an individual who shares the same status as the other members of the department, and who usually has had no special preparation for the role of chair (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Hecht et al., 1999), is selected to lead the department (Hecht et al., 1999). And as soon as the status of the new chair is confirmed, along with the privilege to lead comes the responsibility to function as a superior.
The Problem

Gmelch, Burns, Carroll, Harris, and Wentz (1992) identified the tasks performed by department chairs and demonstrated that chairs work to serve faculty, administration, staff, and students. Each of these constituencies expects chairs to fulfill their constituent expectations, even though their interests and expectations are often in direct opposition to each other (Bennett, 1998; Gmelch & Burns, 1994; Hecht et al., 1999; Tucker, 1992); and satisfying them would necessitate chairs taking divergent positions or actions. Faculty members expect their chairs to support and defend them in a variety of circumstances. Administrators expect chairs to maintain academic and professional discipline among their faculty and, at all times, to manage faculty for the academic benefit of the institution (Houchen, 1994). Students who have a complaint against a faculty member or feel they are being treated unfairly expect chairs to do something to fix situations and restore their comfort. Clerical staff expect chairs to take responsibility for the actions of their faculty colleagues. When department chairs are pressured by opposing forces as described here, chairs may experience internal conflict.

In a study of department chairs from 100 Carnegie Council Research and Doctorate Granting I and II institutions, Burns (1993) found that department chairs identified five major dimensions of stress: faculty role stress, administrative relationship stress, role ambiguity stress, perceived expectations stress, and administrative task stress. Gmelch and Burns (1994) studied department chair stresses resulting from the dual identity as faculty and administrator. They reported that the greatest stress factor reported by chairs—who sometimes sacrifice their own personal development so that their faculty colleagues are freer to pursue their own teaching, writing, and research—was stress
related to conflict mediation. Within this factor, the greatest stress came from negotiating rules and regulations, program approvals, and disputes between faculty.

Using an instrument created by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) called the Role Conflict Scale, Young (2007) concluded that mild to moderate role conflict existed in department chairs in Illinois community colleges. Whereas the mean rating for all seven items on the scale was 4.4, the rating for the item “I work with two or more groups who work differently” had a mean rating of 5.3. Since in Young’s study the department chair role set included faculty, the department chair, and the academic officer, she concluded the following: “the competing expectations of these three groups contribute considerably to department chair role conflict” (p. 223). In this Janus-like position, named for the mythological Roman god of beginnings who is usually depicted with two faces looking in opposite directions, chairs are caught in the middle and are stressed by their need to mediate the constraints of the institution and differences among faculty (Gmelch & Burns, 1994).

Thus, as a result of the legitimate obligation of academic department chairs to respond to the personal and institutional demands of opposing forces within their colleges, chairs can experience internal conflicts or feelings of ambivalence as they carry out departmental functions (Eisen, 1996). In addition to observing the extra long hours that many chairs spend on campus in fulfilling their responsibilities, sitting chairs experience internal conflict in carrying out their roles; and prospective chairs may recognize the conflicts of the position and conclude that the chairmanship is a position to be avoided at all costs. The research problem of this study is the complex and conflicted nature of the role of the public community college academic department chair and the
internal conflict experienced by chairs as they carry out their responsibilities to their faculty, to administration, to clerical staff, and to students.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of the public community college academic department chair and to describe the evolving phenomenon with a focus on the internal conflict of that phenomenon as experienced by chairs. Extant research on department chairs has provided plentiful listings of chair tasks and responsibilities and has also articulated and described sources of conflict for chairs. For the most part, these studies have been fully quantitative or primarily quantitative with supplemental qualitative aspects; and the apparent purposes of these studies were directed at analyzing aspects of the chair role itself. This information has been very valuable in analyzing the chair role. However, these studies have not focused on the topic of interest here: the chairperson as a living, breathing human being.

My study sought to generate information on the phenomenon of contradictory forces acting within the person of the department chair, a phenomenon that has not been examined and that is not evident in the literature. The purpose of my study was to look at the person, the flesh and blood human being who is sitting in the chair. The study explored what chairs see, hear, taste, and primarily feel as they function from day to day; the study describes what happens inside their beings as chairs contend and cope with conflicting elements of their responsibility. I presented myself as a researcher and former department chair. Then, through respectful, sensitive, and increasingly probing interview questions, I engaged chairs to travel into themselves and into the questions for which I
sought answers. Through discussion we traveled together from the outside, from the observable external behaviors that made up their lives as chairs, to the inside, into their emotional responses to and feelings about day-to-day aspects of their lives as chair. But most especially, we explored their descriptions of themselves as chair.

This study was not based on any one existing framework or theory, though numerous frameworks and theories were studied and useful in shaping the problem and formulating the research questions. The primary framework was my own 12-year experience as a community college department chair. The phenomenon needed to be explored and studied because so little is known about a chair’s inner life, what struggles chairs experience in the process of carrying out their roles and responsibilities. My findings can contribute to creating a framework for understanding the essence of department chair inner conflict and can become the basis for further study of this phenomenon. My study was based on the assumption that understanding the essence of the tensions, stresses, and conflict inherent in the role of academic department chair can lead to developing approaches, behaviors, and practices that can mitigate the negative impact of paradoxes of the role. The study was conducted with the expectation that understanding the essence of the internal conflict in the role of the academic department chair can provide a basis for developing, in sitting and prospective chairs, the capacity, skills, behaviors, and principles that will equip them to more successfully manage their role as chair.
Research Questions

To achieve the outcome identified in the purpose of the study, the primary research question of the study was the following: What is the essence of the internal conflict in the role of the public community college academic department chair? This larger question was probed directly and through the following sub-questions:

1. How does the internal conflict in the role of the public community college academic department chair manifest itself?

2. Of the many tasks of department chairs, which tasks seem to create internal conflict for the public community college academic department chair?

3. Through what self-perceptions and with what words do public community college academic department chairs present images of themselves?

Significance of the Study

As the complexity of the lived experience of department chairs is analyzed and described, that lived experience can be better explained and understood. Understanding the internal conflict experienced by academic department chairs is crucial for understanding the department chair role itself, especially since it is the observed negatives of this conflict that turn so many faculty away from considering or accepting the role of chair (Hecht et al., 1999). Non-chair faculty observe the chair’s long hours, the long list of required reports and meetings, and the endless responsibilities. This reality, combined with the essential role chairs play in sustaining academic quality and leading academic reform in colleges (Bennett, 1983; Brann, 1972; Lucas, 1990), makes the topic a matter of academic urgency.

Understanding the role of chair requires understanding aspects of the role. If there is greater understanding of the essence of the conflict in the role of chair, elements of the
conflict can be identified and examined, and practices can be developed to soften the impact of the conflict. Also, with greater understanding of the essence and sources of conflict, it may be possible to eliminate or reduce the conflicted aspect of certain chair responsibilities. At the very least, chairs’ understanding the components of internal conflict prior to the onset of potentially negative experiences can encourage preparation that reduces the internal conflict for them, as desired ends are achieved.

In community colleges, the primary desired goal is the effective education of students. Chairs who understand the internal conflict in the role of chair can become more effective leaders for achieving the effective education of students, as they use their skills more purposefully. Hecht et al. (1999) reported that chairs’ understanding of the goals and motivations of individuals with whom they interact increases as their communication skills increase, thus decreasing the likelihood of internal conflict for chairs. That is, chair conflict can be reduced through an understanding of its potential causes. Also, according to Bennett (1998), chairs are the guardians of academic quality, as they bear major responsibility to foster academic integrity in their departments. As identified leaders and agents of change in their departments, chairs lead faculties to assess student-learning, review and revise course curricula, set academic standards, recommend and implement new programs, and certify student achievement. Thus, if effective education of students with improvement in educational outcome is to occur, it will occur largely as a result of the leadership of active, committed department chairs, for whom internal conflict is minimized through understanding and skill.

Improving educational outcomes in American colleges today is crucial. As the United States maneuvers to maintain its position in the global economy and its grasp on
global capital, the country needs to educate citizens who are competent to conduct research, develop new products, manufacture economical goods, and communicate peacefully with world neighbors. Indeed, as citizens strive to reduce violence in the world setting, it certainly seems reasonable that improvement in educational outcome is an aspect of enhancing global understanding. Since department chairs are essential to the successful functioning and on-going improvement of colleges (Bennett, 1998; Brann, 1972; Hecht et al., 1999; Leaming, 2007; Tucker, 1981; Westmeyer, 1990), every effort should be made to develop in department chairs a sense of competence, professional optimism, and purposefulness. And since community colleges provide the first college experience for more than half of minority students in American higher education today (Sullivan & Phillippe, 2005), it is especially important that community college department chairs experience the benefit of new research and support.

An understanding of the internal conflict in the role of the public community college department chair can assist sitting chairs and aspiring chairs by helping to demystify the murky waters of the role, to bring greater light to the many positives of the role, and to strengthen their resolve to prepare for and pursue the department chairmanship. A faculty member will be better able to identify the nature of the stresses he or she would face as department chair and will not be surprised or traumatized by the suddenness of their appearance. Leadership programs created by trustees, boards, and other policy makers to prepare and support incipient department chairs can incorporate findings of the study into their training programs. Also, new programs and/or workshops may be developed specifically to address issues uncovered and findings of this study.
Definitions of Terms

Role. Role, as used in this discussion, is the set of behaviors expected by members of the community of the person identified by a term (Burns, 1978). The term includes both “outer” demands from given social positions, as a set of influences from outside the individual and, on the other hand, “inner” demands of role as individuals’ perceptions and definitions of their place in sets of social relationships, of ‘what someone in their social position is supposed to think and do (p. 98). The role discussed here is that of academic department chair, a professional who is situated in a particular location in higher education functioning and who assumes expected duties and performs expected tasks.

Department chair. A department chair is at the lowest administrative level in a college (Tuckman & Johnson, 1987), that is, the front line administrator in a college who deals directly with individual faculty members and who serves as the first step in the line of communication of faculty members to higher administrators (Westmeyer, 1990). In the context of this study the term refers to a faculty member who has been chosen to perform the special duties of department chair that may be outlined in college documents or are accepted through college tradition. Also, only department chairs who remain teaching faculty within an academic discipline were included in the study. Since the purpose of this study was to examine the conflicted nature of the role of department chair as colleague-supervisor, division chairs who oversee several departments and have no teaching assignment in any of the disciplines they supervise did not fit the definition of the phenomenon being studied here and were, therefore, not considered for this study. Young’s (2007) study, defined a department chair as “the administrator of an academic
unit and primary representative of that unit to internal and external entities” (p. 14). Our definitions are consistent, with the additional stipulation that for this study, target population chairs also taught classes in an academic discipline.

**Conflict or internal conflict.** These terms are used interchangeably in context to describe the internal struggle experienced by a department chair as he or she attempts to manage the complex of human and academic requirements in a community college; to achieve satisfactory solutions to problems, where interested parties frequently desire seemingly opposed actions; and to maintain academic quality and professionalism. Tucker (1981) defined internal conflict as concerning a person’s feelings, not consisting of observable behaviors, but having to do with frustrations or anxieties that a person feels and which can affect a person’s normal functioning.

Further, conflict is perceived here as the most intense and extreme of a continuum of internal responses, which begins with tension, proceeds to stress, and extends to internal conflict. Conflict follows tension, which is understood to be a temporary state of tautness or creative energy that is appropriate and necessary for action to occur, optimally resulting in efficient operation; and conflict follows stress, which is understood to be a palpable straining beyond the point of productive tension, which lingers beyond its usefulness, and which cannot be tolerated indefinitely. Lucas (2000) warns that conflict always emerges with change, which often involves adding more tasks (causing stress) to already full schedules (tension).

**Public community college.** The institutional setting for this study was the *public community college*. There is great variety of post-secondary education available in both academic and technical fields at this point in our country’s educational development. For
purposes of this study a community college is defined as “any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree” (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, p. 5). This definition accommodates both privately funded and publicly funded institutions; however, this study included only publicly funded community colleges in the State of Illinois.

Since most local support of public community colleges is through property tax, there will likely exist a wide variation from one community to another in tax or other public support for the local community college (Breneman & Nelson, 1981). This range in economic resources from one community to another exists in part due to the disparate economic strata among local citizens. Regardless of the economic status of the various communities, the colleges in this study shared the identity as publicly funded institutions. The mission of the Illinois Community College System, for example, “is to provide high quality, accessible, cost-effective educational opportunities for the individuals and communities it serves” (Lach & McMillan, 1999, p. 151). Local interpretation of this mission relative to participant department chairs resulted in varying levels of institutional support and resource allocation.

**Leadership.** Leadership is defined by Northouse (2004) as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). The individual who is named department chair inherently accepts the responsibility to use his/her personal and professional skills to influence department faculty, staff, college administration, and community to work cooperatively to achieve the educational goals of students and the institution.
Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

A delimitation of the study is that it was conducted within the State of Illinois with research sites selected from among the 48 public community colleges in the State, and further delimited to the large metropolitan area in northeast Illinois that is anchored by the City of Chicago. Due to their proximity to the city, the educational districts of the research sites are largely urban, within community college districts described by the Illinois Community College Board (2009) as metropolitan counties. The number of public community colleges in the Chicago Metropolitan Area, within 3 tiers around the City, numbers 14; and these institutions serve 310,213 students, accounting for 44% of the total of 700,072 community college students in the State (ICCB, 2010).

A limitation of the study is that it involved a small sample of participants from several academic disciplines, including participants with varying years of experience as faculty members and as department chairs. Creswell, Seagren, and Henry (1979) found that the stress experienced by chairs varies by academic discipline and that younger faculty-chairs may experience greater stress than more mature faculty-chairs. To avoid variation in chair experience that might have been due to academic discipline, and because the researcher is familiar with the general functioning of community college English departments, this study included faculty-chairs from English departments and two other broad general education areas: humanities and social sciences. The researcher’s familiarity with tasks of English chairs and other chairs who serve an unselected student body made it possible to bring greater understanding to participants’ comments without introducing researcher bias.
A further limitation of the study was that participants might have been at least partially self-selected. Following my receiving permission to do research on the campuses, the deans might have asked chairs to express their willingness to participate in the study. This would result in a degree of self-selection. However, since I was given access to numerous chairs on each of the campuses, I concluded that this circumstance did not jeopardize the integrity and utility of the qualitative data that I sought to collect.

**Summary of the Study**

The study is organized in the following manner. Chapter 1 describes aspects contributing to the research problem, the research problem itself, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, definitions of terms, and delimitations and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 reviews past and current literature on the role of the academic department chair under the following topics: the historical development of the role of academic department chair; general chair role definition, including responsibilities and duties; chair roles specifically related to institutional governance and the academic department chair as institutional leader; leadership styles and traits of effective chairs; and tensions, stresses, and conflicts associated with the chair role. Chapter 3 discusses the philosophical framework of the phenomenological method, which constitutes the research design of the study. The chapter also describes related methods and strategies of interviewing, the primary tool for collecting data.

Chapter 4 presents introductory profiles of each of the chair participants. Their identities will be protected through the use of code names, but the purpose of the profiles is to give as much as possible a sense of who the participants are as human beings. This is
an important aspect because the focus of this study is the internal effect on themselves as persons. Chapter 5 reports and discusses results of the data collected and presents a thematic analysis of the data, as well as discussion related to the research questions, supported by analysis of representative quotations from the participants. Chapter 6 presents a summary of the research findings, discusses implications of the research, and makes recommendations for further research.

These chapters address the research problem: the complex and conflicted nature of the role of the public community college academic department chair and the internal conflict experienced by chairs as they carry out their responsibilities to their faculty, to administration, to clerical staff, and to students.
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The following integrative review of the literature on the academic department chair is intended to present the current “state of knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 112) about department chairs and to summarize the broad themes (Cooper, 1984) of past and current scholarship focusing on aspects of the role of the department chair related to role responsibility, stress, and internal conflict. By assembling and engaging scholarship that gives guidance to department chairs in these matters or that explores sources of role conflict, one can articulate understandings and expectations of the role of department chair and determine areas of interest and concern that have not been researched. The research presented here is grouped into the following themes: (a) historical development of the role of academic department chair; (b) general chair role definition including responsibilities and duties; (c) chair roles specifically related to institutional governance, with an extended consideration of the academic department chair as institutional leader; (d) leadership styles and traits of chairs—considering attributes of effective chairs; and (e) tensions, stresses, and conflicts associated with the chair role.

Historical Development of the Role of Academic Department Chair

Colleges have not always been organized by departments (Hecht et al., 1999). The first American colleges were home to a small number of privileged young men who enjoyed a close, family-like relationship with their professors in an often-idyllic setting (Rudolph, 1990). These early colleges required only a president, a few or several faculty, and a small number of students. From 1636 when Harvard College was established with
the ideals of preparing “a learned clergy and a lettered people” (p. 6), through the establishment of the other pre-Revolution colleges, to Mark Hopkins’ presidency at Williams College (1836 to 1872), only a very small percentage of young Americans attended college. According to Thelin (2004) statistical interpretations from “incomplete and not entirely trustworthy” records suggest that in 1800 only 0.6 percent of American men between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five attended college, and by 1860 this number had grown only to 1.75 percent (p. 69). Young women who attended college during this period probably attended one of the few women’s institutions that opened during the 1840s and 1850s—the states of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio each having three women’s colleges, along with Mount Holyoke in Massachusetts, founded in 1837 (Thelin, 2004).

With the growth of industrialization and other worldwide trends of the late nineteenth century, with the rise of the great American universities like Johns Hopkins—which emulated the great European universities (Veysey, 1965)—and with the establishment of State universities, more and more young Americans—male and female—committed to attending college following their common school education. To satisfy a growing trend toward mass education, many American colleges and universities conducted programs to prepare common school graduates for the college curriculum. This practice led to the certification of college preparatory programs and the ultimate creation of the secondary school as an educational entity in American public and private education (Rudolph, 1990).

As colleges responded to the educational aspirations of increasing numbers of Americans by accepting more and more applicants, student populations grew; and
institutions expanded in size and administrative complexity (Veysey, 1965; Westmeyer, 1990). No longer could a president operate a college by himself or with the assistance of a treasurer. To satisfy the growing needs of the late nineteenth century academic market, colleges added layers of administrators to relieve the president of teaching duties, to manage the business affairs of the institution, to select and guide students, and to support their personal and academic needs. As a result of expanding book collections and the growing centrality of these collections to the status of colleges, full time librarians were added to manage library acquisitions, often the result of gifts from benefactors. Following librarians, full time registrars were the second administrators added to keep track of courses taken by students and their performance in courses (Westmeyer, 1990). Academic deans and counselors, deans of student affairs, and deans of divisions were added to carry out other academic, managerial, and business functions of the institutions (Hecht et al., 1999; Veysey, 1965; Westmeyer, 1990).

More students created a need for more instructional faculty. The continuing search for and expansion of new scientific knowledge, the division and subdivision of academic disciplines through the creation of specialties and subspecialties, and the emergence of new fields of inquiry created the need for a structural reorganization of faculty. Departmentalization was, according to Rudolph (1990), inevitable. For example, at the University of Chicago in 1893, the Department of Biology was reorganized into the five separate departments of zoology, botany, anatomy, neurology, and physiology. Also, the shift in curriculum from the standard classical course of study of the colonial colleges to the elective system of the universities required greater autonomy of disciplines (Veysey, 1965; Westmeyer, 1990). No longer would a faculty member write and lecture
in multiple disciplines as disparate as rhetoric, aesthetics, and political economy. As groups of increasingly autonomous faculty-specialists classified themselves according to area of study, departmental hierarchy was also introduced, and the department chair became the titular and practical head of each academic discipline (Rudolph, 1990; Westmeyer, 1990).

**General Chair Role Definition Including Responsibilities and Duties**

As community colleges entered the arena of post-secondary education at the beginning of the 20th Century, the pattern for college administrative organization had been fairly well established (Duryea, 2000), and many community colleges followed that established pattern. Even though some community colleges function with midlevel managers of academic and vocational areas who are no longer referred to as chairs, but rather division deans or academic deans, an analysis of their duties demonstrates that the functions they perform are the same as performed by department chairs (Bennett, 1983; Gillett-Karam, 1999). These division heads manage budgets and develop schedules; and they apply departmental bylaws and rules to tasks related to curricular changes, faculty hiring, evaluation, promotion, and tenure. They keep records, administer student support programs, supervise grants and contracts; and they organize faculty, staff, and student events (Thomas & Schuh, 2004).

Academic faculty are generally categorized by discipline, with the possible grouping of closely related disciplines into divisions, as in the physical or social sciences, where, for example, physical sciences might include chemistry, physics, and astronomy and social sciences might include sociology, education, and psychology. In many
community colleges there is also hierarchical academic separation, with its ranking from instructor to professor. And at the head of each academic department or discipline grouping, there is a person who accepts the responsibility to be first in the line of communication of faculty members to administrators (Miller, 1999), to deal directly with individual faculty members as their own front line administrator (Westmeyer, 1990), and to be primary representative of that department to internal and external entities (Young, 2007). This person—in the majority of community college settings—is most commonly called a department chair.

**Background research on chair role.** Only since about the 1980s has the academic department chair become a topic for serious scholarly attention and research. Earlier research had focused on college presidents and deans because they were the significant actors in the functioning of colleges, while faculty were often poorly paid and not well respected (Rudolph, 1990). Indeed, faculty designation as tutor of many subjects speaks to the utilitarian function faculty performed (Cohen, 1998). As faculty gained stature as a result of university specialization and departmentalization in the early 20th Century, department chairs emerged as primary scholars of their disciplines (Rudolph, 1990), even though their duties continued to include matters relative to the day-to-day functioning of a department: making schedules, ordering textbooks and supplies, solving student problems, and attending meetings with deans. Scholars and researchers have now focused on the many aspects of chair roles. However, a national study of community college department chair work was not conducted until 1993 (Miller & Seagren, 1997).

In the late 1960s scholarly associations (like the Modern Language Association) offered sessions for faculty acting as chairs through in-service activities presented during
the summer or at special sessions during their annual conventions. According to Emmet (1983), these were often discipline specific efforts presented by associations of disciplines like English, engineering, accounting, and philosophy. Between 1967 and 1971 professional development activities for department and division chairs moved outside disciplinary focus, as the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE), supported by a grant from the Danforth Foundation, conducted seminars on the role of the department chairperson, and the Higher Education Executive Associates (HEEA) developed seminars that allowed department chairs to meet and discuss their roles and managerial needs (Emmet).

Modeled after the WICHE and HEEA seminars, the American Council on Education (ACE) conducted two institutes for departmental leaders in public institutions in the Midwest. Papers presented at these institutes were collected by editors James Brann and Thomas A. Emmet and published in 1972 under the title *The Academic Department or Division Chairman: A Complex Role*. The 28 papers discuss a variety of topics relating to the complexity of the job, academic planning, departmental development, information for and about new chairmen, chairman-dean relationships, administrative styles, academic issues and standards, community college chairmen and division chairmen, assessment systems, faculty wishes for chairmen, resistance to change in curriculum planning, and faculty evaluation (Brann & Emmet, 1972). A few years later, in 1975, a paper by Herbert Waltzer of Miami University of Ohio, titled *The Job of the Academic Department Chairman: Experience and Recommendations from Miami University*, was published by ACE. These studies completed the major work published prior to 1978 emphasizing the role and development of the department chairperson.
(Emmet, 1983). In 1980 ACE established the Departmental Leadership Institute, bringing greater scholarly focus to this important academic role. A year later ACE published Tucker’s (1981) seminal work.

Tucker is recognized as a pioneer among researchers who insisted that department chairs are a significant component of college administrative structures (Hecht et al., 1999). He contended that, unlike recognized college administrative officers who had clearly defined roles and areas of responsibility, department chairs had a very broad range of administrative duties and responsibilities. In 1977 Tucker, a former vice-chancellor of the Florida State University System and then professor of higher education at Florida State University, was awarded a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to design and test a model for enhancing the planning, management, and leadership competencies of department chairpersons. Tucker gathered information from department chairpersons in the nine Florida state universities and in institutions of higher learning outside Florida. In 1981 the American Council on Education published the result of Tucker’s research under the title *Chairing the Academic Department: Leadership Among Peers*.

The 14 chapters of Tucker’s text discussed the broad range of common problems confronted by academic department chairs. The chapters addressed the following topics: the chairperson’s roles, powers, and responsibilities; types of departments and leadership styles; delegation and department committees; department decision making and bringing about change; faculty development—encouraging professional growth; faculty evaluation; performance counseling and dealing with unsatisfactory performance; faculty grievances and unions; dealing with conflict and maintaining faculty morale; department accomplishments and aspirations—setting goals and developing action plans; the budget
cycle—preparing department budget requests and persuading the dean; assigning and reporting faculty activities; managing department resources—time, people, and money; and faculty views about management (Tucker, 1981).

The contribution of Tucker’s research, as reported in his text, was that it delineated the breadth, depth, and complexity of the role of the department chair, demonstrating the chair’s involvement in and influence on every aspect of college functioning. In very direct and practical language, Tucker introduced prior social science research and gave chairs suggestions and direction on how to avoid problems and how to function effectively. He used the phrase “first among equals” to describe the paradoxical nature of the position of department chairs relative to their departments and to the rest of the college; the phrase continues in the literature. Through specific scenarios, Tucker also dramatized the number and variety of department chair frustrations. The text was revised and published again in 1984 and in 1992.

Whereas Tucker’s research provided the first scholarly examination of the variety of tasks and responsibilities of academic department chairs, John B. Bennett, a former director of the Departmental Leadership Institute at ACE, created in his Managing the Academic Department: Cases and Notes (1983) a workshop-in-a-book for department chairs. In this volume, fairly specific cases of department chair dilemmas were presented for analysis, discussion, and possible solution. Users of the book were encouraged to analyze the cases, which were complete with realistic detail, abbreviated only to avoid the possibility of specific institutional identification. In the workshop sessions, chairs were directed to work collaboratively to identify the issue and the problem in each case, to focus on principles of leadership and management that might be helpful, and to arrive
at possible solutions to the case. Bennett’s acknowledgement in the text that different personality or leader types might choose different approaches to solving the case is supportive of chairs as individuals. Response notes from experienced (presumably wiser) chairs were presented after each case (along with the respondents’ institutional affiliations). The variety of responses in the notes demonstrated a range of interpretations as to the identified problem in the case and a comparable range of approaches to solutions.

**Complexity of chair role.** In delineating the many aspects of the department chair’s role, Tucker (1981) created the following list of chair tasks and duties, organized into eight categories.

1. Department governance: Conduct department meetings; Establish department committees; Use committees effectively; Develop long-range department programs, plans, and goals; Determine what services the department should provide to the university, community, and state; Implement long-range department programs, plans, goals, and policies; Prepare the department for accreditation and evaluation; Serve as an advocate for the department; Monitor library acquisitions; Delegate some department administrative responsibilities to individuals and committees; Encourage faculty members to communicate ideas for improving the department.

2. Instruction: Schedule classes; Supervise off-campus programs; Monitor dissertations, prospectuses, and programs of study for graduate students; Supervise, schedule, monitor, and grade department examinations; Update department curriculum, courses, and programs.

3. Faculty affairs: Recruit and select faculty members; Assign faculty responsibilities, such as teaching, research, committee work, and so forth; Monitor faculty service contributions; Evaluate faculty performance; Initiate promotion and tenure recommendations; Participate in grievance hearings; Make merit recommendations; Deal with unsatisfactory faculty and staff performance; Initiate termination of a faculty member; Keep faculty members informed of department, college, and institutional plans, activities, and expectations; Maintain morale; Reduce, resolve, and prevent conflict among faculty members; Encourage faculty participation.
4. Student affairs: Recruit and select students; Advise and counsel students; Work with student government.

5. External communication: Communicate department needs to the dean and interact with upper-level administrators; Improve and maintain the department’s image and reputation; Coordinate activities with outside groups; Process department correspondence and requests for information; Complete forms and surveys; Initiate and maintain liaison with external agencies and institutions.

6. Budget and resources: Encourage faculty members to submit proposals for contracts and grants to government agencies and private foundations; Prepare and propose department budgets; Seek outside funding; Administer the department budget; Set priorities for use of travel funds; Prepare annual reports.

7. Office management: Manage department facilities and equipment, including maintenance and control of inventory; Monitor building security and maintenance; Supervise and evaluate the clerical and technical staff in the department; Maintain essential department records, including student records.

8. Professional development: Foster the development of each faculty member’s special talents and interests; Foster good teaching in the department; Stimulate faculty research and publications; Promote affirmative action; Encourage faculty members to participate in regional and national professional meetings; Represent the department at meetings of learned and professional societies. (pp. 2-4)

In addition to the dramatic variety of department chair tasks and duties reported by Tucker (1981) is the wide-ranging set of roles department chairs play. Tucker asserted that chairpersons assume roles appropriate to accomplish their objectives, describing a role as indicating how or in what capacity a chairperson relates to various kinds of persons, as individuals or in groups. Tucker’s list of department chair roles included 28 possible relationships:

- teacher, mentor, researcher, leader, planner, manager, advisor-counselor, mediator-negotiator, delegator, advocate, representor, communicator, evaluator, motivator, supervisor, coordinator, anticipator, innovator, peacemaker, organizer, decision maker, problem solver, recommender, implementor, facilitator, entrepreneur, recruiter, peer-colleague. (pp. 23-24)
Complicating the multiple paradoxes of these roles, relationships, tasks, and duties is the reality that most chairs come to the position with no preparation of any kind for the rigors of the job (Bennett, 1983; Tucker, 1981).

While the foregoing lists include aspects of university life that may not seem to apply to department chairs in community colleges, most of these tasks do appear among the responsibilities of department chairs in community colleges. Of the 54 tasks listed by Tucker (1981) only 1 does not apply to community college department chairs because it refers to graduate student research supervision, and community colleges routinely focus on student instruction rather than research (Tucker, 1992). Also, even though community colleges have not traditionally been thought of as research-generating institutions, the recent push toward data-driven instruction and creating cultures of evidence in community colleges (Jenkins, 2006; Morest & Jenkins, 2007) puts greater emphasis on faculty research and publication even at the community college level.

Complexity of the department chair’s role was further addressed by Creswell et al. (1990). Their work was the result of a national study of department chairs sponsored by TIAA-CREFF and funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc. In the three-year study begun in 1985, the researchers identified 15 strategies used by 200 “excellent” department chairs. The researchers defined excellent chairs according to their skill at assisting faculty to grow and develop professionally. They invited senior academic administrators and faculty development specialists in institutions where faculty development specialists existed in 70 institutions to identify three to five chairpersons in their institutions who, in their opinion, excelled in assisting faculty to grow and develop professionally. The resulting special sample of 200 “excellent” chairpersons became participant-subjects in a
A qualitative study where the method of data collection was a semi-structured interview protocol conducted via telephone, with follow-up visits to eight campuses during which chairpersons, their faculty members, faculty development specialists, academic deans, and other administrators were interviewed (Creswell et al., 1990).

The data were analyzed and formulated into a project for department chairs and faculty that would assist them in maintaining the primacy of faculty growth and professional development in the face of the daily time-consuming responsibilities that tend to minimize attention to faculty growth and professional development. Material was pilot-tested in over a dozen regional and national workshops involving over 1000 department chairs and faculty. The Academic Chairperson’s Handbook (Creswell et al., 1990) provided valuable resources, analyzed relevant issues, and offered sage advice from chairs who managed, despite the complexity of their roles, to be described as excellent in the task of promoting faculty growth and professional development.

Gmelch and Miskin (1993) further explored the multiplicity of tasks of department chairs by asking 800 department chairs from colleges and universities across the United States to identify their most important tasks. Through statistical analysis of responses, the researchers identified “four comprehensive roles of the chair that are critical to department productivity and faculty survival: faculty developer, manager, leader, and scholar” (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993, p. 5). In subsequent analysis, the researchers reported that, in the role of faculty developer, chairs work within the college mission to organize and implement strategies to recruit quality faculty, whom they subsequently support through departmental practices and motivate to perform at high professional levels. In the role of manager, chairs create budgets that meet the needs of
the department and the institution to satisfy all stakeholder groups and manage resources through wise decisions. In the role of leader, chairs develop departmental vision/mission goals for the department and its members and work toward their achievement. In the role of scholar, chairs continue to move forward in their own personal development, while contending with an unrelenting pace of events characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004).

A different approach to the analysis of chair roles was provided by Lucas (1994). Instead of looking at the numerous and various specific tasks that chairs perform, Lucas, having spent years conducting workshops with chairs, focused on the roles of leader and faculty developer, roles which, she asserted, require both conceptual knowledge and interpersonal skills. Contending that effective performance of the leader and faculty developer responsibilities by chairs was necessary for strong departmental leadership, Lucas provided the following list of nine chair responsibilities: (a) leading the department, (b) motivating faculty to enhance productivity, (c) motivating faculty to teach effectively, (d) handling faculty evaluation and feedback, (e) motivating faculty to increase scholarship, (f) motivating faculty to increase service, (g) creating a supportive communication climate, (h) managing conflict, and (i) developing chair survival skills (pp. 25-28).

There is certainly similarity between and among these various lists of chair roles and responsibilities. There is also overlap of duty descriptors with varying degrees of importance given to specific aspects of chair responsibilities. However, recognizing the tremendous variation that can occur from one academic setting to another, it is not surprising that there is also some variety. It is a testament to the value of the broad
research samples of the studies that familiar role descriptors are present in each study. An emerging truth is also apparent: the role of the academic department chair is much more than that of a manager who puts all the parts together or puts all the right people in a room. It is clear that the academic department chairperson is an essential element in the fulfillment of an academic institution’s mission.

**Department chairs as managers.** To a disinterested observer, the role of the academic department chairperson may appear to be primarily managerial. After all, academic departments exist as part of academic organizations called colleges; and a department chair’s observable behaviors do include planning, organizing, coordinating, and (to some extent) controlling. However, *influencing* might be a substitute for *controlling* in the chairperson’s set of behaviors. These four were the behaviors of managers described by Henri Fayol in 1916 (Mintzberg, 1973). Later, Mintzberg (1989) observed that, “When we think of organization, we think of management” and that “what distinguishes the formal organization from a random collection of people … is the presence of some system of authority and administration, personified by one manager or several in a hierarchy to knit the whole effort together (p. 7). Mintzberg also described management as a “process by which the people who are formally in charge of whole organizations or part of them try to direct or at least to guide what they do” (p. 2). Since each of these statements could also be made of colleges, academic departments, and department chairs, respectively, it is appropriate to consider the relationship between the roles of manager and department chair.

Instead of accepting general, unexamined conclusions about managers, Mintzberg (1973) conducted empirical research to study the manager’s job, essentially to answer the
general question, “What do managers do?” He was concerned about the activity “of those people formally in charge of organizations or their subunits” (p. 3), and he included in this group people with titles such as president, dean, and department head. Mintzberg (1973) suggested that the following questions should be answered in order for managerial training and management science to have a real impact on practice:


2. What are the distinguishing characteristics of managerial work? What is of interest about the media the manager uses, the activities he prefers to engage in, the flow of these activities during the workday, his use of time, the pressures of the job?

3. What basic roles can be inferred from a study of the manager’s activities? What roles does the manager perform in moving information, in making decisions, in dealing with people?

4. What variations exist among managerial jobs? To what extent can basic differences be attributed to the situation, the incumbent, the job, the organization, and the environment?

5. To what extent is management a science? To what extent is the manager’s work programmed (that is, repetitive, systematic, and predictable)? To what extent is it programmable? To what extent can the management scientist “reprogram” managerial work? (p. 3)

To answer these questions, Mintzberg gathered data from the diaries of senior and middle managers; from extended observation of street gang leaders, hospital administrators, and production supervisors; from analysis of working records of U.S. Presidents; from activity sampling of foremen’s work; and from structured observation of the work of chief executives. Though limited by the lack of diversity of his research participants, Mintzberg’s findings resulted in the following major conclusions:

1. Managers’ jobs are remarkably alike. The work of foremen, presidents, government administrators, and other managers can be described in terms of ten basic roles and six sets of working characteristics.
2. The differences that do exist in manager’s work can be described largely in terms of the common roles and characteristics—such as muted or highlighted characteristics and special attention to certain roles.

3. As commonly thought, much of the managers’ work is challenging and unprogrammed. But every manager has his share of regular, ordinary duties to perform, particularly in moving information and maintaining a status system. Furthermore, the common practice of categorizing as nonmanagerial some of the specific tasks many managers perform (like dealing with customers, negotiating contracts) appears to be arbitrary. Almost all of the activities managers engage in—even when ostensibly part of the regular operations of their organizations—ultimately relate back to their roles as manager.

4. The manager is both a generalist and a specialist. In his own organization he is a generalist—the focal point in the general flow of information and in the handling of general disturbances. But as a manager, he is a specialist. The job of manager involves specific roles and skills. Unfortunately, we know little about these skills and, as a result, our management schools have so far done little to teach them systematically.

5. Much of the manager’s power derives from his information. With access to many sources of information, some of them open to no one else in his organizational unit, the manager develops a data base that enables him to make more effective decisions than his employees. Unfortunately, the manager receives much information verbally, and lacking effective means to disseminate it to others, he has difficulty delegating responsibility for decision-making. Hence, he must take full charge of his organization’s strategy-making system.

6. The prime occupational hazard of the manager is superficiality. Because of the open-ended nature of his job and because of his responsibility for information-processing and strategy-making, the manager is induced to take on a heavy load of work, and to do much of it superficially. Hence, his work pace is unrelenting and his work activities are characterized by brevity, variety, and fragmentation. The job of managing does not develop reflective planners; rather it breeds adaptive information manipulators who prefer a stimulus-response milieu.

7. There is no science in managerial work. Managers work essentially as they always have—with verbal information and intuitive (nonexplicit) processes. The management scientist has had almost no influence on how the manager works.

8. The manager is a kind of loop. The pressures of his job force him to adopt work characteristics (fragmentation of activity, emphasis on verbal communication, among others) that make it difficult for him to receive help from the management scientist and that lead to superficiality in his work. This in effect leads to more-pronounced work characteristics and increased work pressures. As
the problems facing large organizations become more complex, senior managers will face even greater work pressures.

9. The management scientist can help to break this loop. He can provide significant help for the manager in information-processing and strategy-making, providing he can better understand the manager’s work and can gain access to the manager’s verbal data base.

10. Managerial work is enormously complex, far more so than a reading of the traditional literature would suggest. There is a need to study it systematically and to avoid the temptation to seek simple prescriptions for its difficulties. We shall improve it significantly only when we understand it precisely. (pp. 4-5)

Mintzberg (1973) described 10 roles of managers in three categories. In the Interpersonal category, he described managers in the roles of figurehead, leader, and liaison. In the Informational category, he described managers in the roles of monitor, disseminator, and spokesman. In the Decisional category, he described managers in the roles of entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator. He also created a statement of five basic reasons why organizations need managers: to ensure that his organization serves its basic purpose—the efficient production of specific goods and services; to design and maintain the stability of his organization’s operations; to take charge of his organization’s strategy-making system, and therein adapt his organization in a controlled way to its changing environment; to ensure that his organization serves the ends of those persons who control it; and to serve as the key informational link between his organization and its environment (p. 95).

The comparison so far between manager tasks and chair tasks does show limited similarity, but ultimately, a department chair is much more than a manager. Chairs do perform certain managerial tasks, as indicated by the research of scholars whose studies have been discussed in the previous section. However, an academic department that is only managed is a department that is not also growing because there is no vision, no
leadership. A person who occupies the role of a department chair and who functions only as manager is not a department leader and fails to meet the expected academic standards of a department chair. It may be possible that the best managers are also leaders, but without the leadership capability, the manager can still manage effectively. But academic department chairs do very much more than manage their departments, and a department chair who is not also a leader fails in his or her primary responsibility to promote high academic standards.

Perhaps even more crucial in the argument to separate department chairs from managers is the consideration not only of what they do but why they do it. Whereas one of the major tasks of managers is to make sure that an organization functions for the benefit of those who control it, the major function of department chairs, especially in community colleges, is to ensure that the college functions for the benefit of the students, the least powerful of its constituents. A humorous example from Mintzberg (1973) can cement the difference between a manager and a department chair. In a caption below a chapter title introducing some distinguishing characteristics of managerial work, Mintzberg presents what he describes as a contemporary adage: I don’t want it good—I want it Tuesday. This sentiment may be acceptable—even desirable—for a manager; but it would never do for an academic department chair, whose charge it is, according to Bennett (1988), to be guardian of the academic quality of his or her discipline.

In other contexts, Mintzberg (1979) described organizations as belonging to a machine bureaucracy, a professional bureaucracy, or an adhocracy. In a machine bureaucracy the structure exists for a single purpose, and when presented with a stimulus, there is no diagnosis because the structure can exercise only its standard sequence of
programs. In a professional bureaucracy diagnosis is fundamental, but is circumscribed by the intention “to match a predetermined contingency to a standard program.” In an adhocracy there is open-ended diagnosis “which seeks a creative solution to a unique problem” (p. 353).

In describing the organizational structure of colleges, Mintzberg (1979) identified them as representing a professional bureaucracy, which is a highly decentralized structure, horizontally and vertically. The power over the operating work is at the bottom of the structure—not at the top as in a machine bureaucracy—within the professionals (the faculty) of the operating core. The professionals’ power derives from the fact that their work is too complex to be supervised by managers or standardized by analysis and their services are in great demand. Professionals’ memberships in organizations that set professional standards also place a great deal of the actual power outside the institutions completely. The support staff in colleges, however, represents a machine bureaucracy with power flowing from the top down. The technostructure, middle line of management, in colleges is not well developed.

Chair Roles Specifically Related to Institutional Governance: The Academic Department Chair as Institutional Leader

Following up on Tucker’s (1981, 1984, 1992) work, which established the importance of the role of department chair, and the work of others who contributed to describing the work of department chairs, Hecht et al. (1999) went beyond the idea that department chairs are first among equals within their departments and explored the greatly magnified range of responsibilities that department chairs shoulder. Chairs are leaders within and even beyond their institutions. They are responsible for department
governance and office management, for curriculum and program development, for faculty matters and student matters, for communication with external audiences, for financial and facilities management, for data management, and for institutional support (Hecht et al., 1999). Given this extensive range of responsibilities of department chairs, Lucas (2000) observed that it is apparent that institutional organizational development and change are not possible without their participation and leadership.

**Chair as communicator.** Bowman (2002) also addressed the wide range of academic department chair responsibilities, but argued that instead of managing activities and functions, department chairs actually manage conversational inquiry such that they influence others to take various actions. Bowman contended that this responsibility of the department chair requires a wide range of leadership capabilities, including skills in communicating, problem solving, coaching, conflict resolution, cultural management, and transition management. Lucas (1994) added to this perspective, suggesting that understanding another person is a far more complicated process than it appears because every message from another person contains not only the content of the message, but also the combination of feelings and attitudes that underlie the content. Thus, “as listeners, chairs should ask themselves, ‘What is the faculty member trying to tell me? What does this mean to the faculty member? How does he or she see the situation?’” (p. 174).

Keeping these ideas in mind while actively listening to the faculty member and avoiding judgments during the conversation can lead to a successful conversation.

Hickson and Stacks (1992) contended that not only is communication an essential skill for successful department chairs, but that all tasks for which chairs are responsible are communicative tasks. They contended that the influence of chairs is not related to any
real power other than personal power, which is an element of communication. Similarly, Hecht et al. (1999) argued that chairs have only the authority relegated to them by their superiors—the definition of formal authority—but by their positive representation of their departments to academic superiors, chairs gain favor for their departments, which is repaid in the form of faculty compliance to chair requests.

In the sense that department chairs occupy a position between faculty and administration, they can be seen as co-leaders in the institution. According to Heenan and Bennis (1999) the greatest responsibility of persons in positions of co-leadership is to advance the purposes of the institution by soliciting the truth; for it is only with an understanding of the truth of situations that co-leaders can communicate effectively with those above and below them. The authors demonstrated the necessity for truth with a example from the case of IBM chief Kenneth P. Olsen as he discussed with colleagues the probable market for computers. Olsen had declared that people would have no need for computers in their homes. Because of Olsen’s stature in the business world, intimidated colleagues did not express their reservations about his conclusion. The result was the undercutting of IBM’s mainframe business at a time when they should have expanded that sector. Bowman (2002) asserted that, “When colleagues keep reservations to themselves, the true sentiment in a discussion is often the opposite of the apparent consensus” (p. 2).

In the academic world, where nearly 80% of all administrative decisions in higher education are made at the department level (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004; Gmelch & Miskin, 1993), institutional success depends on department chairs who ask questions, probe for truthful responses, and take the lead in creative responses that will ensure the
growth and development of their departments and the institution (Gmelch & Miskin). As an example, new department chairs and their departments need to make the transition from a former familiar relationship to a newer one. Together they will experience the sometimes-unsettling stages of small group development described by Tuckman (1965), as *forming, storming, norming, and performing*. Lucas (1994) summarized these stages sequentially as the initial honeymoon stage; followed by friction arising over how tasks should be performed and by whom; followed by group members collecting and sharing information, accepting a new point of view, developing rules for solving problems, and beginning to develop cohesion; followed by the members becoming an effective group of individuals who perform their functions well. Continued growth of the department requires successful completion of these four stages, the quality of the transition resting on the skills of the chair as communicator and ever-evolving leader.

Bridges and Mitchell (2000) described a similarly unsettling three-stage transition process: saying goodbye, shifting to neutral, and moving forward. In the first stage, colleagues must let go of what feels like reality to them to move into a neutral zone full of uncertainty and confusion, where coping consumes most of people’s energy. In discussing this process, Bowman (2002) described the chair’s task as assisting colleagues through the neutral zone with real communication, as opposed to simple information, so that the group is able to move forward.

**Leadership defined.** Leadership has classically been described as a personal quality of individuals to influence others. This description is incomplete, as it does not take into account the cooperative social relationship required for true leadership. Gardner’s (1990) definition was that “Leadership is the process of persuasion or example
by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to pursue objectives held by the leader or shared by the leader and his or her followers” (p. 3). This definition allows the social aspect of the process by recognizing the reality of followership, but does not emphasize the essential importance of followership. Northouse (2004) further defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 3). He emphasized process, influence, group context, and goal attainment. Burns’ (1978) definition, however, seems to be most appropriate for the context of our discussion of department chairs: “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations—of both leaders and followers” (p. 19).

Burns (1978) identified two basic forms of leadership: transactional and transforming. He did not separate leadership from followership, contending that “one of the most serious failures in the study of leadership has been the bifurcation between the literature on leadership and the literature on followership” (p. 3). Burns described leadership (a) as collective activity; (b) as dissensual in that it makes room for internal conflict, often resulting in broader solutions; (c) as causative, not transactional exchanges between leaders and followers, but resulting in changes in leaders’ and followers’ motives and goals that produce further good effect; (d) as morally purposeful; and (e) as transforming—elevating leaders and followers to more principled levels of judgment.

Burns’ (1978) treatise provided a blueprint for transformative change in human society. His first point, that leadership is interactive and collective, removes the attitude that followers are merely subordinate and that all subordinates are followers: a subordinate rises to the level of follower only when he or she participates in the process
of communal growth. Burns’ second point is that leadership is dissensual, the opposite of the consensual state of calm arrived at by common agreement. He insists that dissent is essential because in a democracy popular aspirations are not harmonious. Leaders manage conflict by reaching out for followers and searching for allies.

In describing leadership as causative, the third point, Burns (1978) made the distinction between leadership that has true social effect and that which does not, contending that true leadership is not merely symbolic or ceremonial. When leaders and followers engage in an even exchange of any kind they complete what Burns identified as a transaction, which begins and ends with the act and has no further social effect. But when leaders and followers engage in an interactive process, the result is change in the motives and goals of both that produces a causal effect on social relations and political institutions. Burns said, “The effect ranges from the small and hardly noticed to the creative and historic. Small changes are more numerous, of course, and collectively and cumulatively they bring about the ‘gradual change’ that permanently alters the course of history” (p. 454). The most tangible lasting effect of leadership is creation of an institution “that continues to exert moral leadership and foster needed social change long after the creative leaders are gone” (p. 454). However, the most lasting and pervasive leadership of all is intangible and non-institutional: the leadership of influence fostered by ideas embodied in social, religious, or artistic movements.

Burns’ (1978) fourth point was that leadership is morally purposeful, always oriented toward a goal. He said that successful leadership points in a direction and is also the vehicle for continuing and achieving purpose. Both leaders and followers are involved in the shaping of purpose; and purpose can be either singular or multiple, in
which case multiple purposes are presented as sets of priorities. Burns described the transforming leader as one who taps into the personal needs of followers, thus raising their aspirations and helping to shape their values. In this way transforming leaders mobilize the potential of their followers.

Finally, Burns (1978) described the elevating effect of transformational moral leadership. From a moral level above that of the followers, leaders are able to engage with followers, not in a power relationship, but in an interactive process generated by mutual needs, aspirations, and values. Fully aware of alternative leaders and programs and having the capacity to choose among alternatives, followers respond to leaders in pursuit of their collective purposes. Leaders take responsibility for their commitments by fulfilling the promises they make. The result of this “enmeshing of goals and values” is that “leaders and followers are raised to more principled levels of judgment” (p. 455); all are transformed to higher levels of morality and understanding. This kind of leadership is capable of shaping public and private opinion; it is the “leadership of reform and revolutionary movements” (p. 33). Moral leadership “renews and challenges its own institutions” (p. 456).

Chair as leader. The chair as leader influences faculty to follow when following is voluntary (Bowman, 2002; Leaming, 2007; Lucas, 1994). In the collegial setting, a department chair is not considered a superior in the sense that he or she has the authority to issue orders that must be obeyed. In fact, the very essence of the chair-faculty relationship, as discussed herein, is that of equals, of peers. A chair’s ability to influence the behavior of his or her colleagues grows out of their shared goals and motivations and
acceptance of relational interactions. This shared interaction is the essence of leadership (Burns, 1978; Lucas, 1994; Northouse, 2004).

McArthur (2002) further emphasized the leadership aspect of department chairs by comparing them to the Speaker of the House (in Congress), who—as first among equals—cannot alone carry on any academic program. As the department chair balances between departmental needs and college monetary constraints, for example, the department chair as problem solver comes into play. In a practical situation like this, Laurie (2000) suggested the use of Harkins’ (1998) four-step Tower of Power, which generates three questions and a charge: What’s up? What’s so? What’s possible? Let’s go! The first question uncovers a colleague’s agenda or needs and feelings; the second explores underlying assumptions for the purpose of establishing fact; the third identifies real choices and creative solutions; and the final “Let’s go!” encourages selection of the choice from step three that will achieve the goal and establish a shared commitment to action. This example demonstrates the need for the department chair to be able to listen, to communicate, to establish purpose, to manage conflict, and to negotiate solutions.

Whenever people interact, as faculty may in an academic department, conflict is a normal occurrence (Lucas, 1994). Real world situations generate conflict, as when people want different things but must settle for the same thing or when two people want the same thing but must settle for different things. In such situations department chairs must learn to manage conflict among colleagues so that individual self-interests do not overshadow mutual interests, which could damage departmental relationships. They must, at the very least, maintain department stability, recognizing that conflict can be a creative tension in its ability to broaden understanding leading to comprehensive
decisions that address more aspects of an issue than a simple consensus might achieve. Such instances can increase options and generate high energy levels that increase participation and commitment to a group decision (Lucas, 1994).

The chair as leader focuses on organizational culture in the forms of mission, vision, engagement, and adaptability (Bowman, 2002). Department chairs have a major leadership responsibility to create and sustain an alignment that preserves an organization’s values, reinforces its mission, stimulates progress toward its aspirations, and invites and affirms colleagues’ contributions in pursuit of mission and vision (Collins & Porras, 1997). However, if an institution is to be truly visionary, aspects above and beyond a mission and vision statement are necessary. Department chairs can help to transform their institutions into learning organizations (Senge, 1990), and in the process they will empower their faculty. By discovering what is important to each faculty member and by creatively interacting with each toward shared institutional vision, chairs can rise above the managerial aspects of transactional leadership to become transforming leaders in and for their institutions (Burns, 1978; Lucas, 1994).

Lucas (1994) described the characteristics of academic department chairs as transformational leaders. Leaming (2003) presented these characteristics as components of a fundamental leadership process adapted from Kouzes and Posner’s (1995) five leadership practices and ten behavioral commitments. Each leadership practice is supported by two behavioral commitments. Practices 1 through 5 with their accompanying commitments are listed as follows: (Leaming, pp. 30-34)

1. Challenge the process: Search for opportunities Experiment and take risks
2. Inspire a shared vision: Envision the future Enlist others
3. Enable others to act: Foster collaboration Strengthen others

4. Model the way (to desired objectives): Set the example Plan small wins

5. Encourage the heart (of everyone involved):
   Recognize individual contribution Celebrate accomplishments

Lucas summarizes the behaviors of department chairs aspiring to become transformational leaders by encouraging chairs (a) to challenge existing climates and norms by looking for opportunities to make things better, (b) to picture a desired future that individuals want to create, (c) to encourage faculty and students to have ideas by listening and giving feedback, (d) to create a positive climate by taking a problem-solving approach that avoids fixing blame, and (e) to believe in people (pp. 50-64). Actively focusing on these practices and commitments will, according to Lucas, create and sustain an atmosphere of continuous growth in an academic department.

**Chair as agent of change.** Like leadership, change is a process involving social interaction of people, requiring willing and committed followers (Bennis, 2000). For an organization, change is a process of transition from a present state, through a state of instability, to a desired (changed) state (Watwood, Frank, & Rocks, 1997). Periods of instability develop as soon as an established order or pattern is threatened, often generating feelings of insecurity and fear among individuals, causing them to resist change in order to maintain a sense of comfort and control. Since a primary task of the department chair as leader is to facilitate change, he or she bears the responsibility to “create the conditions that enable the whole workforce to adapt to change and participate in solving the problems their organizations face” (Laurie, 2000, p. 22).

Bowman (2002) described change as a multifaceted process triggered by an event: changes in conditions, assumptions, practices, and pedagogical theories. Bridges and
Mitchell (2000) contended that the conditions that prompt and describe change are external, but that real transition is internal, a psychological reorientation that people go through before the change can work. The researchers asserted that people cannot just implement a new plan, but must experience a transition process involving three steps: saying goodbye, shifting to neutral, and moving forward. This transition involves letting go of what feels like a world of experience and a sense of reality (even identity) and moving into an in-between state that is full of energy-sapping uncertainty and confusion.

Bowman (2000) continued by claiming that the real work of department chairs in this neutral zone is coaching colleagues not to rush ahead prematurely or to retreat precipitously into the past because to do so would undercut the creative transformation that must take place in the neutral zone if meaningful change is to occur. Acknowledging that behaving in a new way can be disorienting to the point of putting a person’s sense of competence at risk, Bridges and Mitchell (2000) contended that assisting colleagues through the neutral zone requires real communication, rather than simple information, and the use of the “4 Ps” of transition communication. *Purpose* communicates why we have to do this. *Picture* communicates what it will look and feel like when we reach our goal. *Plan* communicates step by step, how we will get there. *Part* communicates what you can do (and need to do) to help us move forward. The department chair who accomplishes these tasks is truly an agent of change.

The most ordinary and expected kind of change in an academic institution, especially in a community college, is improving the effectiveness of instruction and level of student learning. Assessment activities, which seek to measure and to monitor improvement in instruction and learning, are based on change and examination of the
impact of change. Have students learned more with the addition of review-discussion sessions? Or do opportunities for practical applications yield better results? In the culture of continuous improvement and the learning organization, the academic department chair becomes the orchestrator of a successful effort (Senge, 1990).

Stark, Briggs, and Rowland-Poplawski (2002) studied 44 chairs judged by vice-presidents in randomly selected institutions to be especially effective in curriculum planning. The researchers conducted 50- to 90-minute telephone interviews with chairs of departments that engaged in regular, collaborative, information-based curriculum planning as their routine practice, rather than as an exception. The researchers described these departments as “continuously-planning departments.” Their research goal was to determine the department chairpersons’ self-reported roles in curriculum leadership for undergraduate programs; and they examined the congruence of these roles with a generalized process of curriculum planning that included development, implementation, and evaluation of an academic plan. Of particular value in this study are two important facts: that the randomly selected institutions varied widely from community colleges to 4-year institutions offering graduate programs; also, final exploration of contextual factors of the institutions—such as institutional type, discipline, departmental size, and organizational structure—demonstrated a consistent dependence on chair leadership for change, varying primarily in the chair leadership role played by the chair.

Stark, Briggs, and Rowland-Poplawski (2002) determined that chairs—acting as change agents—fell into seven leadership roles relative to curriculum development: sensor, facilitator, initiator, agenda setter, coordinator, advocate, and standard setter. The chair’s role of sensor included four aspects of perceiving both problems and opportunities
relative to curriculum. The first sensing included perception of internal departmental curriculum issues that needed attention or adjustment (problem sensor). The second type of sensing included awareness of what was going on within the institutional environment external to the department that faculty in the department could be helped to respond to, such as institutional mandates, budget crises, or state initiatives (external sensor). The third type of sensing included the chair’s maintaining national or regional connection within the discipline and its constituencies, such as employers and professional associations, so as to keep faculty informed of emerging issues and trends (information broker). The fourth, and least reported, type of sensing was to develop and share with the faculty comprehensive visions for the future (vision sensor). The researchers concluded that chairs who accepted the roles as sensor initiated curriculum proposals.

In this study by Stark, Briggs and Rowland-Poplawski (2002), chairs who described their roles as facilitator, initiator, and agenda-setter demonstrated concern with the process of curriculum planning. Though there was a difference in the level of neutrality adopted by chairs depending on their preferred role, their goal was to translate issues and ideas into curriculum proposals and decisions. Chairs who described their roles as advocate and coordinator demonstrated concern with implementing curriculum decisions: obtaining resources and support and ensuring that faculty work was coordinated. Chairs who described their roles as standard setter were concerned with standards of quality and success. The researchers demonstrated that the cycle of these roles revolved from curriculum development, to curriculum implementation, through to curriculum evaluation—a repeating cycle that is the essence of curricular change. While chairs reported lack of expertise in the evaluation phase, they acknowledged growing
institutional pressure to perform evaluation tasks. Thus, regardless of the level of chair expertise in evaluation process, the fact that the responsibility for evaluation remains with department chairs demonstrates the essential role chairs play as necessary agents if change is to occur.

A further case is made that not only must department chairs be agents of change, but they must be agents of transformational change if they are to respond to the urgencies of modern academic life (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000; Hilosky & Watwood, 1997; Lucas, 1994). This role is so important that Hilosky and Watwood (1997) asserted that the role as change agent is one of the most important challenges facing new department chairs. The researchers described the pivotal role of the community college department chair in leading change efforts within the setting of seven concepts for effective change: visionary transformational leadership; empowerment of individuals to act without direction from above; teaming of individuals as a factor of institutional culture; gathering and using data as an integral factor in all activity; focusing on quality and an effort to improve; innovating by flowing with change and using change to improve; and assuring constituent satisfaction by effective communication and meeting their needs. This study is particularly valuable because it provided a framework for chairs in their management of institutional change.

**Emerging roles of chairs.** Changes in the academic landscape over the last 10 to 15 years and into the future have had and will continue to have profound impact on both the responsibilities and functioning of academic departments and department chairs in four-year institutions as well as community colleges. In an environment of deep criticism of higher education, new responsibility roles for department chairs have emerged (Lucas,
Discussions about continuously-improving departments and learning organizations are related to the growing importance of the accountability movement, where citizens and funders (both public and private) are demanding that academic institutions demonstrate efficient and effective use of financial resources. Assessment for the purpose of improving teaching and learning is described by Cross (1990) as assessment for improvement, and is an expected type of departmental review. However, another type of assessment, assessment for accountability, which includes reporting of such aspects as faculty workloads, committee assignments, and other time allocations (Lees, 2006) is now a topic of concern. “In the accountability model, feedback is usually public, normative, comparative, and competitive” (Cross, p. 124). This means that what is found to be successful in one venue may become so attractive to deans in other institutions that department chairs may be pressured to adopt patterns and practices that may not be appropriate for their settings (Lees). According to Lees, department chairs in this position must go beyond their traditional role as advocate for their departments; they must now take on the added role of shielding their faculty from what faculty consider to be undue interference (even harassment) in academic issues. Communication tasks in this new role become ever more delicate.

Another emerging role of department chairs is to evaluate fellow departmental faculty within the context of newer professional responsibilities and union agreements (Bennett, 1998; Tucker, 1992; Young, 2007). Non-tenured full-time faculty have traditionally undergone intense scrutiny prior to earning tenure, and tenured faculty have been evaluated for their teaching. Recent accountability, assessment, and continuously-improving paradigms and increased economic pressures on academic institutions have
now required that the evaluation of tenured faculty include topics other than teaching effectiveness (Levin, 2002). Faculty committee work, contribution to assessment and research projects, and increased productivity are factored into the total evaluations. In cases where tenured faculty are members of unions, chairs assume the role of implementing the union contract in terms of faculty assignments and of evaluating faculty performance relative to those clearly articulated assignments (Levin; Young, 2007). This role as contract implementer requires that chairs make teaching and non-teaching assignments within agreed upon parameters. When faculty members are found to be performing below expected standard, union agreements often demand yet another new role for department chairs. In addition to the traditional role of providing professional mentoring and/or support, chairs are often required to take on the role of defender or prosecutor in trial-like disciplinary of grievance proceedings.

On-line instruction has introduced yet another role for department chairs (Lucas, 2000). This new delivery system for instruction requires that chairs exert academic oversight in a division of their institutions where they may be strangers—technology centers. Chairs must become technological gurus, acquiring knowledge of how their discipline can be presented on-line and appreciation for and expertise in the pedagogical aspects of effective on-line instruction. Chairs must become knowledgeable about instructional technology.

Increased chair activity outside the department, through such efforts as strategic planning and interdisciplinary activities, has significantly increased. External program review, civic engagement, and compliance issues are still other new responsibilities of department chairs (Lees, 2006; Lucas, 2000; Young, 2007). Issues related to diversity, to
hiring of part-time faculty, and to support for persons with special needs are no longer rare occurrences for chairs; they are ordinary daily concerns. These issues require that chairs may no longer be simply manager-leaders in their disciplines, but must become servant-politicians, acquiring knowledge of legal requirements and limitations of their office and skilled practitioners in the art of diplomacy. Given the importance of community support for institutions and the necessity for chairs to engage with external partners, chairs may even take on campus and external entrepreneurial roles (Lees).

Traditionally, recruiting of undergraduate students was done by designated teams in institutions. Increasingly, faculty and department chairs are now being asked to assume roles in student recruitment because of the draw they provide in a competitive environment for increasing student enrollment (Lees, 2006; Young, 2007). These activities include creating and updating brochures about programs, establishing web sites, conducting tours of departmental facilities, and writing personal letters to prospective students.

Department chairs are also increasingly involved with student retention (Lees, 2006). As leaders, chairs must influence their departments to discover behaviors and institute practices in the discipline that have been found to increase student success. Such practices might include creating recitation-review sessions, coordinating work with tutors, or engaging in specific instructional techniques. Lees emphasizes the point that turning innovations addressing the retention problem into scholarship through collection and reporting of data would be positive contributions to the professional literature. Service learning is a new addition to the expected outcomes of academic instruction for
students, and the role of leading that effort has been added to the list of emerging roles for chairs (Lucas, 2000).

In the face of these changing contexts of and for higher education, responsibilities of department chairs as academic leaders must also change. Bennett (1988) described department chairs who grapple with new challenges regarding curriculum and personnel as having to assume new roles as “custodians of standards.” He asserted that, along with changes in institutions and the larger society, departments themselves need to change. They must reflect shifts in student experience, capacity, interests, and needs and must also reflect developments in the discipline itself, as well as changes in faculty strengths and abilities. As “custodians of standards,” (Bennett, p. 65) chairs need to assure themselves and others that the curriculum is appropriate for new developments in the discipline, in the student body, and in faculty capacity; and they must assign faculty judiciously so that their individual talents are aligned with instructional needs and opportunities. Bennett described this curriculum/personnel responsibility for chairs as including the traditional role of mentoring junior faculty, while also supporting an aging professorate who may be doubtful about the value of new approaches and sensing a loss of privileges; and these tasks must be accomplished by the chair while planning for a future that may introduce dramatic changes in the college job market.

Community college department chairs. Academic department chairs in twenty-first century community colleges also occupy a position that requires both leadership and managerial skills—along with skills of the resource manager, instant problem solver, spokesperson, deep listener, motivator, enabler, meaning maker, systems designer, and cultural rainmaker (Bowman, 2002). Seagren, Wheeler, Creswell, Miller, and VanHorn-
Grasmeyer (1994) found that deans and department chairs are instrumental in leading change in their institutions. In fact, Mellow (1996) contended that community college department chairs must be at the head of the line of transformational leaders who will help to transform higher education.

At the community college, the point of entry for a growing majority of college students (Sullivan & Phillippe, 2005), the most mundane responsibility of an academic department chair is to create course schedules and to assign classes to faculty. However, a leader’s approach to course scheduling relative to faculty is to create a schedule that supports the human needs of faculty, enables the development of personal professional creativity, and encourages professional behavior among faculty. Faculty as individuals have different and often competing academic agendas, and faculty whose main interests are their own academic disciplines or sub-disciplines must today become fluent in skills as far ranging as technological language and practice to nuances of local politics and service organizations. Community college department chairs must be able to make vision and mission real, while nurturing community and convincing competing parties to use their differences to enhance community vitality.

Mellow (1996) described the community college as the ideal institution where the kind of continuous learning described above must take place and where academic department chairs must lead the way. Having inherited the hierarchical organizational structure of other institutions of higher education, community colleges must find ways to move away from the former Late Industrial Era paradigm to one that is representative of and responsive to the current Early Information Era. Recognizing that the traditional structure of colleges can hinder an institution’s efforts to respond to current student
needs, like improvements in advisement and registration, Mellow proposed for community colleges the model of the Learning Organization (Senge, 1990), with the community college academic department chair as the key agent of change in an institution not yet ready to revise its entire organizational functioning.

The learning organization is described as one that (a) allows for and fosters learning and transformation at the organizational level; (b) enables stability in a dynamic environment and coherence in chaos; (c) continuously develops the capacity to both generate and respond to change; (d) generates abundant and random information, processes information rapidly, and shares it broadly; and (e) acts with consideration for the individual, the enterprise, the range of external stakeholders (Mellow, 1996). The function of the community college department chair, according to Mellow, is to inspire faculty to make decisions on a specific topic—like academic advising—based on an understanding of the functioning of the entire college (systems thinking), to bring to the surface of their understanding underlying principles upon which decisions are based (mental models), and to delay decisions until divergent perspectives can be thoroughly understood and incorporated into the final expression (dialogue). Academic department chairs in community colleges who are able to accomplish these tasks will lead their departments and their institutions through a process of “co-evolution,” where both entities will interact and grow over time. Charging community college chairs to engage in the study and practice of change, Mellow contended that community colleges are the best organizational structures to bring these concepts of change fully into the future.

Young (2007) studied Illinois community college department chairs and reported seven categories of duties that did not appear on the Carroll and Gmelch (1994) list of 21
department chair duties. These categories were handling student issues, academic assessment, recruiting students and marketing the department, scheduling classes, accreditation and program review, textbook selection process, and resolving conflicts/concerns/complaints.

Through further analysis of her first research question (What level of importance do Illinois public community college department chairs attribute to 21 duties performed by department chairs?), Young (2007) also determined and reported five role factors for Illinois public community college department chairs: Department Leader, Resource Manager, Faculty Leader, Instructional Manager, and Teacher and Student Advisor. These five roles compare to the four roles reported by Carroll and Gmelch (1992): Leader, Scholar, Faculty Developer, and Manager. Young explained the difference in these role listings as possibly highlighting the differences between the interests of community college department chairs and those of research university department chairs. A close examination of the role factors could result in expressing the community college roles as Department and Faculty Leader, Resource and Instructional Manager, and Teacher and Student Advisor. Since student instruction, as opposed to research, is a major focus of community colleges (Grubb, 1999), this alignment of effort and intention appears to be appropriate, encouraging, and commendable.

**Power issues related to department chairs.** The collection of responsibilities and expectations associated with academic department chairs necessitates decision-making, use of authority, and consequent use of power (Laurie, 2000). According to Northouse (2004), the capacity or potential to influence is the definition of power. While Northouse expressed the idea generally, it can apply to department chairs in that
department chairs lead their faculties by influence. Therefore, “the concept of power is related to leadership because it is part of the influence process . . . . People have power when they have the ability to affect others’ beliefs, attitudes, and courses of action” (p. 6). Northouse cited French and Raven (1959) as describing five kinds of social power, using the conceptual frame of a relational dyad between the person influencing and the person being influenced. The types of power identified were reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power. “Each of these types of power increases a leader’s capacity to influence the attitudes, values, and behaviors of others” (p. 9).

Northouse (2004) contended that in organizations there are two major kinds of power: position power, which “refers to the power a person derives from a particular office or rank in a formal organizational structure,” and personal power, which “refers to the power a leader derives from followers” (p. 6). Applying this notion to higher education administration, vice-presidents and department chairs have greater amounts of position power than do lower level staff; and leaders (managers, for example) who are admired by their followers for personal or professional reasons benefit from the personal power granted to them by their subordinates. Lucas (1994) observed that department chairs have three kinds of power to motivate faculty: position power, also referred to as legitimate power because of the authority individuals have due to their positions; personal power; and expert power, which is based on knowledge and control of resources. These definitions of power are consistent with the discussions of power by Burns (1978), who described power specifically as it relates to leadership, i.e., emphasizing the cooperative relationship between the influencer and the influenced.
Soranastaporn (2001) analyzed faculty perceptions of types of power used by or available to department chairs in higher education institutions in Thailand, and he examined the relative effect of these perceptions on specific faculty responses. Public universities were to become free of centralized bureaucratic state control in 2002, becoming less dependent on government control and more dependent on entrepreneurial effort. Faculty would lose tenure, and department chairs would gain more formal authority. The researcher wanted to determine how faculty at Mahidol University perceived department chair power type and how those perceptions of type of chair power might affect the degree to which faculty complied with the directions and wishes of their department chairs, the sense of conflict faculty felt within the organization, and the degree to which they felt empowered within the organization.

Mahidol University had 2,755 faculty members, divided into 14 faculties [discrete disciplines] and 6 colleges, 5 institutes, and 4 academic centers. The researcher collected a 20% systematically randomized sampling of 467 participants. Soranastaporn (2001) indicated that faculty completed four questionnaires: the Rahim Leader Power Inventory (RLPH), the Compliance with Superior’s Wishes Scale (CWSW), the Rahim Organization Conflict Inventory I (ROCI-I), and the School Participant Empowerment Scale (SPES). Since the survey instruments had been developed in English, they had to be translated into Thai. Validity of the translations was assured through a process called back translation, and reliability was assured through field-testing of the Thai version.

Soranastaporn (2001) explained that in back translation, native Thai speakers who were degreed experts in linguistics (the researcher being one of the four with a master’s degree in linguistics) performed the task, which was accomplished in four rounds. The
first translator was provided an English version of the instrument and translated it into Thai. The second translator was provided the Thai translation of the first translator and translated that text into an English version. The third translator used this English text and translated it into Thai. The fourth translator used this Thai version and translated it into English. Finally, the last English version was compared to the original English version, and differences were analyzed and discussed. The most appropriate Thai words were selected for translation. Thai versions of the instruments were field-tested.

The independent variable in the study was the faculty perception of the leader power bases used by department chairs: coercive power, expert power, legitimate power, referent power, and reward power. The dependent variables were (a) faculty empowerment, (b) faculty compliance, and (c) faculty conflict. Descriptive statistics were used to answer research questions indicating faculty perceptions of power bases used by their department chairs and faculty perceptions of their compliance with superiors’ wishes, the degree of conflict faculty experience, and faculty perceptions of their empowerment within their organizations.

Results indicated the following: (a) Faculty members perceived that their department chairs used reward power the most, followed in order by referent power, legitimate power, expert power, and coercive power. (b) Behavioral compliance with superiors’ wishes appeared to be stronger than attitudinal compliance. (c) On average, self-perceptions of conflict were strongest within the interpersonal domain, followed in order by intragroup conflict, and intergroup conflict. (d) Faculty members perceived the greatest sense of empowerment in the self-efficiency domain, followed in order by the domains of status, professional growth, impact, autonomy, and decision-making.
Regression analyses were used to demonstrate the correlations between faculty perceptions of the types of power used by their department chairs and faculty compliance, experience of conflict, and sense of empowerment. Major findings indicated that (a) the department chairs’ use of expert and legitimate power appeared to have the strongest influence on the faculty members’ compliance with superiors’ wishes; (b) referent power, although correlated with empowerment, was also correlated with intragroup conflict, intergroup conflict, and interpersonal conflict; and (c) coercive power was correlated with neither compliance nor empowerment, but with all three forms of conflict measures.

The results showed that expert power was the most effective power base, followed by legitimate power and referent power. Reward power and coercive power were shown to be ineffective. In the analysis of power type relative to faculty compliance, expert power appeared to be the most effective means of influencing faculty because it was positively correlated with both attitudinal and behavioral compliance. Coercive power appeared to be ineffective because it did not influence faculty behavior, but was correlated with intrapersonal conflict, intragroup conflict, and intergroup conflict. Other types of power showed mixed impacts on faculty behavior: Reward power may lead to faculty empowerment but not to compliance; referent power leads to faculty empowerment, and in some cases to attitudinal compliance; legitimate power leads to behavioral compliance but not to attitudinal compliance.

This study of perceived chair power is important in a discussion of leadership because the essence of leadership is the cooperative interplay between the leader and those being led. If the type of department chair power perceived by faculty influences attitudes and behaviors of faculty, that reality raises faculty perceptions to levels of
significant influence in the chair-faculty relationship. The study suggests that community college chairs would do well to discover how they are perceived as they move through their daily tasks because faculty perceptions could become an unknown factor in their leadership effectiveness.

Leadership Styles and Traits of Effective Chairs

The preceding discussion of power issues dramatizes the significance of department chairs’ personal styles and traits relative to their effectiveness and success in fulfilling their professional duties and promoting institutional missions. A style is a set of behaviors toward or manner of interacting with others in the context of a particular social setting; behaviors communicating perceptions, values, and attitudes. When two or more people share a common environment, they relate to and engage each other by adopting personas that are specific to that setting and relationship. Such personas are variable and transitory, moving symbiotically in a cocoon of wholeness. Chu (2006) described this relationship in an academic department as a closed social system. In a closed system, faculty see that which occurs within the organization, the department, as most important; and they see the primary work of the organization as that which occurs in the classroom.

Chu (2006) subsequently argued that contemporary departments should, in fact, function as open systems, where departments are viewed as embedded within and dependent upon the external environment, the institution, and where they exchange their services for support from learners, administration, accreditors, and faculty. However, this view of the department as an open system obviates the boundary-spanning function of the department chair as described in the closed system, where the department chair works
between the department and constituent groups surrounding it. It is this latter description that has relevance to this study: specifically, that behavior and perceived power choice of department chairs relative to their colleagues influences faculty behavior and self-perception (Soranastaporn, 2001). This kind of relationship is characterized by the closed system paradigm (Chu). The following section of this review of literature further explores research on the styles and traits of academic department chairs deemed to be effective leaders.

**Specific skills for effective chairmanship.** Habits of effective communication have been established as the most basic of essential chair skills (Hickson & Stacks, 1992; Higgerson, 1996; Laurie, 2000). Communication with administration as advocate for faculty and discipline-specific standards, communication with faculty to achieve professional cooperation for academic improvement, communication with and for students as interpreter of institutional and discipline issues, communication with external agencies for mutual understanding and appreciation—the chair’s job is to communicate; and an effective chair must use receptive, analytic, and expressive faculties to negotiate understandings and agreements. To parse the skill more finely, Robinson (1996) discussed the importance for chairs to listen; to transmit information in an open, honest, and positive manner; to take responsibility for mistakes; to be unselfish with sharing success; and to be diplomatic in handling sensitive issues. Wu (2004) described these skills as those of a good politician, not just a good talker, one who is able to delegate responsibilities, trusting that they will be properly fulfilled, and verifying that everything is under control.
In addition to communication skills, effective department chairs also need skills in problem solving, conflict resolution, cultural management, performance coaching, and transition (Bowman, 2002; Gmelch, 2004). Also needed are skills in negotiation and resource deployment (Gmelch, 2004; Hecht, 2004). Wu (2004) described the resource deployment skills to include aggressive acquisition and careful management of resources, such that chairs explore every possibility for useful resources, put the right persons in key positions, and invest in the most important items. Since chairs must be role models for faculty, staff, and students, effective chairs must be solid researchers and excellent teachers (Robinson, 1996; Wu). As faculty colleagues, chairs must advocate for and facilitate faculty wishes and needs (Robinson). Wolverton, Ackerman, and Holt (2005) also emphasized that, as the chairmanship is a series of interruptions and interactions with people from all levels of the institution, in addition to communication skills, department chairs must also have good interpersonal skills, must be willing to respond rapidly to situations, and must possess a range of other skills that are not necessarily found in every good faculty member. The researchers contended that some faculty possess both faculty and administrative skills, but many do not. Therefore, not every faculty member can be an effective department chair (despite the practice in many departments of rotating department chair responsibilities).

**Personal qualities of effective chairs.** Harkins (1998) concluded that, even with the training that many researchers have suggested would be appropriate for new department chairs, the most frequently selected items of critical importance to the success of deans and department chairs focused on character values as opposed to administrative or technical skills. In a survey study that sampled three deans and three department chairs
selected from each of the 58 Association of American Universities (AAU) institutions in the United States, Harkins received responses from 106 deans and 118 department chairs: 224 individuals. Respondents suggested that externally manifested aspects of leadership, such as charisma, humility/modesty, passion, benevolence, use of authority, education, assertiveness, and self esteem, are not as important as the inner qualities of leadership, such as integrity, ethical conduct, competence, trustworthiness, and dependability.

In addition to leadership ability and technical skills, Eisen (1996) found that character, integrity, and respect for collegiality were essential for chair effectiveness. Examining the role of the department chair in departmental decision-making and the importance of collegiality to academic governance, Eisen developed the concept of collegiality as an egalitarian authority structure comprising consensus, democracy, consultation, communication, and enfranchisement. The quality of patience, according to Wu (2004), supports these collaborative processes by helping to avoid chaos and minimize serious confrontations. Gmelch (2004) added that chairs must have credibility because they resolve conflict from principal rather than with power.

Lumpkin (2004) asserted that the effectiveness of department chairs is enhanced by qualities described by Collins (2001) in his fifth—and highest—level of leadership, the executive. Collins identified the first four levels of leadership as the highly capable individual, the contributing team member, the competent manager, and the effective leader. Collins contended that these first four types of leaders can help an organization become good, but that only “the executive,” through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will, builds enduring greatness. Factors required to become a Level 5 executive leader are hiring and retaining the right people, confronting the brutal
facts, being relentlessly consistent to become and remain the best, and focusing on incremental and continuous change. Behaviors in this process include exerting rigor in getting the right people on and the wrong people off the team, creating a climate where truth is heard by leading with questions (not answers), engaging in dialogue and debate, and conducting autopsies (of failed attempts) without blame. Lumpkin concluded that, assuming the merit of this perspective, department chairs who would lead their academic units to greatness may rely on the same paradoxical blend of personal humility (described in religious settings as a spiritual virtue) and professional will to lead a team of faculty who will argue and debate in pursuit of the best answers, yet will unify behind a decision once it has been made.

Stark (2002) tested a model of curriculum leadership to determine whether Stark and Lattuca’s (1997) interpretation of Quinn’s (1988) business model provided recognizable leadership roles for academic departments. Designed to tap the four quadrants of Quinn’s model of competing values, Stark’s survey asked chairs who had been previously identified as effective to describe their own leadership styles and to identify the style they judged to be most effective. The eight competing models emerged from the combinations of behaviors favoring flexibility versus control and internal focus versus external focus. Through examining behavior quadrants created by the intersection of the Flexibility/Control vertical axis and the Internal Focus/External Focus horizontal axis, four major models were defined, each having two components. In the Flexibility—External Focus Quadrant, the Open Systems Model produced the Innovator and the Broker. In the Control—External Focus Quadrant, the Rational Goal Model produced the Producer and the Director. In the Control—Internal Focus Quadrant, the Internal Process
Model produced the Monitor and the Coordinator. In the Flexibility—Internal Focus Quadrant, the Human Relations Model produced the Mentor and the Facilitator.

Behaviors of each of the models were described as follows: In the Open Systems Model, the Innovator facilitates change and adaptation; and the Broker maintains external legitimacy and obtains needed resources. In the Rational Goal Model, the Producer motivates people to take action and maintain high productivity; and the Director clarifies expectations and priorities and communicates vision. In the Internal Process Model, the Monitor ensures compliance, tracks progress, and analyzes results; and the Coordinator maintains order, structure, and flow of the system. In the Human Relations Model, the Mentor engages in the development of people with care and empathy; and the Facilitator fosters collective effort to build cohesion and teamwork.

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<th><strong>Human Relations Model</strong></th>
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<td>The Mentor engages in the development of people with care and empathy</td>
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Figure 1. The Competing values model: Eight managerial roles. (Stark, 2002, p. 61)

The majority of the surveyed chairs judged the Rational Goal Model (Control—External Focus) behaviors to be the most effective mode of operation. However, percentages of chairs who self-reported using this behavioral style fell short of those who found it most effective. Chairs were asked to give and did give explanations for the
disconnect between their judgment of most effective style and their self-reported behaviors. Chairs cited the possibility that their personal characteristics might include aspects from each of the styles and that none of the styles was really negative or least effective. Others mentioned that no one style is most effective in all circumstances; still others mentioned the necessity for chairs to maintain flexibility. Stark (2002) suggested that other possible reasons for the disconnect might have been that chairs might have responded to the survey based on the activity being mentioned, rather than on the stimulus relative to internal/external and flexibility/control aspects of the leadership approach. It was also possible that chairs behaved in ways that came naturally to them without a calculated determination as to a strategy for effectiveness. Also, self-perception might have been skewed, as chairs might have used a particular style of leadership without recognizing that they were doing so. Reflecting on these behaviors, it seems that all of the behavioral styles have a place in the department chair’s repertoire because specific chair duties and fulfilling a wide range of responsibilities require varying styles, depending on varying times and circumstances.

While much research suggests that effective chairs function somewhere in the middle of the range between coordinator/manager and complete transformational leader, characterized by distinct and unwavering vision, commanding presence, and great charisma (Robinson, 1996), Brown and Moshavi (2002) found that transformational leadership behaviors were positively associated with faculty satisfaction with department chair supervision, perceptions of organizational effectiveness, and willingness to expend extra effort. In a study to determine faculty reactions to transformational and contingent reward leadership, 440 faculty of 70 department chairs completed the Multifactor
Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). Of the elements in the MLQ—contingent reward, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (the latter 4 representing the “4 Is” of transformational leadership)—only idealized influence (the charisma factor of transformational leadership) significantly influenced all three measured dependent variables: satisfaction with department chair supervision, perceptions of organizational effectiveness, and willingness to expend extra effort. Brown and Moshavi concluded that while idealized influence plays a generally significant role in effective leadership, it is particularly important in the case of academic department chairs.

The importance of transformational leadership by department chairs for the purpose of institutional change was demonstrated in a 2001 study that focused on community college department chairs (Leftwich, 2001). The State of North Carolina sought to reengineer its community colleges by introducing a new program review process, reviewing program titles, developing a statewide common course library, and developing a regional program planning/approval process. Conversion from a quarter system to a semester system was to accompany these changes. The North Carolina Association of Community College Presidents approved the plans following recommendations of the task forces who studied each component of the needed changes. The reengineering, which went into effect in 1997, required strong leadership for this change. Operating on the assumption that “if one wishes to understand exceptional performance, one must study exceptional performers,” (p. 12), Leftwich studied the “leadership styles of exceptional department chairs in community colleges involved in leading significant change” (p. 12). The research questions explored (a) the self-
perceived leadership styles of department chairs identified by their instructional administrators as outstanding in leading their departments through the conversion and reengineering process; (b) the chairs’ leadership styles as perceived by their faculty; (c) what differences existed between chairs’ self-perceptions and faculty perceptions of chairs’ leadership styles at large and small institutions; and (d) whether differences existed in department chairs’ self-perceptions and faculty perceptions of chairs’ leadership styles at large and small institutions.

The population was the 58 community colleges in North Carolina, and the population sample was a convenience sample of 32 chairs who represented 26 different community colleges. Chairs were identified by their college president or top instructional administrator as exceptional at leading their departments through the semester conversion and reengineering. All nominated chairs were sent the Multifactor College Leadership Questionnaire III (MCLQ-III) Self-Evaluation Form. Full-time faculty reporting to nominated chairs were surveyed using the Multifactor College Leadership Questionnaire III Team Member Form. From the 35 statements describing leadership attributes, 5 thematic clusters of transformational leadership characteristics were measured: intuitive component, people orientation, motivational orientation, influence orientation, and ethical orientation.

Leftwich (2001) cited Roueche, Baker, and Rose (1989) to operationally define the clusters as *Intuitive Component (Vision)*, a leader’s conceptualized view of the future; *Influence Orientation*, the process of shared attention to problems and understanding the roles to be played in resolution; *People Orientation*, the process of leader and follower interaction in which the team is considered a living system and where the strengths of
each team member are maximized, while a strong focus on the individual is maintained; *Motivational Orientation*, the process whereby the mass of the organization accepts a new vision and mission; *Ethical (Values) Orientation*, the moral fiber of the leader including her or his commitment, quality, integrity, trust, and respect through modeling.

Data collected from the MCLQ-III Self-Evaluation Form and MCLQ-III Team Member Form were analyzed. Department chairs rated their own strongest quality strongly in the Ethical cluster, as did their faculty. However, at both large and small colleges, the faculty rating was not as high as the chair self-perception. The full range of department chair self-perceived mean cluster ratings, ranked highest to lowest, were Ethical, People, Influence, Motivation, and Intuition. The mean faculty ratings for their chairs at large colleges ranked the clusters as Ethical, People, Influence, Intuition, and Motivation. At smaller colleges the ranking was People, Ethical, Influence tied with Intuition, and Motivation. Coming first in four out of five listings, the Ethical cluster was clearly a strong transformational leadership component for department chairs in this community college setting.

Analysis of the data also revealed that there was a significant difference between chairs’ self-perceptions of their Ethical clusters and the faculty ratings; in the other clusters, the chairs’ self-perceptions were found to have no significant difference from determinations by their faculty. At larger institutions there was no significant difference between chairs’ self-perceptions and their faculty ratings overall, but at smaller institutions there was a significant difference overall. This study suggested that the chairs and faculty agreed generally on the thematic clusters of transformational leadership characteristics used, but there was a variation in degree.
Larger understandings and professional behaviors of effective chairs. Gmelch (2004) contended that, in addition to skills necessary to achieve desired results from interactions with faculty, staff, students, and other administrators, effective chairs must understand leadership from a conceptual or cognitive point of view: chairs must develop mental models, frameworks, and role theory understandings of the dimensions of leadership (Conger & Benjamin, 1999). As they move from faculty, new chairs must perceive themselves differently (Gmelch), moving from an understanding of their human resource and structural frames of leadership to an increasing understanding of their symbolic and political frames of leadership, as described by Bolman and Deal (1997). In other words, whereas new chairs may see themselves as occupiers of particular slots on the hierarchical organizational charts of their institutions and charged with specific tasks and responsibilities, maturing chairs grow into fuller understandings of their roles as symbols for the integrity of their faculty and discipline and as persons possessing significant political influence both within and outside the institution.

Another mature behavior of department chairs is the practice of reflection. Defined as learning how to learn from past experiences, the practice of reflection teaches chairs to perfect the art of leadership through reflection on the divergent situations they face and the knowledge they gain from these situations, knowledge which is most often held in silence (Gmelch, 2004; Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt, 2005). Schon (1983) described this skill as reflection-in-action, a tool which makes it possible for leaders to operate in settings of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict. As an aspect of this art of leadership, “chairs need to communicate their private dilemmas and insights” and to “test them against the views of their peers” (Gmelch, 2004, p. 73).
Perhaps the most important understanding that a department chair can and must achieve is to understand himself or herself. Leaming (2003) contends that “leaders who never come to understand themselves are destined for failure” (p. 1). Leaders must not only understand who they are but must also accept themselves for who they are. Arguing that effective leaders cannot be overly sensitive to criticism and that individuals who do not accept who they are tend to be defensive, Leaming advises that academic deans and department chairs should take steps to become proactive people, focusing “their efforts in the circle of influence, working on things they can do something about,” where . . . “their energy is positive, enlarging, and magnifying, causing their circle of influence to increase” (p. 6). Leaming differentiates this description of proactive leaders from reactive people who “operate mostly in the circle of concern, focusing on the weaknesses of other people, the circumstances over which they have no control, and the problems of the environment” (p. 6).

**Tensions, Stresses, and Conflicts Associated With the Chair Role**

The chairperson’s position between faculty and administration is inherently stressful, based on its traditional ambiguity (Bennett, 1983; Gmelch & Burns, 1994). A chairperson is always looking in two directions, like the Roman god Janus “mediating the concerns of the administration to the faculty and vice versa, while at the same time trying to maintain some independent identity and integrity” (Bennett, pp. 2-3). This role ambiguity also carries political precariousness for chairs because both faculty and administration expect loyalty; and in cases of conflict between faculty and administration the chair is in the middle, running the risk of alienating one or the other or both (Bennett).
Existing research on the academic department chair describes objectively the stressful effect of this pulling from opposite—sometimes many—directions.

**Definitions and dimensions of department chair stress.** The role of department chair is even more conflicted than is suggested by the dual identity between faculty and administration (Bennett, 1983). This internal paradox of chairs is complicated by external pressures from a variety of constituencies (Hecht et al., 1999). Bennett described five constituencies of department chairs, each having its own needs, expectations, demands, and forms of retribution: the chair’s individual faculty members, the college dean and other administrators, students, the academic discipline itself, and groups outside the campus. This last category includes central administration, professional accrediting agencies, state boards of higher education, and granting agencies (Hecht et al.). These separate constituencies expect chairs to ensure that students are appropriately served, that faculty rights and privileges are protected, that standards of the discipline are maintained, that effective communication with and approval of accrediting agencies pertains, and that the campus community understands and supports the work and results of the department.

On a single issue—a student’s grade, for example—each of these five dedicated constituencies might have opposing agendas. A faculty member fails a student because the student has not met established disciplinary standards. The student angrily complains to the dean for redress, claiming he was too ill to take the required discipline assessment. The community is insisting that students be better prepared academically for work at the various businesses in town. The professor wants to be supported in an academic decision; the student begs a humane decision based on illness; departmental standards dictate that a minimum academic standard be met to satisfy expectations of credit-receiving entities
and/or employers; and the dean insists that this is a departmental matter to be settled among the parties involved, but also that the final decision must have no negative political effect. This is conflict, not simply because each constituent wishes something that is opposed to the wishes of the others, but more intensely because each constituent position has merit according to some standard of measure. The reality for department chairs in such contexts is that they may be sympathetic to one constituency and annoyed by another even as they recognize that each has some portion of entitlement in the situation, thus producing for the chair an internal conflict. Dealing with this kind of conflict is the greatest source of stress and job dissatisfaction for chairs (Gmelch, 2004). Yet, department chairs regularly operate within this swirl of competing agendas and principles, where it is their responsibility to find or to create solutions satisfactory to all parties.

Gmelch (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993) conducted numerous studies on the role of the department chair and with Burns has discussed the sources of stress for academic department chairpersons. In a study that assessed the stresses of department chairpersons that arise from their dual roles as faculty-administrators, Gmelch and Burns (1994) described the chair’s role as not only pluralistic as a result of dual roles and objectives, but fractionated in terms of task behaviors. In this study the researchers described stress on faculty and administrators in higher education as “one’s anticipation of his or her inability to respond adequately to a perceived demand, accompanied by the anticipation of negative consequences for an inadequate response” (p. 83).

To capture the administration-faculty role of chairs, the researchers developed and tested an instrument which combined and supplemented both the Administrative Stress
Index (Gmelch & Swent, 1984) and the Faculty Stress Index (Gmelch, Wilke, & Lovrich, 1986). Using the adapted survey, the authors studied department chairs from 101 institutions, randomly selected from the target population of the 237 research and doctorate-granting institutions classified by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. Eight department chairs were selected from each institution, stratified according to Biglan’s eight-cell classification of disciplines: hard versus soft, applied versus pure, life versus non-life (Biglan, 1973). Of the 808 department chairs sampled, 564 usable surveys were returned, representing a 70.2% response rate.

Results showed that conflict-mediation registered the highest stress for chairs, including the tasks of negotiating rules and regulations, program approvals, and disputes among faculty. Task-based stress was the next greatest stressor, including heavy workloads, trying to keep current in one’s discipline, attending meetings, balancing personal and professional time, and contending with telephone and personal interruptions. The third dimension of chair stress was professional identity, including concern about preparing manuscripts for publication and acquiring support for research (even though as chairs they were in a management line). Relative to this dimension, Gmelch and Burns (1994) observed that chairs suffer from excessively high self-expectations in that they try to perform full faculty responsibilities while they also try to perform the duties of department chair. Reward and recognition stress and role-based stress, including resolving differences with superiors, too much responsibility without authority, and dissatisfaction with career progress, were shown to be dimensions causing some stress for chairs, but least as compared to the other dimensions.
Gmelch and Burns (1994) also found that stress did not decline with the age of the chairs; that professional identity stress and task-based stress were not higher for women department chairs than men (even though these stresses were higher for women faculty than men); that 60% of chairs identified with faculty, 23% with administration, and 17% with faculty and administration equally; and that 55% said that they would serve another term, 29% would not, and 16% were undecided. Other observations were that those chairs unwilling to serve another term reported higher stress dealing with conflict and that 65% of department chairs return to faculty, while only 19% continue in higher education administration.

 Whereas the study above examined the stressors generated from administration and faculty roles of department chairs, Burns (1993) conducted an earlier study of department chair stress using an instrument developed for the study, the Chair Stress Inventory. Five stress factors, or dimensions of stress, emerged: faculty role stress, administrative relationship stress, role ambiguity stress, perceived expectations stress, and administrative task stress. These categories of stress confirmed the dual administrative and faculty roles of chairs and established the logic of studying chairs from those dual perspectives. This and other studies also confirmed that role conflict and role ambiguity are highly correlated to stress (Rade, 2005; Young, 2007).

 Houchen (1994) did an exploratory study of dimensions of perceived stress of department chairs at community colleges to discover (a) what job situations were perceived as most stressful, (b) what stress factors emerged for community college chairs, (c) how stress factors related to personal and professional characteristics, (d) whether chairs felt constrained by the time available for personal and professional activities, and
where chairs receive the most support (from supervisors, other department chairs, faculty, or family and friends) and whether chairs with more support experience less stress. This exploratory study used the national database of 9000 community college department chairs from all disciplines maintained by the National Community College Chair Academy (NCCCA). Questionnaires were sent nationwide to 967 randomly selected chairs at community colleges using the Gmelch and Burns Chair Stress Index (DCSI) and the Administrative Stress Index (ASI) (Gmelch and Swent, 1984). Major findings were that (a) major stress factors for community college chairs were time demand stress, management role stress, conflict and expectation stress, and reward and recognition stress; (b) measurements of social support correlated strongly between and among sources for all types of support; (c) no significant correlations occurred between the stress factors and personal or professional characteristics; (d) time demand and management role stress were the greatest contributors to total stress; and (e) gender played no significant difference in stress factors or stress levels. Other aspects of chair stress were related to their sacrifices regarding professional interests and personal scholarship, which suffer significantly as a result of accepting the role of chair (Creswell et al., 1990). Another source of concern was the need to balance personal and professional life (Gmelch, 2004).

**New chair stresses: transitions from faculty to department chair.** New chairs suffer psychological dimensions of role ambiguity as they re-negotiate established relationships with friends and colleagues while they question their own identity and/or continued competence as faculty (Bennett, 1983). Bennett described three major, rather abrupt, transitions new chairs must make. The first transition is from identity as a
specialist, with training, socialization, and authority in a narrowly focused area of inquiry that has been a life or career interest, to becoming a generalist, who has responsibility to understand and support other departmental areas or disciplines with equal enthusiasm. The second initial transition is from being an individualist who operates at one’s own pace and preference to “running a collective,” where the chair must “work through others” and share credit for what is accomplished, perhaps even getting others to propose the chair’s original ideas (p. 4). The third transition is from loyalty to one’s own discipline to loyalty to the institution. Under this aspect, Bennett discussed a chair’s responsibility to accommodate his or her department’s requests to the realistic possibilities of the institution at the time and “to manage curriculum and faculty with an eye to what times permit, not what the discipline should have” (p. 5).

Bennett’s (1983) description of the new chair’s obligation to shift loyalty from discipline to institution seems to reveal his fairly strong inclination to identify a chair more closely with administration than is perhaps the reality for many chairs. Chairs whose loyalty is closer to the departmental sentiment might fight as hard as possible for what the department needs or wants, even in the face of inhospitable contingencies, while knowing full well that the result may be less than desired.

Gmelch and Miskin (1993) presented a longer list of transitions for new department chairs: (a) from solitary to social, (b) from focused to fragmented, (c) from autonomy to accountability, (d) from manuscripts to memoranda, (e) from private to public, (f) from professing to persuading, (g) from stability to mobility, (h) from client to custodian, and (i) from austerity to prosperity. Oddly, both lists seem to be complete relative to the aspects they consider. Bennett (1983) seems to be making broad view
observations, whereas Gmelch and Miskin seem to capture and describe the transitions that new chairs perceive on a day-to-day basis and feel internally.

**From functional belief system to a situated practice theory.** According to Rade (2005) most studies on department chairs approach the study from the perspective of a functional belief system. In such systems it is assumed that knowledge is accumulative, static, individual, abstract, transferable, rational, and having an end-goal. Learning is the process through which knowledge is produced or constructed, as in a workshop on preparing a budget at an institutional training session, where know-what knowledge is gained. Acquired knowledge can be used repeatedly because it changes little and has an end-goal of learning. Knowledge resides in a person’s mind, so it is the individual who must do the learning. Knowledge is transferable and abstract; it can be imparted away from its institutional environment; it is decontextual and transferable and therefore can be used in most situations. In a functional belief system, know-how and know-what knowledge consists of a collection or sum of various separate aspects of knowledge, focusing on the teaching and learning of information, knowledge, or skills. Rade proposed that even though studies of department chairs often proceed from these philosophical perspectives, the behaviors described do not explain how chairs actually form and develop their identity.

Given the conflicted perspectives of department chairs as faculty/scholar and administrator, it follows that an initial source of stress arises from role conflict and ambiguity of identity (Gmelch & Burns, 1994). This ambiguity is more than a structural functional hierarchical reality, but is also a socio-psychological construct (Rade, 2005). Chairs spend many years being socialized as faculty/scholars before moving to positions
as chair-administrators, where values, methods, and goals of the identities collide. Relying on the perspective of social practice that learning is an aspect of everyday behavior (as described by Lave, 1993), Rade studied the process through which chairs integrated role identity and social identity of being scholar/faculty member, administrator, and chair. Data were collected in multiple open-ended interviews with two department chairs and two directors of professional schools from a research university. Research questions were (a) How do chairs view the nature of their role identity as department chair? (b) How do chairs understand their jobs in terms of role conflict and role ambiguity? (c) Which strategies, methods, and resources do chairs use? And why? Discourse analysis was used to address the research questions.

Given the inadequacy of the functional belief system to explain how chairs understand and change their understanding of their job in terms of role identity, Rade (2005) observed the following about situated-practice theories. Knowledge is not a product of learning but the process of learning itself; thus knowing or knowledge-in-action is better terminology than the term knowledge. Knowledge-in-action is not a fixed entity, but is irrelevant unless it is implemented and adapted to circumstances. Knowledge-in-practice is relational and distributed, where there is always a dynamic interactive relationship between the chair and other people, policies, opinions, products, and cultures. Learning is contextual and concrete, a complex process for which one needs know-how and know-what: information, insight, and skills. Identity is not created out of the mechanistic sum of separate elements: learning to become and be a chair is a holistic process that requires continuous reflective work to integrate fractured and contradictory parts/issues. Merely offering leadership development opportunities is not the solution to
the chair problem because just doing the job is not sufficient to be a chair, to develop the identity of a chair.

Rade (2005) concluded that a situated practice theory, not a functional belief system, is necessary to assist chairs in assuming both their roles and identities as chairs:

In the situated-practice conceptualization of learning, learning is a form of understanding and negotiating one’s position. By participating in chair practice and community, chairs constantly negotiate with others what it means to be a chair. For example, expectations for the chair by the dean, faculty, students, professional community, and so on, regarding any given issue and decision need to be worked out by the chair as part of a relational and interpretative process. Therefore, a chair’s identity can never be a static/fixed entity but is a fluid reinterpretation. (pp. 295-296)

Rade’s final finding was that there is a limited number of available labels as opposed to the multitude of concepts to express professional identity.

**Relationship to recent study.** Young (2007) studied role conflict among department chairs in public community colleges in the State of Illinois. Her quantitative study of the positional tension experienced by department chairs sought to identify the tension and determine reasons for the tension. Because Young focused on precisely the same group of Illinois public community college academic department chairs as this study, and because hers is a quantitative study, I follow up on her quantitative study with my own qualitative study of some of the people who would have qualified as part of her study. However, my study explores the lived experience of the department chairs as explained using their own words, as opposed to the statistical quantitative information gathered by Young. While other studies have used qualitative methods, no search conducted by this researcher uncovered an in-depth phenomenological study focusing on the essence of the conflict in the role of the public community college academic department chair.
Summary of the Review of Literature

The process of this review of literature has been to trace the path of research on the department chair that contributes to an understanding of the perspectives of interest for this study. The review began with a discussion of the emergence of the chair role as a parallel to the development of American higher education so as to demonstrate the context within which chairs function. Following this contextual placement was a discussion of research on the chair role conducted over time and the resulting knowledge of chair tasks and responsibilities, leading to an appreciation of the complexity of the chair role. Observing the complexity of the chair role is a significant platform from which to appreciate the potential for internal conflict for the chair, and it is an important observation for this study because the study focused on the internal conflict experienced by chairs.

Continuing the discussion of the complexity of the chair role, but extending it to influence beyond the department, the next category of the review of literature discussed research on chair roles specifically related to institutional governance, acknowledging the chair’s function as institutional leader. Topics discussed under this category included the chair as communicator, as leader, as agent of institutional change, and as agent of power. Special coverage was given to emerging roles of chairs and community college chairs to demonstrate the continuous development, growth, and change of chair roles and responsibilities and to link them to the lives of chairs at the center of this study: those in community colleges. This category of influence of chairs is important to this discussion because influence beyond the department devolves into another source of responsibility and potential conflict for chairs.
Having focused on the job of the chair, the review then turned to research on the person sitting in the chair, the human being him or herself who lives the role: the focus of the study. The discussion first addressed the category of leadership styles and traits of effective chairs, as revealed through various studies and research instruments. The aim here was to explore the behavioral profiles of individuals who were described as successful chairs, including observations ranging from general personality/character aspects to larger philosophical considerations. This discussion was then followed by the category of the review that is an outgrowth of all the foregoing elements: a discussion of research on the tensions, stresses, and conflict associated with the chair role. I see this discussion as a step-by-step configuration of research, building the case for and the conceptual threads integral to an in-depth phenomenological study of internal conflict in the person of the department chair.
Chapter 3

Research Methods

The purpose of this study was to explore the essence of the internal conflict inherent in the role of the public community college academic department chair. An expectation of the study was that, by describing and promoting an understanding of the day-to-day lived experience of sitting department chairs, the study could reveal the inherent conflict and stresses of the role in such a way as to benefit sitting chairs, prospective chairs, chair-training planners, and educational researchers. Sitting chairs may understand and anticipate the conflicted elements in their roles, thus mitigating some of their negative effects; and chairs may, therefore, approach the issues of their daily practice from a place of greater preparedness and acceptance. Prospective chairs may less strenuously avoid pursuing or accepting the role and may come to embrace it without trepidation, recognizing its tremendous opportunities for personal and professional growth. Planners of department chair training programs may develop strategies to strengthen participants against the unexpected negative effects of the conflict in the role. Researchers may view the phenomenon of department chair from new perspectives and may conduct further study to explore additional aspects of the chair role.

My interest in this topic derives from my own life experience. I began my professional life as a certified assigned teacher of English in a high school reputed at the time to be one of the best in the country. Five years later, having attained an advanced degree, I departed the then declining high school and continued my career as a public community college professor of English in a large mid-western city. Over the course of 39 years at the community college, I taught a variety of courses in developmental reading
and writing, English as a Second Language (ESL), college level composition, advanced composition and logic, journalism, and literature—all the while pursuing a broad range of academic and professional interests and advancements and assuming an increasing variety of leadership roles in the department, the college, and the district. During the crowning 12 years of that time span, I lived the dramatic phenomenon of English department chair. Thus, having experienced the phenomenon of interest here, I bring to this study, not only keen energy and poignant sensitivity to the phenomenon, but a passion to explore it and to share my discoveries.

With the research participants, I became co-investigator of the essence of internal conflict in the role of the public community college academic department chair. The participants and I explored their experiences and the meanings of their experiences in order to arrive at an understanding of the essence of internal conflict in the chair/faculty lived experience. According to Creswell (2003), this co-investigator relationship is appropriate for researcher and research participants who are bound together in a study by co-discovery of their experiences and research interests, using qualitative methodology. In this process of co-discovery, the research participants and I sought to discover, to describe, and to interpret the lived experience of public community college academic department chairs. These questions of discovery, description, and interpretation are the questions posed by phenomenology (van Manen, 1990). Therefore, the primary process of this study followed the philosophical path of phenomenological human science inquiry, as described by Moustakas (1994).

Also, since the research interview questions gave the participants opportunities to express a wide range of feelings on topics that contributed to internal conflict for them,
thematic coding of data was blended with the phenomenological approach; and the thematic coding yielded eight themes, which are discussed fully and presented in Appendix D of this document.

**Phenomenology: How Things Come to Meaning**

“The search for truth shapes all fields of inquiry” (Baronov, 2004, p. 2), and in the social sciences the notion of truth and the means of uncovering it have undergone constant reflection and reconsideration (Baronov), each new approach growing out of and/or reacting to those approaches that have gone before. A complex, multi-faceted philosophy which “defies simple characterization because it is not a single unified philosophical standpoint” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 191), phenomenology grew to prominence as a form of scientific inquiry following the strong influences of positivism, post positivism, and structuralism. Phenomenology falls within the sphere of hermeneutics, which held that the earlier approaches of scientific realism supporting the privileged position of the empirical sciences were appropriate for physical science inquiry, but not the social sciences. “Proponents of hermeneutics insisted that the nature of social phenomena required an analysis of the meaning behind human thought and action” and “called for investigative techniques that could recover the subjective meaning behind human action and social development” (Baronov, p. 7).

Phenomenology was described by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) as a method for investigating human experience and for deriving knowledge from a state of pure consciousness (Moustakas, 1994). If it were possible, there would be no influence from the unconscious; and we humans would describe our experiences from
a completely rational perspective. Husserl held that there are certain structures within a person’s consciousness that give form and meaning to the world around us; he held also that these structures are present in everyday life experiences (Baronov, 2004). Husserl’s method of phenomenological inquiry explored the world of pure consciousness where these essential structures reside. In his method, a phenomenon is reduced to its essence by identifying features unique to the phenomenon; then the structures used by consciousness to constitute the phenomenon are explored so that the phenomenon can be understood.

However, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), at one time a student of Husserl, argued that “Husserl erred in trying to separate the study of central structures of consciousness from the realm of empirical phenomena” (Baronov, 2004, p. 122). He held that the structures of human consciousness do not exist prior to one’s entering the empirical realm because consciousness is a product of human experience. One’s consciousness of the world and the world itself are not the same. They are separate. But it is one’s consciousness that determines the nature of the individual’s experience of the world. Heidegger developed what he called the being-in-the-world, referring to aspects of being a human being—such as one’s historical life circumstances—that shape consciousness. Therefore, according to Heidegger, what Husserl referred to as essential structures of consciousness “actually originate in a person’s lived experience, rather than in some realm of pure consciousness … they do not exist prior to experience” (p. 122).

Heidegger’s approach is referred to as existential-phenomenology, as opposed to Husserl’s rationalist-phenomenology, both approaches having been “highly influential for the development of hermeneutics” (p. 122), which reformulated ideas of the functioning of the human mind, not to objectively reflect the world, but to interpret it creatively.
Phenomenology seeks to achieve “clear openness or clear consciousness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90), to see things clearly and openly, as a reflection of reality. For this reason the first step in phenomenological study is a process of reduction to “bracket” out—to enclose so as to keep out or exclude—any preconceived ideas or notions that interfere with clarity of the phenomenon under study. In this process, “prejudices and unhealthy attachments that create false notions of truth and reality can be bracketed and put out of action” (p. 90). To whatever extent it is possible for human beings to perceive and/or understand their prejudices, the more they can bracket the prejudices, the more clarity can be achieved. Once bracketing is accomplished, the resulting state, called Epoché, is achieved and one focuses on the phenomenon in order to come to an understanding of its essence, that which is at the center of its nature, excluding all else.

What is a human experience phenomenon? It can be any real life experience. It can be walking one’s dog, piloting a sail boat, giving a speech, listening to a concert, over-hearing an argument, or running for a taxi. A phenomenon is any named or un-named anything, a human experience of any variety. And what does that experience mean to us? That is the question to be answered. We do know that our consciousness of the experience is not the same thing as the experience itself. Phenomenology gives us a method for describing and understanding the essence of the experience itself by first shedding preconceptions of what the experience is through Epoché, then describing and reflecting on the experience. Presented below, from van Manen (1990), is a mother’s lived-experience description of her concerns about her son. The process of phenomenology can uncover themes in the text to tell her and us what it means:

Lately I have been wondering if I expect too much of my son. He gets all mixed up in his homework, is overtired, can’t think straight, and spends hours doing one
straitforward assignment when he should just be relaxing and enjoying family life like all the other kids in his class; he has misread the instructions and has to do the whole thing again; he has a thousand ideas for a report on gorillas, but can’t seem to get it together to write even the opening sentence. So yesterday I looked at Robbie’s cumulative-file at school. I felt guilty in a way, resorting to that, especially since those numbers have so little to say about a person. And my love and hopes for him are unconditional of course; they don’t depend on his achievement or IQ scores. But the numbers weren’t supposed to tell me whether Rob is special or not—they were supposed to tell me what to do: whether it is alright for me to tease, prod and cajole him about his homework, and say, “Hey, you lazy schmuck, get some of this work finished in school instead of fooling around,” or maybe, “Of course you can’t think straight when you’re so tired. You’ll have to get home earlier and do this homework before supper. (pp. 93-94)

Van Manen (1990) tells us that the description of any lived experience “is an appropriate source for uncovering thematic aspects of the phenomenon it describes” (p. 92), but that some descriptions are richer than others. Also he says that expressing the overall meaning of a text is somewhat of a judgment call in that different readers may discern different fundamental meaning. To discuss how to conduct thematic analysis, he provides three approaches toward uncovering or isolating thematic aspects of a phenomenon. They are (a) the wholistic or sententious approach, (b) the selective or highlighting approach, and (c) the detailed or line-by-line approach. He further explains the approaches:

In the wholistic reading approach we attend to the text as a whole and ask, *What sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main significance of the text as a whole?* We then try to express that meaning by formulating such a phrase.

In the selective reading approach we listen to or read a text several times and ask, *What statement(s) or phrase(s) seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?* These statements we then circle, underline, or highlight.

In the detailed reading approach we look at every single sentence or sentence cluster and ask, *What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?* (p. 93)
In uncovering the themes from the mother’s text above using the wholistic or sententious approach, we see that the mother feels that her son has a problem at school and is uncertain about what to do or say in order to help him and also be sensitive to his feelings. Van Manen (1990) suggests that an appropriate sententious formulation would be the following: “A parent needs to be able to know how to act tactfully toward a child in the child’s best interest” (p. 94). Using the selective or highlighting approach, we would select from the whole text sentences or parts of sentences that seem to represent themes of the parenting experience. “I have been wondering if I expect too much of my son” might be expressed as the theme “To parent is to distinguish what is good and what is not good for a child.” “My love and hopes for him are unconditional of course” might be expressed as the theme “The fundamental experience of parenting is hope.” “They were supposed to tell me what to do” might be expressed as “Parents constantly need to know what to do.”

In using the detailed or line-by-line approach, we first read very carefully each sentence or sentence cluster. Then we ask what each sentence or sentence cluster seems to reveal about the nature of parenting. For example, in the text above the first sentence shows how we have parental expectations as well as doubts about them, and the second sentence shows how particular situations give meaning to our expectations. Each sentence or sentence cluster is then examined in this way. As themes and thematic statements are gathered cumulatively, the thematic statements may be gathered into phenomenologically sensitive paragraphs. These thematic gatherings, as paragraphs, evolve through the process of writing and more reading, thinking, and writing, into
composed linguistic transformations. This sequence is a creative, hermeneutic process (Van Manen, 1990): generative and interpretive.

The Method of Phenomenology

A phenomenon is a “central idea, event, happening, or incident that arises from other events, incidents, or happenings, and about which a set of actions or interactions are [sic] directed at managing, handling, or to which the set of actions is related” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). In other words, a phenomenon is a fairly important thing that is caused by some other thing(s) and about which something is being done or has to be done. The primary goal of knowledge in a phenomenological study is to understand the “meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the context of a particular situation” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 14). In this study, we want to understand the real world relations of particular department chairs as they describe chair life experience in their environments, and in particular we are interested in understanding the internal conflict that may result when ordinary tension and stress evolve into internal conflict. The primary method of investigation for phenomenology is description (van Manen, 1990). Description is achieved through communication, through interviews.

Dilthey (1976) guided the study of human experience in his discussion of hermeneutics, the science of interpretation. He asserted that all science and scholarship are empirical, i.e., based on observation (perceived by the senses) and experiment rather than theory, but that experience is connected to and given validity by our consciousness, which is subject to distortion. Zahavi (2003) reported that Husserl also argued that the beginning point of establishing the truth of things must be individual perception, and
Moustakas (1994) stated that “the return to the self as the basis for absolute knowledge of the way things are is the first and foremost step” (p. 58). The external world remains only a phenomenon, subject to the distortions of our perceiving minds. This is the important first step in understanding any phenomenon.

If we are to come to truly understand human experience, we must achieve an undistorted appreciation of a phenomenon. This undistorted understanding depends not only on a description of the experience as such, but also on a study of the history of its context. Dilthey (1976) concluded that the interrelationship of the direct conscious description of experience and the underlying dynamics or structures that account for the experience provides a central meaning and enables understanding of both the substance and essence of the experience. This understanding of both the substance and essence of an experience is possible because, according to van Manen (1990), as we humans come to know and understand ourselves, we come to know and understand other people and the world.

An example of the use of phenomenological research methods from early phenomenological discovery helps to clarify the definition above. According to Moustakas (1994), the most frequent applications of phenomenological research, as well as the development of the theory, concepts, and processes involved in human science inquiry, came from Volume 1 (Giorgi, Fischer, & von Eckartsberg, 1971), Volume 2 (Giorgi, Fischer, & Murray, 1975), Volume 3 (Giorgi, Knowles, & Smith, 1979), and Volume 4 (Giorgi, Barton, & Maes, 1983) of the Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology. Moustakas reported that, prior to these studies, van Kaam (1959, 1966)
operationalized empirical phenomenological research in psychology as he investigated the experience of “really feeling understood” (p. 12).

Van Kaam (1966) asked high school and college students to recall a situation or situations in which they felt understood by someone, such as, one’s mother, father, girlfriend, or boyfriend. His emphasis was on obtaining descriptions of their feelings. From an analysis of 80 to 365 descriptions, he derived . . . constituents of “really feeling understood” (p. 12).

Moustakas further reported that, from his research, van Kaam was able to create a definition and articulate the components of “really feeling understood” (p. 12). The general description he derived states the following:

The experience of “really feeling understood” is a perceptual-emotional Gestalt: A person, perceiving that a person co-experiences what things mean to the subject and accepts him, feels, initially, relief from experiential loneliness, and, gradually, safe experiential communion with that person and with that which the subject perceives this person to represent (p. 12 from Van Kaam, 1966, pp. 325-326).

The aim of empirical phenomenological research, according to Moustakas (1994), is “to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13). The experience must be understood in its actual context and in a concrete manner so that the tangible essences are perceived. Moustakas reported (pp. 15-16) that von Eckartsberg (1986) outlined the steps involved in the method as occurring in Step 1: the problem and question formulation—where “the researcher delineates a focus of investigation . . . [and] formulates a question in such a way that it is understandable to others”; Step 2: the data gathering situation—where subjects as co-researchers provide descriptive narratives creating the protocol life text as a response to questions from or dialogues with the researcher; and Step 3: data analysis—where the researcher reads and scrutinizes data “so as to reveal their structure, meaning, configuration, coherence, and the circumstances
of their occurrence and clustering . . . emphasis is on the study of configuration of meaning . . . involving both the structure of meaning and how it is created” (p. 27).

The first step of the phenomenological method indicated above—the problem and question formulation—has been accomplished in the first chapter of this study. The phenomenon was presented and described in terms of relevant parameters, and the questions of research were presented. The second step of the phenomenological method—the data-gathering situation—was accomplished through a series of in-depth, topical-guided interviews, where, as described above, the subjects as co-researchers provided descriptive narratives creating the protocol life text as a response to questions from or dialogues with me, the researcher. According to Moustakas (1994), when the scholarly purpose of research is to understand the lived experience of human subjects and to understand what the experience means to those persons who have had the experience, and when the voice of the research subject is primary, the individual in-depth interview is the appropriate data-collaborating tool. The individual interview was the data-collaborating tool for this study.

**Organizational Structures of Illinois Public Community Colleges**

This study focused on department chairs in Illinois public community colleges. The State of Illinois has 48 public community colleges (Illinois Community College Board). Seven of these colleges make up the district of the City Colleges of Chicago, and four comprise the district of Illinois Eastern Community Colleges. The other 37 colleges exist in their own districts, some having sub-campus. In addition, the East St. Louis Community College Center offers classes taught by three community colleges. Each
district operates under the authority of the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), as well as the local Board of Trustees of the college district (ICCB, the System, Community Colleges).

The sub-set from which I drew my sample included the community colleges in counties that form a first and second ring around the City of Chicago, sometimes called the collar counties or the Chicago metropolitan area. I chose not to draw my sample from any of the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC) because of my prior association with the City Colleges and my desire to study the department chair role unencumbered by my long-term experience as a faculty member and department chair in the CCC district.

Given the broad mission of community colleges, the various individual colleges are organized in a variety of patterns. There is generally separation by program name or division among the various functions of the institution: developmental, college credit, business and technology, career education, lifelong learning, community outreach. The setting of this study is the academic division of the college. However, there is variety in the organizational structures of academic divisions, as well. Some colleges employ a traditional college structure with a college president at the top of the organizational chart, assisted by one to three vice-presidents, who supervise deans, who in turn supervise academic department chairs. In other colleges, the academic disciplines are blocked together so there may be just a few division heads, who hold responsibility and perform administrative duties for faculty with whom they share no academic identity (ICCB, the System, Community Colleges).

According to an analysis of administrative positions at a level just above faculty for Illinois public community colleges (Young, 2007), the following results emerged.
During the 2006-2007 academic year, of the 349 individuals in this managerial line, there were 236 persons identified as academic or department chair (67.62%) of which 23 persons were identified as associate dean (6.59%); and 90 persons were identified as director (3), dean (51), division dean (3), and division chair (33). This last group (25.79%) was aggregated because, even though the titles were slightly different, they appeared to perform the same administrative function. For purposes of this study, only the academic department chair who shares a discipline with faculty and actually teaches in that discipline is my focus.

**Research Design**

**Research sites.** I selected the four research sites from the target population of 14 community colleges in the metropolitan Chicago area. These 14 colleges were determined by consulting the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) website that provides a map showing county lines and the Illinois Community College Districts, as well as a list of all the public community colleges in the State. I was interested in colleges outside the City of Chicago (for reasons described above), but colleges that enjoyed a complex constituency because the complexity of constituencies in the community college is a factor in the lives of the department chairs that I sought to study. Also, since it was necessary for me to visit each department chair at least four times for the interviews, and because I wanted to conduct one-on-one face-to-face interviews, I needed to select sites that were within a reasonable distance of my residence. I defined a reasonable distance as one that would allow travel to the location, 60 to 90 minutes for the interview, and return travel—all to occur within the space of a single business day, not requiring an over-night
stay. Therefore, the four sites selected were in the northeastern metropolitan area of the State of Illinois, also referred to as the collar counties of Chicago.

To identify these colleges, I used the ICCB website which provides links to information about each community college in the State. Using these links to the administrative personnel of the colleges, I accessed the names and telephone numbers of the vice-presidents of instruction or other officers who performed the academic administration function. When I reached each college officer, I held a brief conversation to determine whether the organizational structure of the institution fit my paradigm regarding department chairs (i.e., department chairs who also maintain an active role as teaching faculty). If the structure did not fit, I thanked the officer, ended the conversation, and eliminated that institution from consideration for the study. If the organizational structure did fit, I explained my research project and asked for information regarding the process of gaining approval to do research on that campus. One college reported not having department chairs, and a few others were non-responsive or declined participating due to evaluations or other activities that were going on at the college.

In response to requests for information about the study from various college officers in colleges that had teaching chairs, I prepared and sent to each college two documents: a Brief Description of Research, a one-page introduction and summary description of my research, including my contact information; and a 3-page presentation of Introductory Sections of my research proposal, including source references. These documents comprise Appendix A of this study.

At some of the colleges, permission was granted based on my conversation and the information submitted, but at others the process was longer and more complicated. I
went through the many levels of administrators, secretaries, and local approval boards to inquire about and finally satisfy local approval requirements. One college had its own Institutional Research Board (IRB) that required additional information before approving my request. Another had a campus committee that was responsible for reviewing my request, and the committee did review the request and grant approval. For most of the colleges, the permissions were granted in writing, and for one it was verbal. During this period of time, I developed a plan for keeping track of the status of the negotiation-approval process at each campus; and I developed the courage to persist when progress seemed slow. Along the way, one generous dean shared this encouragement from A. A. Milne’s Christopher Robin, “You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think” (Geurs & Crocker, 1997 [Motion picture]).

Once the permissions were secured from the four selected colleges, the vice-presidents or appropriate deans provided me, via e-mail, the names, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses of department chairs, using the criteria for my target population (presented below). It is possible that the deans shared the information I had sent and were sending me the names of chairs who had made some positive response to my study. In responding to my request, three of the four selected research sites sent me information on chairs in the departments that I requested (suggesting the likelihood of participant self-selection was low). At the fourth site, I was provided the names of chairs of several subdivisions of social science. From the pool of possible participants, I selected the ones to call initially based on departmental discipline and gender.

**Target population of department chairs.** Six criteria were used to identify the target population of department chairs for this study: (a) The individuals were selected
for the chairmanship from the ranks of teaching faculty of their disciplines, consistent with the organizational policies in their colleges. (b) After selection as a department chair, the individuals continued teaching, usually or always a reduced load, as they performed their administrative chair duties. (c) The individuals were selected from English, humanities, or social science departments, representing disciplines described by Biglan (1973) as soft, pure, non-life, where most students are mandated to take courses to meet general education requirements, resulting in a large population of unselected students, including students from all the various population streams of the student body, without the application on any selection criteria. (d) The individuals had at least three years experience as chair, so that their responses to the chair lived experience would not be attributable to newness. (e) The individuals demonstrated an interest in participating in my study, understanding the nature and intensity of the method of personal interviewing over time. (f) The individuals, when formed into the group of study participants, were diverse in discipline, location, and gender.

Research sample. The sample chosen for this study consisted of six department chairs, all of whom were responsible for leading a group of full-time faculty and a larger group of part-time faculty. Most were chosen for the chairmanship by application, followed by administrative appointment. Officially described as faculty themselves, they taught classes and had part of their class load reduced from the regular full-time load as compensation for their duties as department chair. Some chairs also received an additional stipend for being chair. Some of the chairs had private offices, and some shared larger office spaces with other faculty in their departments. Most chairs had at
least limited access to clerical support, but most found it to be inadequate. Only a few chairs had a departmental secretary, sometimes shared with another department.

My analysis of college organizational charts and conversations with professionals titled as directors, deans, division deans, and sometimes associate deans, lead me to conclude that, despite the multiplicity of title names, which gives the impression that the organizational structures are vastly different, it is not difficult to locate—regardless of title—the individual who is the administrative head of an academic unit and who also teaches classes in that academic discipline. This is accomplished through an analysis of tasks performed by the individuals. Thus, whereas it may be the case that some individuals identified as dean, division dean, or division chair also meet these criteria, this fact does not alter the assumptions of this study. These individuals, along with chairs, occupy the chair in the middle and, therefore, represent the target population.

The chairs were also similar in academic discipline orientation. According to Biglan’s (1973) classification of academic disciplines, on the first dimension of hard versus soft, English, humanities, and social sciences are soft disciplines; there is not the existence of a single paradigm. On Biglan’s second dimension of pure versus applied, which addresses the dimension of concern with practical application of subject matter, the communication aspect of English is slightly more applied than the pure literature, humanities, and social science. On the third dimension of life versus nonlife, English and humanities are nonlife because they are not concerned with living or organic objects of study, whereas social science is concerned with human life (Biglan, 1973). Gmelch and Burns (1994) reported that chairs from hard disciplines (especially hard-pure-life sciences) may experience higher professional identity stress than chairs in soft disciplines.
because knowledge base changes can occur rapidly in hard disciplines. Thus, in my view, this general similarity of English, humanities, and social science disciplines as soft-pure-nonlife/life reduces the likelihood that the department chairs’ lived experiences—and therefore internal conflict—will be influenced by variation that might occur were they from vastly different disciplines.

Also, chairs who had been in the chair role for less than three years were not included in the research sample to reduce the effect of newness as a source of internal conflict. The term of chair appointment in several of the colleges was three years, and eliminating from participation a chair with less than three years experience assured that participant chairs had survived their first appointments.

The number of participants was limited because the study depended solely on multiple in-depth one-on-one interviews with each of the participants. The study was originally planned to include five participants, but a sixth participant was added to increase the diversity of the participants (see Figure 4). In this case, I refer to diversity of age, gender, ethnicity, and culture. It was essential for the validity of the study that each utterance be captured in its full context and probed for meaning. For the researcher, the intensity of involvement with the data from each interview session with each participant was great, and extending my relationship with the participants and to the data too broadly would have diminished the importance of smaller, nuanced pieces of meaning captured from the interview sessions. The number of chairs included in the study represented a reasonably limited number to make multiple interviews possible while still providing for important variety and diversity of experiences and perspectives among the participants.
Participant selection. I placed telephone calls to the chairs and held conversations with them to determine their suitability for the study and to provide information about the study, its purpose, the potential commitment from them, and their level of interest in the study. Most were enthusiastic to participate in research on department chairs. Anyone who was hesitant or reluctant for any reason (I recall only one), or who did not fit the purposeful selection criteria, I thanked and did not pursue further.

In the conversations with chairs, I determined that some would be more appropriate for the pilot study because they were immediately available and their availability over a longer period of time was uncertain. Also, the conversation helped me identify chairs who were willing to put in the longer time commitment for the full study. In the end, I had two participants for the pilot study, one from English and one from a social science discipline, at different colleges; and six participants for the full study. The six participants for the full study came from English, humanities, and social sciences departments from four different community colleges, no more than two participants from any one college.

When the participants were identified, full details of the research and data collection process were reviewed with the participants, and they were assured of complete confidentiality. None of their comments would be attributed to them individually, and notes and recordings created during data collection were to be held in a secure location in accordance with, and for the time stipulated by, requirements of the College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, then subsequently destroyed. Also, participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any
time for any reason. Consent forms were offered, signed, and deposited according to University stipulations. All participants who began the interviews remained through the entire process.

**The pilot study.** IRB approval was received for a pilot study, including approval of invitation letters, interview protocols, and informed consent agreements. I conducted the pilot study to get a sense of what the full study would involve and to work through all the aspects of the process. First, I wanted to gauge the effectiveness of the questions I had created for the purpose of eliciting ideas, attitudes, and feelings that I wanted to uncover in the study. I also wanted to have the experience of meeting face-to-face with strangers who had taken the leap of faith to explore these ideas with me. I gained confidence as an interviewer/researcher as I engaged in more interviewing, and I gained the experience of driving long distances—in most cases hours—to meet department chairs in previously unfamiliar settings.

The pilot study was completed at two sites with two participants in two interview sessions. The interview protocols for the sessions captured the major topics of interest for the full study. The pilot results revealed that the questions of the protocols might need to be presented to a participant in slightly varying order than anticipated in the planning phase because sometimes the participant’s conversation led naturally into an area expected to be sequenced later in my original protocol. In those instances, I probed the topic that had already been introduced by the participant.

Another important lesson from the pilot study, somewhat related to the first, was the necessity to make adjustments in the questioning based on the openness of the participant. Some participants were eager to share their feelings, and some were quite
skilled at keeping their feelings hidden. For these latter participants, questions needed to be approached from an angle so that the participant offered an idea or entered an area of discussion without seeming direction. Then, instead of asking a direct question, which the participant might avoid, I simply encouraged the participant to go further in the area. I learned that the process for these participants might even require a series of smaller questions to encourage the participant to finally arrive at a discussion of the idea being investigated.

The participants of the pilot study were invited to keep journals during the interview period, but neither did so. In fact, one of the participants indicated that if keeping a journal had been a stipulation for participating, he would have been disinclined to participate. Since he was very enthusiastic in all other matters, I decided that I would make it clear that while the journal had possible benefits, it was not essential to the study. Most especially, it was certainly not a reason to opt out of the study. I surmised that a person who was already in the habit of keeping a journal might not find this practice objectionable; but for someone who had never done so before, journaling might seem an onerous additional responsibility. Whether the participant kept or did not keep a journal did not seem to alter the participant’s representation of the phenomenon of study because the participant who did keep a journal did not report experiences that seemed more enhanced or detailed or plentiful than those of the non-journaling participant.

The pilot study revealed another practical aspect. I had originally considered using only English department chairs as participants. This proved to be impractical because it significantly limited the possibility of finding willing participants. Assuming that each community college had only one English department chair, if I went through the
institutional approval process only to meet an English chair who did not wish to participate, I would have to begin the approval process again at another institution. Therefore, I decided to include chairs of other liberal arts departments, which, in addition to English, serve virtually all students in the institution through required courses. The added departments were humanities and social science departments. These departments are similar to English in their academic classification as soft-pure disciplines (Biglan, 1973).

These adjustments were integrated into the full study. I was able to more sensitively plan the content and sequence of questions for the four 60- to 90-minute interviews of the full study. I revised the informed consent agreement to specify that keeping the journal was encouraged, but voluntary, and to give participants a practical estimate of the number of hours they would contribute to the study. I became more adept at handling the recording technology. I managed to get to the campuses using the resources of MapQuest. Certainly the most valuable result of the pilot study was that I gained practice and confidence in conducting the interviews, actually feeling the experience of listening deeply to the participants. I was surprised and encouraged by the participants’ expressions of appreciation for being a part of the study and their opinion that this was a very important study.

**The full study.** Relying on the ideas learned from the pilot study, I reviewed and revised the protocols for the full study, consisting of four 60- to 90-minute interviews. I applied for IRB approval for the full study through an amendment to the original IRB approval, and it was granted. The IRB amendment request included invitation letters and emails, interview protocols for each of the four interviews, the revised informed consent
agreement, and letters from the selected research sites granting permission to do research on their campuses.

As a former professor of English and department chair, I might have had less difficulty than others in understanding and interpreting iterations from English chairs and chairs of departments serving an unselected student body. However, this familiarity with English and other departmental practices that must respond to students at all levels had the potential for making me vulnerable to bias and making unfounded or hasty interpretations. I guarded against these dangers by engaging in a process of critical self-reflection, or reflexivity, to uncover and acknowledge my own biases and theoretical dispositions, as described by Schwandt (2001). To ensure that I did not insert attitude or detail from my own biases, I listened deeply to the participants to extract and understand their meanings only; and I asked questions of them that were numerous enough and detailed enough so as to provide their full color that would obviate a need to fill a void with my bias or assumptions. This was my process from the very first telephone conversations during the participant selection process. Later, during data collection, it was the process that helped establish Epoché. Following data collection and analysis, I verified the accuracy of my interpretations through member-checking with participants.

As researcher, I also kept a journal from the first day of personal contact with potential participants; and I continued the journal throughout the data collection, data analysis, and writing up periods of the research process. This, too, is an aspect of reflexivity that has the effect of critically inspecting the entire research process (Schwandt, 2001). Keeping a journal is also recommended by Creswell (2003) as an aid to qualitative research. It is a record of an individual’s thoughts and significant events
(Lester, 1991) and is not intended to be shared or published. Benefits to the researcher are numerous in practical ways: A journal aids memory of surrounding details of the interview setting; it inspires approaches that may result in more open conversations with the research participants; it enhances creativity of the researcher as a result of reflection; it helps to clarify ideas and meanings from the interview conversations; and it promotes reflection that informs analysis and interpretation of the data.

**Data collection.** Data collection followed the model of phenomenological human science inquiry. Four topical-guided qualitative interviews were conducted in 60- to 90-minute sessions spaced about one week apart. *Epoché*, the first process of the phenomenological human science inquiry model, was established to create an unbiased, receptive presence, i.e., to *bracket* the topic for each interview (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological human science inquiry recognizes that the world is not something that simply exists, but rather, that “the world appears, and the structure of this appearance is conditioned and made possible by subjectivity” (Zahavi, 2003, p. 52). Since it is the subjective experience of the world that is of interest, “it is necessary to suspend our acceptance of the natural attitude. We keep the attitude (in order to be able to investigate it), but we bracket its validity. This procedure, which entails a suspension of our natural realistic inclination, is known by the name of *epoché*” (p. 45). Having established an “abrupt suspension of a naïve metaphysical attitude” (p. 46) by excluding all collected ideas about the topic and crossing through this “philosophical gate of entry” (p. 46), the topic of the interview was addressed.

During the interview sessions, I made written notes about aspects of the setting that impressed me. These notes included information about the chairs’ offices and the
atmosphere in which the department chair functioned, including photographs, art, posters, and even computer screen savers; about the size and relative privacy of the offices; about my impressions of the mood of the setting and any impact that might have been apparent to me; about non-spoken elements or factors; about any extraordinary circumstance that might have been operative at the time of the interview(s), like the fact that summer term had begun and fewer students were around; and about any other factors that might have seemed to influence the chair and/or the interviews. Some of the chairs also shared archival data relative to their work.

The interview sessions were the primary means of data collection and were recorded using a small, unobtrusive digital voice recorder. The specific recorder used was a Sony IC Recorder (ICD-UX70). This recorder has the capacity of folders so that participants’ interviews could be grouped separately. It also has a repeating function that permits a looped repetition of small passages during playback. This function proved to be invaluable in the transcription process. When the first digital recorder was full, I had not yet transcribed all the data stored. Therefore, I purchased a second identical recorder so as to maintain all data in its original form to permit accurate transcription and later verification for accuracy. As a backup, I also used a small cassette tape recorder.

It was my intention to transcribe the interviews within 24 to 48 hours of each interview session so as to recall as accurately as possible details of jottings from the interview environment. However, this was not possible because I had to schedule the interviews within spaces of time that were reasonable for the participants, and the transcribing took exponentially greater amounts of time than I had anticipated. Also, I wanted to do all of the transcribing myself. This was a lofty commitment, given the time
required for the task. Roughly, the transcribing took six times longer than the interviews. In other words, an hour interview required six hours transcription time; but the results were well worth the time and effort. Most of the transcribing actually took place after all the interviews were concluded, and I was able to re-live the experience of the interviews while I was transcribing. I was also able to mark the text in ways that aided later interpretation of the data.

Twenty-five interviews were conducted over an eight-week period, averaging approximately three per week with six interview participants. One participant thought a fifth session might be fruitful, which accounts for the twenty-fifth session. After each session with a participant, the next session was scheduled for about a week later, except one instance where the participant was going to be unavailable until two weeks later. All of the participants thought the study was important and were committed to completing the interview sessions; none of them wished to terminate their participation in the study.

The interviews were conducted during what was probably the most opportune time of the academic year. It was near the end of the spring semester and into the summer term. The fact that classes were winding down made it possible for at least some of the interviews to be conducted when the chairs were not likely to be disturbed every few minutes and could devote time to the interviews. But the fact that the term was ending also meant that chairs were in the midst of finishing up one term while completing plans for the term on the horizon and planning for the one following that. During these eight weeks, my travel days consisted of about two to two-and-a-half hours of driving time to arrive about twenty to thirty minutes before each appointed time. Following the 60- to 90-minute interview session, I drove another few hours back home.
Data collection consisted of four 60- to 90-minute one-on-one interviews. The first interview was introductory at a basic level. It explored the chair’s personal educational and professional background and information about the college campus, its organizational structure, the chair’s position in the structure, relationships in that structure, and something about the chair’s perceptions about the chairmanship—before and since becoming chair. The interview also explored the process by which the chair was selected, the amount of teaching included in the chair’s schedule, and the range of the chair’s responsibilities and academic and non-academic duties. This interview was intended to address Research Sub-questions 2 and 3.

The second interview was conducted approximately a week after the first. After a short debriefing, the interview explored the breadth and details of the department chair’s work in that setting. I wanted to understand the fullness of what the chair did in the process of doing his or her work. An important focus was to begin to uncover the chair’s attitudes and feelings about his or her duties relative to use of time and relationships. This interview was intended to address the primary research question and research sub-questions 2 and 3.

The third interview was conducted approximately a week after the second. After a short debriefing, the interview sought to perceive any tensions, stresses, or internal conflict the department chair was experiencing or had experienced recently or in the past. I wanted to explore the emotional aspect of the department chair’s experience. This interview was intended to address the primary research question and all three of the research sub-questions.
The fourth interview was conducted approximately a week after the third. After a short debriefing, the interview was used to expand and clarify ideas that either the researcher or the participant wished to pursue further and to allow the participants time to reflect and comment on what they had experienced throughout the data collection process. The influence of keeping the journals was explored as to the value of the journal for the participant as an aid to memory, reflection, or interpretation of meaning of recalled events. I also sought to discover how the interview series had impacted the participants and to provide an opportunity for them to express any ideas they felt were not addressed or were insufficiently addressed and needed to be added to the data. This interview was intended to address the primary research question and all three of the research sub-questions. Also, time was reserved in this final session for the researcher to express thanks and gratitude to the chairs for their participation in the study.

Figure 2 summarizes the Interview Session - Research Question Relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions addressed in</th>
<th>Session 1</th>
<th>Session 2</th>
<th>Session 3</th>
<th>Session 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary: What is the essence of the internal conflict in the role of the public community college academic department chair?</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-question 1: How does the internal conflict in the role of the public community college academic department chair manifest itself?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-question 2: Of the many tasks of department chairs, which tasks seem to create internal conflict for the public community college academic department chair?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-question 3: Through what self-perceptions and with what words do public community college academic department chairs present images of themselves?</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2. Research questions addressed in each interview session.*
Data Analysis. According to van Manen (1990), data analysis for a phenomenological study does not follow a specific pattern of theme analysis involving an application of frequency count or strict coding or other breakdown of protocol content. In human science research, articulating the notion of theme serves to further clarify the nature of human science research. It is “a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure—grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of ‘seeing’ meaning” (p. 79).

To analyze the data, I fulfilled the processes of phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of composite textural and composite structural descriptions described by Moustakas (1994, pp. 180-181). I followed the method presented by Moustakas as his Modification of the van Kaam Method of Analysis of Phenomenological Data, which lists the following steps:

Using the complete transcript of each research participant:

1. **Listing and preliminary grouping**
   List every expression relevant to the experience. (Horizontalization)

2. **Reduction and Elimination**: To determine the Invariant Constituents:
   Test each expression for two requirements:
   a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?
   b. Is it possible to abstract and label it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience. Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated. Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms. The horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience.

3. **Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents**:
   Cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience.
4. **Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application: Validation**

Check the invariant constituents and their accompanying theme against the complete record of the research participant. (1) Are they expressed explicitly in the complete transcription? (2) Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed? (3) If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to the co-researcher’s experience and should be deleted.

5. Using the relevant, validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each co-researcher an *Individual Textural Description* of the experience. Include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.

6. Construct for each co-researcher an *Individual Structural Description* of the experience based on the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation.

7. Construct for each research participant a *Textural-Structural Description* of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes.

*From the Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions, develop a Composite Description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole.* (Moustakas, pp. 120-121)

When the data was analyzed and descriptions of the phenomena were completed, I shared the results with the participants. Since it had been about nine months since I had concluded the first interviews, I contacted them first by e-mail to confirm that they were still available for my consultation. Upon receiving confirmation that they were still at their campuses, I e-mailed them the chapter of interpretations and asked that they give me their opinions as to the validity of the results. Through e-mail and telephone conversations, they approved of my analysis and interpretations. No one expressed any idea that suggested that I should make changes to the interpretations.

The participants shared their pleasure with the results, and one participant reiterated pride in being part of the study. However, a few participants were surprised at “the number of pauses” and the less-than-perfect sentence structures of some of the
passages quoted from the transcript. One participant suggested that the participant expressions should be edited. I assured them that theirs was a common concern. I also shared that as a former writing teacher I knew that verbal expression often falls short of the standards we expect in a written presentation. Ultimately, as I revised the manuscript, I found that the phrase “you know” appeared so many times in all of our responses that it sometimes obscured the meaning of a passage. The phrase was a speech pattern, which in the verbal expression did not indicate meaning or connection; but in the written text, the phrase intruded on the ideas being expressed and became distracting. Therefore, to keep the focus on the meaning of passages, I edited out that phrase in all instances where its use was without meaning. Quotations reported in the results were selected as exemplary of the topic under discussion to show both examples and counter examples as they are discussed. In many cases they are also typical expressions.

**About the Researcher**

Because this is a qualitative study, the readers should know something about me and my background. I was born and raised in the City of Chicago in a family of three girls. My parents were well-educated positive citizens who worked very hard and took courageous steps to provide a secure and happy life for my sisters and me. Upon earning my bachelor’s degree in English, I was assigned as a certified high school English teacher. For five years, I was one of a few young teachers in a building where the average age of most of the teachers was about fifty. The students loved having younger teachers, and I loved the students. I had never attended a public school and was most excited by football and basketball games and all the other events of a large urban public high school.
Also, I found that I had a magnificent and respectful rapport with adolescents, as I taught regular, honors, double honors, and developmental classes and sponsored various student activities. I found the idealism of optimistic adolescents to be a grounding philosophical treasure. But when I earned my master’s degree in English five years later and serendipitously learned about the community college, my sense of adventure prompted me to apply for a position. I was fortunate to be hired full time at the downtown campus of a multi-campus public community college district. This was during a period of great community college expansion in the mid-1960s.

In the early years, I was content to learn the ropes of working in a junior college, as they were called at the time, and to adjust to the students who were just a bit older than my beloved high school adolescents. I had to tell myself that as time went by, the students would seem younger to me, as I got older. Besides, the college scheduling would be a better fit for the family I hoped to have. Time proved this to be a worthy advantage, as I was able to rear a family of three sons without compromising my standards of mothering. As my sons grew older and as time permitted, I sponsored clubs and activities, served on Faculty Council, took many in-service courses, and finally—after 27 years as faculty and having attained the rank of associate professor—I was elected department chair.

My immediate superior in the first several years of my chairmanship was the vice-president of academic affairs with whom I enjoyed a very positive relationship. He was a very experienced educator and was a person to whom I could go with any problem. Also, the president of the college at that time was a woman for whom I had a great deal of respect, and she was always very willing to share her experience and wisdom. Later the
dean of instruction was named under the vice-president, and my relations with her were equally pleasant. Unlike the earlier president and vice-president, she was younger than I, but I think we both had a healthy respect for each other. I actually delighted in sessions with her when I was able to help solve what might have been difficult issues.

The department included the speech and theater divisions, and the size averaged about 29 full-time faculty, with increasing numbers of adjuncts, rising to about 30 during one period. This proportion brought adjuncts up to about 51% of the nearly 60 professors in the department. During my first or second year as chair, in anticipation of contract negotiations, the district Board was demanding some new and fairly drastic changes in faculty course allowances. In response, it seemed that almost monthly there was at least one protest meeting, either with Board members or with other faculty to strategize opposition to the Board. At the end of the first semester, I realized that if I continued with the same intensity and at the frenetic pace of the previous sixteen weeks, I would be a lunatic before the year ended. I learned right then to recognize the difference between a fight that was winnable and one that was not. The changes the Board demanded and the increasing number of full time faculty retirements resulted in the need for many more adjunct faculty. The number of adjunct faculty grew, therefore, from one or two at the beginning of my chairmanship to thirty or more as time went on.

As the department employed more and more adjunct faculty, a coordinator was identified to assist in coaching and supporting them. The English Department adjunct coordinator created an adjunct faculty handbook, which became a model for a similar document for the college. As assessment practices became increasingly more complex—by virtue of the establishment of district-wide standards, normative grading, and
derivation of departmental vs. individual faculty statistical analysis—a second coordinator was granted a formal, release-time-compensated, position in the operations of the department. What had been a voluntary contribution to department functioning became a research-driven process requiring greater analysis, reporting, and accountability.

At one period of time, the District was creating an international associates degree partnership between my college and several “further colleges” in England. As chair of the English Department, I was given the opportunity to go to England to observe programs in those colleges and to participate in academic negotiations to revise their offerings to conform to Carnegie Unit requirements that would allow my college to grant credit for their work. A few years later, I was also asked to lead the college’s first assessment efforts. I invited leaders in the college, primarily other department chairs, to become part of the first assessment committee. It involved a great deal of study about the nature of assessment, and we created plans for assessing all the required courses in the college.

Over the years I learned that the better I knew my English department faculty, their unique skills and what they individually needed, wanted, and would or would not accept, the better I was able to be an effective chair. There were always complaints from students, and even those yielded opportunities to better understand faculty perspectives. I was able to negotiate all manner of things for our department, from registration and teaching arrangements and schedules to class loads and overloads to new course offerings and programs. I found being department chair exhausting and exciting. I had originally hoped to go back solely to teaching before I retired; however, I remained department chair for the next 12 years, aging from my fifties into my sixties, until my retirement.
Throughout my life, I have always been intrigued by challenges and have responded to them. When my children were young and I saw young mothers shyly afraid to take the first steps to making friends, I felt compelled to just walk over and say, “Hello.” When my oldest son’s Cub Scout troop needed a Cub Master, I took the job, even though Boy Scout rules required a man in the position. By taking the job, I was able to convince the fathers to step up when it was time to take the boys camping. As my children grew more independent, I took on more leadership roles in various capacities in my community, in the college, and in the district. Academically, I earned over 60 graduate hours beyond my master’s degree through a variety of courses in teaching and learning theory, multi-cultural literature, technology, leadership, administration, and history of the American experience for various minority groups. Then, a year before retirement, I began a doctoral program.

I was not aware of any lack of contentment with my previous accomplishments; nor did I sense urgency for earning a doctorate. However, I did know that the idea of earning a doctorate had always been, for me, the definition of a complete education. Even as an undergraduate, I assumed I would eventually earn a doctorate. Also, from my first days as a high school teacher, professionals around me had assumed that I would one day become a scholar who earned the title doctor. The doctoral program seemed like just another challenge that I was eager to accept; but it has, in fact, allowed me to put my teaching career into a historical perspective that has been a joy to re-live. It certainly has been a challenge, but one, perhaps, that I actually needed in order to finish my work. This dissertation is a culmination of that effort.
Chapter 4

Profiles of the Research Participants

These profiles consist of the participants’ descriptions of themselves. The information here is skeletal background detail about the participants that I sought from them during my first interview and before I began to interact with them more deeply in an exploration of their lived experience as department chairs. This introductory conversation served very much to bracket the phenomenon of their personal experience as chair by excluding preconceptions about the chair experience generally and by communicating to them that the subject of the study was each chair and his or her personal experience as an academic department chair in all its uniqueness.

Where possible, I presented information using the participants’ own words to enhance appreciation of them as individuals and to provide a glimpse into their personalities or experiences, in line with the notion of using phenomenology. It is my intention to create a sense of the flesh and blood, breathing and thinking human persons who provided data for this study. Information provided includes (a) the academic setting where participants work; (b) their academic disciplines and degrees; (c) their approximate ages, time as faculty, and time as chair; (d) the size of their departments, including the number and proportion of full-time and adjunct professors; (e) their involvement in and with campus activities not specifically related to their roles as chair; (f) their interests outside the college; (g) their expectations as to how long they will continue as chair; and (h) other general information and impressions.

It is important to note that the participants provide a very broadly diverse representation of American society. I interviewed six participants from four community
colleges, with two of the colleges providing two participants each. Four participants are male and two female, varying in age from forties to sixties, and representing diverse ethnic/cultural backgrounds. I made these distinctions of ethnicity based on physical appearance and/or surname association. I did not ask any participant to identify him or herself according to any of these social markers. However, during the course of the interview conversations, most of the participants made some reference or statement that confirmed the association noted. In all cases, the participants provided the age range information. Figure 3 provides a visual scan of this social distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant College</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
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<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Diversity of research participants.*

This diversity among participants was only partly expected. (When the researcher is included in the grouping, all ethnic categories above are represented.) In the process of searching for and reaching out to representatives of the currently socially expected minority voices, I connected with chairs who also represented a variety of cultural heritage within the American mainstream. I think this fact is worth highlighting because all of my own life experiences have taught me what I believe to be an unwavering truth: The external apparent differences among us human beings is a deceptive classifier which leads us to erroneously assume differences that do not exist; and the external apparent
similarity suggests a universal sameness that is similarly non-existent. In other words, I think the ethnic differences that I have noted above may be proven in some future researcher’s future research to be of similar importance or unimportance among the entire spectrum of differences noted. While it is certainly true that various cultural groups of our American society have historically endured particular life experiences, there is a commonality of responses from people who, despite their diverse heritage, do live a common life experience.

Other aspects of diversity among the participants are their years of experience as faculty members and as chairs and the numbers of full-time and adjunct professors in their departments. Figure 4 presents this information for comparison.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
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<td>Years at college</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years before chair</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years chair</td>
<td>2+4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of full-time faculty</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of adjunct faculty</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22-28</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14-21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40-50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4. Experience of department chairs and numbers of department faculty.*

**Participant A, Prof. Albert**

Participant A is an instructor in sociology and chairman of the Anthropology and Sociology Department. His department is a subdivision of the social science division, and his immediate superior is his division dean. He is in his mid-forties, is married, and has a little boy. Having earned a master’s degree in sociology, he has been at the college about 12 years and has acted in some capacity as an academic discipline leader for about half that time. He was coordinator of the academic unit before department chairs became part of the organizational structure of the college, and he was named chair when the title was
instituted at the college. This is his fourth year as the titled chair, and he was coordinator of his discipline for two years before that. Prior to his current full-time position, he had been an adjunct professor at various regional colleges and universities for about four years. His department consists of 5 full-time faculty and about 16 adjunct faculty, depending on immediate need for adjuncts each term. This proportion makes adjuncts about 76% of the 21 professors in the department. The specific number of adjunct faculty sometimes varies from semester to semester based on student enrollment and specific course offerings. For the sake of anonymity, in this document I refer to Participant A as Prof. Albert.

Prof. Albert said he was inspired early to be a good student because he “just liked school so much.” He always had close relationships with his teachers and professors and enjoyed seeing even fictional characters make a difference in someone else’s life through education. He reported that since his fictional role models were teachers and he liked school, it was almost inevitable that he became a teacher. Also, he said that as a little kid he always liked science fiction. Again, with a certain combining, he now sees sociology and science fiction as “pretty much the same thing, except one is a science and one is an art form. And they both really do the same thing, which is sort of comment on social experiences and society and where we’re going and where we’ve been.”

Prof. Albert’s goal is to just be a good teacher and “do professional development to be a good teacher.” He says he has “zero administrative desires.” What he is interested in is promoting and sharing his love of sociology. In addition to teaching, he does this by researching and writing for popular culture venues like the Star Trek website, where he
likes to “sneak sociology lessons within the articles.” He also participates in college and civic programs on topics of social interest and popular culture.

Prof. Albert is a very energetic young man who is much sought after by students and colleagues, as well as by civic organizations outside the college, for his humane and scholarly approach to sociology. He is certainly succeeding in his goal to attract new audiences to sociology, as he uses Superman, Star Wars, Star Trek, and That 70s Show to teach media literacy, which he believes “is equally as important as any other kind of literacy in our society today.” He is also pursuing a second master’s degree in humanities because, he said, he does a lot of crossover humanities activities in his sociology classes, and he wants to legitimate himself “in that area a little bit.” He is about halfway through this second master’s program.

Prof. Albert expressed openness to someone else taking over as department chair at some point, but he also expressed a desire to accomplish certain goals as chair before that happens. In addition to his commitment to his discipline, Prof. Albert is also very devoted to his family, as indicated by the priority he places on scheduling of his daily activities to accommodate family activities and responsibilities.

**Participant B, Prof. Bruce**

Participant B is an economist and chairman of the Social Science and Humanities Department. He holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in economics and has completed all but his dissertation toward a PhD., quite likely several years in the past. He described his college as divided into three areas: arts and sciences, for students planning to transfer to four-year institutions; career programs, for those seeking a two-year degree leading to
employment; and continuing education, for community people simply wishing to pursue areas of interest to them. His immediate superior in the college is the dean of arts and sciences; the current dean, his third since becoming chair, has been in the position “about a year and a half or so.” For the sake of anonymity, in this document I refer to Participant B as Prof. Bruce.

Prof. Bruce is in his sixties. He has been chair for 10 years and had been a faculty member for 17 years before that, for a total of 27 years at the college. He described himself as “probably within three years of retirement.” He stated, “What I’d really like to do is retire from full-time teaching, but I’d like to continue teaching online on a part-time basis. I’d like to kind of refine some online courses, two or three of them. Do a better job also with coming up with my own PowerPoint notes, not just the author’s textbook notes, that I could utilize with any textbook that I wanted.” As for the remainder of his career, he would “like to stay chair until retirement,” and he’d like “to see a couple more new courses introduced to the department.” He says he “never really aspired to an administrative position . . . to be dean or something like that, even though the college has had faculty move up into the ranks of dean.”

Prof. Bruce’s department consists of 6 full-time faculty and between 22 and 28 adjuncts, varying from semester to semester. This proportion makes adjuncts about 78 - 82% of the 28 - 34 professors in the department. Prof. Bruce ranks among his major responsibilities scheduling of classes, hiring adjunct professors each semester and summer, planning and monitoring the budget, and following through on contractual obligations for faculty. He also helps his colleagues to plan new offerings for the department and works on college committees. A very seasoned chair, he seems to take in
stride the various responsibilities of the role, including monthly department meetings, monthly chairpersons’ meetings, and a significant volume of student petitions. He also seems to enjoy friendly interactions with colleagues outside the college setting in the form of attendance at baseball games, golfing, and going to dinner, as well as reserving some time for family activities.

**Participant C, Prof. Carroll**

Participant C is professor of philosophy and chairperson of the Humanities and Philosophy Department. The college, according to her, “has in the past been recognized as supposedly one of the best community colleges in the country.” The college has two campuses, and her responsibility as chair extends to both campuses. The Humanities and Philosophy Department is in Division Three of the college’s four divisions. She explained that “Basically everything that has to do with the meaning of life is in Division Three….The largest department in Division Three is the English Department, and then also humanities and philosophy, art, music, modern languages.” The division dean is her immediate superior. Participant C has a bachelor’s, master’s, and PhD in philosophy. She came to the college full time about 11 years ago and became chair of the department about a year later. In a sense she was hired to become chair because at the time of her hiring, there were many retirements among the faculty, and the sitting chair was not expected to remain. Participant C is in her early fifties, is married, and has two children who are young adults. For the sake of anonymity, in this document I refer to Participant C as Prof. Carroll.
Before coming to the community college Prof. Carroll had been a university professor of philosophy in an eastern state for five years. She then left academia for a while to work as a political organizer. After having children she started teaching part time as an adjunct. Then for what she described as “a number of years,” she taught as a full-time faculty member at a university in a non-tenure track position. When she was not successful in gaining a tenure track position that she applied for at that university, she again became an adjunct professor part-time. One of the places she taught was her current college, where she applied for and gained a full-time tenured position. Prof. Carroll described her final hiring interview with the dean as specifically directed at her readiness to assume the chairoship (as opposed to her knowledge of philosophy) because that was the great need of the department at the time, and she presented significant academic and professional experience. She said that she officially became department chair even before she had gained tenure. This is a very rare occurrence, usually necessitated by the retirement of all tenured full-time faculty in a department.

Prof. Carroll liked studying philosophy. She “began studying it and continued studying it,” and she sees her progression to teaching philosophy as a natural result of her love of the discipline. She likes teaching philosophy at a community college because most students have not had philosophy in high school and, therefore, have not had bad experiences with the discipline. She is “dedicated to building a quality department” and is proud of her “fairly astounding faculty.” The department has 6 full-time faculty and 47 adjuncts. This proportion makes adjuncts about 89% of the 53 professors in the department. Of the adjuncts, Prof. Carroll says, “A lot of them have PhDs; a lot of them have written books; a lot of them are excellent, excellent teachers. In any rational and just
system, they would have full-time jobs.” Prof. Carroll is also very proud of the fact that enrollments in her department have grown “precipitously,” some 75% in the last few years.

Prof. Carroll is a very active member of the American Philosophical Association and makes frequent presentations at conferences. Also, she has, in cooperation with other campus leaders, led semester-long faculty development courses in ethics for her campus, which have been very well received. She is a leading participant in college governance and in campus assessment planning and activities. Prof. Carroll shared with me many of the college reference guides, manuals, and courses of study that she created or participated in creating, all of them thoroughly researched and meticulously presented. From my examination of these shared materials and my discussions with her on a variety of topics, I concluded that her commitment is to doing all things to the highest level of professional expression and according to ethical rightness. She is thoroughly dedicated to principles, to her discipline, and to her college.

As to how long she will continue as chair, Prof. Carroll is “very torn” because the person she was working with, whom she was assuming would replace her as chair, “has had several new children arrive and is very wrapped up with this.” She expressed these words with some weariness because it is clear that she is working very, very hard in her role as chair; and I had the clear impression that she would be eager to know that the work she had started and moved along so well would be continued by some newer, more energized colleague. She has not yet identified that person.
**Participant D, Prof. Donald**

Participant D teaches Spanish, is a native speaker of Spanish, and is chairman of the Foreign Language Department. He has been a faculty member for ten years and has been chair for the last four to five years. He earned his academic credentials at a California university and spent nine years as an administrator in the business environment before coming to teaching. He heads a department where he is the only full time faculty member, and he supervises from 14 to 21 adjuncts. This proportion makes adjuncts about 93 - 95% of the 15 - 22 professors in the department. At his college, his immediate superior is the dean of the school of arts and sciences, and he also works “in conjunction with the assistant dean.” Participant D is in his mid-fifties, is married, and has young children. For the sake of anonymity, in this document I refer to Participant D as Prof. Donald.

Prof. Donald observed that he had been in school all his life. It is apparent from his general conversation that he has a wide knowledge of literature, a great appreciation for the well-examined life and its meaning, as well as a bit of a struggle with aspects of the English language. Before coming to the college, he “administered a company for nine years in Corporate America, and it entailed to be [sic] in charge of mid-managers and superiors and foremen and employees at large.” That gave him “a lot of experience in dealing with people, with pressure, with scheduling, buying, selling, all the angles of business in running corporate America.”

“But then,” he said, “it got to a point where I could not stand that kind of environment any more, so I re-directed the energies to become a teacher.” Later discussions revealed that this decision was the result of a shift from the pragmatism of
working in a lucrative corporate environment to acceptance of a personal scholarly inclination. All the time that he had been working at that corporate job, he had also been taking classes at a community college. So after ten years as a student at a community college and nine years in Corporate America, he decided “to gear all that energy towards one goal.” He made a “couple other tries and different areas,” but, he said, it became clear to him that teaching was something that he wanted to do.

Prof. Donald graduated from one of the university systems in California, studied abroad for a couple of years, and even taught abroad. He came to Illinois, earned his master’s degree, and went “to work as a teacher in a college.” He also taught in a high school, where, he said, he gained more teaching experience and an understanding of how students progress in their acquisition of education. Describing his arrival to teach at his college, Prof. Donald said, “The opportunity presented itself to be here, Xxxx College. Not only that, but I wanted it to be a community college.” He was eager to accept the opportunity because of his own ten-year community college experience and because he “liked the environment of a community college: the diversity and the idea that community colleges offer a real opportunity for students to go ahead.” He said, “It’s real. It helped me. So it’s very real.”

When the previous chair retired, Prof. Donald was next in line, so he became chair. The only other full time faculty member moved out of State last year, leaving him the only full time person. He says that he is “in the process of acquiring another one, but it’s a long process.” With generous assistance from a group of very dedicated adjunct faculty, Prof. Donald is able to carry on a very active foreign language program. To address the special needs of the non-English-speaking portion of the community, he has
even written Spanish language plays, which the faculty have cast, directed, and performed. Many of these special activities take place within the college, but he is equally generous with his time for community events outside the college. Prof. Donald said that he gives many talks to groups outside the college, both to make the community more aware of what the college has to offer and to address the needs of the community. Many of these talks have been given in response to requests from various community organizations.

Prof. Donald could not anticipate how long he will remain as chair. He is clearly doing more than he can continue to do for an indefinite period of time, as evidenced by the unrelenting pace of his day. The urgency of daily tasks seems to consume time that he feels he needs to devote to planning and acquisition of basic departmental resources. Also, declining institutional support has led him to question why he continues to do what he is doing and to express recurring feelings of frustration. For now, he keeps going on, each day finding a way to overcome the doubts and to continue to work to build an even more viable department.

**Participant E, Prof. Estelle**

Participant E is assistant professor of psychology and chair of the Behavioral Science Department. She has been a faculty member for eight years and is in her fourth year as department chair. Her immediate superior is the dean of liberal arts, although she said that she would report eventually to the vice-president of academic affairs because he is head of her division. Her bachelor’s degree is in psychology and economics, and her master’s degree is in applied psychology. At the time of the interviews, she was writing
her dissertation in completion of a PhD in counselor supervision and counseling, which she had begun ten years ago, having completed coursework three years ago. Her department consists of 6 full time faculty and 26 adjunct faculty. This proportion makes adjuncts about 81% of the 32 professors in the department. Participant E is in her forties, is married, and has three sons in their early to mid-adolescence and a step-son in his early twenties. For the sake of anonymity, in this document I refer to Participant E as Prof. Estelle.

Prof. Estelle came to teaching after working for a number of years in social work. In what she described as “a lot of real kind of in the trenches social work stuff,” she worked in the juvenile court system with abused and neglected children and with the homeless in the homeless shelter. She says, “[I] decided to leave to get my doctorate to go full time and ended up seeing an ad for an adjunct position. . . . I applied. Got the job. Within a week, I had to start teaching. And I loved it. I just thought, ‘Oh, my gosh, this is what I want to do. This is . . . ’ I just loved it. I would have done it without being paid for it.” This realization changed her focus from therapy to teaching, and she adjusted her doctoral program so that she could finish it and “teach somewhere.” When a full-time position became available at her college, she applied. Despite acquaintances telling her that it was “impossible to get into the community college system,” she was hired into a department where, she said, she had to do a lot on her own to get information and to figure out what she was doing.

Prof. Estelle described her transition from faculty to chair as something of a necessity. She says, “Everyone else in the department was getting ready to retire.” In a very short time, she was going to be the only tenured person left; and if she had declined
the chairmanship, someone from outside the department would have been appointed chair. She and other faculty in the department feared that this would mean that the department would lose control of scheduling; so she took the chair. After about a year as chair of the psychology department, she was asked to take on the chairmanship of the social science department as well. She declined this request and was permitted to continue with just the psychology department duties.

Prof. Estelle seems to be just getting the hang of being department chair, as she expressed increasing appreciation of her abilities and capacities as chair. She says she “was a little bit apprehensive,” but she is currently participating in a multi-year program of leadership development, which has exposed her to various leadership profiles and surveys from which she has gained insight into the way she functions as chair and how she “can be better in this role.” She says that she has learned a lot about herself since becoming chair, and she has learned “to be a little more assertive and a little more directive with people.”

Prof. Estelle is also co-chair of the Department Chair Roundtable at her college. From this position it is expected that she will become chair of the Chair Roundtable next year. Her current 3-year term as chair ends in two years, and she seems inclined to apply again. But since “anybody can apply,” she says she has no idea whom the dean will choose. For now, she juggles family responsibilities, her personal academic development, classes that she teaches, and her professional responsibilities and development. She also continues to do a small amount of individual therapy in a private practice, conducting a women’s group one night a week.
**Participant F, Prof. Franz**

Participant F is associate professor of communications and English and chairman of the Communications, Literature, and Languages Department. He has been a faculty member at his college for nine years and chair for five years. His department includes a very wide discipline range: all the composition and speech classes, all the literature classes, and all the foreign language courses taught in the college, including Spanish, French, German, and Arabic. The department includes 23 full time faculty and between 40 and 50 adjunct faculty. This proportion makes adjuncts about 63 - 68% of the 63 - 73 professors in the department. The department was in the last phase of hiring another full-time faculty member at the time of the interviews. With a department this large, Participant F found it necessary to identify two assistant coordinators to oversee specific aspects of the department functioning. His immediate superior in the college is the dean of liberal arts. Participant F is in his fifties, is married, and has a school-age daughter. For the sake of anonymity, in this document I refer to Participant F as Prof. Franz.

Prof. Franz came to teaching after a number of years working in his family’s insurance and financial services business. As vice-president of operations, with a bachelor’s degree in English, he did all the human resources and accounting tasks. He says, “Then I just decided that really wasn’t my thing.” So he went back to the university and got his master’s and PhD in English. He started teaching part time after he got his master’s, and he started looking for full-time positions after her finished his doctoral coursework. After one year of full-time teaching at another community college, he started full time in a tenure track position at his current college. He stated that he particularly wanted to teach in a community college because his “own value system and the mission
of a community college are very much in alignment.” He said that he very much believes “that folks who go to community colleges deserve to have the same caliber of instructors” as “those of us who were blessed to be able to get advanced degrees at places like xx, xx, xx, or xx [the most prestigious public and private universities in the area].”

Prof. Franz prepares for each day by getting up at 4:30 am and running for about five miles. He is planning to compete in an upcoming marathon, but he says that this running relaxes him and makes it possible for him to maintain a very positive attitude during his long workdays. His regular schedule is like a marathon: besides his chairmanship and full-time work at his own college, he also teaches at a local university one evening each week. Despite all of these complexities Prof. Franz seems able to find the humor in any difficult situation, as most answers to questions were punctuated by laughter at some aspect of the question or his response. When asked how many full-time faculty there were in his department, his immediate response was, “three hundred and twelve,” an exaggeration to emphasize the very large actual number of 23.

Prof. Franz sees himself as a leader and feels that his background in business has helped him with organization. When asked how long he is likely to continue as chair, he responded, “Oh goodness. There’s the fifty thousand dollar question.” His current term ends in about two years. He says that if he still feels effective, he may stay on; but if he starts to wane, maybe he’ll “start getting the succession plan in place.”

Summary Observations About the Chair Participants

The department chairs who participated in this study did so because they believed that what I was doing had value. They took precious time that they needed to complete
other tasks, and they gave their full attention to our conversations during the time we were together. They cleared their calendars, rejected phone calls, and turned away visitors. They told me that they did not usually agree to participate in research projects, but that this one seemed important. They appreciated the focus on themselves and the opportunity to talk about themselves and their work. Whereas I represented a community college chair who was hired during the period of dramatic growth in the mid to late 1960s, and one other participant was hired in the 1980s, the other participants began employment in and after the 1990s, all of us together representing Deegan and Tillery’s (1985) third, fourth, and fifth generations of the community college. Regardless of these differences, the chair experiences reported represented a range based more on chair growth than historical time.

Each participant seemed to exemplify specific aspects of the chair lived experience. Prof. Albert expressed himself as the young man on the move, doing a lot for the department, the college, and the community—but with a young family who take center focus in his life. Prof. Bruce expressed himself as the well-worn pragmatist, having endured and absorbed many chair life lessons. Prof. Carroll expressed herself as the professional philosopher who is committed to social justice and professionalism in all areas of life. Prof. Donald expressed deep philosophical commitment from a moral perspective of the chair, along with the angst and frustration of limited authority and lack of institutional support that matches his passion for his department. Prof. Estelle expressed herself as a young woman professional, also with a family, still putting her own professional life in order, just learning her real capacity, and not quite demanding all that she can get from her institution. Prof. Franz expressed himself with explicit and
specific detail about the activities and components of his chair leadership, supported by physical fitness and humor as strategies for survival.
Chapter 5

Results

Interview data were collected to discover the essence of the internal conflict experienced by community college department chairs. This focus was stated as the main research question that was the central question of the study. Sub-questions 1, 2, and 3 serve to support and shed light on the central question. My analysis of data collected to answer the research questions revealed eight themes not specifically related to the research questions. Two of these themes were introduced by the interview questions because they were intended as tools for discovering answers to the research questions and were therefore not surprising to me. The other six themes were not prompted by any specific interview question, but were introduced by the chairs as part of the narratives they told of their lives as chairs. The themes were introduced so routinely by several of the participants that I concluded that these themes warranted presentation in this study because they were palpable factors in the lives of the participants. However, because they are not specifically related to the research questions of this study, I have not included a discussion of them in the body of the study; but I have presented them in an appendix to the study (Appendix D). There, I present the themes in a sequence that seems to me to run from the beginning of the chair experience, through the daily work, to more intangible aspects of the chair experience. There may be additional themes that can be gleaned from the data, as I do not contend that I have discussed every idea that the chairs expressed.

The thematic coding strategy also revealed a pathway to answer the first—and most important—research question because identifying the essence of the internal
conflict of the department chair’s lived experience required stripping away all of the specifically identified annoyances of the chair’s life to get to the kernel of conflict which, if absent, would negate the pervading condition of internal conflict. This first research question is the primary overarching question of the study, while the three research sub-questions are subordinate to and supporting of the primary one. Through analysis of the data, the answer to the primary research question emerged; and from an understanding from the primary research question, research sub-questions 1, 2, and 3 were answerable directly from the interview material.

**Effect on the Chairs of Their Being Chairs: “A Blade With Two Sharp Edges”**

The most meaningful theme relative to this study that emerged from the interview data was the personal effect on the chairs of their being chairs. In responding to questions as to whether their personal lives had suffered or had been enhanced by being chair and questions probing the best and worst parts about being chair, the chairs often became quite introspective about themselves and their work. What emerged were ideas regarding the effect on the chairs of their being chairs. Analyzing this topic yielded meaning and understanding that provided the answer to the central research question of this study: the essence of the internal conflict experienced by chairs. One of the effects of being chair, as I will discuss at the end of this section, is the effect of internal conflict.

From the chair reflection described in themes that emerged, chairs were able to see changes in themselves that they identified as resulting from their being chair. Prof. Franz was probably the most articulate on this subject. He talked about the heaviness of his responsibility for making the right faculty choices because of the “thousands of
students over the course of that person’s career” who would be affected by the faculty choice. And he talked about the pride he felt in realizing that he had had “an integral part” in hiring half of the people in his department. Even though he had been in leadership positions before, he said that he did not realize how personally invested he had become in the success of his colleagues. He described the pride as feeling “a little bit like a parent’s pride,” where an adult cherishes the accomplishments of another who is in some way an extension of him-or herself. But he said that a primary effect he experienced as a result of being chair was learning to “think of more ways to utilize the resources” that he was “very blessed to have and to try to be creative in ways to get even more people involved in doing more things that will tap into their own talents.”

It seems that these were great lessons for Prof. Franz. By stepping back and looking at his work objectively, he was able to put his work into a context that he was not able to perceive while he was rushing from one daily task to another trying to do everything himself. He was able to evaluate his work and to determine that he was proud of his accomplishments. Also, by learning to rely appropriately on the two coordinators assigned to assist him—one for composition and literature and another for speech and foreign languages—he gained greater awareness of new possibilities for the department and greater appreciation for opportunities that became apparent once he tapped into the strengths of his colleagues. This development is contrary to what he said was his earlier assumption: that the more he worked as chair, the more self-sufficient he would become.

He said he learned the opposite: that he had “become more able to rely on others to do their jobs and to do them well.” In his words he “became a better team player.” By letting
go, he learned to build capacity in others; and he grew as well. This is the essence of true leadership as described in the literature.

Other chairs also expressed ways they had been affected by virtue of being chair. Prof. Estelle noted her development of a greater sense of purposefulness and direction. Prof. Donald felt that chair responsibilities gave him the opportunity to test his abilities as a leader of classroom and college-wide activities, and he felt that the traveling and workshops that he experienced as chair gave him the opportunity to understand that he is not alone in his concerns. Prof. Bruce found the learning community for chairs a life-enhancing experience; and Prof. Carroll found the development of close friendships, many with other chairs, a development resulting from her role as chair. Prof. Albert said that he found that working with newer faculty and nurturing their development made him happier about teaching and happier in general about his life.

The chairs also reported experiencing negative effects from being chair. Professors Albert and Estelle reported having less time with their families as the major negative effect of being chair. This caused internal conflict for them because it was at odds with what they would do if they could do otherwise. Prof. Carroll reported having to work many more hours than she thought reasonable, and she was especially discontent because she thought appropriate clerical support for chairs would have been cost effective for the college and would have reduced the necessity for her to do so much clerical work. Prof. Bruce had to give up a partial season package for his favorite baseball team because of chair activities. Prof. Franz said that he takes home more stress and that his daughter misses him whenever he is not home. Prof. Donald felt that being chair took him away from his teaching too much. He said, “I am a teacher. I get up in the morning. I want to
go and teach. That’s my life.” His words reveal his definition of himself, his identity, and his committed purpose for being. He was saying that teaching is the driving force of his life and that being a chairperson is an impediment to his fulfilling his image of himself. So chairs experienced important personal changes as a result of being chair. at the same time, they also made personal sacrifices to live their chair roles.

Considering what chairs perceived as the best and worst parts of being chair brings us ever closer to perceiving the essence of the internal conflict of a chair’s experience. For Prof. Albert the best part about being chair was giving somebody else a chance to teach. As he put it, “finding somebody [while] looking through a stack of papers and pulling one out and saying, ‘This person seems like they would be interesting to teach here.’” In these words he expressed the adventure of search and the excitement of discovering a new teacher. He felt that through these acts as chair he gained greater “realizations about what it means to be a teacher” as he became more conscious of his own impact on the future through a kind of lineage as he cultivated other teachers.

For Prof. Carroll the best part of being chair was “getting to move things in a good direction, being able to accomplish something that’s meaningful.” Her expression was general, but Prof. Franz seemed to fill in the detail for what Prof. Carroll had meant about having meaningful things and moving in a right direction. He described the best part of being a chair as “having a hand” in providing quality community college experiences for students whose lives will be “radically changed” by their matriculation. He noted that community college students “are not children of privilege who are enhanced slightly by their college education.” They’re people whose lives would otherwise be very different. He sees that his work is literally changing people’s lives.
Both these statements include words that imply creating change through effort on the chair’s part. Using the hands to move things suggests physical action involving touching and exertion of energy. This is how these chairs see their jobs. Prof. Estelle filled in with more detail by describing the best part of being chair for her as having control of the schedule and, from a leadership capacity, guiding the way for the department in terms of assessment and objectives for the department.

What Prof. Donald provided as the best part about being chair was a multi-layered reflection on the practical aspect of the role itself, of its meaning and impact for him, of his own personal response to the role, and ultimately a translation back into the language shared between himself and the other chairs:

Well, I think it’s the ability to be on both sides of the aisle, the classroom and also the administrative. And it’s a blade with two sharp edges. But I think it keeps one on our toes. I think if it’s a person like myself who’s always prone to tension, not tension but pressure, it’s a way of an operating system for me. So pressure helps. I think that’s the best thing to have that sort of pressure. At the same time it’s sort of a curse. But I think that’s the best thing to be. What else could it be? I mean—what else could it be? I could say that it’s probably an opportunity to grow as a leader. Maybe that’s the best part, that it provides some sort of opportunity, although small, to have some sort of impact, you know, in the decision making process.

By speaking of the chair’s role as being on both sides of the aisle he suggested the political negotiation that is often a part of the chair’s role as the chair attempts to satisfy the wishes of both faculty and administration, making the wishes and demands of each side palatable to the other. He described this duality as “a blade with two sharp edges.” So he sees the chairperson as the blade, a solid strong single central entity, with the sharp edges of classroom concerns and administrative concerns directing their energies and their effect in opposite directions from the central support. Having provided an image for the locus of pressure in the blade, he acknowledged that, as a person for whom
responding to tension or pressure is a method of operation, the pressure is helpful to him and good to have.

The part of his statement that I find most compelling, though, is his identifying the totality of the reality he has just described not only as a curse of some sort, but also the best thing about being chair. A curse is generally considered to be a kind of relentless, unyielding harmful milieu that surrounds a person from which one cannot escape and over which a person has no control. Prof. Donald sees aspects of this reality in the chair’s role, and says that this is also the best part about being department chair. Then he struggles to give this curse another name, and he finds the word leader, which he describes as one who will have only a small impact. Interestingly, he says that the leader has “some sort” of opportunity—not a great opportunity, not even a clearly defined opportunity—and then an opportunity that can have only a small impact. He describes impact in terms of size, rather than importance, which seems to further diminish its effect. So the best part of being a department chair, according to Prof. Donald, is to have some sort of opportunity to make a small impact, all of which may be described as living under some sort of curse.

Prof. Donald has dramatically captured and expressed the ultimate effect on himself of being chair, and statements of the other chairs support and provide detail for his conclusion. Call it leadership, call it a curse, it is the seemingly inevitable emergence in chairs, at some time or another, of a feeling of internal conflict. This internal conflict can be described as the colliding of reality, in the form of myriad practical exigencies, with the chair’s personal sense of what should be, where this sense is based on and guided by a chair’s commitment and desire to create a department or a community
college that represents an imagined ideal. When chairs, because they are chairs, and in
the process of being chairs, learn that being a chair means being a leader; and when they
develop goals and aspirations for their departments and for themselves as chairs; and
when the realities of daily circumstances thwart their achieving their goals, chairs may
experience internal conflict. This internal conflict is different from tension or stress or
work overload because those pressures are external. The presence of internal conflict, as I
describe it here, depends for its existence on the admixture of the chair’s personal
dedication to achieving something in the presence of sometimes overwhelming opposing
forces. This is what the data revealed.

Based on the interview data, it is apparent that chairs do not experience this
internal conflict all the time; but the participants have shown here that, depending on
their circumstances and their experiences, most chairs experience internal conflict at
some time and to some degree during the course of their careers as chair. Also, the
sources of conflict may vary from person to person. For example, several of the
participants experienced internal conflict early in their terms as chair as they strove to
realize their own perceptions of chair and they came to feel the weight of a workload that
was completely unexpected by them. For Prof. Donald it was most dramatic relative to
his having to apply for grants; for Prof. Albert and Prof. Carroll it was related to student
complaints; for Prof. Estelle it was overwhelming amounts of paperwork managed by the
former chair that somehow Prof. Estelle had not noticed even though she had shared an
office with the former chair. These chair experiences are discussed in detail under the
theme Surprise at the Chair Workload as part of the emerging themes provided in
Appendix D.
Among the participants, each was particularly sensitive to one or more aspects of the chair reality. And when the realities of daily circumstances or events collided with the individual chair’s ethics or aspirations or sense of the-way-things-should-be, that chair experienced internal conflict. Prof. Carroll was in turmoil over the conditions of adjunct faculty; Prof. Albert examined every call to a meeting for its potential to upset the balance of planned regularity that allowed him to meet his personal and professional obligations. These circumstances of the chairmanship and others that the participants discussed generated internal conflict in the chairs, and they talked about it to me.

Primary Research Question

What is the essence of the internal conflict in the role of the public community college academic department chair? As described above, one of the effects on chairs of their being chair is the generation in them of internal conflict. Through analysis of chair discussions in the interviews, I derived the following meaning of internal conflict for chairs. Internal conflict for department chairs is the colliding of reality, in the form of numerous practical exigencies, with the chair’s personal sense of what should be, where this sense is based on and guided by an intention and desire to create a department or a community college that represents their imagined ideal. Prof. Donald actually verbalized this idea in a very long, probing, searching response to a question about what he had learned as chair that he would like to have known before becoming chair or that he would like all potential chairs to know.

Essentially, Prof. Donald described the ways in which running a department was becoming more and more like running a business: bringing in raw materials, setting up a
production line, measuring outcome, and then marketing a product. He said that the conflict was that he had “more humanistic ideas, more altruism” than running a business. As he wound down to the conclusion of his statement he said that he saw a lot of his colleagues struggling with that idea and pushing to see themselves within the business model of their institution by taking classes for personal development in budgeting, accounting, and business model leadership. He concluded his response by clearly identifying the two opposing sides of the internal conflict:

After all, maybe it’s just a business. It’s just the teachers who are sort of dreamers that want to change the world, and to change the world through a classroom and academically. It’s different than being in a business model when it becomes very cold and logical and results driven. And so I don’t know, maybe that’s the most devastating issue among us as far as the internal conflict.

Thus, the internal conflict is expressed in practical terms. It can also be described as the clashing force of real world practical issues (such as meetings, need for funds, and student complaints) as currently in motion against the academic and professional aspirations that department chairs have for their departments and themselves. Prof. Donald said that his colleagues shared his experience. Also, my analysis of other chair expressions in this study supported this meaning of internal conflict.

The research question, however, seeks to identify the essence of the internal conflict, that kernel of meaning at the center of the internal conflict which, if absent, would shatter the phenomenon to nonexistence. In other words, we must identify that quality that must be present for the internal conflict to exist. Sokolowski (2007) defined insight into an essence as eidetic intuition. Through intuition, we can make present to our consciousness the essences that things have. Sokolowski directed that, to find the essence, we “let our imagination run free, and see what elements we could remove from
the thing before it ‘shatters’ or ‘explodes’ as the kind of thing that it is” (p. 179). We search creatively and experientially until we arrive at eidetic intuition, and “when we reach an eidetic intuition, we see that it would be inconceivable for the thing in question to be otherwise” (p. 179).

Eidetic intuition is achieved through a three-stage process (Sokolowski, 2007). The first stage is finding similarities among a number of experienced things, for example observing that a particular piece of wood floats, and that other pieces of wood float as well. At the second stage, we observe that the individual pieces of wood have not only similar predicates, but the same predicate (that they float). At this stage all of our experiences confirm the observation, resulting in an empirical universal. At this point the claim can be proven false if we experience more broadly to find wood that does not float. In the final stage, “we try to move beyond empirical to eidetic universals, to necessities and not just regularities” (p. 178), that is, from what is experienced to what is necessary for the form to be what it is (eidos). This transition is accomplished by using our imagination, in a process called imaginative variation, to propose, examine, and reject qualities of the object until we find qualities that must be present for the thing to be what it is. “If we run into features that we cannot remove without destroying the thing, we realize that these features are eidetically necessary to it (p. 179). These are the steps that I took to arrive at the identification of the essence of internal conflict for chairs.

The first clue to the essence of the internal conflict came through an analysis of chairs’ discussions of the best and worst parts about being chair. In a section above I provided discussion of what chairs had to say about the best parts and worst parts about being chair. In summary, the best parts about being chair were functioning as leader
through interaction between faculty and administration, developing a great sense of responsibility for the quality of decisions and pride of building capacity in colleagues, developing a greater sense of purposefulness and direction, recognition of one’s potential for greater effectiveness. If we look closely at what a few chairs said were the worst parts about being chair, we find reference to the same subjects addressed in the discussion about the best parts, but with negative effect and the introduction of conflict.

Prof. Bruce provided a response that addressed several concerns of the chairs:

Perhaps the feeling that you don’t really have that much power on some of the things you’d like to. You go back to…tenured faculty members. Even though we’ve gotten most of the people we wanted, I still realize that it’s ultimately the president’s decision. And I could have a wonderful teacher, and if the president for some reason says, “No, we’re not going to tenure that person.” And … I’m powerless to do anything about it. Same thing … with the budgets. We can ask for money, but often it’s not there. And I understand if the money’s not there, but it’s usually frustrating because there’s no good communication, or poor communication as to why these things got cut…. If I had unlimited budgets, I’d probably add two more full-time faculty members right away—two or three. And I actually think that the quality of education would be better.

He mentions hiring decisions, budget decisions, lack of communication, and what he would do if he had the power to influence matters according to his sense of what should be. He identifies the worst part right away as a feeling, a feeling that comes as a result of his powerlessness. And this sense of powerlessness exists within the context of expectations from faculty and administration that chairs have capacity to accomplish things that need to be done.

For Prof. Carroll the worst part was simply “Working so many hours and having to make unpleasant phone calls.” This reference to hours worked harkens back to her complaints about lack of clerical support, which is the reason she spends so many hours doing clerical tasks; and the unpleasant phone calls refer to adjuncts whom she has to call
to inform them of some unpleasantry like their class is under-enrolled, and they will have
the option of teaching for half pay or having the class cancelled. Both of these
circumstances are ones that she, as leader, has lobbied to change, but has found herself
powerless to influence to her satisfaction.

The statement by Prof. Donald addressed classroom related matters over which he
lamented his lack of power as capacity to effect change:

The worst part is about having a ton of ideas and a very tiny way to make them
possible, a very minimum…. We are not independent to do things. Any decision
is dependent upon this, that, there, and everywhere else. So that’s the worst thing.
If I had the decision power to do everything that I think could be [done], the
material, the lesson, the curriculum, the thing that will provide the department
with the best possible outcome, I will do it in a [snap, snap]…. So the worst thing
is we have all these ideals with all these plans and a very minimum way to
achieve them.

The intensity of his statement communicates his passion about his primary concern:
teaching. He contrasts the exaggeration “a ton of ideas” against his, not just tiny, but very
tiny, capacity to achieve them. His statement is a complex of extremes and frustration. He
says that if he had the decision power to provide the department with the best possible
outcome, he would do it faster than words could communicate, as indicated by his
snapping fingers. If his words are compared to the familiar terms of assessment reports
and outcome evaluation—goals, outcomes, objectives, achievement—we find that they
overlap considerably; we hear the same ideas. It is as if the best part and the worst part
are the same realities, except for capacity to integrate. The best part about being chair is
the opportunity to do something based on one’s skills; the worst part about being chair is
the inability to do that same thing based on lack of control. It is like looking at the same
image from different perspectives: as a goal or a weight.
We can synthesize the discussion to say that the best part about being chair is the opportunity and responsibility to lead and to accomplish good things academically for one’s department; and the worst part is that, given that same opportunity and responsibility, the chair lacks the decision power and authority to control resources that would make it possible for him or her to fulfill those responsibilities according to personal standards. This is the essence of the internal conflict experienced by public community college academic department chairs. I defined the internal conflict earlier as the practical demands of business-model reality, in the form of numerous practical exigencies, versus the chair’s personal sense of what should be, where this sense is based on and guided by an intention and desire to create a department or a community college that represents their imagined ideal. We now identify the essence of that internal conflict to be, as stated above, the lack of decision power and authority to control resources that would make it possible for chairs to fulfill their responsibilities according to their own standards. This idea of internal conflict is further exemplified in the following narrative.

**Example of meanings.** Sometimes, while chairs are fulfilling their professional obligation to enhance their departments, departmental offerings, and the integrity of their disciplines, chairs must actually fight for the survival of their disciplines, as college priorities shift resources away from their departmental support. Prof. Donald is the only full-time faculty in his department and as chair leads a cadre of up to 21 adjunct faculty who, according to Prof. Donald, generously contribute to a stellar foreign language program. They engage in creative activities like student roundtables, bulletin boards of student work, book discussion groups, and student travel. When I conducted the first interview for this study, Prof. Donald literally glowed with the vitality and energy of the
activity in his department. Arriving early, I waited in a sitting area while a group of students and faculty participated in a small group work session. Such a program would surely be the envy of many a college.

However, by the end of our series of interviews, I learned from Prof. Donald that the ax had fallen on his department. He had lost his battle to hold onto the department’s space in the college because the space had been turned over to administrative offices. The lovely conference area that had buzzed with student conversation a few weeks earlier would be transformed very shortly into space for another purpose. For the fourth interview, I met Prof. Donald in a building in a remote part of campus. The building had poor light, and he seemed to have no office. We met in a classroom where he was told by a maintenance man that the building would have to be closed soon.

Prof. Donald had earlier described his relationship with his dean with some hesitation. He described the relationship as professional, but having survived some recent friction because of some physical movement of departments. Evidently the situation that he thought had been resolved was revisited. He had been aware then of the terrible possibility that had now become reality, as he had now lost his departmental space. What an undoubtedly serious disappointment for a man who had earlier described his professional goals thusly:

Well, I’m still hooked to the dream of making of this department, my department, a very significant area where students in our community can be helped and assisted by the programs that we offer. I’m learning still because like I said I inherited this and it’s a learning curve, and I think I finally got there. In the last two years I was able to see clearly what it is that needs to be done. And that in turn helped me in creating my professional goals. And that is not to become a dean—I told you that I don’t have any motive of administrative—but rather [to] become a very effective chairperson.
This poignant narrative describes what I have derived as meanings for the essence of the internal conflict experienced by chairs. We see in Prof. Donald a completely idealistic chair, having struggled to achieve competence and a feeling of confidence in his role as chair, still “hooked to the dream” of making his department a service to the community, and committed to doing the best that he can for his department. And we see that he has been powerless to hold onto the physical space that housed his department. His academic home is gone. The essence of his internal conflict is lack of decision power and authority to control resources that would make it possible for him to fulfill his responsibilities according to his standards. In the face of decisions made by administrators above him, a dean with whom he thought he had come to an understanding, he does not have the power or authority to hold onto a space that had made it possible for him to conduct a respectable foreign language program, despite being the only full-time faculty member of the department. Already functioning with many deficits, but succeeding despite those deficits, he has now been forced out of his space because somebody else wanted it.

Research Sub-Question 1

How does the internal conflict in the role of the public community college academic department chair manifest itself? When the words sad, frustrated, perplexed, exhausting were used by the department chairs to describe their feelings about their jobs and/or about issues related to their jobs, or when they reported stress-related physical responses to conditions at their colleges, the department chairs seemed to be identifying a pervading negative presence that had engulfed their spirits and persisted even when
factors or influences that initiated those feelings were no longer present. These persistent, uninitiated negative conditions seemed to be the expression of internal conflict because the chairs reported those feelings as they described issues they had to contend with as they dealt with various aspects of their daily lives as chairs. Since the conflict exists internally—within the beings of the chairs—I could detect and identify that conflict either through its external manifestation in department chair behaviors or in their articulation of experiences to me. This discussion will trace evidence of this internal conflict, as I will present and examine behaviors of chairs that seem to demonstrate internal conflict.

With respect to research sub-question 1, the qualitative interview data revealed seven major themes that emerged through the coding process. Themes that emerged as expression of internal conflict were the following: (a) most of the department chair participants were ready to quit after their first year as chair; (b) department chairs work many more hours per week than they think they should or want to; (c) department chairs lose sleep and time with their families to accomplish their chair tasks; (d) department chairs experience a range of negative feelings; (e) department chairs struggle to find ways to balance work-life issues to make it possible for them to cope with internal conflict to handle the job; and (f) many faculty who closely observe the job of department chair don’t want it.

Most of the department chair participants were ready to quit after their first year as chair. Prof. Estelle described the great admiration she had for the woman who was chair before she became chair. Seeing “some of the stuff that she had to deal with,” Prof. Estelle said she was “fine teaching,” rather than adding the administrative duties of a chair. However, she was persuaded by her colleagues to become chair, and she said that
a training program for chairs conducted by the vice-president during the summer before her term began helped her after understand aspects of the role. Still, she said after the first year, she was going to quit. She explained her reasons:

Stress. I mean teaching is stressful to some degree. But I would have somebody quit at the last minute, student complaints, dealing … It just seemed like it was too much of a headache. Like it would be so much easier just to go back to teaching where I’m in control of things in a sense and not have all the other garbage that comes with the chair position.

Her less-than-enthusiastic observation of the job evidently did not prepare her sufficiently for the level of activity and the unexpected events she would have to deal with that would cause her so much stress. She describes the tasks of the chair as “garbage,” which communicates feelings of annoyance and rejection. She indicates that her stress comes to her in the form of headaches. In a different conversation Prof. Estelle said that she actually regularly developed a stress-induced cold sore at the beginning of the academic year. She wanted to quit at the end of the first year because the job was affecting her physically. She reported talking to her husband who encouraged her that she’d get used to it and that it would get easier. So she stayed and she said, “It’s worked out.” She is accepting now, but the first year was a shock for which she was not prepared.

Prof. Albert also wanted to quit after the first year as chair. For him meetings were so oppressive that he was willing to give up the chair to avoid them. He said that after they “went from being coordinators to chair … it became awfully bureaucratic” and “there were these mechanisms put in place because of contracts” and everything became a “very McDonaldized process”:

I was very dissatisfied the first year when it switched to chair because it seemed like people were calling meetings to call meetings. And anybody could call you to a meeting because you were a chair in the whole college. I would be sitting in some of these meetings just trying to really figure out what this had to do with me.
or my area or teaching or being a chair or … I mean it was just bizarre, bizarre experiences. And we were having a lot of meetings and there was a lot of bureaucracy and I was not going to do it again for the following year because it had become this, what I consider to be an administrative monster.

He talks about a feeling of dissatisfaction, which for him was probably even painful, given the passion with which he had described mentoring adjuncts and addressing his teaching and his other academic work. By “McDonaldized” he is probably referring to the prescriptive methods of conducting business, as opposed to his preferred personal contact method for which he expressed so much appreciation. He obviously sees no need for the meetings if he feels that they could come from any direction and for no purpose except to have another, “meetings to call meetings,” as if he were under attack from anyone who chose to call a meeting because he, as chair, was an acceptable target.

In a later conversation he came back to this same theme of frustration with meetings. His discontent seemed to be related to the frequency and relevance of the meetings. He said that he could not find necessity or relevance for his presence at so many of the meetings. However, he also noted that the college was transitioning its administrative structure to include newly-established department chairmanships and other aspects “because of contracts.” The recognition of “contracts” suggests to me that these changes came about because of unionization. He later reported that the meeting frequency lessened near the end of the year, perhaps just enough to allow him to tolerate them on a very limited basis.

There were no counter examples to this experience. Prof. Carroll had no option to leave the chair because she was hired to eventually become chair. Prof. Bruce’s first year had been a very long time ago. Prof. Franz had an experience during his first year that created internal conflict for him more intense than the descriptions above. He had to
contend with a dean whose behavior he described as erratic and whose goal was to fire him. He reported that every day was devoted to simply surviving to the end of the day. That dean was subsequently fired from the college to the relief of a list of chairs, and Prof. Franz said the experience has had the lasting effect of making him less trusting.

The second theme that emerged as manifestation of chair internal conflict was the following: 

**department chairs work many more hours per week than they think they should or want to.** If the chairs work beyond the point that they think is appropriate, whatever amount of time that may be, the conflict exists for them to a degree that is individual for them. Prof. Carroll described “working so many hours and having to make unpleasant phone calls” as the worst part about being chair. She said that she worked many more hours than she would like to work and that doing so was a strain. She gave further detail:

> And now it is a very time-consuming job. My husband’s job has become more time-consuming. He’s away. He has to be in xxxxx all week. So both of us feel that our hours of work, in both cases, have drastically increased. And that does not make us happy … that we have to work as many hours as we have to work. And there’s no particular prospect of ... I mean I guess when I’m no longer chair of the department, I wouldn’t have to be here as many hours. But, so it, it has certainly interfered with things in terms of just the sheer number of hours we spend doing this.

She indicated that the hours of her work exceed what is simply an intellectual calculation of excess, but actually moved into the range of generating an emotional, if not also a physical strain. She describes the emotional strain that accompanies her husband’s and her own time-consuming jobs, the hours of both having increased drastically. As a philosopher, she says that circumstance does not make them happy, suggesting that the work hours test and stress many aspects of their lives. The only relief she anticipates is at
a point when she is no longer chair, as if working excessively is an inevitable consequence of being chair.

Her comments about the amount of work that she has to do and the inappropriate amount of time that she reported having to spend on clerical tasks suggest that for her this expenditure of time has moved her to weariness. In discussing the balance of her work as chair against the time she spends teaching classes, Prof. Carroll described how she tries, during the fall and spring semesters, to devote half of her time to teaching so that she can try to get caught up by reserving the summer to “just do chair stuff.” However, at the time of our interviews we extended into the summer, and she was not catching up. Prof. Albert, Prof. Donald, and Prof. Estelle also made statements lamenting the great number of hours that they spend at work in their departments. This is time that they take away from personal activities and away from their families.

Prof. Bruce did not seem to be bothered by the hours he worked. Interestingly, he was also the only one of the participants who had a departmental secretary. As chair of social sciences and humanities, he shared the secretary with the chair of behavioral sciences, whose office was in the same suite. A long-term chair, Prof. Bruce seems to have matured to the point that what might have been a source of internal conflict in the past has now become a topic of annoyance. Whereas Prof. Franz and Prof. Carroll have developed strategies for dealing with what they perceive as inevitable sources of internal conflict, Prof. Bruce seems to have accepted the reality of certain annoyances, reserving internal conflict for urgent circumstances like the current book-ordering pressures.

The third theme that emerged as manifestation of chair internal conflict was the following: **department chairs lose sleep and time with their families to accomplish**
their chair tasks. Prof. Estelle got an evaluation from her children as to changes at home that they had noticed since she became chair:

Well, I guess my kids, particularly my youngest son was saying, “You’re gone so much more. You’re, it seems like you’re gone more.” And I have to say it does. I mean the hours are more regular cause our meetings at xxxxx are from 3:30 to 5:00; that’s our meeting time. So there’s more meetings as department chair, and so I am gone more. Now from my, I don’t think it’s suffered as much, but I guess, again particularly my youngest son feels that. He’s twelve. So this would have been, well, yeah, last year. He would get home at 3:00 and then there’d be this gap where, so maybe a little bit like that.

Prof. Estelle seems not to want to accept that her youngest son is experiencing a difference in his returning home after school to find that his mother is not there. Her sons say not only that she is gone more, but “so much more.” When she focuses on the reality she says she doesn’t think home life has suffered, even though she acknowledges that her youngest son may feel that it has suffered “a little bit.” Prof. Estelle also reported that during a particularly stressful time at the college, the situation at the college “was impacting some things at home” in terms of her stress and just not sleeping well. She said that the situation was “dominating” her “life and thoughts.” Beyond mentioning her loss of sleep, she did not describe in what other ways she may have reacted at home, perhaps only by being distracted, or perhaps also in other ways.

Prof. Donald also reported problems of losing sleep. He said that when his programs were being cut at his college and his department’s space was being reduced and relocated he “couldn’t sleep thinking about it.” He said it all came as a surprise:

I was told to be moved from my area like four weeks ago something like that. And I had no previews, no preparation. I had to move everything, relocate somewhere. And that affected my job as a chairperson and my job as a teacher too because I’m thinking, “Wait, first they cut this program. And now this other program was cut. And now we’re relocating to a smaller area somewhere. What’s going on here? Something that I don’t understand? I’m not getting the message over here or something?”
And that started affecting me. And before it got worse than that, [I] couldn’t sleep thinking about it. It’s only a week, but still that’s the only time I think, I’m thinking. It’s nothing that I’ve done, so I have no control over it or no. None of this came up somewhere. So I just went and confronted directly the persons involved with this decision-making. And I can happily say that I’m still now gonna remain in my same area and everything. But I had to do that confrontation to the people who were making decisions up there.

Prof. Donald appeared to be in a state of turmoil. His departmental offerings were being eroded and he, the lone full-time faculty of his department, was being displaced. His comments reveal his growing understanding of his desperate situation. The passage also shows the feverish anguish a person feels in situations that cause one to lose sleep.

Prof. Albert described how his sleep patterns and his family life had changed since he became chair:

So I have, I balance my family, my wife and our son, who’s going to be seven next month. I balance that with a full-time teaching load and taking my own classes. I take one or two classes myself, usually one, and the chair. So I have a lot, but I don’t sleep a lot. I never really have. So I often get up at 4:00 in the morning or so, and I get a good two hours to do work before I have to start getting ready. I teach a 7:00 am class here and so I keep busy, and I try to balance those things. So I teach a full load. Next year I’ll have one less class because I’ll have that grant. So I’ll be teaching four. But a normal full time load here is five in sociology. And then there’s my grant, my chair responsibilities. That includes attending meetings, scheduling, those kinds of things.

He seems to express personal satisfaction with the comprehensive plan that he has created to keep the multiple aspects of his life in order. His work as chair, his family, his teaching, his classes, his class preparation, his sleep—all the parts of his life have their allotted time. No wonder he is so distressed when meetings that he considers unnecessary distort his plan. Prof. Albert added that if he didn’t have that schedule, it would be very hard to balance things. He said that he finds literally fifteen hours a week by not sleeping eight or ten hours a night. For the time being, he has found a balance by limiting sleep.
The fourth theme that emerged as manifestation of chair internal conflict was the following: **department chairs experience a range of negative feelings.** Department chairs feel sad, sometimes also hurt and angry. These words were used by Prof. Albert in recounting various experiences as chair. He reported feeling sad on occasions when he had to intervene or take action in situations where there had been a conflict between a teacher and student. He said, “I’m always sad when those things happen because there’s been a failure of some kind for that connection that a student and a teacher should make.” His comment implies the supportive relationship that he aims to create between student and teacher. He called it a “disappointing experience” when there has been a failure of this kind. For him this is an event that touches him emotionally because teaching and being a faculty member is so central to his professional identity.

Prof Albert also recounted a fairly long story regarding his attempts to hire a full-time faculty to teach and to spearhead the overhaul of a certain discipline topic in his department. In this instance, the powers that he could not persuade were his own department members. They refused to approve hiring a specialist in their discipline, maintaining that anyone in the department was equipped to teach this specialty, even though, according to Prof. Albert, no one had interest in doing so. After all was said and done, these were Prof. Albert’s feelings:

And anyone who has eyes can look at the schedule and notice that we have full-timers in every area except for xxx and that our xxx area is hurting …The program was written in the 1980s and reads like a 1980s class. It needs to be changed and updated. So that hurt. It hurt. It hurt. I was angry, very angry. In fact, probably the angriest I’ve ever been. And it took everything I had not to pull any kind of power thing with that situation.

Prof. Albert’s passion is evident. He seems incredulous of the lack of perception of his colleagues of the importance of this discipline. He is taking it as a personal rejection that
his colleagues did not support his idea. He said that it was only his dean’s understanding and support that pulled him back from the desire to retaliate.

However, this experience was so painful to Prof. Albert that in the last interview, when he was asked whether there was anything we had discussed in the conversations that he would have preferred not to remember, he said the following:

Not too much. I mean I guess thinking about that discussion about the xxx and the other faculty not accepting why I was doing it. ... I never like thinking about that too much because if I think about it too much I get, I’ll get annoyed again. And I’ll be like, “Fine, I’ll call your bluffs.” And I’ll go back into that angry, being a little bit angry about it. But no, I think it’s good to think about the positive and the negative experiences. I mean there’re all experiences, and so it helps you to react better in the future ... by thinking about those things.

Even though he said he did not regret recalling the experience, it was clear that he was still angered by recalling it. In fact, he observed that he still becomes so angry in the recollection that he still thinks of retaliation, even though he describes his recollected anger as “a little bit.” His comment suggests that he feels that even with all the logic that a chair may bring to bear in a situation, sometimes emotion is stronger than one would like it to be. He seemed to want not to be so angry, but he just was.

Department chairs sometimes also feel perplexed. Although Prof. Donald said there was no specific thing that was “perplexing” to him, he acknowledged that he had problems with grant writing and with finding the time to create new curriculum. He said he certainly did not have a problem managing personnel, which he thought was his best quality. But he felt that it was the job as a whole that was perplexing. He described it this way with a humorous example as emphasis:

But one specific thing will be hard to find, that is very difficult, I mean the most perplexing thing. I think that being the chair as a whole it’s a monster of unique nature. That’s the whole thing. You know not as a big thing. I’m talking to you right now and I already ... while you were sitting in front of me, I talked to three
students on the phone, one through the window there in the office, and a teacher that we were doing sign language. I mean this is a chair doing all these things, and that’s perplexing to me!

In this statement, Prof. Donald captured the fragmented process that can become ordinary in the life of a department chair. First he described the life of a chair as a monster, suggesting a wild, uncontrollable beast, full of thrashing power. His description of the conversations that overlaid our interview was dramatic and humorous, but quite consistent with detailed frenetic activity described by other chairs in this study.

Department chairs sometimes feel frustrated as they are thwarted in their efforts to achieve goals for their departments by the intrusive realities of their daily chores. All of the chairs expressed this feeling at some point in an interview, but it was perhaps most dramatically expressed by Prof. Donald. He described how he thought that, as chair, he would be developing programs to improve the department. He envisioned creating courses and surveying students, the feeder high schools, and the community to build programs and to increase enrollments. However, he said that “once you’re in here, then you realize that everybody wants and needs something before you can go anywhere else.” He thought at first that, even though it was a challenge, he could do it. But soon he realized “that no, it’s not possible, and so then you start getting frustrated.”

To dramatize the reality of daily chores that interfere with chair goals, he described a few moments in the life of a chair.

Look a chair is like this. Walks into the office, there’s messages already both in e-mail and the phone that need immediate attention. And even one phone call does not only require one answer, but requires several phone calls to gather the information that you will need for that particular answer. Imagine that multiplied by all the others…. At the same time, you need to start getting ready for your class; it starts in five minutes. So in the presence of answering these questions and gathering information to answer the other ones later, you gather your materials to
rush into your classroom…. And on the way there, you are intercepted by students and teachers that also want something from you. That’s the chair.

He continued by describing the mental notes that chairs make about things that have to be done immediately after class is over. He expressed shock and questioning that “people don’t see what sort of job this is.”

In addition to feeling frustrated, department chairs are also exhausted by battles that they feel are unnecessary and unproductive. All of the chairs shared specific issues that have become problematic for them. Four of the chairs specifically recounted ongoing battles with the bookstore and/or administration where there is an attempt to seriously curtail textbook choices for classes. The chairs see this as a limitation on education, the polar opposite of their professional goals as teachers. Discussing how he felt having to spend so much time fighting for the right of English teachers to have students buy of variety of inexpensive paperback novels, Prof. Franz gave perhaps the most succinct explanation and expression of his exhaustion:

It makes me very frustrated, depending on the issue. This issue frustrates me to no end because I think it’s a very myopic way of looking at books. It’s as if we could somehow create some kind of a master reader that would contain all of these things. Which we could but it would cost a fortune. So it, it would defeat the whole point of the project…. I wish everybody else would say, “Well you know what, they’re right. Their situation is different and it’s cheap, so who cares?” But they won’t do that at this point. So I continue to fight them. But I feel like I go to work and fight them, which is not really what I signed up to do.

Asked how he felt having to fight so much, he continued:

Oh, I feel aggravated cause it’s not the nature of my personality to be combative. I’m actually a very peaceful person. I’m not combative. So it’s frustrating when I have to go to work and have all these meetings and have to just constantly be ready with my next point. But you know it’s fine. If the greater good is served, I’m OK doing it for a while. It may result in me getting tapped out of energy sooner rather than later. And then a new younger person may have to step in at a certain point.
Reflecting on the extent to which he found himself having to engage in daily battles he continued:

Yeah, and there are many a day lately when that has become more of the norm. And as I said, it’s OK. It isn’t what I like to do. And again it’s very opposed to my own personality, but I’m getting good at it. Cause I always come very prepared. That they won’t, you know, have they met an English chairperson who isn’t thorough? We don’t get to be that if you aren’t prepared. So I’m of course hyper-prepared for everything, and I’ll sit there for hours with them. But I go home very, very tired then because I’m having to be someone who’s a very different version of me for a long time then. And that’s just harder to do. But we’re, at this point we’re winning.

From these comments, it is apparent that this book battle consumes a great deal of Prof. Franz’s personal, intellectual, psychological, and emotional energy. Again, four chairs reported similar battles on the same topic, but all the participants had experienced similar battles on some issue. These struggles seem to force chairs into behaviors that they feel are unnaturally combative, and they may contribute to chairs’ decisions to end their tenure as chair.

The fifth theme that emerged as manifestation of chair internal conflict was the following: department chairs struggle to find ways to balance work-life issues to make it possible for them to cope with conflict and to handle the job. One of the ways of coping with the conflict presented by Prof. Albert, besides limiting sleep, was to share his feelings about the chair experience with his wife, as he explained in this statement:

It gives, occasionally gives me things to complain about or talk about with my wife because the stories, sometimes the stories are very good stories. They’re good experiences, funny experiences, and I seek my wife’s advice. She’s a wise person, so I seek her advice. And so it’s made for some interesting conversations about this, “What would you do in this situation? I got this problem. What do you think about this?”

Throughout our conversations, Prof. Albert expressed great respect for his wife, who is also a professor. His statement shows the ease with which he is able to share experiences
with her, to admit to having a problem, and to ask for advice from her. And it seems that she is able to give him advice that he would accept and respect.

When asked later whether he thought dealing with difficult situations that he has responsibility for has had any effect on him, Prof. Albert revisited the idea of talking to his wife, but extended the conversation to fantasizing about not being chair at all:

Yea, I guess seeing a lot more of the administrator, I mean sometimes I talk with my wife about this. I sometimes really wish I just taught at the college again. And I’m sure I’m going to fairly soon—within the next you know, within five years. I don’t think I’m going to be chair five years from now. I can say that. At least not continuously. If I give it up in two years, and in four years someone wants to give it up, well then I might pick it up again. But there is a certain charm in just teaching and just showing up and not knowing about anything. It’s sort of like the old adage of knowing the recipe: Sometimes you don’t want to know the recipe of what you’re eating; you just want to eat it. Cause it tastes good.

And in a way that’s how teaching is. Unfortunately I know too many of the insider information about what’s going to happen and whatever. Now sometimes that’s a benefit and it’s interesting to know that. Lot of times I’d rather not know it. And so that’s been kinda … I don’t know if you call it a stressor, but it’s been, I don’t want anything to take away from my enjoyment of being in the classroom. And I wouldn’t say that being chair has at all done that, but I’d sometimes just like the idea of just coming here and teaching and then doing those things you kinda have to do like a committee now and again, but then just going home. And just being a teacher and nothing else and nothing that borders on having any leadership position or any of the things they tell you that you are. I’d just rather be a teacher. And I think that’s probably the biggest emotional thing.

In these statements, Prof. Albert sounds like a warrior in need of relief. In the previous statement about his wife, he sounded as though he was sharing amusing events. But here he sounds as though the weight of administrator activities has grown so heavy that even though he is unwilling to say that he wants to give up the chair altogether, he is yearning for just a little furlough. He yearns for the simplicity of not knowing what is making the college tick for a little time, while he limits his scope and purview to his classroom. He wants “nothing that borders on having any leadership position.” And he
wants to avoid “any of the things they tell you that you are,” perhaps because maybe that is not what he feels he really is; and he wants the freedom to explore more possibilities.

Another way of coping for Prof. Albert is eating. He said, “I’m sure I’m a little bit heavier than I would have been cause I’m getting up at four, I’m up more during the day. So the more you’re up and the less sleep you get, you eat a little more.” He shows here that he understands that his limited sleep is negatively impacting his health, in contrast to the very matter-of-fact way that he first presented his ordered life plan. He acknowledges that being chair has in regard to his weight “taken a toll.”

Prof. Estelle said that when she has to deal with issues that are frustrating, she usually talks to people inside the college or just tries to deal with difficult situations the best she can:

I usually talk to my office mates. Although they’re not chairs, they kind of know what I’m doing, and so they let me vent or sympathize with me to some degree. Or I talk to, every once in a while I talk to another one of the department chairs. She’s right upstairs and say, “You know, what the heck is this? You know, what’s going on?” Commiserate with each other. Or, like I said just kind of re-think it and say, “I signed up to do this. I don’t have to be, I could go back to just being faculty and just teaching.” So just kind of kick myself in the butt and deal with it.

Prof. Estelle is fairly hard on herself. If she talks to non-chair office mates, their allowing her to vent is generous and their sympathy limited, as she acknowledges. It sounds as though her interactions with her chair comrade are fairly infrequent, as she is farther away than a strong lifeline stretches. So she is developing personal resilience and independence.

Besides talking, Prof. Estelle also uses other strategies to manage the stress. And sometimes her body gives her signals:

Talking about situations that are going on to other people. I make sure that I exercise three to four times a week. Sleeping, make sure I get enough sleep. You
know just kind of the basic stuff that I, so I don’t get rundown. I know like the
beginning of every school year, I usually get a cold sore. Because the stress, I get
cold sores. If I’m doing well, I won’t get one. But it almost never fails in August.
[Sqk] it comes out. It’s like “Oh, stress.” Cause it, just the beginning and getting
everybody, student complaints are usually heavier at the beginning or at the end.

She really is learning to take care of herself. She outlined a plan that she could
recommend to others. She uses human resources when she can, but she is developing and
strengthening her own personal set of strengthening behaviors and coping strategies.

Prof. Franz had yet another way of keeping himself in balance, especially after
days filled with seemingly fruitless discussion or argument. Asked how his tiredness
manifested itself, he offered the following explanation:

Well, I don’t know. I’m also a runner. And I run out a lot of my frustration. I’m
right now training for my third marathon in three years. I didn’t start running ‘til I
was thirty-nine. So, I ran this morning. My legs are tired right now. We’re doing
speed work. So I ran quarter-miles in ...

He shared that he was running with a trainer, a friend who is a high school vice-principal.

He said he uses exercise to eliminate his hostility.

The sixth theme that emerged as manifestation of chair internal conflict was the
following: most people who closely observe the job of department chair don’t want
it. Since it seems unlikely for a person who is not a chair to fully understand the job of
chair, close observation of the chair is one of the best opportunities for non-chairs to
imagine themselves in the role. And the result of this imagining seems consistently and
persistently enough to convince most faculty that they don’t want the job. Not one of the
chairs interviewed came to the chairmanship through a process of competitive selection,
such that they would be declared the winner of a hard fought competition of worthy
opponents.
Prof. Carroll advanced from adjunct to full-time faculty with the expectation that she would become chair. Prof. Donald became the only full time tenured faculty member of his department besides the chair, who was retiring. Prof. Bruce was the most senior faculty member available to become chair after the former chair retired because the person first in line was busy with other college responsibilities. Prof. Estelle entered the chair spotlight because the former chair was retiring and another faculty member who seemed to want the chairmanship was someone whom many in the department preferred not to have as chair. Prof. Albert had been the discipline coordinator, a role that fit his casual collegial style; and he was subsequently re-named chair when a more formal administrative structure was established at his college. Prof. Franz appeared to be the only one of the six chair participants who actually applied for the chairmanship because he actively sought the opportunity to lead his department.

This summary is not intended to suggest that these chairs were not eager for their jobs, but rather to show that they are unique in their departments. In their college environments, most of the other possible candidates for the chairmanship avoided responsibilities that these six were willing to take on. These chairs represent faculty who, despite the many complexities of the role of chair, accepted the challenge to serve their colleagues and their colleges. Further discussion of their reasons for doing so will be presented in the discussion of Research sub-question 3.

Based on analysis of the interview data, the major finding for Research sub-question 1 is that the life of a department chair is, at various times, fraught with internal conflict; and department chairs manifest their struggle with internal conflict in a variety of ways, some through negative feelings and behaviors and some through coping
strategies that help them survive daily ordeals. Chairs need to develop strategies to find the hours necessary to satisfactorily fulfill their obligations as chair and to overcome initial uncertainties based on the disparity between expectation and reality of chair life. The few faculty who accept this role continue to search for ways to overcome the recurring inconsistencies of chair life.

Research Sub-Question 2

Of the many tasks of department chairs, which tasks seem to create internal conflict for the department chair? We can begin the answer to this question by first looking at the tasks performed by community college academic department chairs and observing that, based on chair responses to questions in the interviews, community college department chairs have a very broad range of responsibilities quite similar to chairs at other levels of higher education. Of the 54 chair tasks reported by Tucker (1981), only one item, under the category of Instruction—to monitor dissertations, prospectuses, and programs of study for graduate students—is a task that is not performed by community college department chairs (Tucker, 1992). Prof. Carroll, who was not a university chair, but who spent five years as a full time university professor before moving to her community college position as chair, observed that “because department chairs in community colleges have … so many administrative responsibilities, and because of their position of being the supervisor of adjunct faculty members, that does make them seem more like administrators than chairs often are at four-year institutions.”
Her observation is supported in the literature by a study conducted by Samuels (1983) and reported by Tucker (1992). Community college and university department chairpersons were surveyed to determine the relative importance they placed on ten chair tasks. Community college chairpersons “ranked the importance of administrative and bureaucratic tasks much higher than did their university colleagues. University chairpersons, on the other hand, placed greater importance on activities that are faculty related” (Tucker, p. 31).

Each of the community college department chairs interviewed made a clear assertion that they are faculty and not administrators. At some point in the interviews, and sometimes with great emphasis, all participants made some comment affirming that they were not supervisors, but rather, faculty who also perform certain administrative tasks. Of course, this is true for all of the chairs contractually because they are all members of unionized faculty groups (American Federation of Teachers). However, the reality of the chair tasks created a bit of confusion for one of the department chairs in his early years in the role.

In discussing aspects of his role as chair that he wished he had been aware of before becoming chair, Prof. Albert described lessons he had to learn. As an adjunct, he had taught at a university where the department chair devoted most of his time to administration and taught perhaps a single course per semester. Prof. Albert had been lead faculty for his discipline, and his main responsibility had been to mentor adjunct faculty, where he said he was “totally and only helpful and totally and only positive.” He was familiar with the responsibility to “offer legitimate criticism and say, ‘Well I think you might want to think about doing this better, or this is a problem, or how about this

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idea, or something like that.” But the idea of being “literally evaluative” and having to fill out formal evaluation forms that list areas of improvement was something quite contrary to his inclinations. He was not prepared for this administrative aspect of his new role, which did cause him internal conflict. As a person, a human being, it was his personal intention to be humanely helpful; but he was the department chair. As department chair, he had to objectively evaluate the individual and to make judgments about him or her, even to the point of stifling his natural inclination to mentor. This is an internal conflict.

All the chairs indicated that their first practical responsibility was scheduling and staffing classes. Being careful to respect the administration’s power over the schedule and the rights of full-time faculty to make scheduling requests, chairs emphasized that they simply facilitated the scheduling, especially for full-time faculty. Prof. Franz described his responsibility to have “the appropriate number of courses and sections offered based on enrollment trends and student needs and days and times.” He had to schedule 24 full-time faculty and 45 part-time faculty in nine different disciplines, trying to accommodate “faculty members who need some consideration in terms of trying to be geographically close to classes that are back-to-back fairly near each other.”

Prof. Bruce concurred that scheduling was the thing that takes most of his time and that it was somewhat complicated now because of limitations in the Union adjunct contract: “adjuncts can’t be scheduled for more than ten hours a semester, ten in the fall, ten in the spring, six in the summer.” So he might have a class that an adjunct was willing to teach, but could not because doing so would put him or her over their load for the term. In that case Prof. Bruce would have to find somebody else. Referring to scheduling, he
said “That’s probably the biggest challenge and also just trying to get students into the classes if possible.”

Prof. Albert summarized the process of scheduling and described scheduling as the chair’s primary practical responsibility:

You make the schedule in conjunction with the deans. The deans have final approval on everything, but you set the schedule. You work with the full timers to set their schedules. And so you schedule and you staff. You schedule the classes for what’s best for our students, and then you staff those classes for what’s best for the students and for faculty – what times they’re available and such.

Besides scheduling and staffing classes, community college chairs participate in hiring and evaluating full-time faculty of their own and other departments. They hire adjunct faculty and mentor non-tenured and adjunct faculty. They act as liaisons with other units in the college and with curriculum commissions, accrediting agencies, and other agencies outside the college. They represent their departments and their colleges at conferences and local college nights. They deal with problems in the classroom, hear student complaints against faculty, negotiate solutions to complaints, and sometimes (at the request of administration) review other professors’ grading policies. They review and revise course curricula and syllabi, and they evaluate the course content of classes in order to allow or not allow students to substitute one course for another. They make and manage budgets, review and sign reimbursement forms, and submit book adoptions. They also teach classes. And they attend meetings.

**Ordinary and expected chair tasks become a source of internal conflict when paired with the practical reality of inadequate clerical support for the chair.** Nearly all of the chairs spoke about their colleges moving to assign clerical support, not to individual chairs and departments, but to divisions. A division secretary was usually
“down the hall” or upstairs or downstairs from the chair and required some form of paper order as a work requisition. When chairs accept personal responsibility for tasks that they at the same time resent having to perform, they likely develop internal conflict relative to those tasks. Prof. Carroll said, “One of the things that’s most ridiculous is that, as chair I do a lot of clerical work. You know I don’t have a secretary.” After sharing with me college and departmental planning documents that she had worked on, she concluded that if she had had adequate clerical assistance, she would have been able to produce those volumes without working 70 hours a week. She explained the situation in this way:

There’re secretaries in the division office. And I can ask them to do work, and they do some work for me. But it has to be these discrete tasks that I can give them, as opposed to someone who knows a lot about the department and therefore can do a lot of things without my having to give instructions. But you know how sometimes it’s faster to do it yourself than to explain to someone else how to do it all? And there’s also a problem of what kinds of clerical skills people in the office have and not having adequate skills in Dreamweaver or Access. I mean it doesn’t make a lot of sense that someone whose PhD is in philosophy is the one who needs to do the clerical stuff because someone else doesn’t understand how to do it. And that has to do with also what the clerical staff are paid and what grade level they’re hired at. But it’s a really false economy in the end because you end up with chairs doing clerical work.

Prof. Carroll makes the connection between the value of her time and the economic decisions in the college that create this situation that causes her so much distress. She feels that if she had a dedicated department secretary, routine tasks could be completed by the secretary with little instruction from her.

Prof. Estelle’s experience was similar. When asked whether she had clerical support, she replied, “Yes ... and no. I mean, I mean they don’t ... they’re a great resource, but in terms of doing any typing or those kinds of things, I do all that myself.” Asked to clarify the secretary’s being a great resource, she added the following:
Like if I ... like since I’m in charge of the books, to make sure we have books for all the classes. So if I say “You know we need books ordered for Psyc 101, for 105.” Then I just tell ... you know she’ll do that and make sure the books get put away and things like that.

Prof. Estelle shares this secretary with the liberal arts division. Perhaps this is why she is unsure of whether she actually has clerical support and why she does all her own typing.

The example from Prof. Carroll above can be added here to support the idea that division secretaries provide inadequate clerical support for department chairs and that the practice of providing inadequate clerical support to department chairs makes each of their clerical tasks potential sources of internal conflict.

Of the participants, only one had a secretary dedicated to his department. The secretary served two departments that shared a physical space. While expressing gratitude for his current clerical assistance, Prof. Bruce provided a glimpse at the way it used to be.

We, we have a full-time secretary for our two departments here, social and behavioral science. And we’re lucky to have her really because some of the departments don’t get a full-time secretary. Some of them just get like a thirty-hour a week hourly. And so I do feel very lucky that we have her. You do have to go through paperwork sometimes. For example, prior to our present secretary, who is on a twelve-month contract, our previous secretary had the last of the nine-month contracts…. And one problem then would be “What about summers?” Well we would hire an hourly for the summer. So every year I’d have to fill out the paper work, put in a request for a new hourly position, and get all of that straightened out with human resources every year. So luckily I don’t have to go through that anymore since we have a twelve-month position now. … Since we have a full-time secretary and we also have a student aide, we can give the work to them to do. We can just give them something and say “Go get me fifty copies of this or a hundred copies or …” So the clerical has worked out pretty well.

Prof. Bruce is fortunate, and he has the past experience that enables him to appreciate his good fortune. His experience with and without a department secretary supports the argument that lack of clerical support can be conflict-generating for the chair. It is intriguing that because there is a secretary, there is also a student aide. One might think,
as Prof. Carroll reported considering, that if a chair did not have a secretary, a student aide might provide a minimal amount of assistance. However that was not the case because it is the secretary’s office that provides space for a student aide to work. Without a secretary’s office, a student aide—who might be of some assistance to a department chair without a secretary—could only work in the department chair’s office. Limited space and chair need for privacy would not allow this. None of the other chairs had the level of clerical support Prof. Bruce enjoyed.

Another source of internal conflict for chairs is that too often, ordinary tasks, which in themselves are not onerous, become problematic because they must all be done at the same time. One set of interview questions asked chairs to focus on their teaching duties and their duties as chair and to try to evaluate how the balance of responsibilities was working for them. The point here is that, as chairs are committed to performing all of their responsibilities well, having too little time to devote the level of care they perceive necessary to do the job they want to do can create internal conflict. Prof. Franz, whose department was involved in a number of work-intensive projects at the time, shared his feelings about balance:

Well it’s exhausting. And it’s a great deal of work because we’re also changing curriculum. We’re constantly involved in assessment work. We’re adding new positions, doing search teams, evaluating. About half the department right now is non-tenured. So we’re evaluating non-tenured faculty, hiring adjunct faculty. It’s exhausting. But my new plan I think will create a better sense of balance.

The last sentence of Prof. Franz’ statement reveals the typical chair optimism that things will get better or that he will become better able to cope with them. Why else would chairs persist in conflicted situations if they could not imagine relief from one of these sources? Prof. Franz was able to get some relief in the form of two recently identified
coordinators: one for composition and literature, and one for speech and foreign
languages. His task during the weeks of the interviews was determining how best to use
their skills for the benefit of the department and orienting the coordinators to their duties.
He described his work prior to this adjustment, saying, “It got to be where I just couldn’t
keep up with it any more. I was going out of my mind.”

Sometimes the ordinary tasks of the chairs were unexpected. When Prof. Bruce
was asked whether there were responsibilities that were surprising to him as chair or that
he was not prepared to meet, he noted the following:

Yes, it does seem that more and more, if administration can pile more things on
the chair people, they sometimes do that. For example, going back to budgets, in
the first few years that I was chair, really the only budgets that I dealt with at all
were a few discretionary things that we get to spend, like our office supplies,
instructional supplies, computer software—if we got any money approved. Then
somewhere a couple years ago, they … maybe more than that, four or five years
ago, they started sending us the personnel budgets every year. And they’d never
done this before.

The list of tasks continued to grow for Prof. Bruce, but the additional responsibilities
were not accompanied by additional or sufficient time to complete them, as he further
described:

Well, probably like most chair people, we do get a little bit of release time. I wish
it was more. It would be nice to teach a little bit less and have more time for the
chairperson activities. I’ve often felt—and I said this at some meetings last year—
not just as chairperson, but we have so much going on on campus. We have the
master plan that we work on and funding issues, and we have activities on
campus. And everyday I’m getting e-mails about this and that and this and that,
that there’s simply too much for anybody to do. You can’t do it all. You can’t
come close to it.

Prof. Bruce seems quite willing to do as much as he can. In fact his last comment seems
to suggest that he may have tried to keep up with the new activities and simply had to
acknowledge defeat. He actually seems overwhelmed as he admits “you can’t come close to it.”

Prof. Donald described unexpected chair tasks as ones that “continue to appear almost every day … the unwritten responsibilities that are not in the job description manual.” Among other things, he learned that he needed to look for grants outside the institution to gain funding to support departmental programs that he wanted to provide. He realized with surprise, “If I want to do the things I want to do, then I’m going to have to start doing these other things.” This really does sound like a Catch-22 situation. He is already overwhelmed by too many things to do in too little time, but now he must add more work—work that is difficult and unfamiliar to him—if he is to have a hint of a chance to accomplish his goals. Grants were his nemesis, with the “filling out forms and contacting and researching.” He said that he done “a little bit of some and a lot of others,” he had never been able to complete the whole process because it is so time-consuming.” He acknowledged that “Maybe some people have that ability of looking at things and writing things and filling out forms and proposals and be very succinct,” but for him it was “a difficult thing.” He continued, “But other things that I wanted to, I couldn’t complete the process. It was just too time-consuming.” Here is a man, defeated by forms.

In response to this same question about unexpected responsibilities, Prof. Carroll had the most chilling response of all. She was not surprised by any of the responsibilities themselves because she had had “a big thorough orientation” before she assumed the chair duties. However, she said, “What was surprising was in some cases institutional resistance to facilitating my attempts in fulfilling that responsibility.” By this statement, she seemed to be referring to her failed attempts to negotiate sufficient clerical support
for all department chairs. She indicated that she was offered special assistance for her
department, but she turned it down because she didn’t want to benefit from a “special
arrangement” that was not available to all chairs. This example demonstrated that
ordinary tasks, coming in waves faster than chairs can negotiate, can become the source
of internal conflict for chairs.

Among the participants, there were no counter examples of chairs who felt that
there was enough time for all their responsibilities or that events on campus were well-
paced so that there was not the need for them to over-extend their efforts. On the
contrary, the participants experienced internal conflict in varying degrees relative to
issues that mattered to them. The chairs did not have the power or authority to make
decisions or effect circumstances that would obviate the internal conflict.

Handling complaints against full-time faculty is a task that is a source of
internal conflict for chairs. Listening to student complaints against faculty;
investigating details of complaints; and, most especially, making evaluative judgments
about their colleagues’ professional performance are behaviors that the participants
associate with responsibilities of supervisors. Chairs perform all of these supervisory
functions. Yet, by contract, department chairs are not supervisors. Every official
description of chairs’ relationship to their institutions confirms that they are faculty. For
all participants, their compensation for being chair included some form of release time
from their normal teaching load, accompanied also by an additional stipend for a few.
Chairs know that when their terms end, they routinely return to a full schedule of
teaching. Prof. Franz described his conflicted feelings in these words:

I didn’t expect to be really handling student complaints... when they would be
against full-time instructors. Again because I’m not their supervisor. And the
college makes it very clear that the supervisor for the full-time faculty is a dean. I was very uncomfortable fielding those questions even though I did it and the dean wanted me to do it at first. My colleagues wanted me to do it because then I was kind of the triage nurse. And therefore it didn’t become drama unless it needed to. Where I could often just diffuse the situation, manage the situation, and then everyone could move on. But the longer that I did it—and sometimes the more complicated the issues got—I really had a conversation with the dean and said, “You know I just don’t think this is something that I should be a part of cause I’m their peer. You know I’m not their boss.” And they’ve since made some changes, not just because of me. But because other folks have said, “Really, I don’t think that’s an appropriate place for me to be as a peer, involved in those kinds of situations.”

Prof. Franz and other chairs in his college raised the issue of their hearing complaints against full-time faculty peers with their dean. With the support of the Faculty Association, it was determined that such complaints would go to the dean. This was a reasonable decision, given that department chairs are faculty, not administrators. However, this solution is an exception rather than the norm because the other chair participants continue to be the first receiver of complaints against faculty. Prof. Estelle described negotiating complaints from students as the worst part about being a chair. She also provided this example, which emphasizes that the chair’s official relationship with faculty is collegial, not supervisory.

There was one semester where there was a full-time person in the student services who was teaching as an adjunct for psychology, which we have a few of those situations. And that person was not meeting the seat time. And so I had to kind of ride the fence between faculty, because she was technically as a peer with me. But then at the same time it’s a weird spot because technically we’re not supervisors, but we’re in this supervisory role. So we have, we’re put, I think at least here, we’re in our position where we’re supervising, we’re hiring, but we have no leverage—I guess for lack of a better word. We have no … like I can’t say to that instructor who was …. “You know, you really need …” or things like that. I mean I can make suggestions, but there’s no follow-up, there’s no remediation that I can do with him. It’s just … so that piece causes frustration more than anything.

There were no counter examples of this theme. The majority of complaints that chairs reported were against adjunct faculty, and even those generated internal conflict.
From my experience as chair at a time when the majority of faculty were full-time, I know that handling complaints against full-time faculty, besides being outside the logical interpretation of chairs’ relation to faculty as colleagues, sometimes requires that chairs engage in disciplinary processes for someone they not only feel friendly toward, but for whom they have high professional regard. In cases like this, handling the complaint so that all sides are heard and treated fairly can become a matter of intense negotiation. It can involve first the chair’s actually learning something about the colleague’s philosophy or method to gain an understanding of what the colleague was trying to impart that the student was unwilling or unable to grasp. Also, it involves helping the colleague understand that what he or she was trying to accomplish is not working. Conversely, it involves convincing the student that learning takes time, and that sometimes an uncomfortable situation can develop into a valuable learning experience. This assumes positive intentions all around, which is only sometimes the reality. In any case, until the chair becomes a skilled negotiator, he or she is likely to experience internal conflict because he or she cannot control the outcome.

**Handling complaints against adjunct faculty is also a task that is a source of internal conflict for chairs because of the great amount of time required to resolve complaints.** Complaints against adjunct faculty are different for chairs than complaints against full-time faculty because chairs do supervise adjunct faculty and, in the current staffing environment, there are proportionally more adjunct faculty, resulting in the possibility of proportionally more complaints. For Prof. Estelle negotiating complaints from students against adjuncts and “working those things out” was the worst part about being chair. Prof. Carroll said that dealing with student complaints was not only the
biggest surprise about being chair for her, but that it was also (behind scheduling and staffing) the second greatest consumer of her time. When asked how much time was consumed in hearing complaints against adjuncts, she provided the following explanation of the impact of this use of time:

Well of course it varies a lot, and it’s unpredictable. If something really terrible is going on, it could end up taking an immense amount of time. It could end up taking ten hours. It could take a week just dealing with one student complaint. Other times of course there’s nothing. But the fact it’s so unpredictable and the fact the other work still has to get done. Because everything is on a very tight schedule. So just because there’s a major crisis with a student complaint doesn’t mean that I can neglect the things that have to be done cause they’re associated with a deadline.

Prof. Carroll reveals that the internal conflict for her stems from her desire to actually resolve a difficult situation and that doing so is encroaching on time that she urgently senses needs to be devoted to other tasks.

Besides the expenditure of precious time consumed by complaints, another source of internal conflict relative to complaints is the content of the complaints. Prof. Carroll found that while some of the complaints “are just frivolous and silly,” a number of them are not. And she felt that even in more serious cases, the faculty member might have been “technically right, but ethically not right,” in some cases even having been “disrespectful or mean to the student.” Sometimes also there could be “really unreasonable” class requirements. She found it “pretty unpleasant” and expressed discomfort in handling cases of this sort. It is important to note that the participants agreed that student complaints, whether against full-time faculty or adjuncts, increased around the end of terms, adding further to that already difficult time.

**Performing the tasks of assessment work is a source of internal conflict for chairs.** Even though department chairs seemed to accept and understand the reason and
the need for assessment, they found that the manner in which it is accomplished is too
time-consuming and/or inappropriate. Demonstrating an understanding of the goals and
processes of assessment activities, Prof. Franz shared the following:

Well things have become more complicated. It seems to me that one of the trends
is a higher degree of accountability. So we’re doing a lot more assessment. We’re
doing a lot more. We’ve done grade calibration, which I had never even heard of
before, where we’ve tried to calibrate ourselves so that our grading is fairly
consistent. The curriculum is being at least tweaked if not radically updated I
think more often than it ever had been.

However, Prof. Albert objected to attempts to assess courses of study where
faculty are free to choose from a variety of sources and approaches and where
consistently prescribed components make up a very small proportion of the course. He
said that his biggest conflict has been with the assessment committee because he objects
to assessment at the program level in a community college because students do not
actually take enough sociology for a program assessment to have meaning. He objected
also because introductory classes offered by different professors would likely share only
theory and the scientific method in terms of class content. He also objected to the
frequently adopted method of using a ten-question series at the beginning and the end of
an instructional period to measure learning.

Prof. Carroll’s objections to assessment are a source of even greater conflict for
her for perhaps deeper philosophical reasons. This is what she had to say about
assessment in general and about assessment in her discipline specifically:

I also didn’t expect that so much time would have to be spent on assessment
related activities. And I do not, I’m not fond of those activities. I think that they
are usually motivated by a political agenda I don’t agree with.

She continued by saying that she thought assessment was based on testing and supposed
accountability and was moving in the direction of inappropriate standardization. Like
Prof. Albert relative to sociology, she thought that trying to assess all introductory philosophy classes when different sections could have studied different philosophers was difficult. Even though her department’s assessment plans had been praised, she felt that assessment doesn’t get to the most important things her department is trying to teach, like critical thinking skills. She felt the goals of assessment could be met by looking at syllabi, observing classes, examining instructional materials, and seeing what grades students earned. She added that in the humanities classes, they are trying to increase students’ aesthetic experiences, which cannot be assessed by current methods. She concluded by reiterating that her department does do assessment and has gotten an A+ rating for doing a good job.

Prof. Bruce found the process of course review frustrating, not so much because he objected to it but because it was unexpected and he did not know just how to handle it initially. This is what he had to say:

I think every course in a community college is on a five-year cycle of … with the ICCB where you’re supposed to look through curriculums … Review, yes. Like a review process. For the first several years I was chair, we were never involved in that. I think just the deans did that. And then all of a sudden one year I got something sent to me saying “Gee we’re supposed to review the geography program or review …” and I’m like “We’ve never done this before.” And again it’s not so much that I mind doing it, but it’s sort of when it catches you by surprise and you have no idea what you’re supposed to be doing with it. That’s frustrating.

It seems apparent from these examples that the chairs do not experience the internal conflict related to assessment and program review simply because they object to doing the work. These examples demonstrate that chairs do the work, in many cases with exemplary results, based on evaluations by their colleagues. The issue is that assessment and program review can become sources of internal conflict because of chairs’ lack of
training in the processes even while maintaining responsibility for their execution, chairs’ reasonable professional disagreement with the academic effectiveness of prescribed methods, and chairs’ concerns related to ethical issues. Prof. Carroll, like the other chairs, surrendered to the inevitability of assessment and current assessment practices, despite her reservations and misgivings:

And another ... we, I think as a department have figured out how to do assessment in ways that are more useful. But I still don’t like it. And so another member of the department is in charge of it. Which I think is a good thing, not just because I don’t like it, but because it lets me spend more time in the classroom. And also it means in a sense that someone else is working on assessing the classes that I’ve planned and supervised. So I think it’s a good balance anyway.

**Attending inefficient and unnecessary meetings is a source of internal conflict for chairs.** Of course no one likes inefficient and unnecessary meetings, but department chairs are called to so many meetings of so many different kinds that it is not surprising that chairs demonstrate a particularly low threshold for the task of attending meetings that seem less than essential. Prof. Albert seemed most disturbed by meetings that did not start on time and for which there was no agenda. He complained of meetings where the content, in his eyes, could have been communicated by e-mail. He also criticized faculty behavior at meetings, saying the following:

Meetings I never ever like. I really I don’t like them. I think a lot of them could be done by e-mail. There’s a lot of posturing in meetings. I think people, I call it peacocking, where you know just ruffle their feathers to show other people who they are. And I also find that people often ask a lot of individually specific questions at academic meetings. Like literally like “My computer has this problem.” “Like well why are you taking everyone’s time talking about that?”

He also observed a bit of hypocrisy at meetings:

I always think it’s funny that in meetings we break every rule that we tell our students that they can’t do in class. So we have food in the meetings. You know in fact I was at a meeting once where we were talking about how there was a new policy at the school: there would be no food in the classrooms. And then they
brought a cake in for someone’s birthday during the meeting. And I was like “We’re having cake in the meeting.” So it’s OK for us to have the cake. But the students can’t have cake.

**Functioning within a bureaucracy and dealing with bureaucratic practices**

are tasks that can be sources of internal conflict for chairs. By bureaucracy here, I refer to a complex of conflicting and seemingly intractable rules that, when applied, make all movement impossible; or secondly, an application of hierarchical authoritative power that overrides well-reasoned conclusions reached by sincere effort of workers at a lower level in the hierarchy. Prof. Albert recounted a situation where his college lost the opportunity for a renowned movie director to give film-making workshops for students because the college could not come up with the small transportation fee that would have been necessary, an amount of money Prof. Albert described as equivalent to “somebody’s budget for their water for the month.” In another example, Prof. Bruce provided a more frustratingly typical example of institutional bureaucracy:

When I assign adjuncts to classes for the fall, normally there is a little form that I filled out and I sent it to the dean’s secretary. Well now they’ve changed the policy: somebody over in HR is going to be doing all of that entry. So, sometimes I used to just e-mail these to the dean’s secretary. But this lady won’t take e-mails; it’s gotta be on the form. So I have to make sure it gets over to her. Just some of the same ... it gets a little frustrating when the same problems that you thought were resolved keep creeping up, creeping up, creeping up.

Perhaps the most painful bureaucratic practice from the chairs’ perspective is the occasional hierarchical influence on departmental hires. In the colleges where this issue was discussed, the actual hiring decision is made by the dean. Most of the time, hiring of new full-time faculty follows a process involving a hiring committee, interviews, teaching demonstrations, discussion of candidates, and recommendation of candidates to the dean for action. Once a faculty member is hired full time, he or she is granted tenure
only after three years as a successful instructor. At the end of the third year, the tenure
decision will have long-reaching impact on a department. Prof Bruce shared this story:

Now fortunately I do think, out of the people we’ve hired in our department,
we’ve done a very good job of hiring people that you don’t have to worry about.
That they’ve turned out really good. Of course sometimes even your opinion can be over-ruled. There’s a different department where the chair had not
recommended somebody for tenure, and they got it anyway. Because ultimately
it’s the dean and the vice-president and president who make those decisions. And
I think sometimes they don’t realize the problems they’re creating when they do
that.

As disturbing as that situation was for another department where faculty will have
to interact on a daily basis with a colleague whom they rejected, Prof. Bruce recounted
his own past experience when a colleague had been strongly recommended for tenure
only to have her name removed from the approved list and another substituted. He
revealed the story with some bewilderment:

For our full-time faculty, when we have a non-tenured person, and if I feel that
person is very good, then of course I want them to have tenure. And, and that’s
always been a goal. And there’s been ... Well for the most part we’ve gotten the
people tenured we wanted. But there was one incident years [ago] when I first
became chair when somebody didn’t get tenure that I think probably should have.
And that created a lot of ill feelings in the department at the time.

Asked why the person did not get tenure, he continued:

Well, I don’t think we’ll ever be told the full story. That’s part of the problem.
The person had been recommended for tenure. Their name was actually in the
booklet to go to the Board. And the day before the board meeting, the president of
the college removed her name. And the reasons he gave me I’ve never believed
fully. I think there was something political there. I have some theories and some
ideas, but I can never prove them.

These incidents involving faculty hires are so very frustrating for department chairs
because they say to the chairs that in regard to the decisions that are probably more
important to them than any, their opinion is completely dismissed and disrespected.
The task of working with adjunct faculty in the environment of their exploitation by colleges is a source of internal conflict for chairs. In the current academic and economic environment, community colleges, as well as other institutions of higher learning, employ part-time faculty to teach a majority of the courses offered in many departments. As indicated in the discussion in the preceding chapter, the percentage of part-time faculty (often referred to as adjuncts) employed in Prof. Albert’s department is 76% of all departmental instructors, 78-82% in Prof. Bruce’s department, 89% in Prof. Carroll’s department, 93-95% in Prof. Donald’s department, 81% in Prof. Estelle’s department, and 63-68% in Prof. Franz’s department.

Typically, adjunct faculty are paid by the class or credit hour at a rate far below the pro-rata rate for full time faculty; and they do not receive employee benefits, such as paid sick days and group medical insurance coverage. For these reasons, adjunct faculty cost the colleges significantly less while delivering instruction to students that is granted the same academic credit as that delivered by full-time faculty. Recently negotiated agreements between colleges and adjunct faculty groups have resulted in slightly higher rates for adjunct instruction, certain limited rights and privileges for class assignments based on longevity, and one or two days of paid leave. However, since the cost of employing adjuncts is still a significant benefit to colleges, most colleges rely heavily on adjuncts, as opposed to hiring new full-time faculty.

Most department chairs accept the realities of the current trend and simply try to hire the best adjunct faculty that they can for the sake of the academic vitality of their departments. However, when chairs have experience with long-time part-time faculty, the wearing effect of the adjunct status becomes unmistakable. Chairs may begin to feel that
by participating in the process of hiring and supervising adjuncts, they are contributing to their misfortune; or they find it painful having to deal with adjuncts who are trying to survive without health benefits, some of whom have health crises.

Chairs also find it difficult dealing with disheartened adjunct faculty. Perhaps Prof. Carroll’s response is more poignant than most, but this is how she responded when asked to identify the most difficult or perplexing aspect of being chair:

How to deal with adjunct faculty members who, particularly ones who have been adjuncts for many years and who haven’t been able to get full time jobs and who are getting pretty upset and devastated about this. I’ve had them sit in my office and just cry or get very, or just lash out in certain ways. And it’s a horrible situation. They’re getting older. They don’t have health insurance. And, and what can I do? I mean I try to make sure that they have good schedules, that I treat them with respect, and I try to integrate them in the department, but ...

She expressed anguish and felt some guilt about cooperating in a system that is so disrespectful to true scholars. Caring so deeply as she does about social justice, she said “and yet here I am the accomplice, the perpetrator of much injustice.”

Even chairs who do not feel the sting quite as sharply as Prof. Carroll are sensitive to the plight of their adjunct faculty. Every single one of the participants had been an adjunct professor for some period of time before arriving at their current full-time positions. Their stories are recounted in the participant profiles in the previous chapter. Prof. Albert lived the full experience of teaching at four or five institutions simultaneously; Prof. Bruce, Prof. Donald, Prof. Estelle, and Prof. Franz worked as adjuncts briefly before hearing of the jobs they now have; Prof. Carroll even spent time on the track to tenure but did not receive tenure. So the participants know the uncertainties of the lives of adjunct faculty. Each of them had experienced the necessity
to redesign a schedule or to find additional adjuncts on short notice (even using an entire holiday vacation to do so) because of an emergency or illness in the life of an adjunct.

Based on analysis of the interview data, the major finding for Research Sub-question 2 is that many of the tasks that department chairs perform on a regular basis in the process of fulfilling their responsibilities as chair can generate within chairs feelings of internal conflict. These tasks include (a) ordinary and expected tasks performed without the assistance of adequate clerical support; (b) ordinary tasks, which in themselves are not onerous, but which must be performed simultaneously; (c) tasks related to handling complaints against full-time faculty; (d) tasks related to handling excessively time-consuming complaints against adjunct faculty; (e) tasks related to assessment; (f) the task of attending inefficient and unnecessary meetings; (g) tasks performed in a bureaucratic environment; and (h) tasks dealing with adjunct faculty in the environment of their exploitation. These tasks can generate feelings of internal conflict in chairs because they can require that chairs perform in ways that are inconsistent with their ethics, purposes, intentions, goals, and aspirations as department chairs.

**Research Sub-Question 3**

**Through what self-perceptions and with what words do public community college academic department chairs present images of themselves?** In the third interview, the department chairs were asked to describe themselves, both as they intended to be and the way they thought they were perceived by others. Their responses revealed several threads that were common to them all, and individuals also highlighted their own special ideas about themselves and their role. However, their responses in numerous other
places in the conversations also revealed ways in which chairs were very strongly and purposefully directing their energies and their professional lives. All of this material has contributed to the answer of this question.

**Department chairs set a vision for their departments and are committed to working to achieve specific goals.** These department chairs demonstrated a clear understanding that their job was more than just performing the prescribed administrative tasks. Even though the administrative tasks took up much more of their time than they would have preferred, the chairs worked in the glow of the visions to which they aspired.

Prof. Albert said that as chair “you set a vision,” and he identified that task as the main theoretical responsibility of the chair. He provided further detailed description of his responsibilities, demonstrating both his vision for his sociology department and his powerlessness to accomplish the vision on his own. He said that he had a good relationship with his colleagues, but he had not been successful in persuading them to hire a full-time person to help build a specific area of their departmental program. Describing the situation as “a bit of a struggle,” he said he does not understand the resistance to hiring a full-time person to head up the specific area, especially since all other specific areas in the department have full-timers in charge of them. He admitted to “a bit of conflict,” but no slamming of doors. A polite collegiality remains.

Prof. Carroll was committed to globalizing the curricula of her department’s philosophy and humanities offerings. She said, “the way philosophy and humanities is taught for the most part is an absolute disgrace,” that they are taught entirely within the European tradition with focus on Europe and the United States. She would like to change that. She explained that her department was revising all the course syllabi to create a
globalized curriculum, “a difficult and exciting task.” During the course of the interviews she was using the summer to finish the work of re-writing the generic syllabi. This is work ideally shared by full departments, but, she said, since “philosophers of course argue about things,” she and her colleagues “only got through about five of thirty during the whole year.” She was finishing the work alone.

Her other major concern was the treatment of adjunct faculty. While she said that she could not create a goal to change their official status, she did “try and run the department in a way that is less harmful to them than other ways of running it.” She said she takes the additional time it takes to do this.

Prof. Donald described his vision for his department several times during the conversations. Referring to a quote that he ascribed to Ezra Pound that “All the wisdom of the world cannot be contained in any one language,” Prof. Donald said, “I believe, firmly believe, that anybody in the world should know at least two if not more languages. He explained that his department had recently lost its programs in German and French and now taught only Spanish, Italian, and Chinese. He expressed concern that “immigrants from everywhere that come to the United States lose their language in sometimes in the second generation, even in the first generation.” He said that since we are a nation of immigrants, he thinks philosophically that “the department should be able to offer all those languages back to the community and have them connect to their roots or be more of service in a global community.”

He said, “slowly the society is catching up,” and he referenced the Illinois language requirement. Prof. Donald described his vision of societal advancement:

What the ideal situation will be for students from a very early age [will be] taking a second language [so] that by the seventh or eighth [grade] they learn another
language—the second one. And then starting in high school, they are already doing the third one. And that should be a very easy thing to do if you start at that time, relatively easy. So by the time they will come to me in the community college, I’ll be teaching the third, the fourth languages. I mean that’s an ideal, right? But it doesn’t take just the community college, doesn’t take just the chairperson to do it; it’s a whole society thing. And I, now how do I engage that as a chairperson? Because after all, a chairperson should be in touch with the community and the needs of the community. Now what happens when the community is not in touch with their own needs?

He admitted being frustrated that even with the recent movement to require graduates of two-year institutions to have some foreign language, he has not been able to convince his own college to institute the policy. He said that he had “been proposing it since day one,” and he has prepared the proposal and “taken it to all the administrative bodies that need to know this in the college. And it passes through some stages with flying colors, but when it comes to establishing it doesn’t go through.” He said he hopes the resistance will see the real need. Recognizing that he might be accused of working in his own interest in this regard because he teaches foreign languages, and ever the seeker of “why,” he continued and joked: “And I, what benefit do I get from doing all this as a person, as a chairperson, as an individual? I mean why am I doing this? It’s not like job security, cause it’s not. If I was looking for job security, I’d probably find another job to secure.”

The primacy of the chair as department visionary is sustained even in the absence of effect. Prof. Bruce identified areas of program advancement that he could have pursued more energetically, new curriculum and on-line teaching for part-time faculty:

Looking back at it now, I think one of the areas that I could have also improved in is bringing more new curriculum and new courses into our department, constantly be looking for ways for the department to grow and change. The other thing possibly is while most of our full-time teachers teach online, very few of our part-timers do. I’d like to see some more of the part-timers get involved in that. Even though there’s problems with online education, and there’s probably too many students enrolling in it who shouldn’t be, it is still a great growth area. And
there’s been times when I can’t offer as many classes because I don’t have anybody who could do the online courses.

Prof. Bruce sounds a bit regretful that he has already missed opportunities for on-line classes because he did not have faculty to teach them. The fact that he is approaching the end of a nearly 30-year teaching career tells us by inference relative to faculty numbers that he may not have realized early enough how great a proportion of courses would eventually be taught by part-timers. His full-time faculty do the online work. If he had anticipated the need for on-line teachers outdistancing the capacity of his full-time faculty, he might have encouraged (or allowed) part-time faculty to participate in on-line training and instruction.

Prof. Franz is very proud of the new hires that he has brought into the faculty. Half of his twenty-three-member department are faculty he “had a hand” in hiring. He also worked to expand the departmental offerings, including literature courses and Arabic language courses two years ago. For assistance in this effort, the department behaved with great vision and creativity to consult professionals outside the college for referrals. The chair participants set visions for their departments and work diligently to achieve departmental goals.

Department chairs want to be good leaders. Prof. Estelle said she felt obligated to become a better leader. She felt obligated “to engage in professional development,” not only in her area of psychology, her expertise, “but also in the area of leadership and department chair leadership.” The fact that she felt obligation suggests that she had an image of a leader and what a leader should be, and she concluded that she did not yet match her own image of a leader. She wanted to bring herself into closer alignment with
her image of a leader. Her desire to be a better leader is at the root of her sense of obligation.

Prof. Donald acknowledged that he did not have a problem with managing people. In situations regarding hiring, firing, and dealing with difficult issues it was his practice to deal with things right away and “cards on the table, let’s see what’s happening.” He said he did not believe in just letting people go because they had a problem. His goal as a leader was to help teachers correct problems that they were having. He wanted to sit down and figure out how he could help. In fact he asked himself, “What is it? Did I fail somewhere in my leadership?” He described his attempts to get teachers having difficulty to examine their techniques and method of delivery of instruction, even personality issues. He offered help to correct problems and was successful in helping. He admitted, however, that his efforts to help were not always successful and that in one case, he did have to let a teacher go.

Prof. Donald said that when he himself was in need of help as a leader, he found support at conferences of chairs and foreign language instructors, where he was able to gain greater understanding of his role as chair and assistance in becoming a better chair. He said that it took him about two years to learn the basic in’s and out’s of being chair and that he is still learning. He also acknowledged that he would like even more education in this area:

I need more education, maybe not in the teaching per se as much as, and not in administrative per se, but some sort of administrative education plan that will give me an understanding of how a chairperson can have a really positive effect in the community college. And I think I can get that through a—not a PhD, not any master’s degree—but some sort of specific courses that can help me through that. I [was] contemplated finishing, or getting another master’s, or completing a PhD. And I don’t know. I’m not sure still that that will help me in that professional goal.
He will probably continue to question and to struggle to find answers to the very important academic issues that he continues to face.

Prof. Carroll found her entrance into a leadership role quite new for her and quite to her liking. She said that she “wasn’t actively wanting to be the chair of the department. That was what the job was.” She described her former academic persona:

I’d always been in academia a person who had been kind of on the fringes of my department and had not certainly exercised any power in terms of shaping the departments that I was in. So I found it very exciting to be able to participate in this total rebuilding of the department and therefore be able, at least of some extent, given the real constraints I was under, be able to shape a department in a way that I thought was good in terms of who was hired and what the curriculum was. I was pleased to be able to do that.

She was also very proud that she extended her leadership activities and skills outside her department to several other committees in the college:

Well I’m on a number of committees. Right now I’m on the global studies committee. I’m on the women and gender studies committee. I’m on the honors advisory council. I have been on, when I was head of the Council of Chairs and Coordinators, I served on a number of committees as part of that, including the institution strategic planning committee. I’ve been on, well just a long list of things. Many of them have had some connection to the department. For example we do have a lot of global studies classes. And since that’s a direction that we’re interested in taking in the department, my being on the global studies committee is a kind of natural fit. I’m an active faculty member in terms of committee participation.

Prof. Carroll is especially proud of her work to establish a process of shared governance in the college, such that decisions would be made based on demonstrated need, as opposed to other methods of decision-making. She provided the following:

I fought very hard for a shared governance process that would involve the faculty more in advising the academic VP and the administration as a whole on what new positions should be created, in other words, new full-time faculty positions. Because that process had always been rather mysterious. Like how is the decision made? On what basis? So I worked as part of a committee that negotiated a shared governance agreement with the administration that laid out a whole process for
this. And that process involves ways in which departments make these requests for new faculty members. And then those are shared at the Council of Chairs, and we talk about it.

She explained that “the academic VP has to come to the Council of Chairs with an initial proposal and give his reasons for this and discuss it.” She explained that the process does not “give the chairs the power to somehow decide what the new positions are going to be,” but the fact that it is a “public discussion with reasons and looking at statistics” does make it public and allows more voices to be heard. She said this process is better then one involving “deals being made behind the scenes like, ‘Your department can have a new faculty member if you do the following.’”

Prof. Franz, having been the only one of the chairs who seemed to have actually sought the chairmanship and analyzed his capabilities for success in the role, described his leadership capabilities in this way:

One of the skills that I bring to the table is leadership skill. I think I’m fairly good at organizing things. I’m pretty organized and guess I’m not afraid to speak my mind. So I think that’s useful. I also have a background in business, which I think has been helpful in terms of, in just trying to move the department forward with—again it’s a very large group of people and it’s a very diverse group of people, not only in terms of their backgrounds, but also in terms of what they teach. So I think all of that, the fact that I’m very organized, helps.

The chair participants are committed to developing leadership skills and demonstrating the qualities of a good leadership.

As part of the leadership function, department chairs see themselves as the face and the voice of their departments and sometimes the college. Prof. Franz found himself on many very important college committees, where he contends his presence was requested, not solely because of his personal attributes, but because he was chair of the English department. One of these assignments was the co-chairmanship of the college’s
re-accreditation portfolio preparation for submission to the Higher Learning Commission.

He was also appointed to the college’s diversity task force and the master plan task group. He described his function in this way:

The function is we had a consulting group come in because one of our strategic, one of our core values is embracing diversity. And we had a consultant group out of xxx come to the college and really look at the make-up of our faculty, of the way our processes work, of basically the way the college operates to see if in fact we were encouraging and embracing diversity the way we had been doing things. And also to make recommendations for ways to do better at that. And so I was on that. I was one of a very few faculty members who was on that large multi-year task group. I also was on master, the campus facilities master plan task group. And a lot this I think just, has kind of happened because I happen to be the chairperson of the largest department. It also might be my personality, I don’t know.

It is probably impossible for Prof. Franz to engage even quite serious subjects without some injection of humor. This aspect of his personality may make him a welcome addition to most committees. He feels that he does represent his department and his college well.

Prof. Franz felt that the value to the college of these very important tasks and activities significantly outweighed any negative effect on himself, even though these responsibilities were time-consuming, energy-consuming, and clearly extra-departmental. He admitted that he “was probably more tired than usual. But that just kind of occasionally goes with the territory.” He said that he didn’t like to say “No” to those things unless he absolutely had to because he thought it was important for a department as large as his “to continue to have a voice,” and he was “the person currently situated to best be that voice.” He remembered that there had been times when his department was not invited to participate in important decisions, and then decisions were made that did
not work well for his department. He considers this representation “being the leader but also the voice” for his group. He said, “I think it’s important to be at the table.”

Prof. Donald talked about the importance of his department’s having a presence in all college activities. He makes sure that his department participates in special college programs, and he was also sensitive to his representing the department and the college in settings outside the college. He said, “Small departments are at a disadvantage” and that chairs “carry within us the image of the university.” He felt that as a representative of the institution, he always has to keep in mind that he is part of the institution. “And sooner or later, whatever I do, whatever I say will eventually come back” to the institution. All the chairs accepted their identification as the face and voice of their department.

**By their own description, department chairs are, first and foremost, teachers.**

Even though the chairs understood, accepted, and appreciated the responsibilities of leadership and the privileges that came with their role as chair, they all maintained an abiding respect, inclination, and preference for teaching. By examining their statements about their professional behavior, we can observe that the preference for teaching—even for being in some cases—was how they defined themselves. Early in our conversations, Prof. Bruce said the following:

Well, I’ve never really aspired to an administrative position. I’ve never really aspired to be a dean or something like that, even though we have had faculty move up into the ranks of dean. I mean we’ve faculty who were academic vice-president. And most of them end up coming back to the faculty. But the nice thing about department chair is I still consider myself first and foremost a teacher. You get some release time. You get to teach less. But you’re still a teacher who also does these additional chairperson duties. And that was enough administrative power for me. I like that idea. I don’t mind working a little bit with budgets and schedules and things like that. It was a little break from just teaching.
In a later conversation, he repeated the idea more succinctly and made reference to one of the real jobs of teaching, grading papers:

Well, as I think I said to you last time, I’m still a teacher; and I teach quite a few courses. And as I said to you last time, I still consider myself first and foremost a teacher who also has these other side duties as chair. So I still like to spend as much time as I can on my class work. I’ve got a pile of papers here to read that I just collected yesterday. So I spend a lot of time doing that.

Prof. Albert’s focus on teaching is so great that, with the chair duties, he may be overloading himself with classes. He explained why he teaches so many classes:

Most chairs take the chair as a load reduction. So they are given a certain number of hours. I take it as a stipend. So I take it as, you’re paid what the equivalent would be of my teaching full time those hours. So mine is sort of a stipend above my normal salary.

Asked how this balance was working for him in terms of all his responsibilities, he added the following:

Well, you know I don’t think I would do the chair if I couldn’t teach the five because I like it so much and it’s fun. I don’t really, to me teaching really isn’t work. I mean there are moments when you’re grading a paper, and you have to Google the paper to find out how much is plagiarized. Those are not great moments. That’s work and not very enjoyable. But you know 90 percent of my experience as a teacher is more fun than anything else. So I never really thought of it as work. I’ve never really gotten up in the morning and said, “I don’t want to go teach.” I may have said, “I don’t want to go to that meeting.” Once you start getting into anything administrative then it’s a job.

Prof. Donald had an equally committed attitude toward teaching as opposed to administrative duties. He said, “And so the magic starts when I walk into the classroom. And then you know it’s a world in itself.” He described himself as a teacher in this way:

Well I think that I [have] always been a teacher, first and foremost. That said I think I belong in a classroom. How I end up in some sort of administrative position, I think has to do with teaching too. Otherwise, I think I will not accept a deal in a chair if it is not related to the teaching part. Because I’m not, my goals are not to become some sort of a dean or president. My goals are to affect teaching. The student acquiring, teaching and learning processes.
Prof. Donald also thought that it was necessary for chairs to teach in order to understand what is important for teachers. He said the following:

A chair needs to be, and I have to say this because from my experience, a chair needs to be a teacher, yes. Because the only, the way to understand the everyday process and needs of a department or a program is by being a teacher. But it cannot be like the way it is now. It can’t. You can’t function that way. You cannot have a full load of classes and then be a chair, and not even half. I think that the chair should be teaching teachers.

Prof. Carroll agreed with the idea that a chair needs to teach classes in order to properly function as chair, “to be able to even do the chair parts” of her job. She described a situation where faculty were having difficulty getting through all of the material specified in the syllabus of a certain philosophy course. She taught a section of the course herself and was able to understand the teaching difficulty and subsequently made appropriate changes to the syllabus that the faculty found helpful. Prof. Carroll also made the following comments about teaching:

I would like to do some writing some time. I guess that’s a goal. But my goal is to be an excellent teacher. I think I am an excellent teacher. I really love teaching. I have these ambivalent feelings about being chair because I’d rather teach. And I’ve been trying to prepare someone else to take over the chair position. But it then becomes increasingly clear to me that perhaps anyone who takes over the chair position will not have the same commitment that I have. And that is difficult for me to contemplate because I do, as chair I do, I think I have moved the department in very good ways. And I would like to see it continuing to move in those directions.

Regarding details of her teaching, Prof. Carroll said that she never teaches a class the same way twice. She explained that she does not agree with the “kind of split between scholarship and teaching that many people assume exists.” She said that scholarship should be present at all times and that it can be incorporated into teaching by modeling for students “what someone does to learn things” and allowing them to see what people do to inform themselves, to see people “struggling with new debates and new issues.”
She said that teachers should not present themselves as people who already know everything, but who are learning.

**The chairs are committed to teaching at a community college.** Prof. Franz said in the second interview that after he had finished his coursework for his doctorate and was looking for a full-time teaching position, community colleges were the only places that he applied because that was really where his “heart was, and it stayed, and it continues to be there.” This was a mission of his from the very beginning of his doctoral studies, as his comments below indicate:

I, I really ... my own value system and the mission of a community college are very much in alignment. I very much believe that those of us who were blessed to be able to get advanced degrees at places like Loyola and DePaul and University of Illinois and Northwestern and University of Chicago, that folks who go to community colleges deserve to have the same caliber of instructors.

He described how he had to tailor his doctoral coursework to include composition theory so that he would be prepared to teach in a community college, knowing that teaching composition was going to be the bulk of what he would be doing. He worked with his advising team at his university “to carve out independent studies at different kinds of angles” to make sure that when he applied for jobs at community colleges, he would be “well positioned to get them.”

Prof. Donald’s preference for the community college is no less dramatic. After having spent ten years in a community college before he earned his degree, he is committed to the institution that made his own success possible. When he went looking for a full time job, he said that he “wanted it to be a community college.” He said, “It’s real; it helped me. So it’s very real. So I thought you know, “What else do you know help[s] people [more] than community college?”
The majority of the chairs perceived themselves as fortunate, and they told the stories of how they experienced good fortune in being hired full time at their various colleges. Prof. Albert noted that when he decided to stop teaching as an adjunct at several colleges and focus on full-time teaching at a single institution, he was informed of the opening at his college. He said that he applied for one full time job and was fortunate to be hired that first time. When Prof. Estelle was pursuing doctoral courses, she too was teaching as an adjunct and later decided to seek a full-time position. She recounted that her friends and associates told her that it was impossible to be hired full time at a community college, and yet she was successful. Prof Franz also, having completed coursework for his doctorate, was teaching as an adjunct at his college when he applied for and was granted full time status. The same sequence of events was true for Prof. Donald, although he seems to have taught at a few institutions, including a high school, before he was hired full time at his college.

Prof. Carroll had had the experience of teaching at a university for a number of years and not receiving tenure before she arrived at her college. However, her stellar professional background propelled her, not only into a full-time position at her college, but also into being hired with the expectation that she would take over as chair. Though Prof. Bruce’s hiring at his college was much longer ago than the others, his experience was very similar. He was a teaching assistant in his graduate school, where he was ABD (having completed all but his dissertation for his PhD). The story in his words would stand fairly generally for the other professors as well:

I saw an add in the paper for a class that I had taught in graduate school and ended up starting here part-time, and I was kind of in the right place at the right time. The previous full-timer in my field had moved on to a department chairmanship and was teaching less and there was a full-time opening.
The chairs see themselves as nearly the oldest and most senior in their departments. All of the chairs, despite their differences in chronological age, described themselves as senior faculty. This was not surprising from Prof. Bruce, who is within three years of retirement and among the more senior in age. However, even the two professors who are in their 50s (Carroll and Donald) said that they are among the more senior in the department. Of those in their 40s, Prof. Estelle and Prof. Franz also identified themselves among the more senior in age. Prof. Albert indicated that, even though he is not among the more senior in age, he is more senior in experience at the college.

Chairs had their own individual, personal perceptions of themselves as well. Prof. Albert wanted to be thought of as considerate. He said that he was considerate when he made people’s schedules and that he considered ways to improve the program. For him being considerate included things like being on time and “getting back to people in a timely manner” if they e-mailed or called him and “being open” to people calling him at home or if there’s an emergency, as well as being available. He said that the word was a very big word for him in terms of meanings. He also wanted to be known as “a good listener to students when there were problems, also with faculty and other people. He said that these are the ways he sees himself an how he hopes others see him.

Prof. Carroll said she regarded her “primary purpose as trying to work for social justice.” She explained herself in this way:

And I try and do that through my job and in other ways. So I try and do it by what I teach in my classes. I try and do it in how I teach, the kind of instructor I am, how I treat my students. When I became chair of the department, which is not a position I’d aspired to, but a position I found myself in eventually, I wanted to bring that same perspective.
Prof. Carroll demonstrated that primary purpose in all the aspects of her life that we discussed. Her work to revise course syllabi to produce a global curriculum, she pointedly described as working to produce an “anti-racist curriculum.” The very directness of her statement surprised me a bit. But as we discussed her commitment to the city she lives in and her dedication to political causes, I could see that all the work she does is done with philosophical commitment.

Prof. Bruce described himself as “pretty easy to get along with.” He said that he was “not too terribly demanding.” He answered from his perspective as chair and continued in this way:

It’s not like I’m going to come snooping around your classroom or something like that. On the other hand I do want to see faculty who do what they’re supposed to be doing and perform their job the way it’s supposed to be performed. But I think most people would describe me as I guess [a] pretty good boss to get along with, or pretty easy to get along with. I have not had very many battles.

Prof. Donald described himself as an effective chair who could do more with more resources. He said that he was a good leader, but that he did not have “the personnel to materialize all the ideas and projects” that he had for the department. He said also that he was a creative person who “does things that he can” but that he is not able to do all of the things he could really achieve if he had the help that he needed. He said that on a scale of one to ten, he would “probably be between seven and eight.”

Prof. Estelle was obviously aware of the growth that she had undergone recently as a result of her new learning and new experiences. She said she would describe herself as responsible and a leader. She felt that her department members feel that she is responsible for the integrity of the department, that she wants the department to be a good one, and that they have rigorous, high standards for the courses. She feels also that she
has high standards for herself and that that “trickles down to other people,” so that they understand that she expects them to have high standards as well. She said that, having gone through the leadership conference, she now sees herself as a leader as well, “an example to some degree.”

If Prof. Estelle is typical of department chairs who experience the kind of leadership training she has had over the last year or so, she certainly provides a good recommendation. By her own admission, she has come to understand herself more as a person and a leader, and she has grown in confidence and competence. She has begun to think strategically for her department, and she has survived character-building experiences during the course of her time as chair. I think she is at the beginning of what will be a very respectable career as department chair.

Prof. Franz also sees himself as a leader. He actually made that identification quite precisely and quite early in our conversations. He also insisted that he is not a supervisor to any of his full-time colleagues. He made quite a point of this, even though he seemed to acknowledge that his colleagues may accord him more of a supervisory role than he admits verbally. His behaviors, however, suggest that he is fully in charge. Here is how he described himself:

Well, I guess I perceive of myself amongst my full time peers as kind of the first among equals. I don’t in any way look at myself as their boss. I don’t try to overly influence them. I don’t know that that’s the way they perceive me; that’s the way that I want to be perceived. I know that I, well I guess I also perceive myself though as the voice of the department to make sure that the department’s needs and concerns and wishes are shared across amongst my fellow chair-people, but also by the administration. Because I’m the person who is in the types of meetings where there are opportunities to voice those concerns. Whether it’s a sub-division level or the division level or the college level, where my teaching peers—my peers who only teach—are not always invited to those meetings. And I guess I also feel a sense of responsibility to always represent the department well. Not always my own personal wishes, but the wishes of the group.
Prof. Franz has detailed aspects of the leader as one equal member of his group, their voice, their representative, responsible to them. He is very serious about this relationship, and he works very hard to maintain it.

**Though they do not or cannot yet fully understand what it is that compels them to live the role, the department chairs expressed commitment to a job that defies logic, even in their own eyes.** In other words: Who are these people? Where do they come from? Prof. Donald attempted to explore for answers to these questions:

I still haven’t been able to pinpoint what it is that keeps me in the job as a chair…. [Do] you know what is it that a person puts him or herself through this sort of situation? As a chairperson I want to know what that is. And I don’t know if it has something to do with control … having a little bit of say in classes and projects and everything that happens within the department. Maybe there’s something there. Or if it is the idea of finding the Holy Grail of education as a leader and bring[ing] it to the university and to the students….I think about the impact it has had on my life all the time…. I believe there is something there that I needed to find out that keeps me here. And I need to pinpoint that to say, “This is what is keeping me here.”

As he struggled to find the answer to why he stays as chair, he acknowledged that he is not able to be positive every day:

There are days that I say, “This is it! This is as far as I go!” I mean I gotta go and teach and, and just a you know how there, which is most happy and classroom. And yet, every time I said, “No, there’s gotta be something else that I can do to balance things out.” So I, I have to tell you being a chair, it’s a constant back and forth between saying “No, no more; no more being chair” and “There is one more thing that I could do.”…No, it’s a constant struggle.

In another statement Prof. Donald thought he might have found an answer to the question of why he stayed as chair. He said that after thinking and meditating, he thinks maybe that it is the “naïve goals” that he set for himself when he first became chair three or four years ago saying “I will make out of this department the best— and by best meaning the most service oriented to this community department of foreign languages in the nation.”
He asked if I could imagine such a goal. I did not tell him that I think that is the goal of many a new department chair. Most do not have to contend with circumstances like his.

Prof. Albert may have demonstrated the ambivalence of the role in his answer to the question whether his personal life had suffered in any way since he became chair. He responded that his personal life had not suffered, even though the content of his answer detailed the ways in which his personal life had suffered. Here is what he said.

No, little less time with the family, with family occasionally … especially for the things that are … it’s ridiculous like the college night type stuff. Where I think I explained that before, I say ridiculous. No one ever shows up for sociology. So I sit there and stare at a wall for hours and hours and hours. And even if there’d just been one student I would feel OK. But no students, just makes you depressed and sad and lonely and staring at a wall and I could be at home with my family. But I guess if you’re not there, that’ll be the night that the one person shows up, right? That’s always what happens.

Perhaps his intent here was to admit that his personal life had suffered, but that he was willing to make the sacrifice in order to do the job that he wanted to do. Perhaps this is the answer for all of the department chairs.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented findings of my study of community college department chairs. Each of the participants, in my opinion, was so different from the others that I feel that I achieved something of a collection of exemplary types. Yet as different as they were—in age, gender, years in the role of chair, personality type, ethnicity, life stage—they all exemplified chair qualities that had been praised by their colleagues. And they all performed the role of chair with courage and commitment, as indicated by their comments reported here. In one of my jottings, I wrote the following:
I personally don’t think you can necessarily identify a great leader before the fact. With God’s grace, you choose a good one. And then the anointed leader grows in ways that surprise even him- or herself to lead well. And what is the grace that guides the choice? It is the spiritual connectedness with the eternal truth that makes the voters recognize the new leader.

I make this comment here because, of the six chairs included in the study, only one actually sought the chairmanship. The other five moved into the role following the retirement of a former chair. Some even had to be encouraged to take the role; and for one, taking the chair was an expectation of their full-time hiring. The point is that they had not been preparing or yearning to be chair. Yet, once they became chair, they found within themselves the traits and capacities to lead nobly, growing in stature and understanding with each passing semester.

All the chairs were shocked by some aspect of their new job; yet they plowed ahead like soldiers to do the job that needed to be done. As they worked through their daily requirements, assignments, classes, and meetings, they came to experience—in one context or another—bouts with internal conflict. They experienced a collision of opposing forces rushing toward each other: their own goals and aspirations for themselves and their departments from one side, and from the other side, the tasks, requirements, and limitations of their daily responsibilities. Each chair, at some time or another and in some context or another, experienced and described this conflict.

There was a primary research question for this study. That question sought to reveal the essence of the internal conflict experienced by department chairs, its eidos, the thing that, if it were not present, would render the internal conflict non-existent. Through analysis of the chairs’ comments, I discovered that the essence of the conflict was buried deep within the reality of the chair existence. The essence of the conflict is that, even
though every constituency of the chair (including the chair him- or herself) expects the
chair to achieve ideal outcomes, the chair does not possess the decision power and the
authority to control resources that would make it possible for chairs to fulfill their
responsibilities according to their own standards. By definition of the authority structures
within which they function, chairs will be thwarted in their efforts to accomplish their
goals.

There were also three research sub-questions in this study, all of which were
presented to provide backdrop and support for the primary one. Discussion of the first
sub-question provided the picture of the conflict to show its external signs and
illustrations of the chair in conflict. Discussion of the second sub-question listed the tasks
which, as they are performed, serve to push the chair into internal conflict. And
discussion of the third sub-question allowed each chair to define him- or herself, the other
elemental force in the collision. In this self-definition, each chair provided an explanation
of his or her personal attachments that created the source of his or her particular version
of internal conflict.

Preliminary analysis revealed eight theme clusters that had meaning for chairs,
not all of which generated internal conflict for chairs: lack of competition in chair
selection, surprise at the chair workload, working within the context of a unionized
faculty, impact of chair relationship with dean, concern with work ethic of other chairs,
emergence of Arabic studies, effect on chairs of participating in interviews, and effect on
chairs of their being chairs. Because the first seven themes are not necessarily related to
the research questions of this study, their discussion is not presented in the main body of
the study. However, since the information is valuable supplementary material, it is
presented in Appendix D of this study. The eighth theme, the effect on chairs of their being chairs, provided the bridge to answering the primary research question of the study. This theme, therefore, was presented as the approach to that question.

Data analysis showed the following six reactions by chairs to their internal conflict: (a) most of the department chair participants were ready to quit after their first year as chair; (b) department chairs work many more hours per week than they think they should or want to; (c) department chairs lose sleep and time with their families in order to accomplish their chair tasks; (d) department chairs experience a range of negative feelings, including sadness, anger, pain, frustration, and exhaustion; (e) department chairs struggle to find ways to balance life-work issues to make it possible for them to cope with conflict and to handle the job; and (f) most people who closely observe the job of department chair don’t want it.
Chapter 6

Summary, Implications, and Recommendations

This study of the lived experience of the public community college academic department chair grew out of my interest to understand the complex and conflicted nature of the chair role and the essence of the internal conflict that chairs may experience as they carry out their responsibilities relative to their faculty, administration, students, college staff, their discipline, and the community. This study used methods of phenomenology, and data was collected through a series of four face-to-face topical-guided interviews with six department chairs in public community colleges in the State of Illinois. Since I had been a department chair, my familiarity with chair functioning was useful in preparing questions for the interviews. However, I was careful to apply principles of reflexivity and to engage in practices that would enable me to reach conclusions based only on participants’ responses, not biased by my own experiences. I was diligent in bracketing the topics and listening sensitively to the responses of the participants, probing for detail from them so as to get their full stories. Because the multiple interviews provided opportunities for the chairs to discuss many aspects of their professional lives, they explored many ideas that fell outside the parameters of this study; and several unanticipated themes emerged as the data was analyzed. However, this summary includes only themes that are related to the research questions of the study, and other material is presented in Appendix D of this study.

The interviews were conducted over a two-month period that spanned the waning and ending of the spring semester into the early weeks of the summer term of 2009. This period was opportune for the interviews because it provided the environments of both the
busiest time of the academic year and a time when chairs have an increased opportunity for reflection. The interview discussions yielded rich results. Since I transcribed all the interviews myself, I developed great intimacy with the texts as a result of the auditory repetition required in the transcribing process. This intimacy with the text allowed me to relive the interviews and to re-capture the emotion of the discussions as I later analyzed the data from the printed page.

**Summary of Results**

The primary research question of this study was to identify the essence of the internal conflict experienced by public community college academic department chairs. Department chair participants shared many experiences that clearly described situations and circumstances that generated internal conflict for them. **The particular situations were most often different for each participant, and the most extreme internal conflict seemed tied to the individual’s personality and personal set of values.** For example Prof. Carroll, who described her commitment to social justice as central to her life work, was most conflicted about the unfair treatment of adjunct faculty, even as she went about the task of using adjuncts to pursue the academic purposes of her department. Prof. Albert, who prided himself in and enjoyed an open and friendly interaction with people, was most conflicted when power issues seemed to intrude into relationships; and he found himself performing from a scripted plan or arguing with colleagues whom he preferred to praise. Prof. Franz, who found humor in almost any circumstance, was internally conflicted when he felt pushed into confrontational behaviors over long stretches of time, because he felt those behaviors were contrary to his nature, but essential
for maintaining the integrity of his department. As English department chair, he found himself embroiled in battles with administrative pressures to curtail his department’s textbook selections, even though faculty had cooperated with the goal of limiting costs by locating inexpensive texts that would also fulfill their instructional goal of maintaining academic variety.

So the individual personality and personal principles of each participant were clearly factors that influenced the specific locus of the most extreme internal conflict for the participants. Whereas the specific points of contention varied from one participant to another, all the participants reported suffering internal conflict at some point in their experience as chair, whether it was related to a particular set of circumstances or events or during a particular time in their career. This internal conflict seemed to reveal itself most dramatically at the point of the chair’s greatest commitment to a specific ideal, the point of connection to his or her particular dream.

The results showed that it was the admixture of this personal component that established internal conflict as an entity that went beyond the ordinary and expected tensions and stresses associated with the chair role. Whenever there was more work for a chair to do than seemed reasonable or possible, tension and stress could afflict the chair. Similarly, situations like unexpected meetings or denials of budget requests could also act as external counterweights to a chair’s plans; but these complications would not necessarily invade the being of the chair to become internal conflict. They remained external tensions or stresses as long as the chair confined them to that category. In other words, they remained annoyances or impediments existing in the environment of chair responsibilities; and, most importantly, they remained outside the person of the chair.
However, if a chair had been or became philosophically dedicated to a given course of action or became personally committed to achieving a specific goal—became “hooked to a dream” as described by one participant—and if other circumstances of the day to which the chair was equally committed presented themselves in opposition to the chair’s accomplishing other goals, that chair likely experienced internal conflict.

For example, when Prof. Carroll recruited and hired adjuncts for her humanities department, she selected the most highly qualified professionals available to her because she was committed to building a quality academic program. Yet her commitment to social justice made her empathize with the life circumstances of adjuncts, who lacked adequate work benefits for a secure lifestyle. Therefore, her professional commitments collided with her personal sensitivities in that she had to violate the latter in order to satisfy the former. Prof. Bruce experienced internal conflict when he struggled to comply with new processes for recording adjunct assignments, which required that he personally perform tasks that he considered meaningless and unnecessary. Prof. Estelle experienced internal conflict when she was required to participate in the censure of a full-time faculty colleague, which she felt was outside the limits of her authority, but required by her commitment to protect the integrity of her department. Thus, her responsibility as chair required action from her that violated her own principle of non-judgmental egalitarian relationship with fellow full-time faculty.

As described above, for each chair the source of internal conflict was generally different; and the depth of the conflict often depended on a variety of circumstances, including the topic of concern, the personal commitment of the chair, life experience of the chair, personal and professional expectations of the chair, colleague or family...
support, or even age. The seeds of the internal conflict of chairs seemed to reside in the chairs themselves: in their perceptions of their circumstances, in their passion to accomplish particular goals, and in their desire to be good chairs—according to their own definitions of good chair.

Though most of the reported sources of internal conflict varied from one participant to another, certain topics seemed to have the potential for generating internal conflict among a few chairs. Activities related to assessment fell into this category. Assessment seemed to be a source of internal conflict for chairs, not because of the stated objectives of assessment, but because of the way the process was carried out at their college. Prof. Albert objected to program assessment through typical methods of pre- and post-testing when his program did not require a series of specific courses with prescribed curriculum. He celebrated the divergent approaches that various faculty took in the introductory course in his discipline, that being the only course common to all students who identified themselves as pursuing that program. The internal conflict for him was that he wanted to be a cooperative chair who contributed to the strength of the college, but he felt that his legitimate concerns were interpreted as challenging to the process. Prof. Carroll, despite her department’s having produced an assessment plan that was highly praised by the assessment committee, felt that the assessment process failed to measure what she considered to be a key goal of her department: to increase her students’ participation in cultural events and activities. She experienced internal conflict even in her apparent success. Prof. Bruce also had difficulty with assessment. He initially found course review frustrating because it was unexpected and he felt ill prepared to handle it. For him the internal conflict was his failure to be as effective as he wished to be.
These examples demonstrate that whether the sources of internal conflict affected chairs individually or generally, the key ingredients for the generation of internal conflict were the committed personal intention of the chair versus other realities of the chair role to which the chair was also committed in some way that was very important to the chair. Department chairs most often had fairly ambitious goals for their departments, and they were generally willing to work hard to achieve those goals. However, they were often thwarted in their attempts to accomplish goals, in part, because the volume of daily tasks and responsibilities—including increasing numbers of reports, student complaints, special projects, attendance at meetings, and other responsibilities—and the pace of college events consumed all the time that chairs had at their disposal.

**An additional component of internal conflict for community college chairs was the structure within which they work.** As leaders of their departments, chairs represent expert and referent power (French & Raven, 1959), but they actually have limited personal authority to make significant decisions that affect their departments. Major decisions generally require agreement from their departmental colleagues and/or approval from superiors in the administrative structure. Chairs are denied the power of control over resources that could ensure success or that they feel are essential for success. Also, chairs often function in environments with limited, inadequate, or non-existent clerical support. This circumstance not only adds to the likelihood of internal conflict, but also exacerbates it on a daily basis. All these conditions, coupled with chairs’ desire to be effective leaders in their own eyes and in the opinions of their constituents, create internal conflict for chairs because they cannot achieve their own goals. Given the circumstances and structure within which they work, chairs often cannot accomplish all that expected of
them or that they expect of themselves. Figure 5 depicts the internal conflict experienced by community college department chairs as an extreme condition that is farther along the continuum of the expected tensions and stresses of the department chair lived experience.

Figure 5. Relationship of department chair lived experience and internal conflict.
The Essence of the Internal Conflict

Whereas the examples of situations that generated internal conflict for chairs were easily drawn from their statements, the primary research question of this study demanded that we go beyond identifying the internal conflict to exploring the essence of that internal conflict. The essence of the internal conflict exists as the characterizing core within the internal conflict and depended on analysis for its detection as the key aspect or ingredient that rendered the internal conflict viable. Through analysis and interpretation of the participants’ statements about the best parts and the worst parts about being department chair, I began to perceive that the worst part about being department chair was somehow twisted into or enmeshed within the best part. In other words, as chairs enthusiastically discussed the best parts about being chair, they were often pulled up short by an aspect of their roles that pricked them rather painfully, as it caused them to dejectedly acknowledge their inability to carry out their intended behaviors. Earlier in this study, I described this condition of being thwarted in chairs’ intentions as “the lack of decision power and authority to control resources that would make it possible for chairs to fulfill their responsibilities according to their own standards.” To be sure, this limitation of authority is a function of the structure within which most community college department chairs operate, since most of the important decisions that they make with their faculty—whether regarding expending funds, hiring full-time faculty, offering new courses, revising programs, or even hiring clerical support—depend on approval from a superior. And all too often, that approval is denied. Therefore, the essence of the internal conflict that chairs experience is that, committed as they are to an idea or goal or dream, they lack the authority to turn their dreams into reality.
Chairs expressed the internal conflict that they felt in a number of ways. In the interviews, they expressed their feelings verbally, allowing their words to describe the consternation or anger or anguish that sometimes pervaded their days. In the interviews, they actually seemed to surrender into the feelings, releasing themselves from the contained packages that they kept closed as they went about their daily chair tasks. They allowed the feelings to flow through their words to tell me of the situations, past and present, that sometimes caused them physical pain, sometimes mental anguish.

In addition to the verbal expression chairs gave to their internal conflict, they also acknowledged unspoken behaviors that resulted from those feelings. The first of these behaviors was to try to avoid continuing as department chair at a time when it was possible to escape the role. This and other behaviors were explored through research sub-question 1, which uncovered ways in which the chair internal conflict manifested itself. These attempts took several forms. In an attempt to keep up with the demands of their jobs, the participants worked many more hours per week than they thought they should or wanted to. They lost sleep and time with their families; they experienced a range of unpleasant feelings, including sadness, hurt, anger, frustration, and even physical exhaustion. Recognizing that their lives were out of balance due to the excessive demands of day-to-day realities, the chairs struggled to find ways to balance life-work issues in order to make it possible for them to cope with their internal conflict and to handle their jobs. This research sub-question also revealed that a further behavior practiced, not by chairs, but by non-chair faculty members in reaction to the observed realities of the lived chair role, was avoidance: nobody else wanted the job.
The activities of chairs who had arrived at a point where they were relatively successful at identifying and employing practices that would mitigate the internal conflict represent a level of growth that perhaps only few chairs enjoy at any given time. Of the six study participants, only two of the chairs may have achieved this category. Prof. Bruce seemed to have found a kind of mature calmness that allowed him to know that, even though something was terribly disturbing to him at the present, the passage of time would mute its sting or moderate the demand that was generating the internal conflict. Being near retirement and having spent many years as chair, he had lived through many experiences that probably disturbed his younger self. Now, he was able not only to understand the beginning and middle of a conflict-generating situation, but also to anticipate its likely withdrawal or end. Prof. Franz engaged in a regular practice of daily long-distance running. While his running did not make his internal conflict disappear, the physical activity surely had both a physical and a psychological effect on him. He said that running everyday helped him a lot to cope with his everyday life as chair.

Chair tasks that contributed to internal conflict for chairs were reported in the answers to research sub-question 2. Chairs identified these tasks as (a) ordinary and expected tasks performed without adequate clerical support, (b) multiple ordinary tasks requiring completion simultaneously, (c) handling complaints against full-time faculty, (d) handling complaints against adjunct faculty when they are excessively time-consuming, (e) assessment tasks, (f) attending inefficient and seemingly unnecessary meetings, (g) functioning within insensitive bureaucratic practices, and (h) participating in the exploitation of adjunct faculty. Examples of these tasks form the body of the
definitions of internal conflict described in the chair experiences reported in the previous
discussion.

**The impact of the internal conflict on the department chairs was revealed in**
their comments about themselves, the topic of research sub-question 3. Chairs
understood that their roles were fraught with tension, stress, and internal conflict. Even
though they found this reality an initially shocking aspect of their roles, they were able to
perceive a range of possibilities of the role. They became hooked to some aspect of the
role that elicited their dedication and provided the inspiration for them to continue in the
role. They saw themselves first as teachers committed to community college students,
and as leaders setting a vision and goals for their departments; and they dedicated
themselves to achieving those goals. They felt they were lucky to be teaching in their
settings and saw themselves as representatives of their disciplines and their colleges.
Even though the chairs could not explain the logic of their hard work in the face of so
many sources of internal conflict, they acknowledged that there was something that kept
pulling them into the role.

**Can Internal Conflict be Avoided?**

Given the frequency and impact of internal conflict in the chair role, it seemed
appropriate to consider whether it is possible for department chairs to avoid the
experience of internal conflict. Though this study is not representative of all community
college department chairs by any means, results suggest that it is not likely that chairs can
avoid internal conflict completely. As stated above, the first component of internal
conflict for chairs is their own commitment to a goal or personal ideal. A subsequent
component of internal conflict is commitment to a countervailing entity that necessitates action in opposition to those prior allegiances. Department chairs, placed as they are in a structure that grants them limited authority in their role, frequently lack the decision power to make the kind of pragmatic adjustments—of time or money allocation, for example—that might be necessary for internal conflict to be averted. Chairs are routinely accountable to at least two levels of constituents below them, in faculty and students, and to at least three levels of authority immediately above them, in their deans, vice-presidents, and presidents. Thus, the structure within which chairs function assigns them tasks to accomplish and simultaneously curtails their depth and range of influence. Given the ubiquity of this organizational structure of community colleges, it is unlikely that chairs will avoid internal conflict.

In my study, all the chairs reported experiencing internal conflict at some point. For some, the greater agonizing conflict was in the past, and some were experiencing its intense pain during the study. Thus, the degree of internal conflict seemed to vary from chair to chair and within individual chairs, depending on the time or the circumstance or issue. It seemed that the topics about which individual chairs cared most were the topics around which they experienced greater intensity of internal conflict. So what does this mean for the lived experience of the chair? A basic question would seem to be, “Is the internal conflict a bad thing, something to be avoided at all costs?” Or does the internal conflict serve a useful purpose in the chair’s life and work?

Since the greater internal conflict seemed to run parallel with chairs’ greater commitment to specific goals, a foolish conclusion might be that chairs could avoid internal conflict by giving up their goals. If chairs simply accepted a routine of
departmental management and did not commit to any particular goals, they might avoid the experience of internal conflict. While this seems a logical possibility in theory, the research results demonstrated that it is very unlikely that flesh-and-blood department chairs will not develop commitments to any aspect of their responsibility. Failure to do so would be contrary to the ideals of visionary leadership, which chairs described as their first responsibility. We can conclude, therefore, that if internal conflict serves the purpose of keeping chairs agitated to continue fighting to accomplish their academic goals, the internal conflict can be seen as a useful tool for inspiring progress toward goals: a good thing. Indeed, the results showed that after chairs’ initial shock at the amount of work and internal conflict involved in being department chair, most chairs in this study did not try to find ways to contain the work and internal conflict, but rather struggled to find strategies that would make themselves more effective in handling both the workload and the internal conflict.

This commitment to goals occurs, not because all department chairs are a special breed of hero, as one might infer from the descriptions presented in this study of department chair self-sacrifice and commitment. Rather this commitment to goals occurs because there seems to be a consensus among the full college constituency as to the job description of department chairs: they are leaders, vision setters, mentors, planners, managers, and scholars (Gmelch & Miskin, 1995). Bennett (1988) described chairs as “custodians of standards” (p. 65), and administrators see them as first among their peers (Tucker, 1981). Indeed, the faculty-turned-chairs themselves, as evidenced by the participants of this study, share those definitions of their role; and they strive to fulfill the ideals of the role. That is where the hint of heroism quietly makes its presence felt, as
sitting chairs strive to live up to their own ideas of what it means to be a department chair. In fact, living up to the definition of the role of chair can actually be another source of internal conflict for chairs, as each struggles in his or her own way both to be a good department chair and to have a balanced life.

To be sure, some sitting chairs fall far short of this description, a fact confirmed by participants in this study who reported having to work with and around a few of their colleagues who no longer seemed to care about making progress as chairs. But these non-committed chairs were seen by those who criticized them as casualties of the role. In other words, it was the role itself, with its responsibilities, limitations of authority, and internal-conflict-generating experiences that lead some chairs to succumb to defeat. As reported by participants of this study, they gave up trying to be good chairs; and they accepted their failure. But this condition was an end result, not an initial position. As such, these non-committed chairs proved that commitment to goals is a key characteristic of department chairs because they who had abandoned commitment to goals likewise admitted by their behavior that they were no longer trying to live the definition of department chair. Thus, even those who no longer made the effort agreed on the ideals of the role of chair.

Again, I am not suggesting that all department chairs are heroes, rather, that the accepted definition of the department chair contains within it elements of heroic behavior toward which most committed chairs continue to strive. The participants of this study fell into this category, and they reported behaviors of chairs who did not. The relevance of this circumstance of variation in chair behavior is that it dramatizes the effect of internal conflict on chairs and, thereby, demonstrates the importance of discovering ways to
mitigate the negative effect of internal conflict in the role of department chair because if internal conflict becomes overwhelming for chairs, they will likely depart the chair or continue to occupy it ineffectively. Both of these outcomes constitute a loss for the community of the college.

We may conclude, therefore, that understanding the personal impact of the internal conflict experienced by chairs has been essential. Whether a chair perceives his or her experience as positive or negative depends on how the chair responds to the internal conflict, how the chair has been prepared for it, or how the chair is equipped by nature, by training, or by reflection to handle it. The lesson that some of the chairs in my study seemed to have learned was that the conflict can be useful, and its negative effect in their lives can be controlled by practices that serve to balance life.

**Even though chairs cannot likely avoid entirely the experience of internal conflict, the research suggested that the frequency and intensity of internal-conflict-generating experiences can be lessened.** Methods for lessening chair internal conflict include circumstances and chair skills that would increase the likelihood of chair success in achieving their goals and other measures that would remove factors that the chairs identified as sources of conflict. That is, chairs are less likely to experience unabated intense internal conflict if they can be reasonably successful in achieving some of their goals; and chair success is often a function of chair skills, many of which can be developed or increased with experience. These ideas were demonstrated by the chair participants as they discussed aspects of their daily lives that generated or assuaged their feelings of frustration, anger, or sense of failure.
Implications for Sitting Chairs

Sitting chairs can control the degree to which they experience internal conflict. This realization may not be apparent to new chairs, as they go about from day to day trying to live whatever dream they have imagined the experience of chair to be. However, as they gain experience in the chair role by being confronted with circumstances and situations that generate internal conflict for them, chairs are likely faced with realities that teach them that if they do not learn to bend, their inflexibility will cause them to crack—mentally, emotionally, or physically. Recognizing the appropriate time for and degree of flexibility that they should invoke will be revealed to chairs as they engage in professional collegial sharing with other chairs and through the practice of reflection, described by Schon (1983) as a tool equipping leaders to operate in settings of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict. Employing judicious flexibility need not represent an abandonment of chairs’ principles. Rather, it may teach them to develop more fully their skills of perception, analysis, introspection, perspicacity, farsightedness, patience, communication, and persuasion.

Sitting chairs who understand that their internal conflict is generated at least in part by their own perceptions can reduce that conflict by viewing their role as part of a larger context. Instead of focusing solely on their own goals, intentions, and perceptions, chairs can expand their vision to include not only the mandates but also the responsibilities of their superiors and other constituencies. If chairs are aware of the social, economic, and political pressures of their constituents, and if they develop an understanding of responsibilities and orientations other than their own, chairs may understand reasons for the limitations that are put on their own projects and activities.
Birnbaum (1988) explained that when colleges are seen as organizations, they are perceived as “groups of people filling roles and working together toward the achievement of common objectives”; and when they are seen as systems, “particular roles and structures seem less important and our concern is focused on the dynamics through which the whole and its parts interact” (p.1). He explained further that colleges, being social systems, are largely “symbolic inventions that exist because we believe in them” (Birnbaum, p. 1). Therefore, as chairs perceive themselves as existing within the college structure to perform a unique function, they may experience less internal conflict over a new board policy that they find disturbing if they consider the responsibility of board members to respond to community voices other than those of academic faculty. This understanding may, in appropriate circumstances, help to neutralize chairs’ sense of isolation and/or victimization.

Chairs who find themselves internally conflicted due to large numbers of student complaints against faculty may invest a bit more of their precious time in getting to know important details of the academic processes of offending faculty so as to diagnose the actual source(s) of student discontent. This is especially important in the cases of faculty who generate significant numbers of student complaints while at the same time earning the respect and appreciation of significant numbers of other students. Committing the extra time necessary to acquire a high level of familiarity with colleagues’ processes likely falls into the category described in Leaming (2007) as “staying in love,” to develop the compassion and empathy to see inside other people (p. 14). Chairs can use the time spent in investigating and hearing faculty responses to the complaints to respectfully explore their colleagues’ intentions, purposes, and methods.
These conversations can become non-directive approaches to encouraging faculty to inspire—rather than antagonize—their students.

**Sitting chairs can turn their internal conflict to productive use.** When sitting chairs reach out to understand others deeply, they may also come to understand that people whose principles and opinions differ sharply from their own are not necessarily evil, as chairs’ conflicted senses may suggest in their weaker moments. When chairs are able to explore the real meanings and background for situations that are causing them internal conflict—to the extent possible—they may find that they have the capacity to create and/or introduce solutions that would simultaneously solve the problems of their opponents and themselves.

**Sitting chairs who recognize the essence of their internal conflict can develop habits and pursue behaviors that will help them neutralize unproductive negative energy.** When chairs realize that they have experienced internal conflict in relation to their role and that they are, in fact, powerless to control certain aspects of their role that generate internal conflict for them, they can examine their daily routines to introduce practices that will help them to release the tensions and stresses that accompany the internal conflict. Strenuous physical activity has been demonstrated to be helpful in this matter. Discussing issues with fellow department chairs can help to remove the sense of loneliness and may also provide suggestions for solutions as a result of shared experience or wisdom. Family members may also provide support by listening. If no means of eliminating the causes of the internal conflict can be found, at least attempts can be made to mitigate its negative effect. One of these methods is recognition that all things change in due course.
Implications for Aspiring Chairs

Faculty who would otherwise aspire to the role of chair often avoid the role or face it with trepidation due to the turmoil of internal conflict that they observe in sitting chairs. The result of this reticence is that the pool of faculty who are willing to take on the role is small, often limited to faculty who are willing to give inordinate amounts of time to the role or who seek the role for reasons not entirely beneficial to the department. In order to reduce the negative personal impact of the role, aspiring chairs can prepare themselves for the role in ways that will reduce the possibility of internal conflict if and when they become chairs.

Aspiring chairs should serve on departmental and college-wide committees as preparation for the chair role. When departmental faculty participate in the functioning and governance of their departments and college, they learn how things work in their institutions and may come to understand the unique—and sometimes conflicting—agendas of trustees, administrators, faculty, clerical staff, students, community groups, and others. Serving on departmental committees, in addition to providing information on a range of departmental functions, will acquaint aspiring chairs more closely with the personalities and behavioral styles of their department colleagues with whom they will work in different ways as chair than simply as colleague. Inter-departmental committee work will also familiarize aspiring chairs with a wider range of college issues than those relating to their disciplines. Appreciation of the concerns of trustees, administrators, clerical staff, students, community groups, and others will serve to widen the vision of aspiring chairs to give them a more realistic idea of the demands of the chair role than they otherwise would have.
Aspiring chairs should work to develop and enhance their communication, problem-solving, negotiation, conflict-resolution, and time-management skills. These skills are basic tools for accomplishing chair tasks since chairs function in part as managers of people individually and in groups. As colleagues, chairs succeed through persuasion, rather than coercive power (Soranastaporn, 2001); whatever goals chairs have for their departments will depend for success on chairs’ abilities to convince colleagues and superiors of their validity. Other chair responsibilities involving disputes and complaints will depend for their successful resolution on chairs’ skills at understanding through empathetic listening and effective negotiation. Also, day-to-day issues will depend on chairs’ skills to analyze problems and find solutions to them. Researchers who have reported on chair issues confirm the essential importance of these skills (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Higgerson, 1996; Leaming, 2003; Tucker, 1992). Possessing these skills can mean the difference between chairs successfully handling difficult situations or having those situations descend into murky controversies that add to internal conflict for the chair. Therefore, faculty members who aspire to become chair should be consciously aware of the importance of these specific skills and should seek opportunities to develop these leadership tools, skills that will enhance the effectiveness not only of the chair but also of the department and college.

Aspiring chairs should prepare for the role of chair by confirming their willingness and readiness for its time-consuming reality, by establishing balance in their lives, and by putting into place methods to maintain that balance in difficult circumstances. It is certainly advisable that aspiring chairs spend time observing the chair in as many aspects of performing the role as possible. Since so much of the chair’s
deliberation and learning is accomplished privately, discussions between chairs and prospective chairs on topics important to the role would be beneficial.

**Implications for Administrators**

College administrators can reduce the likelihood of internal conflict in chairs by avoiding practices that chairs in the study identified as sources of internal conflict and by engaging in practices that chairs in the study identified as helpful to their successful functioning. Since department chairs are pivotal to the successful functioning and academic effectiveness of colleges (Bennett, 1988), efforts that contribute to conflict-free experience for chairs make it possible for chairs to devote greater proportions of their time and energies to effective conduct of their department goals and purposes.

**Administrators should provide clear explanations for denials of requests, especially when chairs and faculty have spent considerable professional time and effort to prepare the requests.** Clear explanations for denials of requests, even when chairs do not agree with the conclusions, indicate some level of respect for the effort involved in the request process. Explanations could reduce the frequency of chairs’ feelings of frustration. Indeed, when administrators keep chairs informed with as much information as possible about college operations, the college will likely benefit from creative solutions and offers of cooperation from chairs that may result in dynamic positive impact.

**Administrators should provide regular opportunities for chairs to engage in communities of practice.** As described by one of the study participants, regular opportunities for chairs to gather for discussion of topics important to chairs can serve to
enhance the effectiveness of chairs and to assuage feelings of isolation. When a problem that is generating internal conflict for one chair is shared with fellow chairs, professional discussion becomes a source of learning for all discussants. Through the reflection that constitutes and accompanies discussion, chairs can learn from each others’ experiences (Lees, 2006), thus providing a reservoir of professional expertise and support from which chairs benefit long after the discussions have ended. These practices may serve to decrease the internal conflict that individual chairs experience. Chairs will be able to draw on their colleagues’ experiences for greater understanding: strengthening themselves to endure and benefit from the internal conflict that is uniquely theirs.

Administrators should provide orientation or workshops for new chairs. Since most chairs have not had any special preparation for being chair, it is important that they be provided an opportunity to learn as much as possible about expectations of the role in their particular college in order to orient themselves and avoid avoidable pitfalls. Given the realities of college functioning, there will be surprises enough without adding routinely anticipated events to the list of conflict-generating circumstances. Since faculty may be reluctant to declare an overt interest in the chairmanship early in their careers due to a faculty value system that devalues “the desire for power or its cultivation” (Green, 1988a, p. 15), a basic orientation for the chairmanship may need to take place after new chairs have been identified.

Administrators should acknowledge the good work of chairs. The participants of this study who felt appreciated by their deans clearly showed a greater ability to accept and cope with the internal conflict that they could not avoid than those who felt they had no support from their superiors. The former seemed to express a resignation that all
things could not be expected to run smoothly at all times, while the latter expressed frustration and isolation, wondering why they continued to try to do the impossible.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study has examined the lived experience of community college department chairs by looking at the internal conflict experienced by them as they carried out their responsibilities of leadership. In the section above I have suggested behaviors by chairs themselves and adjustments that might be made in colleges to create settings where conflict-producing factors are minimized. I would challenge a community college administration to explore the maximum benefit achievable in an optimally productive environment for chairs. That is, we could explore what would happen in a college where, to the extent possible, the chairs were not affected by internal conflict that was generated by the conditions just identified. Or, perhaps a more practical goal might be to eliminate one or two identified sources of internal conflict and to study that environment.

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of chairs on an everyday basis. In order to avoid capturing chairs when they might still have been experiencing the stress of the true neophyte, the participants for this study had all been chairs for at least three years. They were familiar with chair duties and were, for the majority, also in fairly active periods of their personal lives. They had the responsibility of incorporating their chairmanship into a life that probably would have been somewhat eventful even if they were not chairs. The following research would add to the value and understanding of a wide span of the chair experience.
Repeat this study with chairs who have been in the role for specified longer periods of time: 10 - 15 years, 16 - 20 years, 21 - 25 years, 26 - 30 years, or more. The goal would be to learn whether the chairs had been able to further reduce the negative impact of internal conflict, based on their increased understanding and acceptance of the realities of their limited decision power and authority to control resources.

Explore with mature chairs questions like the following: What are your rules? What guides you? What balances you? What keeps you strong? What do you like/dislike about this job? How have you incorporated your role as chair into your personal life? How have you incorporated your personal life into your role as chair? How much longer will you remain chair? Do you expect to return to full-time teaching and leave the chairmanship? Do you expect a transition from chair to teaching only to be difficult? If you are planning to step down as chair soon, why did you decide to do so? What are your feelings, joys, regrets? Is there anything that has changed over the years that you thought would never change? Is there anything that has not changed over the years that you thought would certainly have changed? I think understanding chair responses to these questions would provide guidance and advice for younger chairs and may give them greater insight into the role of chair, its joys and its dangers.

Repeat this study after several of the implications of the study have been put in place to determine whether that implementation has had a strong positive impact on the lived experience of community college department chairs. I think the results might help to clarify just how the sources of conflict are or are not related to the chair conflict.

Replicate the study for hard science disciplines. Creswell, Seagren, and Henry (1979) contend that during the years of chairmanship, chairs in the hard sciences lose
more time for professional development and advancement than do chairs in the softer disciplines. My study focused on chairs in English, Humanities, and Social Sciences. I made no attempt to explore the phenomenon of conflict in department chairs in the hard sciences. Therefore, the study needs to be replicated among hard science chairs to see whether they experience similar internal conflict, its manifestations, the offending tasks, and chair self-description.

Replicate the study with a larger sample. A study with a larger sample, where decisions and situations that reflect conflict, conflict resolution, or lack thereof could be explored in great detail to be probed for a wide range of meanings. Such a study could provide greater tangible evidence of the importance of the issues addressed here and could likely increase the strength of transferability of the findings of this study.

Closing

This study has been very important to me, not simply as an academic accomplishment, but also as a testament to the magnificent professionalism of thousands of community college department chairs. According to the participants in the study, it was also important to them. It provided an opportunity for them to reflect on the meaning of their roles and the significance of their roles to themselves and to society. They identified the process of reflection as healing, and they expressed a desire to do this kind of meditative reflection on a regular basis throughout their terms as chair.
References


Brann, J. (1972). The chairman: An impossible job about to become tougher. In J. Brann & T. A. Emmett (Eds.), *The academic department or division chairman: A complex role* (pp. 5-27), Detroit, MI: Balamp Publishing.


Appendix A

Permission Seeking Materials
Description of Research

My research project is designed to describe and understand the unique personal experience of the public community college academic department chair, positioned between faculty and administration. The study will consist of multiple individual interviews (2 for the pilot study, 4 for the full study) with chairs of English, Humanities, or Social Sciences departments who are also teaching faculty.

Since this is an in-depth qualitative study, a small number of research participants is anticipated. Research sites may be any of the public community colleges in the State of Illinois, but as a matter of practical convenience, proximity to the Chicago area will be preferred. It is important to note that the study will not capture or report any information that will identify either the research site or the individual department chair. Pseudonyms or coding will be used throughout the project in order to guarantee complete confidentiality. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has approved this research project.

This description of research is presented as an explanation of the purpose and process of my research for the purpose of gaining permission from your institution to conduct research on your campus. If you have further questions, please contact me by telephone or E-mail, as indicated above.
Raymonda T. Johnson, Doctoral Candidate, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Introductory sections of the Dissertation named below presented to Potential Participants for the purpose of encouraging participation in the project

**Conflicting Essences: A Phenomenological Study of the Internal Conflict Experienced by Public Community College Academic Department Chairs**

Academic department chairpersons occupy a position of trust and responsibility in the organizational structure of most colleges. When information must be communicated to faculty, the chair acts as conduit. When new college policy must be explained and/or implemented, the chair mobilizes support and leads the initiative. When students seek redress of grievances—real or imagined—they turn or are directed to a department chair. From above the position of faculty and from below it, the department chair wrestles with issues, seeks solutions, and negotiates terms for the betterment of the college, the department, and the students.

Within their departments, chairpersons occupy a position that must be sensitive to and responsive to the goals, priorities, and expectations of several opposing forces. While there is general agreement that the primary purpose of a college is the education of its students (Bennett, 1998), the various constituencies who make up the college—administration, faculty, clerical, staff, and students—see the institution from different perspectives and attach different and varying ranges of value to the many elements essential to college functioning.

As department chairs work to solve problems for these varying constituencies, there is the possibility of internal conflict because the solution for one individual’s problem often violates the legitimate claims of another. Thus, standing in the nexus between teaching faculty and various iterations of college administration, and having reason and responsibility to identify with and respond to each—while also championing the rights of students—department chairs accept challenges from many sides, as they are expected by each to generate meaningful solutions to myriad daily problems.

Department chairs may also be teaching faculty. Young’s survey of Illinois public community college department chairs (2007) reveals that approximately 68% of public community college department chairs in Illinois are teaching faculty. As such, they prepare and present instructional lessons, administer and evaluate assessments of student learning, keep records of student attendance and academic progress, and participate in departmental and college-wide committee activities. The result is that department chairs, faculty-scholars, take on a role that, according to Tucker (1981), requires extraordinary behaviors. As “first among equals,” (p. 4) chairs live out the paradoxical inconsistency of simultaneously operating both within and above their departments. This dual existence, according to Gmelch and Miskin (2004), is most perilous for the chair as relates to the chair as scholar: the identity most damaged in the daily life of the academic department chair is that aspect which was at the center of his/her academic professionalism.
The method by which department chairs are selected contributes to the duality of perspectives experienced by them (Creswell, Wheeler, Seagren, Egly, & Beyer, 1990; Hecht et al., 1999). Some chairs are appointed, others recommend by their departments for appointment, others elected by department members—individual faculty taking turns in the position (Hecht et al., 1999). The result is that an individual who shares the same status as other members of the department, usually having no special preparation for the role of chair (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Hecht et al., 1999), is selected to lead the department (Hecht et al., 1999). Upon confirmation, a new chair, along with the privilege to lead, accepts the responsibility to function as a superior.

The purpose of this study is to describe the essence of the internal conflict inherent in the role of public community college academic department chair. The study will be conducted with the expectation that understanding the nature of this conflict can provide a basis for developing—in sitting and prospective chairs—the capacity, (leadership) skills, and personal principles that will equip chairs to successfully manage their roles.

To achieve the outcome identified in the purpose of the study, the primary research question of the study is the following:
1. What is the essence of the internal conflict in the role of the public community college academic department chair?

This larger question will be probed directly and through the following sub-questions:
2. How does the internal conflict in the role of the public community college academic department chair manifest itself?
3. Of the many tasks of department chairs, which chair tasks seem to create internal conflict for the public community college academic department chair?
4. Through what perceptions and with what words do public community college academic department chairs present images of themselves?

The research protocol for this study will follow the methods of phenomenological human science inquiry (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990), the primary tool of which is multiple, one-on-one, in-depth interviews. The data collection will consist of four 60-minute interviews.

Raymonda T. Johnson
REFERENCES


Appendix B

Pilot Study Materials
1. Will you describe the college and organizational structure of your campus?

2. Who is your immediate superior in this structure? How would you describe your relationship with your superior?

3. How long have you been chair? How were you selected as department chair?

4. Assuming that you do teach classes, what proportion of your time is devoted to teaching and what proportion to chair’s work? How is this balance working for you in terms of all your responsibilities?

5. Would you describe your background, what brought you to this career and this campus, and what your professional goals are?

6. What were some of your thoughts about department chairs, and what influenced you to seek the chairmanship?
7. Would you describe your major responsibilities as chair?

8. What are other tasks that you are responsible for?

9. Are there responsibilities that you have had to accept that were surprising to you or that you were not prepared to meet?

10. How did you respond to these situations? How did you feel in these situations?

11. What is it that takes most of your time? Is this how you expected to spend most of your time? How does this make you feel?

12. What does it feel like as you respond to administrators? To faculty? To clerical staff? To students? Have you had situations where satisfying one person would make you violate the wishes of another? Would you describe some of those situations?

13. What would you say is the most difficult or perplexing aspect of being chair?

14. How do you cope with these feelings?

15. Has your personal life suffered in any way since you became chair?

16. How long do you think you will continue as chair? Why?
You are invited to participate in a research study designed to describe and understand the internal conflict experienced by public community college academic department chairs. Your contribution to the study will add to the professional understanding and knowledge of the department chair lived experience. I am Raymonda Johnson, and I am conducting this research as part of my doctoral dissertation under the direction of Debra D. Bragg, Ph. D., Professor in the Department of Educational Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

As part of the study, I will be conducting multiple in-depth face-to-face individual interviews with professionals who chair departments of English, humanities, or other academic disciplines in public community colleges. The 60 to 90-minute interview sessions will be recorded and will be scheduled about a week apart. The audiotapes will be transcribed and coded to remove individuals’ names and will be erased after the study is completed. Participants will be asked to keep a journal during the course of the interviews. These journals are reflection aids for the participant and will not be read or collected by me. (As researcher, I will also be keeping my own journal during the process.)

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Your responses will be completely confidential and will not be linked to you personally. Any identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms or codes in the transcripts of the recordings.

At the conclusion of the study, all data and materials will be archived for a period of three years and then destroyed. The results of the research may be disseminated as part of a dissertation, journal article, workshop for department chairs, or conference presentation.

Risks associated with participation in the study are anticipated to be minimal. You may experience mild distress at recalling unpleasant events, but the reflection process will likely bring a sense of closure and accomplishment to these events. The interview sessions will consume several hours of your time, but you will be adding to professional understanding and may gain personal benefits through reflective practice.

If you have questions or concerns about this research study, please contact Raymonda Johnson, the researcher, at 773-324-2865 or by e-mail at rtjohnso@uiuc.edu or Dr. Debra Bragg, UIUC professor and research supervisor, at 217-244-8974 or by e-mail at dbragg@uiuc.edu.

I have read and understood the information above and voluntarily agree to participate in the study as described. I understand that I will not receive compensation for my participation. I am between the ages of 18 and 64 years. I have received a copy of this consent agreement.

Signature  
Date

I do agree to have the interviews audio taped for the purposes of transcription.

Signature  
Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant please contact Anne Robertson, Bureau of Educational Research, 217-333-3023 or arobrtson@uiuc.edu or the Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or irb@uiuc.edu.
Full Study Interview Protocol

Interview One

1. Will you describe the college and organizational structure of your campus?

2. Who is your immediate superior in this structure?
   How would you describe your relationship with your superior?

3. How long have you been chair?
   How long had you been a faculty member before becoming chair?
   How were you selected as department chair?
   What influenced you to seek the chairmanship?

4. Would you describe your background?
   What brought you to this career and this campus?
   What are your professional goals?

5. How many full time faculty are there in your department?
   How many part time faculty are there?
   How many classes are part time faculty permitted to teach?

6. Assuming that you do teach classes, what proportion of your time is devoted to teaching and what proportion to chair’s work?
   How is this balance working for you in terms of all your responsibilities?

7. Would you describe your major responsibilities as chair?

8. What are other tasks that you are responsible for?

9. What were some of your thoughts or assumptions about department chairs before you became chair?
   Have those ideas changed in any way?

10. How long do you think you will continue as chair? Why?
21. Are there responsibilities that you have had to accept that were surprising to you or that you were not prepared to meet?

22. Do you have responsibilities outside the department? 
   Do you have responsibilities outside the college?

23. How did you respond to these unexpected situations?

24. How did you feel in these situations?  
   Can you describe any attitudes or feelings that were generated by these tasks or situations?

25. What is it that takes most of your time?  
   Is this how you expected to spend most of your time?  
   How does this make you feel?

26. As you think over your schedule of responsibilities over the last week or so, is there anything you want to mention in addition to what you’ve already discussed?

27. What kinds of requests or responsibilities do you get from the various constituencies of the college and community?

28. What does it feel like as you respond to administrators?  
   To faculty? To clerical staff? To students? To community concerns?

29. What would you say is the most difficult or perplexing aspect of being chair?

30. Have you had situations where satisfying one person would make you violate the wishes or interests of another?  
   Would you describe some of those situations?  
   How do you feel in these situations?  
   How do you cope with these feelings?
Full Study Interview Protocol

Interview Three

31. How do you see yourself as department chair?

32. How would you describe yourself as department chair?

33. What are you trying to accomplish as department chair?

34. Have you perceived any change in attitude or relationship with individual faculty since you became chair?

35. Have you had situations where you have had to deal with colleagues who were experiencing illnesses or difficult life situations that were affecting their professional performance? To the extent that you wish to, can you describe some of these situations? How did you deal with these situations? How did you feel as you dealt with these situations?

36. Has dealing with any of the situations of your responsibility had any affect on you that you can identify?

37. Has your personal life suffered in any way since you became chair?

38. Has your personal life been enhanced in any way since you became chair?

39. What is the best part about being chair?

40. What is the worst part about being chair?
41. We’ve spent a few sessions discussing some of your experiences as department chair. Is there anything that you’ve thought of over the past few weeks that you’d like to discuss or that you’d like to discuss further or to say more about?

42. Is there any question that I did not ask that you think I should have asked? What is that question? Would you answer that question? Why do you think that is an important question?

43. Is there anything that you have learned as chair that you wish you had known before you became chair or that you’d like all potential chairs to know?

44. Would you describe what the experience of doing these interviews has been?

45. If you kept a journal since we started these conversations or during any part of this time, what effect do you think journaling has had on your reflections and expressions?

46. Has discussing aspects of your role as chair had any impact on your thinking or behavior as chair?

47. Is there anything we’ve discussed in these conversations that you would have preferred not to remember? Why?

48. Do you have any advice for me as I continue in this research project?
You are invited to participate in a research study designed to describe and understand the internal conflict experienced by public community college academic department chairs. Your contribution to the study will add to the professional understanding and knowledge of the department chair lived experience. I am Raymonda Johnson, and I am conducting this research as part of my doctoral dissertation under the direction of Debra D. Bragg, Ph.D., Professor in the Department of Educational Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

To gather data for the study, I will be conducting four in-depth face-to-face individual interviews with professionals who chair departments of English, humanities, or social science disciplines in Illinois public community colleges. The 60 to 90-minute interview sessions will be recorded and will be scheduled about a week apart. The audiotapes will be transcribed and coded to remove individuals’ names and will be erased after the study is completed. Participants will be encouraged to keep a journal during the course of the interviews, but doing so is optional. These journals are reflection aids for the participant and will not be read or collected by me. (As researcher, I will also be keeping my own journal during the process.)

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Your responses will be completely confidential and will not be linked to you personally. Any identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms or codes in the transcripts of the recordings.

At the conclusion of the study, all data and materials will be archived for a period of three years and then destroyed. The results of the research may be disseminated as part of a dissertation, journal article, workshop for department chairs, or conference presentation.

Risks associated with participation in the study are anticipated to be minimal. You may experience mild distress at recalling unpleasant events, but the reflection process will likely bring a sense of closure and accomplishment to these events. The interview sessions will consume four to six hours of your time, but you will be adding to professional understanding and may gain personal benefits through reflective practice.

If you have questions or concerns about this research study, please contact Raymonda Johnson, the researcher, at 773-324-2865 or by e-mail at rtjohnso@uiuc.edu or Dr. Debra Bragg, UIUC professor and research supervisor, at 217-244-8974 or by e-mail at dbragg@uiuc.edu.

I have read and understood the information above and voluntarily agree to participate in the study as described. I understand that I will not receive compensation for my participation. I am between the ages of 18 and 64 years. I have received a copy of this consent agreement.

Signature
Date
I do agree to have the interviews audio taped for the purposes of transcription.

Signature
Date
If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant please contact Anne Robertson, Bureau of Educational Research, 217-333-3023 or arrogtsn@uiuc.edu or the Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or irb@uiuc.edu.
Appendix D

Thematic Discussion of Emerging Themes Expressed by Chairs
Eight themes that emerged from the clustering of horizons in the data were the following: (a) lack of competition in chair selection; (b) surprise at the chair workload; (c) working within the context of a unionized faculty and, in some cases, unionized adjunct faculty; (d) impact of the relationship with their dean on chair behavior and performance; (e) concern with work ethic of other chairs; (f) emergence of Arabic studies on their campuses; (g) effect on the chairs of participating in the research study interviews; and (h) effect on the chairs of their being chair. The themes were addressed at varying points during the interviews, and individual chair comments about a theme were not necessarily expressed in the same context as others on the same theme.

**Lack of competition in chair selection: “Well, I think I just sort of emerged.”**

In the first interview, the chairs were asked how they were selected as chairs. I had crafted this question because I knew from the literature that there are different paths to the chair appointment, and I wondered whether I would find any difference of chair lived experience that might somehow be related to the manner of selection. Also, I knew from my own experience that chairs are sometimes democratically elected by department members, with that selection being sent up to administration for official appointment. In my case, the appointment was by the president. What emerged from the chairs’ responses to this question about selection was that none of them had had to compete for the chairmanship, although the process of becoming a department chair was somewhat unique. In answering the question each chair detailed the scenario of his or her appointment.
Prof. Albert described his selection as a kind of progression from his role as lead teacher, a role he had accepted based on his desire and willingness to mentor adjunct faculty and administrative approval of his academic quality:

Well, I think it just sort of emerged out of that discipline lead notion ... I don’t know how much of that was planned to eventually become a chair, or if that was sort of accidental ... I’m second in seniority in the area, and the person who’s first in seniority has a lot of responsibility running our international program....They may have just gone first with seniority and it worked out. And then I just sort of had it since then.

Prof. Albert’s description presented a casual, almost effortless, approach to the chair; and “it worked out” because he evidently performed satisfactorily. His concluding sentence, “I just sort of had it since then,” suggests a similarly effortless continuance in office based on a drama-free stability. Prof. Bruce likewise, when the previous chair retired, was the second in seniority, where the first was busy with other activities and stated specifically that he did not want to become chair. As Prof. Bruce said, “Nobody else in the department was that interested in it.” He felt he got the job by default because nobody else wanted it.

Prof. Carroll said she was not looking to be chair when she applied for the full-time position, but “that’s what the job was.” She was hired into a waning department where “everyone in the humanities and philosophy department was leaving. ... No one had paid much attention to the department for a few years. And building up to those retirements, things were in quite disarray.” She was hired with the expectation that when the current chair retired, she would become chair and would have the responsibility “to participate in this total rebuilding of the department.” She said she was happy to do this.

Prof Donald, being the only full-time faculty in his department, said he was “a team of one.” Not only was there no competition for the chairmanship, but he has no
academic discipline peer colleagues, which is an unusual and surely an undesirable reality. In response to the question of how she was selected as chair, Prof. Estelle said simply, “Everybody else in my department was getting ready to retire. I was going to be the only tenured person left.” Though she did not at first want to become chair, she accepted the chairmanship to protect the department from administrative control from outside the department. In accepting the role, she fulfilled a primary chair function. Prof. Franz did have to apply and described his process as follows:

The vice-president of academic affairs sends out a notice every two years that department chair appointments are up…. Usually there’s just one applicant, so it isn’t usually a big drama. My predecessor had been chair for seventeen years. I took over when he retired. His predecessor had been the chair for ten years.

Prof. Franz’ statement highlights the lack of competition and the lack of turnover for chair in his department. If the sitting chair can simply re-apply until he/she no longer wishes to be chair, the longer terms are understandable. Whereas Prof. Franz was appointed by his academic vice-president, the other chairs were appointed by their deans.

As these chair experiences indicate, much of the ease of their transition to chair was related to large numbers of faculty retiring at the same time or in very close periods of time. Prof. Estelle used the words “they were getting ready to retire.” These words could be interpreted to mean that for the affected faculty, they were actively making preparation to leave, as opposed to putting their energies into teaching. This idea was not put forward by Prof. Estelle in reference to her faculty, but the idea was clearly intended by Prof. Carroll as she described her department as a place where “no one had paid much attention to the department in a few years” and its being in “quite disarray.” Perhaps this lack of competition for the chairmanship had something to do with the historical context. My own experience would support that this situation was historically contextual. When I
was elected chair in 1992, I ran unopposed, in contrast to previous elections, where there were as many as four candidates seeking the office. Due to large numbers of faculty retirements within narrow time periods, competition for the chairmanship can vary from active to non-existent. Stability in the chair role also decreases competition.

**Surprise at the chair workload: “So much time.”** Some of the chairs had formal or informal preparation for their roles as chair, and some did not; however, most of them said that once they had become chair, they were surprised at the workload. It would be understandable that those who did not have preparation might be surprised at the actual amount of work involved in being chair. But even those who had formal training, or who had opportunity to observe the former chair, found the actual experience of being chair one requiring much more work than they had been prepared for. Questions in the second interview probed chairs’ responsibilities and time expenditure relative to their expectations before becoming chair. In response to these questions, Prof. Estelle expressed her surprise:

> I did not expect to have as much administrative paper work and so on. I think the person who was chair before me, who I shared an office with, it seemed like most of what she was did was just teach. I didn’t see her doing a lot of the scheduling and the reports and those kinds of things. So I think I was a little surprised [at] the timeline, and how we had to stay on top of assessment and these kinds of things.

Prof. Estelle said that she did not see the former chair doing the paperwork even though she shared an office with the chair. Of course, she only saw the chair work when they were in the office together, and Prof. Estelle may have been unaware of times when the chair worked alone or took work home. Prof. Estelle did not mention ever having discussed the workload with the former chair, even though she did say that the chair had encouraged her to take the chairmanship. Prof. Estelle said that her pre-chair orientation
was with her dean. It is possible that the dean’s instructions could not prepare her for the day-to-day reality of the chair’s lived experience.

Prof. Donald was surprised and somewhat frustrated by the fact that he needed to apply for grants, placing them among the “unwritten responsibilities that are not in the job description manual” that “continue to appear almost every day.”

All of a sudden I realized that I also had to look for grants outside the institution to get some funding. And that requires a lot of effort and [is] time consuming. So now not only [do] I have the responsibility to see within the classroom and the offices, but also now it’s outside the institution.

An element of surprise for Prof. Albert was that he had to handle issues of student misbehavior in the classroom. He said “anything that would have to do with a student in the classroom maybe having to be removed” he knew would be handled ultimately by the “vice-president for the student side of the college.” Therefore, he assumed since he was a chair, but “still faculty although we have … some administrative duties,” that he would not be responsible for any of these kinds of complaints. Prof. Albert recognized that administrators have the authority to officially remove students from classes, and he concluded that they would then handle such cases fully. His surprise was that before the administrator acted, the chair was required to conduct an investigation and possibly make a recommendation. He was also unaware that when he transitioned from lead faculty to department chair his responsibilities shifted from mentoring adjuncts to encompass a host of quasi-administrative tasks, which he was unprepared to handle. He said in a later interview that training in conflict resolution would have been helpful to him.

For Prof. Carroll the biggest surprise was how many student complaints she had to deal with, and the second was that “so much time would have to be spent on assessment related activities.” For Prof. Franz the surprise was that he had to deal with
student complaints at all. He said, “I didn’t expect to be really handling student complaints when they would be against full-time instructors. Again, because I’m not their supervisor. And the college makes very clear that the supervisor for the full-time faculty is a dean.” Prof. Franz’ words address what he perceived to be a college policy that he had interpreted logically. The error for him was that his logical conclusion was not the way the policy was actually implemented. This situation I think points to the unpredictability and frustration of the chair’s life: when one brings to bear one’s best intentions and abilities and the conclusion does not fit the reality. Despite appearances from the outside, the chair role is more complex than can be imagined and chairs do not fully comprehend their roles until they have entered them.

**Working within the context of a unionized faculty: “One foot in each side.”**

All of the participants worked within the context of a unionized faculty, specifically the American Federation of Teachers. I use the word *context* here and not *environment* because I do not mean to suggest that the settings of the colleges were emotionally charged by having their faculty working under union contracts, an idea I associate more with the word *environment*. At least at the time of my interviews, unionization was not a point of contention; it was not a stress; it was not a strain. The unionization of faculty was simply a factual context within which the chairs and their faculty colleagues operated. But this topic is important and still warrants mentioning here because unionization is the fact upon which these community college chairs declare themselves to be first and foremost members of the faculty, not administration. Every single one of the chairs made this declaration at some point in an interview as a statement or expression of contractual identity.
That department chairs are faculty is the reason that the primary compensation for being department chair is an exchange of hours released from teaching. While some chairs also reported receiving a monetary stipend in addition to the “release time,” stipends are not a universal compensation for chairs in a unionized setting. For example, when I was department chair I did not receive an additional stipend above release time. I am not suggesting that it is unionization that prompts the chair’s commitment to faculty, as opposed to administration; but I do contend that unionization helps to sharpen the focus for any chair who is unsure of his or her inclination.

Prof. Franz described the chair-as-faculty identity as follows: “You feel like you have one foot in each side, but you really don’t. And I think we function best when we’re mindful of the fact that we are faculty members who assist the department by doing administrative duties.” Having established this caveat, Prof. Franz then applied the principle of chair-as-faculty to his responsibility for creating schedules. He said, “The tricky thing with that is that I don’t approve or disapprove of schedules. So I facilitate them.” He then explained that in creating individual faculty schedules he follows the union-mandated principle of seniority:

And basically the full time faculty members in the department will give me their wish list, what they would like to do. And then I follow—I’m very rigid about the whole thing—I follow a very rigid protocol where I do my very best to fill in what they have asked for within the parameters of following a combination of seniority, also being mindful of geography.

By geography, he refers to the fact that his is a sprawling physical campus, and he uses discretion in assigning faculty to classes that they can get to within the time between classes.
Other phrases are also important here, and they represent the bifurcation of a chair’s life relative to union matters. The phrases, “do my very best” and “very rigid protocol,” introduce opposing principles that do not generally operate simultaneously. “Very rigid protocol” suggests a process that does not bend or waver, that must be followed at all costs. “Do my very best,” on the other hand, implies a setting where reason, compassion, professionalism, and therefore flexibility hold sway. The principles behind these phrases are mutually contradictory; yet they aptly identify the chairs’ constraint and discretion in a unionized context: Rules must be followed, but common sense must prevail. The context of unionization is a backdrop for 21st Century community college professionalism (AFT). It provides structure and guidance for processes and behaviors.

**Impact of the relationship with their dean on chair behavior and performance: “Such a good dean.”** Two questions in the first interview prompted chairs to identify their immediate superiors in their college’s organizational structure and to describe their relationship with those persons. The questions were intended to provide contextualizing introductions of the chairs, but the intensely positive responses from some of the chairs, along with narratives of disastrous relationships with former superiors (shared in later interviews) prompted me to examine this topic in greater detail. Some very interesting responses emerged. When asked to describe her relationship with her superior, Prof. Carroll said, “My dean? Excellent. She’s the best dean in the history of the world.” Prof. Albert said, “Well my immediate superior is the dean for social sciences, and I would say that we have a very good relationship.” Prof. Franz said, “Among my best collegial relationships. He and I work very, very well together.” These comments
were precursors of narratives and discussions that demonstrated to me how strongly the relationships with their deans contributed to the chairs’ behavior in numerous situations.

During the course of the conversations, Prof. Albert frequently made reference to the help he had gotten from his dean. When he had an idea for expanding a department program and had created what he thought was a very good plan, he said that his dean’s greater experience made it possible for the dean to recommend adjustments that made the plan even better. Prof. Albert summarized the dean’s contribution by saying, “Again showing that sometimes deans come up with better ideas.” In another instance when he had become embroiled in a professional power struggle with a colleague that had become public through e-mails, Prof. Albert was about to send an angry e-mail response but decided first to seek counsel from his dean. He said his dean advised him not to press the Send button. The result of this restraint was that a more cooperative resolution to the situation was negotiated. In still another situation when he was having a dispute within his department and was about to react negatively, he said “it was only my dean which pulled me back.” These examples demonstrate the beneficial effect of a calm, wise dean on a younger, intense department chair.

I certainly probed Prof. Carroll’s hyperbolic description of her dean as “the best dean in the history of the world.” Asked to elaborate on her description of her dean, Prof. Carroll continued:

Well, one of the reasons I think she’s such a good dean, besides her character of course, and her extraordinary work ethic…is she was a department chair before becoming a dean….So she really understands how everything works, and she really understands the academic realities. She really understands the situation department chairs face. So she can both be very helpful in concrete senses and also advocates policies that make a lot of sense.
In this short passage, Prof. Carroll used the phrase “really understands” three times. She appreciated someone who understands the complexity of the work she herself does, who respects it in part because she had done that work, and who is able to give good practical guidance while also advocating supportive policies. In a later interview Prof. Carroll said that, whereas she sometimes spent 70 hours a week at the college, she felt supported by a dean who seemed to work just as hard. I think it is worth noting that the dean carried the work ethic from her chair responsibility to her dean responsibility in a way that is obvious to the chairs whom she supervises.

In contrast to those extraordinarily positive responses describing relationships with their deans, in response to the same question Prof. Bruce said, “It’s very good. She’s easy to get along with, accessible. Unfortunately, she has some health issues right now, so she hasn’t been here very much lately. So I’ve had to deal mostly with the assistant-dean lately.” He continued, “Since I’ve been chair, I think we’re on our third dean now, in the last ten years roughly.” Asked about his relationship with the assistant-dean, he said, “The assistant-dean is fairly new also. She’s only been here about a year and a half or so.” Prof. Bruce’s bland tone suggested that he has not been able to rely on support from his deans over the years. Their short tenure certainly might be a reason for his feeling unsupported, but it is also possible that their short tenure might have been the result of lackluster performance. Fortunately his experience as faculty member and as chair taught him lessons he needed for success to this point in his career.

Prof. Donald said the following in describing his relationship with his dean: “Well, right now it’s good….But that said, it’s been rough in the last few months because of some physical movement of departments. And that causes some sort of friction here
and there. But on a professional level it is good.” He says the relationship is good right now, suggesting that this positive statement might not have been possible a few months earlier. He referred to friction in the recent past and seemed to be saying that it was only professionalism that has kept the relationship civil. This modulated response parallels the uncertainty regarding Prof. Donald’s department at the time, a situation that did grow worse, as will be described later in this analysis.

When asked to describe the relationship with her superior, Prof. Estelle said, “I guess it’s good. I mean I think I can go to him when I have concerns. He’s usually pretty busy. So for the most part, it’s usually kind of squeezing in time just randomly.” During the interviews Prof. Estelle described a few situations with her dean that would explain why her initial response, “I guess it’s good,” sounds as though there is some doubt on her part. In later discussions she described that in one encounter she was required to monitor the attendance of a full-time faculty member, a task she found inappropriate. In another situation, there was disagreement between her dean and herself about a hiring decision, which caused her considerable stress. It was the dean who conducted the training program she went through before becoming chair, although she described the training in this way: “I mean we have the summer training before you’re chair, but it’s more like ‘Here’s all the forms. Here’s all the paperwork you have to know how to do.’” She seems to suggest that familiarizing new chairs with forms was not adequate preparation for the range of responsibilities chairs shoulder. On the positive side, her dean was the person who recommended her for participation in the leadership conference that she was finding helpful to her professional development. These situations, I think, explain her lukewarm, somewhat ambivalent, responses relative to her dean.
It was interesting to me that when the chairs were asked to describe their relationships with their deans, they gave a short relational response, but followed that immediately with their evaluation of the deans. The point I want to make here is that the level of respect for their deans and the chairs’ relationship with their deans seem to color the chairs’ general attitude or exuberance about the deans and about the work of the chairs themselves.

**Concern with work ethic of other chairs: “Just blowing it off.”** Although only a few of the chairs in the study expressed concern with the work ethic of other chairs in their colleges, I think it is important to present this topic primarily because of the way the participants were identified. Because I had to go through the academic officers of the colleges to get permission to do research on the campuses before I had access to the chairs, some of the chairs initially responded to information provided by their deans. The deans then forwarded to me the names and contact information of possible research participants. So the participants I contacted were chairs who may have at least partially decided that they were willing to become part of the study, resulting in my having a partially self-selected research sample. It is likely that these chairs are among the more professionally generous in their colleges and may also demonstrate a stronger work ethic than other chairs in their colleges. I think that by noting participants’ concerns about other chairs in their colleges I will introduce to this study a broader perspective of chair behavior.

Though other participants acknowledged concern about poor performance on the part of other chairs, the concern was expressed most strongly by Prof. Carroll as she described a situation about a former chair who had to be replaced:
A department chair in this institution has so many responsibilities and so much power. Department chairs hire adjuncts. No one approves this. Department chairs make lots of decisions about the schedule. No one approves this. Department chairs can be conscientiously trying to do a good job of this, or they can be just blowing it off. And no one knows.

She continued that “Department chairs have such tremendous responsibilities…and they’re also not given adequate resources to do what they’re supposed to do. So some department chairs do their work….I think there’re just vast differences in, in terms of how chairs function.” She allowed that, “Given all the burdens on the deans, it’s not surprising that every dean is not at every moment checking into this.” Probing her statement regarding “vast differences” in chair functioning, I asked if she could—without naming names—pinpoint individuals whom she would describe as “just blowing it off” or “taking the easy road.” She answered simply, “Yes.”

The individual chairs she might have been referring to came up in a later discussion in the fourth interview with this same participant. Asked if there were questions I might have asked but did not, she replied that I might have asked what criticisms she had of other department chairs. Pursuing this question, she said the following:

I mean the thing that I feel most critical of is those department chairs that are not trying to think strategically….And then some department chairs who have given up through burnout cause I can understand it. But I think you have to not be a chair any longer once it’s happened to you. Because it really harms both adjuncts and students.

In this statement, Prof. Carroll identified as primary the condition she found in her own department when she joined it. Having experienced a department that she had described as “in quite disarray” and having spent great time and energy building courses and increasing enrollments, she was well aware of the effect of inattention to planning.
Throughout her criticism she was sensitive to chairs who had burned out, having done some fairly exhausting work herself, but she was mindful of the chairs’ responsibility to serve students and adjuncts. To her, the responsibility of being chair is great, and she seems to suggest that if one is no longer willing or able to function at a professional level, he or she should give up the role.

Her second criticism was of chairs who “behave in very territorial and not cooperative ways.” She said she’s “seen lots of cases” where chairs seem to feel “they might best preserve what they have by not supporting their colleagues in other departments. They see it as very competitive, and that’s a big mistake for everyone.” By regarding this behavior as “a big mistake for everyone,” she shows herself to be a strategist who has considered how to be successful in reaching goals and has decided that the path to success is through cooperation, not competition. In light of Prof. Carroll’s stated desire “to work for social justice in all things,” this is a logical position for her to take. In other conversations she reported turning down special treatment for her own department in the form of needed clerical assistance because she insisted that all chairs needed the help. She wanted to work to get sufficient help for all chairs.

Prof. Carroll offered a third criticism of other chairs as follows:

This is an even more difficult criticism to make because this would be true even of some people I respect very much. And it...could be applied to me at times too. It’s just hard when you’re overwhelmed, when you have a lot of work to do, it’s hard to then spend extra time to try and transform the system that’s creating the inappropriate amount of work. Cause it takes more work to try to get things in order.

I think this criticism makes it clear that Prof. Carroll is not simply criticizing people who are not like herself, that is, who don’t do things that she thinks are important. She seems to understand the humanness of her chair colleagues, that they are overwhelmed with
work, even as she expresses the importance of transforming the system they work in to make it function positively for all the participants. By including herself in the mix of faulty chairs, she tells us that her yardstick for chair quality is not her personal preference, but her perception of an ideal chair. She went on to describe a specific chair who never comes to meetings, and she expressed understanding that he was overwhelmed. But she expressed regret that, by separating himself from his colleagues, he is not participating in efforts that could transform the system to make it less onerous and more supportive. Her words tell us that she still has the expectation that things can be corrected and that she is willing to do the extra work to try to put things in better order.

These criticisms of other chairs present chair behaviors that may not be represented by other participants. However, the criticized chairs are colleagues of the participants with whom they interact; so they are part of the lived experience of the participants and therefore appropriate for inclusion here. Of the participants, only Prof. Bruce made reference to chair activities that he did not always attend: a faculty learning community for chairs, which met monthly in the evenings. This however was more a collegial social gathering, not an on-campus professional activity. By describing chair concerns about other chairs who might not be working with similar purpose or effort as their own, we get a more balanced look at chair behaviors than by observing only the participants, who may be among the more high-performing of chairs.

Emergence of Arabic studies: “This globalizing and anti-racist project.” According to some of the participants, there has been a noticeable increase of Arabic-speaking immigrants to the areas served by their colleges. Two of them were taking steps to address Arabic cultural needs. Prof. Franz was very proud that two years ago his
college added Arabic to the foreign languages taught, along with Spanish, French, and German. At the time of the interviews, he was in the process of hiring a full-time person in a program that he described as “exploding in terms of student interest and … relevance in the world.”

Prof. Carroll was in the process of trying to build a department that has a globalized curriculum. She made these comments about her discipline:

Philosophy…is taught entirely within the European tradition, as though Europe and the United States were the only places that existed. And when there are obviously important philosophical traditions in the rest of the world that are just dismissed as unimportant, then this dismissal is profoundly racist. And so I’ve been trying to build a department that does have a globalized curriculum. And that’s a difficult and exciting task. And it’s also meant that I’ve had to learn many things that I didn’t know about before.

So last year, in an attempt to fill in her own learning, Prof. Carroll started studying Arabic because, as she said, “some of the most important philosophy in the history of the world has been written in Arabic.” She said she has also tried to make hiring decisions reflect this focus. She reported that her department is revising “all [their] generic syllabi trying to look at them in terms of this globalizing and anti-racist project.” I think that her commitment to learning Arabic will not only enhance the educational experience of Arabic-speaking students, but will also greatly deepen the philosophical learning experience of all her students by virtue of her department’s revised programs. In responding to the academic needs of the growing Arabic-speaking student population, chairs were increasing the offerings and quality of their departmental programs.

Effect on the chairs of participating in the research interviews: “Our talks reflected reality.” Questions in the fourth interview asked chairs to reflect on the interview process to expand on any idea or to bring up ideas they thought should have
been covered but were not. I was also especially concerned to know whether the chairs regretted remembering any of the sometimes-negative experiences that we had discussed. I was happy to hear that even those most reticent in expressing their feelings had no such regrets. The chairs indicated that by discussing even the negative experiences, they were able to put them into the context of their personal growth. From the responses to these closing questions emerged the chairs’ discussion of the effect on themselves of participating in the research project through the interviews.

Prof. Carroll said that she found the interviews “highly enjoyable.” She said, “Not everyone is interested in talking about what chairs think about,” and that she appreciated the interviews because she didn’t get to express herself “on these topics a lot.” For her the focus on her work was a welcome experience, possibly healing in its effect. She had to be encouraged many times during the interviews to share her feelings about the topic under discussion, and one silence that followed a question in the third interview made me quite fearful that I had broached a subject that was too painful for her to handle. I asked if she wanted to stop the interview, but she said that she did not. That her overall assessment of the interviews was so very positive in the end suggests to me how very much she wanted and needed to share her experiences and her feelings.

Prof. Carroll acknowledged that she would have liked to discuss the academic activities that she is pursuing in her department because she is interested in them, but she said “our talks reflected reality.” She said that she would have liked to discuss the other topics, but that the reality is that she is “dragged down into the other stuff. And the other stuff is very important.” By describing routine chair tasks as “other stuff” that drags one down and away from the strategic plan and quality guarantees of her department’s
courses she indicated their lower place in her hierarchy of values. Yet she acknowledged that those tasks are important, and that she does them because they are important.

In general, the chairs indicated that doing the interviews was a meditative, reflective experience that they appreciated. Prof. Franz said the following:

I think the process has been really good for me to think about all of these things in a more purposeful way. I mean I think about these things but not in the focused way that I’ve been thinking about them as I’ve been taking notes and jotting things down and having thoughts of things that we would talk about.

Prof. Franz revealed that anticipating the conversations made him focus on what he was doing and his process while he was doing it, as opposed to moving from one responsibility to another without reflection. He added that on particularly frenetic days he was “more mindful of the craziness of the days” and that the interview process had helped him to think about these things in a more formal way.

The day of the fourth interview was a vivid example of such a day. On that particular day his schedule included an 8:30 am appointment with a student, a 9:00 am videotaped interview for a college-wide project, a 10:00 am meeting with me, another meeting that would begin at 11:00 am and continue until approximately 3:00 pm, and then a 3:00 pm appointment with a dean and a non-tenured faculty member. He said that normally he did not “think about the fact that the tide is coming in and out. But in…these interviews I’ve been mindful of those things.” He was saying that the interviews helped him put the craziness of the days into a perspective that contains a beginning and an end and a purpose and a method, making them if not less exhausting, at least more intentional.

Prof. Estelle said that doing the interviews made her “think a little bit more about some things” that she really hadn’t thought about. This was particularly true of the
question about what she hoped to accomplish as department chair. She said, “I kind of thought ‘OK, I’m just doing my job.’” She said that she had been working hard to fulfill her responsibilities, but that she had a limited perception of what her role was and had not thought about initiating plans and processes for her department. She said the interviews made her more aware of the impact she could have, even on her division, as chair of her department and of some things that she “could be taking on or doing more with” that she “hadn’t thought about doing.” She said, “I’ve got a few things on my agenda that I’m going to talk about at the first meeting that we have this upcoming fall: the department…how we’re going to do strategic planning, how we’re going to do assessment. She also said that journaling resulted in helping her clarify goals.

Most of Prof. Estelle’s statements about her earlier approach to her chair role were tentative and minimizing in their scope: use of phrases like “a little bit,” adding “I guess” to her statement “an impact I could make,” and her being “conservative” in what she thought her role was. After the interviews, she stated she had a personal agenda of ideas for her department, suggesting greater purposefulness, greater confidence, and greater vision. The interviews helped her see herself differently.

For Prof. Donald doing the interviews was not only reflective, but a meditative experience. He thought that it was probably also a necessary exercise for all chairs to sit down with an interviewer and talk about their job and to have the interviewer ask, “What do you think of your job? How do you see yourself in it?” In describing the positive results that a chairperson could get from an experience like that, he said the following:

If you reflect upon what you are doing, then you acquire a clearer vision. You know what it is you’re really doing. Are you accomplishing the goals that you set out for yourself or for a department? How effective are you really to an
organization like this, based on your understanding of it? Do you understand the position you are in?

Prof. Donald said he thought this kind of periodic self-exploratory exercise in self-awareness would help chairs to clarify their “place in the universe.” He said that he personally tries to do just that and to “measure the statistics of the impact” that he is going to have in his life, and he thought this kind of exploration would be helpful. The effect on the chairs of participating in the interviews was, according to their description, that they enjoyed and appreciated the attention to their work: The interviews gave them a greater sense of direction and purposefulness; the interviews expanded their perceptions of themselves and the value of their work; and the interviews served as reflective and meditative instruments for measuring their life work.

In this section, I have discussed seven of the eight emergent themes evidenced in the interview data, along with statements and analysis of statements by the participants from which those themes arose. The eighth theme was presented in Chapter 5 as an introduction to the primary research question for which it provided a link. The themes were presented because this study sought to explore each chair’s lived experience relative to internal conflict, and the chairs gave evidence in their conversations that these themes colored their behavior as chair. The themes were (a) lack of competition in chair selection; (b) surprise at the chair workload; (c) working within the context of a unionized faculty and, in some cases, unionized adjunct faculty; (d) impact of the relationship with their dean on chair performance; (e) concern with the work ethic of other chairs; (f) emergence of Arabic studies on their campuses; (g) effect on the chairs of participating in the research study interviews; and (h) effect on the chairs of their being chair. This last theme has formed the bridge to the exploration of the research questions
of this study because one of the effects on chairs of their being chair is that they experience internal conflict.
Appendix E

Author’s Biography
Raymonda Theodora Greene Johnson was born in Chicago, Illinois, on January 12, 1939, and has lived there all her life. She attended Corpus Christi Catholic School in Chicago’s Bronzeville until the sixth grade. When her family, consisting of her parents, her two younger sisters, and herself, moved to the Hyde Park community in 1949, she transferred to St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic School and remained there through high school. She attended Rosary College in River Forest, Illinois, as a resident freshman, then transferred to DePaul University, where she earned a B.A. in English in 1960.

Raymonda taught English in the Chicago Public School System at Hyde Park High School from 1960 to 1965. Upon earning her M.A. in English from Loyola University Chicago in 1965, she transferred to Loop College (now Harold Washington College), City Colleges of Chicago. She taught English composition, American and African American literature, advanced composition and logic, reading, English as a Second Language, and developmental courses. In 1992 she was elected and appointed chair of the Department of English and Speech/Theater; she performed this and other leadership roles in the college and the District until her retirement in 2004.

Raymonda has been married to her husband Hulon Johnson, Ed.D, since 1964; and together they have reared their sons, David, Theodore, and Alexander, to successful adulthood. She began her doctoral studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2003; and upon completion of her Ed.D program in Community College Executive Leadership in 2010, she plans to write, consult, and teach in the areas of her special interest: leadership and the community college academic department chair.