

University Senate



Resolution for Chair-led Departments

November 19th, 2025, approved by the University Senate

The University Senate wishes to express its concern and disappointment about recent proposals and discussions with leadership concerning the potential replacement of department Chairs with managerial Directors. However, according to the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, effective shared governance requires strong faculty leaders as well as a capable board and an actively engaged president. Coordinating efforts, Chairs can enable the institution to meet challenges and take advantage of opportunities in a timely manner. For this reason, we believe that Chairs play an essential role in the future success of CHSS.

The latest restructuring plan for the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, announced on November 10, does not provide a clear internal structure for the proposed schools nor does it present a detailed vision of how the future College would thrive without the core functions currently vested in Chair-led departments. A strong collaborative partnership with department leadership, led by Chairpersons, will help bear the heavy load of the CHSS restructuring, and any other future transitions the university seeks to undertake.

Academic institutions rely on collaboration, shared governance, and intellectual pursuit and community. Chairpersons play a crucial role in both the shared governance structures and day-to-day operations of academic departments. While Deans and Directors can play an essential role in strategic alignment and policy implementation, Chair leadership excels in building trust, more authentic discourse, and facilitating sustained cultural and academic growth.

Power dynamics are deeply embedded in academic organizational settings. Instructors and staff may self-censor and suppress honest reporting in discussions with deans, directors, and senior leadership. Chairpersons, elected by their peers, can bridge the gap and remove hierarchical pressure, enabling frank discussions of challenges and opportunities that often remain invisible to deans or directors. Chairpersons understand the immediate realities of academic life which then produces more practical, current, and empathetic problem solving than top-down guidance alone could. Greater psychological safety is created under Chair leadership and that, in turn, invites experimentation and collaboration. Without concern for administrative optics, departments have higher potential to become incubators for new ideas, and innovation.

The role of Chair is also student-facing, and Chairs serve as an accessible frontline point of contact for students as well as instructors. They act as a point of reference for student advising,

grade grievances, and they are accessible to provide immediate feedback on instructor-student concerns. Chairpersons have direct line of sight on both the program requirements, and the availability of specialized instructors for any given term that can impact the scheduling needs and ultimately, time to degree completion of students enrolled in their programs.

Many of the roles and responsibilities of Chairpersons, such as those around personnel actions, are laid out in negotiated agreements at the state and local level. Further, Chairpersons are the named first step in student process policies, such as the Grade Grievance Policy and credit adjustments.

If the position of Chair were to be eliminated, these clearly-defined roles could potentially be scattered among several employees, such as faculty area heads, Associate Directors of Faculty, or other coordinators, or not covered at all. Maintaining this central and vital source of institutional leadership and student-centered decision-making will help strengthen the quality of instruction and research in CHSS, supporting the very goals the Administration aims to advance through the restructuring effort.

Department Chairs are elected by peers and, typically, are scholars of the same or a related discipline. As elected individuals, subjected to recall, they are empowered to legitimately speak and act on behalf of their department—this makes them fundamental to shared governance, transparency, and academic freedom. Instructors and program staff benefit most from a centralized leader selected among their peers, who can provide a well rounded, future-focused vision for curriculum and program goals reflective of global disciplinary standards, as well as one that takes into account student experiences.

In summary, these points underscore the fundamental role that department Chairpersons perform in shared governance, and the fundamental role that shared governance plays in the vitality, community, and mission of the university. Sharing governance in the face of sweeping and transformative change can help shift the thinking and planning of senior leadership, managers, instructors, and staff from defending outdated, narrow interests to aligning efforts to plan for new challenges and external pressures.

As the steward of shared governance at Montclair State, the University Senate believes that the restructuring of its largest and oldest College presents important opportunities to reaffirm these principles.

References:

American Association of University Professors. (n.d.). *Statement on government of colleges and universities*. AAUP. Retrieved November 18, 2025, from <https://www.aaup.org/reports-publications/aaup-policies-reports/topical-reports/statement-government-colleges-and>

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