

Advice for new unit leaders from current unit leaders (or things current unit leaders wish that someone had shared with them when they started)

- Consult. You are never alone. When challenging issues arise, consult with others to get perspectives on how to handle the situation— consult with other Heads, Associate Deans, Deans, Vice Provosts, General Counsel, OED staff, Title IX staff, etc. There are a lot of people on campus who want to help you.
- Title IX. You are a mandatory reporter. If you receive information concerning prohibited conduct, including sexual misconduct or relationship violence, you must report it to Office of Title IX within 48 hours. Do not say that you will keep information told to you confidential. If someone begins to tell you information that you will be required to report, ensure that they understand that you will be obligated to report it to the Title IX office *before* they share the information. Tell them that they can speak with someone at the Student Counseling Center or the Health Center if they want to speak with someone confidentially.
- If your discipline has a national organization and listserv of Heads/Chairs of your discipline, join it. It will provide excellent information and useful data about peer and aspirational departments in your discipline and will provide good, discipline-specific ideas and perspectives on challenging issues.
- When you make mistakes, and you will make mistakes, acknowledge them, consult with others about how to deal with them, and learn from them.
- Talk regularly to your faculty, staff and students; solicit feedback; keep communication as open as possible. Give positive feedback along with critical feedback.
- Good news can be shared with a faculty member in an email. Critical feedback or bad news should not be shared in an email. This may be more challenging during a pandemic, but Zoom is preferable to email.
- Set aside time for the things most important to you (re: family, exercise, research) - there will always be more to do than you can finish.
- Identify some goals to help you focus and see/show progress.
- Find mentors and advice in other department heads. This job is thankless and it is difficult to move from being a colleague to being the “boss”. I found that having the support of other department heads was key.
- Develop your own voice. You don’t have to do everything the way others do it or to do everything as well as they do. Find your own strengths and work on your weaknesses.

- Learn to communicate to faculty and staff without overcommunicating. Our previous head had the habit of forwarding about every other email he received that could possibly be of some interest to somebody in the dept. As a result, nobody read his emails anymore. In my first year as head, I did not communicate enough, not wanting to “bother” my faculty with some of the things I was taking care of on their behalf. So they were left wondering if I was really on top of things. Finding that fine line can be tricky - especially in these crazy times, where things change fast. I now send “summary emails”: they typically contain 3-4 different topics, I put them in a table format for clarity, and it looks like my faculty really like that approach. Frequency of these emails depends on what has been happening and the urgency of events. There are weeks I send 3 of them, other weeks, I only send one.
- I wish I'd known, at the start, just how important it is to broadcast department wide, for everyone's benefit, how every middling-to-major decision was arrived at, in real time, especially if voting was involved.
- Have another department head as a mentor.
- Know the names of graduate and undergraduate students.
- Know the importance of leaving alone faculty that are doing well in research, while know when to intervene with faculty that are not so research active.
- Good organization is one of the keys -- Keep a good calendar with upcoming deadlines. Responsibilities/deadlines will increase as the academic year progresses and due dates will creep up on you.
- Getting advice from other department heads, especially those with experience, will help you to navigate difficult situations/conversations.
- Meet with other DHs in your college. Create a sounding board of 2-3 DHs whom you trust to talk to and share difficult things. In our college we get together to calibrate T/TT evaluation scores. This has been helpful in having confidence in your scoring when you share with faculty members.
- Think of all the things you're juggling as balls, some heavy metal, some rubber, and some glass - you will always have to drop balls from time to time - try to identify which ones are which - rubber balls bounce back and don't hurt much; metal balls hurt but will survive; glass balls will shatter - try not to drop the glass balls.
- Send emails to large groups (e.g., your whole unit) with the email addresses in the bcc field.

- Develop a weekly communication channel. We started a department news that (once the format and cadence was clarified) the staff took over sending out. Keeps dates in front of faculty; celebrates faculty; alerts to incoming speakers and UTK deadlines.
- Advisory board is a great resource when forming new curriculum. Should be more than dog and pony show but provide them opportunities to sink teeth into real issues. If you inherit an advisory board, early is a good time to review rotation (which ones to roll off, and which ones to keep).
- Your relationship with most colleagues will change. Have to be careful what you share and with whom.
- Have five initiatives that need funding at your fingertips in case a potential donor asks what/where are your needs.
- Review your last accreditation report to check for ongoing activities that should be happening.