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Panel II. Leadership and Engagement of Mid-career Faculty

Why Mid-career Faculty Should Consider Being a Department Head
(and what UGA can do to help them)?

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1. Being a department head is an enormously satisfying position because (a) it is an opportunity to shape the future of your department and the careers of your colleagues in a more direct and immediate way than is possible in any other administrative position and (b) you get to continue your teaching and research, which is why all of us became academics in the first place.
2. But the vary nature of the position—partly administrative, partly regular faculty—makes it an inherently ambiguous one. Is it a service or is it a form of management? I think it's both of these, which creates distinctive challenges—most notably the fact that it's a very difficult to be a good department head without also being a good colleague. In other words, faculty governance means that the department head has just one vote on most issues.
3. Another potential problem is that we provide very little training or preparation for people who become department heads. Many faculty members, in fact, chose this career precisely because they did not want to have to manage others in the workplace.
4. The result is that the performance of department heads is quite inconsistent. Some have been mentored by the outgoing head or have acquired a familiarity with administrative matters by being graduate coordinator or associate head and manage quite well; others enter the position cold, have to learn on the job, and make mistakes, often inadvertent ones.
5. The position of department is too important to be handled in such a hit-or-miss way. In fact, the position has become increasingly complex and complicated over the last decade due to scarce resources; knowing how to get these resources and how to use them effectively is critical to being a good department head and should not just depend on the new head figuring it out on the job.
6. I propose that UGA consider an administrative fellows' program focused explicitly on mid-career faculty who are interested in being department heads. We have faculty programs of various kinds, but nothing for the people who can do the most good (or harm) to faculty, especially to the most junior faculty. That is an oversight than can and should be remedied.