**Making Meetings Work**

An important part of your position as Chair is holding meetings for your department.  Meeting are very valuable to any working group:  Why?  They can build community and connection, ensure inclusiveness, increase a sense of responsibility and ownership, create a shared vision and purpose, provide information and ideas, clarify and resolve problems, and make important decisions about policies, processes, and governance.

When meetings are difficult, they can feel like a waste of time and effort.  Some of the barriers to effective meetings include:  unclear purpose, lack of agenda, lack of attendance, sabotage by a member, monopolizing by a member, lack of full participation (if this happens, try to find out why), lack of clear ground rules (or a failure to enforce them), poor time management, and a lack of follow-through.

Here are a few good reminders for making meetings work:

1. Make the objectives clear.  Set an agenda and send it out 2-4 days in advance so members can come prepared.  It’s a good idea to allow others to add to that agenda, but with the understanding that you may need to prioritize depending on available time.  If time runs out without covering agenda items, end the meeting by deciding what to do with those items, such as holding an additional meeting or adding the items to the next meeting.
2. Show up.  Ensure you require attendance to monthly meetings based on the list of why we value meetings, above.  Smaller committee meetings as well as full departmental meetings add great value to the overall effectiveness of the department.  Err on the side of inclusivity.  Showing up also means participating fully.  If you have silent members, find a private time to meet with them to find out why they are not speaking and find ways to encourage them to speak (if it doesn’t feel safe to speak, you may have some work to do).
3. Stick to your schedule.  Consider placing time frames alongside agenda items if talk tends to run over-time in your experience.  Consider bi-monthly meetings if important issues are not being addressed in a timely manner, or alternative, set special meetings to discuss issues that will require much more than 15-20 minutes.  Start and end on time.
4. Establish Ground Rules.  This goes beyond Robert’s Rules of Order, which can be very helpful as well.  Take a few minutes at your next meeting to talk about *what would make meetings seem more effective and valuable* and collectively develop a list of ground rules or guidelines everyone can abide by.  Consider things such as: no monopolizing (no speeches longer than 3 minutes), focus only on the meeting (no electronics, newspapers, etc.), listen to understand without interruption (unless someone is monopolizing), be open-minded to others’ ideas and ask questions before criticizing (including no eye-rolling or other offensive body language), and ensure everyone’s voice is heard and valued (this can especially help junior faculty establish their voice in the department).  \*To stop a monopolizer, you might say: *we appreciate your contributions, but we also need to hear from other before we make a decision.”*  Be neutral and public about it, and not sarcastic or passive/aggressive.
5. Follow-up.  Be sure someone takes notes and creates a list of who attended, what was accomplished or decided, as well as what needs to be done, by whom and when, and email that to all who were able to attend and those who were not within 24 hours of any meeting.  Keep the flow of business going by calendaring any new deadlines that have been set, and remembering to include key issues in subsequent agendas.