Motion to Provide Guidelines for Initiating Searches for New Department Heads and for the Appointments and Terms of Interim Department Heads

Committee on Governance

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Goal of the Motion

• To ensure that Department Head transitions, whether they occur due to anticipated or unanticipated circumstances, are handled smoothly, efficiently, and with a minimum of disruption to the department concerned:
  – Minimize reliance on Interim Department Heads, in order to….
  – Minimize such problems as:
    • Delays in seizing opportunities and/or addressing challenges with longer-term departmental implications
    • Difficulty in recruiting and retaining faculty members
    • Unneeded uncertainty/insecurity in departmental leadership role
    • Reluctance of internal candidates to apply for the Dept. Head position
Overview of the Motion

• **Timely searches for a new Department Head: for anticipated circumstances**
  - *When it is known a year in advance* that the current Department Head will not continue in their current role, *then the search for the next Department Head will begin early in the next academic year*
  - Eliminates the need to appoint an interim Department Head

• **Limits on Appointments and Terms of interim Department Heads: for unanticipated circumstances**
  - **Appointments**: Interim Department Heads should only be appointed due to unanticipated circumstances.
  - **Terms**: a Department should not be led by Interim Department Head(s) for more than two consecutive years
  - **Searches**: for a new Department Head will begin by no later than early in the next academic year (following the year in which the Department Head vacancy first became known)
Overview of the Motion (cont.)

• **Openness of the Appointment Process: for either the Dept. Head or interim Dept. Head**
  
  – A department and/or those faculty members within the department wishing to provide its/their input to the Dean in a confidential and/or anonymous manner will be provided the opportunity to do so.
  
  – The Dean accounts for/shares this information with the Provost who makes the Dept. Head/interim Dept. Head appointment
Rationale

• Recognizes the significant leadership role played by WPI Department Heads
  – **Continuity within WPI Departments**: Five-year terms, up to ten-years of consistent stewardship
  – **Contrast to other Universities**: Relatively short one-, two-, or three-year rotating terms of “Dept. Chairs”

• Ensures that Department Head transitions are handled with minimum disruption
  – Continued focus on long-term departmental initiatives and strategies
  – Ongoing ability to recruit and retain faculty members
  – Needed certainty/security in departmental leadership

• Minimizes perceived disadvantage that can discourage qualified (internal) candidates from applying for Department Head position

• Adds more openness for faculty input to appointments of Department Heads and interim Department Heads