



# Chairing an Academic Department

*Walter H. Gmelch, Val Miskin*

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## **Chairing an Academic Department** Walter H. Gmelch, Val Miskin

"Academic leaders may be in the least studied and most misunderstood management position in the world," authors Gmelch and Miskin state. Although chairs come to the position for varied reasons, few come with any specific leadership training. Once in the position, they are critiqued, judged, and evaluated by both their faculty and administrators—groups which frequently have conflicting criteria.

Based upon their extensive study of the demands on and needs of chairs, the authors have distilled their findings into a practical and highly accessible volume to guide chairs in their growth. Despite the varied paths to the position, the authors state that all chairs find themselves in an environment distinct from their former faculty situation.

One of the most dramatic changes is that chairs need the ability to switch from one task or situation to another very quickly, and must develop a facility for refocusing. As chairs, individuals assume four basic roles: faculty developer, manager, leader, and scholar. Because of these roles and the need to quickly refocus, Gmelch and Miskin advocate becoming a swivel chair. They state: "To balance their roles, chairs must learn to swivel without appearing dizzy, schizophrenic, or 'two-faced.'"

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