

DEPARTMENT CHAIR COMPENSATION AND COURSE RELEASE

Department chairs serve a vital role in the effective functioning of the College, providing valuable leadership and mentorship to faculty colleagues and attending to administrative responsibilities required for healthy, prosperous departments. At Wabash it is expected that chairing duties will be shared among tenured faculty across a department with periodic rotation. A more robust explanation of department chair responsibilities is provided in an earlier section of the Department Chair Handbook.

For serving as department chair, faculty are typically compensated by a merit raise, which goes to the faculty member's base salary, and a modest stipend. The standard merit raise is one merit unit per calendar year (a half unit per semester served as department chair), but may be adjusted by the academic personnel committee during the faculty salary review process based on factors including leading faculty hiring; leading faculty reviews; completion of a department review; number of faculty and staff supervised; and other notable activities (e.g., public events led by the chair, number of majors/minors to monitor etc.). It is expected that each department chair will annually engage in some of these activities during the regular course of their duties, but in some years the responsibilities will be higher and the academic personnel committee seeks to recognize that with a merit increment of 1.25 units or, in rare circumstances, 1.5 units for a full year of service.

Department chair compensation is evaluated annually rather than biennially, meaning that any chair merit is for a one-year period rather than a two-year period. Chair review is based on service during the preceding calendar year, meaning it lags by one semester and the most recently completed spring semester is included in the following review period. Since summer 2022, department chairs also have received an annual stipend for their service. The stipend is added to their July pay and does not go to their base salary. As of 2025, the additional stipend for serving as a department chair for the full prior calendar year is \$1,250. Merit unit value is subject to change based on funds that are available for annual salary adjustments. Similarly, the Dean of the College will continue to examine the level of department chair stipends.

To better address the time commitment required to serve as department chair, a chair may apply to the personnel committee for a course release in particularly burdensome semesters. When a chair release is granted, the faculty member will not receive a merit raise for the semester of the release and will forgo the chair stipend for the particular calendar year. Unawarded stipends may be re-distributed to other chairs without a release. Chair releases must be covered under regular staffing (e.g., the College will not hire part-time faculty to cover a chair course release), and it will be necessary to have all sections of all-college courses staffed for the upcoming semester before any course releases are finalized.

Requests for a chair release generally should be submitted to the Senior Administrative Assistant to the Dean of the College within two weeks of the start of the semester prior to the desired release time (e.g., by about September 15 for a spring release request and by approximately February 1 for a fall release request). In their request for a course release, the department chair should:

- Explain the upcoming duties that require an unusual time commitment by the department chair.
- Confirm that the department is able to meet its traditional all-college course contribution and number of distribution seats/sections.
- Provide a draft department course schedule for the upcoming semester, explain what has been altered in the course offerings to accommodate the release, and demonstrate that sufficient courses and seats are likely to be available for students (this might include providing information on past course taking patterns; explaining the removal of an upper-level, low enrollment course; and/or modest increases to caps in courses that might be expected to have high demand in the department).

In evaluating requests, the personnel committee will review this information along with broader consideration of all-college course staffing and enrollment pressures.

In some instances where a course release is requested but the department is unable to adjust their offerings to accommodate the release, it may be possible to identify another department that can offer an all-college course in place of the requesting department/chair or a department that is able to offer more seats supporting an impacted distribution area.

In other instances, a chair might request a release the semester *after* a particularly burdensome semester or year as chair in order to be able to address work and responsibilities that were impacted previously but emerged too late to request a chair course release or because a chair course release could not be supported the prior year or semester.

Department chairs and departments also need to be prepared for a degree of uncertainty and have the ability to be flexible regarding chair course releases. A department may need to flex *out* of a course release because there is an additional all-college need due to staffing constraints in another area. Or a department might have the ability to flex *in* to a course release after pre-registration when an unexpected, low enrollment situation emerges.

It will take time to calibrate this effort, including the number of releases that can be supported and the bar that must be met to qualify for a release. After a period of approximately three years, the personnel committee will review the totality of release requests and its decision making and the Dean should engage in additional conversation about chair compensation with department chairs.