

---

# LEADING TRENDS

---

## The Art of Departmental Leadership



Leadership development for academic department chairs is increasingly important as they play a pivotal role in shaping educational institutions' overall success and effectiveness. Department chairs are not merely administrators but the linchpins connecting faculty, administration, and students. These leaders are responsible for guiding the strategic direction of their departments, fostering a positive academic environment, leading conversations about educational excellence, and ensuring that program goals are met. Given the multifaceted nature of their

6642 Clayton Road, #382  
Saint Louis, Missouri 63117  
USA

---

+1.314.725.8889

---

[projects@ta-stl.com](mailto:projects@ta-stl.com)

---

roles, robust leadership development programs can be crucial to enhancing chairs' skills, promoting innovation, and enabling them to navigate the complex challenges faced by modern academic institutions.

One of the reasons for emphasizing leadership development for department chairs is the profound impact they have on the faculty under their guidance. Effective leadership fosters a culture of collaboration, motivation, and mentorship, which

**“We are mindful that the chair’s role is, in many instances, ambiguous and conflicted. Chairs can feel like neither fish nor fowl, not really administrators but not totally in the faculty world ... We think that what chairs may lack in overt power—say to hire and fire—they make up for in the influence they have to shape departmental conversations and agendas.”**

directly influences faculty engagement and performance. Department chairs who undergo leadership training are better equipped to manage conflicts, communicate expectations, and provide constructive feedback. By honing these skills, chairs can create an atmosphere that nurtures professional growth among faculty members, leading to higher teaching standards, improved research productivity, and increased student satisfaction.

Perhaps more strategically, leadership development programs equip academic department chairs with the tools to address the evolving landscape of education. The sector is fast changing, from artificial intelligence to other ed-tech advancements to shifts in pedagogical approaches. Effective departmental leaders must be able to adapt to these changes, make informed decisions, and implement innovative strategies that keep their departments at the forefront of academic excellence. Leadership development

helps chairs enhance their problem-solving abilities, strategic thinking, and change management skills, enabling them to lead their departments through transitions and ensure continued success.

At the same time, we are mindful that the chair’s role is, in many instances, ambiguous and conflicted. Chairs can feel like neither fish nor fowl, not really administrators but not totally in the faculty world. At its worst, being a chair can carry a burden of responsibility without the power to get things done. We think that what chairs may lack in overt power—say to hire and fire—they make up for in the influence they have to shape departmental conversations and agendas. Effectively using this sort of “soft” power can be very hard, as management guru Tom Peters likes to say.

Institutional collaboration is another significant aspect that benefits from leadership development for department chairs. In such professional development programs, chairs often interact with peers, administrators, and stakeholders from other

departments and divisions. Stronger leadership skills will enable them to foster effective partnerships, share best practices, and contribute to advancing their institution's academic mission. By nurturing collaborative leadership, academic department chairs are better prepared to drive interdisciplinary initiatives and engage in meaningful dialogue that positively impacts the broader educational community.

Higher education is a bit, but only a bit, ahead of private, independent schools in terms of leadership development for academic department chairs. A page on our website contains a continuously expanding set of resources for academic leaders. While many of these link to higher education, we think independent school department chairs will also find the tools helpful.

Triangle Associates is out in front creating leadership development opportunities for chairs across universities and independent schools. We would love to hear about what you are doing at your school and are happy to discuss ways to support your chairs as a new academic year begins across the Global North.

---

## How We Help Schools

Triangle Associates solves governance problems, keeps boards on track, guides strategy formulation, and develops senior leaders for private, independent schools around the world. See our [web site](#) for more information and a partial list of clients.

Governance  
Strategy  
Leadership

### Stay in Touch with Triangle

Our popular Leading Trends newsletter is published quarterly, and [back issues](#) are readily accessible on our website. We hope you will [sign up](#) to receive this free newsletter. You can also follow [our blog](#) through an RSS feed by clicking the "Subscribe" button at the top of the page on our site. We update our [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) feeds on a regular basis, as well.

Thanks, and feel free to [contact us](#). We hope to work with you soon.