

Chairs' Response to Proposals Affecting the Role and Responsibilities of Department Chairs

30 July 2026

Dear President Poser and Provost Riordan,

While the Chairs are conscious of the ongoing negotiations regarding the new CBA and do not want to insert themselves into these negotiations, a number of ideas that would directly affect the role and responsibilities of Chairs have been shared with us by both the Administration and the AAUP. Because these proposals would substantially alter both the responsibilities of Department Chairs and the governance structure within which departments operate, we believe it is appropriate to share our perspectives on their practical implications.

At Hofstra, Department Chairs occupy a unique hybrid role within the University's system of shared governance. They remain members of the faculty rather than full-time administrators, while also providing institutional leadership as the principal link between faculty and the Administration. Their effectiveness depends upon the confidence and trust of both groups and upon their ability to exercise leadership through consultation, consensus building, and academic judgment rather than through supervisory authority. Collectively, the proposals outlined below would significantly redefine that role by placing Chairs in the position of supervising, monitoring, comparing, and compensating colleagues. This would fundamentally change the nature of the position, its relationship with faculty, and its place within the University's shared governance structure.

We therefore wish to briefly note our concerns regarding the following proposals.

Three-Day Campus Requirement

Requiring faculty to be on campus for three days each week does not seem particularly helpful or enforceable. More to the point, we would not be in favor of Chairs being expected to monitor faculty presence on campus and make judgments about how individual faculty members allocate their professional time. These responsibilities move the Chair beyond its traditional role as a faculty leader and into that of a supervisor responsible for monitoring compliance with institutional policy. This would represent a significant change to the role of Department Chairs that we would not support.

Merit Pay

We note that Hofstra already has established mechanisms for recognizing and rewarding merit through reappointments, promotion, tenure, and Professor Plus incentives. In addition, there is nothing to prevent the Administration from awarding additional salary or bonuses to faculty members whose contributions warrant such recognition.

We understand the Administration's desire for more timely assessments of faculty performance. But that is separate from determining and awarding merit. Assigning responsibility to Chairs for determining annual merit pay would fundamentally alter the relationship between Chairs and the faculty they represent. Chairs are expected to provide faculty leadership among peers, build

consensus, mentor colleagues, and advocate for their departments. Asking them to determine annual salary increases transforms that relationship from one of collegial faculty leadership into one of managerial supervision. This represents a significant departure from Hofstra's model of shared governance and risks undermining the trust, openness, and collegiality that are essential to the effective functioning of departments. Indeed, this model of peer leadership among faculty who rotate in and out of Chairpersonships is part of Hofstra's "secret sauce" that the President often alludes to.

Faculty Load and Designations as Teaching and Research Professors

We understand the Administration's desire to recognize that faculty members have differing research responsibilities and that these may justify variations in teaching load. However, not only do the proposals undermine the professionalism of faculty, but we also foresee significant practical challenges in implementing such a system while continuing to meet the instructional needs of departments.

The Chair's primary responsibility is to provide faculty leadership that ensures the curriculum is delivered effectively and that students can complete majors and minors in a timely manner. Faculty expertise is often highly specialized, and faculty members within a department are not interchangeable. Reducing one faculty member's teaching load does not necessarily mean that another faculty member, or an available adjunct, has the expertise to teach the courses that must still be offered to meet the curricular needs of the students.

This longstanding model has also served the University well. Department Chairs, acting as faculty leaders rather than supervisors, have helped ensure the effective delivery of curricula while supporting both student success and faculty scholarship. During the years in which this governance model has been in place, Hofstra has experienced improvements in student retention and graduation rates, increased research productivity across the faculty, and, most recently, achieved Carnegie R2 research status. While many factors have contributed to these accomplishments, they demonstrate that the existing model of faculty leadership has successfully advanced the University's academic mission.

Nor should Chairs be placed in the position of making annual judgments about whether a research faculty member has made sufficient progress to justify a reduced teaching load. Research productivity varies considerably across disciplines and often unfolds over many years. A faculty member working on a major book project, for example, may spend several years conducting research and writing before any tangible outcome appears. The six-year cycle of the existing Professor Plus incentive appropriately recognizes these realities.

Decisions regarding faculty load allocations and the continuation of research designations have implications not only for individual faculty members but also for curriculum planning, student progress toward graduation, departmental morale, and the long-term operation of academic programs. Chairs should certainly provide advice regarding these matters, but placing final responsibility on Chairs fundamentally changes the position from one of faculty leadership to one of personnel management.

We also note that, when questioned about how Chairs would make these determinations, we were advised that additional training would be provided. While training may assist Chairs in implementing new procedures, it does not address the fundamental concern. The issue is not whether Chairs can be trained to perform these functions. Rather, these responsibilities are inconsistent with the governance role of Department Chairs and would substantially redefine the position. In addition, many of the current Chairs who would receive this training are unlikely to remain in those positions when these proposed policies could take effect because of the expiration of Chair terms and the proposed departmental mergers.

Equally important, the cumulative effect of transforming the Chair into a position centered increasingly on supervision, compliance, personnel management, and compensation decisions is likely to make the role substantially less attractive to faculty members. At a time when many institutions already find it increasingly difficult to recruit faculty willing to serve as Chairs, further expanding the managerial responsibilities of the position risks making succession planning considerably more difficult and reducing the pool of experienced faculty prepared to assume these important faculty leadership roles.

As noted above, the undersigned Chairs have grave doubts about the wisdom of the proposals that have been shared with the Chairs. Collectively, these proposals would substantially redefine the role of Department Chair by shifting it away from faculty leadership and shared governance toward supervision, compliance, personnel management, and compensation decisions. The current model of Department Chairs as peer faculty leaders has coincided with meaningful improvements in student success, increased faculty research productivity, and the University's achievement of Carnegie R2 research status. While these accomplishments reflect the contributions of many across the institution, they also demonstrate that the existing governance model has effectively supported Hofstra's academic mission. We respectfully suggest that these proposals be reconsidered in light of the concerns outlined above and that any changes to the role of Department Chair be guided by clear evidence that they are necessary to improve upon a model that has demonstrably served the University well.

Respectfully submitted,

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