

New Department Chair Compensation Model – Questions and Answers

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Background

1. Why change the old system?

The system of Department Chair (DC) compensation that existed under the 2020-2023 and our previous Collective Bargaining Agreements consisted of a series of DC responsibilities, outlined in Article 2 of the CBA, a compensation schedule based on DC Levels (I, II, and III), outlined in Appendix A of the CBA, and an elaborate schema for calculating DC Levels, outlined in Appendix G.

The DC responsibilities in Article 2 were generally reflective of the tasks typically carried out by DCs, although there were areas where some responsibilities needed clarifying, and there were also some tasks often carried out by DCs that needed to be added. The main issue was that the list of complete responsibilities was found in the Department Chair Feedback Form, listed in the Appendix of the old contract, instead of in Article 2. This meant that, in practice, some chairs did not see the full list of responsibilities until the end of their first year as chair, when they received the completed feedback from their dean. The responsibilities themselves, however, were not the main cause of concern among DCs, and among the union negotiators in the recent round of bargaining.

The most significant issue that emerged in an LRCFT survey of DCs was not so much that the responsibilities were wrong, but that, in too many cases, DCs were not adequately compensated for taking on the multifarious tasks that typically fall to them. Undercompensation and workload creep were chief concerns among many DCs, with over half of respondents to the union’s survey disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that their DC compensation was fair and reasonable given the amount of work they were required to perform.

Many DCs also expressed frustration with the system laid out in Appendix G for calculating DC Levels. Not only was Appendix G seen as both complicated and subjective, but the vast majority of departments had not seen their DC compensation levels recalculated under the provisions of Appendix G for four years or even longer, despite the fact that the CBA called for regular reassessment of chair duties. Almost 95 percent of survey respondents supported rewriting Appendix G.

2. What principles guided LRCFT in negotiating the new compensation system for DCs?

A fundamental principle informing LRCFT’s approach to Department Chair compensation was that DCs, as a group, were not being fairly compensated for the work that they were doing, and that correcting this would involve some combination of reduced work and increased compensation. Because many of the tasks that fall to DCs cannot easily be taken on by someone else, the focus was on improving the compensation plan. Among DCs who responded to the LRCFT survey, a majority expressed a preference

for a compensation system focused on reassigned time rather than stipends, and the union's team took this into account.

Alongside a general desire to improve the compensation system was a focus on simplifying the process for determining which level of compensation each DC would receive. An examination of similarly sized community college districts in California found no other district with a DC compensation plan even approaching the level of complexity found in Los Rios' Appendix G. Most districts we looked at use a system based wholly or mainly on FTE. While the LRCFT understands that FTE is not always a perfect proxy for DC workload, it seemed no less arbitrary and prone to subjectivity than some of the criteria that made up the old Appendix G.

NOTE: We will use the term FTE here; counselors, coordinators, and library departments might be more familiar with the term FTEF. For our purposes, in this document and in the new DC compensation model, the two terms are interchangeable.

Practical Questions – How Will It Work?

3. What is different about the new system?

In the recent round of negotiations, some changes were made to the Responsibilities and Duties section, 2.2.4.3, applying to Department Chairs. Changes were designed to bring this section into line with the realities of DC work and the existing Department Chair Feedback Form.

The most significant DC-related changes in the new tentative agreement, however, can be found in the new Appendix G, which was completely reworked, eliminating almost all the categories employed in the old points system and employing a radically simplified FTE-based calculation.

The old system of three department levels (with sub-levels at Level III) has been replaced by a new five-level system. Each level corresponds to a specific amount of reassigned time for the DC, and there is no longer the option of a DC stipend. All DCs will receive reassigned time as compensation for their chair duties.

Departments will be assigned to a level based initially on the number of FTE for which a DC is responsible. All DCs will receive at least 0.1 FTE reassigned time each year, and the upper level of reassigned time has been increased from 0.4 FTE under the old system to 0.5 FTE. The new system also adds a mechanism by which DCs who feel that the FTE-based calculation does not account for all the work they perform can appeal to the administration for a higher allocation.

The Department Chair Compensation form, which all DCs will be required to submit, contains a table outlining the relationship between FTE and reassigned time. This table also contains a column detailing the average number of hours per week at each level, in terms of time spent on DC duties. These hours will form the basis for reviews of DC duties and decisions regarding appeals for higher levels of compensation.

4. How much reassigned time will the Department Chair receive in my department?

This will depend on which level your department has been assigned under the provisions of the table in the Department Chair Compensation form. This calculation is based on the department FTE. DCs will have an opportunity to request more reassigned time. See Q. 6, below.

5. When and how is FTE calculated for the purposes of assigning a department level for Department Chair compensation?

Initially, for faculty considering candidacy for the position of Department Chair, the FTE for each department will be calculated prior to the Department Chair election. This FTE number will be conveyed, as part of the Department Chair election announcement, to all full-time faculty in March of odd-numbered years, before the DC election.

Department FTE will be the average annual FTE, calculated by averaging the final Fall FTE and the subsequent Spring semester FTE at census. This number will form the basis for the *minimum* reassigned time for the two-year term of the DC.

6. If I think that the Department Chair reassigned time for my department is too low for the amount of work involved, can I request an increase?

Yes. The Department Chair Compensation form asks each DC whether the level of compensation accounts for all of the responsibilities of the position. Those who check the “No” option will then meet with their area Dean to discuss DC workload and request an increase. This request will require a written description of the anticipated workload and “the estimated average number of additional hours required to complete the additional work.” Approval of the request is subject to mutual agreement with the Dean, and approval by the appropriate Vice President.

7. If my department’s FTE increases or if other aspects of the workload increase significantly during my tenure as Department Chair (e.g., new grants; changes in state law; etc.), can I request an increase in my compensation?

There is no provision in the new model to request changes during the two-year period between DC elections. Typically, FTE and workload do not increase overnight, and these types of increases should occur gradually enough that they can be accounted for as part of the biennial DC election process.

During negotiations, LRCFT convinced the administration to agree that compensation would not decrease during the two-year period, and we believe that it is reasonable to accept that it will not increase either. There are ways other than chair compensation that the administration can compensate people for unexpected and necessary work that's required by law during transition periods.

8. Can I take a stipend instead of reassigned time as a Department Chair?

No. All DC compensation under the new system will be reassigned time.

9. Can my Department Chair reassigned time be taken as overload?

No. All DC reassigned time must be taken as part of your regular load. You may, of course, still choose to accept other work, including teaching work, as overload.

10. Many classes at Los Rios are weighted at 0.2 FTE. What happens if my release time is an odd number, like 0.1 or 0.3 FTE?

DCs at levels 1, 2, and 3 will be allowed to combine Fall and Spring reassigned time in a way that allows them to take course releases. For example, a DC with 0.1 reassigned time may take a full 0.2 course

release in one semester, and no release in the other, in order to average 0.1 for the year. A DC with 0.3 reassigned time could take 0.2 in Fall and 0.4 in Spring, or vice versa.

11. What happens if I combine my two-semester release time into a single release in the Fall semester and then resign as Department Chair before the Spring semester?

If this happens, you might have received up to a full year's worth of DC reassigned time in a single semester. This reassigned time was advanced from the Spring on the understanding that you would continue as DC, so if you leave the position, you will owe the advanced release time to the District. This must be repaid by a commensurate reduction in salary, or by working overload in a subsequent semester.

12. Does the new Department Chair compensation model include any payment for work conducted during the Summer?

No. In this respect, there is no change from the old system.

13. How will the new system work for load balancing, for Department Chairs whose load-balancing cycle might not be in step with their DC term?

This would not necessarily work any differently for Chairs than for any other faculty member who is subject to a load-balancing schedule under Section 4.6.2 of the CBA. Any faculty member who takes reassigned time for any purpose, and who is subject to load balancing, would also have to deal with this. In fact, this same situation could arise under the old DC system for Level II DCs who choose reassigned time, and for all Level III chairs.

14. The new Appendix G says that the LRCFT will be able to receive copies of the Department Chair Compensation forms. How will it work, and what role will the union play here?

The union will not receive every compensation form as it is produced, but has the right to receive those forms upon request. LRCFT plans to keep an eye on this program, to look out for problems with implementation and interpretation. We plan to do this on a college- and district-wide basis, but we are also happy to talk to individuals concerned about their own situations. Any DC may send their compensation form to their LRCFT Representatives, their LRCFT Campus President, the LRCFT President or the Executive Director, and we would be happy to talk with them about any concerns they might have.

15. What happens if the new system of Department Chair compensation does not work as intended, or is unpopular among a large number of Department Chairs?

A provision in the new CBA (2.2.5) allows LRCFT to discontinue this project at the end of the new contract cycle, in 2026.

Potential Problems and Concerns

16. The new Appendix G, which calculates Department Chair levels and compensation based on FTE, does not allow for nuance. It lacks provisions for criteria such as budget management, equipment inventory, etc., that were part of the calculations under the old system. Isn't that a problem?

Unfortunately, the point system of the old Appendix G, with points allocated based on measures such as the size of the discretionary budget and the value of equipment inventory, was a very blunt instrument. It took no account of the fact that some discretionary budgets take very little time to allocate, while others are more complex, and that some big-ticket items might require very little work while smaller budget items might take considerably more work.

Under the old system, not only did chairs have to deal with the Byzantine criteria for compensation established in Appendix G, but the periodic re-evaluation that was supposed to be part of the process was often neglected or dropped altogether. The new system is not perfect, and the base reliance on FTE means that it cannot capture every nuance of every chair's duties, but it will give most chairs at least the same amount of compensation, or more compensation.

The new system also contains a mechanism for requesting additional compensation, and this is precisely the place to raise the nuances related to budgeting, equipment, etc. And, in fact, if previous Deans and Chairs had discussed these budgeting issues in calculating compensation under the old Appendix G, this could form the basis of discussions after a DC requests increased compensation under the new model.

17. Will most Department Chairs do better financially under the new system than under the old one?

According to our calculations, yes.

First, the new 5-level system based on FTE will allow a significant number of DCs to receive considerably more reassigned time than would have been available under the old system. The new system also eliminates the \$3,897 stipend that was paid to Level I DCs under the old system, and allows all DCs to receive a minimum of 0.1 FTE.

Under the old system, a DC in a Level II department could choose between a 0.1 FTE release with \$500 stipend, or a \$7,796 stipend. Any DC at or above the following Class and Step levels would receive compensation of more than \$7,796 for a 0.1 FTE release:

- Class I, Step 11
- Class II, Step 10
- Class III, Step 8
- Class IV, Step 7
- Class V, Step 5

As an experiment, we looked up the Class and Step of every Department Chair at Sacramento City College, and of the 41 Department Chairs listed on the web page for the Department Chairs Council, only one (1) was below the levels listed above. Most were well above these levels, and thus would receive considerably more compensation under the new model.

Not only that, but considerably more DCs than previously will qualify for 0.2 FTE or higher reassigned time.

18. Will some Department Chairs receive less compensation under the new system?

Probably.

There are certainly some DCs who will, under the initial FTE-based calculation, be placed at a level that provides them with less compensation than they received previously.

In some of these cases, it could well be that the amount of work performed by these DCs will justify an increase in their level, and this is precisely why the new contract includes a system that enables DCs to apply for, and present a justification for, a higher level of compensation.

There might also be some DCs who receive less compensation under the new system, and who are unable to successfully argue for raising their level. It is possible that some DCs were, under the old Appendix G, receiving compensation in excess of the amount of work required of their positions, and these DCs might end up with lower remuneration than before.

One of the guiding principles animating the bargaining team was that DCs should be paid fairly for the work that they do, but any significant change in a system like this is likely to be detrimental for at least some members. We regret this, and will do our best to monitor the working of the system to ensure the best possible outcomes for everyone.

Even for DCs who were happy with their compensation under the old system, and who might lose compensation under the new system, there was no guarantee that their previous level of compensation was going to remain the same. The administration made clear to LRCFT that it was their intention to re-evaluate all DC compensation under the old Appendix G in the summer of 2023. It is possible that, even without the changes described in this document, some DCs would have seen their compensation reduced in the 2023-2024 academic year.

18. Why move to a system of reassigned time only? Why can't we still have stipends?

A key reason for this change was to simplify the system, and to allow more faculty to receive more of the type of compensation that they told us, in our survey, that they preferred. Reassigned time at class and step is worth more, financially, for most DCs than the old stipend was.

19. But reassigned time is load attributable. The old stipend system didn't count against my load.

Actually, it did. Many faculty seem to be unaware that even DCs who chose to take a stipend rather than release time under the old system still had their DC work count against their load. The main difference here was that the District used a rather complicated (and, we believe, inaccurate) formula in converting DC stipends to FTE for the purposes of load attribution.

20. The system of stipends treated all Department Chairs equally, paying all DCs who chose the stipends the same amount for their DC work. Isn't the new system of reassigned time, which effectively pays faculty at Class and Step for their DC work, an inequitable way to compensate this work?

All reassigned time calculates compensation based on Class and Step, and is therefore unequal among faculty members at different levels. This is true whether the reassigned time is for Department Chair duties, union duties, Academic Senate work, or any one of the many other ways that faculty may receive reassigned time.

Whether this inequality is also inequitable depends on your viewpoint about compensation more generally. After all, the Class and Step system itself reflects ideas about the appropriate relationship between compensation and attributes like qualifications and length of service. The system is based on the principle that people should be compensated for particular levels of education and experience.

If using the Class and Step system of Department Chair compensation is inequitable, then the whole Class and Step system is also inequitable. There are many cases, for example, of faculty members who teach exactly the same course, but receive different levels of compensation based on their Class and Step. The new system treats Department Chair compensation the same as compensation that faculty receive for their regular duties.

21. But under the old system, we could opt to take the stipend as overload. Under the new system, where we have to take our reassigned time as load, any overload a Department Chair might choose to perform will be paid at a lower rate, on the B schedule.

This is correct, and this is one part of the new system that might reduce compensation for a DC who wishes to work overload.

The key focus of the negotiating team was to make the system of setting DC compensation more transparent and to increase overall compensation of DCs within their regular load. The team felt that it was preferable to have a clear and better compensated system in place, even if there were a few circumstances where compensation might be reduced.

This change also brings DC work into line with most of the other types of overload performed by faculty. In most cases, faculty work overload on the B schedule and do not have the option of taking a higher-level stipend.

22. The release time does not add up cleanly for those who teach lecture/lab sections for their classes. For example, a Department Chair who teaches four lecture/lab sections at .283 FTE per class, and who receives 0.1 or 0.2 reassigned time, does not have enough release time in a semester to remove a class from their schedule. If they choose to let their additional FTE be paid as overload, they are being paid at the Schedule B rate, which is significantly lower than their Schedule A rate.

This is true.

It is also true, however, that this faculty member was already being paid on the B schedule for 0.132 FTE ($4 \times 0.283 = 1.132$ FTE) of their teaching load. It is also the case that a number of DCs who will receive 0.1 or 0.2 under the new system were probably receiving the Level I stipend under the old system, and will still be receiving more compensation even when accounting for the fact that their overload is being paid on the B schedule.

23. The old and new systems do not line up neatly. For example, the FTE allocated to the Department Chair in a Level II department is listed as .168. The new model, based on FTE, will put the incoming chair for my department at a .1 release. The same amount of work would be asked of both of us as chair. There isn't a clear way to make the old system and new system work together. Either the incoming chair needs to document even more work and try to get a 0.2 release or ask for responsibilities to be off their plate (which would add them to mine in a 2-person department - for no additional compensation), or do the same amount of work I did for lower compensation.

There are two separate but related issues here: compensation and workload.

The DC in this example is presumably taking the stipend under the old system, and the District FTE calculator has apparently assigned the old Level II stipend (\$7,796) per year, a value of 0.168 FTE per semester for this DC. But if the new, incoming DC receives an initial placement of 0.1 release per semester, and is at or above the Class and Step levels described earlier (Q. 17), the new DC will effectively receive more compensation than the current DC.

On the issue of workload, the appropriate comparison here is not between the FTE allocated to the old DC and the new DC. The appropriate comparison is between the amount of work required by the DC to complete the duties, and the amount of hours allocated by the table in the new Appendix G. If the incoming DC can complete all of the tasks of the DC in an average of 3.5 hours per week, then a Level 1 determination for this department is appropriate. If closer to 7 hours per week, on average, are required to perform all the duties of DC in this department, the new DC should make a request for an increase.

Another observation about this scenario is also in order. If the DC cannot complete all of the tasks required in the time allowed under the new system, and if the Dean and VPI will not approve an increase in department level on Appendix G, the DC should then demand to have tasks removed from their plate. These tasks, however, do **not** automatically become the (unpaid) responsibility of other faculty members in the department; it is the responsibility of the Dean and the administration to ensure that the necessary tasks are performed. Faculty might choose to complete some of these tasks as part of their college services hours, but are not required to perform additional DC-related duties for no additional compensation.

24. What about the impact of Department Chair reassigned time on staffing changes within departments? If a new DC opts not to take overload, isn't it possible that this will create a staffing crunch over summer, when people are off contract?

Yes, this is possible.

This is, however, something that could also occur under the old system in Level III departments, and in Level II departments where the DC opted for release time. It is true that all departments now face the possibility of this outcome, but staffing crunches can happen over summer in any department, for a variety of reasons.

25. Doesn't the new system, with its provision for requesting additional reassigned time from the Dean, make Department Chair compensation subject to the vagaries of the interpersonal relationships between Deans and Department Chairs?

It is certainly possible that the personal dispositions of Deans, or the interpersonal relationships between Deans and DCs, could have an impact on decisions like this where the Deans have discretion. This is, however, possible under the old system, where it was Deans who made (often very subjective) decisions about how to calculate department points under Appendix G. The old Appendix G, with its minutely calibrated system of points, had a façade of scientific objectivity, but in practice was highly subjective and open to competing interpretations.

More generally, any human institution, even with the best safeguards in place, is susceptible to arbitrary decision-making. There are a variety of ways, outside of DC compensation, where the interpersonal relations between Deans and faculty can impact faculty work conditions. Dean approval over scheduling is one; Dean approval over remote work assignments is another. What we hope is that the new system will be an overall improvement, that Deans will be reasonable, and that any subjectivity based on interpersonal friction will be minimal. In cases where the DC believes that the Dean is being unreasonable in denying an increase in compensation, we encourage faculty members to consult with the union, which can reach out to the appropriate Vice President. If there is evidence that the DC position requires more work than is being paid for at the current level, and that the Dean is being unfair in evaluating the situation, the union can request that the VP investigate and possibly intercede.

26. In the forum held by LRCFT on the new Department Chair system, we were told that, in cases where a DC is denied additional release time, they should "work with their Dean to take things off their plate." How would this work? Isn't it unrealistic to expect DCs to just stop doing important tasks?

This is a difficult issue, and we will probably need to address situations like this on a case-by-case basis. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to construct contract language that accounts for every possible difficulty or complication, actual or anticipated. We believe and hope that cases like this will be uncommon, and that reasonable solutions will be possible. For example, a department chair could decide that they want to continue to do some of the additional work as college service, request a stipend to be paid for that additional work from a grant, ask staff for assistance with the work, or a number of other possible solutions that depend on the exact situation and the nature of the work.

A fundamental principle of the union is that faculty should not be required to perform work for which they are not paid. This was one of the motivations behind the changes made to DC compensation in the recent negotiations. It might be, in some cases, that in the absence of an acceptable solution, DCs will need to be willing to let some work fall to Deans in order to make the point that faculty cannot be expected to shoulder workload creep without adequate remuneration. The union will be there to help you make this argument.

Final Observations

LRCFT believes that the new system for determining Department Chair compensation is a significant improvement over the old system, and that the vast majority of Department Chairs will benefit from these contract changes. We are basing this opinion on a careful evaluation of the compensation provided under the new system, as compared to what we believe chairs would have received if all the departments in the district had been reevaluated under the old Appendix G system for the 2023-2024 academic year. Preliminary research showed that a large number of departments had not been reevaluated in years – sometimes decades – and that enrollment declines and changes to college structure could have caused departments to lose significant compensation under the old model.

We understand that the new system is not perfect, that it might result in reduced compensation for some DCs, and that there will be difficulties, both anticipated and unforeseen, that will need to be addressed. We believe that it is possible to support and recommend the new system while also recognizing its limitations. The main concern here was to make the role of Department Chair at Los Rios a less fraught and more fairly compensated one. We hope that the new system will do that, and we appreciate any feedback you have on the changes, both immediately and as the new system goes into effect over this contract cycle.