UC-Santa Cruz
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AMP's Proposal for an Office of Department Operations Coordination

In early 2022, Chancellor Larive announced a bold initiative to prioritize the hiring of 100 additional faculty in the next 10 years, "the most significant faculty hiring effort the campus has pursued since its founding more than 50 years ago". AMP members are excited to support this influx of new faculty and groundbreaking research, yet we remain deeply concerned about the lack of additional staffing to facilitate this endeavor and the ramifications on staff workload and retention.

Department managers and their staff will be expected to initiate search plans, administer recruitments, organize campus visits, process appointment files, assign office space, and coordinate access to department resources in order to onboard these new hires. This work will be in addition to our day-to-day labor on which chairs and directors depend, to coordinate the academic personnel process, manage curricula, and oversee the business process and services that sustain unit operations.

Prior to presenting our suggested solutions, we consider that it may be helpful to set out in a little more detail the major obstacles that administrative managers face on a day-to-day basis. AMP has repeatedly reported the difficulty in retaining staff because of housing costs, lack of professional development, and salary increase below the level of inflation. High turnover results in more inexperienced staff who make more errors, take longer to complete tasks, and require additional supervision. These issues are compounded exponentially because staff turnover is endemic in all units across campus, including in Staff Human Resources, causing an even lengthier process for staff recruitment.

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Administrative managers are the initial support system for newly hired staff and faculty. We recruit, train, and supervise advisors who play a key role in the support system that ensures student success. We are the first point of contact for faculty from the submission of a recruitment application through to retirement. Administrative managers handle the details in the processes over which chairs/directors are given responsibility, and they serve as the repository of institutional memory that ensures a smooth transition in leadership.

AMP was formed by department managers from across campus decades ago to provide a meaningful and effective support system for each other and thus for the entire campus. This group has been sustained by a relatively small group of individuals who volunteer their time to support their colleagues by facilitating monthly meetings with stakeholders in units across campus, organizing an annual conference that brings staff from units across campus together to share best practices, and coordinating a system-wide conference that brings together more diverse administrative experience from across the ten UC campuses.

Over the last several years, AMP has struggled to recruit members to serve on the Executive Board which organizes the activities that contribute to the professional development of administrative managers. Administrative managers are too busy keeping their heads above water given the additional labor created by increased policy enforcement, new collective bargaining agreements that require additional processes to maintain compliance, planning and reacting to ever-shifting campus initiatives, and the seemingly endless cycle of backfilling and recruiting vacant staff positions. AMP has sought to lessen the burden of participation by expanding membership to include research center and program directors and suspending the annual conference organized on campus. As administrative manager positions turnover with increasing frequency, we cannot continue to depend solely on a small group of volunteers to provide the professional development and support needed for administrative managers to perform their jobs effectively.

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AMP is therefore recommending two actions that address the training and development of administrative managers:

1. **A revision of the reporting structure for administrative managers.**
2. **The creation of an office dedicated to supporting and developing administrative managers.**

Reporting Structure

Even the most well-intentioned and experienced chair is limited in their ability to support new department managers. Developing staff is a time-intensive, long-term investment, and chairs are short-term, part-time administrators who depend on the administrative expertise of their staff to handle the details of running a department. Chairs are burdened with mentoring junior faculty and liaising with Deans on top of teaching classes and engaging in their research, leaving no space (even if desired) for them to quickly gain expertise in the business processes necessary to train department managers. In practice, the leadership role of the chair runs parallel to the duties of the department manager, which calls into question their ability to effectively assess performance. As a result, performance appraisals under the current system offer little substance in the professional development of department managers.

The AMP membership has identified the reporting structure currently in operation in the Baskin School of Engineering (BE) as a logical alternative. In BE, Department Managers report to the Director of Operations who in turn reports to the Assistant Dean/Chief of Staff. The current BE Director of Operations is a former department manager who has decades of administrative experience and understands the challenges faced by department managers. Below we set out some of the apparent benefits of this reporting structure:

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- Staff are supported through training, consistent performance appraisals, and advocacy.
- BE Director of Operations advocates for staff wellbeing such as higher pay and reclassifications. This support structure increases staff retention and tenure and therefore increases faculty support, as well as providing consistency around classification and remuneration.
- Reduction of faculty labor, since staff recruitments can be carried out by experienced staff, rather than department chairs.
- Increased, consistent support for incoming faculty.
- Clear backup plan to support faculty when Department Managers are out of the office.
- Offers Department managers room to grow in their positions, increasing retention. This model creates a potential path for promotion from Assistant Department Manager to Department Manager to Senior Department Manager who then supervises other staff.
- Department Managers in BE are viewed as partners to Department Chairs because there is less of a power dynamic, and this builds trust not only between the relevant individuals, but within departments and between faculty and staff across the School.

Dedicated Support and Development of Administrative Managers

Departments have reaped the benefits of the work done in the Office of Campus Advising Coordination (OCAC) to support undergraduate advisers. OCAC staff have served on undergraduate adviser search committees and advocated for the creation of divisional lead undergraduate advisers who have taken some of the burden of training and supporting newly hired advisers. They have created an advising certificate program that allows advisers to further their professional development. They have consulted on and created processes that streamline the administrative work carried out by undergraduate

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advisers so that more time can be devoted to students. The Office of Campus Advising Coordination has been extremely effective in the development of undergraduate advisers because it is staffed by former advisers.

This proposal for an Office of Department Operations Coordination follows a similar model. In addition to providing the infrastructure for the professional development of administrative managers, our proposed Office of Department Operations Coordination (ODOC) would streamline communications as they filter through academic divisions. ODOC staff would be able to effectively consult on the administration of new programs, propose changes to business processes and new systems whose end users reside in the academic units. There are many other benefits that a unit consisting of administrative management professionals could bring to the efficient operation of the campus. AMP is extremely interested in meeting to discuss these proposals further with campus leadership.