

## **What Is The Role of The Dean Internally?**

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### **Brief Background**

The Faculty of Law of the University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria was established in 1962 as one of the foundation teaching and academic units of the University. The position of the Dean is a privileged one in many respects. It is also a very challenging one. This paper focuses on the role of the dean internally. How is the Dean appointed? What are his/her responsibilities towards students, academic colleagues and other staff, the University and other bodies, whose voice and input cannot be ignored in the internal running of the Faculty?

### **Appointment**

The Dean is elected by fellow academic colleague from lecturer II to Professor, in accordance with the prescribed laws governing the University.

I was elected the first female Dean of the Faculty in 2004 and reelected for a second and final term in 2006. I therefore served as Dean for four years (2004-2008). This is the maximum term a Dean can serve in the University.

Only Full Professors are eligible for election as Dean. Most elections are a straight contest between two professors. I was elected unopposed for the first term. The second term was contested.

### **Leadership Roles**

The Dean is the chief executive of the Faculty, and leads and manages the academic, administrative and financial affairs of the Faculty in accordance relevant regulations governing the conduct of affairs in the University. The Dean is answerable to the Vice Chancellor and the Senate and University Council. The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic and Research) and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Management Services) may stand in for the Vice Chancellor. The Dean presides over the Faculty Board of Studies and other statutory meetings, such as the Committee of Dean and Heads of Departments, and Appointments and Promotions Committee. There are other ad hoc committees chaired by the Dean as the need arises but in most cases, a professor or other senior academic staff is appointed as Dean's representative. The Dean operates largely through the Committee system to accomplish many important tasks such as curriculum development, seminar and occasional lecture series, research and publications, Linkages and partnerships, staff and student welfare, examination and lecture timetables etc. It is there expected of a Dean to have excellent communication and persuasive interpersonal skills to carry the Faculty along at all times. Dispute prevention and management skills are also important. A Faculty can only be as dynamic as the Dean.

### **I) Leadership Role: Students**

The Dean has primary responsibility of providing the right academic learning environment for students. The vision of the University is to be a top class institution for the pursuit of excellence in learning and research, as well as in character and service to humanity. The Dean must show unwavering commitment towards a progressive realisation of the vision and mission of the University and the Faculty. He/She should ensure that course content, quality and teaching methodologies are adequate and current, with the aim of providing a sound and broad based legal education, which should translate into broad based lawyers who can fit in anywhere nationally and internationally. The training of lawyers is not complete until the one year professional training is successfully completed at the Nigerian Law School, under the Council of Legal Education. The Dean is a member of the Council and has the responsibility to ensure that students meet the ethical as well the academic requirements require for admission into the Law School.

The Dean is therefore required to be well acquainted with all matters relating to student discipline and code of conduct. Regular contacts with students collectively and individually are needed. Students appreciate a Dean who demonstrates empathy and openness. This in no way compromises firmness.

In dealing with students and staff, the Dean often works through Heads of Departments as the general coordinator. The Faculty has four departments each headed by a full professor. The Dean needs a lot of tact in dealings with Heads of departments especially where they are senior professors. The Dean must therefore be a good human relations manager.

### **II) Leadership: colleagues**

As stated earlier, the Dean provides academic leadership in teaching and research. In conjunction with heads of departments, the Dean oversees the welfare of academic and administrative colleagues; represents the Faculty in university committees on matters relating to promotions, appointments, leaves, termination, and discipline of colleagues. The great challenge here is that peculiar needs of law faculties for example in terms of basic and terminal qualifications for appointments and promotions may sometimes be subsumed in the larger policy direction of an external body charged with oversight functions over the universities. This is one of the areas where networking and partnerships with other Faculties within and outside the country is required to ensure basic minimum and common standards.

### **Financial Responsibility**

The Dean is the chief accounting officer of the Faculty. This involves the preparation of the annual budget for the Faculty. Implementation of the approved budget is also the responsibility of the Dean. Financial autonomy is severely restricted and availability of funds for effective

administration is a severe constraint. The Dean is expected to be a good fund raiser within the laid down guidelines.

### **Relationship with University**

The Dean serves on numerous committees of the University. The Dean also oversees postgraduate programmes of the Faculty and chairs the postgraduate Committee of the Faculty.

### **Relationship with External bodies**

As indicated above, the Dean is member of Council of Legal Education, body charged with responsibility for the professional training of lawyers in Nigeria; and also a member of the Governing Council of the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies. The Dean with the cooperation of the Faculty and the Director of Academic Planning in the Vice Chancellor's office, prepares the Faculty for academic and professional accreditation as and when due, usually every three to five years.

### **Status**

The Deanship position is an honourable, and respected one. The challenges are however enormous. But, rather than being one to be avoided at all cost, it is one that people aspire to. The exposure and the door it opens into more or less the highest echelon of university administration and decision making cannot be equated with the stress that goes with it. It is in my opinion and invaluable experience.

### **Governance**

It is not easy to combine academic, administrative and managerial responsibilities effectively and simultaneously. From my personal experience, teaching often has to rescheduled or cancelled because of pressing administrative responsibilities, unscheduled meetings both within and outside the university.

### **Conclusion**

Although the Faculty of Law, university of Lagos, is relatively young compared to other Faculties in more developed countries, I believe that we all share similar aspirations as well as challenges. Each Faculty needs a Dean who understand its peculiar needs, a Dean who understands the vision and mission of the Faculty and the umbrella university, a Dean who is a servant leader with unquestionable integrity, and excellence in character. Our Faculties suffer from financial constraints though in different degrees. We all need a good measure of autonomy to be creative and proactive. At the end of the day, the aim of every Dean, in my opinion, is to take the Faculty to the next level of development with unmistakable international recognition. No man or woman is an island. We need to partner with each other to achieve our individual and common goals.