



3.2.2 Which institutional structures best match your desired working practices?

That's how it is in this university; that's the structure ...there is a certain amount of faculty input, but it is all overseen by the chairs of the various committees. (Ginger)

In the above quote, Ginger reflects on how her university functions as regards program development. There are many ways in which universities are structured and each type influences the range of interactions which are possible, and shapes the expectations placed on members of the institution. The larger the university and the broader its mission, the more likely it is to have a complex and likely hierarchical structure. Common structures include:

- **Pyramid/hierarchy:** This is a common structure in large universities with many faculties each including a number of departments. Often in such institutions, the roles of senior administrators focus on distinct aspects of the university mission, with each meeting with the deans of the faculties about their respective portfolios. The deans in turn delegate to associate deans, who oversee different aspects of academic work, e.g., research, international students or teaching and learning. Associate deans in turn work with the chairs/heads of departments. In such structures, decisions tend to be made at the highest levels, which can contribute to rigid structures and reliance on bureaucratic practices, e.g. extensive paperwork or a large number of committees. On the other hand, there will likely be a large number of formal resources to help you to complete work to the necessary standard.
- **Divisional:** This structure is a clustering of disciplines or faculties. It may be used in larger universities to encourage better communication, integration and interdisciplinary research within broad disciplinary groups, e.g. social sciences. While this reduction of units reporting at the top level of the university can decrease the number of hierarchies, communication across the divisions may suffer such that divisions operate quite independently, as nearly distinct entities, with available resources varying considerably across divisions.
- **Functional:** Such an arrangement tends to emerge in smaller universities with largely undergraduate programs where the organizational structure may be based around programs in order to better serve the needs of students.

Of course, departments and faculties will also vary in their internal structures. Understanding the institutional structures and decision-making processes in your own university can help you to navigate to achieve your goals. In our research we were struck by how many junior academics knew relatively little about the nature of institutional structures and their power to shape academics' working lives.



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