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20 Ways for Deans to Say "No"

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Deans sometimes have a tough time saying "No." Many just need to be liked too much and few want to be seen as the resident Scrooge who is miserly with resources. Yet, there is no end of requests that come across the dean's desk.

It's not uncommon for a dean to be assaulted by an enthusiastic staff or faculty member with an idea for a new initiative or a perceived need in the hallway between office and coffee room, or, between chapel and class. But, deans do need to say "No" when appropriate. If they hang around the job long enough most deans will develop a tough enough skin to say "No" relatively easy. Others develop a more delicate and politically palatable manner for staying off pleas for privileges, exceptions, or personal projects. The trick, of course, is to sound sincere and provide a rationale that is believable enough to not be questioned overmuch. Or, hopefully, to postpone the issue long enough for the petitioner to lose interest.



Here are 20 ways deans can say "No" that can serve as a stay against requests you don't want to entertain:

1. We didn't budget for that.
2. Maybe if we get a grant we can do that.
3. The President won't go for it.
4. The Trustees won't like it.
5. The accreditation Standards won't allow for that.
6. It's not in the by-laws.
7. There's no room for that in the course rotation schedule.
8. We don't have the right size faculty to do that.
9. We don't have a large enough student FTE for that.
10. We'd have to hire more staff for that.
11. The Faculty committee that would need to handle that no longer exists.
12. The Faculty Manual (or Academic Manual, or Personnel Manual) may not allow that; I'll have to check.
13. That does not fall within the degree program goals.
14. We don't have a rubric for that.
15. Can you draw up a proposal for that?
16. That will put you over the teaching load.
17. It's in the budget, but we don't have the money.
18. Let's wait till after the curriculum revision is done.
19. Let's wait till after the accreditation visit is over.
20. I think we need to leave that for the next dean.

Despite the tongue-in-cheek list, saying no isn't always easy, but it is often necessary. Sometimes we fear people won't like our decision. Other times we fear people won't like *us* because of our decision. But both are beside the point in the job deans must do. Deans are stewards of a wide ranging area within their institutions, covering multiple facets with limited resources. Few in the organization have the vantage of position that gives them the capacity to

see how saying "yes" to one thing impacts other areas in positive and/or potentially negative ways. For deans, saying "No" just comes with the job.

<https://wabash.center/2014/03/20-ways-for-deans-to-say-no/>