Education Advisory Board | Academic Affairs Forum

Defining Faculty Workload Expectations

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Academic Affairs Forum

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Table of Contents

1) Executive Overview..... 4
Key Observations..... 4
2) Defining Faculty Workloads..... 5
Institution Workload Policies..... 5
Department Variations..... 7
3) Administering Faculty Workloads..... 8
Policy Development..... 8
Workload Determinations..... 9
Additional Course Releases..... 11
Land-Grant Policies..... 12
4) Research Methodology..... 13
Project Challenge..... 13
Project Sources..... 13
Research Parameters..... 13

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1) Executive Overview

Key Observations

Senior administrators collaborate with formal faculty organizations to develop policies that broadly define full faculty workload criteria. Senior university leadership at all profiled institutions negotiated with faculty organizations or collective bargaining units to develop faculty workload policies; one institution employs a workload policy that is shared by all other institutions within the state system. Faculty collective bargaining groups at three institutions represented faculty interests in workload negotiations; the faculty senate at one institution voted to approve proposed workload policies prior to implementation.

Workload policies describe full workload criteria in terms of faculty course load; department chairs adapt baseline standards to meet department needs. Workload policies stipulate the number of courses equivalent to a full faculty workload each semester. Policies also emphasize the academic value of other faculty activities (e.g., research, service) and provide methods to factor additional activities into workload assignments. Workload policies permit department chairs to create department-specific workload expectations that comply with institution-wide standards. Few tenure-track faculty have fully-instructional workloads.

Departments that receive substantial grant funding and offer doctoral degrees emphasize the research component of faculty workloads. Science faculty workloads at all profiled institutions include a higher proportion of research activity relative to faculty in humanities departments. Department chairs expect science faculty to attract grant funding and create research opportunities for doctoral candidates.

Department chairs rarely grant additional course releases for faculty service. Most institutions do not factor basic undergraduate advising responsibilities into workload determinations; faculty at one institution earn one workload unit for every 30 undergraduates they advise per semester. Faculty appointed to lead faculty organizations, direct academic programs, or coordinate advising programs can earn an additional course release for service.

Workload policies do not differentiate between faculty activities related to the land-grant mission and general activities. Workload policies do not incentivize research or service in departments traditionally associated with land-grant funding (e.g., agriculture, plant science). Contacts emphasize that diverse departments perform service and outreach activities consistent with the land-grant mission.

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2) Defining Faculty Workloads

Institution Workload Policies

Institutions Maintain Formal Faculty Workload Policies

All profiled institutions post faculty workload expectations publicly; policies define full faculty workloads as total expected faculty engagement in educational activities (e.g., instruction, research, service) per semester.

Institution	Full Faculty Workload Definition	Workload Interpretation	Unit of Measure	Additional Policy Features
Institution A	12 credit hours per semester	4 3-credit courses per semester	Credit hours	Requires community college faculty to instruct 15 credit hours per semester
Institution B	15 units per semester	5 3-credit courses per semester	Workload units	Maintains a calculator for laboratory courses that provides additional workload credit for high-intensity lab course instruction
Institution C	12 credit hours per semester	4 3-credit courses per semester	Credit hours	Conveys workload expectations for individual faculty members in terms of percentage of total workload (e.g., 25% research, 75% instruction)
Institution D	4 units per semester	4 4-credit courses per semester	Workload units	Allows individual colleges to set formal workload expectations

Workload units at **Institution B** are equivalent to instructional credit hours (e.g., 15 total credit hours of courses). Workload units at **Institution D** correspond to total number of courses instructed per semester.

Faculty workloads at all profiled institutions typically include research, service, and instructional expectations; tenure-track faculty rarely instruct four (or five) courses per semester.

Faculty Workloads Include Multiple Components

Typical workloads for full-time, tenure-track faculty at all profiled institutions include research and instructional components; most institutions expect faculty to fulfill basic advising duties in addition to a full workload.

Tenure policies at most institutions require faculty participation in instructional activity, research activity, and service or outreach activities; non-tenure track lecturers may teach full-time.

Standard Faculty Workload Components

- **Instruction:** the number of courses taught per semester

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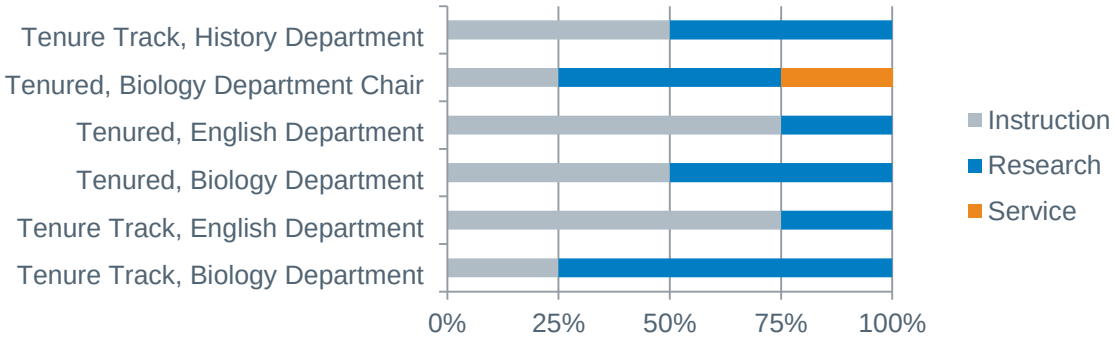
- **Research:** the proportion of total workload that a faculty member devotes to support research activities (includes grant-funded research programs)
- **Service:** program leadership or department chair responsibilities and service on committees or in formal faculty organizations

Sample Distribution of Workload Components by Percentage of Total



Academic affairs administrators at Institution D categorize faculty in the following classifications to guide workload assignments:

Most courses at Institution D are worth four credit hours.

Faculty Classifications at *Institution D*

- **Teaching-Intensive:** instructs two courses per semester, receives one course release for research and one course release for service.
- **Research-Intensive:** instructs one course per semester, receives two course releases for research and one course release for service

Policies Provide a Baseline for Department Chair Interpretation

Institution-wide faculty workload policies provide a baseline definition of a full faculty workload; department chairs enjoy broad discretion to assign faculty responsibilities within the institution-wide framework. Contacts stress that workload policies must acknowledge variations in departmental priorities (e.g., a greater emphasis on research in the sciences) and should afford department chairs flexibility to address departmental needs.

Factors Affecting Workload Distribution

- **Discipline:** Research typically comprises a larger share of total workload for faculty in the science disciplines, which emphasize original inquiry and regular publication.
- **Departmental Degree Programs:** Departments that offer doctoral degrees require faculty to create research and publication opportunities for PhD candidates; faculty workloads include a larger research component.
- **Faculty Preference:** Contacts at **Institution C** report that tenured faculty with less robust research agendas volunteer for increased instructional responsibilities to allow younger faculty to develop strong research portfolios.

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Department chairs set workload expectations for departmental faculty members; contacts indicate that deans rarely become involved in workload determinations and typically defer to the judgment of the department chair.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Department Chair Workload Autonomy

Advantages

- Accounts for differences in departmental priorities and informally expressed faculty preferences that may not customarily come to the dean's attention
- Simplifies the bureaucratic process required to set faculty workload expectations

Disadvantages

- Compromises dean's awareness of variations in departmental workload practices
- Prevents dean from developing a college-wide understanding of real-time educational output levels to compare departmental productivity and maintain overall workload equity
- Magnifies consequences of troubled relationships between department chair and individual faculty

Full Workload Definitions Apply to Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

Workload policies at contact institutions permit department chairs to assign fully-instructional workloads to non-tenure-track faculty within the limits of the full workload definition. Department chairs at **Institution B** and **Institution D** assign non-tenure-track faculty heavily instructional workloads with possible course releases for advising duties.

Department Variations

Department Chairs Create Department Workload Policies

Some colleges and departments create supplemental faculty workload policies derived from the overall institution-wide workload policy; department policies provide standard workload guidelines for department faculty. Department chairs enjoy broad authority to create department guidelines, but guidelines must comply with the university definition of a full faculty workload.

Finance Department Workload Policy at *Institution A*

"Typically, faculty in the finance discipline who are tenure-track are allocated a four course per year teaching load, tenured faculty in the finance discipline are allocated a five course per year teaching load, and tenure-track and tenured faculty in the business law discipline are allocated a six course per year teaching load. The difference in typical workloads between disciplines is a result of external market conditions."

- Institution A Finance Department Allocation of Effort Policy

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3) Administering Faculty Workloads

Policy Development

Develop Workload Policies with Faculty Organizations

Institutions develop formal workload policies through negotiation with formal faculty representative organizations (e.g., faculty senate, faculty unions). Academic affairs administrators at **Institution B**, **Institution C** and **Institution D** collaborated with recognized faculty collective bargaining units; the faculty senate represented faculty interests at **Institution A**. The workload policy at Institution B was established through negotiations between the state board of regents and the statewide faculty union and applies to all state higher education institutions.

Collective bargaining agreements typically do not include lecturers or part-time faculty.

Advantages of Policy Development with Faculty Organizations:

- **Legitimacy:** Faculty perceive policies developed with formal faculty input as more legitimate than policies developed solely by administrators. Policies formally approved by faculty organizations prior to implementation generate consensus and reaffirm faculty agency.
- **Education:** Contacts at **Institution A** report that collaborative policy development generated an institution-wide discussion on the importance of research and service activities to the fulfillment of the institution's education mission. Policy collaborations at **Institution B** produced formal tools to assign relative values to faculty activities.
- **Workload Equity:** Formal workload policies establish objective standards to evaluate faculty productivity and help department chairs and individual faculty members directly compare productivity to their peers. Contacts report that policies clarify standards for productive research; policies motivate faculty members to reassess workload components and accept more instructional responsibilities to relieve unfairly burdened peers.

Union Representatives Participate in Workload Determinations

Representatives from the faculty union at **Institution C** advise faculty members in all workload adjustment negotiations with the department chair the institution. Faculty who object to workload assignments at **Institution B** can appeal to the Workload Review Committee for formal, binding review.

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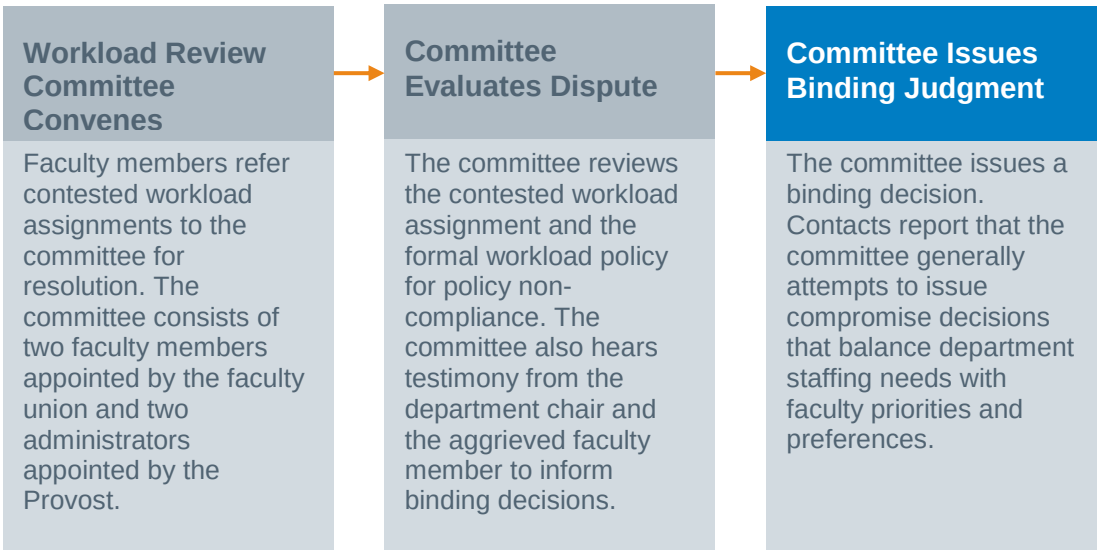
Contested Workload Dispute Resolution at *Institution B*



Workload Determinations

Formal Workload Assignments Improve Oversight

Department chairs at **Institution A**, **Institution B**, and **Institution C** convey faculty workload expectations through formal documents provided before a faculty member begins instruction. Department chairs at Institution C include workload assignments—expressed as percentages of a full-time portfolio—in listings for faculty positions and reiterate assignments in faculty appointment letters.

Strategies to Improve Workload Assignment Processes

Acknowledge New Faculty Priorities

Contacts indicate that new faculty members respond positively to workload assignments that allow them to develop a robust research portfolio for eventual tenure review. Department chairs should develop standard assignments for incoming faculty that provide generous research opportunities.

Review Workload Assignments Annually

Department chairs at Institution A meet annually with faculty members to prepare “allocation of effort” statements for the coming year. Chairs review faculty work for the previous year and discuss faculty priorities to inform these agreements. Annual reviews ensure satisfactory faculty performance and facilitate department-wide duty allocation.

Incorporate Peer Assessments

Department chairs at Institution C receive and review quadrennial peer assessments of faculty member research quality and output and suggest workload adjustments as necessary. Peer reviews provide an accurate evaluation of a faculty member’s research productivity.

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Require Dean Approval

Deans approve allocation of effort agreements brokered by department chairs and faculty members at Institution A. Decanal review ensures that department chairs do not disproportionately assign instructional duties to junior faculty and enhances the dean's understanding of college instructional capacity.

Determine Relative Activity Value Using Faculty Effort

The faculty workload policy at **Institution B** provides guidelines for workload calculation based on faculty effort. Faculty must undertake 15 workload units each semester that require an equivalent investment of effort.

Relative Value of Workload Units at *Institution B*

"Research, scholarship, and creative activity are fundamental components of faculty expectations and workload. Professorial ranks and librarians with professorial rank will have a clear expected part of their workload devoted to research, scholarship, and creative activity, and will be evaluated annually through their PSE [Professional Staff Evaluation] on accomplishments in this area. Therefore, workload credit will be granted for those activities. The number of workload units granted will be consistent with the percent of time and effort of the individual faculty member. An equivalent level of effort will be expected for a unit of research, scholarship, and creative activity as for a unit of instruction."

- Institution B Faculty Professional Activity Policy

Contacts at **Institution A** reference Ernest Boyer's 1990 "Scholarship Reconsidered," which outlines the importance of non-instructional faculty activities to a university's academic mission, to justify the requirement that faculty perform multiple educational activities.

Permit Workload Adjustments to Accommodate Faculty Priorities

Department chairs reassess faculty workload assignments to acknowledge changing faculty academic priorities. Contacts at **Institution C** report that senior tenured faculty often accept a higher-than-average instructional burden to allow new faculty more opportunities to pursue grant funding, develop a research portfolio, and prepare for upcoming tenure review.

Avoid Unplanned Workload Assignment Adjustments

Faculty workload policies include provisions that outline additional compensation for overload workloads. Policies instruct department chairs at **Institution B** to only offer overload work to fully-instructional faculty.

Department chairs hire adjunct instructors to accommodate unexpected over-enrollment rather than assign additional instructional responsibilities to full-time faculty. Unplanned workload adjustments disrupt normal assignment processes and can generate resentment.

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Additional Course Releases

Department Chairs Welcome Faculty Buy-Outs for Research Purposes

Workload policies do not outline guidelines for additional course buy-outs from grant-sponsored projects; faculty directly negotiate course buy-outs with department chairs.

Course Buy-Outs Confer Advantages to Department Chairs

- **Surplus Funds:** Sponsored grants provide departments a pro-rated portion of a faculty member's salary in exchange for a course release; because a full faculty workload at **Institution A** is equivalent to eight courses, course buy-outs typically total one eighth of the faculty member's annual salary. Departments absorb the savings associated with hiring a less expensive adjunct instructor to cover the course release.
- **Research Opportunities:** Sponsored research projects allow departments to provide more research opportunities for students without an additional commitment of institutional resources.

Institutions Rarely Grant Course Releases for Additional Service

Most profiled institutions expect full-time faculty to perform advising duties and participate in shared governance organizations (e.g., faculty representative units, faculty or joint committees) and do not factor basic service obligations into workload determinations. Faculty at **Institution B** receive one service workload unit for every 30 current undergraduate advisees. Policies outline certain additional service activities that may yield additional workload credit:

Service Activities Factored into Faculty Workload

- **Coordinating Advising:** The workload policy at Institution B permits department chairs to confer additional workload credit to faculty assigned to coordinate advising programs or mentor faculty advisors.
- **Shared Governance Leadership:** The chair of the faculty senate at **Institution A** receives a course release for each year of the appointment.
- **Program Directorship:** Faculty appointed to lead programs or departments typically receive additional workload service credit.

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Land-Grant Policies

Contacts at **Institution B** report that music department faculty who provide instruction and public concerts receive additional service credit consistent with the land-grant mission.

Institutions Categorize Extension Work as Service for Workload Purposes

Land-grant institutions perform outreach and service functions in addition to traditional student instruction. Contact institutions receive federal funds to maintain extension programs and experiment stations that allow university faculty and staff to provide services to the general public and evaluate the practical applications of their research. Institutions fulfill most outreach duties through cooperative extension units that function as independent colleges.

Workload policies provide standards for the evaluation of faculty activities related to the land-grant mission.

Categorizing Land-Grant Mission Activities in Faculty Workloads:

- **Cooperative Extension:** Faculty assigned to cooperative extensions at **Institution B** must catalogue their activities and demonstrate that they meet the 15 workload unit expectation each semester.
- **Service/Outreach:** Faculty who undertake significant community outreach and service obligations (e.g., regularly scheduled nutrition consultations at a local clinic, workshops on green farming practices) typically receive service workload credits.

Land-Grant Activities Do Not Receive Additional Weight in Reviews

Workload policy documents do not direct department chairs, deans, or other academic administrators to preferentially evaluate activities related to the land-grant mission in faculty workload reviews.

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4) Research Methodology

Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- **Defining Faculty Workload**
  - How do other institutions set faculty workload expectations?
  - What is considered an appropriate full-time workload?
  - How does faculty workload vary across disciplines?
  - How does faculty rank effect workload expectations?
  - How do workload requirements vary between tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty?
- **Administering Faculty Workload**
  - Who defines and measures faculty workloads at other institutions?
  - What methods are used to track faculty workloads?
  - What role do department chairs play in determining and negotiating faculty workloads?
  - What are optimal workload benchmarks?
  - How are relative value units determined for instruction, research, and service activities?
  - How is workload equity maintained across departments?
  - What additional factors are generally included in workload determinations?
  - What policies govern buy-outs for additional research?
  - How are faculty efforts or projects related to land-grant funding sources evaluated?
  - How much agency do faculty governing bodies and leadership possess in workload policy decisions?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- Education Advisory Board's internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (http://nces.ed.gov/)
- Institution websites

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed academic affairs administrators responsible for faculty workload oversight.

A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

Institution	Location	Approximate Institutional Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)	Classification
Institution A	Mountain West	14,500/18,000	Research Universities (high research activity)

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Institution B	Midwest	11,000/13,000	Research Universities (high research activity)
Institution C	Northeast	9,000/11,000	Research Universities (high research activity)
Institution D	Northeast	12,500/15,000	Research Universities (high research activity)

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