

The Work of Faculty: Expectations, Priorities, and Rewards

The statement that follows, excerpted from a longer report of the same title, was approved by the Association's Committee on Teaching, Research, and Publication in December 1993.

Introduction

What is it that college and university faculty members really do? Much of the confusion surrounding the current debate over faculty workload stems from misconceptions about how faculty spend their time, particularly outside of the classroom. People making policy decisions need to understand the multiple components of faculty work and to take account of the diversity within the American higher education system, a rich variety that militates against the development of simple or uniform standards applicable to all types of institutions.

The purpose of this report is to assess the current state of public discussion regarding the duties and obligations of the professoriate: to look at recent debates about the size and nature of faculty workloads; to offer clarification of the roles of teaching, scholarship, and service for faculty, their institutions, and the public welfare; and to set the problems of the academy against the backdrop of public debates about the costs and benefits of higher education.

In 1969, the Association addressed the question of faculty workloads and the appropriate balance between teaching and research. The statement that was adopted by the AAUP's Council defined maximum and preferred teaching loads in terms of classroom contact hours; advocated collegial procedures for establishing, administering, and revising workload policies; and identified common sources of inequity in the distribution of workloads.

The world changes: the problems of the 1990s differ dramatically from those of 1969. In this report we now address these issues by directing attention to total faculty workload, rather than classroom hours. We approach the question of balance through definitions of teaching, scholarship, and service that emphasize the great variety of activities so embraced; we urge the integration of all the components of academic activity. We do this in the face of external pressures upon the academy and in acknowledgment of the need to reassess our profession and our priorities and to communicate to the general public our understanding of our work and its value, while emphasizing the immense variety of institutions of higher education and the wide range of their problems, resources, and academic and public missions.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

We offer these conclusions and recommendations . . . with the forceful reminder that no single answer to any of the complex questions we have examined can possibly fit all institutions in the diverse world of colleges and universities.

1. *Faculty workload combines teaching, scholarship, and service; this unity of components is meant to represent the seamless garment of academic life, and it defines the typical scholarly performance and career.* Higher education works best when faculty members teach with enthusiasm, engage in scholarly activities and research, and are deeply committed to collegial, community, and professional service. All of these are vital components of the work of faculty. Ideally they reinforce each other, to the benefit of students and institutions and as major motives and sources of satisfaction in the life and career of each faculty member.

We distort the enterprise of higher education if we attempt to separate these endeavors, or to define them as essentially competitive rather than as complementary.

2. *Faculty workload and hours in the classroom are not the same thing.* The general public tends to equate the number of hours spent in the classroom—the contact-hour teaching load—with a faculty member’s workload, which properly should be seen as the aggregate of hours devoted to all the forms and demands of teaching, of scholarship and research and publication, and of the many varieties of professional service. Not only does a mere tally and consideration of “teaching hours” ignore members of the faculty who teach in laboratories, or in settings other than within the traditional classroom (as in studios, small-group tutorials, field work, or clinics); it also distorts the nature of academic work by minimizing the value of the integrated career and the synergistic nature of experience and judgment that come from engagement in the multiple dimensions of faculty work.

Data show that on average faculty members routinely work somewhere between 45 and 55 hours per week. Workload should be thought of as total professional effort, which includes the time (and energy) devoted to class preparation, grading student work, curriculum and program deliberations, scholarship (including, but not limited to, research and publication), participation in governance activities, and a wide range of community services, both on and off campus.

3. *External mandates of workload and productivity are not an effective or desirable means of enhancing the quality or cost-effectiveness of higher education.* We believe that nothing of any value, insofar as the quality of higher education is at issue, is likely to result from extramural efforts to define workload or to determine an appropriate mixture among types of professional activity, whether we refer to individuals or to institutions. Many such attempts at external supervision and demands for accountability rest on an unsupported idea that heavier teaching loads are the solution to the current budgetary ills of higher education. We find no reason to think that more hours of student-teacher classroom contact are the road to better higher education. Nor does any convincing logic indicate that closer supervision of faculty performance will raise productivity and cut costs.

It is not difficult to understand why such externally imposed remedies are widely advocated for the problems that beset higher education. However, they neither blend with nor add to higher education’s ongoing efforts to improve educational quality and to broaden access to institutions of higher learning.

4. *Teaching is a basic activity of the professoriate, and institutional reward systems should reflect the fundamental importance of effective teaching.* Teaching—which includes laboratory instruction, academic advising, training graduate students in seminars and individualized research, and various other forms of educational contact in addition to instructing undergraduates in the classroom—should be given very high priority in all institutions of higher education. Surveys and interviews indicate that faculty members derive great satisfaction from teaching well and from working closely with students. Expectations of teaching effectiveness should be high, and those who meet them should be rewarded for their success—as for other noteworthy contributions—as part of the regular reward system of colleges and universities.

We worry that efforts to offer special rewards to a few faculty members for superior teaching may in some instances be substituted for broader and deeper institutional commitment to teaching and to the educational welfare of the students. Such rewards are well earned and come as a welcome signal of institutional concern. But, by themselves, such individualized rewards can become mere tokens and can even detract from efforts to direct scarce and contested resources toward an across-the-board enrichment of education, especially of bread-and-butter undergraduate teaching and student needs. The culture of each institution should expect the vast majority of its faculty—at all ranks—to engage in serious teaching as well as in educational planning, just as it should interpret the many forms of teacher-student interaction as dimensions of its pedagogical mission.

5. *Research, generally understood to mean discovery and publication, should be related to a broader concept of scholarship that embraces the variety of intellectual activities and the totality of scholarly accomplishments. Though discovery and publication are the core of scholarly endeavor, scholarship seen in its many forms offers a wider context within which to weigh individual contributions.* Innovative and integrative research are essential to research and graduate institutions as well as the capstone of many faculty careers. But scholarship can also mean work done to further the application and integration or synthesis of knowledge, and new directions in pedagogy clearly fall on both sides of the line between what we see as teaching and what can be classified as scholarship. In addition, work in the creative and performing arts, in applied fields of academe, and in areas that demand practical training, is also—by the working definitions of the needs and traditions of such areas—often best classified as research. By enlarging the perspective through which we judge scholarly achievement, we more accurately define the many ways in which intellectual inquiry shapes the path of scholarly pursuits and of our complex and interrelated roles as teachers and researchers in a multitude of institutional and disciplinary settings.

We believe that all faculty members—regardless of institution and regardless of workload—should involve themselves as fully as possible in creative and self-renewing scholarly activities. We enjoin all institutions to commit a suitable share of resources to encourage faculty to engage in the scholarship appropriate to their careers and to each institution’s mission. Each institution should create and interpret its system of rewards to reinforce the efforts of all members of its faculty who are striving to contribute. The responsibility of providing opportunities for such creativity falls upon administrators as well as upon faculty members themselves, and we especially point to the responsibility of senior faculty to encourage and support the scholarly development of their junior colleagues.

6. *In a public climate that, in recent years, has posited a competition between teaching and research, and that is inclined to blame the latter for a perceived decline in the quality of the education available to undergraduates, we need to affirm our support for research.* Eliminating research from the majority of our campuses, and relegating it to an elite few, would cost our country dearly. It would also deal a heavy blow to the morale of the professoriate as well as to the status of higher education as a profession that attracts a stream of gifted and dedicated young men and women.

Major reductions in research would also ultimately lead to a decline in the quality of teaching. We would find it more difficult to prepare a new generation of graduate students and researchers, and our collective loss would extend to the humanistic and social enhancements as well as to the material gains that have come to our society through the advancement of knowledge. The arguments offered against academic research—that if faculty members did less research they could teach more—disregard the quality of teaching that students would receive were professors to become mere transmitters of received information, rather than explorers and discoverers. We must pay tribute to the many ways in which research informs teaching within the world of higher education, just as it serves society beyond the walls of the academy.

7. *The “ratchetting up” of expectations is detrimental to students as well as to faculty.* Public calls for more faculty time in the classroom have not been balanced by reduced demands, on the part of educational administrators and even by faculty peers, regarding faculty publications and service. The current and highly publicized calls for a “renewed” emphasis on teaching, combined with the long fiscal crisis in the service sectors of our society, have meant that faculty at many institutions—and especially those in the public sector—are being called upon to teach more courses and more students.

At the same time, however, institutions have increasingly urged faculty to publish, and they have shaped the reward system accordingly. Faculty who wish to continue to devote time to scholarship and publication—generally seen as the surest route to tenure and promotion—must often do so while carrying teaching loads that are becoming heavier each year. This is cruel to members of the faculty, as individuals, and it is counterproductive for our students’ education. Institutions should define their missions clearly and

articulate appropriate and reasonable expectations against which faculty will be judged, rather than simply exercise a managerial prerogative of demanding all things from all their men and women.

8. *Service, both institutional and community, is an important component of faculty work.* The institutional service performed by faculty is vital to the functioning of our colleges and universities. We do not urge that the rewards for service be commensurate with those for dedicated teaching and scholarship. On the other hand, we believe that such service is essential to the health of our institutions and can make significant contributions to society. It should be recognized and appropriately rewarded.

Service represents enlightened self-interest on the part of faculty, for whom work on the curriculum, shared governance, academic freedom, and peer review comprise the scholar's and teacher's contributions to the shaping and building of the institution. In addition, it is through service that the professional disciplines communicate and that the exchange of scholarship, by means of conferences and publications, is made feasible. And it is through service that the faculties of our colleges and universities offer their professional knowledge, skills, and advice to their communities. The faculty's commitment to the public welfare, as well as its reinvestment in the health and continuing social and intellectual utility of the academy, is expressed to a considerable extent by what we refer to as service. It is a vital component of our collective lives and of our role in society.