Faculty Workload Conversation

Faculty workload has many integrated and moving parts. Although it is always divided into teaching, scholarship and service, the pieces that make up those three parts are complex, interwoven and often hidden. By now, this should be a familiar conversation here at Albright. The complexity of faculty workload has been the focus of many Dean’s Seminars as well as last year’s faculty retreat.

Discussing workload, however, takes time. Currently, we are in the process of tackling the teaching component of faculty work. Rumors abound, but there is no hidden agenda, no secret blood pact, and no ritual sacrifice going on here! In January, the Sloan committee decided that a Dean’s Seminar was not the place to discuss changes to teaching load. This decision stemmed from the fact that every department is unique, and when we tried to put together a presentation of the cumulative data and changes, all it did was draw our attention to the individual components of our suggestions. So, we put on our fortune-telling hats (yes, I’ll admit we did a bit of that) and prophesied that meeting with individual departments might be a better way to provide this information. For most departments the changes are not earth-shattering, so we have only scheduled meetings with those departments that face significant changes. The committee will be meeting with department chairs of the less affected departments as well.

As we round the bend towards the end of the conversation, however, we cannot forget that teaching is only one piece of the puzzle. Scholarship and service contribute to faculty workload as well. The Faculty Governance Guide, having been substantially revised, is being reviewed by the PC. Scholarship criteria is currently being reviewed by the Sloan committee. But, in addition to these larger pieces, many smaller pieces keep the whole system in balance. Rest assured: these small pieces did not go unnoticed. In April, you will be presented with the project as a whole, and while we cannot account for the things that make your job unique (e.g. grading student papers, excess one-on-one student contact outside of classes, etc.), we hope that the proposed changes will help provide recognition for the things you currently do for student success that are not recognized in any meaningful way.

Retiree Office Space

The limited space on campus has made it difficult to discuss retiree support as addressed in the grant application. However, given the space changes that have occurred all over campus, we are pleased to announce that we will be setting up an office for retirees in the Rockland Center. This space will provide faculty retirees with cubicles and computers with access to the Albright network. This space is also close to the Schuma Center—perfect for stopping out of the office.

“...the amount of collegiality one finds in colleagues is the greatest outside determinant of health.”

Websites

The Albright Project for Faculty Balance website is complete! The “First-year Faculty” section of the site has been updated, and the “Resources” section and the “Teaching and Learning Resources” section are now available. In the “Resources” section you will find last year’s videos, extensive resources on elder care, and a section on College policies and services pertaining to faculty. Furthermore, you will now find online benefit and medical leave forms in the “Faculty Flexibility Policies” section.

We have also been working on web pages for academic departments. Although few departments have accepted the offer to assist with web presence, sociology, history, and the Latin American and Caribbean studies program are working to improve their pages. These are works-in-progress and are currently unavailable for viewing. However, if your academic department is interested, please contact Samantha Roy at sroy@alb.edu.

AAC & U Presentation

Representing the Sloan committee in late January, Dr. Andrea Chapdelaine presented information about the initiatives and activities of the Sloan Grant on a panel titled “Data, Grants & Goals” at the AAC & U Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. The presentation emphasized the data collected as a result of the grant and how the College has used the data to achieve goals related to faculty work.

Soup Socials

Due to their popularity among faculty members, the Faculty Soup Socials continue this semester. Created as a way to advance faculty flexibility and camaraderie, many faculty members have said that the soups provide an opportunity to chat with colleagues whom one might not otherwise see often. They also ease the burden of thinking about what to bring for lunch that day, while not obligating faculty members to stay if it’s a particularly busy day.

After this semester, however, the funds from the Sloan Grant will be depleted, so we are looking for your suggestions on how we can keep the socials going. Send your ideas to sroy@alb.edu. Soup socials for March are scheduled for Thursday, March 8 and Wednesday, March 28.

Your Co-Workers Might be Killing You

According to a recent article in The Wall Street Journal, “the typical American will spend about 15 percent of his or her lifetime working at the office” (Lehrer). Since college faculty are by no means typical when it comes to work, this number should probably be closer to 20 percent. In this case, “Your Co-Workers Might be Killing You”... faster. Jonah Lehrer reports some findings of a recent study conducted by Dr. Arie Shirom at Tel Aviv University that examines the workplace and its impact on the health of individuals. Shirom claims that the things upon which research normally focuses, such as hours spent at work or employer-employee relationships, have little or no impact on a person’s physical well-being. Rather, the amount of collegiality one finds in colleagues is the greatest outside determinant of health. Lehrer reiterates, “middle-age workers with little or no ‘peer social support’ in the workplace were 2.4 times more likely to die during the study [than those with support].”

While the relationships between college and university professors can be and often are cut-throat and unsupportive, at Albright, many faculty strive to make connections with colleagues, including administration and support staff. However, if you have caused someone stress recently, perhaps you should go out of your way to do something nice for that person. After all, you did just take minutes off of his or her life. Read the full article by logging in to the library database and searching The Wall Street Journal classroom edition for the title.