



TO: Senate Agenda Committee
FROM: Academic Policy Committee
DATE: March 5, 2024
SUBJECT: Final report for AY 2023-2024 Academic Policy Committee

The Academic Policy committee had 4 meetings during the academic year. The committee carried out the specific charges assigned by SAC. The charges were addressed as follows with recommendations and/or resolutions:

1. Review, in conjunction with Academic Technologies and CATLR, new faculty orientation and training related to in-classroom, hybrid, and online technologies.

The APC was tasked with “reviewing, in collaboration with Academic Technologies and CATLR, new faculty orientation and training concerning in-classroom, hybrid, and online technologies.”

This charge stemmed from the findings of the 2023 faculty survey. The raw data from the 2023 survey suggested that most faculty believed hybrid technologies, which enable students to attend an in-person class remotely, hindered teaching and learning. However, upon closer examination, the raw data did not indicate that faculty and students struggled with the hybrid modality due to a lack of proper training in hybrid teaching technology. Therefore, there appears to be no basis to support the charge to evaluate Academic Technologies and CATLR training.

Instead of focusing on our technology training, the APC conducted a survey of faculty in the spring of 2024 to: (1) confirm that faculty were concerned with hybrid technology, not training, (2) identify the reasons why faculty perceive hybrid classes as less effective than other modalities, and (3) ask faculty which solutions they preferred.

Results of the 2024 Faculty Survey

Faculty were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement: “Classes that are either in-person or online are better for teaching and learning than classes taught in hybrid formats (i.e., some students attend in-person while others attend virtually).” Overall, 47.4% strongly agreed, 22.8% agreed, 20% were neutral, 6.6% disagreed, and only 2.4% strongly disagreed. Put simply, 70.2% of faculty agreed that hybrid classes are less effective than either in-person or online classes.

Next, faculty were asked about their preferred solutions. In summary, the solution with the most support, 37.1% of faculty, is to allow faculty to select the course teaching modality. Less preferred options, 22%, recommended improving the quality or availability of live tech

support during class, and 20.4% recommended improving the technology, apps, or software used for hybrid teaching. Notably, only 14% recommended improvements in hybrid teaching training.

Numerous faculty members provided written feedback. This feedback emphasized various critical aspects of teaching modalities, notably the preference for faculty to have the autonomy to choose the most suitable format, concerns regarding the effectiveness and challenges associated with hybrid teaching, and the significance of considering student engagement and learning outcomes. Below is a synthesized overview:

1. **Difficulty Managing Multiple Modalities:** Faculty members express difficulty in effectively managing both in-person and online teaching simultaneously. This includes challenges in distributing focus evenly, especially during group projects, and the logistical complexities of splitting students into groups and coordinating their participation.
2. **Issues with Classroom Technology:** Faculty members report frequent issues with classroom technology, such as delays, unreliable equipment, and glitches. This not only disrupts the teaching process but also hampers the overall learning experience for students.
3. **Preference for In-Person Interaction:** Despite acknowledging some benefits of remote teaching, many faculty members emphasize the importance of personal contact and the immediacy of the classroom experience for student engagement and learning.
4. **Skepticism Towards Technological Solutions:** There is skepticism regarding whether training or better technology can effectively address the inherent challenges of hybrid teaching. Faculty members express concerns about the fundamental differences between teaching in-person and online simultaneously.
5. **Need for Faculty Autonomy:** There is a strong consensus that faculty should have the autonomy to choose the most suitable teaching modality based on pedagogical reasons and course content. This includes considerations for the quality of teaching and student engagement.
6. **Call for Improved Support and Resources:** Many faculty members emphasize the need for better support and resources to facilitate hybrid teaching effectively. This includes access to reliable technology, timely technical assistance, and adequate training opportunities.
7. **Schools have varying requirements and purposes for utilizing hybrid technology.** Some schools are bound by accreditation standards that impose restrictions on online or hybrid classes, while others cater to students who are spread out geographically, necessitating extensive use of hybrid classes. Implementing a single university-wide policy may not be practical or feasible given these diverse needs and circumstances across different schools.

In summary, the consensus among faculty members is that the choice of teaching modality should be left to individual instructors, who are best positioned to determine the most

effective approach for their courses. While most faculty believe that the challenges of teaching and learning in hybrid courses are inherent to the modality and cannot be fully mitigated, even with the best available technology or training. Ultimately, most faculty desire a policy that prioritizes student learning and ensures that courses are delivered in a manner that maximizes engagement, comprehension, and retention.

Recommendation:

Each department/school/unit should create clear written policies outlining how courses within its unit will be selected for hybrid or online formats. These policies should also define the criteria for determining which faculty members are best equipped to teach these courses effectively. This ensures that faculty members are appropriately matched with the teaching modalities that align with their strengths, ultimately leading to a balanced distribution of courses across online, hybrid, and in-person formats.

2. Review faculty workload policies developed by units to assess the equitable distribution of workloads across faculty.

An analysis of workload policies across various departments at Northeastern University was conducted. Our focus was on identifying disparities between departments for Full-Time Non-Tenure-Track Faculty (FTNTTF). Our analysis centered on three key areas: clarity in workload distributions, faculty involvement in establishing workloads and adjustments, and the equity and flexibility of these distributions. The goal is to provide recommendations that align with the university's one-faculty model, promoting unity and equal respect among all faculty members.

1. Clarity in Workload Distributions

- **Disparities Observed:** Clarity in workload distributions varies significantly across departments. Some policies provide detailed breakdowns of workload components (e.g., teaching, research, service), while others are vague, especially regarding the expectations for research and service. For instance, workload policies for FTNTTF in the Department of Music (Workload Policy #10) and CCIS (Workload Policy #11) offer a clearer picture of teaching loads compared to other departments which might not delineate the distributions as precisely.
- **Implications:** The lack of clarity in some policies may leave FTNTTF uncertain about their full range of responsibilities, potentially affecting their ability to plan their professional development and balance between teaching, research, and service.

2. Faculty Involvement in Establishing Their Workloads and Workload Adjustments

- **Disparities Observed:** There is a noticeable variation in how much input FTNTTF have in establishing and adjusting their workloads. Some departments offer structured mechanisms for negotiation and adjustment of workloads based on individual faculty needs and departmental priorities, whereas others might not explicitly mention such processes.

- **Implications:** Departments that lack clear mechanisms for faculty involvement in workload discussions may inadvertently reduce faculty satisfaction and engagement, making it harder for FTNTTF to align their workloads with their professional goals and the needs of their departments.

3. Equity and Flexibility of the Workload Distributions

- **Disparities Observed:** The equity and flexibility in workload distributions across departments show considerable variation. Some policies explicitly account for personal circumstances (e.g., family leaves, medical leaves) and allow for workload adjustments to support faculty research and service contributions. In contrast, others offer limited flexibility, particularly in adjusting the heavy teaching loads typical for FTNTTF.
- **Implications:** Departments with less flexible workload policies risk overburdening FTNTTF with teaching responsibilities, potentially at the expense of their professional development and contributions to research and service. This can lead to disparities in career advancement opportunities between FTNTTF and their tenure-track colleagues.

Recommendations for Addressing Workload Policy Disparities

Standardize Workload Policy Frameworks: Encourage all departments to adopt a standardized framework for workload policies that clearly delineates expectations for teaching, research, and service, tailored to the unique needs of each department. This recommendation considers the differences among various types of faculty.

Enhance Faculty Involvement: Implement formal mechanisms across all departments for FTNTTF to discuss and negotiate their workloads with department chairs. This should include annual reviews and mid-year check-ins to adjust workloads, as necessary. The faculty handbook should explicitly state that the initial annual workload determination, and any subsequent adjustments, if necessary, are collaborative processes between individual faculty members and their unit heads. This approach considers both the unit's needs and the faculty's needs for growth and development.

Increase Flexibility and Equity: Develop university-wide guidelines that promote flexibility in workload distributions, allowing FTNTTF to engage more fully in research and service activities. This could include establishing minimum and maximum thresholds for each workload component and allowing for temporary reassignments to support faculty professional development.

By addressing these disparities, Northeastern University can better support the professional growth and satisfaction of its FTNTTF, aligning with the goals of the one-faculty model and enhancing the overall academic environment.

Proposed Faculty Senate Resolution: Enhancing Faculty Involvement in Workload Determination

Whereas, the faculty of Northeastern University are integral to the academic and operational success of the institution, contributing through teaching, research, and service; and

Whereas, the current process for determining annual workload distribution and adjustments lacks a standardized approach for active faculty participation, potentially leading to discrepancies in expectations and responsibilities; and

Whereas, the Faculty Senate recognizes the importance of faculty well-being and professional development, which are directly impacted by workload assignments; and

Whereas, it is essential to ensure transparency, fairness, and mutual understanding in the workload determination process to foster a collaborative and supportive academic environment;

Be It Resolved That, the Faculty Senate recommends the following amendments to the Faculty Handbook:

1. Active Participation of Faculty in Their Workload Determination:

- The Faculty Handbook shall be updated to explicitly require that all faculty members, including Full-Time Non-Tenure-Track Faculty (FTNTTF), actively participate in the determination of their annual workload distribution.
- This participation shall include the opportunity for faculty to discuss and negotiate their workload assignments with department chairs or unit heads, ensuring that workload decisions are made collaboratively.

2. Collaborative Process for Workload Adjustments:

- Any adjustments to a faculty member's workload, whether initial determinations or subsequent modifications, shall be made through a collaborative process involving the faculty member and their unit head.
- The Faculty Handbook shall state clearly that such adjustments are to be discussed and agreed upon with the faculty member before implementation, ensuring mutual agreement and understanding.

Be It Further Resolved That, the Faculty Senate charges the Faculty Handbook Committee (FHC) to promptly implement the proposed changes to the Faculty Handbook and collaborate with the Provost's Office to ensure that all department chairs and unit heads are fully informed and trained on these updated procedures.

Be It Finally Resolved That, this resolution shall be communicated to the university administration and to all department chairs, by the Provost's Office, with the request for immediate action to update the Faculty Handbook in accordance with these recommendations.

Results of the 2024 Faculty Survey: Charge 2, Question 3

In addition to our review of unit workload policies, faculty were asked a third question in the Spring 2024 Faculty Senate Survey, “After reviewing your unit’s workload policy, are there any edits you would suggest to best reflect current workload not well defined or represented in the policy?” Responses were 87 (12%) yes they would edit current policy, 439 (61%) no they would not edit current policy and 190 (27%) comments were received from 10 colleges and their units. The following summary of comments is organized by area of current workload policy and by areas to be considered to revise current policy to better reflect growing areas of faculty workload.

1. **Address Workload Policy Variability Across the University:** Faculty is keenly aware of the variability of workload assignment and description within units and across the university. Recommendations included reassess workload policy template, units review and approve workload policy with faculty annually and that the areas of workload be clearly described.
2. **Faculty Well-Being & Promotion:** Across colleges, having any work-life balance is difficult as workload exceeds contracted time requiring use of personal time. Also, the workload assignment may not align with merit and promotion expectations.
3. **Teaching:** Current use of percent of workload may not align with number of classes, credits, size of class, or requirements to prepare for a lab or advise. Faculty also recommended that roles and workload be included and clearly defined (lead faculty, coordinator role, course preparation outside of assigned courses, mentoring/advising students). Three courses/semester leaves little time for significant course innovations and student support needs has increased workload.
4. **Scholarship:** Research may be included in teaching faculty scholarship instead of being recognized in workload as research
5. **Research:** FTNTT faculty may be expected to conduct research without support or workload and if assigned a research workload, it quickly exceeds 10%. Grant writing is not considered in workload.
6. **Administrative:** Requested that course release be defined.
7. **Service:** Service significantly exceeds assigned workload was a recurrent theme. Service expectations leave little or no time for scholarship or improving courses. Several faculty asked how service to the department, college and university are weighted for a 10% workload. It was noted that professional service activities do not have the same definition across colleges. Gaps in workload policy related to service included support of other NU needs are not clearly defined in policy, summer service roles should receive additional compensation, Interviewing/attending faculty applicant presentations has been very time consuming and not currently included in service workload.
8. **Joint Appointment:** Faculty wishing to contribute appropriately asked what does it mean to have a 25% appointment in a unit? Workloads with joint appointments need teaching load clarity, and service commitments definitions.

9. **Cooperative Faculty:** Asked to be included in workload policy with the College of Engineering being an exemplar to be considered.

In summary, there are inconsistencies and gaps in the current workload policies. A significant portion of the work that faculty members undertake is not accounted for in their assigned workload, resulting in a shift of time commitment from contracted hours to personal time. The allocation of workload ought to be reevaluated, especially as faculty members are required to take on additional tasks throughout the year. To ensure the success of faculty, students, departments, and the university as a whole, it is crucial that workload, merit, and promotion criteria are harmonized. Many units are currently reviewing their workload policies, and Mills College is developing its workload policy.

Recommendation:

Review the current university workload policy template to capture and clearly describe current areas of faculty contributions to the unit, college and university to provide a baseline for revision of a school's workload policy to be inclusive of current, as well as new workload needs. That the school and faculty collaborate to annually review and revise the workload policy to reflect current faculty contributions and activities for improved retention and engagement.

3. **Review and obtain clarification of guidelines concerning teaching and service for merit reviews of jointly appointed faculty.**
 - We reviewed and evaluated comments from a previous Faculty Senate survey concerning interdisciplinary service and merit reviews.
 - We reviewed the current policies regarding merit procedures for jointly appointed faculty.

Recommendation –

Our recommendation is that there is no need to develop a new policy with respect to merit procedures for jointly appointed faculty. The merit procedure is clear about how merit reviews are conducted.

Chairs and unit heads should be encouraged to work with jointly appointed faculty to better understand how to evaluate research, teaching and service contributions in different units, but it is difficult and probably too inflexible to develop a policy given the vast differences in disciplinary norms across units.

Other activities:

- **TRACE Concern** - APC provided SAC with a report addressing the TRACE concern raised by a faculty member within the College of Social Sciences and Humanities. The faculty member observed that students enrolled in online asynchronous courses confront the challenge of lacking an N/A (Not Applicable) option for certain TRACE survey questions resulting in statistically inaccurate data.

Recommendation

1. Insert an N/A option for the question "In-class sessions were helpful for learning" located under the "**Learning-Related Questions**" section to make it relevant for students of online, asynchronous courses.
 2. Introduce an N/A option for the following questions under the "**Instructor-Related Questions**" section:
 - a. "The instructor came to class prepared to teach"
 - b. "The instructor used class time effectively"
 - c. "The instructor was available to assist students outside of class"
- **Review *Draft Academic Consequences for Violating University Academic Integrity Policy***

The Academic Policy Committee (APC) reviewed a proposed addition to the Academic Integrity Policy, focusing on academic consequences for policy violations. The review utilized criteria such as alignment with institutional values, educational outcomes, and equity, finding the policy addition to align with the university's commitment to academic integrity. Recommendations include uniform understanding and application of the policy, regular monitoring and evaluation, and clear communication to ensure its effectiveness and maintain the university's academic standards. The APC supports the policy addition.

- **Review of *Draft University Graduate Curriculum Committee Bylaws Revision***

The Academic Policy Committee (APC) reviewed the proposed University Graduate Curriculum Committee (UGCC) Bylaws revision which included minor administrative changes related to the previously-approved change in the name of the UGCC. The APC fully agrees with the proposed revision to the UGCC Bylaws.

Respectfully submitted,

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