RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

Making faculty work visible: An equity-minded approach

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Abstract
The fact that overloaded plates and stress are common in mid-career is well known. Likewise, we know that the unequal distribution of faculty workload is one of the most important, yet least talked about, inequities that shape the experiences of faculty members within colleges and universities. In particular, women and racially minoritized mid-career faculty face unusually high service, teaching, and mentoring workloads. Often we place the onus for aligning time and priorities, and "saying no" on mid-career faculty members themselves. In this chapter, the author(s) take a different approach, drawing on five years of action research with academic departments. They share key conditions that department leaders can create, and practices they can put in place to scaffold equity and agency in mid-career faculty workloads and rewards.

Just say no.

INTRODUCTION

The phrase "just say no" is one of the most common pieces of advice offered to mid-career faculty members about how to better manage their workloads. Mentors, institutional leaders, faculty development coaches, and opinion editors encourage faculty members to protect their research time by rejecting invitations to serve on department or college committees or refusing to take on more advisees (Babcock et al., 2017; Maycock, 2015; Mitchell & Hesli, 2013; Rockquemore, 2010). They argue that to be promoted to full professor, associate professors should keep their heads down and their doors shut.

This advice is well-intentioned, particularly for women and racially minoritized associate professors, who tend to do more service, advising, mentoring, and teaching (Baker & Manning, 2021; Britton, 2017; Carrigan et al., 2011; El-Alayli et al., 2018; Guarino & Borden, 2017; Misra et al., 2011, 2012, Misra, Kuvaeva, et al., 2021; O'Meara et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2015; Zambrana, 2018). However, such advice ignores the reality that departments and

institutions need faculty members to engage in service and teaching. It also devalues the service and teaching activities women and racially minoritized associate professors may find rewarding and sustaining (Baez, 2000; Baker, 2020; Griffin et al., 2013; Kelly & Fetridge, 2012), particularly as they navigate toxic workplaces, work-life stress, and burnout (Eagan & Garvey, 2015; Zambrana, 2018). In addition, as Reddick (2021) points out, this approach affords privileges to those faculty members who are not over-burdened with requests. It lets them off the hook for their responsibility to become allies for a better system. Individual faculty members, as well as their departments and institutions, need better solutions than "just say no" (Pyke, 2015).

In this chapter, we consider how departments and institutions can take an equity-minded approach to the issue of unequal workloads for mid-career faculty. That is, we reject the view that it is incumbent upon individual associate professors to say no and protect their time. Instead, we consider how departmental workload and rewards systems can be intentionally reshaped to recognize and value the important work of mid-career faculty members, particularly women and racially minoritized faculty members.

THE FACULTY WORKLOAD AND REWARDS PROJECT

The stories and strategies we, the authors, discuss in this chapter draw from our experiences with the Faculty Workload and Rewards Project (FWRP). The FWRP was a 5-year, National Science Foundation-funded action research project. We worked with departments and small academic units to enhance fairness in the way workload is accepted, assigned, and rewarded. Drawing from theories of social and cognitive biases (Bohnet, 2016; Kahneman, 2011) and insights from The Equity Scorecard Project (Bensimon, 2007; Witham et al., 2015), we designed the FWRP as an experiment, comparing departments that participated in an equity-minded workload intervention to those that did not. The intervention consisted of a workshop about how and why workload inequality emerges; the development of faculty work activity dashboards; the creation of a department equity action plan for institutionalizing workload reform; and individual faculty professional development (Culpepper et al., 2020; O'Meara et al., 2019, 2020, 2021). The results from the FWRP suggest interventions can improve equity within academic workloads. Faculty members in the intervention departments reported greater perceptions of fairness in how workload was distributed within their department and reported more satisfaction with their workloads overall (O'Meara et al., 2018, 2019).

DEPARTMENTAL CONDITIONS THAT FOSTER WORKLOAD EQUITY FOR ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS

Our project proved that a strategic approach to workload reform can reduce workload inequality. We identified six conditions that increase faculty members' perceptions that workload is fair, and their work is valued (O'Meara et al., 2019, 2021):

- Transparency: "Departments have widely visible information about faculty work activities for departments members to see" (O'Meara et al., 2021, p. iv).
- Clarity: "Departments have clearly identified and well-understood benchmarks for faculty work activities" (O'Meara et al., 2021, p. iv).
- Credit: "Departments recognize and reward faculty members who are expending more effort in certain areas" (O'Meara et al., 2021, p. iv).

TABLE 1 Individual and department/institutional strategies for enhancing workload equity (O'Meara et al., 2019, 2021)

Condition	Departmental/Institutional strategy	Individual faculty strategy
Transparency	Design work activity dashboards to understand the distribution of workload within the department. Share aggregate results with members of the department and use as a way to internally talk about what faculty are doing in terms of workload.	Systematically track work activities (e.g., # of recommendation letters written; # of hours spent advising) and share data with senior leaders during performance reviews. Access information to benchmark performance against peers in relevant career stages/appointment types.
Clarity	Create faculty expectation guidelines for teaching and service activities that include expected range of work in each area accounting for career stage and appointment type.	Request/seek out workload guidelines; seek feedback from multiple department members on what is expected in the areas of service, teaching, and research.
Credit	Implement a credit system to reward extra effort.	Assess what kinds of rewards (e.g., course or service release; service sabbatical) may be in place for taking on certain activities (e.g., chairing a diversity committee); negotiate for workload credit in exchange for taking on certain roles.
Norms	Implement planned rotations for time-intensive service roles.	Speak up for department colleagues when they are overloaded and/or workload decisions are not being made strategically; vocalize your own workload concerns when relevant.
Context	Offer alternative pathways to achieving full professor in promotion and tenure guidelines; invite candidates to include relevant DEI, service, and advising work in their promotion materials.	Make sure that relevant contexts related your work are documented and identified for annual evaluations (e.g., DEI efforts, mentoring and advising of BIPOC groups, and leadership in major campus initiatives).
Accountability	Create a transparent process for what happens when faculty do not meet expectations. This may involve re-assignment, lower merit scores, and/or be related to post-tenure review; conduct a service audit and clearly define service roles.	Speak up to the collective department and/or department leadership when accountability processes are not being followed as intended.

- Norms: "Departments have a commitment to ensuring faculty workload is fair and have put systems in place that reinforce these norms" (O'Meara et al., 2021, p. iv).
- Context: "Departments acknowledge that different faculty members have different strengths, interests, and demands that shape their workloads and offer workload flexibility to recognize this context" (O'Meara et al., 2021, p. iv).
- Accountability: "Departments have mechanisms in place to ensure that faculty members fulfill their work obligations and receive credit for their labor" (O'Meara et al., 2021, p. iv).

In the following section, we use vignettes to illustrate the kinds of workload equity issues that can emerge for mid-career faculty members when these conditions are not present. We then discuss how departments might apply policies and practices to better recognize or value the work of mid-career professors in different kinds of departments and institutional contexts (see Table 1).

Fostering transparency through faculty work activity dashboards

Leslie is a White woman clinical associate professor in a large, interdisciplinary department at a comprehensive institution. She teaches a qualitative methods course for master's and doctoral students. As one of the few faculty members who teaches qualitative methods, Leslie is frequently asked to chair student thesis and dissertation committees. When Leslie solicits her department chair for advice, the chair says that all clinical associate professors in the department do a lot of advising, and there is really no way to systematically understand who does what.

Leslie's department lacks *transparency* and concrete information (O'Meara et al., 2021). The department chair assumes that all clinical associate professors have high advising loads. Without an accurate understanding of how many students advising activities each faculty member takes on, Leslie and the department chair can do little to address her concerns. To enhance transparency, the department could employ a work activity dashboard (O'Meara et al., 2020). Dashboards track and make transparent standard faculty work activities, such as number of advisees or thesis and dissertation committees, so that all department members have access to the data. With a dashboard in place, Leslie and her department chair can see that Leslie is in fact doing the lion's share of advising in the department. They can then assess relevant next steps, for instance, rewarding Leslie for labor in this area or putting in place policies and practices that would more fairly distribute advisees across department members.

Creating clarity through faculty expectations guidelines

Ron is an Asian man associate professor in a large department at a research-intensive institution. He was recently promoted to associate professor and is now constantly asked to serve on department and college committees. He feels comfortable saying no, but, as someone who was recently promoted, he is unsure of how much service other associate professors do. When he consults with other associate professors in the department, they likewise say they are unsure of departmental service expectations.

In this scenario, Ron faces a lack of *clarity*. His department does not have clear guidelines for service expectations, and he has no way to know if he is over- or under-performing (O'Meara et al., 2019). One intervention that could help enhance clarity in this case is the creation of faculty expectations guidelines (O'Meara et al., 2021). Faculty expectation guidelines clearly define what faculty members at different ranks need to do to meet expectations in research, service, and teaching to be promoted (e.g., chairing one committee and serving on two). When equipped with such guidelines, Ron can better assess whether he is currently meeting or exceeding expectations with his current service load. This knowledge of departmental expectations allows him more confidence in saying no when asked to serve in the future.

Giving credit through service credit swaps

Donna is Black woman associate professor in a medium-sized department at a liberal arts college. Her scholarship focuses on anti-racism in media, and she is therefore frequently asked to serve on committees related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Donna currently chairs four committees. She finds the work important and wants to continue to

engage; however, Donna also knows that she is doing more service work than others are. She feels like she is chairing committees on a voluntary basis.

In this scenario, there is an issue of *credit*. Donna's service work is critical to her campus and important to her as a scholar. It is not that she wants to do less DEI work, it is that she wants the work that she does to be valued (Griffin et al., 2013; Misra, Kuvaeva, et al., 2021). In response, her department might consider putting in place a credit system (O'Meara et al., 2021). The goal of a credit system is to recognize when faculty members are going above and beyond in certain areas. A credit system typically builds upon pre-existing faculty expectation guidelines. It defines what is considered "extra effort" and outlines the kinds of "credits" that faculty members can trade in when they engage in extra effort. In Donna's case, her department may define "standard performance" as chairing one committee at the department, college, or campus level. Donna's extra effort as the chair of four committees therefore entitles her a course release in the third year *or* a service sabbatical in the following year.

Enhancing equity norms through planned rotations

Tom is a Latino man associate professor. For the last 8 years, he has been his department's director of undergraduate programs. Because he has been the director for so long, no other department members really know the ins and outs of the undergraduate program. Tom views being the director as important, but labor intensive. Tom has watched colleagues, promoted to associate at the same time as him, advance to full. When Tom brings up the idea of turning over the director role to another faculty member, none of his department colleagues step forward.

The main issue for Tom is that there is a lack of equity *norms* surrounding the process in which service work is assigned (O'Meara et al., 2021). With no process in place for assigning the director role, there is a sense that faculty members who are successfully able to avoid high-intensity service roles are winners and faculty members unlucky enough to be encumbered by such work just need to be better at playing the game. Implementation of planned rotations for time-intensive service roles might address this issue (O'Meara et al., 2018, 2019, 2021). A department like Tom's could identify the key committee service roles that must always be filled (e.g., director of undergraduate programs; director of graduate programs; chair of admissions committee). Then, the department creates a 5-year plan that rotates these roles among department members. Faculty members would be assigned one of these five roles after having served on the respective committee, and the responsibility for director or chair-level roles would rotate on a regular basis, with the schedule laid out in advance. Rather than Tom simply being expected to serve as director for several years in a row, he could rotate to a new position, gain experience in other areas, avoid feeling burdened to find his own replacement, and allow other faculty the opportunity to gain experience in undergraduate programs.

Providing context through alternative pathways to full

Ann is a multiracial woman associate professor in a large department at a large minority-serving institution. Ann previously served as undergraduate program director and since then, has taken a lead role in innovating new curricular design in several of the department's program concentrations. She has served as a faculty fellow at the teaching center and has received numerous teaching awards. Ann's contributions are vital to the

department. However, her unit's promotion criteria for associate professors are rigid. Ann is expected to spend 50% of her time on research, 20% of her time on service, and only 30% of her time on teaching. She would like to go up for full professor but knows that her research productivity does meet the criteria.

Ann's situation in her department reflects the rigidity of many promotion and tenure systems. That is, many faculty rewards systems are designed based on a one-size-fits all approach that does not account for the diversity in strengths, interests, and goals of individual faculty members (Kelly & Fetridge, 2012; Misra, Kuvaeva, et al., 2021; O'Meara et al., 2019). One way to create more flexibility is for the department to provide *context* by offering alternative pathways to achieving full professor (O'Meara et al., 2021). Creating alternate pathways for promotion that emphasize research, service, and teaching in different capacities would allow the department to maintain excellence in each area while valuing and prioritizing strengths of different faculty members (Misra, Kuvaeva, et al., 2021). In Ann's case, a pathway that is 50% teaching, 30% service, and 20% research may be a better fit. Ann would have different standards for merit than colleagues who were on a research or service track, allowing her to focus on her strengths as a teacher, while still contributing to service and research but in lesser capacities. Setting clear promotion expectations for faculty members at the start of their contract or academic year and ensuring equity across all types of paths offered may alleviate some of the rigidity and subsequent bias that can stem from traditional promotion and tenure systems, while allowing faculty members to contribute and participate in meaningful ways. Such context could also be reflected in departmental dashboards so it is clear that faculty members have different workload allocations and are not over or under performing.

Ensuring accountability by reviewing committees and reducing committee sizes

Ben is a White man associate professor in a small, non-departmentalized college. All faculty members serve on many different program and college-level committees, many of which are critical to the vitality of the college. Ben is a good committee member. He does his work well and is viewed as amicable. As such, he is asked to serve on committees very often. At the same time, when Ben is on a committee, other faculty members tend to slack off while he picks up the work. Ben is aware that he is overperforming as a committee member and that this limits his time for research, but he is afraid no one else will take on those responsibilities otherwise.

Social loafing, wherein some faculty members complete the majority of a committee's work while others free-ride, is a common phenomenon (Curcio & Lynch, 2017). For Ben, this could result in burnout or resentment, or the extended service work could lead him to spend less time on other areas of work like research and teaching, thus hindering his ability to advance. A service audit can mitigate issues of social loafing (O'Meara et al., 2021). Using a service audit, the college could create a list of all the committees, reviewing each committee's responsibilities and membership. They could combine or eliminate committees that have become redundant and reduce the number of faculty members serving on committees where applicable. They could also clarify the roles of each committee member, thereby limiting the responsibilities that fall to one person. Outlining specific responsibilities can also enhance *accountability* measures, increasing visibility of the department members who are completing their work, like Ben, and those who are not.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MID-CAREER FACULTY, DEPARTMENTS, AND INSTITUTIONS

How can individual mid-career faculty members and institutions interpret these vignettes? In terms of the individual faculty perspective, we are not arguing that individual associate professors should take on workload reform as a matter of personal circumstances. However, individual mid-career faculty members may find it to be agency-enhancing to know there are other potential options than just saying no. There are structures that can be changed to make workload more flexible and equal. As a small step toward structural reform, mid-career faculty members may find it valuable to begin tracking their "invisible labor," for instance, the number of students informally and formally mentored, hours spent in office hours, letters of recommendation written, or other forms of teaching and service not commonly captured in faculty activities reporting (Baker, 2020; Misra, Mickey, et al., 2021). Using these kinds of data in conversations with department mentors and leadership can help counter the notion that there is no way to track certain kinds of work activities and may spur greater, unit-level action.

There are several key takeaways from the FWRP for departments and institutions. Many of the policies and practices discussed are intended to build upon one another. For instance, departments may first create faculty expectations guidelines and then implement a credit system, or conduct a review of committees, establish the key committees that are needed, and then implement a planned rotation system. The policies and practices that are most salient will depend on the context of the department as well as the equity issues present within the department (as revealed through the work activity dashboard). On the other hand, no single policy or practice will address all equity issues, and department and institutions should continue to monitor and address workload on an ongoing basis.

Many departments and institutions worry that tackling issues of workload would create more challenges than benefits and that engaging in such a process would be opening a can of worms (O'Meara, 2018). However, our work as well as recent research and op-eds, highlight the reality that the so-called can of worms associated with faculty workload is already open (Misra, Kuvaeva, et al., 2021; O'Meara, 2018; O'Meara et al., 2021). Faculty members are well aware that workload inequalities exist, and such knowledge directly influences their work satisfaction and commitment. Moreover, if departments and institutions want to encourage faculty members to participate in the teaching and service that is vital to the fulfillment of their missions, their workload and rewards systems must reflect that effort (Griffin et al., 2013; Misra, Kuvaeva, et al., 2021). Making invisible work visible therefore ensures that department workload and rewards systems are responsive to the new realities of the academic workplace.

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