Joint Working Group on Assignment of Duties - Report from ULFA Representatives

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The Joint Working Group on the Assignment of Duties was created via a Memorandum of Understanding between the Board of Governors of the University of Lethbridge and the University of Lethbridge Faculty Association. Its mandate included research and review of internal and external comparators, which must "include the combination of assigned duties as assigned in 21.03" so that teaching load is assessed within the context of research expectations/productivity, external research funding, graduate student supervision and accompanying availability of graduate student contributions to teaching, etc. The mandate also included conducting a survey of all members of Academic Staff and of senior academic administration; responses were received from 195 members of Academic Staff and 3 members of senior academic administration.

1. Principles

The Memorandum of Understanding stated that the work of the Working Group was intended to be cooperative and collaborative and should value:

- excellence in academic teaching, learning, graduate supervision and research,
- quality education to the University's students over the short and long term,
- positive working relationships within the University and its Faculties/Schools through transparency and increased communication between the parties,
- morale and a sense of fairness among the academic staff,
- work-life balance and overall wellness for the academic staff (prevention of burnout),
- ensuring that the University of Lethbridge is an attractive place for academics to work with regard to retention, recruitment and workplace satisfaction (prevention of attrition), and
- the sustainability of the University and the requirements of the Board to deliver on the University's full mandate as a Comprehensive Academic and Research University.

The recommendations within this report are intended to be practical and consistent with all the principles listed above, recognizing that quality of education necessarily suffers if academic staff are assigned more duties than can reasonably be completed within a standard work week or if academic staff are not given the opportunity to take their full allocation of vacation days. Sustainability of the University depends strongly on positive student experiences, and positive student experiences are dependent upon Academic Staff having the time and energy to devote to their students.

Morale suffers when some duties are not formally credited, as Members feel like they are being expected to work "for free". Uneven distribution of duties perceived as "less valuable" can also have a negative impact on morale. At the same time, it can be difficult for Members to accurately assess duties they do not typically perform, and this

can lead to perceptions of inequities in the absence of clear information about the variables affecting all types of duties.

2. Overview of Survey Results

While the majority (81%) of Academic Staff of all job categories agree that they can meet the expectations of their discipline within their current Assignment of Duties without qualifiers relating to working hours, many disagree that it is possible to complete their current duties within a standard work week without compromising on teaching effectiveness (44%), research/creative activity (65%) or both. This is consistent with the fact that the majority of survey respondents (64% of instructors; 83% of professors) reported spending more than 40 hours/week performing assigned duties, even when summer hours are included in the weighted average. While some of the additional hours for some Members may be due to passion for research, the nature of field work, etc., it is clear that there is a systemic expectation for Academic Staff to work more than a standard working week in order to perform all assigned duties well. The most common recommendation from instructors (31%) was to address instructor workload. The most common recommendation from professors (18% overall; 43% of science professors) was to credit independent study and graduate student supervision as teaching.

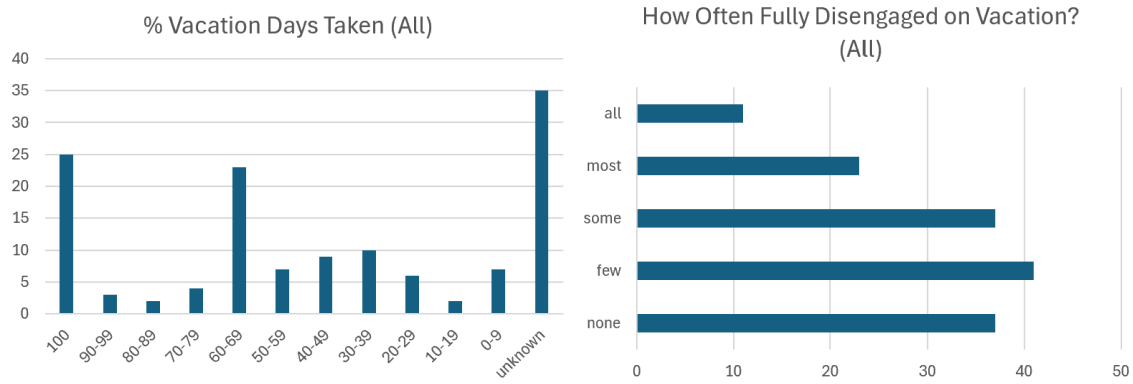
A small proportion of respondents (2.6%; all of them professors) reported that they were happy with current practices and saw no need for any changes, citing the flexibility of their schedule - particularly in summer - as a benefit that outweighed any expectation of high working hours. Several of them shared a particular objection to creating additional bureaucracy to track working hours, as has been done in the United Kingdom - and with that we agree. We believe that the recommendations in this report can and should be implemented without creating any administrative burden over and above that which already exists.

3. Recommendations

Recommendations have been grouped thematically according to the issues they are designed to address. An Appendix has been included which quotes variable lists from current Collective Agreements for Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Windsor. Of the six Canadian postsecondary institutions jointly identified as appropriate comparators in the context of Assignment of Duties, these are the two whose Collective Agreements include a list of variables for use in guiding the assignment of duties. The other four institutions were Brock University, Trent University, the University of New Brunswick and the University of Regina.

3.1. Vacation Days are Not Consistently Being Taken

The survey showed that the majority of Academic Staff do not take a significant portion of their vacation days, and that many members of Academic Staff do not even know how many vacation days they take - though many of those clearly stated that they know the number is not anywhere close to all of them. The survey also showed that fully disengaging while on vacation is not the norm.



Recommendation

- Assignment of duties shall be structured so that members can take all their vacation days consecutively unless the member requests otherwise. Even when such a request is made, Assignment of Duties shall still be structured to allow the member to take all their vacation days annually.

To be clear, we are not recommending the implementation of any vacation tracking systems. The simplest way to implement this recommendation would be to ensure that every member of the Academic Staff has a minimum of two non-teaching months. Duties which must be performed 12 months/year can be shared between members such that each has access to sufficient time to take their earned vacation days.

3.2. Early Career Academic Staff Feel Overwhelmed

For a brand new member of Academic Staff, every course assigned is a new prep and therefore requires more work than teaching a course with which the member is already familiar. Starting a new research program is also labour-intensive, and a new assistant professor will not have any postdoctoral fellows or senior graduate students to help them train and supervise new graduate students, independent study students, etc. so the supervisory load can also be high. For those in disciplines dependent on funding, there is also enormous pressure to write successful grant applications, another skill being learned by the new assistant professor.

Given that the first few years are crucial in establishing a research program and that there is a limit to the number of course releases the university can afford to give, it appears necessary to look to service as a category of duties which could provide some of the additional time required for teaching and research/creative practice in those early career years.

Recommendations

- Onboarding for newly hired academic staff shall be improved and shall include information on how to apply for course releases.

- A newly hired early career professor or instructor shall receive a minimum of one course release in each of their first two years.
- A newly hired early career professor or instructor shall receive a “service release” in each of their first two years. The purpose of the service release is to provide additional time for the establishment of research programs and the development of new course preps that can be used as the foundation for future teaching assignments; it shall not create any expectation of additional classroom teaching. In cases where a service release is not practicable, a second course release may be offered instead.

3.3. Total Amount of Work Undertaken by each Member must be Reasonable (21.04.2)

The majority of survey respondents reported spending more than 40 hours/week performing assigned duties, even when summer hours are included in the weighted average. While we acknowledge that self-reported data are necessarily estimates and that some respondents may have provided the answers they felt were expected, we point out that this does not guarantee overestimation; respondents who forget about evening or weekend emails could easily underestimate their hours. Academic culture is designed to reward (and, in some cases, require) working longer than a standard working week.

It is important to understand that the structure of an academic year impacts how time is distributed within it. If we were to assume a 40-hour work week, 10% of that time would be 4 hours/week. There are, however, very few duties which can be performed at a steady rate year-round. Rather, most teaching assignments are compressed into a single semester. Since one semester is one-third of the academic year, 10% of the year as a whole becomes 12 hours/week for one semester. Three sets of 12 hours/week become 36 hours/week. As such, if one course equivalent is typically considered to take ~10% of the Member’s annual time, it is not reasonable to assign more than three course equivalents to an instructor or two course equivalents to a professor with an active research program in a fall or winter semester. Summer teaching tends to occur in two-month blocks - either May/June or July/August, and 10% of the year compressed into two months is 24 hours/week. So, there is no space to fit two course equivalents into summer without compromising a Member’s ability to take their vacation days or expecting them to work 48-hour weeks for two months. Furthermore, Members also need to have time for their service responsibilities, as the foregoing arithmetic only addresses assigned teaching duties (and the need to create space for research/creative activities for professors).

It is also worth noting that institutions who list a number of hours required to deliver one course equivalent for EI purposes for their sessional instructors tend to list numbers in the 200 hour/course range (195 hours/course for McGill University; 230 hours/course for St. Thomas University; neither institution was an agreed-upon comparator; these are simply values that were readily available) and that a graduate student paid to teach a course as a sessional instructor at the University of Lethbridge is compensated for the equivalent of 224 hours/course. As such, the relationship of 10% = 1 course commonly used at the University of Lethbridge is an underestimate of the time required to deliver one course, particularly in its first instance.

Recommendations

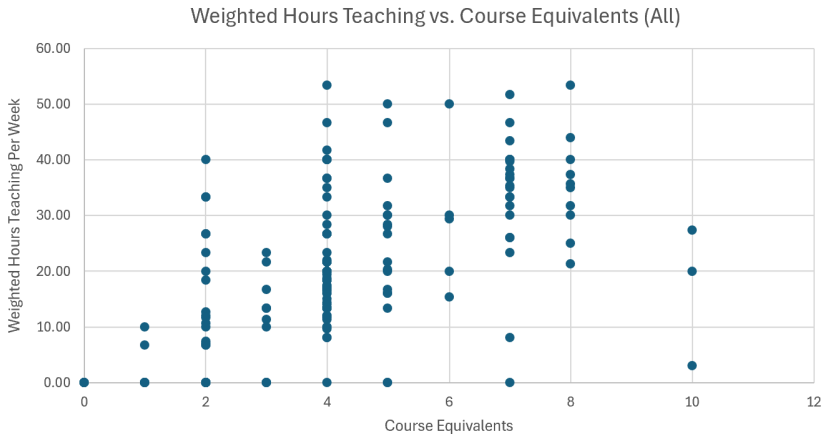
- The maximum number of course equivalents/year that may be assigned to an instructor shall be 7 (3 in fall, 3 in winter, 1 in summer) under normal circumstances.
- The maximum number of course equivalents/year that may be assigned to a professor shall be 4 (normally 2 in fall, 2 in winter) under normal circumstances. It is understood that many field courses, etc., must be taught in summer. Professors who choose to teach in a summer semester shall be assigned one fewer fall or winter course for each summer course assigned.
- Three contact hours/week shall be one course equivalent, regardless of whether it's lecture, lab, tutorial, etc., unless there is clear evidence that there are sufficient time savings to warrant reduced credit for the duty. Teaching duties to which this clause is not relevant are addressed in the clause below.
- All academic units shall have clear guidelines surrounding teaching load. These guidelines shall be created in consultation with Members and, where relevant, shall include unit-specific information, including but not limited to:
    - the number of co-op/applied study courses that is considered to be 1 course equivalent in CareerBridge,
    - the number of music studio students that is considered to be 1 course equivalent in the Faculty of Fine Arts,
    - the number of practicum students that is considered to be 1 course equivalent in the relevant Faculties,
    - the number of hours of clinical supervision that is considered to be 1 course equivalent in the Faculty of Health Sciences,
    - a system for providing teaching credit for supervision of graduate students, independent study students and other student researchers.

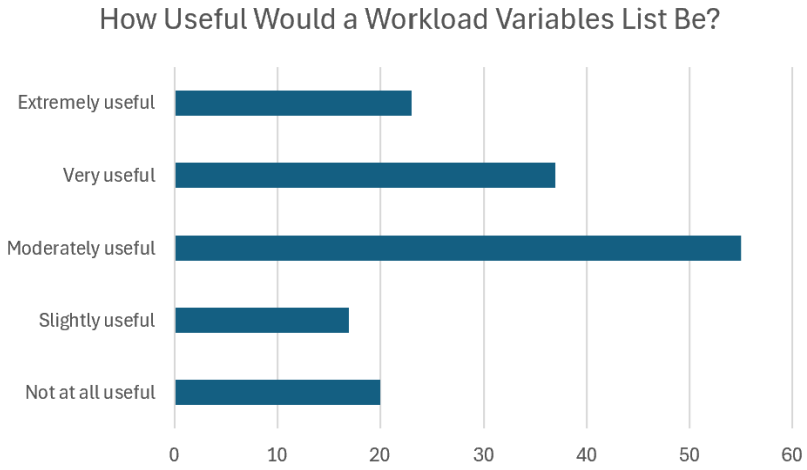
3.4. Total Amount of Work Undertaken by each Member must be Roughly Equivalent (21.04.2)

Workload is complex, and any attempt to improve the equity of workload must address all components of workload. Overly simplistic formulas such as “10% = 1 course” can create inequities by failing to recognize teaching that is not course-based and by failing to recognize that not all courses require the same amount of effort to deliver. That does not mean that such formulas cannot be useful as starting points, but there must be space to deviate from them in cases where a Member’s assigned duties are particularly labour-intensive. To do this without creating resentments requires transparency, and one strategy that some institutions have used to effectively communicate what constitutes particularly labour-intensive duties is to include a variables list in their collective agreement. Ideally, this variables list includes factors relating to all relevant categories of duties such that it is able to account for unusually high-labour service commitments and unusually high-labour research programs as well as unusually high-labour teaching assignments.

The survey clearly showed that there is no clear linear relationship between course equivalents assigned and hours required to complete all assigned teaching duties. (For

graphability, “more than 8” was converted to 10 course equivalents.). The survey also showed general support for the creation of a workload variables list. The working group does not recommend creation of a formula based on this list; we recommend a more holistic application in which the list can be used as the starting point for conversations.





Recommendations

- The number of course equivalents credited for the same teaching assignment shall not be different for different job categories.
- In addition to the Faculty-specific policies, a variables list shall be added to the Collective Agreement that identifies factors contributing to high-labour teaching duties as well as factors that lead to research/creative activities and/or service duties being higher labour than typical. This list shall be modeled after the lists in the Collective Agreements at Sir Wilfrid Laurier and the University of Windsor (see Appendix). Deans shall provide course reduction when one individual is at the high-labor end of too many factors. In cases where preliminary assignment of duties is performed by Chairs, those individuals will be well equipped to identify relevant members; however, the Dean has a responsibility to ensure that such recommendations are made equitably.

- Service taxes shall be mitigated by valuing the service. Service has the lowest perceived value, so if we wish to make its distribution more equitable, it must start being valued in STP and PAR processes by all Deans. Until we can achieve equitable distribution, we should compensate those with the highest service loads (particularly if it is unavoidable due to their status as a member of a historically marginalized group) with course release where necessary.

3.5. Professional Development and Maintenance of Currency in Discipline are Requirements for Competent Performance of Duties

Librarians already have a category called Research and Professional Development, and they are the only group of academic staff that does not suffer confusion around where to report these activities on their PAR/STP/etc. Research and creative activities constitute professional development for many professors; however, not all teaching is aligned with research programs. Currently, Instructors are expected to maintain professional competence, currency of discipline, etc., but are not allocated any time for these activities, so the unstated expectation is that this work is done in the Instructor's personal time.

Recommendation

- Recognize that the true expectation of duties for Instructors is not 80% teaching/20% service; it's 70% teaching/20% service/10% professional development. This is consistent with the arithmetic of the maximum manageable course load earlier in this report.

Appendix

2023-2026 Wilfrid Laurier Collective Agreement

18.2.4.2 The Chair and the Dean, when determining a Member's teaching load, shall take into account relevant factors including but not limited to the following:

(a) the relationship of teaching duties to the Member's area of expertise;
(b) the number of separate courses taught by the Member;
(c) the number of scheduled contact hours per course;
(d) the expected student enrolment in each class, and the total number of students in a Member's classes;
(e) the level (introductory, upper year, graduate, et cetera) of each course;
(f) the type (lecture, team-taught, laboratory, seminar, et cetera) of each course;
(g) the pedagogical methods used in the course (e.g. scaffolded assignments, formative assessments)
(h) the number of hours of preparation, grading and administration per course;
(i) additional hours of preparation for a new course, or for a course substantially revised;
(j) the number of hours of academic and consulting per course;
(k) responsibility for laboratory or tutorial sessions;
(l) academic and administrative responsibilities for large classes with team-taught or tutorial or lab sections;
(m) the availability of markers or laboratory assistants or teaching assistants;
(n) the amount of field, clinical, research, thesis, examination committee service, and other academic supervision of senior undergraduate and graduate students;
(o) responsibility for unscheduled courses such as directed studies at the request of the Chair or Dean;
(p) the location of the course (on or off-campus);
(q) the additional time in travel, committee responsibilities, teaching, and student supervision in graduate and other programs in partnership with neighbouring universities; and
(r) special factors such as filming or broadcasting of lectures, or the use of conferencing technologies.

2021-2025 University of Windsor Collective Agreement

5.08(c) The Head, before recommending the assignment of teaching and academic counselling, shall consult with each faculty member in the AAU and those members who have responsibilities for the coordination of programs.

Each member's teaching assignment shall be based on all relevant factors, including, in particular, but not limited to:

(i) the number of separate courses taught at different times by each faculty member;
(ii) the number of scheduled contact hours per course;
(iii) the amount of preparation, grading and administration per course;
(iv) the number of students enrolled in each course;
(v) the level (e.g., introductory, upper year, graduate) of each course;
(vi) the type (e.g., lecture, laboratory, seminar, tutorial, workshop, or other form of delivery) of each course;
(vii) the training and delivery by the use of alternative learning technology;
(viii) the assistance of Teaching Assistants and/or Graduate Assistants or colleagues in the teaching of courses;
(ix) new course preparation and development of materials;
(x) the amount of intern, clinical, research, thesis, and other academic supervision of undergraduate and graduate students;
(xi) special factors such as the use of video-conferencing and other emerging instructional technologies;
(xii) the faculty member's engagement in research/scholarship/creative activity, except for teaching-intensive faculty, where no such requirement exists;
(xiii) the faculty member's engagement in academic service, including committee work and the member's representation on external bodies, provided such representation has been mutually agreed between the member and the Dean, after consultation with the Head;
(xiv) the faculty member's engagement in activities that disseminate knowledge to the general public on behalf of the University;
(xv) the faculty member's voluntary engagement in student recruitment;
(xvi) the faculty member's voluntary engagement in fundraising;
(xvii) the faculty member's approved teaching, research, scholarly work and service (including racialized, Indigenous, women, visible minorities, sexual/gender minorities, Aboriginal persons, and/or persons with disabilities members' services to their communities) outside of the home AAU;
(xviii) continuing professional education as required for ongoing licensure, and
(xix) academic counselling and mentorship, pedagogical and curricular advising, committee representation, and other labour in support of equity, diversity, and inclusion.