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# EQUITY-MINDED FACULTY WORKLOADS: WHAT WE CAN AND SHOULD DO NOW

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments .....	iii.....
Executive Summary .....	iv.....
Introduction.....	1
Opening the Can of Worms: Why Faculty Workload Equity Matters .....	3
Why and How Faculty Workload Becomes Inequitable .....	5
e Faculty Workload and Rewards Project.....	7
How to Promote Equitable Faculty Workloads .....	10
Conclusion.....	16
References .....	17
Appendix A: Exercises at Illustrate How Workloads Become Inequitable.....	21
Appendix B: Equity-Minded Faculty Workload Audit.....	25
Appendix C: Policy and Practices to Promote Equitable Faculty Workloads .....	28

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# Executive Summary

Recent social movements have revealed the systemic ways that racism and sexism remain entrenched in academic cultures. Faculty workload is taken up, assigned, and rewarded in patterns, and these patterns show important yet overlooked areas where inequity manifests in academe. Faculty from historically minoritized groups are disproportionately called upon to do diversity work and mentoring, while women faculty do more teaching and service. These activities are vital to the functioning of the university, yet are often invisible and unrewarded, leading to lower productivity and decreased retention. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately affected the lives and careers of women and faculty from historically minoritized groups, makes calls for equity-minded workload reform critical.

This report summarizes the authors' findings and insights learned from the Faculty Workload and Rewards Project. The lives and

# Introduction

Recent calls for racial justice have brought a spotlight to the sustained marginalization of faculty from historically minoritized groups, while social movements like #MeToo reveal entrenched gender inequities, all of which undermine a diverse and inclusive professoriate. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent financial fallout in higher education have exacerbated these issues (Amano-Patiño et al. 2020; Gonzales and Griffin 2020; Malisch et al. 2020), making calls for equity-minded reform all the more critical.

One of the most important, but often overlooked, areas in which inequity can arise is within the distribution of faculty labor. Faculty from historically minoritized groups are disproportionately called upon to do diversity work and mentoring (Griffin and Reddick 2011; Turner, González, and Wong (Lau) 2011; Wood, Hilton, and Nevarez 2015), while women faculty do more teaching and service (O'Meara et al. 2017; Winslow 2010). These activities are vital to the functioning of the university, yet they are often invisible and unrewarded (Hanasono et al. 2019; Griffin et al. 2011; O'Meara 2011). Faculty workload

In our National Science Foundation ADVANCE-funded Faculty Workload and Rewards Project (FWRP), we took on this problem, working with academic units to consider ways that they could reform faculty workload with equity in mind. Through a randomized experiment with treatment and control groups, we collected evidence that showed that following these steps led to greater workload equity and faculty satisfaction. Specifically, we worked with academic units to:

1. Improve workload transparency and clarity for all faculty members, which is especially helpful to women and faculty from historically minoritized groups.
2. Make visible the core department and university work that is often invisible (e.g., faculty members who mentored more, served on more search committees, or chaired more dissertations).
3. Recognize differences in contexts (e.g., only woman of color in a department asked to be mentor for many students of color) and effort and performance (e.g., faculty members who lead committees versus serving as members).
4. Encourage departments or institutions to examine data on faculty workload and disaggregate by categories like appointment type, rank, race, and gender, as relevant.
5. Help departments or institutions to identify any workload imbalances through this data, and incorporate policy and practice reforms aimed at equalizing their faculty workload.

Our work was guided by the concept of equity-mindedness (Bensimon 2007; Bensimon, Dowd, and Witham 2016), which refers to a mode of thinking and action practitioners use to enhance educational outcomes for individuals from different groups. Equity-mindedness focuses our attention on the socio-historical context of exclusionary practices in higher education and in this case within faculty careers and academe more generally. Equity-mindedness asks all of us to take ownership and responsibility for equity in workload process and outcomes. In this report, we draw from our experiences with the FWRP to discuss how academic units can use equity-minded practices to enhance faculty workload.

## SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

We begin this report with a summary of why faculty workload inequity matters and why departments and institutions should take action. We then discuss how and why faculty workloads become unfair and synthesize the latest social science research on disparities between women and men, and between white faculty and faculty from historically minoritized groups, in campus service and mentoring work. We then present the conditions that we have found support equitable workloads, citing our own experimental work, as well as other research and practice. We pair discussion of the conditions that facilitate equitable workloads with policy and practice reforms (see Appendix C) that can be put in place to enact these conditions, including



# Opening the Can of Worms: Why Faculty Workload Equity Matters

As a result of the pandemic, higher education faces an existential crisis wherein enrollment, financial viability, and the future of in-person education are threatened. These issues are critical, with relatively more importance to considering whether full-time faculty members experience their workloads as equitable. Even before the pandemic, we, as researchers, sometimes encountered skepticism when we broached the topic of workload reform with academic leaders and faculty. There were colleagues who advised us not to “open that can of worms” (O’Meara 2018b). Some argued that reform was not needed—they suggested that workload differences between individual faculty members were small and department members were productive and generally happy with their workloads. In contrast, others argued that even the most well-intentioned efforts at reforming faculty workloads would create more conflict or magnify existing tensions within departments.

In response to these critiques of faculty workload conversations, we offer three main reasons why academic leaders and departments need to open the can of worms associated with faculty workload:

- As a result of the pandemic, faculty workloads are growing, and growing more inequitable. Reductions in faculty capacity mean that many faculty members are being asked to “pick up” additional work (e.g., teaching extra classes, serving on return to work committees, establishing laboratory standing plans). Most faculty workload systems are not designed to recognize or reward this “extra” effort, even though this work is more critical than ever. It is also reasonable to expect that faculty members who were already seen as “good citizens” on their campuses because of their service work—who are more likely to be women and faculty from historically minoritized racial groups—will be asked more often to participate in these kinds of assignments. Thus, the pandemic is exacerbating existing workload inequities that already undermine diversity and equity goals. As institutions re-prioritize strategic goals and re-allocate faculty work, there is a need to balance equity with the basic functioning of the academic



# Why and How Faculty Workload Becomes Inequitable



# The Faculty Workload and Rewards Project

How do we redesign faculty workloads to be more equitable? First, we foster certain conditions known to be associated with perceived and real equity in workload. Then, we put policies and practices in place as default settings, to ensure that these conditions prime interactions and behaviors to result in equitable outcomes. In the Faculty Workloads and Rewards Project (FWRP), a National Science Foundation–ADVANCE-funded, action research project, we, the authors of this report, worked with 51 academic units to establish equity-minded workload reform. From 2015 to 2020, we (in addition to colleagues Courtney Lennartz, Elisabeth Beise, and Alexandra Kuveava) considered strategies for improving how faculty workload is taken up, assigned, and/or rewarded.

We began our project with a synthesis of the social science and practice research to diagnose the different ways in which workload becomes unfair. We drew on work from behavioral economics to try to understand the choice architecture around how work was taken up, assigned, and rewarded.

We next recruited departments to participate in the project and the interventions associated with it. In total, we worked with 51 departments or academic units located within 20 public universities. The majority of participating departments represented STEM and social science fields or disciplines, while a handful of departments were in the humanities and professional fields. Based upon Carnegie Classifications, institutions represented both doctoral universities and master's colleges and universities, including some Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The website for the project is:

<https://facultyworkloadandrewardsproject.umd.edu/>

A short video was created to help increase awareness about how this happens which can be found here

e initial round was set up as an experiment; half the departments that applied to participate in the experiment were

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# How to Promote Equitable Faculty Workloads

We have found in our own empirical and practical work with faculty (O'Meara et al. 2018; O'Meara, Lennartz, et al. 2019), as well as synthesizing the work of others in this and related areas, that the following conditions support equitable workloads

- Transparency
- Clarity
- Credit
- Norms
- Context
- Accountability

In particular, we found that the more faculty members agreed that these six equitable conditions were present in their department, the more likely they were to be satisfied with their teaching and service loads and the more likely they were to agree that their workload was fair (O'Meara, Lennartz, et al. 2019).

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## Found on ACE Engage

In this section we discuss each one of these conditions and why they are important for workload equity, and list resources

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As such, an important strategy that departments or colleges might enact to increase clarity is to create faculty expectations guidelines, described in Handout #3. Faculty expectations guidelines identify the amount of teaching, research, and service expected for faculty members at different ranks (e.g., assistant, associate, full) and in different employment categories (e.g., tenure eligible versus instructional or clinical faculty). Such guidelines should be created collaboratively, balancing university and department needs with faculty needs and recognizing different appointment types and career stages. Our results indicate that faculty members within departments that had clearly identified benchmarks for service and advising were more likely to be satisfied with their workloads (O’Meara, Lennartz, et al. 2019).

Another example of the benefits of clarity are related to compensation negotiation. Foggy climates can make it unclear when faculty members should negotiate (Beddoes, Schimpf, and Pawley 2014), and research shows that in ambiguous negotiation contexts, women negotiate less often than men (Crothers et al. 2010; Babcock and Laschever 2003; Leibbrandt and List 2015). For instance, many faculty serve in administrative roles like undergraduate or graduate program director (Misra, Lundquist, and Templer 2012). Within departments, it may be unclear whether there is compensation associated with taking this role and/or what the compensation range could or should be. Individual faculty members who serve in these roles may therefore be paid different amounts or not receive compensation at all.

Departments can enhance clarity in negotiation by creating policies that clarify which roles are compensated, which are not, and how faculty members can indicate their interest in compensated roles. Often, these policies are incorporated into department plans of organizations. Results from the FWRP indicated faculty who said their departments had clear information on compensation for key roles were more satisfied with their workloads (O’Meara, Lennartz, et al. 2019). In Handout #4, we provide an example of a process a department might use to give clarity around compensation for key roles.

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### Practices and Policies that Promote Clarity

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## CREDIT

We have placed transparency and clarity before credit because it is very hard to give faculty members credit for doing more work in one area, if the department has not first accounted for what faculty members are actually doing (e.g., dashboards) and provided clarity on what faculty members should be doing (e.g., faculty expectations policies). Once these are in place, it is possible for departments to provide differential credit for work of higher or lower effort.

Research shows faculty members become dissatisfied when they experience a significant mismatch between the amount of time they want to spend on a certain work activity and the time they actually spend on that work activity (Misra, Lundquist, and Templer 2012; Winslow 2010). A faculty member may feel that their dissatisfaction is magnified if they see others experience less of a mismatch between desired and required work activities. Faculty members may feel additionally dissatisfied if their own mismatch impacts their advancement (Misra, Lundquist, and Templer 2012; Winslow 2010). Using even small ways to give credit to faculty members such that they can spend time on their preferred work activities makes faculty

policy that illustrates this practice. Likewise, departments may create teaching credit swap systems that define the teaching workload expectations for all faculty, and offer different pathways for faculty to meet their instructional workloads, which is another variation of giving credit for doing work in different areas. We describe a teaching credit swap system in Handout #6.

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### Policies and Practices That Give Credit

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## NORMS

One of the key challenges in how faculty work is taken up and assigned is that it is often haphazard. The same faculty members are asked, or volunteer, to do work that is important, but less desirable or not career enhancing. At the same time, some faculty members take advantage of haphazard workload decision-making to ensure that they hold onto more desirable service or teaching assignments (e.g., teaching at 11:00 a.m. versus teaching at 8:00 a.m.). An “opt-in” system for assigning work causes burnout and resentment. Over time, the system can create an underclass of workers who support a small number of privileged faculty members who are not asked to share the burden of maintaining their “academic home.”

Everyone doing their fair share and having access to the same opportunities within a group’s collective work facilitates equity norms, social responsibility norms, and norms of reciprocity (Erez, Lepine, and Elms 2002). For instance, our results from the FWRP showed that faculty members who agreed that there was a strong commitment to the workload being fair in their department experienced greater satisfaction with their workload (O’Meara, Lennartz, et al. 2019).

Ideally, the system for assigning work that is less career-enhancing or less desirable shifts from an “opt-in” system to an “opt-out” system. In an opt-out system, it is assumed that all department members will at some point participate in various administrative and service tasks. Opt-out systems reduce the burden of people in vulnerable positions with colleagues (Williams 1999) and are consistent with social psychology research showing we can be steered into better behaviors by changing “default settings” surrounding decision-making processes (Vedantam 2010). Opt-out systems can change the conversation from “why would I agree to do that” to “what is my argument for why I alone should not have to do this.”

One way to enact an opt-out system is by putting in place planned rotations, wherein there is an agreed upon plan for how service or teaching assignments will be rotated among department members. Planned rotations avoid the same people being asked repeatedly to do the same tasks and having to turn them down, while others are never asked (Mitchell and Hesli 2013). Planned rotations send the message everyone has to chip in. They can help avoid “social loafing” and “free-riding,” wherein certain group members fail to do their fair share of the work and others overcompensate to complete the task (Curcio and





## Conclusion

Over the last five years we have done a “deep dive” into the social science literature informing faculty workloads, careers, and reward systems. We conducted a randomized control trial and worked with over 50 departments and colleges on enacting equity-minded workload reform. We have provided an audit tool to help faculty leaders and academic administrators work together to engender conditions of transparency, clarity, credit, awareness of context, equity norms and the sharing of work, and accountability. We have also offered concrete policies and practices such as the creation of faculty work activity dashboards, faculty expectation guidelines, planned rotations, and credit systems. We hope that you find the handouts that accompany this report as useful as our departments did in illustrating concretely how these policies might be adopted by departments, colleges and universities to support equity-minded workloads.

One of the strengths of the policies and practices we propose is that they are adaptable. The strategies we consider go beyond traditional workload modifications (e.g., course releases), and many can be offered at relatively low cost, which is increasingly important in today’s fiscal landscape. Likewise, some departments and institutions may determine that revising rewards structures to better recognize the critical diversity-related work of faculty from historically minoritized groups should be prioritized over efforts to improve equity in how work is assigned. The tools, practices, and policies we discuss allows actors to assess needs and take action where equity-minded reform is most critical.

In all, there are many compelling reasons why institutions, departments, and academic leaders should act to enhance faculty workload equity, including increasing satisfaction, productivity, and retention. We hope the suggestions offered in this report illuminate a path for equity-minded workload reform might be realized.

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## INSIGHTS GAINED FROM COMPLETING THE HALLWAY ASK

After FWRP participants completed this exercise, we asked them to indicate who they chose to be the chair of undergraduate studies. Knowing it was not fair, almost all FWRP participants reluctantly indicated that they would ask Elizabeth. They explained that choosing Elizabeth makes the decision easy: she was present in her office, likely to say yes, and would complete the job at a high-quality level.

We then asked the group to consider the operating principles for this decision (e.g., would they describe the system as strategic? Are some faculty benefiting more than others, and if so, why and how?). The themes from this discussion were as follows:

- **Workload Decisions Occur in “Foggy” Contexts:** We discussed the fact that the “hallway ask” described here occurs in a situation that is “unscripted” (Ridgeway and Correll 2004) and “foggy” (Banerjee and Pawley 2013; Beddoes, Schimpf, and Pawley 2014). That is, participants chose Elizabeth in this case (and will probably choose Elizabeth for other work activities in the future) because they are rushed in deciding, want the decision to be simple and easy, and they lack information on what the other members of the department are doing. In other words, this is both a common occurrence and a perfect storm situation in which bias shapes our decisions.
- **Lack of Tools Needed to Make Workload Decisions:** We also discussed with participants the tools that a department head could use to ensure lack in.9 b.efeshed iaot fale and(Equobaeth nneair)6 department heay lashedatath. edidas nokn holizabetorat the othee facultr memberw ya

By participating in these exercises, faculty began to consider how they, as individuals, made decisions about their own workload, but also how the overall system of workload decisions within their department or unit lacked strategy or structure. us, these two exercises illustrated the complexity and nuances of how inequities occur in how faculty work is taken up, assigned, and rewarded in unintentional, unscripted ways that often go unseen.

# Appendix B: Equity-Minded Faculty Workload Audit

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

This audit was created based on the research on equity-minded work practices and lessons learned from the Faculty Workload and Rewards Project. To use this tool, users should first consider what some of the main issues or goals your unit has for enhancing workload equity listed in Column 1 (Orange). For example, units may want to be more transparent in who is doing what within the department or encourage faculty members to be more accountable to completing the work they have been asked to do. Once users determine their workload goals(s), they should pose the questions listed in the Column 2 (Green), regarding their unit's existing workload data, processes, and procedures. If users answer "no" to the questions in Column 2, Column 3 (Blue) guides users toward the relevant FWRP Policy & Practice Handouts that may help them achieve their workload goals. All handouts are available on ACE Engage at [engage.acenet.edu](http://engage.acenet.edu).

Our Unit Would Like To	Questions to Consider	Relevant Policies and Practices to Consider if Answer Is No, or Not Enough
<p>Promote Transparency</p> <p>Let faculty members see the range of effort in teaching, mentoring, and service by relevant appointment type or career stage and show the relationship between individual faculty effort and overall department effort.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are data on faculty workload publishing and advising loads, committee assignments, and other service assignments available in a transparent and accessible format?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Are they presented in ways that faculty can benchmark their teaching, research, and service against department averages by relevant career stages and apt. types?</li> <li>b. Are there ways to make the often invisible work of historically minoritized faculty and women visible in the representation and credit of workload?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Are the processes through which routine service assignments, advising assignments, and teaching assignments are made fair and transparent? Do faculty have voice in these processes?</li> </ol>	

Our Unit Would Like To	Questions to Consider	Relevant Policies and Practices to Consider if Answer Is No, or Not Enough
<p>Enhance Clarity</p> <p>Ensure faculty members clearly understand what is expected of them.</p>	<p>1. Are expectations for faculty labor in teaching, advising and service clear?</p> <p>a. Are the clear benchmarks for performance, relevant to faculty in different ranks and apt. types?</p>	<p>+ F H Z Q Y ^ * ] U J H Y F Y N T S X , Z M ( T R U J S X F Y N T S K T W 0 J ^ 7 T</p>
<p>Provide Credit</p> <p>Recognize that some faculty members do more work in certain areas than others and that certain tasks require more effort than others.</p>	<p>1. Do policy and practice differentiate the amount of work completed in such a way to allow differential HWJINY FSI WJ\FWI\$ J L HMFNWNSL versus serving, 500-person class \NYM ST 9&amp; [X *[J UJWXTS HQFXX</p> <p>2. Can faculty members bank, or otherwise do more of one work activity, and get credit to do less of another?</p>	<p>( W J I N Y 8 ^ X Y J R X 9 J F H M N S L ( W J I N Y 8 \ F U X</p>
<p>Promote Equity Norms</p> <p>Make sure that all departments are doing their fair share and that less desirable and/or less career-enhancing tasks are not disproportionately being assigned to the same faculty members.</p>	<p>1. Are there planned rotations for time-intensive administrative, service, or teaching assignments, as possible?</p>	<p>5 Q F S S J I 8 J W [ N H J 7 T Y F Y N T 5 Q F S S N S L 9 J F H M N S L 9 N R J</p>
<p>Give Context</p> <p>Acknowledge that faculty members have different strengths and interests.</p>	<p>1. Do policies and practices appropriately acknowledge differences in work contexts and effort levels?</p> <p>a. J L F U Y Y ^ U J administrative role, differential role in supporting under W J U W J X J S Y J I X Y Z I J S Y X</p> <p>b. Are there ways to formally recognize faculty whose workload differs from the norm within the department?</p>	<p>) N K K J W J S Y N F Y J I &lt; T W P Q T F 2 T I N * J I ( W N Y J W N F K T W 5 W and Tenure H F W J J W X Y F L J</p>





# Appendix C: Policy and Practices to Promote Equitable Faculty Workloads

All worksheets can be found on ACE Engage at [engage.acenet.edu](https://engage.acenet.edu).

## Transparency

1. Faculty Work Activity Dashboard Examples
2. Faculty Service Audit

## Clarity

3. Faculty Expectation Guidelines
4. Compensation for Key Roles

## Credit

5. Credit Systems
6. Teaching Credit Swaps

## Norms

7. Planned Service Rotations
8. Planned Teaching Time Rotations

## Context

9. Differentiated Workloads
10. Modified Criteria for Promotion and Tenure

## Accountability

11. Restructuring and Reducing Committee Size
12. Statement of Mutual Expectations

## Developing a Plan for Action

13. Developing a Department Equity Action Plan (Template and Example)



