The Engaged (and Supported) Professor

An Inside Higher Ed webcast
Wednesday, Oct. 26, 2022
2 p.m. Eastern
Presenters

Kristi DePaul
Founder and CEO
Founders

Doug Lederman
Editor and co-founder
Inside Higher Ed
Key Takeaways

• Many faculty members are struggling with increased expectations from students and their institutions while feeling undersupported and lacking job security.

• Some of it is about pay, and more money can surely help. But making instructors feel supported requires more.

• Student success and well-being is closely linked to the job satisfaction of professors (and staff).

• Colleges and universities have a range of options for addressing these issues – some will require money (at a time of constrained resources for most institutions) but also culture change and significant commitment.
How Did We Get Here?

Lightkey/Getty Images
The Erosion of Tenure

• In 1975, 30% of instructors were contingent; in 2020, 30% were tenured or tenure-track.

• Significant portions of the instructional load is carried by people with low pay, without benefits, and given less institutional support and training than their peers.

• Those who are tenured/tenure-track carry heavy loads of committee/service work, mentoring and other responsibilities.
A Productivity ‘Arms Race’

• As institutions chase prestige, expectations for research output increase, leaving less time/energy for fulfilling teaching and service requirements.

• Teaching matters, rhetorically – but institutions typically don’t reward professors for pedagogical impact or count research on impactful teaching toward scholarly goals.

• Service takes significant time but gets short shrift in tenure and promotion decisions.
“There has been a general squeezing of personnel. We are asking folks to do more in terms of what they produce, time that they spend on their jobs, without resources or compensation to keep up with those expectations.”

--Kevin R. McClure
Associate professor of higher education
University of North Carolina Wilmington
Burnout and Demoralization

• The “multiple pandemics” of the last 30 months accelerated many of the trends we’ve been discussing.

• It heightened demands from students, with professors as “face of the institution.”

• Instructors were dealing with their own trauma, ill health, hopelessness.

• Dealing with new modes of teaching (with technology) was a significant stressor.

• Improved job market/constrained institutional finances put more pressure on those who remained.
‘Academic Chapter 11’

Academe, Hear Me. I Am Crying Uncle.

My workload crisis has not only personal but also systemic causes, writes an anonymous professor, and I’ve come to see that the only way to survive in my job is to declare academic Chapter 11.

By Anonymous · Published April 22, 2022
The Acute Problem for Underrepresented Faculty

2017-2021 FACULTY IN HIGHER EDUCATION SURVEYS
Representation of Tenure-Track Faculty by Rank, Minority Status, and Gender

Tenure-Track Representation in 2021*

- White
  - Men
  - Women
- Racial/Ethnic Minorities
  - Men
  - Women

Assistant Professor  Associate Professor  Professor
Possible Solutions and Strategies
First, be human. Increase frequency of substantive interactions. Not the brief “Hi, how are you?” chat passing in hallways, says Kevin McClure, but a 1:1 discussion to gain deeper insight into instructors’ work lives.

Understand what work professors are doing. Among the questions:

- Is this labor responding to expectations within the department?
- Is it responding to policies around promotion that may need to be refined in some way?
- In what ways is this labor being inequitably distributed?
Workload Audits and Reform

The Faculty Workload and Rewards Project

The Faculty Workload and Rewards Project is an NSF ADVANCE funded, collaborative, action research project. Academic department teams study their own workload data, consider and then adopt policies and practices to ensure equity in how teaching and service is taken up, assigned, and rewarded. Drawing on research and theory from social psychology and organizational management, this project provides an evidence-based structure for learning how equity issues arise, using data.

• Relevant links:
  https://advance.umd.edu/fwrp/home
  https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Equity-Minded-Faculty-Workloads.pdf
Preparing Professors to Succeed With Technology

Instructor Support and Resources

UC faculty and instructors receive education technology tools, teaching and learning support, and instructional design and consultation services. The Center for the Advancement of Teaching Excellence (CATE) provides instructors with the resources and support to develop a culture of effective teaching practices and inclusive education supporting the success of all students.

WHAT TO DO WHEN TECHNOLOGY FAILS

PEDIAGOGICAL SOLUTIONS
Supporting Faculty Well-Being

• Most institutional mental-health efforts focus foremost on students, less on faculty (and often even less on staff). Faculty-specific mental health programs should be considered, and they should extend to adjuncts as well as the tenured.

• Lots of programs cropped up during the pandemic – will they continue now that it has “peaked”? 

• Will the pending demographic decline, on top of enrollment drops already endured, compel colleges to invest in faculty and staff to improve student success?
Thanks