

3-2009

Library Faculty Workload: A Round Peg in a Square Hole

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ScholarWorks Citation

Long, Valeria and Sheehan, Lynn, "Library Faculty Workload: A Round Peg in a Square Hole" (2009).
Presentations. 15.

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Library faculty workload: a round peg in a square hole (or, a square peg in a round hole – either way, it doesn't quite fit)

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Why?

Mandated by university provost to better align library faculty with teaching faculty, which also coincided with University re-accreditation in fall 2008.

Along with the libraries' Director of Research and Instruction, we (head librarian for liberal arts programs and head librarian for professional programs) were charged with devising ways to evaluate and determine library faculty workload.

Teaching faculty can define, with a fair amount of accuracy, their work each semester

- set number of credit hours taught
- time for class preparation
- amount of office hours required
- unit and university committee work
- research

Consequently, teaching faculty workload is more predictable and consistent.

Library faculty work is not as easily defined

- only predictable pieces of our workload are reference (reference desk and chat) and, to some extent, unit and university committee work; varies greatly from week to week
- can't rely on teaching a specified number of hours a week, or project how many student consultations will occur each semester
- because increasing instruction is a library goal, librarians often teach during times set aside for research or meetings, thus limiting scholarship and committee participation
- teaching volume is influenced by the amount of marketing we do, and of course, by individual faculty preferences

Consequently, library faculty workload is unpredictable and inconsistent.

References

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What we did

- literature showed that library workload was approached in a variety of ways; no single method was a good fit
- identified areas in which librarians work, and asked two librarians to provide a sample breakdown of how time was spent in each area during a typical week (realizing there is no typical) and an ideal week (realizing there is no ideal)
- asked librarians how they were currently spending their time, how they wanted to spend their time, and how that would meet unit and personal goals
- met individually with each librarian to review proposed workload and discuss its relationship to the library's strategic plan and unit's goal
- all was prefaced with the understanding that no days or weeks were the same, that the process was not perfect and it was a work in progress

Category	Current	Desired
Teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reference	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Collection Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Administrative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Unintended benefits

- provided a formal venue for librarians to review and evaluate how their time was being spent—and how they wanted to spend it
- began the process of aligning library faculty personal goals with those of the library and university
- helped newer librarians with balancing their level of involvement in university and professional activities
- encouraged more experienced colleagues to reexamine how they spend their time and identify areas in which they can cut back in order to expand activities in other areas (for example, scholarship)
- established a feedback loop for librarians to review where their workload (projected or actual) correlates with stated objectives in their annual Faculty Activity Report
- discovered that some librarians were working in excess of 40 hours a week, which led to adjusting reference and chat staffing

Conclusion

Library faculty workload is not a 'neat' fit, and is (and likely will remain) a work in progress.

Next steps

Obtaining feedback and learning from our librarians, and learning about others' experiences with librarian workload.

