

FRRPC Report 20-02-02  
to the Arts & Sciences Senate  
Concerning the  
“CAS format for Faculty Obligations and Responsibilities”

Faculty Rights and Responsibilities Committee

October 12, 2020

## 1 Prologue

The Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences has requested of each Department, by 15 October 2020, a draft statement outlining:

1. Mission of Department/Program
2. Expectations to be met for designation of a faculty-member as research active
3. Definition of teaching load for research active and off-tenure track faculty
4. Description of Annual Goal Setting and Review process for determining research active status including involvement of mentors or mentoring committee
5. Description of process to designate a faculty member research inactive and steps to transition to/from research active
6. Date faculty voted to adopt policy and roster of faculty comprising the quorum who voted

This memo to the Chairs suggests that Departments establish quantitative rubrics against which Faculty can be assessed in regards to their obligations and expectations. It is to the notion of quantitative rubrics that we raise objections.

In this document we focus our attention on the College of Arts & Sciences. Should this issue arise in other schools or colleges represented by the Arts & Sciences Senate, with different administrative structures (e.g., divisions and division heads, rather than departments and chairs), our position is unchanged, but more appropriate terminology can be employed.

## 2 Comments and Concerns

As faculty, we recognize that the triad of responsibilities of the Faculty encompasses Teaching, Research and other Scholarly Activities, and Service. We recognize that this balance is not static, and evolves with time. In general that evolution is a slow process, one that occurs in full view of and with the concurrence of the Departmental Chair (or a succession of Chairs).

Many Departments function smoothly, with understandings between the Chair and the Faculty concerning the balance of responsibilities. An attempt at Decanal levels to enforce a single standard threatens the autonomy of the Faculty, and interferes where there is no need to interfere.

Despite rampant speculation, we profess ignorance as to the motivation for this new attempt to quantify Faculty productivity. It is our experience as Faculty that quantification of Research/Scholarly Activities is simply not possible. Not only do the norms in the various disciplines vary tremendously, but even within a discipline there can be an enormous disparity in the norms and expectations. Norms for productivity in STEM disciplines are no easier to quantify than they are in the Arts and Humanities.

The Dean can and should require every Department to define, as best they can, the norms of that field by which their faculty can be assessed. But the Dean must recognize that quantification of the norms is fraught, and a general statement of principles should suffice.

Perhaps the best standard is the norm of peers in the field, where the field can be defined as narrowly as needed, and peers are other public AAU universities. All Faculty should strive to meet and surpass the norms of peers in their fields. It is the role of the Chair to understand these norms and discuss them with the Faculty. But the Chair must understand the differences between subfields. For example, within STEM disciplines, subdisciplines are funded at very different levels. A Professor of A doing B, and a Professor of A doing C may be equally renowned scholars while their funding, publication rates, and numbers of students advised vary enormously.

Even in areas which we agree should be weighted strongly, such as graduate advisees and undergraduates mentored, there will be inequities. For example, in STEM fields, one must have significant external funding to support an RA. But there must also be graduate students available. Limits on TA lines imposed by state funding limit the number of potential advisees, to the point where an active and funded researcher may be hard-pressed to find a suitable RA.

Any change in the average teaching loads must come at the expense of the other legs of the triad. The UUP has made clear that the overall workload cannot be changed unilaterally. Since Service is generally a small part of the balance, Research and Scholarly Activities are likely to be the most affected should teaching loads be increased. If time available for Research and Scholarly Activities is reduced, our reputation as an R1 university may be diminished, and our standing in the AAU adversely affected. We note that in

some departments SBU's average teaching currently load exceeds that of our peers.

If the Administration feels that the Faculty are insufficiently research-active, and need to be incentivized to propose for more Sponsored Research Funding, perhaps some fraction of the IDC can be returned to the PI of the grant. If Faculty as a whole are thought to be underperforming, perhaps there needs to be a significant carrot - say the possibility of discretionary salary increased (DSI) at the 10-20% level to raise salaries closer to the salary level of our R1 peers, most of whom live and work in less costly parts of the country.

That there is some "deadwood" that takes advantage of the tenure cannot be denied. These individuals give all of us a bad name. In these individual cases, when properly documented, the Chair does have the latitude to assign additional work, within the constraints of the UUP contract. Teaching must never be construed as punishment, and imposing additional teaching loads will not result in a better learning experience for our students. Perhaps it is incumbent upon the UUP and the Administration to discuss possible solutions for these rare cases. But it is a gross injustice to the rest of the Faculty, and to the reputation of Stony Brook University, as well as a Sisyphean task, to impose productivity quotas on the rest of the Faculty.

Finally, it is important to note that the word "workload" appears in at least two occasions in the Dean's memo. It is the position of the UUP that workload is a contractual matter, and that any changes in workload must be negotiated with the Union. The appointment letter is a contract between the faculty member and the University that cannot be changed unilaterally.

### **3 Recommendations**

We recommend that each Department generate a set of expectations for their Faculty, more for the guidance of the Faculty than for any administrative or punitive purposes. However, as one size does not fit all, even within fairly small disciplines, such expectations should be general in nature. The best standards are the norms for our disciplines at other public R1 universities.