Brief Report

Perceptions and Practices for Evaluating Faculty Workload by Pharmacy Education Administration/Leadership

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ARTICLE INFO
Keywords:
Workload
Department chair
Equity

ABSTRACT

Objective: To assess how department chairs/administrators define, measure, and evaluate faculty workload to better understand practices within the Academy.

Methods: An 18-item survey was distributed to department chairs/administrators via American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Connect. Participants identified if they are a primary decision maker for faculty workload, whether their program has a workload policy, how workload is calculated, and how faculty satisfaction with workload equity is measured.

Results: Of 71 participants initiating the survey, data from 64 participants from 52 colleges/schools were eligible for analysis. Leaders of practice departments reported that their faculty spend an average of 38% of their time on teaching (compared to 46% for non-practice departments), 13% on research (vs 37%), 12% on service (vs 16%), and 36% on clinical practice (vs 0%). Most survey participants (n = 57, 89%) are at schools/colleges with a tenure system, and about 24 participants reported that faculty workload metrics differ across departments/divisions. Teaching assignments and service are reportedly negotiable between faculty and supervisors, and workload expectations are widely variable. The majority indicated they do not analyze faculty satisfaction with workload fairness (n = 35) and faculty do not provide evaluative feedback on how supervisors assign faculty workload (n = 34). Of 6 priorities considered when determining workload, ‘support college/school strategies and priorities’ ranked highest (1.92) and ‘trust between the chair and faculty’ ranked lowest (4.87).

Conclusion: Overall, only half of the participants reported having a clear, written process of quantifying faculty workload. The use of workload metrics may be needed for evidence-based decision-making for personnel management and resource allocation.

1. Introduction

Teaching, research, service, and clinical practice are the cornerstones of a faculty member’s work life. Each part is multifaceted, overlapping, and competing for time. Faculty member’s abilities to effectively use their time in each component of their academic role and to accurately document their effort are important because their workload may be regularly assessed by department chairs, faculty supervisors, or administrators.

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajpe.2022.11.006
Received 4 May 2022; Received in revised form 7 November 2022; Accepted 7 November 2022
Available online 15 March 2023
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To effectively and equitably assign, assess, and appreciate faculty’s work, it is imperative that leaders clearly communicate workload expectations. Specifically, they should build consensus, create and implement policies equitably, and explain how faculty workload calculations are used for faculty promotion, evaluation, recruitment, and more. This process provides important context for optimizing departmental teaching assignments, financial and facilities planning, and strategic plan goals. Systematically and transparently optimizing workload can help increase faculty productivity and satisfaction, which may reduce overall stress. Conversely, a lack of policies and common understanding can cause misalignment of department or institutional priorities and perceptions of inequity.

Although the need for a transparent workload assessment process seems obvious, there is a lack of literature in pharmacy and health professions education on the use of faculty workload policies and metrics, where the policies are developed (e.g., department, school, or university level), how the metrics are calculated and evaluated, and the level of consistency with the process. Therefore, the objective of this study is to understand current practices and perceptions within the Academy, regarding how department chairs or administrators calculate, evaluate, and communicate policies, and what their expectations and considerations are for faculty workload. The results may help improve the use of workload metrics in department decision-making for personnel management and resource allocation.

2. Methods

An 18-item questionnaire was developed that included the name of pharmacy program, whether the survey participant is the primary decision maker for faculty workload in the program (eg, department chair), whether the program has a workload policy, how workload is calculated, the minimum expectations for different roles of faculty, and what factors they consider in determining faculty workload. The survey also assessed perceptions of how effectively workload expectations are communicated and managed.

The survey tool was developed in Qualtrics (R) XM and piloted by a sample of department chairs at the authors’ schools. The study protocol and survey were approved by William Carey University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB #2021–062). The survey link and invitation were posted to American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP) Connect online discussion boards (Council of Deans, Council of Faculty, Department Chair Community) in November 2021. Data were monitored for complete responses and number of distinct pharmacy schools to ensure that the sample was broadly representative. A reminder request was posted after 2 and 4 weeks, and targeted emails were sent during the winter break.

3. Results

A total of 71 individuals opened the survey but 7 were rejected because they were not the primary decision makers who determined individual faculty workload or effort at their departments/units. The eligible 64 participants represented 52 U.S. schools/colleges of pharmacy.

Participating schools’/colleges’ characteristics were analyzed to ensure a representative sample. Schools/colleges were characterized by the U.S. Census Bureau’s geographic regions, and grouped into 4 sections (Midwest, Northeast, South, and West). National data were collected from school websites regarding public/private status and year established, and from AACP Total Full-Time Faculty Trends (Table 1).

On average, participants had a faculty appointment for 19 years (range 2–40), have led their departments/units for 5 years (range 0.5–17), and supervised 21 full-time faculty members (range 6–50). Twenty-five participants (39%) lead a department/division that includes only pharmacy practice, 20 (31%) lead a department/division that does not include pharmacy practice faculty, 18 (28%) lead a department/division that includes both pharmacy practice and non-pharmacy practice faculty, and 1 (2%) indicated that the school/college has no departments/divisions. Most of the participants (n = 57, 89%) have a tenure system at their colleges/schools. Participants reported their faculty members spend an average of 40% of their time on teaching, 23% on research, 14% on service, and 23% on clinical practice (Table 2).

Almost half of the participants (n = 31, 48%) reported having written workload policies and most (n = 25, 81%) include metrics to assess faculty workload. Four replied no, and 2 were unsure. Although 30 participants (47%) indicated having no metrics, most (n = 27, 90%) indicated that their school/college has a definition or understanding of how faculty workload is determined or distributed. Two replied no, and 1 was unsure.

It is noteworthy that 24 participants reported that faculty workload is calculated with metrics that are different from other departments/divisions, and only 16 reported that it is calculated with metrics that are consistent across departments/divisions. The remaining participants indicated that workload is either self-calculated by individual faculty (n = 10), not calculated at all (n = 5), or calculated with some combination of methods (n = 9). Sixty-two of the 64 survey participants indicated that teaching assignments are negotiable between faculty members and supervisors, mostly before assignments are made (n = 49), or afterward with minor adjustments (n = 13). Similarly, service assignments are largely negotiable either before (n = 45) or after the assignment (n = 17).

Participants’ expectations for faculty in terms of teaching, research, scholarship, and service varied widely, likely depending on the school/college characteristics (eg, teaching intensive vs research focused). The majority of participants indicated that they do not analyze overall faculty satisfaction with workload fairness (n = 35), and that their faculty members do not provide evaluative feedback on how supervisors assign faculty workload (n = 34). Overall, there was no clear, consistent way of quantifying faculty workload.

When determining faculty workload, participants ranked “support school/college strategies and priorities” as their top priority whereas “increasing trust between myself and individual faculty members” was their lowest priority. Table 3 shows the ranking of the different priorities and the average rank that participants assigned for each priority on a scale from 1 (highest priority) to 6 (lowest priority). Table 4 indicates participants’ self-ratings of how effectively they communicate and manage faculty workloads with respect to transparency, clarity, credit, norms, context, and accountability.
Table 2
Percentage of Faculty Time by Type of Department (n = 64 Participants).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of department (n, %)</th>
<th>Teaching, mean (range)</th>
<th>Research, mean (range)</th>
<th>Service, mean (range)</th>
<th>Clinical practice, mean (range)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A department/division that includes only pharmacy practice (25, 39%)</td>
<td>38 (20–60)</td>
<td>13 (5–30)</td>
<td>12 (5–30)</td>
<td>36 (20–50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A department/division that does not include pharmacy practice (20, 31%)</td>
<td>46 (20–75)</td>
<td>37 (10–65)</td>
<td>16 (5–25)</td>
<td>0 (NA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A department/division that includes both pharmacy practice and non-pharmacy practice</td>
<td>36 (15–80)</td>
<td>23 (5–65)</td>
<td>13 (5–20)</td>
<td>29 (0–65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty (18, 28%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall mean</td>
<td>40 (15–80)</td>
<td>25 (5–65)</td>
<td>14 (5–30)</td>
<td>23 (0–65)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One responding school/college has no departments/divisions. Although this participant provided responses to this question, their data were excluded from this table for anonymity.

4. Discussion

This study evaluated schools/colleges of pharmacy department chairs’ (or administrators responsible for evaluating faculty effort) use and characteristics of faculty workload policies. One finding was that less than half of the pharmacy schools surveyed had formal faculty workload policies. This is surprising given the importance of department chairs’ role in recruitment and retention, allocating resources, and mentoring faculty toward promotion/tenure. This is also lower than non-administrators in Section II: Faculty Development and Performance (means calculated on a 4-point Likert scale, excluding unable to comment). This includes explicit and clear performance assessment criteria (mean of 3.34 for administrators compared with 3.11 for non-administrators), clear allocation of effort (3.52 vs 3.09), guidance on career development (3.12 vs 2.85), funds to support faculty development (3.24 vs 2.96), programs to orient non-practice faculty (3.10 vs 2.82), programs to improve teaching (3.47 vs 3.23), and programs to develop research competence (3.23 vs 2.90).

Department chairs and administrators often make difficult decisions to meet both institutional priorities and healthy work/life integration of faculty members. The majority of participants did not assess overall satisfaction of workload fairness or how supervisors assign faculty workload. This should be further explored.

The 2021 AACP Faculty Survey reflects faculty perspectives that were not evaluated in this study. For example, responses to items No. 41-44, “In my opinion, the proportion of my time spent on teaching, research, service and clinical practice is appropriate” were 79%, 66%, 76%, and 81%, respectively, excluding replies of ‘unable to comment.’ Appropriateness may be an indirect measure of satisfaction and represents an area for improvement, whether through increased transparency or improvement in opportunities for negotiations around workload allocation between the supervisor and the faculty member, particularly in the area of teaching.

One limitation of the current study is that one of the survey questions, whether faculty workload metrics differ across departments/divisions, may have been misinterpreted. The goal was to assess if departments measured workload by different criteria; however, participant feedback indicated that the question may have been interpreted as whether faculty have different proportions of workload by department, which would be expected based on roles.

Another limitation of all survey research is relying on participant integrity to answer truthfully. This is evident in the Results, where 7 participants opened but were ejected from the survey when they affirmed that they were not primary decision makers regarding faculty workload. The authors chose to use AACP Connect for the broadest reach because not all department chairs are AACP members, but the chief executive officer deans likely are and therefore could forward the

Table 3
Ranking of Factors that Participants Considered when Determining Faculty Workload, from Highest to Lowest (n = 64).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Average rank from 1 (highest priority) to 6 (lowest priority)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support school/college strategies and priorities</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve department goals and initiatives</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote fairness/balance in assignments</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase individual productivity and accountability</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen department culture and collegiality</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase trust between myself and individual faculty members</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
survey. There are also structural differences across the Academy wherein chairs may not be the primary decision makers regarding faculty workload, and a few schools are without separate departments and thus no chairs. AACP Connect may not be a 100% verifiable source wherein chairs may not be the primary decision makers regarding fa-

determination impacts on workload and well-

Future studies should assess faculty perceptions and understanding of workload policies, calculations, and expectations. This could be expanded to evaluate faculty perceptions of fairness and satisfaction with workload allocations. With only half of participants having a written workload policy, further studies should identify who creates the policies (chair, school, university), how policy exceptions are granted, and the level of compliance with documenting effort accurately and consistently. Further investigation is warranted to determine impacts on workload and well-being of not having consistent metrics across departments.

5. Conclusion

It is imperative that department chairs or equivalent administrators transparently and clearly communicate workload expectations, including what is being measured and how the data are being used to make decisions regarding school/college and departmental goals and priorities, because workload inequities can decrease productivity and increase burnout. Furthermore, most department chairs did not have processes in place to assess overall faculty satisfaction of workload fairness or how supervisors assign faculty workload. The use of workload metrics may be needed for evidence-based decision-making for personnel management and resource allocation. Sharing workload policies across the Academy and identifying best practices in workload policies and metrics for evaluation could be beneficial.

Funding/Support

There was no external funding or support for this research.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed to this research and its publication.

Table 4

Self-rating on Domains that Could Impact Effective Oversight of Faculty Workloads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transparency: I provide widely visible information about faculty work activities for department members to see.</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarity: I clearly identify and ensure broad understanding of benchmarks for faculty work activities.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit: I recognize and reward faculty members who are expending more effort in certain areas.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norms: I assure faculty that workload is fair and I have put systems in place that reinforce these norms.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context: I acknowledge to faculty that different faculty members have different strengths, interests, and demands that shape their workloads and offer workload flexibility to recognize this context.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability: I have put mechanisms in place to ensure that faculty members fulfill their work obligations and receive credit for their labor.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abbreviations: A, agree (3); D, disagree (2); SA, strongly agree (4); SD, strongly disagree (1); Total, total number of responses.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None declared.

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