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AAUP-QU Newsletter

The mission of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) is to advance academic freedom and shared governance; to define fundamental professional values and standards for higher education; to promote the economic security of faculty, academic professionals, graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, and all those engaged in teaching and research in higher education; to help the higher education community organize to make our goals a reality; and to ensure higher education's contribution to the common good.

We're pleased to bring you the second issue of our advocacy chapter's newsletter. This issue focuses on faculty workload.



AAUP-QU is an advocacy chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Our chapter was founded in summer 2020, in direct response to faculty and staff layoffs at Quinnipiac University, and was officially chartered on August 20th, 2020.

Our aim in publishing a regular newsletter is to communicate with our members, along with AAUP colleagues in the region and nationally, and with the public.

Workload

As a community, we were encouraged by the two recent Faculty Senate meetings (2/8/21 and 2/22/21) in which we learned that the Quinnipiac administration is planning to bring faculty work expectations back to our routinely assigned and more sustainable loads. Faculty cheered the announcement as a step in the right direction. We appreciated the plan we learned at the February 8th meeting: that in academic year 2021-22, tenure-track professors will return to their normal loads, while tenured professors will move a half-step back; and in academic year 2022-23, all tenure-track and tenured professors will return to the workload their schools have for many years determined to be normal and sustainable. And we also appreciated the clarification of the February 22nd meeting that the return to normal loads will apply to teaching and clinical faculty as well, and that the equity across schools is a priority for the Provost. We welcome the particular attention to the predicament of those on the tenure-track, as well as to ensuring that workloads are rolled back to pre-COVID levels for all professors regardless of appointment type.

We very much look forward to returning to our pre-COVID workload, which will allow for more student-centered pedagogical approaches. It affords us significantly more time to prepare classes; it allows us to offer students opportunities to revise assignments to learn from their mistakes and earn a higher grade for improved performance. We can provide more substantive, in-depth feedback on student work and or develop innovative assignments that require significant time investments to evaluate. A more sustainable workload will also allow us the time and energy to support our students outside of class in ways many of us have found challenging or impossible this year, including: writing letters of recommendation; providing research supervision; leading independent studies; providing feedback on fellowship, grant, and graduate school applications; and advising student groups. But most of all, we are looking forward to the kinds of personal encounters that are so meaningful to professors and students alike. We have missed the one-on-one interactions with our students, advisees, and colleagues that build and sustain community on campus.

Many of us also eagerly anticipate a return to our scholarship, which impacts not only us and the prestige of our institution as a whole, but our students. As well as providing critical professional development and progression, faculty scholarship frequently supports student research experiences. Moreover, when faculty retain professional connections and a profile in the field by regularly publishing, engaging in conference proceedings, reviewing grants, etc., students are more successful in competing for fellowships, grants, and entry into graduate school.

Additionally, many professors were drawn to Quinnipiac for its teacher-scholar model, in which our teaching enlivens our scholarship, while our scholarship adds rigor and cutting-edge disciplinary knowledge to our teaching. Indeed, many of us hold appointments that require such scholarship, and strongly affirm the unequivocal statement in the *Faculty Handbook* that “Quinnipiac University endorses the teacher-scholar ideal.” We agree with the *Handbook* that that ideal requires that “Faculty will have appropriate workloads and adequate infrastructure to pursue excellence in teaching and scholarly activity or creative works.” We look forward to returning to our research agendas and again having the possibility of meeting our existing research commitments. Without time or internal funding, these goals have already been undermined. The restoration of time and funding will go some way toward the vision of the Strategic Plan, which promises to “support a vibrant intellectual community and invest in the scholarship and lifelong learning needs of faculty and staff.” We agree with the Strategic Plan that Quinnipiac’s “most important resource is human—the faculty and staff who embody QU’s singular commitment to student learning and development,” and appreciate its acknowledgment that faculty cannot support our common mission without investments in “support for research, professional advancement, pedagogical and curricular innovations as well as initiatives that support lifestyle choices, inclusivity and family health.”

Some details of the workload plan of course remain to be ironed out (and the plan as a whole should be explained in writing). The Provost’s concerns about equity, and historical inequity, within and across schools are indeed well founded. The extent of the differences between schools does give us cause for concern. We know that some faculty have had their appointments shifted from 12 to 9.5 months, and their salary thus reduced, without a reduction in workload or any say in the change, while faculty in other schools have already returned to their normal workload. Some faculty have been told that the change in the terms of their contract is permanent; some faculty expect to return to a normal load in 2022-3; some faculty have already returned to their standard workload. These are significant work and pay disparities. Such disparities also undermine relationships among faculty that are important not only to our health and wellbeing, but to the very interdisciplinary community that we promise our students. Increased class sizes are also having a major impact. In some cases a class that used to be capped at 25, for instance, might now be capped at 35 -- a 40% increase. As professors recount in the testimonials below, in some cases class sizes have gone up so dramatically that they are essentially grading the work of a whole extra class. We have also seen a new expectation that faculty will be available all summer despite not being paid for our summer work. This was stated explicitly by the previous interim provost, but has also been implicit in the sheer labor required to prepare online versions of courses, or, in some cases, multiple versions of courses. To the extent that in-class instruction has improved each semester since the onset of COVID, those improvements are due to the consummate professionalism and dedication of faculty, who have put in many, many hours moving materials online, learning new technologies, and mastering old ones, in order to engage and teach students.

We recognize that faculty and administrators share in the burdens caused by uncertainty in a time where planning for the next academic year must occur. In some cases, faculty members must prepare separate versions of

classes -- hybrid, fully online, and fully in-person -- in order to be fully prepared for their fall schedule. We all share in the ongoing health concerns and stress related to living and working outside of our homes, and many do not feel comfortable planning to come to campus until vaccinations have been more fully disseminated.

Although we applaud our Provost for her commitment to the teacher-scholar ideal, and the administration as a whole for understanding the importance of an equitable and manageable workload for faculty, questions remain for us regarding the way that the decisions about workload were taken, and how such decisions might be made in the future. The departure from our standard terms of appointment was drastic; should the COVID pandemic not recede in the way we all hope, or should Quinnipiac face a different set of financial challenges in the future, we must be clear about the costs of the approach we took this year, as well as its potential benefits. When the directive to increase workload was first announced, we were told that we faced a choice between layoffs and a work overload. This framing damaged the morale of our junior faculty and oversimplified what are surely a more complex set of financial choices and priorities. If the university continues to need to cut costs, and we understand that it may, then we must ensure that we cut costs in a way that preserves our educational mission and is fair and equitable. For instance, we must ask: Where else are costs being cut? While faculty pay cuts have been involuntary, we are unaware of other cost-cutting measures right now. We continue to hear of new administrators to be hired and major projects that continue to receive funding. Moreover, when the involuntary overloads were first mandated last year, they were at first presented as a one-semester measure meant to reduce the financial uncertainties of the COVID crisis. They were then extended to another semester; and now, for tenured faculty, another full year. We are genuinely happy to temporarily bear the burden of financial uncertainty to support Quinnipiac and its mission; however, the burden must indeed be temporary for all of us in order that we not feel that our goodwill has been taken advantage of.

Ultimately, we all know that faculty working conditions are student learning conditions. Faculty mental and physical health manifests itself not only in our own lives and morale, but in the quality of instruction we are able to give our students, from our awareness of developments in our fields to our relationships across schools to our ability to reach out not only to the students who are struggling, but just to those who are a little quiet. We recognize that this is an unprecedented time in our national and global history, and we stand ready to work with the administration to devise ways to cut costs and work more efficiently. But that should be a collaborative, fair, and transparent process, one that builds trust between and among faculty and administration, and that ensures equity across our community. If we indeed need to cut costs, we are willing to be partners in that process, collaborating with the administration to devise ways of doing so that preserve the heart of our educational mission and support the work of the faculty, who are essential to sustaining that mission.

Testimonials

In an attempt to capture the experiences of faculty during this time, our chapter sought out descriptions of the impact that the involuntary overload had on faculty this year. We aim here to give space to those voices and honor the experiences our colleagues have withstood this year.

“This year is so very hard. The Qflex thing requires multiple preps for each class--one for the Zoomers and one for the in-class students. The increase in class sizes essentially means I have a fifth class--from 15/class to 20/class, 4 classes mean a total of 20 new students. I am trying to carve out minutes just to decompress. There’s so much fatigue.” -- *Teaching Professor in CAS*

“The teaching overload took a significant toll on both my research and teaching. We all were ready to go the extra mile and assume increased responsibility to deal with the disruptions caused by the pandemic. It was therefore not the extra load *per se* that caused the harm; it was rather the opaque manner in which decisions were made that made a bad situation worse. There was neither equity nor any transparency in the decision-making process, at least in my School. Unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy exacerbated the problem and made faculty feel helpless and unwanted. Many of our faculty are “faculty of practice” without tenure and as such afraid to voice their opinion. The administration took all necessary steps **not** to waste the crisis. On the contrary, it took full advantage of

COVID-19 to resort to drastic cost-cutting measures without regard to quality of education or faculty morale. Had the administration involved faculty with the decision-making process, it could have achieved the same results without the damage caused to students' learning and faculty morale. A little more fairness and honesty on the part of the administration would have allowed the faculty to make more meaningful contributions to our institution in weathering the storm and also in reimagining the post-COVID 19 life at Quinnipiac. It was a missed opportunity for the administration. While the faculty suffered, the biggest losers are the students and Quinnipiac itself." --*Business Faculty*

"Perhaps the most unfortunate consequence of the increased course load has been the reduced quality of the learning experience for my students. Having to teach 33% more classes and roughly 40% more students (because course caps were also raised) necessarily translated into less-rigorous assignments and reduced feedback on assignments. When I had 80 students across three classes, I could assign challenging essays and give students substantial feedback. Last semester when I had 135 students across four classes, I opted for less grading-intensive assignments. I was working 50 hours a week back when we had a 3-3 teaching load, and I simply can't work 33% more. The only option is to cut back where I can. I feel terribly for my students. They are not getting the quality of education that I would like to provide, or the quality of education that they are paying for, quite frankly.

The increased course load has also had a big impact on my scholarship. Teaching an extra class consumes roughly 10 hours of my time each week, which is about as much time as I dedicated to research each week during the pre-pandemic days. I have essentially had to exchange my program of research for a fourth class. This is most unfortunate for the many juniors and seniors who wanted to get research experience in my lab this year. Their plans for attending grad-school may be put on hold because the university decided that it was more important for me to teach an extra class than provide research opportunities for my students. Beyond impacting my students, the extra teaching load will also have consequences for my own scholarly goals. Being inactive in research for a full year is a big setback. If the 4-4 teaching load continues for another academic year (or more), the research projects I was conducting in 2019 may no longer be novel or relevant in my area of research. And unfortunately, a few years from now, the present research drought will yield a publication drought that will look rather unimpressive when I am being considered for tenure. And one last comment: the increased teaching load has already hijacked one of my summers. I spent two months during the summer of 2020 prepping a new class for the Q-Flex model. If the 4-4 teaching load continues, I anticipate losing the summer of 2021 to another new prep. Summers are critical for analyzing data and preparing manuscripts, and to lose two summers to teaching prep is incredibly detrimental to my scholarly productivity." --*Assistant Professor in CAS*

"Faculty scholarship is a job requirement for me, and it opens up research opportunities for students as well as continuously improving the quality of my-classes. But the administration removed all my time for scholarship, along with almost all of my funding. Between trying to keep up with research projects that are under contract and have to be finished, addressing problems and challenges with HyFlex, and teaching many more students than usual, my health is really suffering. I'm experiencing exhaustion, anxiety, and severe stress, and I'm concerned that I'm becoming clinically depressed (but I don't have the time or emotional energy to get help). On top of this, the constant talk of program reviews, cuts, and permanently eliminating faculty research time and funding is utterly demoralizing. We were told that the involuntary teaching overload was just for a semester, maybe just for this year, and of course it is important to help the university get through COVID-19. But now we're being told that overloading of faculty will go on for a whole extra year for many of us, maybe even indefinitely. I feel betrayed and used by the administration. And I'm honestly so concerned about our students. I am doing the best I possibly can to support all my students' learning, but the overload has forced me to assign fewer challenging assignments and to spend less time with each individual student, which goes against all my professional instincts. I am working every single day without a break to keep up with this overload. To be honest, I don't know how much longer I can go on like this." --*Professor in CAS*

"The greatest impact the work overload has had on me and my students is the lack of time to share my expertise with individual students. Feedback is imperative for learning; developing meaningful relationships, based on trust

and safety, requires meaningful course design. That all takes time. If I am being honest, I feel terrible because my students are my professional life and not being able to meet the needs of every class and every student wears on me, physically and emotionally.” -- *Teaching Professor, School of Education*

“Beyond loss of time and energy for scholarship and non-class, student-centered work (such as regular check-ins with advisees and advising a student group), beyond the late addition of a fourth class on my schedule, the use of Zoom carts to accommodate synchronous, online instruction from a classroom has been a primary source of my deepest frustrations and exhaustion. When I’m in the classroom, my attention is split between the students present in-person, the students attending remotely, the technological dance required to use Zoom and the cart effectively, the concern about the risk of being inside a room with people who don’t live in my household and who may not adhere to COVID protocols as strictly as I do that is punctuated every time I reiterate COVID protocols during the class meeting when a student gets too close or starts taking their mask down to take a drink from their water bottle, and actually TEACHING the material, and it is incredibly draining.

Preparing for each individual class meeting takes significantly more time than it used to. It feels like I’m prepping for multiple classes at once (because I am) and then I attempt to teach those multiple classes simultaneously. In the fall, I spent a substantial amount of time trying to come up with COVID-safe in-class activities that would work for an unknown ratio of in-person to remote-attending students and learning the new platforms (e.g., Padlet, Flipgrid, many of the tools and features available within Zoom) that would allow for us to attempt said activities in class together. When tech or audio issues inevitably arose or when students in the classroom would forget their headphones, these in-class activities suffered. With so many variables to consider in the classroom, I have found it difficult to pivot when things don’t go to plan - so many of the pedagogical techniques I would employ prior to the pandemic simply are not possible right now and coming up with new ways to engage students and encourage active participation across both modalities in real time is a challenge.

There is so much cognitive effort required to teach in multiple modalities at the same time that I feel myself less capable of being accessible to my students in the minutes before and after class and less prepared to “roll with the punches” during class. In the first few weeks of the spring semester, I came to the realization that part of what is so difficult about this work right now is that I’m not able to be the kind of professor I want to be. While I appreciate that students expressed wanting the in-person class experience, it’s hard not to wonder if it is the best educational experience I can provide right now or if their preference is driven more by a desire to have a reason to leave their dorm room and less a belief that they learn better in person than online. When the number of students attending in person dwindled as the fall semester progressed, I heard from a number of colleagues about days when they taught to the Zoom cart directly because no one had shown up in person or how they handled teaching to only one or two in-person students while the rest of their class joined remotely, and I mentally prepared for how I’d handle similar situations. While I didn’t experience it in the fall, I have been experiencing consistently low in-person attendance this semester. In a room that fits over 20 students at a time, I am only getting between 4-6 students in person each meeting. It is difficult to reconcile the pressure felt to be on campus and teach in multiple modalities at once with the experience of having consistently low in-person attendance. In short, doing extra work to accommodate the many variables at play with synchronous, online instruction from a classroom during this pandemic while feeling I could be a more effective, engaging, and accessible teacher in an online-only structure is exhausting and particularly disheartening when only a few students physically come to class.” --*Associate Professor in School of Communications*