

FACULTY WORKLOAD AT ITHACA COLLEGE: THE NEED TO REDEFINE AND REDESIGN

White Paper

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Background

Faculty workload (and teaching load) has been a topic of discussion at Ithaca College for some time. Recently, the College completed a three-year process of lowering the faculty teaching load from 24 credits per semester to 21, adding approximately 34 new faculty positions to complete that process. Continuing discussion centers around the faculty's desire to move to an 18-credit teaching load.

Accompanying the faculty's desire for an 18-credit load are several environmental and organizational factors: 1) in the recent Middle States study, the team report cited the need to clarify faculty 'workload' vs. 'teaching load' – this discussion has not yet begun; 2) practices for assigning load, as well as the number of credits considered a full load, vary immensely across campus; 3) the country is experiencing a dramatic fiscal downturn; 4) there do not exist clear policies regarding the difference of work and/or teaching assignments between NTEN, one-year, and tenure-track/tenured faculty; and 5) when the change from 24 to 21 was made, policies regarding half-time status (including qualifications for benefits) release time for administrative duties, etc., were not considered. In reference to the last point, confusion around whether 24 (or 21) is teaching load or workload contributes to the lack of clarity. It is imperative that further work toward load be accomplished in an atmosphere that acknowledges and clarifies these issues and questions, and utilizes a wide array of actions to reach the desired goals.

The Provost's Workload Study

Prior to broader discussions of changes in the faculty workload, it seemed imperative to me to better understand what faculty at Ithaca College were actually teaching. I began by reviewing a list of courses assigned to full-time faculty who taught both semesters of AY 2007-08. The study offered a great deal of information, including more than 350 faculty. I asked deans and department chairs to interpret for me how faculty load was computed for each individual, based on their course list. Deans and chairs also added to the list various types of load release, special assignments, etc.

I began review of this information, by going through it myself, one faculty member at a time. I soon realized that compiling this information into any meaningful set of data was going to be impossible, for several reasons: 1) the required load of faculty is different in one school¹ from another; 2) many systems of 'counting' and 'valuing' exist, which award extra load credit beyond the listed credit hours of the course; 3) large sections are sometimes counted as two courses, but the threshold that divides a section into two is unclear; 4) credit for administrative duties varies widely from school to school; 5) independent studies are counted very differently from school to school; and 6) some schools 'bank' credits from one year to the next, which would then require a multi-year analysis.

¹In all cases, the term "school" also refers to the Division of Interdisciplinary and International Studies.

The Results

1. Faculty Teaching a 4-3 Course Load (7 courses for 21 credits per year)

I began my study of the load assignments by looking at courses with enrollments of 5 students or more. I counted 112 faculty who were teaching 21 or more hours of courses of this type. Of those, 65 were tenure-track, the remainder NTEN or one-year hires. I should quickly note that many other faculty had the “equivalent” of 7 courses due to various load buy-outs or special assignments, or through other types of instruction, which will be discussed in the following pages.

2. Small-class and Individualized Instruction

Ithaca takes pride in offering students opportunities for faculty-student interaction, undergraduate research, etc. Many faculty are actively engaged in these teaching opportunities. Additionally, some disciplines require extensive individualized instruction, such as music, theatre, art, etc. The study revealed that different schools had developed individualized methods of assigning load credits to these activities. To some extent, this is necessary; but we must look for at least a common vocabulary to describe and value these venues. Assignment of load for special instruction such as science labs, supervision of student research, team-teaching, faculty music ensembles, etc., needs thoughtful study. On first glance, it appears to me that the load credit for these sections may have been elevated beyond national practice precisely because loads at Ithaca College were extremely high. When the load changed from 24 to 21, they were not adjusted. Prior to any additional adjustment, these must be brought into line with national practice.

3. Release Time

Many hours of load are being assigned to ‘release’ for various things, including administrative work, supervision of research or clinical activities, CFRD, Dana professorships or student intern supervision, and others. Without meaning at all to imply that these are less than important, I was struck by the large number of hours that these releases totaled. I counted 1,285 credits of release time. At 21 semester credits as a full-time load, this is the equivalent of 61 faculty members. Additionally, no campus-wide standard exists for duty-based releases, such as administrative duty releases, which vary, once again, from school to school.

4. Sabbatical Leaves

Sabbaticals must be considered as part of the release time paradigm. Thirty-six faculty members were released for one semester each. This equivalent of 18 faculty members, if added to the number above, brings the total of ‘released’ faculty to approximately 81.

5. Load Credit for Independent Studies

Once again, which school a faculty member is assigned to seems to be the determining factor in how this load credit is computed. Some schools assign 0 credit for independent studies; others offer a 3-credit course release after a faculty member has completed 24 credits of independent studies, using a complex system of record-keeping over several years.

6. Load Releases and Course Buy-outs

In some cases, faculty hold multiple course releases for varied purposes; in other cases, course releases actually become de facto overloads, and generate overload pay.

Various systems of ‘banking’ credits from heavier semesters to lighter semesters exist, making analysis of load extremely difficult. Almost no signs of “debiting” were seen (i.e., carrying a negative load forward from a light semester). Carry-over of load credits from one year to another is a practice that needs careful examination for compliance with labor standards that require payment for services rendered at the time the work is completed.

Next Steps

Toward the goal of workload redesign, including the creation of a faculty load system that is in line with the peer institutions, a number of steps need to be taken.

1. The terms ‘workload’ and ‘teaching load’ must be used clearly. Workload must be understood as the complete gamut of faculty activity, including research and service, while teaching load is defined around actual instructional assignments.
2. The role of one-year and NTEN faculty must be clarified, and their teaching expectations set accordingly. Currently NTEN faculty policies vary widely from school to school; in some units, NTENs carry a heavier teaching load than tenure/tenure-track faculty; in others, they carry identical loads. The teaching load of NTENs must be considered in connection with expectations for research and service, and how those expectations concur or differ from the expectations of tenure-track faculty.
3. The relationship between ‘workload’, ‘teaching load’, and the definition of full-time, and half-time, must be clarified.
4. The course release practices on campus must be evaluated, and compared to the same peer institutions whose loads we seek to match. Some examples follow:
 - a. Some department chairs receive a 12-credit release each year. When the load was 24, 12 credits was a 50% release; at an 18-hour load, it would be a 66% release. A campus-wide policy that links the amount of release to the size and complexity of the department is essential; and
 - b. The amount of administrative effort in a department varies widely. Some departments are releasing individuals for multiple roles, including chair, assistant chair, graduate chair, and other roles. The amount of chair release should be tied to the size and complexity of the department.
5. Policies on specialized instruction must be developed and/or analyzed. This includes internships, independent studies, research oversight, clinical supervision, and science labs. Some departments include credit for these activities while others allow no credit, causing unfair disparities in faculty load.
6. Load for instruction such as science labs and music studio classes and applied lessons needs to match load assignments at peer institutions.
7. CFRD funding needs to be re-evaluated. Originally CFRD was partially intended to serve as an opportunity for a faculty member with a heavy teaching load to reassign time to research or pedagogical work; however, many CFRD grants are going to faculty with lighter loads due to research funding or chair releases, etc., while other faculty with heavier loads are not receiving the competitive grants. We must prioritize either load release or proposal strength. And we must

evaluate whether CFRD funding is best applied in this manner, or reallocated toward the goal of achieving a desired load level across campus.

8. The practice of 'stacking' course releases must be examined. As well as a maximum teaching load, should there be a minimum teaching load?
9. Policies regarding a banking system must be campus-wide, and able to stand up to the scrutiny of auditors.
10. Course releases need to be tied to some quantifiable means of evaluating the amount of work involved in a certain project. For example, a 3-credit course involves 45 hours of class instruction, 90 hours of preparation (at 2 hours per lecture), and approximately 30 hours of grading/evaluation. Under this paradigm, a project would need to involve approximately 160 hours of work to qualify for a 3-credit course release.
11. The course offering schedule must be thoughtfully evaluated to avoid duplicity, and to avoid the necessity for numerous independent studies to substitute for regular courses. Courses that are not required for a program of study should only be offered if faculty load time is available without causing overloads for other faculty or the need for part-time hires. Independent studies must be carefully considered, balancing their effect on faculty workload against the opportunity they provide to students.
12. Timing of sabbatical leaves must be considered in order to ensure that the necessary courses can be covered.

Summary

A redesign and redefining of faculty work and teaching loads is imperative at Ithaca College. The solutions will not be found by simply adding faculty, nor is that possible under current fiscal realities. It can only be accomplished through a redesign that includes a search for greater efficiencies, and through a willingness to redefine, re-evaluate, and revise both the array of instruction offered and the manner in which it is assigned to faculty.

Proposed Actions

As a result of the study detailed in this document, I am establishing three working groups, which will include faculty, department chairs, and associate/assistant deans. Each group will be asked to consider one of the following issues:

1. Definition of teaching load vs. workload, including policies regarding credit for various types of instructional activities, and the issue of variances (or not) in load between TE and NTEN faculty;
2. Practices and policies around course releases and buy-outs, including releases for administrative duties, CFRD, etc. (excluding those matters covered specifically in working group three, below); and
3. Practices and policies governing department chair remuneration and release.

I will ask the groups to begin their work this spring.