

A WHITE PAPER SERIES
FROM THE COLLABORATIVE
ON ACADEMIC CAREERS IN
HIGHER EDUCATION (COACHE)

Benchmark Best Practices: Nature of Work: Service

collaborative on
academic careers
in higher education



This series of white papers is offered freely to member institutions as part of our project's three-year support and engagement plan.

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Benchmark Best Practices:

Nature of Work: Service

COACHE Benchmarks

Our surveys of college faculty produce data that are both (a) salient to full-time college faculty, and (b) actionable by academic leaders. The survey items are aggregated into 20 benchmarks representing the general thrust of faculty satisfaction along key themes.

The COACHE benchmarks are:

NATURE OF WORK: TEACHING	TENURE CLARITY	DIVISIONAL LEADERSHIP
NATURE OF WORK: RESEARCH	TENURE REASONABLENESS	DEPARTMENTAL LEADERSHIP
NATURE OF WORK: SERVICE	PROMOTION	DEPARTMENTAL COLLEGIALITY
INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK	FACILITIES & WORK RESOURCES	DEPARTMENTAL ENGAGEMENT
COLLABORATION	PERSONAL & FAMILY POLICIES	DEPARTMENTAL QUALITY
MENTORING	HEALTH & RETIREMENT BENEFITS	APPRECIATION & RECOGNITION
TENURE POLICIES	SENIOR LEADERSHIP	

What is measured in this benchmark?

NATURE OF WORK: SERVICE

Satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with:

- The portion of your time spent on service (e.g., department/program administration, faculty governance, committee work, advising/mentoring students, speaking to alumni or prospective students/parents)
- The number of committees on which you serve
- The attractiveness (e.g., value, visibility, importance, personal preference) of the committees on which you serve
- The discretion you have to choose the committees on which you serve

Agreement (or disagreement) with the statement:

- My institution does what it can to help faculty who take on additional leadership roles, to sustain other aspects of their faculty work.

Why Support for Service Is Important

Among the top three responsibilities of the tenure-stream faculty—but almost always the third—service is infused in the ethos of shared governance and the DNA of faculty life. In COACHE focus groups, faculty included in their definition of their most “vital” colleagues an engagement in service to the discipline and university. Yet, tenured faculty expressed their dissatisfaction with their service work: too many committees doing unfulfilling work, too many reports sitting unread on administrators’ shelves, and too many good soldiers picking up the slack of faculty colleagues who, whether by influence or incompetence, seem always to evade service commitments. Meanwhile, college and universities are often encouraged as a best practice to “protect” pre-tenure faculty from too many time commitments outside of the teaching and research that will make their tenure case. The aggregate result is a gulf between institutional expectations for service and the recognition it receives in evaluations of faculty.

Benchmark Best Practices:

Nature of Work: Service

The COACHE survey instrument invites faculty to explore these tensions with questions about the quantity, quality, and equitable distribution of their service work broadly defined, as well as their institutions' efforts to help faculty be service leaders and sustain their other commitments as faculty. In follow-up interviews with faculty and institutional leaders, a common refrain emerged: faculty are eager to participate not in more service, but in more meaningful service, and institutions must do better to engage and to reward those contributions.

Getting Started

Colleges and universities whose faculty were most satisfied with items in the Nature of Work: Service benchmark consistently cited institutional mission and culture in explaining their results. Among these exemplars were land-grant universities (like North Carolina State University) committed to fostering a service-oriented culture; religiously-affiliated colleges (like Stonehill College) with an explicit service mission; comprehensive colleges (like SUNY Plattsburgh) with strong ties with the local community; and former normal schools (like UNC Pembroke) whose minority-serving mission is inextricable from its faculty's ethic of care.

At Binghamton University, for example, it starts with clear expectations. As the Provost put it:

“The expectations for service, and its importance, are communicated to faculty when they are hired as part of the culture of the institution. Faculty members see their departmental colleagues and respected faculty members across campus who are engaged in service, and they come to understand that service is in fact something that matters and that is recognized.”

College leaders interviewed for this report also cited the importance of stressing the voluntary nature of the survey. As one Provost put it, “Faculty usually volunteer to be on committees, so much of their service is a matter of their own choice.” A Senior Vice Provost elsewhere agreed: “From the department level on up, it's rare to come across someone who feels like they've been coerced to serve on a committee.”

College leaders cited other commitments as foundations for ensuring faculty satisfaction with service. Most ensure that expectations regarding service are communicated to faculty through a number of avenues including handbooks, mentoring, workshops, orientations, and reviews. It is also common practice to provide course release time for taking on leadership roles and to keep the service commitments of tenure-track faculty to a minimum, particularly at the college and university level, and to make certain what commitments are required are meaningful.

What's Working

COACHE researchers interviewed leaders from member institutions whose faculty rated items in this theme exceptionally well compared to faculty at other participating campuses.

Fayetteville State University

Understanding that fostering a culture of service requires finding faculty who share an institution's values, search committees at Fayetteville State manage expectations from the start by making it clear during the interview process that service is a part of the institutional culture. The need for engagement beyond the classroom and the lab is real: some students arrive on campus needing additional help, so hiring practices target faculty who value such engagement. As the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs explained, “We take engagement with students inside and outside of the classroom and engagement with the community very seriously. When we hire people, as we go through the interview process, I think that we make that pretty clear, that's part of the culture of this university.”

“Serious” means explicit definition and measurable recognition of service. Fayetteville State's “Faculty

Annual Report Guidelines” carefully define and delineate service to the university, to the profession, and to the community. The service work counts: promotion to associate professor requires a minimum number of “points” in service, and post-tenure review (every five years at Fayetteville State) solicits evidence of university and community service.

Hamilton College

While its faculty handbook general guidelines and basic expectations for teaching, scholarship, and service, Hamilton recently came to understand the importance of sensitivity to disciplinary variations in service expectations. “Three years ago we asked each department to articulate the guidelines for each discipline,” noted the Dean of Faculty. “That helped the clarity of expectations immensely.” This approach also signaled a respect for faculty autonomy at an institution where it is highly valued. Departmental differences emerged, but all met the high standard demanded of faculty, such as “one significant service commitment on an annual basis” or the expectation to “prioritize department and interdisciplinary program service over college committees” (and in every case, with specific examples provided). Finally, like many institutions in this report, Hamilton emphasizes easing tenure-track faculty gradually into service work over time.

Kenyon College

Framing matters: at Kenyon, service is called “Collegiate Citizenship,” which, according to the Faculty Handbook, is “valuable because it is the foundation of successful faculty governance and a source of community vitality... [and] contributes both to the welfare of the College and the welfare of the faculty member.” Among other activities, citizenship includes “familiarity with fields and activities other than one’s own and attendance at lectures, concerts, and exhibitions.” A Distinguished Service Award, including a small honorarium, is presented annually following nominations from the faculty to the Provost.

North Carolina State University

Joining a common refrain for public institutions and land-grant universities in particular, North Carolina State University cites the clarity of its expectations for service as contributing to overall faculty satisfaction with service. According to the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs, “The responsibilities and requirements are made clear in our dossier that faculty use for promotion to tenure. There’s a separate section for service and by listing it along with scholarship and discovery of knowledge, we’ve flagged that it’s important and we’re interested in it.” The university’s land-grant status has “stitched into the fabric” of NC State what the Vice Provost described as “an added orientation to service and a feeling of responsibly to use knowledge for practical purposes.” This refrain is repeated throughout websites and other resources for faculty. In addition, faculty prepare a “Statement of Mutual Expectations” with their department heads to detail specifics as to what the service requirements entail.

Recognizing that universities must both request and recognize, NC State sends its faculty surveys to asking for volunteers for standing committees and preferences, then delivers to those who serve a “thank you” letter from the Chancellor at the beginning and end of their term. In addition, four categories of undergraduate academic advising awards publicize the accomplishments and commitment of dedicated advisers. “I think that the awards for service are helpful,” the Vice Provost reflected. “Things that faculty feel are indirectly related to their work, like undergraduate advising, can benefit from the award recognition. The faculty receive training and are eligible for the awards, and I think that sends a positive signal.”

As evidence of its sustained commitment in this area, NC State was recently awarded placement on the Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll directed by the Office of the President of the United States (see nationalservice.gov/special-initiatives/honor-roll).

Benchmark Best Practices:

Nature of Work: Service

Stonehill College

Stonehill is another small, mission-driven college where service is seen as equitably distributed. Nearly all departmental, Senate, and Assembly meetings at the College are scheduled at the same date (first Monday, fourth Monday, etc.) and time (lunch) each month, making participation predictable and inclusive for faculty with family care needs. Faculty are advised not to serve on more than two standing committees at any time. Like Kenyon, Stonehill recognizes faculty with outstanding records of service with an annual award that includes a stipend.

University of North Carolina at Pembroke

As an institution that began by educating the teachers of Native Americans, UNC Pembroke counts service as rooted in culture, particularly with regard to the regional community. “There’s a blurring of the line between service and the community,” admitted the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. “It’s really second nature for people here and the service component... it’s a unique history here; I think that has a lot to do with it.” Faculty are encouraged to divide their time between three types of service as they see fit, or “in accordance with the needs of the University.” Guidelines explain how each kind of service will be evaluated (e.g., through letters of appreciation from organizers, through result-driven indicators, etc.). The handbook stipulates that “service receives an area weight of 10% to 40% in a faculty member’s evaluation unless an exception is granted in writing.” Supporting this work is the Office for Community and Civic Engagement, with several initiatives to help faculty become more involved in service with class, research and volunteer opportunities (e.g., by aiding faculty and staff create projects to engage students in curricular and co-curricular learning).

University of Saint Thomas

In explaining her campus’s COACHE results, the Executive Vice President and Provost of St. Thomas cited the importance of meaningful orientation of faculty to campus culture. “During the week-long orientation, they hear about service expectations not only from my office, but also from individuals who are involved in service.” She went on:

“That’s really what perpetuates the culture. I can say, and the deans can say, what counts and how faculty will be evaluated. But that’s trumped by listening to people who’ve been here a while and hearing about how they provide service. It’s something that’s been an accepted practice for 125 years and continues to be. The tenure requirement itself provides an incentive for service.”

The faculty handbook notes that evaluation of performance in service to the university community and to “communities beyond the boundaries of the campus” among the criteria of professional achievement.

The State University of New York

Three institutions among the State University of New York stood out for their faculty’s satisfaction with COACHE service dimensions. In addition to their activities below, these universities are supported by two system-level programs rewarding service: the Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Faculty Service and a distinguished professorship for faculty who leverage excellent research for exceptional societal impact. “You have to bring your intellectual contributions to bear on societal issues,” explained the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs at the University at Buffalo. “There has to be some transfer of your research interests to your service.”

Binghamton University

Binghamton’s policy is to ease tenure-track faculty into service; they serve in department-level service role, then in school- or university-wide service responsibilities as they near tenure. Department chairs earn a stipend, a reduction by half in teaching load, and in the College of Arts and Sciences, a one-semester paid

research leave after three years of department service. “Faculty Masters” at the residential colleges also receive funding in return for their service. As the Provost put it, “Faculty leadership feels that it is respected by the administration; it has a really strong voice in the governance environment and in that kind of situation—where there is really strong collaboration rather than confrontation—people think that their service is more meaningful, particularly in a shared governance context.”

The State University of New York at Plattsburgh

The Provost and Vice President of SUNY Plattsburgh acknowledged faculty service to the community is made important by the rural setting of the campus. “There’s a lot of recognition of faculty serving the community,” he said. “Faculty engaging the community in service is noted and not lost because it’s a tight-knit community. And the community appreciates it. There’s a tight relationship here between the faculty service and community engagement.” Having worked out an “evaluation agreement” with the union, SUNY Plattsburgh allowed departments to elaborate on the evaluation criteria at the local level (see Hamilton College, above) to make expectations even clearer for faculty. That clarity makes it possible to tie salary to service contributions: SUNY Plattsburgh’s merit pay option uses a “discretionary salary increment” service where faculty submit activity reports for raises; thus, the importance of service is made materially apparent to faculty increasing their salary by engaging in service. Still, the quality of that service effort matters, so institutional leaders make a conscious effort to involve faculty in meaningful service work. In describing faculty engagement in the Middle States process, for example, the Provost noted the predominance of faculty on a large committee. “I think they found that process very rewarding and meaningful,” he observed. “They felt empowered in that process. In developing the plan, they did the research and data collection and came up with ideas and improvements for the institution. It was not like throwaway committee work...” The Provost also credited strategic planning—development committees and action committees—as an opportunity for authentic faculty service:

“It was a meaningful, empowering process for faculty; they were being heard. In addition, we used faculty expertise to guide the strategic planning process instead of hiring outsiders. The process included 40 to 50 focus groups and campus-wide meetings.”

The University at Buffalo

The University at Buffalo makes it clear to tenure-track faculty during orientation workshops what the gradually-increasing expectations for service at this AAU institution will be. “We tell them candidly that from assistant to associate professor, service is considered less important,” said the Vice Provost, “but that once a faculty member holds that rank of associate professor, the expectations for service to the department, the discipline, and the university are significantly greater.” Upon earning tenure, UB expects faculty members to be intellectual leaders through contributions to the department and discipline. “We try to get across how faculty should weight service throughout the promotion process,” the Vice Provost explained. “This clarity in the service and promotion process certainly doesn’t hurt satisfaction.” In addition, UB recognizes faculty service in student mentoring with undergraduate and graduate mentoring awards.

Resources

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COACHE Benchmarks

This benchmark report is part of a series of white papers available through COACHE. The complete list of white papers includes:

APPRECIATION & RECOGNITION
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QUALITY & COLLEGIALITY
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COLLABORATION
MENTORING
NATURE OF WORK: RESEARCH

NATURE OF WORK: SERVICE
NATURE OF WORK: TEACHING
TENURE & PROMOTION

About COACHE

The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) is a consortium of more than 200 colleges and universities across North America committed to making the academic workplace more attractive and equitable for faculty. Founded in 2002 with support from the Ford Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies, COACHE is based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and is now supported by its members.

Designed to generate not simply "interesting" data, but actionable diagnoses, COACHE's suite of faculty job satisfaction surveys have been tested and continuously improved across multiple administration sites and cycles. Institutional reports and executive dashboards provide college leaders with a lever to increase the quality of work-life for their faculty; to advance a reputation as a great place for faculty to work; to provoke better questions from and more informed decisions by prospective faculty; and to generate ideas and initiatives from faculty that enrich and expand the range of possible improvements.

COACHE also brings academic leaders together to advance our mutual goals of maximizing the impact of the data, with many opportunities to meet with counterparts from peer institutions and to discuss COACHE findings on faculty affairs.

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