

**White Paper: Faculty Service @ Saint Louis University – Values, Visibility, and Equity in Workload
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Saint Louis University (SLU) is a private, Catholic, Jesuit University. SLU mission centralizes “service to others” and the “pursuit of truth.” SLU strives for excellence in our academic and community-facing activities where equity and justice are a common goal. Efforts towards equity on and off campus have a long standing tradition at SLU including the initiation of the SLU TRIO program in 1984, 1818 program, OccupySLU, among many others. This work happens with students, faculty, staff, and administration. For tenure and non-tenure faculty, “service to others” is an expected part of their annual workloads and commonly called service. It is inclusive of professional, university, departmental, and public or community-based service that utilizes their academic expertise. In 2020, SLU undertook the creation of a new university faculty workload policy that sought to define service and provide guidance to colleges, schools, and departments. The new policy was finalized and active on June 1, 2021 and now requires that individual academic units create their own workload plans for faculty as it aligns with the needs, values, and promotion and tenure expectations of their unit.

This study and accompanying report aim to aid in these workload policy creations given how faculty service assignments and expectations can create invisible inequities leading to barriers in professional advancement for women and faculty from minoritized racial groups. Inequities on campus stand in contrast to our mission and future aims. Thus, this study provides a proverbial “look in the mirror” for aiding workload and promotion and tenure policy creation and their implementation.

Studying Faculty Service @ SLU

Faculty workload includes time in teaching, research, service, and administrative tasks. However, this workload distribution varies by individual faculty, discipline, college, and university depending on many factors and leading to ambiguity and inequity (O’Meara et al., 2019). Many studies to date show inequities in workload by gender and race, with women (O’Meara et al., 2017) and faculty from minoritized racial groups (Wood et al., 2015) engaging in more service. In particular, women from minoritized racial groups (e.g., Black/African American, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous/First People) experience particular demands for service in order to represent both women and a racial group (Hurtado & Figueroa, 2013; Turner et al., 2008). Yet service continues to be undervalued in the tenure and promotion process (Kanter, 1989; O’Meara et al., 2019). The outcome of this inequity in service workload is increased stress, increased length of time to advancement, and lower retention of women and faculty from minoritized racial groups, in particular (Eagan Jr & Garvey, 2015; Watts & Robertson, 2011). There is less research on the workload and advancement of faculty who are part of minoritized sexual and transgender/gender expansive groups (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer; LGBTQ), though what is available suggests LGBTQ faculty who are “out” (or visible as LGBTQ), report being asked to serve on departmental and university committees because of their minoritized identities (Garvey & Rankin, 2018). The overabundance of service workload, the lack of reward or recognition for their efforts, and hostile campus climates are associated with a lack of retention and work satisfaction for faculty from minoritized groups (Garvey & Rankin, 2018; Turner et al., 2008; Victorino et al., 2013).

There are ways to mitigate inequity in faculty workload and advancements. One such step is defining, or making visible, what service workload is and how it is valued by academic leadership who evaluate faculty, assign workload, and review the promotion and tenure processes. This study aims to achieve this step for SLU across department, schools, and colleges in order to guide policy formulated by the Office of the Provost. In addition, we believe our findings will be generalizable to other universities who are struggling to define service workload and develop a culture within which service is equitably distributed and valued.

Method

This study took a qualitative, descriptive approach (Colorafi & Evans, 2016) where the focus is on description of the "everydayness" of faculty service. In this way, the goal was to develop concrete, meaningful descriptions that situate service activities within the academic worlds of particular academic units. Being-in an academic context and performing service activities carries particular meaning and value, as a result. Thus, we aimed to understand this from the perspective of those in academic leadership who make judgments about service activities as part of the faculty workload assignments and in reviewing promotion and tenure applications. Human subjects research approval was obtained from the SLU IRB (#32059).

Procedures

Department chairs or those overseeing workload assignments and faculty reviews in academic units were recruited through leadership meetings and via email where recruitment flyers were distributed. This yielded 30 volunteers for the interviews and 26 completed the one-time, semi-structured interview (see Table 1 for interview protocol) conducted by the PI. The interviews took place during August, September, and October of 2021 via Zoom and were audio recorded. No incentives were offered for participation. Interviews lasted 20 to 44 minutes. Most interviewees became more candid as the interview went on, although a few seemed to stick to "talking points" and seemed concerned about loss of confidentiality.

Table 1. Interview Protocol

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1. First, tell me a little bit about yourself, rank and title, academic field, how long you've been at SLU, what department you oversee, and your age, race/ethnicity, and gender?
 2. Tell me what faculty service looks like in your department.
 3. What do you value about faculty service?
 4. Where do you see problems or challenges with faculty service?
 5. How is service considered in promotion and tenure?
 6. What are your initial reactions to the idea of a tenure and/or non-tenure faculty position that is service oriented?
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Analysis

During each interview, the PI took extensive notes and documented evocative language and examples offered about service activities and how they are valued. After each interview, the PI took reflective notes about the experience as well. This was the beginning of the data analysis. These notes were used when reviewing interviews for codes, identifying quotes, and for developing initial themes. Then the notes with quotes and codes were reviewed two times by Dr. Smith and the PI to generate commentary and reflection for thickening the thematic descriptions with salient examples.

Context

The context of these findings seemed significant for shaping what was discussed and how participants were experiencing faculty service activities. There seemed to be two key factors influencing the findings: 1) recent years of lost faculty and staff to early retirement and hiring freezes; thus, faculty in many departments were overextended and on overload; and 2) a global pandemic that created a loss of faculty time, energy, and concerns about mental health of faculty, staff, and students. The latter shifted resources and the focus of faculty and departmental activities for the 2020-2021 academic year. In addition, the faculty service activities of mentoring, informal check ins, developing and implementing the new CORE, and social events were connected to aiding in student mental health and a positive departmental culture overall. Where possible, we identified how this context mattered in the findings, and the analysis attempted to find transferrable findings to general faculty and departmental life. In many ways, this context created a heightened awareness of faculty service given its absence or change in recent years.

Rigor

The role of the researchers as faculty members allowed us to enter the study as part of this lived world and aided in contextualizing the findings (Crist & Tanner, 2003). Bias is inevitable in any research study (including

quantitative approaches) in implicit and explicit measurement and analysis choices (Wilholt, 2009). In qualitative research, this becomes part of the process of analysis and study (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). For this study, we used a team approach for analysis and each kept reflective notes to aid in interpreting the findings from within our shared academic worlds. This report is a next step in the analysis process for creating rigor where we receive feedback from stakeholders that may generate new meaning, diverging explanations, and amend our findings and conclusions. In addition, we hope this report aids in planning the next phase of the research on equity in faculty service and workload.

Participants

Participants were predominately racially white and non-Hispanic/Latinx (81%) with 34% identifying as women. All schools and colleges were represented in the study except one – the Law School – though this does not mean all faculty and department were represented in the findings given the great diversity across campus. To protect the identity of the participants from minoritized racial and ethnic groups who were part of the study, their racial identities are not being reported either here or connected to quotes in the findings. The participants ranged in their time as faculty at SLU (from 1 years to 44 years) and as chair or a similar role (from less than 1 year to 19 years). Departments, programs, and schools/colleges represented in the sample varied greatly by size with some identifying 3 full time faculty to over 30. Several mentioned managing additional adjunct faculty that varied by semester and year.

Confidentiality

Upon completion of each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed by Zoom and then corrected for accuracy and cleaned by a research assistant or the PI for identifying information. Both the recordings and transcriptions were stored on a SLU encrypted computer and then a SLU Google Drive Folder only shared between the PI and the research assistant. All identifying information of participants, including recordings, will be destroyed after dissemination is complete. When choosing quotes for the themes, care was taken to use quotes that did not identify a participant based on the examples given or language. Quotes are noted by an assigned number given to participants with no demographic or other data provided.

Findings

Overall the findings connect faculty service to SLU's Jesuit mission. The Jesuit mission is often lived out in these service roles because they are community facing or create a community here on campus. This may be especially true for practice disciplines (e.g., medicine, nursing, graduate and undergraduate healthcare programs). Though we found faculty service of all kinds (e.g., committee role, professional organization, 1818 program, industry engagement, etc.) contributes to the university's reputation, faculty development, student success, functionality of the institution, and a shared ethos of service and "good will."

Undermining the value of faculty service was the wide divergence in how well it was encouraged and sustained by the university, colleges, schools, and departments' structures. For example, almost universally the participants commented on promotion and tenure guidelines that evaluate service to a "check box," which is fulfilled in an instrumental or strategic manner. Because promotion and tenure guidelines across departments clearly favored scholarship, participants noted discouraging junior faculty and funded faculty researchers who contribute to the university's reputation and finances from taking on service. Ironically, participants also told stories of losing excellent faculty to more prestigious universities because, in their service, they became strong leaders, were committed to community service, and did not produce traditional forms of scholarship.

To understand this phenomenon holistically, two of our interviewees offered an apt metaphor for faculty service – *caregiving*. Caregiving provides functionality of an environment to support and nurture the growth of others while often remaining unseen and unacknowledged despite the benefits experienced by others for the work. In an academic setting this includes faculty service that makes possible the growth of students, peers, staff, programs, and the overall university. To stretch this metaphor within the data, three themes are described: 1) *The paradox of faculty service: valued "check boxes" and invisible "caregiving"*, 2) *"We are stretched thin,"* and 3) *"Workload nimbleness" and confusions.*

The paradox of faculty service: valued “check boxes” and invisible “caregiving”

The visibility of faculty service activities varied greatly in participants’ descriptions and the degree of value assigned by the participant seemed to stay the same. Some service activities could be easily documented on a curriculum vitae. The common (and visible) service activities of internal committee work and professional engagement with industry and national organizations were referenced by all interviewees. Most considered this to be valuable for maintaining faculty and university visibility and influence on multiple levels. For example, these activities included journal editor or advisory board, grant reviewer, officer for national or regional association, and department or university committee.

Yet there appeared a whole other category of service activities that were less visible. Participants gave these activities many names – “un-reimbursable effort” (Interviewee 5) or “a big bucket where all unpaid or unrecognized work goes” (Interviewee 7) or “the glue that holds your path together” (Interviewee 17) or “it's the third prop on the stool that always gets short shrift” (Interviewee 16). All of these categories equated to work that remained in the background of other roles or accomplishments (e.g., student recruitment events that brought increased enrollment; outreach to area high schools for promoting science and technology education and bringing first generation students to SLU, picking up pizza for the student welcome event, agreeing to mentor the department’s student association). One participant noted: “you can't quantify it, but if you don't have it, you certainly miss it” (Interviewee 16). And even some resisted having to count it, calling it “bean counting” (Interviewee 25) and time consuming. Instead most participants, when discussing this kind of more invisible but valued faculty service, wanted faculty to “pull their own weight” (Interviewee 25) and create a collective effort.

Some participants described trying to create a culture of service in the department that is connected to the Jesuit mission. For example, Interviewee 9 defined faculty service as “intrinsic to our identity as a department.” It seems to create a tolerance for the difficulties of more invisible service (namely, time commitment and lack of acknowledgement or external reward). Yet in this effort, there were several participants noted how service, even if fitting in the mission and identity of the department, can be time consuming and not generate traditional forms of scholarship for consideration in promotion and tenure: “You can do significant work with others or with community groups, but if you don't somehow get paid to do it or you don't get a publication out of it, it doesn't count for anything I mean it wasn't a line on my CV” (Interviewee 1).

Though, when it was time for annual reviews or promotion and tenure, 24 (of the 26) participants agreed that faculty service was poorly represented and undervalued, especially in relation to more clearly defined criteria for teaching or scholarship. Several participants seemed resigned to this as “the way it is” while others thought innovation in accounting for and valuing service was needed and possible. In an effort to make up for the lack of reward, some participants described efforts they made to acknowledge faculty who readily served by granting them influence on departmental decisions and writing strong letters of support for promotion.

“We are stretched thin”

The theme “we are stretched thin” (Interviewee 1) refers to a common experience where there are not enough faculty or staff to “make things work” (Interviewee 15) in the department. Being “stretched thin” was connected to recent losses of faculty and staff to early retirement, hiring freezes, and increased demands and stress on faculty due to the pandemic. Given the invisibility and undervaluing of some types of service and lack of faculty and staff to create functional departments, some participants seemed overwhelmed and referred to faculty also as being overwhelmed. A few seemed cynical with little hope that things would change. Participants referenced needing to complete tasks that typically an administrative assistant may have done in the past. For example, maintaining financial and budget statements and party planning for welcome events. Participants felt shouldered with these tasks and relied on faculty service heavily to complete these and other important university tasks (e.g., CORE committee work). The end result of being “stretched thin” was burnout and resentment.

“People are being called upon again and again, and especially after last year I'm just feeling burnout and resistance from people. I can only ask people to do so many things, and yet things have to get done.” (Interviewee 2)

Whatever the cause of being “stretched thin,” participants described varied faculty attitudes about service. Several talked about knowing who would say ‘yes’ when asked because these faculty had “professional pride” and “community mindedness” (Interviewee 16). They found themselves relying on the “good will” of faculty to volunteer. For example, participants mentioned needing faculty volunteers for student recruitment events, welcome events for new students, holiday party planning, program director and associate director roles, and serving on crucial university committees. Four participants lamented how they knew this was not ideal, but they did not have other good options and one commented that they were “waiting for a problem.” It was clear no one wanted to operate this way, but participants felt unsupported, and even undermined, by the larger college and university who have offered a series of early retirements, freezing hiring, and provided no raises for several years.

Subtheme. Inequity in burden and advancement

As with caregiving in the wider world, some noted the burden of service seemed to fall on women faculty and those who do service well. Most women and two male participants quickly identified the inequity by gender when it came to willingness to volunteer in service capacities.

“I mean, I do a lot of service, but a lot of it's by choice, and it seems like the women end up picking up the slack or service. Oh, this needs to be done.” (Interviewee 24)

Three participants noted that some faculty are not “good representatives” to put on university committee or “don’t play well with others” so they relied on particular faculty who would perform better. This seemed to reflect the varied attitudes of faculty when it came to service roles and, as one participant noted, a lack of flexibility of some faculty to be part of new committees and approaches to student engagement and education.

Additional service (and teaching), given its lack of value in annual reviews, merit raises, and promotion and tenure process, sets up particular faculty for barriers to advancement. Some participants actively tried to mitigate this by mentoring junior faculty away from service. In talking about promotion and tenure Interviewee 12 commented:

“When it comes to teaching and service it's all super vague and amorphous. It's, also the case that nobody is worried about the fact that it's vague and amorphous. What they're worried about is the scholarly you know, and so it really does, I mean, all I can say is you know when I was going up for tenure it felt like what I was really being measured on was scholarly productivity and quality and the other stuff was sort of like as long as I wasn't screwing up and like having students hate me and I wasn't just like completely with nothing to show for service that I was probably fine.”

This is perhaps most stark when Interviewee 25 describes the work and legacy of Dr. Jonathan Smith. Dr. Smith was a vital force for increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus through his administrative and service role; however, he was not promoted to associate professor.

When asked to consider a service-oriented faculty position, about two thirds of participants could readily see how that would fit into their department though expressed concerns about promotion and tenure. In addition, many made connections to the under-valuing of non-tenure track faculty and teaching too. Some imagined a teaching-administrative role (e.g., program directors, department chairs, etc.) and seeing this as stability for keeping faculty who excel in these roles. Interviewee 22 commented that this could “acknowledge or give credit to folks who are really good at this thing that we actually really, really need.” In so doing, Interviewee 18 wondered if “you’ll get higher quality and happier people in administrative roles” if a path to promotion like this existed. Others wondered if this could help SLU retain excellent teachers and mentors:

“I have several phenomenal teachers who have been here for a long time, who teach large classes and knock it out of the park and win awards every year. But don't have the time to publish their two articles, a year and, therefore, are stuck in the system. I think we should have a teaching pathway to promotion to full [professor] too. Where we have a different kind of approach to the haves and the have nots [tenure and non-tenure track].” Interview 12

However, some participants were also quick to consider if SLU was ready to make visible and value faculty service (and teaching and administration) in this way. It would require changes in promotion and tenure guidelines and an allowance for academic freedom (i.e., the need for tenure) that includes teaching and service. In addition, it could sequester service activities to particular faculty and may undercut a cultural ethos of service: “I would hate to see a caste system where you had the service line here and the tenure track here, but then this line is all white [men] and this line is all women” (Interviewee 24). The possibility of replicating our current system seems apt if the undervaluing of service continues both in the culture of SLU and in how it is rewarded.

“Workload nimbleness” and confusion

Across colleges represented in the study, there was a lack of agreement about the definition of faculty service as a workload unit. Some colleges and department have undergone significant effort to define clearly what is service as separate from other elements (teaching, research, clinical, administrative), whereas others saw service as part of their discipline overall (e.g., clinical services in medicine, nursing, and other healthcare disciplines, addressing gender and racial equity, etc.). As a result, they were able to clearly articulate where overlap occurred between roles and make visible service. In addition, these participants talked about being able to match workload to their faculty’s future promotion and tenure expectations (i.e., “strategic service,” Interviewee 8) and offer mentoring accordingly. In this way they assigned value because it fit into the overall picture of scholarship:

“Workload is your scaffold to set up this person for their annual review and show how their marking those steps towards promotion and tenure.” (Interviewee 11)

In departments where workload was less clearly defined, or not defined at all until this past year, these participants described marked confusion sometimes about overlap of roles (e.g., administration and service) and a need to guess for now then adjust later: “I don't know exactly where the line is drawn between those kinds [administration and service] of things” (Interviewee 8). Some participants identified the need for accountability from deans for reviewing the workload policy and its implementation.

Being able to define and quantify service well still left some participants stuck and unable to make changes as opportunities arose for faculty. For example, one participant described a faculty member who was nominated to a prestigious national committee in their field and this created a conundrum in how to adjust their workload mid-semester. Definitions of service alone did not resolve the implementation of a workload policy that could flexibly respond to the professional needs and reward excellence in service of individual faculty.

In addition, the issue of “service” activities generating additional income creates another conundrum if faculty exceed the one day per week extramural activities allowed and encouraged in the Faculty Manual.

Limitations

As with any study, there were strengths and limitations to this approach. First, participants may not have represented all faculty of the department or offered a limited view due to their time in the department. There was a wide range of years in their roles and size of the department faculty and we did not gather descriptive data on the faculty size and ranks of individual departments. Finally, the faculty as a whole are not represented in this first study on service and workload.

Summary

This report offers an initial description of faculty service, its challenges and promise as a vital extension of our Jesuit mission at SLU. The report is meant to generate dialogue, change, and continued research into a central question – how to live the mission here, now as a community. Despite a general consensus by participants that they believed in and saw the value of faculty service, it became difficult for faculty to remain generous with their time when they were aiming for advancement (via promotion/tenure/merit) predicated on traditional forms of scholarship.

Caregiving offers a metaphor for understanding faculty service. Caregiving is often messy and difficult to articulate or quantify within traditional ideas of scholarship or academic life. And caregiving is necessary for creating functionality of academic departments in line with the broader institutional ethos. Like caregiving in general, service entails being a good citizen of the department, university, and profession but often goes undocumented or remains invisible to colleagues and university administrators who benefit from the it. Based on this study and previous literature (Guarino & Borden, 2017), women faculty were named as frequent and reliable volunteers.

Next steps

1. Continued research that is inclusive of service activities, attitudes and values associated with participating in service activities, current experience of burnout and lack of resources. An online survey or a series of focus groups could assist in a broader collection of experiences.
2. Conducting a review or analysis of department workload policies for identifying visible and less visible service activities and their allocation.

Preliminary Recommendations

1. Tracks to promotion for teaching, administration, and service to establish value in these significant areas of workload that overlap with service (and the caregiving of the university).
2. Description of service needs to respect wide variations in academic departments that makes visible valuable activities of “caregiving.”
3. Need for a cultural shift that promotes good citizenship of faculty members for the benefit of the whole even as it may appear to contradict financial interests or individual success.
4. Integration of “good citizen” in mentoring programs and training for deans and chairs.
5. Cross-mentoring and training of department and college/school leadership about workload, promotion/tenure, and faculty mentoring.
6. The university as a whole, and at the highest levels of administration, need to consider how to support and reward excellence in faculty service.

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