Workload for Temporary Faculty

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Workload for Temporary Faculty

Submitted by: Sonya Huber Humes

10/21/2008

Question:

1. This RFI requests information from the administration about whether a five-course teaching load for temporary faculty is being considered or advocated by the university-or college-level administration for the university as a whole and/or for any colleges or departments.

2. If such increases are being discussed, the committee motivating this RFI would like to know whether such increases are intended to be temporary and in response to budgetary concerns or whether such teaching load increases are seen as a permanent solution for staffing needs.

3. If such increases are being discussed, the committee would like to know whether the administration has reviewed documentation regarding the impact that a five-course load would have on teaching quality in the different disciplines.

Rationale:

• This RFI is motivated by the possible scenario articulated by administrators to deans and department chairs that teaching loads in the Dept. of Writing & Linguistics and possibly in other departments across the university will be increased to five courses per semester for temporary faculty. Faculty members (including an ad-hoc committee in the Dept. of Writing & Linguistics who requested this RFI--Dr. Mark Richardson, Dr. Tim Giles, Cliffton Price, and Tina Whittle) are concerned about the negative impact such a
teaching load will have on morale, on equity between tenure-track and non-tenure-track faculty, and especially on instructional quality.

* Informal polling of temporary faculty in other departments across the university has not produced concrete information about whether such a change has been considered or communicated to temporary faculty. We have received conflicting information about the use of a five-course load in a few departments as a voluntary overload or short-term strategy originating at the department level to meet staffing needs, but are specifically interested in receiving any information about formal or informal changes being made or being considered to staffing patterns at the administrative or college level. We would also appreciate information about the departments across the university that currently require a five-course load for their temporary faculty.

• The GSU 2008-2009 Faculty Handbook, Section 217.07 Teaching Loads, reads: “Adjustments to that load may be made with the recommendation of the chair and the approval of the dean.”

SEC Response:

3/25/2009: In a November 2008 conversation with Senate Moderator Cyr, and again in a March 2009 conversation with Cyr and Moderator-elect Mike Moore, Provost Bleicken confirmed that it is the expectation that temporary faculty employed by Georgia Southern University will be assigned a 15-hour teaching load. Some colleges and/or departments have previously employed mitigating mechanisms (such as contact hours in lab and tutorial situations), but the Provost has asked Deans to work with departments to eliminate such special arrangements. In that March 2009 conversation, Provost Bleicken said that the current budget crisis was not the cause of this straitening of policy, and that she cannot predict whether this 15-hour teaching policy will be permanent but believes it is likely to be so, especially given that current budget situation. The current budget uncertainty was confirmed in a March 2009 email from President Grube to Sonya Huber-Humes. In that email, President Grube also noted that the number of temporary faculty employed by Georgia Southern is likely to be lower for the foreseeable future, which provides a further impetus to maintain a 15-hour teaching load for temporary faculty. As for the impact a 15-hour teaching load will have on teaching quality in the different disciplines, Provost Bleicken (who consulted with our Center for Excellence in Teaching) is unaware of such studies or documentation that provide conclusive results. Note from Cyr: As of the writing of this reply on 3-25-09, and in response to another issue entirely, the Senate is just initiating a clarification of who is
and who is not included in the job category “temporary faculty,” as the term is used in this reply; we do not yet know whether there are sub-categories for whom this teaching load would not apply.

**Senate Response:**

Workload for Temporary Faculty requested information on workload for temporary faculty and a reply will be posted soon. In short, an unmitigated 5-5 teaching load for temporary faculty is a University-wide policy. The current budget crisis is not the reason for that policy, but it is one reason the policy is likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future. As for studies on the impact of such a load on the quality of teaching, Provost Bleicken had the CET check out the documentation and they could find no conclusive results.

Sonya Huber (CLASS) asked for clarification on the RFI regarding temporary faculty and their teaching load that was originally submitted in November. The November Senate minutes quoted Dr. Bleicken as saying that “it is not the institution’s intention to assign a 15-hour course load to all temporary faculty members. That decision lies within the purview of the chair and the dean.” In light of the SEC’s report, Huber wanted to know: 1) if unmitigated means that there is no power of the chairs and the deans to assign other workloads besides teaching five classes, and 2) if in a time when flexibility and autonomy are important in dealing with a financial crisis, if the reasons for the decision and the meaning of the word “unmitigated” could be clarified.

Marc Cyr (CLASS) Chair, Senate Executive Committee responded that the Provost had offered some revisions to his draft reply and he is working on some clarifications, but on the issue of mitigation, Provost Bleicken has asked Deans to work with departments to eliminate special arrangements, such as having temporary faculty work in the Writing Center or act as lab supervisors for part of the contact hours. Linda Bleicken (Provost) responded that it is within the purview of the deans and the department chairs to make these decisions. However, there is a budget issue right now, and so any of those special arrangements that might have been used prior to now are being looked at very keenly. The need for everyone, including tenured and tenure-track faculty, administrators, and everyone on this campus, to do more at this time is very obvious and that includes temporary faculty. She stressed that GSU hires temporary faculty almost exclusively with the expectation that they will teach.
Marc Cyr (CLASS) Chair, Senate Executive Committee recognized Cliffton from the gallery.

Cliffton Price (CLASS) asked Dr. Bleicken what the reasons beyond the current budget crisis were for going to the 5-5 load.

Linda Bleicken (Provost) responded that GSU doesn’t hire temporaries to do research or service. They are hired to teach.

Tim Giles (CLASS) wondered who would be staffing the Writing Center if temporary instructors will no longer be used.

Linda Bleicken (Provost) replied that this is a responsibility for deans and chairs to work out, and again reiterated that the primary duty of temporary faculty is to teach.

Richard Flynn (CLASS) stated that he is concerned about the growth in numbers of faculty whose duties are only to teach classes, since GSU’s mission says that we are supposed to have a group of teacher/scholars that do service and do research. He expressed concern that having a class of faculty whose only job is to teach conflicts with the mission and indeed with our public service face when we tell parents of students that they are going to be taught by professors.

Linda Bleicken (Provost) responded that hiring an individual to teach does not preclude the opportunity for that individual to engage in scholarship, but stressed once again that temporary faculty are hired to teach.

Richard Flynn (CLASS) expressed concerned that a large group of faculty won’t have any time to keep up with their field and won’t be able to be the best teacher/scholars that we have in the classroom. He was concerned that GSU would be expanding that group of faculty. Cliffton Price (CLASS) said that he understood a temporary’s primary duty has always been to teach. However, he asked why temporary faculty have not always been teaching five classes of composition every semester.

Linda Bleicken (Provost) reiterated that the primary duty of temporary faculty is to teach and that teaching load assignment has rested with the dean and department chair.

Mary Hadley (CLASS) asked if the current situation might change back to a 4-4 load with improving budget situations in the foreseeable future.
Linda Bleicken (Provost) said that one of the things they observed when looking at the budget and considering our ability to teach the students that we have was that there were disparities across colleges regarding teaching loads of temporary faculty members. In some colleges, temporaries already have 5-5 teaching loads. As a question of equity, it did not make sense to hire temporary faculty in one college and ask them to teach a 5-5 load and temporary faculty in another college and ask them to teach 3-3.

Marc Cyr (CLASS) Chair, Senate Executive Committee, asked that further discussion on the topic be held for a motion scheduled later on temporary faculty workloads.