
At Issue

Determining the Teaching Load for Chairs in Public Community Colleges

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During the decade of the 1960s, 457 junior colleges opened their doors (Scibelli, 2001) which was more than the total number of junior colleges that existed prior to that decade (Phillippe, Patton, American Association of Community Colleges W. National Profile of Community Colleges, 2000). During the next three decades, the unprecedented growth of junior colleges continued. There were roughly 850 junior colleges in 1970, growing to more than 1,000 by 1980 with a total credit enrollment of nearly 4 million (Gabert & Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1991). By the fall 2017 semester, there were 941 public community colleges enrolling 7 million credit students and 5 million noncredit students accounting for 41% of all undergraduates enrolled in higher education (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Not only did enrollment increase during this period, the complexity of the mission of two-year colleges also increased.

Part of this complexity was due to the challenge of responding to the growing demand for services to the communities and constituents the colleges served. Demand for increased services included continuing open access admissions when the quality of students was declining, and meeting the needs for all students in counseling, academic advising, and financial aid.

As one author observed, as community colleges began to grow, “one of the ways in which community colleges responded to the enrollment growth and subsequent increases in size and complexity was to pass some of the increasing academic administrative responsibilities to chairs, who

were usually instructors who assumed these tasks in addition to their teaching load” (Kuhl, 2004, p. 31).

For the purposes of this study, “chair is the term used to refer to persons whose college might have given them any of the following titles: department chair, division chair, coordinator, director, or assistant dean. What they share in common is that they are considered to be faculty, not administrators, they continue to teach, they develop class schedules, supervise and evaluate faculty, and they develop and administer budgets for one or more departments or programs” (Samuels, 2017, p. 6).

Determining how to assign a teaching load for the chair had always been an issue and became more of an issue for academic officers as community colleges grew in size and complexity. In particular, what factors should be considered? Should the factors be weighted and if so, how?

Assumptions

We knew that at the time of this study, there was no agreed upon process or procedure in place to guide a chief academic officer in determining the teaching load for a chair. A published study had not been conducted on the factors used to determine the teaching load for department chairs since the dissertation study completed by Carolyn Branch in 1982. We felt that a new national study would significantly help resolve the chair load problem if it revealed best practices about policies, factors, and procedures in use by multiple institutions. Such a study would furnish needed guidance for other chief academic officers to use when determining the teaching load for their chairs.

We knew that chief academic officers at different colleges used differing methods to determine the teaching load for chairs, and we also knew there was often little consistency in the methods used within colleges. But we wondered, had some colleges found workable strategies for determining how the teaching load was assigned? We realized that while there may never be a single process that can be used by all two-year public institutions, the identification and sharing of successful approaches being used by some institutions may help other colleges identify a fair and equitable process to use for determining an appropriate teaching load for chairs.

The Need for a Solution: The Growth in Responsibilities of the Chair Position

In the '60s and '70s, in order to handle increasing enrollments, college administrators found it necessary to reorganize the academic part of the college into divisions or departments led by a chairperson (Branch,

1982; Branch & Hammons, 1984). This reorganization included assigning some of the dean's administrative responsibilities to a division or departmental chairperson (Branch, 1982). Branch (1982) also reported that these administrative duties were an addition to the existing teaching load of these chairs. As these tasks were added to the chair's workload, the problem of not having enough time to perform the responsibilities of both the teaching and administrative positions grew.

Some of the administrative responsibilities assigned to chairs were leading their department or division, developing unit plans and goals, managing the unit, developing and implementing a budget, evaluating and mentoring faculty, resolving personnel issues among the staff and faculty, overseeing the academic programs, encouraging faculty and staff professional development, developing relationships with students, communicating with their unit, and maintaining their own academic scholarship (Mitchell, 2004). The chairs also had to balance conflicting responsibility to faculty within their unit, the administration of the institution, the community, and the students (Gallagher, 2003). As if this was not enough, chairs had to carve out time to maintain a connection to their chosen discipline by taking part in professional development activities (Gallagher, 2003).

Participating in professional development activities was in addition to their teaching load. The expected teaching workload consists of 13 to 15 classroom hours per week (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The majority of the chairs in this study were teaching four classes, which is more than the findings by Hoffman in 1996. In 1996, Hoffman reported that most community college chairs, who were also part of the faculty, were teaching over 60% of their expected workload (Hoffman, 1996). They also reported that there was not a procedure or process in place to assist deans and vice presidents in determining how to allocate a chair's time between the teaching and administrative responsibilities.

It is surprising that so few studies have been devoted to what is clearly one of the most important positions in a college's success, the chair. One (of many) who recognized this was Grau, who in 1997 pointed out that "possibly the most important yet underrated position in a community college is the department chair, the person in a position to have the most effective influence on faculty but, for most colleges, the most neglected or least integrated position in the organizational structure" (Grau, 1997, p. 3). Grau (1997) went on to state there needed to be a fresh look at how to determine the workload for departmental chairs.

In many instances, chairs are being asked to teach a full load in addition to their administrative responsibilities. Given that the typical teaching load for a full-time community college faculty member is 15 semester credit hours, a full load of teaching, plus taking on administrative responsibilities may be too much for an individual to handle as pointed out by two authors. This led them to ask, “Would it be better to have CC chairs as administrators with part-time faculty duties” (Smith & Stewart, 1999, p. 32) rather than a faculty member who is considered a half-time administrator? This is a choice some colleges have made.

Methods

Because of the lack of current research and the growing need to address the problem of the position, we designed a survey instrument to use in a national study to identify the factors community colleges were using to determine the teaching load for chairs. Our hope was to identify a process and/or factors we could use to suggest a method that public community colleges could use to guide them in assigning fair and reasonable teaching loads for chairs.

The target population for the study consisted of the 982 public community colleges in the United States of America as listed on the website of the American Association of Community Colleges (2019). The sample consisted of a stratified random sample of community colleges. The population was stratified by the number of full-time students enrolled in the fall of 2014 semester and by accrediting region. The stratifications for the number of full-time students were as follows: fewer than 2,500 students; 2,500–4,999 students; and 5,000+ students.

To ensure the confidentiality for each community college, each survey was assigned a number. The data from the surveys were entered into a statistical software package. The statistical software package used for this research was the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). After entering the data, descriptive statistics were used to conduct an analysis and synthesis of the information.

Findings

The information gathered through the survey provided answers to the five research questions that were posed. A discussion of the findings follows.¹

1 As the senior author observed, conducting national, stratified random studies on timely topics was once doable. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case. Despite a well-done follow-up effort, the low response rate, especially from some regions and some size categories, made it impossible to report meaningful findings by size or accrediting region. Due to the importance of the study, the decision was made to report findings by percent of respondents. While we acknowledge the issue of limitations of this decision, we believe the results will still be of use to colleges concerned about the question of load.

Research Question #1: What percent of colleges use factors, other than the number of full-time faculty, for determining chair teaching load?

All of the respondents (100%) to the survey used multiple factors, in addition to the number of full-time faculty, when determining the teaching load for chairs.

Research Question #2: What factors are colleges using to determine the teaching load for the chair position?

All respondents used the majority of the factors listed in the survey to determine the chairs' teaching load with one exception, turnover in full-time faculty. The most frequently selected factor used to determine chair load was administrative duties with 74% of the respondents indicating they used this category.²

The second most often selected factor was the number of full-time faculty supervised (69%) followed closely by the number of part-time faculty supervised (62%). We found that eight (of 10) of the following routine factors identified in the Branch (1982) study were still being used by one or more colleges to determine the teaching load for the chairs.

- number of full-time faculty
- number of part-time faculty
- general curriculum and instructional duties
- number of advisory committees
- general duties related to students
- complexity of the budget
- number of noninstructional personnel
- quantity of administrative duties

The only two factors in Branch's study that were not being used by colleges in this study were teaching and learning aids and geographic contiguity of faculty. Three factors some colleges were using in this study that had been identified in the Branch study on an "as needed" basis were:

- specialized accreditation
- number of grants submitted or managed
- involvement in planning or remodeling facilities

Forty-four percent of the institutions used specialized accreditation, 18% used the number of grants submitted or managed, and 15% used the involvement in planning or remodeling facilities as factors.

² In the study, the use of the broad term "administrative duties" as a factor was acknowledged as a shortcoming that was not detected during the pilot test of the instrument.

Twenty-three percent of the institutions listed factors in addition to the factors that were provided. These added factors included:

- enrollment and advising
- number of sections in the chair's area
- number of courses offered
- number of classes being taught
- faculty contract
- necessity for overload coverage within division

Judging from the number of factors being used, it was apparent that colleges were attempting to find a fair and equitable solution for determining teaching load for chairs.

Research Question #3: How long have they been using current factors for determining the teaching load? What percent have made changes to the factors used in the last 10 years?

Five percent reported using the same factors for at least 11 years. Twenty-six percent of the respondents had, within the last three years, made changes to the factors they were using. Over the last 10 years, 56% had changed factors.

Research Question #4: If changes have been made, why were the changes made and what was the nature of the changes?

The major reasons for making changes were suggestions from the chairs (31%), the increased responsibilities of the chair position (31%), or suggestions by the administration (23%). The varied nature of the changes were the factors that were being used.

Research Question #5: Are the chief academic officers (CAOs) satisfied with their current system?

Although there was no consistency in the formulas identified in the approaches used to determine the teaching load for chairs, 69% of the chief academic officers were satisfied with the factors they were using. This may have been due to the individual tailoring of load by each instructional unit or college.

Additional Findings

Although a major shortcoming of the study was the low response rate, several conclusions were reached based on the responses that were received. We fully acknowledge that the low response rate (10%) prevented the results from the survey being generalizable to the target population but we do believe the results can be of use to colleges seeking to develop a for-

mula for determining a workable teaching load for chairs. We also think the results suggest a noticeable change in the percentage of male chairs. In 1992, Seagren, Wheeler, Creswell, Miller, and VanHorn-Grasmeyer (1994) reported that 59% of the chairs in community colleges were male. Based on the results of this study, progress has been made in the hiring of women in leadership positions as evidenced by our finding of a drop in the percentage of male chairs to 44%.

Our findings also show that 21% of the chairs had been in their position for 8–10 years with another 15% reported as being in the position for over 11 years; and 54% reported as having been in the position for 4–7 years. If these numbers are inferred to the target population, it would suggest that there is not an impending major turnover of personnel in the chair position.

Although the majority of the colleges are consistently using the same factors every year to determine the teaching load for chairs, our finding that the teaching load changed for over 60% of the chairs suggests that institutions were attempting to adjust the load to match increased chair responsibilities.

We were surprised that two time-consuming factors were not mentioned in the 1982 Branch study or this study: the time it takes to recruit and hire new faculty and the time it takes to lead a search committee.

Forty-nine percent of the colleges reported they had a written policy for determining the teaching load for chairs, and a few of these colleges provided a written copy of their policy. An analysis of these indicated a wide variance in the written policies suggesting that colleges were trying to develop a fair and predictable plan for determining the teaching load for their chairs.

Fifty-one percent of the colleges reported there was a need for a written policy. The same percent reported they did not have a written policy for determining the teaching load for chairs. Our procedures did not allow us to know if these percentages represented the same colleges.

Eighty-two percent of the colleges did not assign weight to the factors. This raises a question. Without weighting the factors, how can a college administrator determine the teaching load for chairs in a way that is consistent, fair, and predictable?

The majority of the colleges (74%) had not recently (in the last three years) made changes to the factors they were using, and 69% reported being satisfied with the factors they were using. We think this indicates

that a majority of colleges have found an acceptable process to use to determine the teaching load for their chairs.

As stated earlier, although the low response rate for this study prevented results being generalizable to the target population, it did lead to the decision to draft a proposed framework for each college to use in writing a policy that aligns with their college's unique circumstances. This proposed framework can be found in the Appendix.

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Appendix

Suggested Steps for Institutions to Follow in Developing a Plan to Assign a Teaching Load for Chairs

1. Recognize the need for determining the teaching workload for chairs using a rational, predictable, and equitable process.
2. Decide the factors that are to be included in the workload formula. These factors need to be described in terms of the chair duties in that college.
3. Determine a method for assigning a weighted value to each factor. This value should reflect the amount of time usually spent by chairpersons on the different factors.
4. Develop a formula based on the factors and their time values.
5. Develop some guidelines for administering the formula. These may include:
 - a. How often the workload is determined, preferably each term.
 - b. Who makes the determination, preferably the chief academic officer and chair.
 - c. Suggestions for determining suitable teaching loads, i.e., 18 time units would result in a 6 credit hour teaching load and so on.
 - d. Who administers the plan and/or settles any related questions or disputes.

Sample Worksheet for Calculating the Teaching Load for Chairs in Public Community Colleges

Routine Factors	x	Weight by Time Units*	Units
1. No. of full-time faculty	x	___ for each person	= ___
2. No. of part-time faculty	x	___ for each person	= ___
3. General curriculum & instructional duties	x	___ Normal ongoing operations (routine planning, implementation, and evaluation of curriculum offerings)	= ___
4. No. of advisory committees	x	___ for each committee for which chair is responsible	= ___
5. General duties related to students	x	___ general student-related problem solving	= ___
6. Complexity of the budget	x	___ non-lab transfer/general education	= ___
7. No. of non-instructional personnel	x	___ for each full-time non-teaching person supervised by chairperson	= ___
	x	___ for each part-time non-teaching person, (including student workers), supervised by Chairperson	= ___
8. Enrollment and advising	x	to be negotiated	= ___
9. No. of sections in chair's area	x	to be negotiated	= ___
10. No. of courses offered	x	to be negotiated	= ___
11. No. of classes being taught	x	to be negotiated	= ___
12. Necessity for overload coverage within instructional unit	x	to be negotiated	= ___
13. Quantity of administrative duties	x	___ for every chairperson in recognition of duties performed that are not described above	= ___
Subtotal for Routine Factors			= ___

*We suggest that each time unit be equal to one clock hour during an average work week. Each college will need to establish its own time unit or weighting system.

Occasional Factors

1. Specialized accreditation	× to be negotiated	= ___
2. Number of grants submitted or managed	× to be negotiated	= ___
3. Involvement in planning or remodeling facilities	× to be negotiated	= ___
4. Recruiting new faculty**	× to be negotiated	= ___
5. Chairing search committees**	× to be negotiated	= ___
Subtotal for Occasional Factors		= ___
Final Total		= ___

Proposed Guidelines for Assigning Teaching Load (these must be developed by each college because the ranges of the workload must be defined for each campus)

If total units are:	Teaching load is:
___ to ___	12 Credits/Term
___ to ___	9 Credits/Term
___ to ___	6 Credits/Term
___ to ___	3 Credits/Term
___ and over	0 Credits/Term***

Note: If clerical assistance (full-time, part-time, student worker, etc.) is made available to some chairs, but not all, the formula could be modified to reflect this.

** Neither of these factors, which are an integral part of chair's responsibilities, were reported in either Branch's or my study.

***If the chair is seen as a faculty position, then an assistant chair or lead instructor would have to be appointed to assume some of the administrative load.

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