

news from CUASA

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WORKLOAD -- HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

In an academic setting, it would be ludicrous to suggest that workload can be as easily defined, measured or controlled as in, for example, a manufacturing or primary industrial setting.

Some courses require more individual attention to students than others. The time and attention required in effective supervision of an undergraduate research project or a graduate thesis, though always considerable, vary with the student, faculty member and subject matter. Responsibility for counselling of students, a demanding and time consuming matter, varies with the aptitude and inclination of individual faculty members. For the most part, students determine this workload. Teaching Assistants can take on more responsibility in some courses than in others.

These and a myriad of other variables help explain the impotence and imprecision of our collective agreement on the matter of workload. It simply states that workload shall not be unreasonably increased. But from what base? How much is unreasonable? If you had, for whatever reason, an onerous workload for several years, is it reasonable to require you to labour forever under that overload?

Our failure to come to grips with workload has created, and continues to create, real problems for many faculty members. Managers have been under no pressure to seek measures to reasonably regulate, and to equitably distribute, work. And because it is so difficult to do so, many haven't tried.

Result? For many faculty members, commitment to the needs of the students and the university has led to overload. Managers, usually with students' best interests at heart, have continually relied on the strong performers. The reward for accepting overload has been even more of an overload.

This vicious circle has, tragically, led to burnout, breakdown of health, premature departure from the profession, and disillusionment. Some of our best colleagues have been the casualties.

On the issue of workload, there may sometimes be a tendency to shoot the messenger. Coasters, however, have never been heard to complain about workload. Why would they?

Until recent years, wisely or otherwise, we have lived with workload problems because they are so difficult to define and to confront. But there are real signs, now, that we can no longer ignore them. The administration's own statistics graphically define the dilemma. In the last five years we have increased enrolment at Carleton by 30% while the faculty complement has remained virtually unchanged. During this time we have struggled to maintain the quality of education here. Have we succeeded? We hope so! Has there been a price? Definitely, and more for some than for others.

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WORKLOAD ACTION PLAN

CUASA took the occasion a couple of weeks ago at a meeting of the Joint Committee to Administer the Collective Agreement, a vehicle for raising and occasionally solving problems arising between negotiations, to propose a small start on workload research. We asked the administration to collect information from each school or department indicating how workload is measured (if it is) and what measures are taken to equitably distribute work.

Our goal, and we know it will be elusive, is a mutually acceptable agreement in principle on a new contractual language regarding workload.

Some of you have already submitted valuable position papers on the matter of workload and its impact on Evaluations. Others have written critiques of the current Evaluation process, raising serious questions about the fairness, accuracy, objectivity and applicability of the process, and the ability of many students to approach the process with these considerations in mind. A future bulletin will deal specifically with Evaluations.

As we tackle this problem with the administration, prior to and quite possibly within the negotiating process, we need your views and experiences so that we may reflect them in our position. We view collective bargaining as a problem-solving exercise. To fully understand your problems in this area, we need your input.

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