

Faculty Alternative Assignment Program

– A Proposal by the College of Liberal Arts

The College of Liberal Arts proposes to offer opportunities for tenured faculty members to take on alternative assignments to their regular faculty duties for defined periods of time and to be evaluated on the basis of their performance in these alternative roles. This proposal responds both to the desire of some faculty members to enjoy more flexibility in their job requirements and to the fact that in the modern American university faculty are called upon to perform many vital functions beyond classroom teaching and conducting research as individuals, functions that often assume secondary importance in performance review and yet are valued by students and faculty alike. This proposal would allow faculty for a period of time to be assigned and evaluated on these functions, allowing them to be considered for merit raises based on performance of these duties.

Such functions might include, for instance, student advising, peer mentoring, alumni relations and development work, community relations, and the like. They may also include teaching for another department outside of one's assigned area. In the portfolio of a tenure-track faculty member, excellent performance in these areas does not substitute for expected excellent performance in research and teaching in the home department and cannot substitute for such performance when standing for tenure or promotion; at the same time, these functions are valued and should be rewarded when performed to high standards. It is with this goal in mind that we propose to establish opportunities for faculty members to take on for a period of time alternative assignments and be evaluated on the merits of their performance of these alternative duties. This document outlines how a faculty alternative career assignment policy might function.

Guiding Principles for a Faculty Alternative Assignment Program

The environment in which a faculty alternative assignment program can be successful must include expectations for each academic unit for achievements in student enrollment, course and program offerings, and faculty and staff productivity established as benchmarks for a given period. Such "benchmarks" might be outlined in each department/unit's strategic plan and annual productivity assessment. Such an environment will allow the potential for faculty members in any unit to have assignments that differ considerably in character from each other, but all of which contribute to the unit's performance goals. And will allow units to occasionally change these assignments to meet individual need for variety and opportunity while at the same time meeting unit "benchmark" standards for overall productivity. In short, faculty members in any unit participating in the "alternative assignment" program will have the opportunity to vary their assignments from time to time, provided that these differing job responsibilities all contribute to reaching the unit's assigned goals during the set period and are approved by the unit heads involved.

Thus, an individual department could differentiate the teaching, research, and service loads of its faculty members, provided that the resulting balance of responsibilities was

equitable to all members of the department and enabled the unit to meet all of its contracted goals and expectations. Departments could also work cooperatively with other units to share expertise by “loaning” or “exchanging” faculty members for periods of time as long as such exchanges helped them achieve their “benchmarked” goals. In similar fashion, faculty, with the cognizance of their chairs, could negotiate with the dean or other appropriate university administrator, for an assignment, partial or whole, outside of their unit to contribute to the development of the university and of the individual faculty member, with the academic unit being provided with the resources necessary to cover the absent faculty member’s responsibilities.

In theory, then, an individual faculty member’s responsibility for research, teaching, and service could run from 0-100%, provided that the chair and dean agreed that the spectrum of assignments in the unit is balanced and enable it to fulfill its assigned responsibilities and goals.

Parameters of the Faculty Alternative Assignment Program

Eligibility: Participation is limited to full-time faculty members who are tenured and have achieved the rank of associate professor or higher. To obtain tenure, junior faculty need to familiarize themselves with the character of the institution, its culture, and expectations, demonstrate their ability to perform well simultaneously in research, teaching, and service, develop a suite of courses to teach on a regular basis, and produce sufficient artistic or scholarly attainments to satisfy the rigorous demands of tenure. Faculty must show that they can perform well in the numerous week-to-week demands placed on them during an academic year, and also come to know the numerous agencies and functions of the institution before they can make good use of a flexible schedule for their own interests and for those of the university.

Proposal requirements: Departments/Programs that wish to propose an alternative assignment for one or more faculty members can approach the dean with a proposal for faculty alternative assignments to assume duties such as the following:

Advising Students in General Studies or Similar Programs

Working with the Development Office

Teaching Assignments for Other Departments (or on Other Campuses)

Research, either individually or as part of a group)

Development or Review of an Academic Program

Academic Administration

Collaboration in a Multiunit Project

Proposals must include the following information:

1. A statement of the proposing department's(s') productivity goals (student enrollment, course offerings, grant productivity) for the next five years along with a statement indicating how the alternative assignment will achieve these goals. This statement must also address, as appropriate, the relationship of this assignment to sabbatical or leave requests and impact on other departments affected by the assignment change.
2. A description of the alternative assignment for each individual involved that states the duties of the assignment, the length of the assignment, and the basis upon which the faculty member will be evaluated during the term of the assignment. This statement must also address possible impact on the faculty member's current position description and how this will impact the faculty member's opportunity for promotion, if relevant.
3. A budget indicating what costs are involved in giving the flexible assignment (e.g., costs for released teaching) and the department contribution to such costs. Such proposals could also include "swap" arrangements between departments in the case of faculty members switching teaching assignments to another unit.
4. A statement indicating that the unit head will produce a letter of offer for each re-assignment, to be signed off by the faculty member, the unit head(s) involved, and the dean, should the proposal be approved.

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