

White Paper

Equitable Teaching Loads and Shared Faculty Governance

In order for the Department of Biology at Texas A&M University to succeed in its goal to become a better department, from the perspectives of its research, teaching, and service missions, the support and full participation of all faculty members are necessary. Clearly, for growth to occur, the research reputation of the department must grow, and in order for the research reputation to grow, research active faculty must be recruited, retained and allowed the professional time to accomplish their research, including grant proposal preparation, performance of experiments, supervision of research personnel, presentation at research conferences, and writing primary research literature and reviews. In essence, we need more grant funding, more publications in better journals, and more, more highly qualified graduate students. Yet, the Department has an enormous teaching responsibility as well, and the fact is that the interests of the Department must also be advanced and preserved through the activity of departmental faculty on time-consuming departmental, College and University committees and organizations. Thus, as a Department, we must create the opportunity for faculty whose research careers are not as successful as some and/or whose interests are not primarily research-oriented to full participate by taking up a greater proportion of the teaching and service roles of the Department than those faculty members who are building a research programs. One might rightfully ask why anyone should volunteer for additional duties. Obviously, the answer to this question is that the reputation of the Department, College and University are implicitly worth working for, so that such voluntary activity should be reward enough. It gives us as a group and as an academic family pride. It is therefore my belief that faculty should be recognized and remunerated for excellence in teaching and service as well as for research, so that our common goal of an excellent Department of Biology can be achieved.

I have developed a scheme through discussions with many faculty within the department and at other TAMU departments. This scheme also borrows several aspects from similar policies at several Departments of Biology at institutions we either believe to be "peer institutions" or at institutions to which we aspire: Department of Biology, Indiana University; Department of Biology, University of Oregon; and both the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and the Department of Molecular, Cellular and Developmental Biology (which were formerly the Department of Biology), University of Michigan.

I therefore propose a new system for objectively determining the level of research, teaching and service activity. This system has several important premises:

Research Active Faculty must devote more time to their research. The problem is that there is no single metric as to what constitutes an "active" research program, but I will maintain the following metrics are most important: (1) grant funding, (2) publications, and (3) research training.

(1) Grants: As many will attest (insist, even), it would be grossly unfair to use the level of grant funding as a single metric, since some areas are simply more expensive than others. For example, molecular biology is much more expensive to conduct than is electrophysiology, and electrophysiology is much more expensive than most field biology research projects. In addition, grant funding rates are much higher in some areas than in others. Still, it is reasonably safe to say that *some* extramural support for one's research is an accurate metric for research activity. Further, it takes time and resources to administer an extramurally funded grant for which faculty should get credit.

(2) Publications: It is clear that publication of one's work in peer-reviewed publications is another way of assessing *bona fide* research activity. Indeed, one can make the case that it is the most important criterion for an active scholastic life. Further, some journal articles have much greater impact than do others. This is, I think, in everyone's view a very unfair metric, but the truth is that the Department will gain more in reputation from papers published in Science, Nature, Cell and PNAS than it will from papers published in second tier journals such as Neuroscience Letters, Brain Research, and Biological Psychiatry (I use journals in which I myself have published to avoid upsetting anyone unnecessarily). Frankly, we gain more from a paper published in first tier journals such as J. Neuroscience or Endocrinology than we do from papers published in Hormones and Behavior (again, I use journals in which I myself have published, all absolutely masterful, magnificent pieces of work but published quite differentially). Therefore, *if our stated goal is to improve the reputation and ranking of the Department*, we should encourage faculty to publish in higher profile journals.

(3) Research Training: Irrespective of whether one receives grant funds and irrespective of whether she or he publishes in high profile journals, if a faculty member serves as mentor for research personnel, this is an indication of research activity. I believe they should get credit for that.

The faculty members with the most active labs will have their assigned teaching reduced to one course per year. Faculty who do little or no research will teach four courses per year. Faculty who make an above average service contribution will have their course load reduced proportionately. In no circumstances are untenured faculty assigned more than 1.5 courses per year.

The actual assignments of classes to be taught will be made by the Associate Head in accordance with the Equitable Work Load (EWL). Changes in teaching assignments not based strictly on the principles of the EWL will only be made in the event of perceived injustice or a significant change of effort on the part of the faculty member.

If a faculty member feels he or she has not been treated fairly, he or she may appeal to the department head as a first resort, and to the Faculty Appeals Committee as a second resort.

Under this policy, each faculty member has an account in the departmental teaching bank. If a member requests to teach more than the EWL, he or she is able to bank the extra course or partial course, and teach less at a later date. However, faculty who request to teach less than their EWL are expected to pay back the department with an extra course in a subsequent semester. Only two courses can be held in the bank at any one time per faculty member. Faculty may not use their bank account to lower their course load to less than one course for any given year. Please note that due to departmental needs in any given semester, it may not always be possible to accommodate the desires of all faculty members in the semesters they choose.

A two-year probationary period will be enacted for those members who choose to teach significantly less than their EWL because they are making an effort to improve their research efforts. If they fail to demonstrate that they have done so within two years, they are expected to begin paying back to the department the courses they owe. Before a faculty member is permitted to begin borrowing under this program, an explicit agreement among the faculty member, Head, and Associate Head must be reached to define what the criteria for satisfactory achievement in waiving their course load will be. For example, obtaining a grant within an agreed time frame would constitute a substantial career accomplishment. Once it is agreed that the faculty member has met the criteria, their debt to the teaching bank will be erased.

Nothing in this policy is designed to be punitive. Rather, the EWL policy is intended to ensure that all members of our department are allowed to contribute to the department's multiple missions according to their strengths and interests, and that such efforts are recognized, respected, and rewarded.