

Flourishing School Library Faculty Members: Understanding Academic Workload

Dr. Jennifer Branch-Mueller

Faculty of Education,
University of Alberta
jbranch@ualberta.ca

Dr. Joanne Rodger

Faculty of Education,
University of Alberta
degroot@ualberta.ca

Jullana Ashley Arevalo

Faculty of Education,
University of Alberta
jullana@ualberta.ca

Crystal Stang

Faculty of Education Research Assistant,
University of Alberta
castang@ualberta.ca

Introduction

Faculty members engage in research, teaching, service, and administration and are expected to excel in all areas to be awarded tenure and promotion. School library faculty members are a very small subset of those working in universities around the world. Yet, they are interesting because they work in faculties, colleges, and schools of education and/or library and information studies. School library faculty members are predominantly women with experience in schools and school libraries.

Research Questions

This research will explore the following questions:

- How do school library faculty members experience teaching, research, service and administration?
- How many hours a week do school library faculty members work in a typical week and what tasks do they complete?
- Has Covid-19 changed how school library faculty members do their work? If yes, how?

Literature Review

In the modern research university there is still the “‘complete scholar’ engaged in coherent, integrated, and self-directed work across the full range of teaching, research, service, and governance” (Plater, 2008, p. 36). It makes sense, then, that we try to understand the experiences of faculty members in the modern research university. To provide context for this study, previous research related to the work of Library and Information Science faculty will be synthesized, including: publication patterns and productivity (Adkins & Budd, 2006; Budd, 2015; Sax et al., 2002; Shaw & Vaughan, 2007; Webber, 2011; Wilson et al., 2012); experiences of researchers (Åkerlind, 2008; Pham et al., 2005); motivation to do research (Hardré et al., 2011); formation of academic identity (Lieff et al., 2012); factors related to research performance (Algadheeb & Almeqren, 2014; Edgar & Geare, 2013); tenure and promotion (Hyon, 2011); open access publishing (Peekhaus & Proferes, 2015); and theory and research methods (Chu, 2015; Kumasi et al., 2013).

Gottlieb and Keith (1997) present the idea of research-oriented and teaching-oriented faculty members. Those that are research oriented are more likely to be male, more likely full professors, work at large institutions (more than 10 000 students), and are more likely required to do research (95%) (Gottlieb & Keith, 1997, p. 404). Those that are teaching oriented are more likely to be female, work at smaller institutions (less than 2 500 students), and only 75% are required to do research (Gottlieb & Keith, 1997, p. 406). Those who lean toward research are “likely to spend one-third to two-thirds more time on research than those oriented toward teaching,” teach fewer undergraduate courses, and publish more articles than those who lean toward teaching (Gottlieb & Keith, 1997, p. 409). Webber (2011) also found

that “faculty who spend more time on teaching are less productive with their research” and full professors produce more refereed journal articles than associate and assistant professors (p. 35). Interestingly, Webber found that race, marital status, and gender had no significant effect on “the production of articles, books, textbooks or presentations’ (p. 35). However, financial support for research and the institution type did have an effect on productivity.

Workload of faculty members can be examined using contract or collective agreement information such as, for example, 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% service in some research-intensive universities. However, these figures may or may not represent the actual amount of time full-time faculty spend on the different aspects of academic work. Bentley and Kyvik (2011) report on a survey of over 7000 full-time faculty in 14 countries to report the number of hours they spend engaging in academic work including teaching, research, and service as well as administration and other academic activities during the teaching terms (roughly $\frac{2}{3}$ of the year) and during the non-teaching term. The following table is a summary of their findings.

Table 1: *Mean weekly hours on academic activities from Bentley and Kyvik (2011) (pp. 535-536)*

| Activity | Number of hours in teaching term | Number of hours in non-teaching term |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Teaching | 19.6 | 7.6 |
| Research | 15.7 | 23.9 |
| Administration | 7 | 6.6 |
| Service | 3.2 | 3.4 |
| Other | 2.9 | 3.2 |
| TOTAL | 48.4 | 44.7 |

A study by Link et al. (2008), using data from the US National Science Foundation, found that scientists and engineers working in Doctoral/Research Universities in the US work an average of 54 hours with the teaching, research, grant writing and service hours being 16.74, 19.42, 4.58, and 13.22, respectively. Another study, by Crespo and Bertrand (2013) found that faculty members in one research-intensive university in Canada self-reported they

worked an average of 57 hours per week and spent their time in the following ways: 44.1% teaching, 35.2% research, 5.8% administration, and 14.8% service (p. 8). Bland et al. (2006) found similar numbers in their study with faculty reporting they spent 45.4% teaching, 26.7% research, 14.8% administration, 6.9% service, and 3.0% consulting.

Methodology

This study is interested in the experiences of faculty members in programs that prepare school librarians and teacher-librarians. Qualitative research examines the world of lived experience by looking at how “social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 14). According to Merriam (2009), generic qualitative research, also called basic or interpretive qualitative research, “attempts to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 23). In a generic qualitative study, the researcher is attentive to the alignment of the research question, the methodological choices, and the research methods (Kahlke, 2014). This research used a snowball sampling technique to find school library faculty members working in universities around the world who read and write in English.

Participants logged their work tasks and the amount of time spent on the tasks during a seven-day period using a personalized Jotform. After compiling time-use data to create a snapshot of the work life of each school library faculty member, each participant responded to questions about their work life and shared a current CV. The interviews were transcribed using the Zoom transcribe feature and analyzed by members of the research team by looking for common themes and trends that emerged across questions and throughout the comments (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1998).

Preliminary Findings

Some findings include:

- Realities of Expectations for Merit, Tenure and Promotion
 - Expectations on paper may not align with the actual expectations for tenure and promotion.

- Changing institutional/leadership can result in different priorities in terms of research and/or teaching
- Consistency is key; strong, steady outputs
- Halfway to tenure (3 year) check-in is important to recalibrate, identify any potential areas for improvement
- Teaching Expectations
 - All participants
 - Taught online, asynchronously
 - Primarily taught graduate classes
 - Large class sizes
 - Teaching may include advising and/or field placements
 - Optional summer teaching
- Research Expectations
 - How is research and scholarly productivity defined by the institution? What counts?
 - Telling your research story and why you make decisions about:
 - Funding for conference travel
 - “Bang for your buck”: Professional vs. research conferences; Local vs. national vs. international
 - Expectations change as you progress through the ranks (e.g. research mentorship for students and junior faculty may become the focus for full professors)
 - Academic analytics and making tenure and promotion decisions using impact factors
- Service Expectations
 - Choice in what counts as service at all academic ranks:
 - State/Regional School Library Associations
 - National (e.g., AASL) and International Organizations (e.g., IFLA, IASL)
 - Service for the professional vs. institution
 - Roles in accreditation and other certification processes
 - Service is required in many roles, but isn’t valued in the same way as teaching and research
- Administrative Expectations
 - Administrative responsibilities are different for each participant
 - Often administrative responsibilities are extra to load
 - May not be reported on annual report
- Time Use Data – Reflections
 - Flow of the academic year
 - Snapshot in time – may not be a typical week
 - No ‘normal’ week or month or year

- More conscientious about doing work because recording time
- Days/weeks are fragmented or fractured
- “I should be doing more”
 - Only so much time; only so much brain power
 - Work/life balance
- Develop systems to prioritize research, particularly before tenure
- Ad hoc committee work and student advising take up a lot of time
- Work smarter: Restructuring courses to maintain student experience (e.g., how much feedback, marking)
- Find your best work time and schedule accordingly
- Phones and devices as distractions for ‘brain breaks’ during the day
- Hard to categorize/track everything (e.g., types of email)
- Thinking and reflection time is necessary, but hard to record or quantify and doesn’t fit into a category
- No place to track the emotional labour of academic work and it isn’t valued
- How work has changed since Covid
 - Work culture has changed due to remote work since Covid
 - What needs to move back to in-person vs. what should stay online?
 - More defined workday hours; fewer evening hours
 - Work smarter – try to be more productive during the work day (and working around family schedules during lockdown)
 - Reality check – what matters in our lives and work
 - Quality over quantity for teaching/research/service
 - Time blocking for research, meetings, email, etc. – being more intentional

Discussion

The findings from this study confirm research done by others including:

- Discretionary power of faculty members
- Impact of gender norms in the academy, including women doing academic housework
- Women professors doing less research and more teaching and service than men
- Women less likely to be promoted to full professor
- Women more likely to be self-discrepant in their time allocations
- Institutional expectations and what happens when intrinsic goals and motivations are not in alignment with institutional expectations
- Collegial recognition
- Impact of Covid not experienced equally

Implications and Conclusions

This study contributes to research about the experiences of faculty members in the academy. There is a disconnect between expectations and realities for school library faculty members in terms of teaching, research, service and administration. Consistent with previous research, school library faculty members work long hours. Individual goals, discretionary power, and collective good come into conflict in different ways at different stages of a career. This study also provides a starting point for others interested in examining and comparing academic work in different disciplines. Potential and current school library faculty may use the findings to inform career decisions, e.g., entry to the profession, career progression, and mentorship.

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Biographies

Dr. Jennifer Branch-Mueller is Associate Dean, Academic, Teaching and Learning in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. She is also President of the International Association of School Librarianship.

Dr. Joanne Rodger is Assistant Dean, Program Evaluation & Director, Program Quality & Accreditation in the MD Program in the Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry. Joanne has experience working in K-12 education, public and school libraries, the nonprofit sector, and has been teaching at the University of Alberta for more than 20 years.

Jullana Arevalo is a current student in the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Alberta. She received a Faculty of Education undergraduate research award to work on this project.

Crystal Stang is a recent Master of Education graduate of the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. She is a teacher in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, and previously taught in Turkey.