

March 12, 2013

Open letter to President Jacobs, Provost Scarborough, and Chancellor Gold:

This letter is being written to you on behalf of the Faculty Senate and the Graduate Council. The Graduate Council authorized this communication by a unanimous vote at our meeting of February 19, 2013, and the Faculty Senate authorized this letter by unanimous vote on March 12, 2013. Members of the Faculty Senate and the Graduate Council are concerned that coping with the claimed financial challenges of the University through the workload policy proposed by Provost Scarborough is over-reliant on cost savings through workforce reduction and indiscriminate increases in workload. Our fear is that the proposed workload policy will prove to be a short-term, possibly even short-sighted, approach that emphasizes quick savings through workforce reductions that will ultimately damage research and graduate education at the University.

Graduate education is a strength of the University. Graduate students account for almost one in five students and the University earns almost double the subsidy and tuition from the typical graduate student than it does from an undergraduate. Members of the Graduate Council perceive the proposed workload as a threat to the reputation, income, and survivability of the University.

Workforce reduction is an attractive strategy for realizing quick cost savings. Increasing the workload of tenured and tenure-track faculty certainly has the potential to reduce costs by allowing the University to rely on fewer part-time, visiting, and other non-tenure track faculty. Increasing workload can also be an attractive strategy for quickly increasing revenues. The danger, however, is in racing to reduce workforce and increase workload without considering the long-term effects. We would like to elaborate on some of the negative consequences of “rush to judgment” on workforce reduction and workload.

Thomas et al. found that 74 percent of downsized organizations reported that morale, trust, and productivity suffered following a workforce reduction. Wager also reported that organizations experiencing a workforce reduction were more likely to have lower scores on efficiency and employee satisfaction measures and “report less favourable [sic] employer-employee relations.”

The high cost of making changes can offset expected savings which can then plunge a company into serious decline. Thomas et al. identified several factors which predicted organizational decline. These were:

- A “brain drain” that occurs following workforce reduction where the best and most highly mobile employees leave the organization. Caperella warns that “control over a firm’s talent inventory is even more critical” during market contractions than it is during periods of expansion.

- Workforce reductions incite rebellion and resistance among employees.
- Employee distress among those who remain after a workforce reduction has an adverse impact on the organization's productivity, worker morale, employee-management relations, quality of work, and customer service.

Perhaps one of the biggest liabilities in employing a workforce reduction strategy coupled with an increase in workload is that it most likely will fail. Thomas et al. found that fewer than half of downsized companies reported that they actually reduced costs, while only 32 percent reportedly increased profits. Ominously, only 17 percent reported that they were actually able to reduce their organizational bureaucracies. Strategies identified by Thomas et al. that predict failure include:

- Downsizing by attrition and hiring freezes
- Mandating more work from remaining employees instead of redesigning or reducing workloads
- Changing the reward and appraisal systems by eliminating cost-of-living increases and/or mandating salary freezes
- Failure to implement systematic, ongoing efforts to improve or maintain quality

It should be noted that these are all strategies that have been employed, are being employed, or are proposed under the Provost's workload policy. Caperella warns that "Typically, workforce reduction is seen as the most immediate way to achieve cost savings, but a 'bare bones' strategy risks . . . a significant negative impact to the business."

There are a number of "best practices" that Thomas et al. recommend that can help insure successful workforce reductions.

- Have a well-developed plan for strategic workforce reduction so that high performing or mission critical units are protected, while underperforming units are aided, modified, or eliminated
- Involve and provide incentives to employees for identifying changes that could or should be made.
- De-centralize decision-making processes
- Empower employees to implement identified changes.
- Use a variety of approaches, not just reducing headcount and increasing the workloads of remaining employees.
- Use mutually agreed-upon performance measures to identify areas that are performing well and those that need improvement.
- Develop new reward and recognition systems that align with new organizational goals and priorities.

It is our belief that many of these components are missing or under-developed in the proposed workload plan.

The members of the Graduate Council appreciate that Provost Scarborough, through his proposed plan, is attempting to confront an existential challenge to the University. The members of the Graduate Council, however, believe that the Provost's proposed solution may be creating other, less obvious, existential challenges to the University in general and to graduate education in particular.

The new policy attempts to impose standardized workloads on a diverse group of faculty, in diverse fields of endeavor, with diverse instructional and research demands. This wholesale approach to establishing instructional loads, while ignoring institutional needs for service and research, emphasizes quantity of work over the nature and quality of the work performed. We perceive the changes to the workload policy as counter-productive to the interests and strategic goals of the University. We expect that the universal application of a standardized workload policy will lead to the above mentioned “brain drain,” poor morale, lost research productivity, a decline in external funding, hostile employer-employee relations, a decline in work productivity and quality, and inferior services to our students.

A particular concern is the de-emphasis and the withdrawal of support for all but “fully-funded” research. The majority of research supported on grants from state, federal, and private agencies will not qualify as “funded” under this new definition, jeopardizing the ability of faculty to complete current projects and compete for future awards. External grant funding for research in the humanities and liberal arts is very limited at best and is often not available for graduate research. The proposed teaching workload policy will severely hinder the ability of faculty and students in these disciplines to conduct research and publish their results, limiting their professional development and hindering the continuous improvement and development of curriculum. Perhaps most importantly, the University will be “ceding the field” to our competitors. Without an active and growing faculty and student research record, students will seek out other institutions to attend where they can pursue their research and educational goals. The ability to recruit and retain high quality, research active faculty and the students they attract will be lost after even a brief interruption and will take years to recover. Many of the members of Graduate Council experienced this nearly 15 years ago as a consequence of the failed presidency of Vik Kapoor.

Another existential threat is mandating minimum class sizes. Mandating minimum class sizes indiscriminately threatens the viability of graduate programs because many graduate courses will not be offered. The consolidation and reduction of course offerings reduces the educational opportunities available to students and places timely degree completion at risk. Students will avoid the University once it is discovered that we cannot guarantee that a course offered will not be cancelled. Students will find delays to graduation, and subsequent delays to entering the workforce, to be intolerable and unacceptable.

These mandated minimum class sizes also affect the viability of many of our smaller but vitally important undergraduate programs. In a manner similar to the de-emphasis on much of our research efforts, the indiscriminate loss of many of these undergraduate and graduate programs also has the potential for a devastating impact on our ability to retain and recruit high quality faculty and the students they attract. Such faculty may value the opportunity to teach large numbers of students in other majors, but they will likely primarily come in order to interact with upper division and graduate students in their majors and to pursue undergraduate and graduate-level research with those students. If this opportunity is diminished or removed, the best faculty will no longer be attracted to the University of Toledo. We believe that the future of the university lies in the ability to attract such faculty.

If we have a real deficit, the graduate faculty have a fiduciary responsibility to the citizens of the state, particularly northwest Ohio, to propose solutions that lead to fiscal stability while providing excellent educational opportunities to our citizens. Below are conversation-starter solutions:

- Decentralize decision-making. Colleges should be given budget targets and the autonomy to determine their own staffing patterns and efficiencies.

- Continued use of metrics to evaluate programs. Under-performing programs should be reviewed for re-design, support, or elimination.
- Continued use of performance metrics (as contractually defined in the CBA) to assess teaching, research, and service productivity.
- Establishing workload should be returned to the Deans and department Chairs. Deans and Chairs should be held accountable for the performance metrics negotiated in workloads.
- Each college should develop its own plans to deliver instruction more efficiently, based on student population and needs.
- The reward structure should provide incentives to faculty who deliver instruction more efficiently or economically.
- Collaboration between faculty and enrollment officers to update enrollment materials distributed to prospective students and to update presentations made in recruiting regions.
- Reductions in administrative costs need to occur in the middle and at the top, and not just at the bottom. Job and work flow analyses need to be conducted to eliminate waste and duplication at the level of the Deans, VPs, and above. Administrative expenses are all cost and no revenue. A reasonable ratio of administrative to instructional costs needs to be determined and achieved.
- Administrators are encouraged to lead by example. Freezing salaries and open positions and foregoing bonuses would be a good faith demonstration that the administration intends to “share the pain.”

Faculty Senate and Graduate Council are eager to work with the administration to revise this most recent workload policy.

Respectively yours,

The Faculty of the Executive Committees of the Υ Graduate Council and Υ Faculty Senate

Nick Piazza, Graduate Council Chair
Michael Dowd, Faculty Senate President

Lawrence Anderson	David Giovannucci	Linda Rouillard	Frederick Williams
Diane Cappelletty	Sara Lundquist	Rebecca Schneider	Kandace Williams
Lucy Duhon	Patricia Relue	Mark Templin	

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