

# Lip Service? White Paper on Service in the Personnel Review Process

Academic Faculty Affairs Committee,

## Abstract

Research both on and off campus reveals that female faculty and faculty of color perform a disproportionate amount of service on campus. This disparity is a problem for personnel review for several reasons, including the language of the College Handbook, the lack of clear minimal standards within and across academic departments and schools for service work, and a piecemeal and inadequate approach to demonstrating evidence of service in personnel portfolios. As a result, the work of some female faculty and faculty of color is undervalued relative to the work of their white male counterparts. This problem constitutes a barrier to professional advancement and a healthy work-life balance. Subsequent to an initial study of this problem, the AFAC makes several recommendations for next steps to address this issue and eliminate discrimination in the personnel review process.

## Problem Statement

The Faculty Senate Steering Committee charged the Academic Faculty Affairs Committee (AFAC) with the task of looking at the value of service reflected in the personnel review process.

The charge arose, in part, from the research carried out by 2017-18 Senate chair, Dr. Judith Ouellette, with regard to gender imbalance in service carried out at SUNY Cortland. The report concluded:

Despite the fact that average percent of female academic and professional staff workforce is only slightly greater than their male counterparts (53.5% vs. 46.5%)—it appears that the female academic and professional faculty disproportionately account for the staffing of the major committees of senate. This finding is consistent with recent published research. Importantly, many of these committees are responsible for major academic policy and curricular decisions on campus and their workload each year can be quite heavy (CCRC, EPC, CTE, GE, and GFEC). Of great concern is the extent to which service is valued (or not) in personnel decisions (renewal, continuing appointment, and promotion); if the typical practice at Cortland is to weigh service activities less than teaching and scholarship/creative activities when making personnel decisions, then the current data would suggest that the committee work that women are providing may be undervalued and could lead to differential personnel actions compared to their male counterparts.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Gender Analysis of Senate-Related Committees*, SUNY Cortland/February 2018 (updated June 2018) J. Ouellette, Chair, Faculty Senate. Full report here: <https://www2.cortland.edu/faculty-staff/faculty-senate/pdfs/Faculty%20Senate.commitees.gender.analysis.updated.June.2018.full.report.pdf>

Since beginning their exploration of the distribution of, and credit, for faculty service at SUNY Cortland, members of the AFAC have been made aware that an unfair burden of service responsibility is falling on faculty of color as well as on women. Researchers have found that faculty of color face pressure to fill service roles that their White colleagues do not. They are pressured by students of color who need their advice to adjust to life as a minority student on campus. In addition, they face pressure from colleagues and administrators to join committees and working groups in order to assure diversity on campus decision-making bodies<sup>2</sup>. This finding has expanded the scope of the committee's review.

Members of the AFAC held meetings with the Provost, all three Deans, department chairs in the three schools, the co-chairs of the Gender Policies and Initiatives Council (GPIC), and other senior faculty members with experience as department chair.

## Background

1. The Policies of the Board of Trustees (January 2019), suggest five areas for evaluation of academic employees:
  - a. Mastery of subject matter — as demonstrated by such things as advanced degrees, licenses, honors, awards and reputation in the subject matter field.
  - b. Effectiveness in teaching — as demonstrated by such things as judgment of colleagues, development of teaching materials or new courses and student reaction, as determined from surveys, interviews and classroom observation.
  - c. Scholarly ability — as demonstrated by such things as success in developing and carrying out significant research work in the subject matter field, contribution to the arts, publications and reputation among colleagues.
  - d. Effectiveness of University service — as demonstrated by such things as college and University public service, committee work, administrative work and work with students or community in addition to formal teacher-student relationships.
  - e. Continuing growth — as demonstrated by such things as reading, research or other activities to keep abreast of current developments in the academic employee's fields and being able to handle successfully increased responsibility.

Article XII. B. 2

However, the Board of Trustees policies do not weight the five areas. The policies say rather that recommendations in personnel matters “may consider, but shall not be limited to consideration of” the above five areas. In personnel decisions SUNY Cortland values teaching, scholarship and service. However:

Primary but not exclusive weight shall be given to the areas of scholarly activity and teaching ...  
College Handbook 220.07.F

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<sup>2</sup> “The Invisible Labor of Minority Professors”, Audrey Williams June, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 2015.

When asked how teaching, scholarship and service loads ought to be weighted answers from Cortland faculty and administrators varied between: a) no fixed weighting, b) 60% teaching, 20% scholarship, 20% service, and c) 34%, 33%, 33%.

It is clear that women and faculty of color carry out a disproportionate amount of service, and given that such disproportionate service takes time away from the two areas the College values more highly, such policy is discriminatory.

2. No consensus exists in the College regarding the level of service required for a positive personnel recommendation. Counting number of committees served is clearly inadequate, with no reference to the committee workload, the committee output, and the faculty member's work on the committee.
3. It is apparent that new faculty members increasingly bring in higher levels of published work, often sufficient to meet the requirements for tenure and promotion to associate professor. We have observed a trend for faculty to apply for promotion to associate professor after two or three years at Cortland, and similarly for promotion from associate professor to full professor. The implication is that as soon as a faculty member publishes the required number of publications, they may apply for promotion. However, the College Handbook in its criteria for promotion to both associate and full professor states a requirement of a "demonstrated and continuing service ..." (22.07.C4.c and 5c). The word "continuing" implies a period of time. It is unlikely that a faculty member can demonstrate continuing service for promotion to associate professor in two or three years, and even more so for promotion to the rank of professor and its more demanding requirements. Further, the Board of Trustees Policies state:
  - a. *Length of Service.* Completion of a minimum period of service with the University may be a consideration but shall not be a qualification for promotion. Article XII. B.
4. In conversation faculty members and administrators repeatedly said that quality rather than quantity of service counts more in the review process. For example, one committee that meets weekly and has a high output ought to be more highly valued than several committees that meet infrequently with little output. However, some departments require a minimum number of committees for positive personnel decisions.
5. At Cortland the negative impact of the inconsistencies in the value placed on service is a threat to the careers of women and minority faculty.
  - a. Women take on a larger share of uncompensated service. For example, as noted above, women are overrepresented on the major faculty senate committees. Labor on the committees is not compensated and the college has no uniform way of measuring the amount of time and effort that service on these committees consumes. Without a measure, it is difficult for people in the reappointment, continuing appointment, and promotion process to present their service effort in ways that inform decision-makers reviewing their portfolios. This

contributes to a sense that service is both less valuable and undervalued in the personnel decisions.

- b. In contrast to their over-representation in service roles, women are underrepresented in service roles that receive course release or stipends. Despite being 53.5% of the academic and professional staff, they occupy only 42.3% of department chairs, and 50% of the paid academic center directorships.

Frustration with the workload distribution was evident in the gender climate review presented at the President's 2017 summer retreat. Both the inequity in workload and the lack of respect for, and acknowledgement of, women's contributions were evident in open ended responses to a survey on gender climate.

*"This campus continues to be an old boys' network. In our department the men are treated with kid gloves while the women handle the bulk of outside work assignments (i.e. open house, graduation etc.)"*

*"[Women] take on the type of work that [does] not lead to recognition, decision making or agency in the institution. Instead they populate many of the working committees that are behind the scenes, yet vital to the college fulfilling its mission. In this way we continue to keep women tied to their work and desks doing the work that men simply will not step up to do. ...The predominantly male cabinet does not seem to acknowledge the symbolic and functional issues and does not make efforts to include women in their discussions."<sup>3</sup>*

- c. The demonstrated strain on faculty of color is clearly an issue at SUNY Cortland. Discussions with the chair of Africana Studies have provided anecdotal evidence of the fact that the 7.5% of the faculty who are racial or ethnic minorities are being called upon to diversify the college's committees and task forces. Given that the college's efforts to increase the number of underrepresented minority students on campus have been successful, and that Black, Latinx and Asian students now comprise over 20% of the student body, the pressure to fill an informal advisor role is now increasing on 7.5% of the faculty.

## Recommendations

1. The AFAC recommends that the College Handbook be revised to reflect the equal value of the three areas of teaching, scholarship and service.
2. The AFAC recommends that GPIC and AFAC conduct a Service Workload Survey to gather data specific to SUNY Cortland.

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<sup>3</sup> *The State University of New York College at Cortland Gender Climate Review: A Three Year Analysis*, June 2017, K. Burke and N. Pasquarello on behalf of the Committee on Status and Education of Women.

3. The AFAC recommends that all departments include guidance in their personnel policies for adequate levels of service at all levels of reappointment, continuing appointment and promotion.
4. The AFAC recommends that the College administration determine a clear set of minimum standards with regard to service in the personnel review process, for reappointments, continuing appointment, and promotions.
5. The AFAC recommends that the College administration defines within broad terms what a minimum period of service for promotion might be, in order to give clearer guidelines at all stages of the personnel review process.
6. The AFAC recommends that the Personnel Action Form be revised to include clear guidance as to how to record service (for example, frequency of committee meetings, role within the committee, committee output, etc.)
7. The AFAC recommends that at significant points in the review process (promotion, continuing appointment) faculty members be encouraged to request verification letters from committee and department chairs as to the value of their service.
8. The AFAC recommends that department chairs encourage balance of responsibilities, and protect new women and new faculty of color from a service overload, especially relevant with the new PRODiG hires.
9. The AFAC recommends a service orientation workshop for new faculty during their second year on campus.

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