

# ATS schools discuss defining faculty workload in recent online gathering

By LISA KERN

Nearly 60 people from ATS member schools participated in an online conversation at the end of November to discuss defining faculty workload in their institutions. An [Engage ATS discussion post](#) asking about the topic gained more than 50 responses from fellow ATS members who were eager to connect with colleagues to learn more, which led to the Zoom gathering.



Facilitator Christopher The, director of student research and initiative management at ATS, was joined by panelists Bruce Coats, academic dean at Winebrenner Theological Seminary; Dave Garner, chief academic officer, vice president of global ministries, and professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary; and Kyle Roberts, vice president of academic affairs and dean, and Schilling Professor of Public Theology and Church and Economic Life at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. The hour-long discussion began with three questions posed to the panelists.

## **What is your current approach to calculating faculty workload?**

Coats explained how his school chose a “real-time work” approach to course loads by estimating the actual time to teach various types of courses and factoring in if it’s

a new course or a repeated course that’s already been offered. He talked about the regular conversations on the topic that now take place between administrators and faculty at his school.

“Every employee at Winebrenner Seminary now meets with their supervisor three times a year to look at their workload, faculty included. So, I meet with faculty three times a year to ask ‘what have you done,’ what are you planning to do,’ ‘what are you teaching,’ ‘what are you researching,’ ‘how are you mentoring students,’ ‘do you have a retreat coming up,’ ‘what sorts of things are you doing,’ and then we try to calculate actual hours of service to the organization,” said Coats. “We are in our first term of doing this and do not consider ourselves experts on the subject...we are trying to reimagine what could it be if the credit hour was no longer the definition of what we are trying to do.”

Garner described how his school moved its allocation of faculty time around the core mission and initiatives it has as an institution. “We wanted to build faculty

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Dave Garner

time around those core initiatives because it is our faculty that actually provide the gravitas and value of all those initiatives, everything that we do,” said Garner.

He said his school decided three years ago to move to true cost pricing, explaining that they no longer discount any of their programs. “Our tuition is actually calculated on what we believe is the actual cost to the institution for delivering those programs, and then we scholarship accordingly. It has forced us to say that faculty time needs to be allocated around every cost center within the institution, and we’re doing that with a ‘ministry stewardship plan,’” said Garner.

He and other administrators meet with faculty each fall to discuss their current areas of research and writing, and then collaborate on how the time spent on those things can be allocated among the school’s core initiatives. Garner explained that his school has started calculating a 35-hour work week, giving faculty five hours to use however they would like in service to their roles and to the institution.

“We are still learning this as we go along and are trying to perfect it as we go along, so I’m eager to hear from others about how they have done some things that might help us in this as well,” said Garner.

Roberts named that his school emphasizes teaching over research and writing when considering faculty workload, mentioning that nearly all his school’s faculty also serve as program directors with additional administrative responsibilities.



Kyle Roberts

“The program directors have a course release to do that work in terms of helping to shepherd and guide and direct the curriculum of the program,

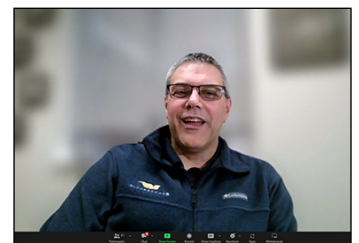
helping with the marketing, and even with advancement things or initiatives like that over their respective programs. So, that’s part of a calculation as well...part of the equation.”

***What is one challenge you faced and one insight you gained as you went through the process of rethinking faculty workload?***

Garner stated that providing accountability without micromanagement is one of the things his school is trying to think through. Emphasizing the importance of collaboration, he said the administrators at his school make the time to listen to what the faculty have to say about their own perceptions and interests and then work with them to see how they can match faculty interests with the initiatives of the broader institution.

Roberts pushed to increase the course load when he became dean, which he said had created some anxiety and stress—as a freestanding school, he explained that his staff doesn’t have the support an embedded institution’s staff may have with marketing, communication, events, and innovation. He has found that it’s important to acknowledge why changes are made and how the changes are connected to the school’s mission, goals, and identity.

Coats shared that people, of course, have a lot of questions when you start to have discussions about how they are compensated or about how you’re going to assess



Bruce Coats

what they did to be compensated. He suggested that keeping the doors open to collaboration and dialogue with faculty and honoring all they do within the workload have both been helpful.

***How many days a week do you require your faculty to be on campus during your term?***

Roberts said they have no listed requirement, but that the question has surfaced again as the COVID-19

pandemic continues to change. Coats said an all-staff quarterly planning meeting is required for faculty, but that they declare their own work schedules. Garner said faculty are expected to be on campus when they're teaching a residential course or have office hours, and to attend a weekly chapel service and a lunch with students that follows.

Following the panel discussion, participants were invited to choose among the following areas to discuss in a breakout group:

- Administrative service in small schools
- Administrative service
- Courseloads for online teaching
- Courseloads
- Embedded schools
- Public service (church and other)
- Faculty research

They talked within their groups about one effective practice at their institutions and one challenge they are facing or a change they are considering around that topic.

The large group reconvened for the last half of the gathering to discuss the questions participants had submitted on the event registration form. One of the topics of conversation focused on how public service was counted into faculty workload. The answers from participants varied greatly—in some schools, everything was counted while only teaching courses was counted at others. Some mentioned that additional administrative responsibilities were dealt with through additional pay or course release while another said that public service was considered part of the course load. Yet another explained that public service was considered volunteer service and not counted at all.

ATS is hoping to launch a research project studying contingent faculty models in early spring 2023.



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Watch the recording of the online conversation below!

