MEMORANDUM

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Subject: Literature Review: Workload, Race, Gender, Role Overload, and Role Burnout

Purpose: This memorandum provides a summary of findings concerning workload as it relates to race and gender, role burnout, and role overload.

Overview: The Spartans ADVANCE Evaluation team conducted a preliminary literature search regarding workload and its relation to race, gender, role overload and role burnout. We focus on these variables to learn more about how Spartans ADVANCE can support and advocate for equal workload management within different departments of the UNC Greensboro (UNCG). First, we reviewed existing research about the relationship between workload, gender, and race, and how perception of workload equity varies depending on one’s gender and race (sometimes both). Secondly, we looked at role overload, which occurs “when an individual fulfills multiple roles simultaneously but lacks the resources to perform them” (Creary & Gordon, 2016). Lastly, we examined research on role burnout among university staff from the US and abroad. Five of the 8 studies presented in this memorandum focus on participants who were employed at universities as professors (full and associate professors). However, the other three studies include other professions such as teaching, nursing, counseling, etc. The results of the literature review are presented under the following themes: race and gender, role overload, role burnout, consequences of burnout and mitigating strategies.

Race and Gender
Female faculty members mainly received work requests involving student advising and faculty advising, while their male counterparts received requests for research, professional service and campus service (O'Meara, 2017). White women were less likely to perceive their department’s workload as equitable when compared to their male counterparts. However, women of color were more likely to think that their departments were unlikely to credit their work through rewards in comparison to their white male counterparts (Misra, Kuvaeva, O’meara, Culpepper, & Jaeger, 2021).
Research on burnout levels among male and female faculty members show inconclusive findings. Ghorpade, Lackritz, and Singh, (2011) indicated that females experience higher burnout than males while others studies showed lower levels among female academics (Bilge 2006). Workload transparency and clarity, and consistent approaches to assigning classes, advising, and service can reduce women’s perceptions of inequitable and unfair workloads (Misra et al., 2021). Equally important, increasing opportunities for female faculty members to engage in research related activities that enhance their research productivity and career advancement can improve perceptions of workload inequities (O'Meara, 2017).

**Role Overload**

Research has shown that role overload is the strongest predictor of psychological well being when compared to leisure satisfaction and job satisfaction (Pearson, 2011); role overload is negatively correlated to job satisfaction, leisure satisfaction and psychological health (Pearson, 2011). Furthermore, role overload and role conflict affect satisfaction in various role domains such as job and marital satisfaction (Coverman, 1989).

Dennison (2012) estimated that regular faculty members in research universities average 55 to 65 hours per week and argues that analysis of role overload should be disaggregated by discipline, rank, pedagogical practices, contractual agreement of the faculty member (Dennison, 2012). Faculty service could include obligations to the department, discipline, college, university, and community at large. Consideration of faculty involvement in research and related activities in addition to teaching and service enhances the equitability and fairness of the workload analysis.

**Role Burnout**

Burnout is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion resulting from a prolonged response to long-term exposure to demanding situations due to challenging employment climate (Sabagh, Hall, & Saroyan, 2018). Empirical research conducted in the UK, Australia and Canada demonstrated high levels of burnout among college and university faculty members (Sabagh et al, 2018). Job demands (e.g., work overload, work–home conflict) and job resources (e.g., job control, support) are major predictors of burnout among faculty members (Schaufeli and Taris 2014). Research by Rothmann and Barkhuizen, (2008) showed a negative association between faculty members’ years of experience and burnout. However, Blix et al. (1994) and Gonzalez and Bernard (2006) observed that young faculty members with less than 10 years working experience and who are below the rank of associate professors were more prone to role burnout than more senior faculty members.

Similarly, work-family conflict proved to be the strongest predictor of role burnout among faculty members. Involvement in research grants and administrative paperwork indirectly increased burnout because it increased quantitative demands, which then increased work-family conflict (Zabroska, Mudrák, Šolcová, Květon, Blatný & Machovcová, 2017). Personal
characteristics such as intrinsic motivation, age, gender and stressors both within and outside the workplace contribute to burnout levels. Resources such as a social community and role clarity were shown to significantly mitigate the effects of faculty burnout (Zabroska et al., 2017).

**Consequences of Faculty Burnout**

Burnout has been associated with health problems (Barkhuizen et al, 2014; Zhong et al. 2009) and lower satisfaction and depression (Singh & Bush, 1998). Adverse consequences of role burnout among faculty include mental and physical exhaustion, reduced productivity and impaired personal and professional competencies (Byrne et al. 2013; Watts & Robertson 2011). Faculty burnout also correspondonds with health problems, disengagement, depression, dissatisfaction and greater anxiety (Barkhuizen, Rothmann, & van de Vijver 2014; Navarro et al. 2010).

**Suggested Mitigation Strategies**

Social support in the workplace from one’s colleagues, organization, superiors (Van Emmerik, 2002) and social support in general in the form of workplace rewards, participation in decision making (Pretorius, 1994), and opportunities for growth resulted in lower exhaustion and greater sense of belonging and accomplishment.

Sabagh, et al. (2018) and O’Meara, et al. (2017) recommended individual and institutional level efforts to help faculty members to deal with burnout. In an additional study, it was found that burnout negatively affects faculty members’ quality of life, regardless of their field of knowledge, age or rank. Overall, the results suggest that programs and actions to prevent burnout may be beneficial, especially for female faculty members (Alves, Oliveira, & Paroet, 2019).
References


