Faculty Workload & Compensation in Online and Blended Courses

Custom Research Brief

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# Table of Contents

I. Research Methodology ........................................................................................................... 4  
   Project Challenge .................................................................................................................. 4  
   Project Sources ................................................................................................................... 4  
   Research Parameters .......................................................................................................... 5  

II. Executive Summary ............................................................................................................. 6  
   Key Observations ............................................................................................................... 6  

III. Overview of Faculty Workload Policies ............................................................................ 7  
   Student Success Metrics ..................................................................................................... 7  
   Work Unit Allocation .......................................................................................................... 7  
   Faculty Workload in Distance Education .......................................................................... 8  

IV. Enrollment Capacity ......................................................................................................... 9  
   Overview of Enrollment Capacity ....................................................................................... 9  
   Enrollment Capacities in Distance Education .................................................................. 9  

V. Compensation ................................................................................................................... 10  
   Overview of Compensation ............................................................................................... 10  
   Additional Compensation ................................................................................................. 10
I. Research Methodology

Project Challenge  Leaders at a member institution approached the Council with the following questions:

- **Scope**: What is the retention rate, graduation rate, and average GPA in online and face-to-face courses?

- **Faculty Workload**: What is instructors’ typical annual workload in terms of work units in distance education courses? How do administrators assign workload units for non-instructional duties associated with advising, scholarship, or administrative positions?
  - **By Course Type**: Are online and blended courses considered equivalent to face-to-face courses in terms of faculty work units?
  - **By Course Discipline**: Are online and blended courses loaded differently according to disciplines or academic units (e.g., are writing-intensive courses loaded at a higher number of faculty work units than other courses)?

- **Enrollment Capacity**: What is the enrollment capacity of online and blended courses? What is the capacity of face-to-face courses? Is there a formal process or formula by which capacity is determined?

- **Compensation**: Does compensation for online or blended courses differ from compensation for face-to-face courses? Are there any circumstances under which instructors of online and blended courses receive extra compensation?

Project Sources

- Advisory Board’s internal and online research libraries (www.educationadvisoryboard.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (http://nces.ed.gov/)
- Contact institution Web sites
The Council interviewed deans and directors of distance education at mid-sized, master’s universities.

### A Guide to the Institutions Profiled in this Brief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Approximate Enrollment (Undergraduate/Total)</th>
<th>Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>15,000 / 17,000</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges &amp; Universities (larger programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>11,000 / 13,000</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges &amp; Universities (larger programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>23,000 / 29,000</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges &amp; Universities (larger programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>18,000 / 22,000</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges &amp; Universities (larger programs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University E</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>14,000 / 15,000</td>
<td>Master’s Colleges &amp; Universities (larger programs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

### Definition of Terms:

**Blended Courses:** Courses that require both face-to-face and online coursework. Blended courses are synonymous with “hybrid” courses.
II. Executive Summary

Key Observations

Faculty workload policies do not differ between online, blended, and face-to-face courses. Online courses count for the same number of work units as their face-to-face counterparts. Additionally, enrollment capacities are similar among online and face-to-face courses, and compensation schemes are similar across course delivery formats.

Most institutions require faculty to complete a 4-4 work unit schedule every year. One work unit is equal to one typical (i.e. three or four-credit) course. University B, University C, and University D allocate part of a faculty member’s work unit load to research and service. At University A and University E, research & service expectations are built into faculty contracts and tenure requirements; profiled institutions do not allocate work units to these activities.

Contacts note that the proportion of an instructor’s schedule occupied by teaching online courses varies widely among instructors and departments. The willingness of faculty to teach online courses and a department’s need for online instructors most affect how many courses and how frequently a faculty member teaches online courses.

Though enrollment capacities do not differ between online and face-to-face courses, they do differ between lecture-style and writing-intensive courses. Though enrollment capacities for all courses vary between 25 and 50 at most institutions, administrators usually hold writing-intensive courses to a capacity between 20 and 25. Department chairs have considerable discretion to determine course enrollment capacities, and enrollment capacities can vary widely among disciplines.

Adjunct instructors teaching online courses typically receive compensation between $3,000 and $5,500 per course taught; compensation does not differ between online and face-to-face courses. Most institutions incentivize faculty to create new online courses by offering a course development stipend worth between $3,000 and $4,000 per course developed.
III. Overview of Faculty Workload Policies

Student Success Metrics

*Online and Blended Programs Display Similar Student Outcomes*

Enrollment in online and blended programs varies widely among contact institutions – from approximately 250 students at University A to over 20,000 at University C. However, contacts report that online and blended graduation and retention rates, as well as grade point averages, are similar to those of face-to-face programs. Contacts at University A, University B, and University E report graduation rates of 75-80% in both undergraduate and graduate programs.

Work Unit Allocation

Most institutions *Assign Faculty Four Work Units per Semester*

Most profiled institutions operate under a 4-4 workload policy, which requires faculty to perform four units of work per semester. One unit of work corresponds to a typical course, which may be worth three or four credit hours, depending on the institution’s course credit conventions. Thus, faculty typically teach three or four courses per semester. Delivery format does not affect the weighting of a course.

### Overview of Faculty Workload

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Work Units Required Per Year</th>
<th>Distribution of Work Units</th>
<th>Number of Courses Taught Per Year</th>
<th>Number of Credit Hours Taught Per Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>8 units</td>
<td>Teaching: 8 units</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>8 units</td>
<td>Teaching: 6 units, Research: 2 units†</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>30 WTUs</td>
<td>Teaching: 24 units, Research: 4 units, Service: 2 units</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>8 units</td>
<td>Teaching: 7 units, Research: 1 unit</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University E</td>
<td>24 credit hours</td>
<td>Teaching: 24 credit hours</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† One unit per semester. Deans may require that faculty dedicate research units to teaching if they consider a faculty member’s previous research poor.

*Source: Research interviews with contacts*
Some Institutions Allocate Work Units for Research, Service, and other Duties

Administrators at most contact institutions budget time for research and service within each faculty member’s work unit allocation. However, at University A and University E, research and service are not accounted for separately but instead are “built into” faculty employment contracts. Academic advising duties are not explicitly included in measure of faculty workload. Only tenured and tenure-track faculty are subject to research and service requirements.

- Separate Accounting of Research & Service
  Faculty workloads at University B, University C, and University D explicitly allocate work units to research and service duties. Faculty with especially high research loads may petition their department chair for an additional course release for research at University D or University B. Contacts at University B add that administrators may revoke a faculty member’s allocation for research if the department chair and dean judge the faculty member’s research to be inadequate.

- Built-in Accounting of Research & Service
  Faculty workload policies at University A and University E do not explicitly allocate time for research and service expectations. At University E, faculty typically commit five hours per week to research and service, though research expectations vary among departments. At both University A and University E, tenure-track and tenured faculty may receive one course release for research from their department chair on an ad hoc basis. Additionally, a department chair may approve a course release for especially demanding service requirements (e.g., service on the English department committee that develops introductory composition courses).

No Differences in Workload for Distance Education Courses

Administrators do not assign different workload values to courses based on delivery format; face-to-face, blended, and online courses are identical for the purposes of determining workload.

In previous years, administrators at University E counted online courses as four credit hours of work, compared with three credit hours for a typical face-to-face course. Because faculty must teach 24 credit hours per year rather than a specific number of work units, faculty were able to reduce their total workload by teaching online courses under the previous arrangement. The distinction between online and face-to-face courses was eliminated in the university’s 2011-2014 faculty collective bargaining agreement.

Contacts across contact institutions note that the number of distance education courses that a single faculty member teaches varies widely among departments. Individual faculty have significant influence over their own online workloads and may refuse to teach online courses altogether. Additionally, the preferences of department chairs and the prevalence of online courses in a given department are important variables in determining how many courses and how often faculty teach online.
IV. Enrollment Capacity

Overview of Enrollment Capacity

Administrators have not established blanket enrollment capacities for distance education or face-to-face courses at any contact institution. Instead, department chairs select suitable capacities based on consultations with instructors and deans. Contacts report that enrollment capacities for most courses fall within a range of 12-35 students.

Writing-Intensive Courses Assigned Lower Enrollment Caps

Across contact institutions, administrators hold enrollment in writing-intensive courses below enrollment in lecture courses due to the time-consuming nature of evaluating narrative assignments. At most contact institutions, the cap for writing-intensive courses is approximately 25 students, though it rises as high as 40 students at University A. Though caps for writing-intensive courses are generally lower than other courses, contacts do not report any systematic means of adjusting course capacities based on writing intensity; instead, department chairs decide capacities *ad hoc*.

Enrollment Capacities at Profiled Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Customary Enrollment Capacities</th>
<th>Discipline-Specific Enrollment Capacities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>Undergraduate: N/A Graduate: 20-24</td>
<td>Writing-Intensive or Lab Courses: Approximately 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>Writing-Intensive Courses: Cap is generally lower than for lecture courses. No firm rule.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>12-35</td>
<td>Writing-Intensive Courses: 20-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>At least 25</td>
<td>Writing-Intensive Courses: 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University E</td>
<td>25-50</td>
<td>Writing-Intensive Courses: 25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enrollment Capacities in Distance Education

*Enrollment Capacities Do not Differ by Delivery Format*

Enrollment caps at contact institutions do not systematically differ among online, blended, and face-to-face courses. In some contexts, enrollment caps for online courses may be higher than for similar face-to-face courses because of space constraints in physical classrooms; contacts at University B note that higher enrollment caps are acceptable for large, lecture-style courses with minimal writing required.
V. Compensation

Overview of Compensation

Faculty compensation at contact institutions does not differ among online, blended, and face-to-face courses. Tenure-track and tenured faculty at most institutions receive a salary, not compensation per course, to teach a certain course load every semester, and online courses and face-to-face courses count equally toward that load. Administrators at University D and University E, unlike other institutions, calculate salaries based on the number of courses taught. Fees do not vary between online and face-to-face courses.

Faculty Compensation at Profiled Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Compensation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University A</td>
<td>Information unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>Tenure-Track Prof., On-Load: Salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tenure-Track Prof., Off-Load*: $1,548 per credit hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjuncts: $1,548 per credit hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>Tenure-Track Professors: Salary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjuncts: $4,500-$5,500 per course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University D</td>
<td>Fall/Spring: $3,000 per course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer: $3,500 per course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University E</td>
<td>Instructor Holds Master's Degree: $800 per credit hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor Holds PhD: $1,050 per credit hour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Off-load refers to a teaching load that exceeds the number of credit hours that a faculty member is expected to teach (see p. 7). For more information on off-load stipends, see p. 11.

Additional Compensation

Course Development Stipends

Most institutions offer a course development stipend to encourage faculty to create online courses. Stipends are generally paid out of the central university budget after a course has been approved by the relevant department chair and dean.

Rules for Course Development Stipends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Stipend Amount</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University B</td>
<td>$1,000 per credit hour</td>
<td>Quality Matters: Quality Matters certification is not required, but faculty earn an additional $1,000 if the course is certified by Quality Matters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University C</td>
<td>$1,500 per course</td>
<td>Online Courses Only: Stipend does not apply to blended courses. Progress Checkpoints: Faculty receive the stipend in four installments, each paid after one of four progress checkpoints that ensure the course is developed properly and at a steady pace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University E</td>
<td>$4,000 per course</td>
<td>Quality Matters: The course must receive Quality Matters certification.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**First-Time Teaching Stipend**

Faculty at University E earn a stipend worth 100 percent of their normal per-credit-hour compensation for teaching an online course for the first time. Instructors with a master’s degree earn $800 and instructors with a PhD earn $1,050. Faculty also receive a second-time teaching stipend worth 75 percent of their normal compensation to encourage them to continue engagement in online education. A second-time online instructor with a master’s degree earns $600 and an instructor with a PhD earns approximately $787.50.

**Other Forms of Additional Compensation**

- **Summer Teaching Stipend:** Administrators pay instructors an additional stipend for teaching during a summer term at University A. The stipend is worth between five and 10 percent of the instructor’s salary and applies to courses in all delivery formats.

- **Teaching over Normal Course Load:** Faculty at University D may receive either a $1,500 stipend or a course release for teaching over their normal four-course load regardless of delivery format. For example, if a faculty member teaches four courses that exceed the expected 12 credit hour load (e.g., three courses worth three credit hours and one course worth four, a total of 13 credit hours), he or she may teach a lighter load the following semester.