

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, 1996-2010

*Mary C. Wright*

The University of Michigan is a large, complex research university with a strong commitment to teaching. The Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT), which is part of the Provost's Office, is charged with providing support to U-M faculty in their teaching. In order to support this commitment effectively, CRLT tries to understand faculty work-life and communicate their values regarding their roles as teachers. The *U-M Faculty Work-Life Study* is particularly helpful in offering insights on this topic.

The 2010 *U-M Faculty Work-Life Study* was directed by the Center for the Education of Women (CEW), with support from the Office of the Provost and CRLT. The 2010 survey updates information collected in a 1996 study directed by the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education (CSHPE) and CEW. Although many questions varied, both surveys sought to determine the conditions that lead to satisfactory careers for instructional faculty, including issues of workload, productivity, institutional and unit climate, career satisfaction, and the balance between family and work.

This Occasional Paper presents the 2010 *U-M Faculty Work-Life Study* survey data on teaching, with comparisons to 1996 data when applicable. The specific questions addressed here include the following: How much time do faculty spend working and how is their workload divided among teaching, research and service? What are the challenges that U-M faculty encounter in managing their heavy workloads? How satisfied are faculty with their teaching and their perceptions of the tenure process? Data are presented for all tenured and tenure-track faculty (except those in the Medical School because of the unique character of their work). For figures on other ranks and the Medical School, please contact CEW ([contactcew@umich.edu](mailto:contactcew@umich.edu)).

### **Mean Hours Faculty Report Working per Week in Primary Academic Roles**

U-M faculty members are extraordinarily busy and productive. On average, over the course of a year, faculty report submitting four articles to refereed journals, four conference

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*Mary C. Wright is an Associate Research Scientist and Assistant Director for Evaluation at CRLT. She has a Ph.D. in Sociology.*



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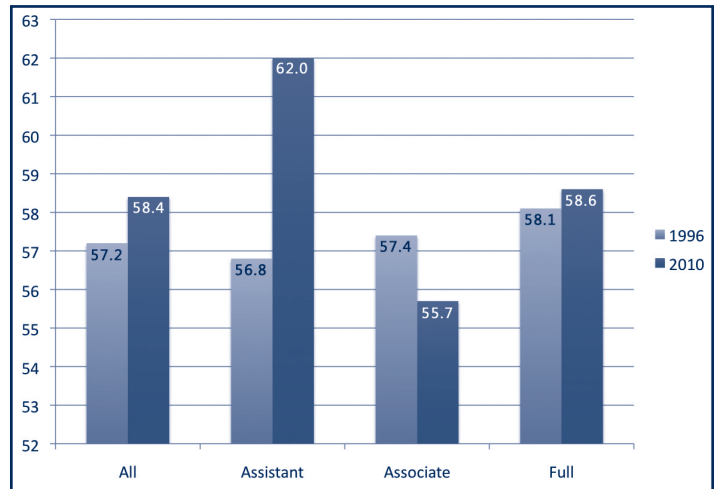
papers, one book chapter, and two external grant proposals. They chair two dissertation committees, are on four additional dissertation committees, and they serve on one school/college/university and two department committees. Additionally, on average, they indicate they are teaching four courses, and they advise six graduate students, eight undergraduates, and one postdoctoral scholar.

*Respondents in 2010 report a mean workweek of 58.4 hours, a directional increase from the 57.2 hours per week documented in 1996.*

Faculty work much more than the forty-hour standard. In fact, tenured and tenure-track faculty report spending an average of 58.4 hours per week on their professional responsibilities (Figure 1). This total has gone up slightly since the last *Faculty Work-Life Study*, with 1996’s respondents reporting a mean workweek of 57.2 hours. Comparing these two surveys, the increase in work hours is most acute for junior faculty, with 2010 assistant professors documenting over five more hours than 1996’s respondents. Overall, a majority (61%) of faculty describe their workload as “too heavy” or “much too heavy,” with no statistically significant difference in ratings of their workload by rank.

Nearly half (46%) of the time faculty members report working per week is devoted to teaching and meeting with students (Table 1). Notably, as in the

**Figure 1. Mean Hours Instructional Faculty Report Working per Week in Primary Academic Roles, 1996 and 2010†**



† It is important to note that survey questions for the two instruments were phrased slightly differently. In 1996, faculty were asked to report the number of hours, in a typical week, that were allocated to teaching, advising, scholarship/professional growth, research/creative work, clinical work and service. In 2010, faculty were invited to respond to the question, “During an academic year, how many hours is your typical workweek?” The more open 2010 question may have encouraged reporting of additional work hours for activities not listed in the 1996 survey (e.g., consulting). However, comparisons are presented here because 2010 respondents indicated that external paid consulting and “other work-related activities” made up a small fraction of their work portfolio.

1996 findings, professors of all ranks report that they spend a greater proportion of their workweek on teaching and advising students, compared to the time they allocate to their own scholarly work. However,

**Table 1. Mean Percentage of Hours Faculty Report Working Per Week in Primary Academic Roles, 2010†**

	ALL RANKS	ASSISTANT PROFESSORS	ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS	FULL PROFESSORS
Teaching & meeting with students**	46%	50%	49%	43%
Scholarship & research***	29%	34%	24%	30%
University service***	20%	12%	22%	22%

† Adds to less than 100% because results are not presented for other activities (e.g., external paid consulting).  
 \*\*Denotes a significant difference by rank (p<.01).  
 \*\*\*Denotes a significant difference by rank (p<.001).

*U-M professors of all ranks indicate that they spend a greater proportion of time teaching and advising students than on their own scholarly work.*

there is a statistically significant difference in the percentage of instructional time by rank, with full professors documenting a slightly lower percentage of hours devoted to teaching and meeting with students (43%), compared to junior faculty (50%). To some degree, this discrepancy may result from the greater fraction of time that full professors indicate they spend on administrative work, committees, and University service (22%, compared to 12% for assistant professors).

### **The Growing Perceived Importance of Teaching in Faculty Career Success**

In 1996, fewer than half (43%) of all faculty members agreed that to secure tenure at U-M, one must be a good teacher. Although a similar question was not asked of respondents in the 2010 study, it is interesting that the proportion of those who indicate that teaching was somewhat or highly valued in

the tenure process was over three-quarters (81%) of respondents (Table 2). The 2010 survey findings suggest that after receiving tenure, recognition of the role of teaching in the University's tenure process increases, with a vast majority of associate and full professors affirming its centrality. However, nearly half (46%) of faculty also report that teaching contributions are undervalued in tenure and promotion procedures, and associate professors were especially likely to express this view.

The 2010 survey suggests that post-tenure, faculty satisfaction with their teaching increases, although distinctions by rank are not statistically significant (Table 2). However, across ranks, a majority of faculty report feeling satisfied with their teaching and advising responsibilities. (Comparable data are not available from the 1996 survey.)

*The vast majority of faculty report that teaching is somewhat or highly valued in the tenure process.*

In 1996, about one-third of U-M professors in the survey found it difficult to master effective teaching, and one-quarter indicated that it was difficult to work well with students. In particular, lecturing skills

**Table 2. Perceptions of Teaching in Faculty Careers, 2010**

PERCENTAGE OF FACULTY REPORTING THAT	ALL RANKS	ASSISTANT PROFESSORS	ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS	FULL PROFESSORS
<b>Teaching is somewhat or highly valued in the tenure process.**</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>Teaching is somewhat or highly <u>undervalued</u> in the tenure process.**</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>They are somewhat or very satisfied with their teaching responsibilities.</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>They are somewhat or very satisfied with their advising responsibilities.</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>65</b>

\*\*Denotes a significant difference between ranks of  $p < .01$ . Chi-square tests were performed on the full Likert scale response, e.g., on a scale of 1-5.

elicited much concern, especially among assistant professors, with nearly half reporting that excellent lecturing is difficult. Although these exact questions were not replicated in 2010's survey, the more recent data indicate that a small proportion of faculty continue to experience a great deal of stress from their instructional interactions, both teaching and, to a small degree, advising. Nearly a quarter (20%) of tenured and tenure-track faculty report feeling extensive stress from their instructional responsibilities, and a small fraction (10%) perceive advising as a significant stressor.

### **CRLT's Role in Supporting Effective Teaching**

The primary conclusions from the first CRLT Occasional Paper on faculty work-lives continue to ring true years later:

*U-M faculty are hard-working, spending much more than the standard forty-hour week on their academic roles. They devote a significant proportion of this time to the promotion of student learning. Teaching plays a large part in professors' workloads, and they say that effective teaching plays an integral role in their career success and fulfillment.... Additionally, many faculty, especially those in the tenured ranks, believe that it is necessary to be a good teacher in order to secure tenure.*

Although faculty recognize the key role that teaching plays in tenure, many seek an even greater recognition for pedagogical and curricular contributions.

CRLT is uniquely positioned to help busy faculty members with these needs. Founded nearly fifty years ago, the Center partners with U-M faculty, graduate students, and administrators to promote a university culture that values and rewards teaching, respects and supports individual differences among

learners, and encourages the creation of learning environments in which diverse students can learn and excel.

### ***Programs and seminars***

CRLT offers a comprehensive array of curricular and instructional development activities. At these programs, faculty from schools and colleges across the University share expertise with colleagues, as in the following examples:

- At the request of the Provost, CRLT organizes Provost's Seminars on Teaching (<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/faculty/psot.php>), which are gatherings of small groups of faculty from U-M's many schools and colleges, on topics such as teaching sustainability and approaches to assessing student learning.
- For new junior faculty in the largest schools and colleges, CRLT organizes a Teaching Academy. The program offers a two-day discipline-based orientation to teaching before the start of the term.
- CRLT's campus-wide workshops offer instructors research-based practical suggestions, which faculty can incorporate into their classrooms. Topics include evaluating student writing and using instructional technology to foster active learning in large classes. A full list can be found at <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/faculty/facseminar.php>
- The CRLT Players (<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/theatre/index.php>), an interactive theatre troupe, perform regularly at U-M, as well as at campuses around the country. Players' sketches engage faculty and graduate students in discussions of multicultural teaching and learning and institutional climate.

## ***Consultations and resources on teaching and documenting student learning***

CRLT professional staff, with PhDs in a variety of disciplines, are available to consult with U-M faculty members on all teaching-related concerns. These consultations can include assistance with course design, assessment of student learning, creating inclusive classrooms, instructional technology, or gathering confidential midterm student feedback for faculty who wish to solicit student input to improve their teaching (<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/faculty/feedback.php>). Also, CRLT houses a website with teaching strategies and Occasional Papers on various aspects of teaching and learning at the University of Michigan (<http://www.crlt.umich.edu>).

Most respondents to the 2010 *U-M Faculty Work-Life Study* indicated that teaching plays a prominent role in tenure and promotion processes. CRLT staff can consult with departments, schools, and colleges to discuss ways to effectively represent teaching in the tenure process. Additionally, it has an extensive set of web resources on multiple methods for evaluating teaching (<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/evaluation/teacheval.php>).

## ***Instructional grants***

CRLT funds faculty who want to try new initiatives, study their current techniques, or widen the application of effective instructional practices. On the Ann Arbor campus, tenured and tenure-track faculty, clinical instructional faculty, and lecturers who have continuing appointments and course development responsibilities are eligible to apply for CRLT's eight instructional grant competitions (<http://www.crlt.umich.edu/grants/grants.php>). Some competitions are geared to faculty creating, revising or assessing a specific course, while others are for groups of faculty fostering curricular change in their academic units.

## ***CRLT's support of teaching at U-M***

In 1998, former U-M Provost Nancy Cantor remarked:

*We are not just a research university, we are not just a public university, and we are not just a great university. We have, perhaps, a unique burden in that there are very few other institutions that strive to combine those three aspects in one identity.... But we need to recognize that creating that...is not going to be easy, in part because we are asking our faculty to do so much more.*

Over ten years later, in her 2009 "State of the University" speech, President Mary Sue Coleman echoed a recognition of the multiple demands on faculty, pointing to their "record levels of research and discovery," as well as their "innovative teaching" and "the force of creativity." Although the demands may not be new, CRLT recognizes that good teaching continues to be challenging, especially considering the workload pressures that faculty face. To respond to faculty needs, CRLT offers a flexible and responsive array of services that help them teach effectively and efficiently, in order to reap the rewards of teaching at the University of Michigan.

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## **Background of the U-M Faculty Work-Life Study**

The 2010 *U-M Faculty Work-Life Study* was conducted by the Center for the Education of Women (CEW), with support from the Office of the Provost, and was based on an Association of American Universities Data Exchange (AAUDE) survey instrument. The 1996 *Study* was directed by the Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education (CSHPE) and CEW, with support from the Office of the Provost.

Questionnaires for the 1996 *U-M Faculty Work-Life Study* were mailed to all Ann Arbor faculty who held at least half-time appointments, had been at U-M for at least a year, and were in tenured, tenure track, clinical II, or lecturer positions. There was a return rate of 44%, or 1,167 individuals. For other demographic information, please see *University of Michigan Faculty Work-Life Study Report* (November 1999, <http://www.cew.umich.edu/research/pubs/chronpubs>).

For the 2010 study, CEW conducted a four-stage sampling process of all active Ann Arbor campus faculty who were classified as lecturers, clinical instructors, or professors, and who had a .5 FTE appointment for at least nine months prior. The full population of non-white faculty was sampled, and a simple, random sample was conducted of the remaining white faculty, stratified by job classification and gender. There was a 33% response rate to the online survey, or 806 respondents. The proportions of respondents by rank were 27% full,

19% associate, 17% assistant, and 37% lecturers/clinical faculty, while 2009 Office of Budget and Planning (OBP) counts of all faculty indicate a rank breakdown of 30%, 14%, 14%, and 42%, respectively. A third (34%) of respondents are in the Medical School, 12% are from non-medical biological and health science fields, 13% are in the physical sciences or engineering, 19% in the social sciences, and 21% in the humanities and fine arts.

For the figures presented in this paper, data from the subset of non-Medical School tenured and tenure-track faculty were used. Of the 376 non-Medical School tenured and tenure-track faculty, full professors make up 44% of this group, while associate and assistant professors comprise 31% and 25%, respectively. Women (55%) represent a slightly higher proportion of respondents than men (46%).

The analyses presented in the tables and figures here were performed using the non-response adjusted sampling weights reflected in the 2010 sample design. Tests of significance presented in Table 1 were computed using linear regression, with assistant professors as the reference group. Those in Table 2 and in the text were computed with chi-square tests. Tests of significance were not performed to compare 1996 and 2010 findings, due to differences in sampling methodologies and not having access to the raw data from the earlier study. All comparisons should be treated as descriptive, and cautions about changes in the two instruments' questions are noted in the text.

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The University of Michigan  
1071 Palmer Commons  
100 Washtenaw Avenue  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2218