Report of the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee to the Chairperson of the Faculty Organization Regarding College Faculty Workload and Research Policies

**Charges:**

1. Review existing Penn State Behrend faculty workload guidelines and research expectations
2. Make recommendations for possible changes to College guidelines and policies dealing with faculty workload and research expectations
3. Recommend a College definition of a “highly productive program of research.”

# Premise and Guiding Principles

The goals of our work were to define “highly productive research,” consider the implications of this definition within the context of the mission of Behrend and faculty workloads, and to make recommendations for changes to College guidelines and policies regarding faculty workload and research expectations. We begin by stating general reasons for engaging in scholarly activity. We then provide operational definitions of “research” and “scholarly activity” and consider the phrase “highly productive program of research” within a framework of general principles applicable to the context of Behrend. Much of the basis for this discussion was derived from the *Faculty Affairs Committee Response to Charge 2* (April 2010). Last, we consider the problem of balancing teaching, research, and service in an equitable, College-wide policy that meets institutional and individual needs. We accept the premise that the institution benefits most when individual faculty members are engaged in a consultative process of defining, within limits set by institutional needs, a flexible faculty workload based on institutional, professional, and individual goals.

*Definitions of research and scholarly activity*

Research and scholarly activity keep faculty members engaged in their profession, inform their teaching, and involve them in a larger community of scholars. This engagement enhances the reputation and visibility of the academic institution while it enables faculty members to grow and develop intellectually. Such activity is important for all faculty members, not just those on tenure lines. Being active in research and scholarly activity helps to keep faculty abreast of the latest information in their field.

Research and scholarly activity are required of all faculty members at Penn State University, but the nature and extent of that involvement varies greatly. Research and scholarly activity are defined broadly and include papers at professional meetings, workshops, creative accomplishments, performances, pedagogical papers, myriad kinds of publications, and engagement in professional societies. Other appropriate outlets are determined at the College, School, and discipline levels and are specified in detail in the promotion and tenure “rainbow dividers.”

The highest standard by which research and scholarly activity is evaluated, reviewed, or vetted is based on the process of peer review. Peer-reviewed research products include journal articles; refereed conference proceedings; books; book chapters; conference presentations; grant proposals and procurement of external funding; juried artistic and creative works, musical compositions, poetry, and films; and critiqued public performances, such as concerts, dance performance, readings, and radio or television performances. The common elements in all these

examples are a tangible outcome ***and*** peer review. Other scholarly activities can have great value, but lack the element of peer review.

Faculty members who have achieved the rank of associate or full professor have, by definition, produced a significant body of peer-reviewed work. These faculty members should be able to redirect some of their energies toward other valuable scholarly activities including journal editorship, membership on an editorial board, writing a textbook, reviewing and refereeing activity, consulting, professional development, service on grant review panels, outreach, etc.

Such activities should be recognized as a significant component of the scholarship of research and creative accomplishment.

*Definition of “highly productive program of research”*

A productive research program consists of ongoing and sustained research activities that have tangible peer-reviewed outcomes. Research and scholarly accomplishment will range from “almost none” to “ very highly productive.” The descriptor “highly productive” might mean an exceptional level of peer-reviewed research accomplishment. However, flexibility is required to meet a “highly productive” standard in the Behrend environment (heavy teaching loads, no research-oriented graduate programs, and equally high evaluative weighting of teaching and research). Research productivity can be expected to change from year to year and with career stage (e.g., pre-tenure vs post-promotion to full professor) because of cycles of investigation/creation interspersed with publication/presentation, temporary reallocation of effort to teaching or service responsibilities, and personal considerations.

# The principal issue

**embedded in the charge to this committee is how to establish the threshold of research and scholarly activity below which an increase beyond a 3/3 teaching load should be considered.**

*Guiding principles (modified from the Faculty Affairs final report)*

# The definition

**of appropriate levels of research productivity will differ depending on academic rank.**

In the pre-tenure years and for faculty members seeking promotion, existing promotion and tenure documents (HR 23, the “rainbow dividers”) specify appropriates types of research and other scholarly activity. Periodic reviews conducted by School and College Promotion and Tenure Committees, the School Director, and the Senior Associate Dean of Academic Affairs determine appropriate research productivity. After tenure or promotion, qualitatively different activities might be undertaken. These new directions may include heavier service loads, administrative responsibilities, outreach programs with significant community or national-level importance, participation in professional certification activities, reviewing activities, implementation of innovative and new teaching methods, or editing a journal. Many of these activities might better serve the interests of the profession, institution, or individual than traditional research activities.

Therefore, for tenured faculty, flexibility is required when determining appropriate productivity. We emphasize that this flexibility is possible precisely because these faculty members have demonstrated achievement in traditional areas (e.g., peer-reviewed journal articles). Furthermore,

flexibility enables a desirable role adjustment for senior faculty members, e.g., more service to the profession and mentoring of junior colleagues and students as they build careers.

# Behrend is primarily an undergraduate institution.

**Consequently, it places more emphasis on and encourages undergraduate student research. Evaluations of faculty research productivity must carefully assess and give appropriate credit for involvement in undergraduate student research.**

The University’s strategic plan specifies that highly productive research programs will include supervision of graduate students, a goal impossible for most faculty at Behrend. Because of the prominence of undergraduate student research at Behrend, credit must be given for faculty involvement in undergraduate research activities, such as supervision of undergraduate theses, capstone projects, Schreyer Honors theses, and undergraduate research grants and for mentoring undergraduate students working on their own or on faculty research projects.

Faculty members at Behrend spend an enormous amount of time helping students to hone research skills, preparing them to present their research at conferences, bringing them to conferences as attendees or author/presenters, and including them as coauthors on peer-reviewed publications. These activities often come at the expense of traditional “higher value” research and scholarly activity because they often do not result in peer-reviewed publications. They must be recognized and rewarded as research and scholarly activity regardless of the publication outcome of the work.

# Evaluation of research productivity should occur at the scale of several (3–5) years.

Most research requires a multi-year effort that spans planning, funding (when appropriate), implementation, data collection and analysis, manuscript preparation, and the peer review/publication process. Productive research often has a rhythm with peaks and valleys. At Behrend, faculty members often work in isolation, do not have graduate students or post docs, and must rely on their own efforts at every stage of the research process. Short-term fluctuations in measureable outcomes of research productivity often arise when an investigator begins a new or risky project or moves her/his research program into new areas. Therefore, research productivity should be assessed at a multi-year scale, e.g., a retrospective three-to-five-year moving window. This longer time scale would afford the School Director and the faculty member time to assess trends in research productivity, to discuss ways to alter the trends (if unacceptable), to implement strategies for improvement (if necessary), and to provide warning if teaching loads might require adjustment in light of low research productivity.

# Faculty workload assignments should be flexible within limitations.

Faculty workload assignments and evaluation weights should be in line with institutional teaching, research, and service expectations, and these expectations can change over time. Therefore, flexibility in faculty workload assignments and evaluation weights is essential. Published guidelines should be developed to cover situations in which flexibility might be needed. For example, a faculty member might be developing a new course or writing a textbook such that the teaching component should be weighted more than the research component. A faculty member might invest significant time in service to the school or university or in administrative duties meriting an adjustment in research expectations.

Behrend’s relatively small size and high teaching load require careful calibration to achieve a proper balance in a faculty member’s teaching and research responsibilities. Achieving a balance that yields sustainable research productivity and excellent teaching requires a frank, respectful collaborative effort between the faculty member and School Director. This balance must accommodate School and programmatic needs, individual research and teaching interests, and personal factors. Trade-offs might be necessary to reach an equitable result. Faculty members and their School Director might agree to adjust a faculty member’s workload assignment or evaluation of performance from the standard evaluation weights when such a change is in the best interests of both faculty member and school. A discussion of the appropriateness of these workload assignments or weights should be part of the five-year extended review. However, this discussion also should be part of the annual review if a faculty member’s research, teaching, or service responsibilities have changed.

# Review of Current School and College Workload Policies

We reviewed the formal guidelines regarding teaching loads from the Schools of Business, Engineering, and Science, and documentation from the School of Nursing. The School of Humanities and Social Sciences has no formal guidelines for teaching loads, but an informal summary of current practices was provided by Chancellor Burke. We also reviewed the College- level teaching-load guidelines, which were presented to us by Dr. Burke, but are not available on the Behrend faculty intranet. In addition, we reviewed informal notes on school personnel policies and faculty workload prepared by Chancellor Burke. The degree of variability among these documents is striking. In some cases, guidelines were extremely detailed, whereas in

others, guidelines were virtually non-existent. Such inconsistencies breed inequities, misunderstandings, and opportunities for manipulation by faculty members and administrators.

*Common themes among policies and guidelines*

1. Teaching loads for all full-time faculty members is 12 credits per semester or 24 credits per academic year (a 4/4 load assuming 3-credit courses).
2. All schools provide release time equivalent to one course per semester to tenure-eligible and tenured faculty members who are engaged in “active and productive refereed research.”
   1. Course release is granted automatically for tenure-eligible faculty members. In some schools, course release is granted automatically for post-tenure faculty, but in others it is granted based on performance evaluations.
   2. The criterion for course release is “research,” not scholarly activity.
3. All schools provide additional release time or credit for specific administrative duties, service responsibilities, particularly heavy teaching loads, or as rewards for exceptional research accomplishments. Application of these exceptions is variable across schools. Some exceptions are similar among schools, but others vary widely (Table 1).
4. Performance is evaluated on three criteria, teaching, scholarly activity, and service. Evaluation weights assigned to these criteria typically are 0.45, 0.45, 0.10, respectively, for tenure-eligible and tenured faculty teaching a 3/3 load (i.e., receiving a 2-course teaching release for research)

and 0.60, 0.30, 0.10 for instructors and tenured faculty teaching a 4/4 load (i.e., not engaged in productive research). Two assumptions implicit in this weighting are:

* 1. Some minimum level of scholarly activity and of service is expected of all faculty members regardless of whether they engage in research.
  2. Evaluation weights do not reflect actual effort or time spent on teaching, research, or service components of a faculty member’s load.

1. In some cases, a misalignment exists among the College mission statement, promotion and tenure expectations, annual review expectations, and evaluation weights assigned to teaching, scholarly activity, and service. For example, faculty members are often ranked by identical criteria during the annual review process without consideration of academic rank (instructor vs professorial rank), all measures of teaching quality (only SRTEs are used) and research productivity (primarily based on peer-reviewed journal articles), or discipline-specific factors (e.g., relative value of books, refereed conference proceedings, grant proposals).
2. For instructors, teaching loads are addressed explicitly, but guidelines and expectations do not appear to exist for assessments of research and scholarly activity and service.

# Recommendations Regarding College Faculty Workload Guidelines and Policies

1. The current policy of course release in recognition of research appears to be taken for granted by faculty members, rather than regarded as a means to enable faculty members to maintain a productive research program. At the time of hire, new faculty members should be informed of the teaching workload expectations and the way in which course release for research is

determined. School Directors should impress upon faculty members that course release for research will be reviewed periodically to ensure that it is being granted appropriately. However, faculty members should understand that such reviews are intended to encourage and reward research productivity rather than to inflict punishment or offer a legitimate way for them to stop conducting research because these disincentives could have the effect of discouraging research productivity. The decision of a faculty member to cease engaging in research and subsequent movement to a 4/4 teaching load should not alter the fact that holding a professorial rank carries with it a requirement to conduct research. In other words, the evaluative weightings (0.45, 0.45, 0.10) should not change unless a shift in institutional expectations or a faculty member’s professional goals warrant a negotiated change.

1. The type, quality, and quantity of research and scholarly activity sufficient to warrant course release should be defined by each School, but these definitions should be reviewed at the College level to ensure equitability across Schools.
2. Weights for evaluation of teaching, research, and service should be negotiable within limits and should reflect institutional expectations for the way a faculty member should apportion her/his time and effort among various aspects of their job, given rank and career stage. For example, instructors are hired primarily to support Behrend’s teaching mission. Neither time nor facilities are provided for instructors to conduct research. An evaluation weight of 0.30 for research and scholarly activity does not reflect actual institutional expectations and could distract an instructor from meeting their primary responsibility (teaching). A further example might be

alteration of evaluation weights to increase emphasis on service and decrease emphasis on teaching to reflect additional administrative duties assumed by program coordinators.

1. A common system should be developed at the College level for calculating teaching loads based on credits, points, full-time-equivalent student enrollments, contact hours, or some combination. This system should recognize accreditation requirements and guidelines of professional organizations, ensure equitability across disciplines, and describe adjustments for differences among courses and for release time granted for service and scholarly activity/research. This system should be comparable across Schools but implemented in a way that reflects intrinsic differences among Schools. The system should explicitly address adjustments for: number of preparations, number of credits, time required to teach laboratory sections, preparation time for laboratory courses, number of students, course level (lower division, upper division, graduate), time required for grading in writing-intensive or composition classes, whether the course is taught online, is an honors course, is being taught for the first time, or is team-taught. Guidelines should be included for negotiating adjustments for other factors as necessary. The systems currently used by the Schools of Business and Engineering are examples that might be useful models.
2. A common system should be developed at the College level for adjusting teaching and research expectations to account for time and effort devoted to administrative tasks and service activities. This system should be operationalized consistently across Schools. The system should explicitly address adjustments for service as: program chair, assistant School Director, Graduate Program coordinator, Faculty Senator, Chair of Faculty Council, representative on the University

Graduate Council, honors coordinators, and participant in the Administrative Fellows program. Written guidelines should be provided for negotiating adjustments for other activities as necessary. The systems currently used by the Schools of Business and Engineering are examples that might be useful.

1. A campus-wide discussion, perhaps in the form of an open forum, should be held to allow exchange of these ideas with the faculty before a formal campus-wide faculty workload policy is submitted.
2. All Schools should revise (or put into writing) their School faculty workload guidelines to ensure alignment with College-level policy and guidelines. All such policies should be available on the Behrend College intranet.
3. The final Behrend College faculty workload policy should be compared to those of other Campus/College policies across the University to ensure that faculty workloads at Behrend are consistent with faculty workloads elsewhere in the University. Specifically, we question whether a 4/4 teaching workload is the norm for all University academic units, particularly those with research/scholarly activity expectations as high as at Behrend College.

# Definition of a Highly Productive Program of Research

Current promotion and tenure expectations require some School-defined range of refereed publications or other peer-reviewed works and conference presentations within the six-year probationary period. As a rule of thumb, the threshold for peer-reviewed research productivity

for post-tenure faculty members should be set at some percentage of expectations for promotion and tenure over a five-year period. This percentage (30–50%) should be neither so high that faculty members cannot take risks in their research nor so low that faculty members stop producing peer-reviewed research. Although peer-reviewed research is the “gold standard,” other forms of scholarly activity should carry weight in the assessment because they reflect value that comes with changes in professional identity and are important to the individual, institution, and profession.

Table 1. Summary of faculty workload policies and guidelines described in documents reviewed. Blanks indicate no written statement in the School policy. Rows shaded in gray indicate College-level guidelines that, presumably, are followed by each School regardless of whether they are specified in School policies and guidelines. na = not applicable.

| **Item** | **Business** | **Engineering** | **H&SS** | **Science** | **Nursing** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Written guidelines | Detailed | Details limited to school | None | Details limited to school | Details limited to school |
| Base teaching load | 24 credits/y | 24 credits/y = 96 points | 24 credits/y | 24 credits/y = 84 points | 24 credits/y = 8 units including 1 unit of service/y |
| Calculation of load | By credit | Point system  (1 credit = 4 points) | By credit | Point system  (1 credit = 3 points + adjustment for lab hours and course credit) | Unit system  (1 credit = 0.5 units) |
| Addition release/credit for: | - | - | - | - | - |
| **Administrative release** | - | - | - | - | - |
| Campus coordinator | na | na | na | na | 1–2 units/y |
| Program chair/coordinator | 3 credits/y | 3 credits/y | 3 credits/y | 12 points/y, split 6/6 if duties are split between 2 people | - |
| Assistant School Director | variable | - | - | - | - |
| Director of MBS program | variable | - | - | - | - |
| **Faculty Senatea** | 3 credits/2 y | - | - | - | - |
| Faculty Senate Curricular Affairs Committee | 3 credits/y (replaces entry above) | - | - | - | - |
| **Chair of Faculty Councila** | 3 credits/y | - | - | - | - |
| Graduate Council | 3 credits/y | - | - | - | - |
| Teaching peer review coordinator | - | - | - | 12 points/y | - |
| Health care advisor | - | - | - | 6 points/y |  |
| Media production lab | - | - | 6 credits/y | - | - |
| Supervision of Psychology lab | - | - | 3 credits/y | - | - |
| Special projects | - | Variable | - | - | Variable |
| **Research release** | - | - | - | - | - |
| Standard research release | 3-6 credits based on performance | 24 points/y | 6 credits/y | 21 points/y |  |
| Research bonus (large grants) | - | - | - | 6 points/y | - |
| **Teaching credit/release** | - | - | - | - | - |
| Supervision of internshipsb | 3 credits/105 internship credits in 2 y | - | Extra compensation | - | - |
| Course credit adjustment | - | - | - | - | - |
| Emerging technologies | Variable | 2-4 points | - | - | Variable |
| First time teaching course | - | Up to 4 points | - | - | - |
| New pedagogy or technology | - | Variable | - | - | - |
| Large lecture | - | 4 points | - | Sliding scale (~3 points/Additional 30 students >60) | - |
| 4-credit courses | - | - | 1 credit/y up to 3 credits | Calculated into point system | - |
| Music performance courses | - | - | Count as 2 credits | - | - |
| Theater course | - | - | 6 credits/y | - | - |
| Team teaching | - | Variable | Compensate as overload | - | - |
| Multiple lab supervision or course coordination | - | Variable | - | - | Variable |
| Senior projects | - | Points = No. of students | - | - | - |
| Senior projects coordinator | - | 4 points | - | - | - |

a Covered under Behrend College Administrative Procedure BCF13 – Course-Release Policy for University Service

b Covered under Behrend College Administrative Procedure BCF2 – Internships