



# Nursing Faculty Workload in Washington State

## An Initial Review

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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As part of its charge to develop an implementation plan for the Master Plan for Nursing Education in Washington State, the Washington Center for Nursing (WCN) commissioned a study of nursing faculty workload that included two surveys. The first was for deans and directors of nursing programs to learn about the official policies regarding workload assignment. The second was for nursing faculty to learn about their perceptions of the time they spend on their faculty roles.

Faculty workload is a concern because it contributes to work satisfaction and therefore to the ability to recruit and retain the faculty needed to expand nursing education to meet the predicted need for nurses in Washington State. The National League for Nursing (NLN, 2007b) identified workload as a major component of a healthful work environment.

The two surveys were developed using the four categories identified in an NLN/Carnegie study of faculty workload (NLN, 2007a). These categories were teaching-related, research and scholarly productivity, service to the institution, and service to the community and profession. The deans and directors survey asked for a narrative explanation of how faculty workload is assigned at the institutional level. The faculty survey asked faculty members to estimate hours spent on the various categories of role performance during the academic terms and also during academic breaks. They were also asked about work for an institution other than their primary academic institution. An online format was used to distribute the surveys and collect data during the fall of 2008.

Using the members of CNEWS (Council on Nursing Education in Washington State) as the basis for the deans and directors survey, there were 46 potential respondents. A total of 35 (76%) responded to the survey. This included seven baccalaureate and master's institutions, one baccalaureate only institution, eight associate degree only institutions, 15 institutions that provide ladder programs (practical, associate degree, and in one case baccalaureate), and four providing practical nursing only. According to the Washington State Nursing Quality Assurance Commission there are a total of 558 full time and 360 part time nursing faculty members. There were 181 (32% of possible) full time respondents and 62 (17% of possible) part time respondents to the survey. Respondents were spread across all program types and levels.

All deans and directors indicated that teaching and teaching-related activities were required of all faculty in all programs, although in some instances grant funding for research allows this to be decreased for graduate faculty.

#### For graduate faculty

- five programs (83.3%) require research and scholarly productivity,
- five (83.3%) require service to the institution,
- five (83.3%) require service to the profession and/or community.

#### For generic baccalaureate faculty

- three (50%) require research and scholarly productivity,
- five (83.3%) require service to the institution,
- four (66.7%) require service to the profession and/or community.

#### For registered nurse baccalaureate faculty

- five programs (71.4%) require research and scholarly productivity,
- seven (100%) require service to the institution,
- seven (100%) require service to the profession and/or community.

#### For associate degree faculty

- four programs (17.4%) require research and scholarly productivity,
- 21 (91.3%) require service to the institution,
- 11 (47.8%) require service to the profession and/or community.

#### For practical nursing faculty

- four programs (33.3%) require research and scholarly productivity,
- ten (83.3%) require service to the institution,
- seven (58.3%) require service to the profession and/or the community.

Notations were made by some in community and technical colleges that they regarded work on program evaluation as scholarly work. This would not be considered scholarly productivity by most baccalaureate and higher degree programs.

Faculty workload is assigned in many different ways. There are non-numerical methods that require faculty to participate in multiple roles and be assigned to teach in both classroom and clinical site and laboratory. The nursing administrator is responsible for assigning specific workload and in their narrative comments, administrators indicated their efforts to distribute workload equitably across all faculty members. Because these systems are not as objective it may be harder for faculty to understand the rationale for assignments than when numerical calculations are used as described below.

There are three numerical methods of calculating workload: based on contact hours, based on credits, and based on a computed workload unit. In all of the numerical methods of calculating faculty workload, the relationship of teaching in the classroom to teaching in the clinical or laboratory poses specific challenges. Each classroom hour of teaching can be equivalent to 1, 1.1, 1.2, 1.25, 1.5, 2, or 3 hours of clinical depending upon the program. The most common ratio for baccalaureate and higher degree programs is 1:3, for associate degree and AD/PN ladder programs it is 1:2, and for practical nurse only programs it is 1:1. This wide difference in classroom: clinical ratios appears problematic in a practice discipline such as nursing.

For programs basing faculty workload on contact hours, the contact hours for teaching are specified but other hours may not be specified. In a few programs all hours in different roles are specified. In order to compare workload, the hours required for teaching were used for comparison purposes. Hours required for direct teaching ranged from 150 to 300 hours per quarter in practical nursing programs and from 170 to 330 hours per quarter for associate degree and AD/PN ladder programs. The one baccalaureate program using hours reported 170 teaching hours per quarter. Why some programs require double the teaching hours of others was not clear from the data collected. Some programs add to the teaching hours specific hours required in other roles such as student advisement.

For programs basing faculty workload on credit hours taught, the range for associate degree programs is 12 to 18 credits. The only practical nursing program using credits reported requiring 15 credits per quarter. For baccalaureate and higher degree programs the credits ranged from 10 to 12 credits per quarter with student scholarly projects supervised in addition to course credits taught. While credits might be similar, whether these are taught in the classroom or the clinical setting as well as the ratio of hours to credits will make a difference in the actual hours of teaching assigned.

In order to take a variety of responsibilities into consideration, some programs assign faculty workload based on a computed unit of service that may be termed workload units, credit hour equivalents, or instructional units. The most common requirement is for teaching 15 workload units per term while some programs based workload units on a yearly total: 35 for a 9 month contract, 41 for an 11 month contract elsewhere, and 24 per calendar year for still another program. In all systems teaching one hour of classroom instruction per week for the term is one workload unit. (This is teaching one credit.) Teaching in the laboratory or clinical area may be awarded .75, .8, or workload unit for each clinical hour of teaching per week. Thus the teaching load may vary from program to program while the workload units appear to be the same. In many of these programs workload units may be assigned for special projects such as leading accreditation and other specifically identified responsibilities. The use of workload units to recognize responsibilities other than direct teaching has the potential to provide a mechanism to support the full range of faculty roles.

Within the numerical methods of assigning faculty workload, there is a wide range of expectations. For those with hours as a measure, workload ranges from 150 to 300 hours per term. For those using credits and workload units, the differences in the ways that clinical are counted create wide differences in hours of teaching. At the upper end of these numbers, the question arises as to how faculty can meet this teaching load and still plan curriculum, adequately evaluate student progress, manage the evaluation of the program, and participate in wider college responsibilities.

Faculty report that they spend many hours beyond those assigned in direct classroom, clinical, and laboratory contact in order to effectively teach. These hours are spent in curriculum development, class planning, arranging clinical experiences, working with clinical agencies, coaching students for success, evaluating student outcomes, and travel to clinical agencies during the work day. Full-time faculty reported an average of 48.8 hours spent weekly on teaching and teaching related activities. Part-time faculty reported they spent an average of 42 hours per week. The average part-time assignment was 43% for those contracted for percentage of load and 89 hours per term for those contracted on an hourly basis. In addition to the teaching role, full-time faculty spent an average of 5.6 hours in research and scholarly work, 6.7 hours in service to the institution, and 2.6 hours in service to the community and/or profession. This brings the average total work week for full-time faculty to 63.7 hours per week. Part-time faculty also reported that they spent time in these areas of faculty responsibility with an average of 1.3 hours per week in research and scholarly productivity, 2 hours in service to the institution, and 2.2 hours in service to the community and/or profession. This brought part-time faculty to an average of 47.5 hours per week in work for the academic institution.

In addition to their work during school terms, full-time faculty reported that they also worked on their faculty roles during winter holiday break (an average of 20.6 hours), during spring break (an average of 16.7 hours) and during the summer when not contracted for teaching (an average total of 49.3 hours). Part time faculty also indicated that they worked for the academic institution over breaks with an average of 9.8 hours during winter break, 7.7 hours during spring break, and a total of 16.6 hours over the summer holiday. Faculty also indicated that they spent time keeping current with nursing. Many worked for clinical agencies both during the academic term and over breaks and the summer.

### **Conclusions**

The policies and procedures for establishing workload are complex and in some cases not clear. The official policies result in extreme variability in teaching workload expectations from program to program.

The average workload perceived by nursing faculty is high. While some schools seem to have what might be seen as a fair and equitable workload, others have workloads as high as 30 hours of teaching contact per week plus the teaching-related responsibilities mentioned above. In addition, faculty members are accountable for service to the institution (activities such as committee membership, program evaluation activities, and student advisement), often research and scholarly productivity, and in some cases service to the community and/or profession.

Providing recognition for these requirements, for developing a coordinated curriculum and for engaging in continuous quality improvement as well as for direct teaching tasks might contribute to greater satisfaction with workload. Establishing best practices in regard to nursing faculty workload could provide guidance as programs examine their own workload policies. An examination of the relationship of student outcomes to faculty workload might help to identify best practices in establishing faculty workload.

Many factors contribute to nursing faculty work satisfaction in addition to workload. Addressing the entire spectrum of issues will be important to recruitment and retention of the faculty needed to meet the needs of the residents of Washington State for nursing care.

### **REFERENCES**

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