

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Hello, welcome to Advancing Faculty Excellence, a podcast where we at the U of M ADVANCE Program talk about issues facing faculty and what we can do about it. I'm your host Mike Liemohn, a professor at the University of Michigan and an Associate Director of the U of M ADVANCE Program, an office focused on faculty excellence.

**Kelsey Arras:**

And I'm Kelsey Arras, podcast producer and a Communications and Project Specialist at the ADVANCE Program, and I also project manage the RISE committee.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Today we're talking to our colleague, Dr. Allen Liu, about addressing a common problem in faculty life: the unequal distribution of labor, especially teaching and service loads. Each case study focuses on a specific scenario, and today our scenario is: How to foster respect and inclusion in your unit when a BIPOC - that is black, indigenous, and people of color - when a BIPOC faculty member tells you that large courses and time intensive undervalued service are disproportionately assigned to junior BIPOC faculty, and that the resulting inequities are exacerbated by so-called "invisible" service. This is a difficult topic, but I think we had a really good conversation with Allen. There are really two issues here, the institutional level as well as at the level of individual interaction. So Kelsey, I think that Allen really addressed the issue of BIPOC service levels being elevated by invisible service.

**Kelsey Arras:**

I really liked his suggestion about making the "invisible" visible. There was some really great research in the links to the show notes too, that talk about this topic.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

And Kelsey, what are your thoughts about how this discussion went regarding the structural level issues?

**Kelsey Arras:**

What I found interesting about service is how different it can be across all schools and colleges at U of M. There's not one solution for this, but I think Allen offered an array of options on how teams can look at this from different perspectives. It was a really great conversation.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Yes, I agree. We hope that you enjoy this episode of Advancing Faculty Excellence. Our guest today is Professor Allen Liu from the University of Michigan's Department of Mechanical Engineering. Allen, welcome to the show.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Well, thank you, Mike. Happy to be here.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Tell us a bit about yourself and your relationship with this topic.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Absolutely. Yeah. I have been at the University for 14 years and have done a lot of service in my time here. As a junior faculty, I would do the kind of service that everybody does. As I rose through the rank, I got the opportunity to serve on the Senate Assembly Committee as the College of Engineering representative. After that, I was voted on to SACUA, the Senate Advisor Committee on University Affairs. And in 2021 to 2022, I was elected the chair of the SACUA.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Oh my goodness. That's a big role.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Absolutely. Absolutely. So I've certainly seen a lot of service within that context and service I feel is one of the important ones that makes our faculty life interesting. Let's just put it that way.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Yes. And you are also a member of the RISE committee?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

That's correct. It's been a lot of fun, yeah.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Our topic today is Distribution of Labor. So in faculty life there are three main pillars: research, teaching and service. And these can have quite different proportions depending on the institution as well as on the rank of the person, but it can sometimes be inequitably distributed. And so that's our conversation today is actually the inequitable distribution of labor among faculty in a department or unit. So to get us started, I would like to set the stage a little bit with some of the additional resources at the bottom of the climate case study for those reading along. And there are a couple by Professor of Columbia University, KerryAnn O'Meara. And so there's a problem in academia where a department chair needs to fill a service role, for instance, and so they just wander down the hall and they pop into some open door of a colleague that they think would be a good one for that particular job.

And then there's a lot of pressure on that person to say "yes" because your department chair is standing right there asking you on the fly, please do this extra service task. So in her short opinion piece in "Inside Higher Ed" called "The Hallway Ask", O'Meara notes that numerous studies have shown that the distribution of labor is not equal. And to quote her "women in academia spend more time than men doing necessary time consuming and underappreciated service work". And she points out this has detrimental effects on their research. And that furthermore, the reward systems that we have in academia are often focused on your research more than your service. And so if you're taking on an unequal share of the service load or the teaching load, that that can influence your career path and trajectory and promotions even. So this sets you up basically for an accumulation of disadvantage for those that take on this. There was a second short article on the resource list also by O'Meara later in that same year. Allen, could you please tell us about "Undoing the Can of Worms"?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Absolutely. The short piece is actually following up on previous work that Mike just described, and this has to do with how academic departments often leave service mentoring and administrative tasks to women and faculty of color and this disadvantaged folks and loading others to erode just satisfaction. So this is a real serious problem. And the faculty workload and reward project, which is this article describes, it applies a choice architecture, principles that redesign how work is assigned and credited and using tools like Transparent Dashboard of Committee and advising loads. And this allows a clear benchmark for service roles, ability to opt out rotations for tiny intensive tasks. So then there's choices that a faculty can actually make allowing sort of more of these equal distributions of service load. These innovations, prompt data-driven conversations about equity and clarify expectations to reduce bias in evaluating contributions. And this also allows everyone to share responsibility more equally.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Yeah, I really like that concept of transparency with this. I hope that we come back to that a lot.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Yeah, and I think the results have shown that this department's adopting this type of reforms report higher faculty satisfactions and lower intentions to leave. So there's a real benefit to equalize the service load.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

So these two short articles led to a much longer article on the topic that's also listed in the resources for this case study. In 2021, O'Meara led the creation of a report put out by the American Council on Education called "Equity-Minded Faculty Workloads". Allen, could you give us a brief overview of that report?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

So this is a report that describes the faculty workload and reward project, which I just sort of introduced. And this is an NSF ADVANCE Funded Action Research project. And the authors found that there are actions that academic units can take to promote workload equity and the treatment groups participate in four-part workload interventions. And the report makes recommendations on how academic units can promote workload equity and identify six conditions that are linked to equitable workloads. And these six conditions include transparency, clarity, credit, norms, context, last but not the least, accountability.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

That's important so that we know that people are assigned something that it actually gets done.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Oh, I think all six of these conditions are when worked together, can truly equalize the service load.

**Kelsey Arras:**

One of my questions about service load that I've seen talked about throughout some of these readings is how it has an impact on tenure and promotion decisions. How have you seen departments kind of tackle that when they're thinking about equitably distributing labor?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

For two sets of promotion right, one's from assistant to associate. And that tenure decision is oftentimes, as Mike alluded to, is very much focused on research productivity and your teaching and service is almost like a checked box. Right now, at least in my experience, there hasn't been a very clear framework to value those. And I think there's a need to figure a way out to sort of value that and be able to incorporate those contributions to the tenure package. Perhaps these six conditions could be a starting point because then we know that every faculty that's coming up for tenure has done some amount of service and they're comparable across the board.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

I think this even gets down to the wording choice that we use. We call it service, and it has an implication that it is an extra, a burden, this add-on thing that you're serving others, but it's not necessarily for your own career. Changing the language about it, calling it governance, that you're contributing to making the whole unit succeed.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

I mean, the fact that this is one of the three pillars signifies that there is importance to service. It's just one of those things that are very difficult to quantify because there's so many different types of services and can take different levels of effort, different amount of time, different amount of energy, physical or emotional due to carry out these service tasks.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

And for a lot of services, it's getting the work done. So doing it well goes unnoticed doing it, not so well goes highly noticed.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

That's right.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

So the RISE Committee tackles these issues by creating a particular scenario to guide our discussion so that we can provide specific examples that could be readily implemented then by faculty in their home departments. So for this climate case study, we have this specific situation: How to foster respect and inclusion in your unit when a BIPOC, that is black, indigenous and people of color, when a BIPOC faculty member tells you that large courses and time intensive, undervalued service are disproportionately assigned to junior BIPOC faculty, and that the resulting inequities are exacerbated by so-called "invisible" service. The RISE committee uses the approach of the Eight Levers of Change. So this is inspired by Project Zero's: "The 8 Forces That Shape Group Culture", and the RISE committee has adapted these to work within the context of faculty settings and scenarios.

So they help us really just examine the situation from many different directions, getting our brains churning with ideas to mitigate the issue from multiple angles. Time is a lever because it is a resource that we can allocate. The proportion of our work that's spent on different activities and to some degree reflects the importance of that activity. So it's useful to consider our time as this important quantity. And when we're assigning service roles, especially to junior faculty from historic marginalized groups, we should take that time consideration into account. So Allen, do you have an example or two about how time can be used as a lever of change to alleviate inequities in the distribution of labor?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Everything that requires some time, whether you want to teach research or service, what I would do is to engage in this junior faculty and actually provide feedback. The most efficient use of time, try to understand from the BIPOC faculty how much time they're spending on this large intensive course as a way to alleviate some of that stress associated with the situation that he or she's in right now. And are there ways to gain more time.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

In the scenario they bring up right at the end, "invisible service", the service that isn't part of a formal committee assignment or some other readily acknowledged form of activity that can easily go into a line item on a CV or an annual activity report. It sounds like you're one that meets with other faculty.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

The "invisible" part of this from an intensive course perspective, if the faculty wanted to create new problem sets, I mean, that is a very time consuming thing to do. I could foresee that I go to other faculty who's taught the class, more senior faculty put together a library of problems that we have used in the past. And so this will help the junior faculty create these problems more quickly and therefore gain back the time. It is true that these invisible services are ones that don't make up their CV. When you teach a class, you're not going to say, I'm spending 20 hours a week preparing lectures.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

And that invisible service also includes time, like what you were mentioning, that interaction with junior faculty or with students that come in that have questions, they see you as one that can answer it. That is an extra component of helping the department succeed.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

That's right.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Helping your community do well, that can't be recorded well.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

It can be quantified. Yeah, exactly.

**Kelsey Arras:**

So based on one of Dr. O'Meara's pillars where she talked about transparency, how do you make that invisible service that even you are participating in now transparent, and how do you make it transparent to them or transparent to your chair or others around you?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Oh, that's a great question. So I think part of the message in the end is to make invisible service visible. I use myself example, when I took up the RISE committee role, I had talked to my department chair about this, so to make her aware that I'm taking up this role, and she's very understanding, appreciative, and understand that takes time. And when there was a "Road Show" that you guys came over, you explicitly pointed out that I'm a RISE member and the folks that are at the faculty meeting all heard that. So I think it's a way to make these invisible service visible, even though it is a line on my CV. But I think for them to see that, "Hey, Allen is part of this RISE committee", it makes a difference.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Yeah they don't see you in that committee meeting.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

No.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

It's often a different building.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Exactly. Exactly. So that's one example right where I think the transparency part is to have a department have a mechanism to share what other faculty do.

**Kelsey Arras:**

Yeah, I like that.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

And being aware of how much time those things take. But that can also be true for this very informal meeting with students that have issues, but see you as somebody to talk to about that and to help them. The lever of Routines and Structures refers to the policies and practices within the department or unit. We should strive to create a framework to ensure equitable allocation of that work related to our particular scenario. Do you have examples for us regarding routines and structures?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Absolutely. We in fact kind of do this right now with the merit reviews, at least in the College of Engineering. Each year we fill out pretty extensive form, and that goes to department chair. I think the system is starting to capture some of these service load by asking questions along what committee it is, how much time you spend on it. And I think if this is being looked at, the data is being analyzed on teaching service could lead to this a better recognition of this invisible service. And then if the data and

findings are actually being accessible to all, the faculty will have an opportunity to look at, "Oh, you know Mike is doing this. Oh, this is really great and then Sarah's doing that", and you get a sense of the community all trying to help their department, college, universities, and their professional societies. Over time, this can lead to a better reward structure. And I would say another thing is to rotate around the service assignments where we all have these committees, and I've served on a number of committees in my department. It changes annually, so we could potentially rotate across faculty so that it's more equitable that way.

**Kelsey Arras:**

I've heard from people that rotation is actually really refreshing because if you're on a committee with no end date in sight, sometimes it can be very taxing.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

I totally agree. I mean, as an individual, I like to challenge myself doing new things. Very refreshing. As you said, it allows you to come up with new ideas when you're in new environment with new people ideally. Right. If you're on the same committee all the time, your ideas are pretty stagnant. So when you do rotate across committee, you be exposed to functions of the department. I think it's a very valuable thing.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Yeah, setting up that policy that makes it fair. This reminds me of one of the Toy Story movies. It's the one where they're in the daycare.

**Kelsey Arras:**

Yes, the seniority toys. Exactly.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

The seniority toys, all the over there in the nice room where the kids play well with toys and then the preschool room where they're all abused. Yeah, exactly. And by the end, the final scene during the credits is that they're sharing that load in the preschool room and everybody takes a turn. Another lever is Opportunities, which refers to presenting service work as a positive experience for the faculty, not only as a chance for personal growth, but also for real impact. So Allen, what are your thoughts on this lever?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Yeah, it's great. I mean, opportunities, to me, can present itself as awards and honors, and our department has its own work committee that nominate faculty for departmental award. But also there are, as you know, many college level awards and there are also university awards. So I think for someone who excels at the service level, there are a number of awards that faculty can be nominated for. And this would be a great way to recognize for this work. Again, taking this invisible service to the visible level because once you win a war, that really speaks for itself.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

And that leads to that transparency. "Hey, if I know what my colleagues up and down the hall are doing with regards to service, I know that hey, that's actually an extra load. I might want to put them up for some recognition".

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Service sometimes can lead to real opportunity. And there are certain levels of service assignment that are high status, perhaps not for the junior faculty, but for more senior faculty. And serving on those is the opportunity to develop professional skill like leadership skills and if there's junior faculty who are on the rise, who may be in the make for being a leader down the road. And these can be very valuable experiences.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

One of the levers is Interactions. This is a big one about relational dynamics. For this particular case study, we should provide space for junior faculty to discuss and bring visibility to their service and teaching work. But Allen, do you have an example of how this works for our particular scenario?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

In the College of Engineering, we have something called a mentoring committee for the first year of the faculty that's hired. And this is a form where there is going to be interactions among the mentoring team. A topic like this could come up with, if I were on this committee, I would make sure that the junior faculties are feeling supported. That first of all is to show that you understand that there is a burden by this invisible service. And to be able to discuss this with the faculty and sort of help them understand how to ensure they feel that they're supported in doing this work. And obviously you know doing this mentoring is not a meeting. So this interactions can contribute to additional invisible service, even though the junior faculty is on the receiving end of things, but themselves can feel like that's another meeting. It's not service per se, but it's taking time away from them. And it's challenging these interactions because it's not just one-on-one is we're talking about a relationship. It could be with faculty who are going to work with you for the rest of your life at the university. Quite important.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Yeah. I think this is an important one, how we interact with other people that we need to set that positive tone towards service work and all the work that we're asked to do. Or even that just falls on us, like the invisible service of people just coming into your office to talk about something that we need to uplift that.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

That's right.

**Kelsey Arras:**

Is that an example of something that could fall into mentorship kind of responsibility? So although it's more of an informal mentorship, is that a way that somebody could call out that type of service that they're asked to do?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Absolutely. Yeah. I think in our annual report there's always a sections about others, and I think this asks "Have you mentor other students or postdocs" and so on and so forth. So one can put that down and sometimes it's really hard to quantify the time. But I think capturing that is helpful.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

The Expectations lever pertains to the explicit and implicit cues that are used within a group to define how the members can and should contribute to that group. So here we want to develop clarity about workloads regarding service and teaching, especially the expectation that they will be equitable. What would you suggest for specific actions to set proper expectations Allen?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

I have a couple ideas. First of all, when you think about expectation, there has to be some comparison. Either the department itself can establish benchmark for faculty work activities and communicate that to the faculty. So how do we quantify service load? Is it by the time or is it by the type of service or is it by the impact that you make? By doing that, you can then see individuals that don't meet that expectations and then be able to coach them. And the other point I want to make is tied to this particular scenario that you don't want to assume the type of service a faculty member wants to do. Our identity base, this is oftentimes very much ingrained in our culture. We assume that just because you're a certain identity, you would want to do this type of work to promote that identity. We don't want to make any assumptions.

**Kelsey Arras:**

So I had a question about expectations in some of our articles. It's also been discussed care work, thinking about it in terms of I'm having an elder care situations, we are people outside of work. Our identity is not just our jobs.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

So I have kids and every day at a certain time, I become a driver. Those are the kinds of care work that I have to do, and my wife and I, we have to work together in order to satisfy those constraints. So it is true that oftentimes our profession doesn't take into account of that. If you're in those scenario, I think talking to the department chair, making them aware of the additional workload we all have, aging parents think that at some point it's going to add on sort of this extra care work that we do. And I think just having clarity with the department is extremely helpful. And this benchmark that I just talked about in turn is not a fixed line, and the expectation fluctuates. My daughter is 12 years old, so 12 years ago I had to do certain type of care work and I don't have to do now. So that shifts over time. So I think in very much the same way, it's a dynamic benchmark.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

You're moving through several different ranks, but it's years.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

That's right.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

So we can take a multi-year approach.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Exactly.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

To service equity.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Absolutely. Absolutely. It's a running average. You're not talking about this year I happen to do 20 committees, therefore I do none the next year.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

This is a great time to jump in with a break in our lever parade, because we have a resource exactly on this topic. There's a paper on the Climate Case Study in "Frontiers in Psychology" by Escobar and colleagues Assessing Faculty Time Allocation at Several Historically Black Universities. They asked faculty at several HBU's about their time regarding the various components of their faculty life. And specifically they asked them three different questions about that: the ideal time that they would like to spend on that task, the current time that they spend on that task. And then the expected amount for promotion and tenure and for teaching and service. Current effort was a statistically significant uptick, higher than both the expected for tenure and the ideal levels. And the reverse was true for research with the current effort lower than both the ideal and the expectation for tenure. So at HBUs, this is an extra burden of service and teaching on these faculty. And it was across the board. A big finding is that faculty did not look to formal structures for these expectations, like the faculty handbook. They found the expected amounts for these various tasks, they just learned from their colleagues through the informal networks and conversations and so on. Lastly, we have the environment lever. This refers to the physical workspace. Allen, how can environment be a lever for service and teaching equity?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

This is always an interesting one, I think. What is the perceived availability of this faculty? So if you are somebody who sits in the office like myself too, and people see that you are in the office, they would naturally knock on your door and interrupt you and start doing things. So one way to address this is by, for instance, posting your true availability on the door.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Yeah, mhm

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

This is a time where you can come in and out of my office. But other than that, we should respect the person's time.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

Not only for students, but for other faculties. And in fact, their leaders, their department chair that knows, "Oh, that's what I can expect."

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

That's right. So even though I'm in my office doesn't mean I'm available. But you don't want to do this in the offensive way of say, "don't come" like posting a sign. "Not welcome." But it's a subtle way to let people know that you're busy working on something else.

**Kelsey Arras:**

You're having focused work blocks is what we call them a lot on staff. In the transition to hybrid work models or remote work models, how have you seen people balance faculty governance and service in those kind of environments?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Yeah, that's really interesting. I think this whole hybrid meeting and virtual meeting really started post COVID. It used to be that every meeting that we held were always in person. I think there are a certain advantages and disadvantages. Our campus is quite large. Anytime I have a meeting that's across campus, I have the budget extra 20 minutes, and I think the extra service load could come in where if you do everything virtually, I'm literally hopping from one Zoom room to another Zoom room without ever to move. If I had the opportunity to do things in person, there would be half an hour break because I would want to have a breather and be able to move from one location to the other.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

This gets to providing the transition time between meetings we have for classes, the 10 minute passing time. It's nice to end a few minutes, if not 10 minutes early to allow people to get to their next thing and have perhaps a little bit of a break, you know a chance to reset before that next activity. So Allen, we made it through our levers. Do you have any additional words on this topic of inequities and the distribution of labor amongst faculty?

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Just probably in by saying the main message here is how can we make invisible service visible. And the way we could do that is through really advocating for the service work that people do in general in some way of making it known. And the second is more internal. So how do we make sure that these service work are valued and coaching our faculty, what are junior/senior like, the service work all have a meaning to it, and the things that we do are appreciated at some level.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

So that was Professor Allen Liu from the Department of Mechanical Engineering here at the University of Michigan talking to us today about distribution of labor. Allen, it has been a pleasure to talk with you today.

**Dr. Allen Liu:**

Likewise. It was a pleasure to be on this podcast. Thank you very much.

**Dr. Mike Liemohn:**

This has been an episode of the Advancing Faculty Excellence Podcast, a product of U of M's ADVANCE program. The views expressed in this episode are those of the guests and hosts and do not reflect official positions of the University of Michigan. I'm Mike Liemohn, the host of this episode. This podcast was produced and edited by Kelsey Arras of U of M ADVANCE. Please join me extending to her a huge thank you. This podcast would not exist without it. We want to give a special thanks to our musical crew composition by WP Norton and performed by So Say We All! with WP Norton on lead guitar and University of Michigan, professors Elena Lemon on rhythm guitar, and Denise Sekaquaptewa on bass guitar. We also thank the Shapiro Library Design Lab team for production support, including usage of their sound studios. Please rate, review, and subscribe to this podcast. Thank you all for listening.