



Memorandum

To: R. Michael Banish
President, Faculty Senate

From: Robert A. Altenkirch 
President

Christine W. Curtis 
Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

Subject: Faculty Senate Resolution 17-18-12, Compensation of Faculty with Increased Teaching Levels

Date: August 31, 2018

Faculty Senate Resolution 17-18-12, Compensation of Faculty with Increased Teaching Levels, requests “that the University of Alabama in Huntsville re-establishes both, class teaching overloads and increasing incremental compensation for teaching classes above 35, 45, 55 and 80 students regardless whether a grader is available, that for courses where class size is limited by Federal, State, or Accrediting Bodies that instructors of such courses be compensated at the extra compensation level for a 35 student course, if at least 90% of the 10th day enrollment completes the class, that these teaching overload and class size incentives be applied retroactively back to, and from, the 2015-2017 academic year.”

Our response to these requests is divided into two parts: (1) faculty overloads and (2) incremental compensation for teaching classes above 35, 45, 55, and 80. Our response references several sections of the Faculty Handbook, which are provided below.

The Faculty Handbook in Chapter 7, Section 7.5 Faculty Workload states that “the workload of a tenured or tenure-earning faculty member normally includes obligations in three areas of activity: teaching, research or creative achievements, and service. The workload of clinical faculty is normally concentrated in the areas of clinical teaching and clinical practice. Deans, in consultation with department chairs, are responsible for administering faculty workloads in an equitable fashion and for weighing the impact of teaching loads on resources and productivity. The teaching responsibility for research-active, full-time faculty is normally 18 semester hours per academic year. Teaching responsibilities may be higher, with a maximum of 24 semester hours, or lower depending on the needs and mission of the department and the obligations of the faculty member. Exceptions to the standard are recommended by the appropriate

department chair and approved by the dean after discussion with the provost. Possible exceptions might include special assignments for the department, college, or university; supervision of professional projects, theses, or dissertations; and major time commitments to funded or unfunded research.”

The Faculty Handbook Chapter 7, Section 7. 7.6 Criteria for Evaluating Tenure-Earning, Clinical and Tenured Faculty, 7.6.1 General Criteria for Tenure-Earning and Tenured Faculty states: “Faculty members are evaluated on the basis of their effective performance or potential for effective performance in three areas of activity: (1) teaching, (2) research or creative achievements, and (3) service. These criteria form the basis for evaluating faculty members for appointment, annual performance reviews, tenure, promotion, and salary increases.”

The Faculty Handbook Chapter 7, Section 7. 7.6 Criteria for Evaluating Tenure-Earning, Clinical and Tenured Faculty, 7.6.3 General Criteria for Evaluating Clinical Faculty states: “Clinical faculty are evaluated on the basis of their effective performance in four areas of responsibility: 1) clinical teaching; 2) clinical scholarship; 3) clinical practice; and 4) service. Not all faculty are expected to contribute equally in all areas and the major emphasis is expected to be on clinical teaching and clinical practice.”

1) Faculty Overloads. At this time, course overloads, which are defined as teaching courses in addition to the a normal full teaching load, are approved for special circumstances where there is no faculty member or part-time faculty member who is able to carry the load as a part of their normal workload. Circumstances that have required course overloads in the last several years include but are not limited to the need to cover classes because of an unexpected illness or the untimely death of a faculty member, the unexpected retirement or departure of a faculty member, a new curriculum that requires additional teaching until sufficient faculty can be hired, and similar circumstances. The process that is described above in Chapter 7, Section 7.5 is followed and faculty are appropriately compensated for the additional teaching load. We attempt to minimize faculty teaching overloads to provide faculty sufficient time to conduct research, perform their service activities, to ensure that faculty can teach effectively and to have reasonable and balanced workloads in order to prevent burn-out, etc. Overloads may be highly detrimental for faculty who are seeking tenure and promotion to associate professor or promotion to professor if the priority is given to teaching extra for compensation rather than engaging in scholarship.

2) Incremental Compensation for Increased Teaching Levels of 35, 45, 55 and 80 Students. As stated in Chapter 7, Section 7.6.1 of the Faculty Handbook, full-time tenure-track, tenured and clinical faculty members are expected to perform teaching, research and service as their full-time commitment to the university. As you are aware, different disciplines and academic programs have different numbers of students and,

hence, different class sizes. The interest in a discipline can change with time and can be cyclic depending upon economic, societal, and cultural forces, resulting in the number of students interested in a given discipline to vary from decade to decade.

The request for incremental compensation for increased teaching levels raises a number of issues and pitfalls, mostly in the areas of fairness, potential detrimental consequences, and legality.

Fairness Some programs do not have much opportunity to teach large classes. The reasons for this situation could be caused by lower student interest, accreditation requirements, state statutes, or other constraints outside the control of the faculty member. Faculty in those programs are preparing their courses, teaching highly effectively while not having the opportunity for extra compensation. They are doing their jobs just as the faculty who are fortunate to be in disciplines where there substantial student demand. Incentive compensation can only engender feelings of being slighted in departments with fewer students when colleagues in larger programs are being paid more for teaching. It is also quite possible under the proposal that a faculty member teaching a larger class would receive extra compensation but overall not teach as many credit hours as another faculty member who does not receive extra compensation because of the size of classes they teach. For example, a faculty teaching a full teaching load of classes with fewer than 35 students may teach more students and have higher credit hours production in a semester than a faculty member who is receiving incentive compensated for teaching one or two classes of 35, 45, and 55. Finally, issues of fairness arise when there are differences in the work associated in particular courses. A four or five credit hour course with 30 students could involve significantly more work than a three credit hour course with 50 students. Likewise, smaller writing- or research-intensive courses often require greater effort than large lecture-based courses with multiple choice exams.

Detrimental Consequences. The drive for extra compensation can have detrimental consequences. For instance, assistant professors are typically the lowest paid tenure-track faculty. Are they going to seek to teach large classes and forgo research so they receive more compensation in the short term? In addition, the extra compensation can contribute to a negative climate within a department or college. Popular or highly effective faculty attract more students in their courses, leading them to earn more for teaching the same course than others. Competition also arises when certain courses are more likely to have higher enrollments while others almost never have as high enrollments. Who decides which faculty members are assigned courses with higher enrollment potential?

Legal Issues. The original reason given for discontinuing the practice of extra compensation was because of the Department of Education ruling on incentive compensation that does not allow extra compensation for recruiting students or for encouraging them to seek financial aid. This particular practice has been abused in some instances by for-profit colleges and possibly in a few public institutions. Whether such extra compensation would lead to abuse at UAH is not known, but the potential for abuse exists. Here is why. There have been occasions where faculty members teaching courses have actively recruited students into those courses. As long as the faculty member is receiving the same compensation for teaching that course as she or he does for all other courses, there is no problem. However, if a faculty member actively recruits students to take their course, and there is extra compensation based on the outcome of that recruitment, then there is a federal issue.

A faculty member's job obligations are to teach, conduct research, and engage in service. Extra compensation to perform the functions of one's job is not reasonable. We believe that it is safe to say that the taxpayers of Alabama would not understand why extra compensation is being paid for a basic job function. Moreover, the proposed extra compensation has to come from generated revenue which means that because our university has only finite sources of funding some other need would have to forgo funding.

We checked with our sister institutions in The University of Alabama System to determine if incremental compensation is provided to faculty teaching larger classes. We found that neither The University of Alabama nor UAB provides incremental pay for larger class sizes. Basically, full-time faculty are expected to fulfill their primary job responsibilities without additional compensation. The proposal for re-establishing incremental compensation for class teaching overloads and increasing incremental compensation for teaching classes above 35, 45, 55 and 80 students regardless whether a grader is available is not accepted.