

**AAC Ad-Hoc Subcommittee on Faculty Loading
Summary Report (Phase One)
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Revised**

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Charge to the Subcouncil on Faculty Loading:

The AAC expects to study loading in two phases, with the Subcouncil on Faculty Loading charged with the first phase only. This first stage will focus on fact finding and make a recommendation as to whether a relatively more restrictive or comprehensive scope should be undertaken in a second phase of study. The second phase will make policy recommendations.

The AAC charges the Subcouncil on Faculty Loading to:

- Become familiar with faculty teaching loads at Union (faculty teaching responsibilities and teaching credits). The AAC suggests the following steps:

Undertake fact finding and collect a list of issues that should be studied in the consideration of loading (may include, but not limited to senior thesis, WAC, GenEd, ID programs, etc.).

Survey faculty on loading and collect issues that faculty believe should be addressed in a second phase.

Survey academic deans on loading and collect issues deans believe should be addressed in a second phase.

Consider loading practices at other colleges.

Become familiar with the loading reports from 1994-1996, the Division IV loading report from 2001, and the May 2012 Memo on Loading from Chairs and Directors.

- Prepare a summary report of findings and recommendations with appendices of data to be completed by the end of Spring term 2013.

Part I:

Methodology:

Upon receiving our charge in the end of Winter Term 2013, the Subcouncil began meeting to organize and strategize. In the Spring Term, we met with Vice President Therese McCarty (serving as Acting President at time this report was completed), Dean David Hayes (serving as Vice President at the time this report was completed), and Deans Marc Wunderlich and Nic Zarrelli. In addition, we reviewed historical loading documents and numerous supporting documents (see the Document Inventory for a complete list of documents reviewed) to establish “Loading Guidelines/Norms”. We then circulated this document to the entire faculty and invited them to complete a survey on how well the document reflected their own loading and soliciting their opinions on issue. (The survey was reviewed by George Bizer, Professor of Psychology and expert on survey design to reduce the possibility of bias). Forty percent of the faculty completed the survey. A similar survey was created for Chairs and Directors requesting comments from their perspectives in those capacities, with 100% return rate. Feedback from these surveys was then incorporated into the Loading Guidelines/Norms to create a document entitled “Current Loading Practices”. Working with Dean McCarty, the Subcouncil also created a survey of questions regarding loading policies that was distributed to the Northeast Deans’ discussion list (an informal organization through which area Deans can post questions and compare information from colleagues). All materials were collected by July 2013. Meeting intermittently over the summer, the Subcouncil synthesized the materials and produced a report in September 2013.

Subcouncil’s Findings:

Currently there is the perception among many faculty of inequity in loading. This may be due, to some degree, to the absence of an updated, comprehensive document explaining the models of loading and the rationale for each. We intend that the “Current Practices” document will be widely disseminated to the faculty. We also desire that this report will be made broadly available to the faculty so that each department and division will have a better understanding of the pressures experienced by their colleagues in other areas of the college. It should be noted, however, that the “Current Practices” are just that and may include deviations from previously agreed upon policies that are no longer relevant in the current academic environment. For example, the rapid expansion of the Interdisciplinary (ID) programs has put strain on some staffing and required ad hoc decisions because policies were established long before those programs were conceived.

Equally important is the broadly expressed feeling of being overstretched that permeates the faculty. Union has changed tremendously in the last decade and each change has put new demands on faculty time. Our formal teaching load has remained constant, but informal student interactions and non-traditional teaching experiences have increased substantially. These include the expansion of student research opportunities including

mentoring ever more senior theses and summer research fellowships, the introduction of research practica and sophomore Scholars' projects, as well as new social programs such as Minerva and Posse. Each of these small opportunities for involvement with students has been embraced by many faculty and many of us find them among our most rewarding and effective teaching experiences. Indeed, student research has become a defining emblem of a Union education. The standard courses, labs, and studio or performance classes for which our loading guidelines are designed have been augmented by a rich array of non-classroom learning that almost all faculty want to encourage; but putting time into this non-classroom learning while maintaining our existing classroom-related structures has resulted in a total teaching load that seems unsustainable. In addition, there has been a subtle increase in expectations of scholarly productivity as illustrated by the new requirements for promotion to full professor and the discounting of service with respect to research. All of this, added to the substantial service requirements of our faculty governance system, creates a work-load that many faculty feel is too high.

Based on the surveys and other information, we consider the evolving curricular changes to be evidence not of our failures but our successes and genuine interest in student learning. We are succeeding in transforming Union into a school with a focus on process and experiential learning, better preparing students for an information-rich future in which the ability to apply, analyze and synthesize this abundant information is ever more crucial.

Recommendation:

We feel that, with minor exceptions (see below), we have compiled comprehensive information as instructed in our charge. This has revealed a tremendously complex set of loading practices with many contingencies and incongruities. In such a system, small changes can sometimes cascade, causing unexpected and unintended consequences. Therefore, although it is our feeling that it may be possible to alleviate some of the problems stated above by implementing some carefully chosen and relatively limited changes, we recommend that the AAC conduct a review that is comprehensive in scope so as to thoroughly consider the consequences of any changes, minor or otherwise, to the loading practices. In working toward this conclusion, the Subcouncil developed arguments for both a comprehensive and a limited review and we feel that these arguments help to communicate the complexity of the problem. Therefore, we have included them in this report in Part II below.

Areas in which additional data collection is warranted:

- impact of ID programs on departments. This should consider:
 - addition/subtraction of students
 - the distribution of students in the departmental curriculum (i.e., are they concentrated in the introductory courses)

- the need to be revenue neutral
- comparison with other trimester schools (Dartmouth & Carlton –neither participated in the Northeast Deans’ survey)
- number of class minutes/week question (raised by Dean McCarty in her interview)

Part II –Arguments for a Comprehensive vs. Limited review

Arguments for a comprehensive review:

The current practices have strayed considerably from those originally agreed upon in the 1996 Loading Report and there is the impression of inequity in loading. Fifty-five of 88 respondents to the Faculty Survey (62%) somewhat or strongly supported a comprehensive review in the multiple choice question and many argued for a comprehensive review in the open-ended question. (It should be noted that we did not include a multiple choice question to gauge the support for a limited review).

- Everything is interconnected and if we start making changes around the edges, they will reverberate through the system and create more real or perceived problems and inequities.
- Every department has its own set of problems that have produced their loading stresses. Some have more demand on their courses than they can comfortably sustain, others have too little demand which forces them to offer numerous uncompensated independent study courses to maintain their majors. It will not be possible to address these varied, systemic problems in a piecemeal way. A comprehensive review could produce a number of models for loading, much like the current system. Each department and program could choose the model that would best fit their needs and those of their students.

A comprehensive review should take the following areas into consideration.

- Thesis
 - credit for thesis supervision
 - require theses by departments or programs
 - number of terms and hours/week? (at least for which credit can be given?)
- Interdisciplinary Programs
- Number of minutes taught per week
- Number of courses in the major
- Number of lab courses required (there is the belief that we require more than our counterparts and, in relevant departments, more than the accreditation institutions require)
- Use of teaching assistants
- Use of graduate level laboratory instructors
- Amount of credit for teaching labs

- Course releases
 - chair/director
 - “Demi-deans”
 - Grant buy-outs
 - Committee work
 - Pre-health
 - Pre-law
- Common curriculum
 - FYP/SRS
 - Other Common curriculum requirements – i.e., SCLB
 - Revisit which courses should count for Common Curriculum
- Recitations
- Team teaching
- Independent study
- Sophomore scholars projects
- Arts/research practica
- Carry-overs
- Very small/large classes
- Total number of student contacts/year (# students taught per Full Time Equivalent (FTE) per year)
 - The way that this is calculated should be reviewed. The current approach does not take course releases into account. This disproportionately affects small departments that have faculty with course releases and deflates their students/FTE statistic.
 - Should we pro-rate contacts based on credit for the teaching task (for example, for labs that count as 0.75 course should each student equal 0.75 student)?
 - How do we handle students who drop the course, particularly if they repeat or take a seat that would have otherwise been filled?
- Extremely high number of advisees

Arguments for a limited review:

- A limited review will be difficult, but given the interconnectedness of the loading policies, a comprehensive review would be even more difficult to do fairly.
- A complete overhaul will require not only a tremendous effort by the next AAC subcouncil, but an equally large effort by each department and program to reconfigure their curriculum to accommodate the changes. More than 10% of the respondents to the faculty survey felt that this would be best undertaken in conjunction with a calendar change, a reduction in load (to 5 courses) or an increase in faculty size.

- Changing student preferences and interdisciplinary programs appear to have redistributed students to some degree, which has left some departments unable to provide enough courses while others struggle to fill theirs. In the short term, it would be neither possible nor desirable to shift faculty from under-enrolled departments to overenrolled ones since shifts in student interests may be temporary and, as a liberal arts college, we are committed to providing a comprehensive curriculum. We need to examine the institutionalized situations that incentivize the teaching of very small classes. These include required theses, small laboratories and small seminar courses (which often run with fewer than 10 students).
- A limited review could address a few very acute problems such as:
 - senior thesis credits (identified as inappropriately compensated by 44% of the 78 faculty who responded to this survey question),
 - independent study (mentioned by 27%), and
 - sophomore scholar's projects (22%).
- Areas to consider to free up necessary teaching resources to allow reallocation to these acute problems:
 - Reducing the number of courses in major.
 - Reducing the number of courses in common curriculum.
 - Limiting the number of theses (reconsider required theses).
 - Reducing the number of labs and/or very small (seminar style) courses.
- "Tweaks" that would help:
 - Allowing credit for essential independent study at the same rate as senior thesis – 8 terms of independent study equals 1 course.
 - Allowing carry-over of these partial courses for several years.
 - Allowing very small courses to run on a pro-rated basis that is equivalent to the senior thesis/independent study approach.
 - Perhaps this should be paired with a minimum number of students/FTE to balance loads.
- Members of Division II seemed to express the most satisfaction with the status quo, so perhaps this type of system is what the entire college should be working toward as much as is possible.

In weighing these arguments, we feel that although the problems may ultimately be alleviated by limited changes, that conclusion would best be reached by conducting a review of comprehensive scope.

Part III - Summary of Data

Current Loading Practices:

This document provides details on current loading practices throughout the campus. This summary is based on the 1991/1996 Loading Report, the 2001 Division IV Loading Report, two informal reports prepared by Dean McCarty (2011) and Deans McCarty and Hayes (2012), responses from Chairs and Directors to a questionnaire (2013), responses from Faculty to a questionnaire (2013), and from conversations with all relevant Deans. This summary reviews the basic models of loading (we identified 4). The report then continues to list how credit is attributed (or not attributed) to different types of teaching at the college including: laboratory courses, the extra 50 minute class meeting, team taught courses, terms abroad, studio art, music ensembles, other types of practicum courses, independent study courses, summer research, larger courses, WAC, FYP and SRS, under-enrolled courses, seminar series, and cumulative overload. These data reveal that Departments often have unique systems of assigning teaching credit, which can lead to a sense of inconsistency and unfairness. The Committee highly recommends that the AAC read the entire Current Loading Practices report to fully understand the various ways in which Departments handle loading. The Committee also recommends that this document be made public to all faculty in the spirit of transparency. Please see Appendix A for Current Loading Practices and Appendix B for the Loading Guidelines/Norms (based upon historical documents and interviews with deans only). We recommend that these two documents be made available to the entire faculty.

Faculty Survey Responses:

The survey was sent out initially on May 23 and closed on July 3, 2013, with several reminders sent during that time, and 89 of the 218 non-adjunct faculty, a good response rate of 40%, answered it. Questions 1 and 2 were linked, with question 1 asking respondents whether they supported or opposed undertaking a comprehensive view of faculty loading which could lead to changes in the way in which teaching credit is assigned, and question 2 asked for an explanation of their vote in question 1. Of the 88 responses, 62.5% strongly or somewhat supported a comprehensive review, with the highest support coming from Division I (100%) and the lowest from Division II (52%). Only 10% strongly opposed such a review. Among the 79 faculty explaining their answers in question 2, those supporting a review most often cited the length of time current policies had been in effect or a desire for more equity, clarity, or transparency, while those opposing one most often thought the current system was okay, a review would be a waste of time, should not be done now, or that a limited review would suffice. Question 3 asked whether the Loading Guidelines we provided were “consistent with the way in which credit is assigned to you personally,” with question 4 asking for a description of any discrepancies identified. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents to question 3, felt that the guidelines accurately reflected their loading. Comments most

often referred to uncertainty about the guidelines or thesis credit with a few responses to other issues. Question 5 (78 responses) asked whether there were types of student interactions for which current policies did not assign appropriate credit, with senior thesis and various issues with independent studies or research projects being cited most often by far. Question 6 (69 responses) asked whether changes in student interactions since the respondent had begun at Union had impacted their overall workload. Responses were quite diverse: the single most common response was no or not much (12), but 11 specific changes were cited 5-11 times. Question 7 (66 responses) asked whether respondents would change the assignment of credit in their departments if total resources had to stay the same. The most prevalent answer was “No” (29) and 9 others said “Uncertain” or “Depends.” Three refused to answer the question under the zero-sum assumption and 6 others answered but considered more resources crucial. Answers were very diverse, with frequent discussions but varied opinions concerning senior thesis (10), some version of fairness (8), undergraduate or sophomore research (7), and labs (5). Some expressed varying degrees of skepticism about whether any changes would improve the situation, given the constraints,. Question 8 (68 responses) asked whether respondents would support changes in curriculum or classroom practice to offer more credit for activities that now do not receive it, by increases in the number of larger classes, use of student assistants, or reductions in courses in the major or common curriculum or in the number of laboratories. No one of the five specific suggestions received comment from as many as half of those answering, and only reductions of courses in the major or common curriculum drew support of 70% or more among those answering. However, these results did not seem to indicate a mandate for the status quo: only 4 faculty said they would like to see no changes and 6 commented on tradeoffs, while 6 argued for a semester system, 4 for fractional credit for courses based on student numbers and 3 for maximum flexibility. Question 9 (37 responses) included 11 arguments for some kind of regime change (calendar, 5-course load, or increased number of faculty); 12 comments on flexibility, uniformity, or willingness to do uncompensated work, though these did not necessarily agree; and varied other answers that advocated increased transparency or fairness, thanked the committee for the survey, or offered specific ideas on how the college should proceed. Please see Appendices C, D and L for a written summary of the survey, a spreadsheet summary and the complete list of responses, respectively.

Chairs and Directors Responses:

This document includes all the responses from Chairs to the spring 2013 survey. Chairs were asked 1) Are the current Loading Guidelines consistent with the way in which teaching credit is assigned in your Department today? And 1A) If not, please describe any discrepancies. The Committee received responses from all the Chairs, whose comments ranged from simply confirming that yes, the document we sent was consistent with current practices, to lengthy details and clarification. Points of clarification have

already been incorporated into the Current Practices document, though comments on the reasoning for these systems have been left out to keep the Current Practices document concise and as objective as possible. Comments that indicated areas of concern that certain Chairs would like further explored are reflected in the section “Areas to Consider” in this summary report. The AAC may wish to look at the original responses to better understand some of the reasoning behind current loading practices and where pressures lay. Please see Appendix E for the complete responses of the chairs and directors.

Interviews with Deans:

In accordance with our charge, the Subcouncil on Academic Loading met with the academic deans to discuss loading issues and “collect issues deans believe should be addressed in a second phase”. Although we met with Deans Wunderlich and Zarrelli, to ensure that we adequately understood the perspectives of those dealing mostly with students and administration, respectively, most substantive comments came from Deans McCarty and Hayes who brought up many of the same issues. Both agreed that the Interdisciplinary (ID) Programs had exposed possible inequities in loading, and both felt that the time was right for reassessment of faculty loading practices. Both seemed to support a comprehensive review, involving ID programs, Common Curriculum requirements, number of courses in majors, etc. and McCarty felt that it should be possible to make some changes to address the problems without abandoning all the features of our current loading system. Both mentioned inequities in the number of students taught per year by faculty in different departments, while acknowledging that it was difficult to assess the time commitment of different types of teaching. Both deans also felt that some dimensions of our course and program requirements exceed those at other schools, for example: number of minutes taught per week, number of required lab courses, number of courses in a major, etc. They felt that, although it will not be easy, it could be possible for departments to relieve pressure points by reducing the courses required for majors, strategically increasing certain class sizes, and/or other relatively small adjustments. In addition, Hayes, noting the difficulty in staffing First Year Preceptorials and Sophomore Research Seminars, questioned whether it was possible for us to maintain both the ID programs and the current Common Curriculum. Dean McCarty also indicated that she favored our current array-of-options loading approach over a ‘one size fits all’ loading scheme that would force the entire faculty into one approach to loading. Both Deans felt that it should be possible for faculty to tailor their curricula and major requirements to reduce stress without sacrificing educational quality for our students. Please see Appendix F for a more complete summary of the Deans’ interviews.

Faculty Loading Practices at Peer Institutions

A brief, 14 question survey was sent out to a group of deans of small colleges in the Northeastern U.S. Deans from 17 colleges completed the survey, 13 of which are in our

comparison group. In a series of questions regarding teaching load and the treatment of various non-standard types of teaching, Union was with the majority of schools in 9 of the 14 question areas. The 5 questions in which we departed from the majority related to credit given for: laboratory teaching (Union appears to be in the middle of the group, although more information is needed to draw any meaningful conclusion), direction of performance ensembles (we seem to be on the low end of compensation), and senior thesis (we are unique in giving credit in some circumstances but not in others). In addition, our overall load of 6 courses per year is higher than that in 15 of the 17 schools. Thus, the overall impression is that Union is in the middle to low end of the spectrum represented by the participating schools (US News rankings from 3 to 60) in how we allocate our teaching credit. It should be noted that this is a fairly simplistic survey and follow-up is warranted in several of these topic areas. Please see Appendices G, H and I for the Northeast Deans' Survey Questions, a summary of the Northeast Deans' Survey Results and the complete responses, respectively.

Appendices:

- A. Current Loading Practices
- B. Loading Guidelines/
- C. Summary of Responses to Faculty Loading
- D. Faculty Survey (anonymous) responses spreadsheet
- E. Chairs' and Directors' Survey Questions with Responses (verbatim)
- F. Summary of Interviews with Deans
- G. Northeast Deans' Survey questions
- H. Faculty Loading Practices at Peer Institutions
- I. Northeast Deans' Survey responses and quantitative summaries
- J. Senior thesis credit by department – derived from the responses to the chairs and directors survey.
- K. Course release Norms – this information was supplied by Dean Zarrelli.
- L. Supporting spreadsheet to the response from the chair of the Mechanical Engineering Department to the Chairs' and Directors' Survey.
- M. Faculty Loading Survey – complete responses