



Dissatisfied and Frustrated in Academia: Women Faculty Members' Experiences of Inequitable Workloads

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Abstract: This study examines the experiences of women faculty regarding inequitable workloads. Data were collected via eight focus groups with 29 women professors at a research-oriented university in the U.S. Midwest. Our findings showed dissatisfaction with workload distribution regarding the quantity of teaching, size of classes, and time spent on high-quality mentoring and advising (graduate) students. Findings also revealed concerns over non-promotable or low-promotable internal and external service tasks on and beyond committees. Participants noted a lack of tools at the department, college, and university level to efficiently monitor, address, and correct workload inequities. We propose the *Awareness-Rewards-Equity* (ARE) framework to capture faculty work tasks and facilitate conversations and policy development toward more equitable workloads.

Keywords: women faculty, workload, U.S. academia, equity, STEM, teaching, service

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Introduction

A growing body of literature has shown that scholars have different experiences in higher education depending on their gender. The U.S. academy is structured in a way that often advantages men over most women by providing more opportunities and support. One significant obstacle is the pipeline into certain disciplines, such as the “broader science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)” communities, including some social sciences (NSF ADVANCE, n.d.), as well as into better paying disciplines and full-time faculty positions (Colby & Fowler, 2021). Once inside academia, studies show women are saddled with service and teaching assignments (Domingo et al., 2022; Drake et al., 2024; Gordon et al., 2024) that do not contribute to promotion (Babcock et al., 2017, 2022a). Women faculty are asked more often to do tasks that are less promotable and do more teaching and service than men faculty who in turn have more time for research (O’Meara et al., 2022).

We analyze how women faculty at a research-oriented university in the U.S. Midwest have experienced workload equity before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data are from eight focus groups in 2022 with 29 women faculty members who are on the tenure track or tenured, in a variety of humanities, natural and social sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics disciplines. Drawing on a typology of conditions for creating equitable workloads (O’Meara et al., 2022), we show the multiple ways that women faculty identify a lack of awareness of who does what and how much, the lack of rewards for faculty members who go above and beyond, and a problematic distribution of workload tasks. Our study contributes to further understanding how women faculty in the U.S. experience workload issues. Based on our empirical data and coding process, our *Awareness-Rewards-Equity* (ARE) framework emerged to guide policy and practical departmental conversations about workload.

The Gendered Academy

Feminist scholars theorize that work organizations are gendered (Acker, 1990), such

that workplace logics—their culture, policies and practices, and interactions—are not gender-neutral. They are based on the premise that organizations and the underlying culture value certain bodies and behaviors. Consequently, these logics dictate who should do what and in which ways in the workplace. Perceptions about women's and men's abilities, and their expected roles at work, shape hiring, job allocation, salary, promotions and other rewards, and daily work experiences.

While the U.S. academy has some distinctions from other workplaces in that its employees – faculty – participate in “the production and dissemination of knowledge and faculty governance,” it similarly operates as a gendered organization (Laube, 2021, p. 477). For instance, what knowledge is valued and recognized is not the same for all faculty members. Epistemic exclusion (Fricker, 2007) reflects the ways that disciplinary biases may privilege certain scholarship, journals, or methods to the detriment of marginalized faculty (Lerchenmueller & Sorenson, 2018; Settles et al., 2021). Faculty members may occupy different roles over the course of their professional career, but women experience distinct barriers to opportunities for leadership (Bain & Cummings, 2000; González, 2010; Schmitt & Wilkesmann, 2020). Finally, faculty undergo performance evaluations that assess their progress towards garnering a reward (e.g., tenure, promotion, salary raises). Women are underrepresented at higher ranks, are less likely to have a tenured position within each rank, and are more likely to leave without tenure (Durodoye et al., 2020; Griffin et al., 2013), leading to consistent pay disparities (American Association of University Professors, 2025).

Undergirding many of these gendered outcomes is how the workload tasks that faculty are expected to perform are recognized, valued, and distributed among faculty members. While they may vary depending on the kind of university, typical work expectations of faculty within U.S. universities include research, teaching, and service (Panda & Gupta, 2014). However, there is a distinction between work tasks that demonstrate hard skills or products that have clear evaluative metrics, versus soft skills that may go undocumented or, if documented, are undervalued. For instance, at a research-intensive university, much more weight is placed on research,

followed by teaching, during faculty evaluation processes. Promotable tasks are “instrumental to increasing the organization’s currency,” visible to colleagues, require specialized skills, and prepare a person for future tasks by developing skills and access to positions (Babcock et al., 2022a, p. 21-23). Research is highly valued and an easily quantifiable product that has formal and clear evaluative metrics. Though many teaching tasks are captured in the evaluation process, it is “either a negative factor in compensation or ... unrelated to compensation” (Bellas, 1999, p. 97).

In contrast, service tasks are valued the least (Griffith & Altinay, 2020; Domingo et al., 2022) and do not significantly impact tenure and promotion compared to research and teaching (Babcock et al., 2022a). Babcock et al. (2022a) describe non-promotable work as a “task [that] matters to your organization but will not help you advance your career” (p. 17), meaning tasks that are often invisible and routine, do not require specialized skills, and do not advance one’s skills (pp. 24-25). In academia, this means, for instance, serving on committees, planning events, recruiting students, resolving conflict among coworkers, filling in for absent people, getting coffee, cleaning and organizing, editing, and compiling others’ work if you are not the editor (Babcock et al., 2022b), among others such as writing recommendation letters or conducting reviews. These work tasks are not always quantifiable and captured in formal metrics. Domingo et al. (2022) refer to this as “hidden service,” arguing that these tasks may go “unnoticed or undocumented” because they “do not meet the formal criteria for inclusion” on curriculum vitae (CVs) or in retention, tenure, and promotion (RTP) documents (pp. 367, 376). In their study, faculty gave examples of “hidden service that were outside of the professional roles recorded on CVs or RTP self-summaries” (p. 374). This additional service work “plays a role in creating barriers to career advancement” (p. 374).

Within service and teaching, some activities are more valued and quantifiable than others. Using interviews with pre-tenured and tenured faculty, Hanasono et al. (2019) examine how institutional gender biases impact the evaluation of service. Their study shows task-oriented, quantifiable, and competitively selected service roles, such as leadership within national academic organizations, are perceived as

“masculine” and are more likely listed on CVs by all participants. In contrast, relational work such as mentorship/career guidance, recommendation letters, and student recruitment is perceived as “feminine.” Only women participants say they provide service that they may be able to add to their CVs, including emotional labor that goes into relational maintenance labor with students, including those who are not their own advisees, and colleagues, but is not adequately recognized in their units. Moreover, CV templates that are specific to institutions and required to be filled out for internal evaluations may also not accommodate certain types of service in the template design and focus heavily on quantitative metrics, as was the case at the university where we collected data. Hanasono et al. (2019) conclude universities tend to reward task-oriented over relational-oriented service, aligning with Acker’s (1990) argument that organizations are inherently masculine and favor task-oriented roles that can be measured empirically, therefore undervaluing relational-oriented services that support others.

This distinction in valuing some faculty members’ service and teaching work over others is particularly poignant since much of this work in academia is relational and requires soft skills, such as mentoring and guiding colleagues and students. This work often includes enduring additional emotional labor (Bellas, 1999). Hochschild (1983) contends this labor is subject to ‘feelings rules’ that govern how, when, and the degree to which one can and should feel a certain way and then act accordingly. Given entrenched expectations that women are “nurturing,” the labor of caring about the well-being and needs of others (e.g., students, colleagues), falls more often on them (Guarino & Borden, 2017). Though emotional labor is difficult to quantify and capture in formal metrics, it is no less work on the part of faculty who provide it.

The distribution of non-promotable and hidden tasks is gendered, with women faculty frequently performing these tasks due to a combination of push and pull factors. Women are more likely to volunteer due to the expectation that they do so, and – in part because they did or were made to do certain tasks in the past – and accept requests to volunteer to avoid punishment for violating peer expectations by saying no (Babcock et al., 2017, 2022a). Women faculty in the U.S. academy are

asked more often to do work that is less promotable or does not advance their career and spend more time on teaching and service than men faculty, while men spend more time on research (which advances careers) than women (O'Meara et al., 2022, p. 5). For instance, O'Meara et al. (2017) show women faculty receive an average of 3.4 more work requests than men faculty, including for more teaching, advising, and professional service. Similarly, Guarino and Borden (2017) find women faculty report 0.6 hours more service per week than men faculty.

Women also may feel a pull to do certain kinds of work that they find personally rewarding and to give back to the community. While women want to contribute to campus service, such activities are devalued, inequitably distributed with no reward/compensation, and lack clarity/consistency regarding promotional policies; more specifically, women report more time on committee and community service work compared to men (Domingo et al., 2022). Drake et al. (2024) similarly show women faculty do more annual service and teaching than men. Even how faculty think about service work and its contributions is gendered – most men try to avoid it to further their careers, and most women view it more communally (O'Meara, 2016). Further, Gordon et al. (2024) find that when women of color say no, their answer is not always respected by persons higher up in the academic hierarchy, indicating that a strategy of declining a request puts the burden on individuals to navigate difficult work situations. Overall, faculty from minoritized groups, especially women, perform more teaching and service labor compared to other groups (Guarino & Borden, 2017; Misra et al., 2021; O'Meara et al., 2022).

Universities have made efforts to support women faculty toward retention and promotion. For instance, Hutchins et al. (2022) find that a mid-career workshop helped women faculty members to have increased knowledge about the promotion process and a better understanding of promotion criteria, including “increasing service visibility” (p. 26), which led to these faculty members “feeling more in control of the process” (p. 26). Long-Fox et al. (2025) find that an Advocates & Allies program institutionalized mentoring, including on service loads, and Peer Mentor Circles helped (women) faculty raise concerns in a confidential space, foster

“supportive, development-focused faculty relationships” (p. 15), and to be clearer about institutional expectations for promotion. Long-Fox et al. (2025), however, note the Advocates & Allies program reached those “eager to learn about gender equity, yet this left out those who may need the training the most—those who either do not perceive the value of the program or are too busy to participate” (p. 25). At the policy level, Miksys et al. (2024) find in their analysis of institutional policies related to promotion, tenure, retention, and recruitment that in particular “department-level changes may be important for institutional transformation, as the most variation and masculine leaning texts were found on department webpages” (p. 37), and as faculty members spend most of their time in their home department, which “typically sets expectations for workload and provides a social milieu [sic]” (p. 37). Thus, while research demonstrates how the gendered academy creates barriers for women’s careers, interventions can help to lessen the barriers.

Analytical Framework

To better understand how women interpret and experience faculty workloads in the academy, we used the conceptual framework by O’Meara and colleagues (2022) as a guiding tool. Their framework includes six criteria to guide universities toward achieving more workload equity (p. 6):

- *Transparency*: widely visible information about faculty work activities available for department members to see.
- *Clarity*: clearly identified and well-understood benchmarks for faculty work activities.
- *Credit*: recognize and reward faculty members who are expending more effort in certain areas.
- *Norms*: a commitment to ensuring faculty workload is fair and have put systems in place that reinforce these norms.
- *Context*: acknowledge that different faculty members have different strengths, interests, and demands that shape their workloads and offer

workload flexibility to recognize this context.

- *Accountability*: mechanisms in place to ensure that faculty members fulfill their work obligations and receive credit for their labor (O'Meara et al., 2022, p. 6).

We build from this framework to offer a model that can guide departmental conversations toward more equitable practices. Based on our data and findings, our *Awareness-Rewards-Equity* (ARE) model emerged and highlights three overarching and connected questions: 1) Who is doing what? (Awareness), 2) Who is doing how much and why? (Rewards), and 3) Who is supposed to do what, how much, and why? (Equity).

Method

Focus groups are ideal for understanding the range of experiences of individuals who share common characteristics and in-group communication (Krueger & Casey, 2015), which applied to our study. We focused on tenure-track and tenured women faculty, as they share the same process of performance evaluation for research, teaching, and service. Because focus groups can be difficult to populate and only a limited eligible population existed, we used multiple avenues for recruitment (Krueger & Casey, 2015): an institutional email list, website, newsletter, social media, and personal outreach.

Data Collection

The research site is a large, research-intensive university in the U.S. Midwest, with eleven schools and colleges that employ tenure or tenure-track faculty. Focus group participants identified as women faculty; all were either tenured or in tenure-track positions. We initially recruited from the university's STEM departments across three colleges. We followed this with recruitment from other disciplines in ten colleges and schools for wider data collection across the institution. As a result, our focus groups

had either all STEM faculty (5 groups, 19 participants) or all non-STEM faculty (3 groups, 10 participants). Overall, women faculty from 20 departments (of the 73 distinct academic units at the university (27%) across five colleges/schools participated. STEM participants came from 13 distinct units, representing 56.52% of all STEM units (n=23). Non-STEM participants came from eight distinct units, representing 16% of all non-STEM units (n=50). In addition, we stratified the groups by rank so faculty who were not yet tenured could speak freely. Of 314 women tenured/tenure track faculty members who were eligible at the time for the focus groups, 29 participated (9.2% of all eligible women faculty) in eight focus groups: three with assistant professors, three with associate professors, and two with full professors.

Focus groups were conducted between February and May 2022, when faculty had adapted to a mix of in-person and remote classes and meetings following disruptions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. The university transitioned to remote work in March 2020 and continued to offer mostly online classes through the end of Fall 2020.

Each group included three to five participants, as small groups are conducive for discussing topics that participants deem important, are experts in, and have strong feelings about, all of which applied to our study (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Each focus group meeting lasted 90-120 minutes and was recorded via Zoom; the audio was transcribed by a transcription service. Participants' confidentiality was protected by slight changes in transcripts to protect their identity, allowing them to choose pseudonyms, which most participants did, and noting race/ethnicity as white or faculty of color (rather than more specific race/ethnicity self-descriptions to protect identities). Each focus group was conducted by three members of the research team: two co-moderators and a technical assistant.

Using a semi-structured questionnaire, we asked participants about their experiences with hidden/unequal workload, focusing on teaching and service, as the literature shows these are persistent points of workload inequity. For instance, to discuss transparency and clarity, we asked how participants learned what was

expected of them in terms of teaching, advising, service, and research. To assess accountability and norms, we asked which mechanisms and policies, if any, exist in their department to monitor faculty workload. To address context and rewards, we asked how policies or guidelines are implemented, and which barriers exist toward implementation. We added an open-ended question to bring up other concerns. Participants were asked the same questions across rank, with slight adjustments when probing concerns of tenure-track vs. tenured faculty members, for instance, the transition from assistant to associate and/or full professor. Moderators and assistants wrote memos after each focus group conversation for the development of themes and codes for analysis.

Data Analysis

We employed textual analysis to discover main themes in participants' responses and developed a codebook for in-depth analysis through inductive, open coding (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Our team met weekly to compare repeatedly arising themes and exceptional aspects (Fram, 2013; Glaser, 1965). We developed the first set of codes based on these repeated and regular team discussions of themes that became salient in the focus groups. Then, three team members systematically coded three transcripts for these initial codes, which were then further discussed by the team, and any disagreements were resolved in these discussions. This preliminary codebook was refined into code families for use in the qualitative text analysis software NVivo (Lumivero, 2025). Next, NVivo coding was conducted by three team members; each transcript was coded in detail by a primary coder, and a secondary coder re-checked all codes and filled gaps. In our next level of analysis, we examined the emergent codes in relation to the typology on conditions for creating equitable work cultures.

We found that O'Meara et al.'s (2022) six categories to evaluate workload equity spoke to many of the themes addressed by our participants. Hence, we applied their framework to sort arising themes into categories that structure workload research and

conservations. From there, we found a pattern that allowed us to collapse the six workload criteria into our streamlined three-part *Awareness-Rewards-Equity* (ARE) model. Hence, our ARE model emerged from the data coding process. We use our model to analyze the data in our qualitative study. While qualitative studies are not statistically representative, they are a rich data source to develop theoretical models and generate hypotheses for testing.

Study Participants

Self-reported demographics for all 29 participants were collected through a screening tool: race/ethnicity, marital status, LGBTQIA status, caregiver status (defined broadly as caregiving for children, elders, disabled relatives, and others), the number and age of children (if applicable), number of years at university, current department, and number of years in rank. Of those who participated, the average length of time at the university was 12 years, time in rank was five years, and the participants' average age was 46. Most focus group participants were white (72.4%) and married (65.5%). Slightly more than half the participants had children (55.2%), most of whom were older than 5 years old (62.5%). About a fifth (20.7%) of participants identified as LGBTQIA+.

Summary of Findings

Participants' narratives indicated that service and teaching are the main areas where workload inequities persist, including concerns over the amount of service work provided by participants, and a variety of issues relating to teaching, advising, and mentoring. Although we divided the focus groups by rank primarily so each group could speak more freely, we did not find meaningful differences among the groups. In consideration of tenure and promotion, women faculty said they found themselves struggling to allocate and manage their time to meet department and university standards given the uneven distribution of teaching and service assignments and the low- or non-promotable work tasks attached to these assignments. As such,

participants implicated administrative leaders in hindering women's opportunities in academia and their research productivity through unfair workload distribution. Based on our data and coding process, we developed our model to organize our findings along the three themes *Awareness-Rewards-Equity* (ARE): 1) Who is doing what? (Awareness), 2) Who is doing how much and why? (Rewards), and 3) Who is supposed to do what, how much, and why? (Equity).

Who is doing what? Transparency and clarity toward awareness

Capturing data and creating awareness involves transparency and clarity.

Transparency means that departments "have widely visible information about faculty work activities available for department members to see" (O'Meara et al., 2022, p. 6, 11). Additionally, clarity indicates that departments "have clearly identified and well-understood benchmarks for faculty work activities" (O'Meara et al., 2022, p. 6, 11).

In our focus groups, participants overwhelmingly described a lack of transparency in their departments when it came to having consistent, accessible, or easy-to-use information to gauge how their workload compares to their colleagues' work in a given year. When participants addressed transparency, they often referred to the lack of information on who is, or has been, serving on which committee(s) and service work in general. Many participants noted that serving on their department's selective salary/merit pay committee was often the only way to get some sense of what their colleagues' work activities actually included. For instance, one participant, Smith, put the dismay into words that most faculty members across groups expressed:

Smith: There's no real way to understand the work that's being done for different faculty, and there is a lot of frustration on, I'd say, most of our faculty's part. Nobody is happy. Because nobody really understands the work that's being done from the other person's perspective, or they're unwilling to consider it.

According to our participants, little to no formal mechanisms of transparency exist across a variety of departments for individual faculty members to assess if their workload is equitable compared to colleagues of the same rank, especially regarding service load, but also in regard to advising and mentoring labor.

Connected to the lack of transparency on workload distribution in their departments, participants across focus groups brought up a lack of clarity. Coming closest to a benchmark was the consistently discussed topic among participants that assistant professors should be protected from taking on too much service. In their discussion, that meant that committee work with no or low promotability value is a particular problem for assistant professors, as faculty at that rank are supposed to focus on research to meet tenure and promotion standards that put emphasis on published scholarship and teaching. For instance, Ainsley described how some service tasks are outside official committees and come with little incentive other than a moral responsibility to students and the institution, and thus should especially not be assigned to assistant professors while they also remain unattractive for any faculty member:

Ainsley: A lot of junior faculty [members] in particular get sucked into student organizations or events or clubs that they will sponsor. On one hand, it's very good if you want to establish those relationships with students that will help you potentially with your teaching and lead to potential teaching awards and such. But if it doesn't lead to those things, it could also just take up way too much of your time, and it could be a real drain on you. I'm always, especially these days, serving on tons of committees. I don't even know, first off, are we even accomplishing anything? And secondly, do you really get credit for it? Because most people don't even understand how much work goes into it unless you build that into your CV.

The questions she raised also overlapped with the next criterion, of receiving credit for the work put into – in her case – service work, especially into committees that are not established or part of bylaws, but formed spontaneously to address rising

issues, come and go, and leave little institutionally documented trace or category to refer to in CVs.

Who is doing how much and why? Credit and context for rewards

Without transparency and clarity, faculty tasks were often not recognized and rewarded. Participants identified three ways that service and teaching work was not specified as a concrete criterion in a way that such work could be acknowledged.

Lack of Recognition of Service

Participants' statements captured repeated concerns about the differing amounts of work that go into different service assignments that are not recognized by their department or institution. For instance:

Marsha: [N]ot all committees are equal in terms of the work that they take up. Like the grad[uate] committee is a ton of work; undergrad[uate] committee is a little bit less work. The personnel committee is once a year. Our budget used to be a [separate] committee, now it's rolled into [the] executive [committee]... yes, people had an equitable number, but the actual work was not the same.

Autumn: “[S]ervice can actually take quite a bit of time. [S]ervice is only supposed to be 20% of your time, it can often be more than that at any given moment, like, if you're on study section [reviewing grant applications at the national level], you're just embedded in that for two to four weeks, and so that is a time sink that in the long run the university does not officially recognize.

The main narrative that developed across all focus groups was that service tasks were considered a drain on one's time due to being an unrecognized work activity and having no or low promotability.

Additionally, participants consistently addressed related issues such as

fatigue, physical strain, unequal distribution of workload due to research specialties, and the devaluation of most service assignments in general. Participants repeatedly pointed to the crucial role of their department's merit pay/selective salary committee and the importance of faculty members being able to serve on this committee to get a better understanding of how their department and colleagues recognize particular service tasks. Many times, participants stressed the tiny pool of merit pay reserved for rewarding exceptional service work. Additionally, they lamented the low bar for faculty members to receive the highest grade in service during the merit pay process, leading to even tinier amounts of reward money shared among all, without discriminating who put in how much time or extra effort into service tasks. Ultimately, unrecognized work led faculty members to consider exiting specific positions, even in leadership, as succinctly put by Smith: "Some of us are considering leaving those leadership positions just because we don't feel that the contribution is being recognized and valued by the department."

Lack of Recognition of External vs. Internal Service Commitments

If faculty members were interested in moving up in their career, such as receiving tenure to keep their job at the current institution, or in the production of scientific knowledge, then some service assignments could help them strategically, while others were also considered a time-sink if devalued by their department or college. Hence, participants also noted tensions around the recognition of service to the discipline that requires labor outside of their department and institution. The workload for internal and external service shifts with promotion to associate professor and having received tenure, which several participants described, such as, for instance, Sophia: "I'm now chairing several professional groups and things like that. That is a huge chunk of time. And it's also national or international service. So, the domestic service might have stayed at the same level, but the service outside of the university has gone up." Similarly, Autumn pointed to grant reviewing as an important external service in her field and explained its impact on her workload that is not fully

recognized:

Autumn: If you sit on study section, you usually get something like seven to twelve grants...even though it might be in your field, each field is pretty enormous, and so you have to learn a new language and a new topic for every grant that you review, and then you have to write the reviews, and then you present them when you meet as a group, and you discuss them and evaluate whether they're gonna be scored or not.

Moto also noted that external service is not given credit: "Organizing and reviewing abstracts for conferences. It's a lot of time. Completely unrecognized by anyone, except for [being] known in the field, that it's essential." All these statements pointed to a conflict that participants faced: the need to do external service work for their standing in the research community, but also to advise graduate students how to enter the job market in their fields, either in academia or beyond. At the same time, several participants felt their departments do not recognize this work as part of their service labor mix. In sum, participants argued that external service needs to be recognized and rewarded as service to properly account for the time and efforts spent on these activities. This issue also dovetailed with a lack of recognition of advising, mentoring, and teaching (graduate) students.

Lack of Recognition of Teaching, Advising, and Mentoring

Participants pointed to 1) a lack of recognition of the impact of class sizes on workload and 2) issues of so-called shadow advising and unrecognized informal mentoring.

Faculty members in our focus groups often noted that university policies and procedures only account for the number of courses faculty teach, which differ from department to department. Additionally, they lamented that such policies also do not

fully account for how the number of enrolled students per course impacts workload. For instance, Mae explained how measuring just the number of classes faculty teach may be equal, but not equitable: “We have classes that are three-credit classes that have ten or fewer students, and then we have classes that are three to four credit classes that have anywhere from 50-150 students. Whether you are teaching ten people or you are teaching 150 people, they all count the same.” Further, Nico highlighted that even when faculty members have teaching assistants [TAs], mentoring them adds to, rather than lightens, their workload:

Nico: I am over my teaching load, and I think the reason they’re able to do that is because there are TAs, but I’m supervising the TAs. I have extra load, and it is extra work even though I do have the TAs there. I don’t really know why it’s like this. I know we have older faculty members who teach under their load. ...I don’t feel like I have any place to push back against that. I’m not going to push back against that.

Another way that participants identified the lack of recognition of work tasks was in relation to mentoring, particularly writing recommendation letters, “shadow advising,” and additional mentoring due to specialty expertise or students’ emotional needs. For instance, Lucy described the “never-ending” commitment in mentoring graduate students: “I have students who did graduate their degree program. I wouldn’t consider myself their formal mentor anymore, but they still need letters of recommendation; they’re still asking me questions ... There’s still sort of these ongoing mini sort-of-commitments that I feel I have that do end up taking a lot of time.” The term “shadow advising” was used by several participants to describe advising work by faculty members who are not formal advisors to graduate students, as other faculty members would fail to prioritize their advisees. In some departments, “shadow advising” falls primarily on women, as several participants noted. For instance:

Marsha: I've had the experience of doing shadow advising for both master's and doctoral students. And I've now recognized it as a pattern. And I'm not doing it, which now means I advise more students, but I'd rather do that than the shadow advising... ghost advising is another term. The person who is the official advisor of record is not actually advising the student and so then the student seeks out another faculty member to ask advising labor of them, but that person is not recognized or is recognized in a committee or a second reader kind of role. That is a very common pattern among women faculty in our department. There are some men who are well known, like, not very... closely working with their student advisees.

Sam: Other faculty have called [it] like shadow advising with older men faculty in particular... Since we were talking about advising and ...picking up that slack, I'll be on a committee and someone will say, "That's a red flag committee. Watch out. You're going to get pushed. You're going to get all the work, so be careful to say no," and that kind of thing where someone will advise. Then the younger faculty takes on the major role because the other person isn't doing anything.

This issue around advising went beyond specializations, according to participants. Faculty members who were perceived to be more approachable bore the brunt of this type of work, but they were also required to help students who were in emotional distress, as described here:

Sophia: [E]ven before the pandemic, we had a lot of students who are in distress. But they need to pass their exams... their courses. And they disproportionately come [to] faculty members who are being perceived as helpful and understanding and empathetic. And this is

the kind of service that's absolutely below the radar. [...] So, the more students know you, the more reputation you have that you are understanding and a normal faculty member, the more you will have people telling you – basically like I find myself functioning as [campus counseling service]. I'm not [campus counseling service].

This type of unrecognized mentoring extended to peer and junior faculty members in informal mentoring relationships outside formal mentoring programs.

Lucy: [O]ne of my research partners [...] asked me to help her write some proposals, but I'm not funded on them. So it's not recognized by the university that I'm helping her with these. But this is an important relationship for me. I couldn't have done any of my past projects in her community without her. So I'm not going to just say no, and she needs it. So, I feel that's underrecognized kind of, too.

In sum, advising and mentoring are ill-defined in terms of the concrete workload requirements and the recognition of the amount of time, quality, and emotional labor that flow into their many tasks. Participants argued that advising and mentoring of undergraduate students, graduate students, and peers need to be more strongly recognized as part of the teaching workloads of tenure-track/tenured faculty members.

Who is supposed to do what and how much? Norms and accountability for equity

A more holistic approach to distribute tasks equitably and a plan to support individual strengths appeared to be lacking. Essentially, participants indicated that their departments lacked norms that “ensured faculty workload is fair and have put systems in place that reinforce these norms” (O'Meara et al., 2022, p. 6, 13).

Relatedly, faculty also mentioned that without accountability, it would be difficult to enforce such norms.

Most often connected to long-standing principles, norms were more often indirectly discussed in the focus groups, although not necessarily in terms of being fair, but mostly in terms of simply being there. For instance, for service, participants described the significant role of the chair in deciding who serves on which committees and the importance of the chair knowing who has served on what committees. Quinn summed it up: “In terms of service assignments, it’s kind of who volunteers or who leads the different committees; they are tapped from the chair.” She described the informal ways in which faculty members learn which committees are important to serve on:

Quinn: I never get assigned to a committee. I volunteer. I might be encouraged to get on more committees, but I have to find them myself and I frequently have to compete, run for committees [...] Nobody’s ever telling me what committees to be on. There is an expectation, though, that I’m on department, university, and national committees, including study sections or whatever, but as long as I’m doing that then that’s considered to be enough service for me as a researcher. But it’s very much social norms and it’s determined by the Promotion and Tenure Committee in your department.

Similarly, some participants pointed to norms around elections or volunteering that exist but are not questioned and perceived as unfair. For instance, Sophia voiced frustrations regarding the election process for committees in her department, resulting in the same set of faculty members running committees:

Sophia: I don’t know why and how people get elected. It’s hard for me to say. I think it’s some sort of a popularity contest, or who people trust to represent them. But what I have seen at least in recent years is that

the same people get elected on multiple committees. So, policy and personnel, salary review, so if there is an election you can pretty much say that it's going to be the same people.

Only sporadically did participants share experiences of having formalized norms to distribute and keep track of workload that otherwise can go unnoticed easily. For instance, Katherine pointed out: "We've had a mentoring system so when an assistant professor comes in, they get assigned. Sometimes that can be problematic but most of the time it works quite well."

Another prominent theme across focus groups and departments was participants' concern regarding the quality that faculty members put in to fulfil service or teaching tasks, an idea that links to the criterion of accountability. The issue of needing such mechanisms was often connected to our participants' observation of a resistance to address workload issues among some colleagues in their departments, as for instance Ada noted:

Ada: I could imagine the issue of workload policy, trying to balance things. I feel like, and this is not, I'm not trying to generalize – on some more senior faculty there is more of an attitude of, 'I've put the work in, and I've earned the ability now to be pickier about what I chose to do or to say no, I won't cover that intro or lower level course because I did that years ago.'

And Lacy described how department leaders struggled to convince faculty to teach courses they do not usually teach:

Lacy: In terms of the teaching, we have our associate chair and our graduate coordinator, who also does the course schedule. Together they mostly work on that, but most of us in the department have our courses that we've been teaching pretty much since we got here. Every now and then there'll be a need

for someone to teach one of our service courses... Unfortunately, the associate chair will have to beg a little bit and plead and try to get new people into the course because some of the former people have left who used to teach that course. So, we don't necessarily have a great system for those situations in terms of who teaches, but the teaching is pretty upfront.

This then translated into issues that new faculty members may face, for which Marie gave an example: "The class I inherited was just crap when I got it. It was just absolute garbage ...even just to get it to a point where I was 'I'm okay enough using this in class' took a lot of effort, let alone putting in enough effort to actually feel like I'm putting on a good class. That was frustrating." Similarly, Gaida noted the tension between her workload and service to her students: "I want the students to have a really good experience, so if that means that I'm going to put in more energy just so I can give them the resources that they need to be successful, I'm going to do that."

How much work is actually put into a work activity remains a matter of contention. Regarding service, participants also shared a sense that there is a lack of accountability of how much work really gets done on committees. For instance, Bree summarized what many shared: "I think one of the issues is quantify[ing] how much work is done and how we can reward it. Because we don't have any metrics. We don't have any way to describe it on a [CV] certainly."

In sum, faculty members must negotiate the conflict between their desire to serve their students or departments against their need to be fully recognized for work that is more visible and rewarded.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined how workload inequities are experienced by women faculty at a Midwestern research-oriented university in the United States. In eight focus groups, 29 women assistant, associate, and full professors strongly pointed to three overarching issues with workload inequity. They discussed the lack of transparency

and clarity of capturing workload data in their department. They highlighted how the formal mechanisms for evaluating their work did not adequately recognize and reward certain internal and external service, teaching, and advising tasks. Finally, they stressed that both ultimately lead to the lack of an equity plan in their department. We found that these three factors build on each other, and, based on our data, we developed a three-step model to address them more systematically in department conversations and institutional policies: 1) Who is doing what? (Transparency and clarity – Awareness), 2) Who is doing how much and why? (Credit and Context – Rewards), and 3) Who is supposed to do what, how much, and why? (Norms and Accountability – Equity). These three questions, their related categories, and the insights we analyzed lead to our *Awareness-Rewards-Equity* (ARE) model to guide policy as well as departmental conversations to work toward more workload equity.

Our findings corroborate the growing body of literature that shows gendered inequity of non-promotable or low-promotable service tasks on and beyond recognized committees in the U.S. academy (Guarino & Borden, 2017; O'Meara et al., 2017, 2022). For instance, our findings on unrecognized work provided by women faculty in terms of internal and external service and student mentoring are illustrative of low-promotability tasks, which are seldom reported on a CV (Griffith & Altinay, 2020; Hanasono et al., 2019). The participants' narratives correlate with discussion of non-promotable work consisting of "largely invisible" tasks that add up over time and do not contribute to promotion or other tangible rewards (Babcock et al., 2022a). However, the literature does not sufficiently discuss teaching inequities that our participants describe, such as the number of new class preparations and the range in student enrollment in each class, even with teaching assistants for large courses, which can create more unrecognized teaching labor in terms of mentoring these assistants. We recommend further research on conceptualizing teaching, advising, and mentoring workloads.

Most notably across all focus groups and issues was the dependency on department chairs and the lack of university-wide policies to guarantee minimum

agreements beyond a chairs' helpful, or not, attitudes and behaviors to address issues of workloads along the six criteria laid out by O'Meara et al. (2022) – transparency, clarity, credit, norms, context, and accountability. Our study also demonstrates the practicality and applicability of O'Meara et al.'s (2022) framework to study one institution's tenure-track and tenured women faculty workload experiences across disciplines.

Our study also shows support for how the academy is experienced as a gendered organization (Acker, 1990, 2006) both in how work tasks receive differential recognition, with some work garnering greater value (Babcock et al., 2017, 2022a; Domingo et al., 2022; Griffith & Altinay, 2020) and, in turn, in the distribution of those tasks (O'Meara et al., 2017). Participants noted the distinct value placed on some service work that was easily captured on performance metrics, such as external leadership roles that are perceived as more masculine (Bellas, 1999; Hanasono et al., 2019) over some internal service assignments that at times are a "time-sink." They raised concerns about the lack of recognition of the different amount of time that goes into different service assignments, which are not easily measured and often not recognized in evaluation metrics. Participants also consistently discussed the lack of recognition of teaching, advising, and mentoring. Much of this work is relational and can involve significant emotional labor that is not documented or, if acknowledged, is dismissed, such as shadow advising and the "never-ending" commitment of advising. That this type of caring work tends to fall to women did not go unnoticed (Bellas, 1999; Hochschild, 1983); women faculty felt that students came to them because they were expected to be more willing to help and be more generous with their time. Because of the lack of shared, accountable, and transparent norms in a unit, participants perceived there were deep inequities in how this work was distributed among their colleagues.

Although our study extends our knowledge, it is not without limitations. Our sample lacks a wider diversity of participants to analyze race/ethnicity and other social identities, as well as a comparative group of men to systematically interrogate gendered experiences. The study centers women faculty who are mostly white.

Scholars could extend this research by using the ARE framework to capture how distinct and intersecting identities of gender, race/ethnicity, and/or family configuration may shape these experiences distinctly. However, we stress that the benefit of this type of qualitative research is that it provides rich description on which to build a theoretical model that can be tested using quantitative data. In addition, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the time during which focus groups were conducted, and our findings need to be compared with work without this overlay to see which patterns persist.

Despite these limitations, our study contributes to the conversation on workload inequity. Drawing on the work of O'Meara and colleagues (2022), we show how their six categories emerged in our data as three broader themes. First, women faculty lamented that their departments lack systems to establish awareness of who is doing which tasks and how much of it. Second, participants consistently addressed a lack of rewards for faculty who go out of their way to provide work that is valuable and needed for the university to fully function. Last, participants described a demoralizing situation in which faculty members who are not contributing their fair share are not held accountable to establish better workload equity. These three themes led us to develop the ARE model with three guiding questions to address these issues more systematically in department conversations and institutional policies: 1) Who is doing what? (Transparency and clarity – Awareness), 2) Who is doing how much and why? (Credit and Context – Rewards), and 3) Who is supposed to do what, how much, and why? (Norms and Accountability – Equity). As policies at the department level may be most important to spur transformation (Miksys et al., 2024), we offer the following recommendations to consider for departments to create a policy to better document and evaluate teaching, advising, and service work in institutional CVs:

1. Adapt the institutional CV template to include categories specific to a department not currently listed, e.g., professional development events attended (workshops, research talks).
2. Add qualitative descriptions about formal advising and mentoring relationships,

considering length of advising, number of meetings, challenges, and extra resources that have been going into such relationships, e.g., students with disabilities, international studies with adjustment to culture and language, students in caregiving situations needing accommodation.

3. List and describe informal advising and mentoring relationships outside formal programs, such as assisting former co-authors with proposals or reading through colleagues' application materials for an award.
4. Add descriptions to the nature of courses taught when involving extra labor, e.g., maintenance of equipment, technology, software, a high-number of students, lack of teaching assistants, etc.
5. List all inquiries for "help" with a document, committee, process, events, or colleague outside of established institutionally recognized committees and processes, and describe the time and effort going into them.
6. In internal evaluation processes: Encourage faculty to add qualitative descriptions to evaluation materials and encourage committees to discuss them during the evaluation process and meetings. Make it a requirement to not just mention the number of items but to add comments about the content, context, and qualitative aspects of the work, based on descriptive input, in evaluation reports and letters.

At the same time, it is important to screen seemingly gender-neutral policies as they can carry "disparate impact on women" (p. 38), especially regarding service, and to ensure implementation of new policies and practices (Miksys et al., 2024). While we do not suggest implementing a "bean counting" policy or practice regarding work tasks that faculty perform, we are suggesting transparent discussions on all the work tasks that are needed for an academic unit to succeed. Further, we suggest evaluating this work and the policies and practices of how it is recognized and valued, but also perhaps identifying tasks to take off the unit and faculty members' plates or different ways to structure the work. In other words, the more visible the work, the easier it is to have unit-level conversations so that individual faculty can make intentional decisions around their workload and their career pathways, as well

as for units to make decisions around their goals.

By discussing these questions with all faculty members, departments can work from an initial awareness of all tasks and their distribution to better distribute rewards and to then shift tasks toward more equity. Our model is meant to start and guide departmental conversations and policy toward more faculty workload equity. This is a difficult process, but once established, it can contribute toward a departmental atmosphere with higher rates of faculty satisfaction and retention.

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