

The vanishing idea of a scholarly life

Workload calculations and the loss of academic integrity in Western Sydney

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The loss of collegiality and the loss of academic integrity were key themes raised during forums, personal interviews, a survey and focus groups conducted with University of Western Sydney academic staff as part of a research project into academic work load agreements. In this paper the experiences related by participants are placed in the light of current literature. This paper follows Soliman and Soliman (1997) in suggesting that academics must make their work visible or the essential broad contribution of academic work will never be fully understood by managers whose priorities are sometimes peripheral to educational processes. It outlines difficulties academics are experiencing in the key areas of casualisation, teaching and research, and administration, which are contributing to loss of collegiality.

Introduction

Information gathering forums into workloads organised through union contacts at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) suggested that the sheer volume of work might be more tolerable if morale was high. Instead there was widespread disenchantment emanating from managerial practices of audit and intensified accountability for time. Some academics spoke of losing the vision and enthusiasm they once had for serving Sydney's disadvantaged Western suburbs. These forums gave direction to this research project which was approved by the Ethics Committee at the University, funded by the School of Nursing, and conducted in co operation with the National Tertiary Education Union branch at UWS. The research was facilitated by a team of four full-time academics, three of whom accepted voluntary redundancies early in the research process. The research associates who are authors of this paper are not tenured academics of UWS.

The development of the 1725 hours workload model upon which the 'workload agreements' at UWS are based, was intended to be a recognition that academic work is seasonally intensive, and its demands flow into unseen parts of the academic's private life (Soliman, 1999; Soliman & Soliman, 1997). However, its rigid, sometimes creative interpretation at UWS is seen by staff as counterproductive. In the schools a working hour is calculated in different ways, and allocated to highly specific tasks requiring up to three pages of spreadsheets to justify the calculations. Each of the University's three colleges has developed a different model to estimate or interpret the allocation of 1725 hours, and at the level of the schools these become so obscure that many academics do not understand their own agreement. A hybrid interpretation was used in one college where loads were represented as a percentage of the EFTSUL (Equivalent Full-time Student Unit Load) so that a tutorial might be described as 1.76

per cent of an EFTSUL, a figure that was meaningless and incomprehensible to many academics. The target EFTSUL per lecturer was arrived at by dividing the number of staff into the number of full-time students. A further calculation was then conducted to determine how many EFTSUL equated to 10 per cent of a workload. It is an economic model loosely tied to income generated by student enrolments. These variations between colleges are represented in Table 1.

cating they worked on weekends, 96.7 per cent stating they rarely worked fewer than 37.5 hours a week excluding holidays, and 51.6 per cent indicating they worked before 8am and after 8pm four to five days a week. Much of this hidden work performed after hours was work that had not been endorsed or sanctioned through the policies and manipulation of the school agreements. It was work academics felt was essential to meet their own standards of scholarship.

Table 1. College variations in workload formulas

<i>College</i>	<i>Total Hours</i>	<i>Model of Calculation</i>	<i>Actual Calculation</i>	<i>New Academic Staff Allowance</i>	<i>Percentage of Teaching Research and Administration</i>
College of Arts	1725	EFTSUL Calculated in 10% blocks	Divide the schools EFTSUL target by the number of academic staff	10% of workload	50% teaching (flexible). Minimum 1 block of 10% teaching (unless exempted by executive dean)
College of Business	1725	EFTSUL	50 hours of workload = 1 hour face to face teaching	Maximum 12 hours face to face teaching per week	Unknown
College of Health & Science	1725	Hours allocated per activity	Different calculations for each school	Different in each school	Up to 40% research (flexible)

The inability of academics to translate their EFTSUL load into real hours allocated to genuine tasks was a major obstacle to this research. The first survey instrument was designed to try and make hidden work plain, by listing diverse categories of work as suggested by the Soliman papers (Soliman 1999; Soliman & Soliman, 1997). Academics were asked to compare the demands of their school-level workload agreement with the actual hours worked. The survey was sent to 950 academic staff and there were a mere 20 responses. Some academics sent back blank survey forms complaining that their agreements were so obscure that they did not know what was expected of them, and so had no basis for comparison with reality. In effect, the EFSUL agreement entered into by academics at UWS to satisfy school records lacked transparency and bore no resemblance to the actual time they expended.

After rounds of personal interviews and focus groups clarified the problem, a snapshot email survey of 550 academics was sent out at the end of the academic year. It asked only four questions about actual work performed before 8am, after 8pm and on weekends. This time more than 90 responses were logged within a week, with 100 per cent of respondents indi-

In discussing the principles that guided the development of the 1725 hour workload model Soliman (1999) described the 'high levels of complexity and uncertainty,' (p.12) that characterise academic work that do not yield to oversimplification of those tasks. She suggested that academics needed to define their own core business in the light of inevitable change in university economies and governance in order to avoid a division between traditional academic values and the new knowledge worker because university management wanted quantity and did not share the same concepts of quality as academics. At UWS one Associate Professor said she was already a piece worker and only a Bundy clock could satisfy managers that academics were doing real work.

Academics at the University found the time pressures of workload calculation compromised reflective teaching, undermined their scholarly contribution to knowledge production. Such pressures also affected their capacity to both produce and transmit contemporary, evidence-based knowledge. Research, curriculum development, community engagement, mentoring of colleagues and the core business of teaching, were all described as compromised by the various attempts to ensure that academics were ful-

filling their quota of hours. The process itself was felt to be oppressive and demoralising.

In early discussions with academic staff, five key areas of pressure were identified that are reshaping the nature of academic work: casualisation, multiplication of campuses, escalation of technological demands in teaching, devolution of administration and the escalation of bureaucratic processes. Each of these areas was discussed further in focus groups in the search for a more equitable workload agreement model.

Casualisation and the quality of teaching and learning

The tension between quantity and quality was most evident in the University where casual, contract and low level academics were allocated increased teaching workloads left in the wake of voluntary redundancies. The experience of staff may be symptomatic of deteriorating standards throughout Australian universities, exacerbated by its unique profile (UWS, 2007). The university has a high staff-student ratio (1:23.34) and a culturally and linguistically diverse student profile. Local students with a low University Admission Index (the ranking system used by universities in NSW to select students) are boosted in by regional bonus points. Sheer numbers mean that large cohorts are taught by casuals who have little access to professional development and have little or no role in their schools, which equally restricts the collegial support available to full-time staff.

The phenomenon of a two-tiered faculty in which an increasing minority has the privileges of tenure was shown in the RED report (An acronym for the research report Recognition, Enhancement and Development: The contribution of sessional teachers to higher education) into sessional teaching produced out of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) funded project across 16 Australian universities (Percy, Scoufis, Parry, Goody, Hicks, Macdonald, Martinez, Szorenyi-Reischi, Ryan, Willis, & Sheridan, 2008). In his introduction to the RED report, University of Wollongong Vice-Chancellor, Professor Rob Castle, likened tenured staff to middle class Victorians who depended on servants who 'slept in the attic, ate in the kitchen, and you grumbled constantly that what they did was actually not what you wanted, althoughthey were absolutely essential to your...lifestyle.' (Percy et al., 2008).

The report said high levels of sessional staff implied a heightened risk and compromised standards for universities which failed to provide professional development or monitor performance. Universities could not provide accurate data on the real number of casuals employed, and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (formerly DEST) statistics gave only full time equivalence, which also hid the supervisory load of permanent staff. Two universities did report that about 80 per cent of all undergraduate teaching was done by sessional teachers 'in stark contrast to the DEST estimate of 15 per cent FTE' (Percy et al., 2008, p7). In 1998 the lack of plain numerical accounting for casual staff thwarted an attempt to fully survey gender pay equity (Probert, Ewer, & Whiting, 1998) although one university which did supply plain numbers revealed 61 per cent of its individual academic employees were casual or sessional. Data from DEST/DEEWR of the UWS distribution of Level A staff can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparison of Level A Staff Tenured, Fixed term and Casual at UWS 2007

Staff	Full-time Equivalent	Per Cent
Full-Time		
Tenured	80	22.1%
Fixed-Term	26	7.2%
Part-Time		
Tenured	5	1.5%
Fixed Term	6	1.5%
Casual	246 (FTE)	67.8%

Source: DEST/DEEWR Aggregated data set 'STAG2007'

Broad concerns about declining quality in teaching and learning in Australia were a focus of the Independent Review of Australian Higher Education conducted by Professor Denise Bradley. A University of Technology, Sydney submission demonstrated that 'massification' of higher education in Australia had led to the highest entry rates and close to the lowest completion rates in the OECD: 'the quality of teaching and learning in Australia has not improved across the board, and has gone backwards against the rest of the world over the last decade' (UTS, 2008).

It could be implied that in a university such as UWS, both staff and students have considerable experience of many of the issues raised by both the RED report and the Bradley Review. At UWS casuals said

they felt exploited by poor resourcing such as the abrupt withdrawal of library and email services when most needed between teaching sessions; excessive vigilance to restrict the cost of contracts, particularly in relation to marking time where they were most likely to invest personal time and resources of necessity; lack of professional development; absence of feedback; and the poor lead-in times to teaching due to late recruitment. They felt they were regarded as good-enough, but not as respected or valued members of the university faculty. They felt excluded from the core business of the schools:

...there is this fiction... that for every hour face to face you will either do one or two hours preparation If you have done two hours preparation that is \$20 an hour. A little bit above McDonalds but not much. So no it is certainly not fair and equitable. Casuals are delivering these units for under half the cost of using a full timer for doing this work. An absolutely huge saving has been made.
Casual 5 years teaching postgraduate level

Moreover, full-time academic staff, who must recruit and support teams of casuals, reported little recognition in their workload for this increasingly time-consuming task, which is often based on relationships rather than more objective aspects of merit. Some full-time staff

felt their work was intensified or compromised by the low commitment and poor standards of casuals, particularly in marking and other assessments. Full-time academics felt the increasing recruitment of non-teaching professorial staff could not relieve the current teaching pressures, particularly when those taking voluntary redundancies were not replaced. Full time lecturers felt isolated from both the professorial and sessional staff, and lacked peer support.

In 2005 Keogh and Garrick pointed to an impoverished environment where academics were no longer attached to their institutions because of policies that eroded collegial cooperation. Casualisation was seen as a key issue in need of depth research (Keogh & Garrick, 2005). At UWS a sense of alienation and isolation was reported by casuals who said they knew as few as eight staff on campus, which included administrators who processed their contracts and one direct

supervisor. Extreme financial stress and anxiety were reported by those who depended on academic work as their primary income. Some casuals who reported financial distress had served the University between five and 12 years. Another, who had lectured, co-ordinated and done research work on campus for four years, said she had given up hope of achieving permanency as the entry level bar kept rising. Approaching colleagues for casual work at the beginning of semester was described as begging, and the prostitution period.

Casuals felt they subsidised the University through unpaid preparation, student consultation, and marking time. Increasingly unrealistic contracts meant they felt obliged to donate their time to get the work done although intense vigilance of their contract hours by administrators was eroding their willingness to continue making personal sacrifices. Some schools emphasised the turn-around time of 20 minutes per 1000 words of marking, by withholding contracts until minimal class sizes became evident. Casuals

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felt their ability to contribute to quality teaching was compromised by time pressures that prevented in-depth feedback, which research shows is a significant factor in the development of academic skills (Orrell, 2006).

Extreme stress relating to job insecurity, including delays in wage payments, impacted on performance because so much time was consumed by pursuing and maintaining an adequate income. Sessional staff also reported lost time and productivity through administrative processes, and said they sometimes spent two or three unpaid days each semester negotiating contracts, meeting with staff, and gaining access to essential resources.

It was clear that increasing casualisation was the main strategy for delivering teaching within budgetary constraints. The efficacy of the strategy was questioned by full-time academics that felt teaching quality was being eroded not because casuals lacked ability, but because genuine teaching teams with a shared agenda could not be sustained. Scholarly work, including teaching, can isolate individuals and impact their work negatively unless it is moderated by strong academic communities.

The emphasis on teaching at a cost of research opportunities

Twenty-one full-time tenured academics who participated in either forums, focus groups or semi-structured interviews felt their own teaching standards were being eroded by workload agreements that were teaching intense. These academics, who ranged from Levels A to E, described an increasing focus on teaching that left little room for other scholarly pursuits that would inform practice. Cohort sizes were swelling and demanding face-to-face teaching sessions were complicated by the distance travelled between campuses on some of Sydney's busiest arterial roads. As shown in Table 3, although 81.2 per cent of all academic staff at the University have a theoretically mixed teaching and research workload, lower level academics could not find time to do the research work that would help them gain promotion.

Table 3. Staff 2007: Distributions at UWS by Function (Academic Departments Only)

Function	Number (FTE)	Percentage
Teaching Only	22	2.6%
Research Only	34	4.0%
Teaching & Research	695	81.2%
Other	105	12.2%
Total	856	100%

Source: DEST/DEEWR Aggregated data sets 'STAG2007'

Academics without a research track record reported that they were allocated little or no time to develop their research because time allocations were based on past performance. Some indicated they could not consider pursuing higher degrees due to workload stress, and acknowledged their careers would not advance. Academics who could not get engaged in research and in generating research income felt stuck and not respected in their work as lecturers. Lecturers who were not research active were the most vulnerable in workload allocation, reporting that they co-ordinated a proliferation of small-cohort units that had little EFTSUL value. They insist there is little difference between preparing to teach 10 and preparing to teach 100.

You are in a Catch 22 if you want to get a promotion. I was working on getting my promotion based on teaching excellence but they have moved the goal posts. You have to have a Carrick award or a VC's award. Lecturer A would be really hard

[pressed] to get promoted on teaching. So really the only thing you can get promoted on is research.
Lecturer A

Academics at higher levels lamented they were powerless to help others. Mentoring, community engagement and committee work were given little or no time allowance in their school workloads, even in the professoriate, and when combined with the requirement that they have a minimum 10 per cent teaching load, many felt that the work had lost its purpose and status.

Lecturers described an overwhelming push to teach more intensively, technologically, with larger classes in spaces not designed for the purpose. The complex formulas that had been developed by workload committees to allocate the work around teaching ignored other scholarly work.

The front of the workload agreement in the college says it is expected to be a balance between people who are research focused, people who are admin focused, people who are teaching focused and then it gives indicative ranges of the hours that people could expect in any one of those. We could take [away] everything except the teaching focuses 'cause that's the only thing people are interested in. I was told that, as an associate professor, being on three committees was too much committee membership.
Associate Professor

The loss of trust: morale, integrity, and collegiality

Academics reported that workload agreements left them feeling demoralised by surveillance and mistrust. Those who hoped that university teaching would provide an opportunity to develop their teaching skills and contribute to their discipline through publications and research, felt they were now teaching machines. The distribution of teaching was based on shrinking options rather than expertise. One lecturer whose second semester EFTSUL allocation was regarded as 'full' in March was told she would not be able to teach a course she had just re-written. In the July break, when she had hoped to spend time writing, she was informed that the workload was not in fact 'full' and she would have to pick up the teaching of a new unit for which she felt ill-equipped. The course she had already developed had been re-assigned to a colleague, and was no longer available to her. She spent the semester break, which she had previously set aside for writing, swotting up new content in an area where she

subsequently struggled. This academic described how the idiosyncratic application of policy in her school left her feeling confused and cheated, but obliged to keep her head down and not complain.

Oh... I tried to understand that [workload agreement] but it is beyond [me]...it doesn't actually make sense. They initially sent a draft which said it [workload] was down by 20 per cent. I think, when I tried to follow their calculations ...they were duping me. Even now with some drop in the number [of students] it is still worth 60 per cent of the teaching load. Bits get taken off it to deal with the tutorials and other sorts of things. So even though on paper.....see that is what I couldn't understand about the workload was that we were told that we could take half...say something was worth 60 per cent you're entitled to 30 per cent for the coordination and teaching of it. It just doesn't turn out like that. Recently in the drafts, things were down and nothing had changed the EFTSULs for them....'cause they only communicate the EFTSUL you have to kind of work out what the EFTSUL is as a percentage... they went down. So even this new unit that I believe is worth 15 per cent the last time I saw it they recorded it as 4 per cent. So it just doesn't make any sense to me. *Lecturer B*

Academics who had reported to management that they were feeling pressured by the workload calculation processes felt they were jeopardising their careers. Those who told supervisors that they could not finish their marking in the allocated time, or could not meet the escalating demands to develop online resources, felt they were judged as incompetent.

I work through the night until I get the work done. I have to if I am going to turn around the marking on time. I don't know how long it takes. It takes my whole life. I want a voluntary redundancy because that's how much they owe me. I never get the time back. *Senior Lecturer*

Lecturers said they found it difficult to refuse additional work because everyone was pressured. There was an implication that, if they were not in their office, they were not actually working. In some schools regular office hours had been demanded which made academics more vulnerable to student demands, reducing the opportunities to do sustained work that required concentration.

With general staff there is a presumption that if they turn up to work every day they are doing their work. Academics are asked to work from the opposite premise, to justify how they spend their time. *Academic A*

Some suggested time pressure was inappropriate in a sector that depended on time-consuming intellectual processes. They needed time, and whether it was paid for or not they said they invested whatever time it took to produce the kind of course material that they felt represented contemporary, quality content:

If you love your work and feel it is important to give the students the best, it takes a lot of time and reading. You will always make yourself vulnerable to exploitation if you love what you do. I am not paid for any of it. *Casual Academic*

Some lecturers said they had invested themselves in the University's vision for Sydney's West, seeing it as an opportunity to serve disadvantaged groups. They now felt disadvantaged themselves, as they saw the opportunity for genuine academic careers awarded to a non-teaching elite that had forged its early careers elsewhere.

Anything I do for a research centre will not be considered for my workload. *UWS Associate Professor*

Guest lecturers were now a liability who reduced the hosts' workload hours in a way that made unit coordination seem worthless. Allocations that were supposed to be equitable encumbered those with the least seniority.

It would be just nicer to have a more collegial kind of environment in which to work, where you were all recognised as peers, instead of a more hierarchical, controlled kind of environment, where we clearly have a boss who clearly dishes out the work. *Academic B*

Privilege, prestige and the academic life

Many of the issues raised by academics at UWS are not new. It has been suggested that academic resistance to managerial practices is merely a way of preserving a privileged lifestyle. In a study of UK workload models, Hull (2006) argued that lost collegiality was a poor response to managerialism in education because it appeared to be an attempt to protect elite aspects of university life. Hull usefully asked how academics had failed to analyse, research, define and protect their own working conditions, and emphasised the lack of empirical analysis of academic working life.

Although academic detachment from industrial issues might have been suggested through the early poor response of UWS academics to this research (see introduction), many claimed they simply did not have

time for further workload record-keeping to justify their busy lives. Others said they were waiting to take voluntary redundancies rather than endure further workload stress. It was only by asking a few questions at the right time, that this research provoked a genuine response: academics in semester time had little breathing space.

The loss of morale described in this paper does not equate with Hull's (2006) concerns about an elite academy. Academics at all levels felt isolated and unsupported, while higher level academics felt too time-deprived to give mentoring support. The privileges of a scholarly life which Harris (2005) said could not be justified, were unknown to those who had to expend 90 per cent of their 1725 hours carrying teaching loads at UWS. Academics, who were in demand due to their reputations as higher research degree supervisors, were equally disadvantaged by the EFTSUL calculations which allowed as little as one hour per week for a PhD student, and no time for journal editing or contributions to national scholarly projects.

Universities are the site of the same kind of neo-liberal practices that have had an impact on other professions: professional accountability has been replaced by corporate protocol-driven scrutiny and '...economic values rather than educational values are becoming central to defining professional identity and professionalism' (Harris, 2005, p425). The complexity of intellectual practice is not easily understood by administrative staff who can achieve their own tasks in office hours. Yet even if academics could explain how much reading, thinking and writing time is needed to produce quality teaching, there is the strong possibility that managers do not want slow and expensive processes.

Scholarship is a dual task of both knowledge production and transmission (Houston, Meyer, & Paewai, 2006). This implies that an academic should be engaged in both research and teaching, although there is a case for academics who only teach. Marsh and Hattie (2002) gave evidence that there was little correlation between research and better teaching although Harris (2005, p. 430) argued that, without research, teaching will remain a 'shallow dialogue'. Although research is tied to career advancement and recognition, it also enhances teaching practice and refreshes the approach of those who have spent decades in the lecture theatre.

They have taken out the professorial position and our professorial money and used it for someone who is big into research in some other field that

has nothing to do with us. I find this quite offensive. When we did have a professor he never even introduced himself to us. Under the original professor we had a weekly meeting for research and [it was] encouraging. We had mentoring going on within our group, within our programme.

Academic A

As early as 2003, the vulnerability of Australian universities to shifting Government policy and the porous boundary between management and academic leadership were seen as a precursor to a loss of professional identity (Zipin & Brennan, 2003). Zipin and Brennan used fictionalised workloads to explore some of the moral tensions created at the intersection of academic workloads with budget cuts, casualisation and the hegemonies impacting upon career prospects. As a newer university situated in or near some of the most disadvantaged suburbs of Sydney's West, UWS, and therefore its staff, is particularly vulnerable to economic movement. Academics suspect that the university is seeking status, evidenced by the expensive new school of medicine and the gradual shift east at the expense of its home campuses in the west.

A confusion of calculations that do not add up

Academics at UWS report they are working harder and longer, particularly in the light of pressures to increase their skills in information technologies, to reduce face-to-face teaching time in favour of online resourcing, to conduct workshops and tutorials with lecture-size classes and to teach mega-cohorts, through staff redundancies, escalating administration, and increasing casualisation. Yet according to the way in which their workload agreements are calculated, it is hard for them to prove they are working 1725 hours.

Complexity and vagaries seem to be increasing the demands, and fail to address the hidden load created by new influences, including increased class sizes, blended modes of teaching, technological and bureaucratic demands. Lecturers suspected the ambiguity was designed to simply make sure workloads fitted within the limitations of budgets and understaffing.

Conclusion

The workloads research project at UWS thus far has revealed a high level of dissatisfaction with the implementation of workload policies. Staff members say

they are not averse to hard work, but there is a desire to work effectively and to have a greater measure of preferential time management for the hidden work that improves teaching quality. Time integrity is an essential hallmark of professionalism (Shulman, 2005a, 2005b) that recognises a fundamental motivation to contribute in a field where work spills into private lives, and cannot fit into a nine-to-five schedule.

In the final stage of the project, there will be an attempt to discern whether the problems at the University of Western Sydney are unique. Given its status, location and student profile, it is possible that morale can also be related to academic isolation, the University's rapid growth, and restructuring, and the diversity of its disciplines. This final stage analysis is complicated by the lack of comparative information about the methods of calculation other universities are using at schools level, and how agreements are inviolated. This suggests a need for further research. There is also a dearth of information on the range of workload agreement models in place elsewhere. There is still a need to research precisely if and how other universities enable academics adequate time not only to fulfil their teaching obligations, but also to develop their research profile in order to enhance practice. Soliman's (1997) concept of 1725 annual hours, undertaken according to the complex seasonal demands of the academy, was the preference of many academics interviewed, provided those hours were flexibly, equitably and transparently expended.

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