The Role of Service in Faculty Life


Definitions of Service:

“There are internal and external dimensions to service. These two forms of service are distinct, yet they are often lumped together under the rubric "faculty service." Internal service refers to service to the institution as a means to conduct institutional business and service to the discipline as a means to maintain disciplinary associations--it supports the internal functioning of the academic profession and higher education as a whole and is tied to the premise of shared governance. Most faculty members spend considerable time attending committee meetings, answering e-mail queries from students and colleagues, scheduling lecture series and conferences, reviewing articles for journals, and advising student groups. This service to the discipline and campus is part of the hidden curriculum of faculty life.

In contrast, external service is a means for institutions to communicate to multiple external audiences what it is that higher education does to meet societal needs. External service takes many forms, including extension, consulting, service-learning, and community and civic service. Common to all of these forms is faculty operating in contexts beyond the campus.”

Differences by Faculty Roles and Identities:

“Research shows that there is variability in internal and external service roles depending on institutional type, discipline, rank, and demographics such as race and gender. Faculty at larger and more prestigious campuses, especially tenured faculty, have greater personal power and professional autonomy, which typically translates to fewer service obligations tied to the institution (Austin and Gamson, 1983). Service for faculty at these institutions tends to be focused outward on national activity and reputation, as well as funding agencies. As one moves further down the institutional scale, administration begins to take precedence in the setting of policy for faculty, who are treated more as employees contracted to teach than as equals in governing of the campus (Austin and Gamson, 1983). [...]

Other research on faculty shows that participation in and influence on institutional affairs is dictated, in part, by an individual's rank (Austin and Gamson, 1983; Finkelstein, 1984). Knowledge about institutional and disciplinary affairs grows as one gains more experience as a professor in general and as a professor at one campus in particular. Austin and Gamson (1983), using earlier research by Baldwin and Blackburn (1981), found in their work on the academic workplace that service appears to increase over the years. Faculty members appear to get more involved in service activities as they become more comfortable with their teaching responsibilities and less pressured by demands for scholarship (p.22).

Increasingly, both anecdotal and research-based evidence supports the notion that people who are different from historical norms in the professoriate are called on disproportionately to serve their units, campuses, disciplinary associations, and communities (Aguirre, 2000). For a faculty member whose gender or ethnicity is unusual on a campus or in a department, this difference can translate into frequent calls to represent his/her gender or ethnicity in organizational and disciplinary affairs.”
University of Michigan Faculty Handbook on Service

In conjunction with teaching, scholarship, and research, faculty participation in service activities within and outside the University constitute the core responsibilities of a public university. Service to community groups, and to local, state, national, and international governmental groups, not only provides these organizations with faculty expertise but also helps to fulfill the University's mission of service to the people of Michigan and the world. Faculty service on appropriate unit and University committees and participation in administrative tasks are essential to the effective functioning of the University (see Chapter 4 "Faculty Roles in Governance"), as is the mentoring of junior faculty colleagues. Leadership of professional organizations and participation in other professional activities such as reviewing works submitted to professional journals or conferences are also important to the mission of the University, as well as to the advancement of one's profession or discipline.

The University takes great pride in the various service activities of its faculty and supports and encourages participation. Faculty should check with their dean, director, or chair about that unit's policies concerning the evaluation of service activities as part of reviews for merit salary increases and tenure and promotion. [...]

taken from the University of Michigan Faculty Handbook: