

We are Overwhelmed: Productively Understanding, Venting, and Managing Our Stress

The Problem: In a recent United Faculty Survey, respondents were asked how they would describe their current mood related to working in the Contra Costa Community College District. The survey results revealed that 38% of faculty members are exhausted, 39% are frustrated, 40% feel overworked and 50% feel undervalued.

Possible Causes of Workplace Dissatisfaction:

- Increasing obligations to create forms and reports
 - Time is devoted to reports involving data that is sometimes hard to access and sometimes seen as 'busy work' that supports bureaucracy rather than students—the perception is that we are generating paperwork much of which will not be read or used but rather checked off and filed. For example, SLOs take so much time to do and compile that there is little time left to have department meetings sharing their implications where faculty aptitude might shine
 - Time is taken away from what is seen as the vital work of teaching and professional development to meet Kafkaesque demands such as assessing your assessments; the urgency of state requirements being met on time does not prioritize classroom teaching as the highest objective
 - Difficulties completing the variety of reports within the deadlines allotted lower personal confidence and morale
 - Supervisors and staff members who are also under demands and deadlines often don't have time to give positive feedback and may only have time to point out errors, increasing the employee's sense of being frustrated, incompetent, and undervalued; supervisors have to become gatekeepers for state requirements rather than the mentors and advisors they used to be
 - The increasing demands, increase in procedural complexities and constant mail create a 24/7 mentality of work obligations that leave faculty members with no sense of rest or break and in solitary isolation from colleagues. The isolation leaves a person believing that everyone else is

'getting it' and he/she is the only one who is not measuring up

- * In an organization, temporary crisis mode tends to become the norm as time moves on and new administrators and relevant staff members join the organization—agreements to make sacrifices of time and focus don't come with an expiration date and the more rigorous demands become the expected work output. For example, fewer individuals are doing work that was formerly distributed among many hands and no priority is practically given to the work for which one was hired. If a report is due and a student needs an extended appointment to understand an assignment, or if new research should be studied and included in a lecture, what should be chosen?
- * New technology must be continually learned and integrated into course content, requiring new course outlines and numerous hikes on the winding learning curve
- Faculty (60%) are taking on extra classes to make up for the lack of COLA increases
- The increased busyness of our lives makes it harder to exercise, eat well, rest, and have meaningful social connections that would help us absorb the demands

We are Overwhelmed:

Solutions

Keep Perspective:

We still have wonderful jobs with inspiring students, great colleagues, and a good and supportive administration. We have great benefits, including vacations and flexible schedules. We have the privilege of being with students and we get to help to change their lives in meaningful ways. There is still cause for gratitude, and we need to walk in that awareness.

Connection:

Despite our busyness, we need to find connection with each other, both to solve problems and to just enjoy others who love our community. We need to find time to expand our connections and to support each others campus events and our students' athletic and performing arts events.

Personal Care:

We need to find ways to exercise, rest, eat well, and relax.

Boundaries:

In order to have all of the above, we need to separate the 'urgent' stressors from the truly important tasks. We need to find time to shut off phones and emails and say no or 'not right now' to more than we can handle.

Stop the Madness:

If we had time to find out how the state system works to continually impose ever-changing demands, we should protest these demands in a constructive and productive way. It might be worth pitching in to hire an investigative researcher to find out how we got here and how we can dial it back for the sake of our entire educational community.

What creates job satisfaction and a good working environment?

Sociologist Arne Kalleberg who has done extensive studies on work environments and employee satisfaction delineates the job environment into six dimensions. For each of these dimensions, think about what gives you satisfaction presently and what might give you more satisfaction in the future.

- (1) The intrinsic dimension, which refers to characteristics associated with the task itself (e.g. creating lesson plans, lecturing, interacting with students--What would you do if you had more time to work on this dimension?)

- (2) The convenience dimension, which refers to good hours, pleasant physical surroundings, and convenient travel.

- (3) The financial dimension which includes items such as pay, fringe benefits, and job security

- (4) Relationships with co-workers and whether there are chances to make friends and meet social needs

- (5) Career dimension including whether the chances for promotion and increased responsibility are good

- (6) Resource adequacy: whether there is enough help, equipment, and information required to adequately complete the job.

Old Extra-Classroom Obligations

Rosters, A&R Reports/Forms
Division Meetings
Department Meetings
Serving on Committees
Scheduling and Budgeting
Annual Plan
Recommendation letters

New Extra-Classroom Obligations

Rosters, A&R Reports/Forms
Division Meetings
Department Meetings
Serving on Committees
Scheduling and Budgeting
Recommendation letters
Box 2A plan and presentations
Program Review
Content Review
SLOs
SLOAs
Budget Augmentation
C-ID Compliance Forms
Transfer Agreements/Majors
Flex hours
Council of Chairs
Evaluations
New procedures for box office accounting, hiring, tutoring, positive attendance recording
Validation team assessments and meetings
D2L and then Canvas
CurricUNET
24/7 emails
Elumin
Accreditation upgrades to course content
Shared governance committees and meetings