Faculty and Staff Perceptions of Competing Priorities

in the School of Education

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At the School of Education's 2002 Annual Faculty and Staff Retreat, Susan Klein chaired a discussion group on "Competing Priorities." As Susan put it, "I'm always struggling with priority setting, and I know from others, that I am not alone" (S.M. Klein, personal communication, May 3, 2004). Numerous issues were discussed by the approximately 15 people who attended the session: time management, balancing career and family responsibilities, coping with stress, and more.

A faculty member who participated in the discussion group suggested to the Faculty/Budgetary Affairs Committee that Susan's theme be added to the committee's agenda for the 2002-03 academic year. The FAC invited Susan to speak at one of its meetings, and moved to establish a committee (composed of a faculty member, a staff person, and an administrator) to further explore issues related to the topic. That year, the Competing Priorities Committee began its work. Due to the departure from the university of two of its members, the committee was later reconstituted. In 2003-04, Judith Chafel, Alfreda Clegg, and Amy Sutley agreed to serve as members.

After some discussion about how to address its charge, the committee decided to design and administer a survey to solicit faculty and staff perceptions. The survey posed two questions:(1) What do you perceive to be competing priorities? (2) What are some ways these competing priorities might be addressed? During the Spring '04 semester, surveys were distributed electronically and via campus mail to 109 faculty and 111 staff in the School of Education at IU (Bloomington). A total of 25 completed surveys were returned, yielding a response rate of 11%. Appendix 1 contains the raw data.

Analysis of the data proceeded in two steps: (1) compilation of the responses to each of the two questions, and (2) grouping of the responses into categories. A careful reading of the data suggested that responses to the first question,"What do you perceive to be competing priorities?,"could be classified into three categories: (1) work issues, (2) time management/organization issues, and (3) personal issues. These categories are shown with examples from the data in Table 1.

Scrutiny of the responses to the second question, "What are some ways these competing priorities might be addressed?," indicated that the data could be grouped into three similar categories: (1) work issues, (2) time management/organization issues, and (3) personal issues. These categories are shown with examples from the data in Table 2.

Respondents were quite clear about their perceptions. Several commented on the stress they experienced at work, a frequently appearing theme in the data. One respondent wrote, "Since I don't have any children at home juggling work and family is not a big problem. The one problem I do have is the stress related to dealing with such a large faculty and student population as C & I." Another respondent communicated, "Time management is an enduring issue. The volume of work expected of faculty creates great stress at times." A third respondent wrote, "If I had to do it all over again, I would never have taken this job in the first place (a tenure track position with three children). It's not worth it. It's way too hard, way too stressful and not healthy for anyone." Still another reflected "Stress is a big issue for me as I assume it is for most people."

Although these responses may not be representative of all SOE faculty and staff in the School of

Education due to the survey's low response rate, they are consistent with the findings of a study recently completed by W. Harvey Hegarty of the School of Business at IU (Bloomington) ("How Professors See," 2004). In his study, Hegarty administered a questionnaire to faculty in various departments on the IU (Bloomington) campus. In the School of Education, 29 faculty (almost equally divided among ranks) responded. According to Hegarty, these responses constituted a representative sample.

The survey solicited comments on four themes: (1) what motivates my research, (2) what motivates my teaching, (3) how do I see my work environment, and (4) how I think. Figure 1 shows the distribution of responses given to the item, "There is too much stress at work": no response" (0), almost never (1), sometimes (11), often (13), almost always (4). More SOE faculty (nearly 60%) responded with "often" or "almost always" to the item than the university as a whole. The SOE mode ("often") exceeded the mode for the university ("sometimes"), a finding that Professor Hegarty suggested "may warrant discussion" ("How Professors See," p. 5). Based on the data collected with the instrument, which solicited responses to items in four categories, Hegarty stated that "the School of Education is overall a very healthy environment" ("How Professor See Their Work," no page number given).

Recommendations

Respondents to the survey administered by the Competing Priorities Committee communicated various ways to address the quality of life issues they perceived in their workplace. These recommendations should be implemented in a series of three phases.

Phase I: Initial Implementation and Information Gathering (Spring and Summer 2004):

- disseminate this report to all faculty and staff in the School of Education at Indiana University (Bloomington);

- implement walking groups, a weight watchers program, an exercise program, and educate faculty and staff about "flex time";

- gather information about wellness, communication, and time management workshops;

Phase II: Partial Implementation and Information Gathering (Fall and Spring 2004):

- implement a symposium "sampler" on time management, wellness, communication, and work/family issues; begin fire side chats with the Deans about "research vs. teaching," committee work, etc;

- survey participants to assess degree of interest in and quality of programs offered in Phases I and II;

Phase III: Comprehensive Implementation (Summer '05, Fall "05, and Spring '06):

- continue activities begun in Phases I and II;

- develop programs based on information collected in Phases I and II (e.g., fuller, more elaborate symposium on time management).

Table 1: Responses to "What Do You Perceive to be Competing Priorities?"

Work Issues	◆ Time for individual productivity ◆ Volume of expectations for faculty ◆ Change to be more realistic ◆ Value of research vs. teaching, field experience, program coordination, committees ◆ Realize that colleagues are stressed and help when possible ◆ Have better understanding of colleague's responsibilities
Management/Organization Issues	◆ Balance dissertations, research/publications, classroom instruction, professional association activities ◆ Organize time to address large numbers of faculty and students ◆ Too many tasks and duties assigned to me; volume of faculty responsibilities ◆ Balance home and work (a more frequently expressed comment) ◆ Expectations related to emails and immediate response ◆ Staying abreast of technology ◆ Prioritizing project deadlines
Personal Issues	◆ Exercise ◆ Diet ◆ Personal fitness ◆ Stress management ◆ Burnout ◆ Emotional energy ◆ Breast feeding ◆ Day care: IU day care too restrictive

Table 2: Responses to "What Are Some Ways These Competing Priorities Might be Addressed?"

Work Issues	◆ Mentoring, fire side chats about tenure process ◆ Respect for childbearing faculty issues (e.g. recovery period after a birth) ◆ Respect for individuals trying to set boundaries for balancing home, career, research, teaching, etc. ◆ One retreat for faculty and staff; community building focus ◆ Learn SoE routines and short cuts when appropriate ◆ Recognition for service work
Management/Organization Issues	◆ More GA's and hourly assistance to help with organizational issues with teaching and record keeping: Visible support from the dean, money from the dean ◆ Time management workshops ◆ Employees get day off from regular duties to organize and file ◆ Organize a symposium on multi-tasking ◆ Discuss ways of aligning teaching with research and dissertations with personal publications and research
Personal Issues	◆ Walking support group ◆ Wellness workshops ◆ Communication workshops ◆ Flex time for staff ◆ Exercise programs–available and affordable ◆ Weight Watchers ◆ Better food choice in atrium ◆ Baby changing stations ◆ Educate employees about IU options for health ◆ Massages ◆ Pilates ◆ Yoga ◆ Social events with parents with young children

Reference

"How Professors See Their Work." (2004). Retrieved May 2, 2004, from
http://www.indianaa.edu/~educ/faculty/howprofsviewtheirwork.pdf

Appendix 1: Summary of Raw Data

I. What Do You Perceive To Be Competing Priorities?

Since I don't have any children at home juggling work and family is not a big problem. The one problem I do have is the stress related to dealing with such a large faculty and student population as C&I.

Miscommunication, bad attitudes (hesitant to speak to co-workers because worried about how they would be treated; putting stop to the Payton Place environment—the "Rumor Mill"), lack of planning, resistant to change, lack of exercise and diet.

Time management and the numerous duties assigned to me. Stress related to the above.

All the above listed examples. Basically I think we're all trying to do too much and would benefit from working less hours. But I don't know how to maintain my standards at work if I work less.

Juggling work and family responsibilities.

Need for reading/research/reflection time competes with expectations from students and colleagues that e-mails will be answered "immediately". Building a sense of community/collaborative relationships competing with students and faculty using email to complain, say nasty things out of context. Need for individual productivity competing with expectations for Ed School committee work, staying abreast of Ed School/University initiatives, staying abreast of INTASC, etc. (let alone staying abreast of research in my own discipline.) Increasing emphasis of technology competes with delivery of client-centered services and availability of "people" to answer questions, provide directions, "sit" somewhere while waiting for a faculty member/meeting/class.

Work and family juggling is definitely #1. Immediately after that though is personal fitness and stress management; trying to accomplish #1 often means there is not much "me" time left! I am very encouraged to see the SoE is taking steps to help employees address these issues. All of these issues have repercussions for the university in terms of increased health insurance expenditures, employee sickness and possibly even turnover.

Now that my youngest child can drive, my responsibilities with family are not nearly as demanding but it's still an important issue. There are days when its 6pm and I have more people to get back to but I really need to get home and see my family. I'm sure it's much more of an issue for people with younger children. I tend to work at strange times (I'm filling this out at 11pm) when things a home are quiet. Stress is a big issue for me as I assume it is for most people. I keep telling myself (and others) that any one person can only do so much—when its time to quit working its time to quit working. One of the great things about the School of Education is that there are so many dedicated people but we can't let them burn out.

Time management is an enduring issue. The volume of work expected of faculty creates great stress at times.

Competing project deadlines.

Commitment to research and service, particularly coordination of programs and filed experiences that takes time away from research but is not recognized with higher points on merit reviews or with release time. As part of previous point, overload of committees and other meetings at random times. The reply—that's my research day is not valued.

Teacher education vs. research and scholarship. The former involves faculty in an excessive amount of administrative tasks.

Time management, stress, juggling work and family responsibilities, and leisure, (exercise, hobbies, recreation).

Family (infant 9 months old, marriage, other children, etc); publications/research efforts; supervising dissertations, classroom instruction, program work in school psychology, program contributions to teacher Ed in the form of classroom management class, professional association activities.

Multiple projects that require more time than I have, travel, too much email.

Competing priorities professionally are always balancing research, teaching, and service. Research filed work away from home is the most difficult aspect of my work to balance with family responsibilities.

Teaching vs. non teaching responsibilities in department.

For me the ongoing challenge of academia (teaching especially) is maintaining boundaries between work and home life; the flexible nature of my schedule is often an advantage but it also makes "job creep" an issue for time with my family; I am finding, for instance, an expectation from students in particular that I am responsive to email throughout the weekend.

Work and family.

Childcare hours are not flexible—and the childcare at IU is closed the two days prior to the start of the fall semester! Juggling committee work with research and teaching.

Time management, community responsibilities, and developing a strong line of research and inquiry.

My schedule is too busy to squeeze in trips to the massage therapist and similar things. Balancing family and work gets tougher every semester.

For me these issues of work and family: How do I keep the household running smoothly and get everything done for work? I find myself jealous of our good friends. He's a dentist and she's an occupational therapist, and they can leave their patients and jobs behind at the end of the day. They seem so much more relaxed. My husband and I never leave our work behind, its' always there—on the computer, laptops, or stack of folders and books on the counter staring at us. Who is more important, my three children and husband or the dozen or more students who always have immediate seeming crises and deadlines with their graduate programs that need addressing, or dissertations or qualifying portfolios that they need feedback on? Or is I the constant stream of students who come to my office who need advice or handholding? If I expend all of my emotional energy resources on them, is there enough left over for my family when I get home? Then, even if there is enough energy left for the emotional needs of my

family...what about the physical aspects of running the household...OHNO!!! The groceries, the laundry, the cooking, the cleaning, the picking up, taking out the trash, running the errands.....its exhausting. And then what about ME? There never has been (at least in the past 20 years or so) really any time for me to focus on my health or welfare or attend to my interest of needs. If I had it to do all over again, I would never have taken this job in the first place (a tenure track position with three children). It's not worth it. Its way too hard, way too stressful and not healthy for anyone.

The university and the School are extraordinarily inefficient in it management of the processes of service and governance. Meetings are poorly managed, request for information are redundant, service/committee request are imprecise, and facilitation of governance processes are clumsy. The department as an organizational unit is the last stop in organizational ineffectiveness. It is where all the other inefficient processes are cleaned up or smoothed. The net of all this grotesque inefficiency is the good spirited faculty and staff, absorb the work for the wiser cantankerous majority. (Myself included). We reward self serving, self absorbed autonomous faculty. We would not be very effective at managing our way through a crisis. The issue you raise is a symptom of a larger issue of culture. The university is a classic study in reactionary organizational ineffectiveness.

I have found my work environment to offer mixed support regarding the balancing of family and work life. As a nursing mother, I was relegated to a stall in the public restroom to find a place to pump mild. Yet my immediate supervisor has been supportive of my family life. My biggest stress/competing priority has been finding affordable, quality, dependable part-time child care which has on numerous occasions distracted me at work, caused me to miss work, and caused conflict with my spouse when we both need to be at work. My spouse and I consider it a priority that were the primary care givers for our child and arranged our work schedule accordingly but finding child care to cover the overlaps in our schedule was and remains difficult. The part-time childcare through the University is too rigid to cover occasional departmental meetings that are outside of the routine. I've also seen our office work slowed by university bureaucracy. Competing priorities of adhering to university policy and getting work done in a timely manner. Delays in employee appointments, new employees getting keys to the office, authorizations for new employees for university systems. I offer two concrete examples. First, it took our new accountant over one month after being appointed to have full access to our account, purchasing authorization, etc. which meant extra work for someone else in the meantime (not me but I watched this process put stress on co-workers and delayed my own work). Another instance, it took over four weeks to get through the university process to post a job opening in our area, and that doesn't' include any of the actually applying, interviewing, and hiring; just posting. I'm a big believer in equal opportunity, but not all the barriers/tasks we encountered seemed to be designed to protect that. Obviously, I'm an outsider to the human resource office and they weren't the only delay, but the delays in hiring have put pressure on several in our office to carry out those duties and delayed other work/publications.

II. What Are Some Ways These Competing Priorities Might Be Addressed?

I would be very interested in joining a walk support group and wellness workshops.

I think the workshops on communication would be great! I think summer hours would also boost morale for some. Available and affordable exercise programs for the School of Education employees. At least one retreat with faculty and staff (both are human and they should know each other.

I don't know...I think much of what I experience is related to still trying to figure out what the SoE routines are so that I can (when appropriate) use the acceptable "short cuts".

Anything that encourages a healthier lifestyle—weight watchers meeting held in the SoE. Walking support groups. Better and healthier choices of food in the atrium—i.e. Subway.

Creating walk support groups and organizing wellness workshops.

Email management strategies, code of ethics. Baby changing stations, walk support groups, wellness workshops, time management strategies, increased involvement of all support staff in school-wide committees and initiatives (give everyone more ownership of missions), coffee/tea/water stations on every floor.

Walk groups would be very nice, especially in good weather—but not all the SoE staff is housed within the SoE building. IN order to ensure inclusiveness and a sense of community within the SoE, I thin it is important to keep that in mind! I think wellness workshops are a wonderful idea, as well as some sort of communication effort designed to educate employees more about the options they have at IU for things like exercise, onsite daycare, and school options for school aged-children (if there are any). I think the yoga and pilates classes at the SRSC and HPER buildings are great, but asking staff to pay on top of their memberships for these classes seem a bit unfair, considering we are already paying to be able to get into the SRSC and HPER buildings. I would like to be able to persuade SRSC/HPER to offer many more "staff friendly class times, too! More work-related assistance, such as the assistance with organizing files ideas is very nice, but that would require a lot of support from the Dean's office. Although I think visible support from the Dean's office would really lend a lot of credibility to any efforts made by the committee. I also think staff might be hesitant to use this type of service to avoid being perceived as unable to do their jobs in some circumstances. Maybe another route to take would be to have a "day off", where the employee gets agreement on timing from his/her supervisor and comes into the office but does none of his/her regular work like answering email, telephone calls or questions and just gets to organize his/her work area and files? Thank you very much for providing this opportunity for feedback. I'm very encouraged to be working for a department where there is this level of sensitivity to employee issues and this much commitment to helping employees with them!

We need to do all that we can to be family friendly and to support each other. My sense is that all of us need different things. Support groups and wellness workshops are great for some people, but for others, it's just one more thing to do. More than anything, we need to let our colleagues know that we care about them and that working themselves to death isn't good for them or for the School as a whole. We need to keep looking for ways to help people cope with all their work and non-work responsibilities but we can't be disappointed if the things we try don't work—most "fixes" will only be fixes for a few.

Organize a symposium on how to multitask effectively, "cut corners", and other efficiency serving themes that might address how to cope better with the volume of work.

Always good to have more communication within our department, just so we'll know what's going on. I know this is hard because everyone's so busy. Good to know what everyone's job description and responsibilities are, for efficiency and to avoid misunderstandings.

Recognition for service work. Grouping meetings to allow for a consistent work schedule.

Creating walk support groups within the building or stretch classes, organizing wellness workshops, or massages.

My goal is to achieve greater alignment of dissertation topics with my personal pub/research efforts. Likewise, trying to find ways to align teaching with my research will also help.

I never thought time management workshops worked well for me, but I am willing to try again. Organizing a time management workshop and even having personal consultation about time management could be helpful.

For me the most important support offered through my work is graduate student assistants.

No extra meetings or workshops! I really enjoy my exercise schedule developed independently of any organization.

I see it mostly as my responsibility to consistently and clearly maintain those necessary boundaries and I'm hopeful that my colleagues and students will respect them in response.

The University would be wise to consider the effects of childbearing on women faculty. The work family pressures faced by women who are pregnant, recovering from pregnancy, and/or nursing are not the same as those experienced by male faculty.

Creating more flexible childcare hours at the IU centers. Having the IU childcare centers close a different week during the summer rather than the week directly before the beginning of fall semester.

It would be nice if there were something similar to "fireside chats" with associate and full faculty members about the tenure process. I think it would be quite beneficial to listen and learn from other faculty members who have been successful in developing their research, their relationships with colleagues and students, and their teaching.

Social even for parents of young children, finding massage therapists who are willing to visit campus regularly.

My wish list:
♦   Weight Watchers meeting—and I don't care how much it costs and that there has to be a minimum fee, the SOE can afford it.
♦   Food court with healthy sandwiches, soups, and salads.
♦   Weekly chair massage
♦   A "walk the block" group that together once or twice a week goes out and walk the big block around Rose, 3rd Street, Jordan, 7th (or whatever it is0 and gets us out of our chairs and moving.
PS I've requested a baby changing station for years—I think that would help young families tremendously. It should, of course, be in both the men's and women's' room.

These are all attractive ideas. But as noted above the name of the game is: do your research, bring in extra money, keep your head down and avoid as much service work and time consuming teaching activity as possible. The culture inadvertently rewards self serving behavior. The ideas above make sense for targeted faculty and staff groups such as non tenured faculty. We could reasonably ask department heads

and other leaders to insure such services are made available to the most vulnerable of staff. Or put another way such services need to be part of a larger strategy that creates a more humane environment. I think the present stressful environment is unconsciously designed to create neurotic faculty and staff. Faculty/staff services seem good in some cased (i.e. ETS) insufficient in others but largely uncoordinated.

I don't have good suggestions. I'm afraid I'm a complainer without solutions in this instance.