

Suggested Best Practices for Better Work-Life Balance¹

Department of Spanish, Italian, & Portuguese

Email

We're all drowning in email, and the many hours we spend on it are generating ever more work. Some best email practices include:

Suggested Best Practices:

- Send emails only during regular work hours on M-F from 9AM-5:30 PM. If you are most available after hours, schedule email delivery by selecting the option to "Send Later."
- Include this suggested language for email signature. "I occasionally use email outside of normal work hours, but I do not expect you to respond other than when you are typically at work," OR "I respect the diverse working hours of my students and colleagues. Please feel free not to respond to emails from me outside of your working hours," OR "As an educator committed to work-life balance and respect for others, I strive to follow the Email Charter."
- Expect short and slow responses to emails.

Family-Friendly Scheduling²

The robustness of UVA's scholarly programming has lengthened the workday and placed stress on the schedules of faculty whose family obligations make it difficult to participate in events commencing at 5:30 pm or later. After-hours programming places particular demands on early career faculty, the cohort most likely to have young children and most concerned with being perceived as disengaged from the scholarly life of the university. Likewise, mid and late career faculty (especially those carrying substantial administrative responsibilities in smaller departments, holding joint appointments, or affiliated with interdisciplinary centers) can face pressures to organize and attend events multiple nights a week. The preponderance of post 5:30 scholarly programming conveys the mistaken impression that research is an extracurricular activity for the faculty. Such programming creates difficulties not only for faculty parents and caretakers, but for faculty with other family commitments or those seeking the elusive, but much celebrated, work-life balance.³

Family-friendly scheduling – wherein family is understood in its widest, most diverse definition – does not mean that all events after 5:30 PM should be prohibited. Rather, it means that we should be conscious of the exclusions created by after-hours events and should take proactive steps to accommodate faculty unable to stay on campus into the evening. It forces an acknowledgement that there is no perfect time for a lecture on campus; a 5:30 lecture excludes some faculty just as a lecture at 12:00, 2:00, or any other time typically associated with

¹ For existing UVA resources on work-life balance, see: <https://hr.virginia.edu/future-work/>; <https://med.virginia.edu/women-in-internal-medicine/wellness-work-life-balance/>

² Language for this section was taken from Brown University's Memo on "Family-Friendly Scheduling."

³ Although data on UVA's faculty is not available, "national statistics indicate that male faculty members (of every rank) are more likely than female faculty members (of every rank) to have a spouse or partner whose comparably flexible work schedule allows that spouse or partner to handle the bulk of evening-time household responsibilities. Put differently, male faculty members are more likely than female faculty members to have the household support to attend campus events after 5:30. We must be attuned to issues of gender equity when we think about program scheduling. We must also consider the particular challenges faced by single parents when required to attend events outside the regular hours of childcare" (Brown University, "Family-Friendly Scheduling").

classroom teaching excludes others. Too often we hear that “5:30 is the only time that everyone can make it,” but this is not accurate. Faculty members recognize that their responsibilities can periodically extend into the evening; a faculty member serving on a search committee understands that the task requires dinners with the candidates. The larger problem is when a program puts the bulk of its programming at 5:30; a faculty member with family responsibilities may be excluded from conversations crucial to his or her professional development for a period of years.⁴

Suggested Best Practices:

- Recognize that 5:30 PM or afterwards is not a time at which “everyone is free.”
- Distinguish between programming meant to serve the broader community and programming meant to bolster the research, teaching, or professional development of the faculty. Programming in the latter category should happen during the workday, when possible.
- Vary the times of workshops, seminars, and lectures so that the same people are not excluded. In particular, ensure that early career research faculty with family responsibilities do not miss the professional development or networking opportunities essential for tenure.
- Enfranchise faculty by making sure that departmental governance and other essential activities take place during the workday.

Service

Nearly everyone is doing more service than is required by their contract, especially considering the proportion of tenured and tenure-track faculty members in relation to the current student population. Some of this work is “visible” (meaning it is done in an official capacity and documented on one’s annual report), but much of it is “invisible,” and thus overlooked and undervalued.⁵

Suggested Best Practices:

- Be mindful of gender and race discrepancies in the invisible labor of student mentorship. Think carefully before asking a colleague from an underrepresented group to take on additional mentorship roles.⁶

⁴ According to Brown university’s memo, after-hours programming is deemed most necessary in those departments where faculty teach a 2:2 course load or more. There is substantially less after-hours programming in departments where faculty teach 2:1. Faculty in Economics and STEM fields report the fewest conflicts; faculty in interdisciplinary Humanities fields report the greatest pressures posed by after-hours programming.

⁵ Perhaps the most consistent form of “invisible labor in the academy” is “student-initiated mentorship, in which faculty provide ‘hands-on attention’ to ‘serve as role models, mentors, and even surrogate parents’ and engage in caregiving and emotional work, especially pertaining to student diversification and inclusion” (Reid, “Retaining Women Faculty”). This invisible labor falls overwhelmingly on women, LGBTQ, and BIPOC faculty. See Kimberly A. Truong, “Making the Invisible Visible,” <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2021/05/28/why-and-how-colleges-should-acknowledge-invisible-labor-faculty-color-opinion>; and Rebecca A. Reid, “Retaining Women Faculty: The Problem of Invisible Labor,” <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ps-political-science-and-politics/article/retaining-women-faculty-the-problem-of-invisible-labor/236BB88E11BDDDF04FC7F6DEEC46C5D1>

⁶ For example, SIP’s graduate program is 60% women, which is highly disproportionate to the percentage of women graduate faculty. The invisible labor of mentoring “can be exploitative for women because they are predominantly assumed to take on caregiving roles associated with gender stereotypes and motherhood” (Reid, “Retaining Women Faculty”). Faculty of color frequently devote significant time “to supporting BIPOC students navigating racist encounters and differentiated treatment from faculty members, peers and supervisors; coaching those students about adjusting to a predominantly white campus and feelings of isolation; mentoring and encouraging them to see

-Understand the difference between service roles with important decision-making responsibilities and those that do not empower faculty to develop policies. An overload of the former, especially if related to a colleague's teaching or research, is categorically different from an overload in the latter.

-For especially burdensome administrative roles, course releases and/or reductions of other service should be negotiated for all types of faculty, both Academic General Faculty and Tenured/Tenure-Track Faculty.

-Administrative assignments should rotate so that members of the department can contribute to its success. Our bylaws state that "The Department is committed to rotating administrative positions to ensure equitable distribution of service positions, decision making, and shared knowledge of procedures. The recommended term limit is two terms."

-Consider our colleagues' time before calling a meeting or asking them to take on additional tasks.

-Recognize that many of our colleagues are doing department, university, and national/international professional service.

-"No means no," meaning if a colleague communicates that they are unable to take on an additional service role, we need to accept their need to set a professional boundary.

potential within themselves that they may not yet see; and connecting them with prospective BIPOC students who are interested in learning more about the institution" (Truong, "Making the Invisible Visible").