

# The Faculty Senate Instructional Academic Staff Task Force Final Report and Recommendations

March 10, 2005

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## Introduction

The Instructional Academic Staff (IAS) Task Force was appointed by the Executive Committee of the UWL Faculty Senate in October, 2004 to investigate and make recommendations about instructional academic staff concerns regarding contracts and other employment and representational issues.

In addition to Faculty Senate, recommendations to attend to academic staff concerns have been made by both system and UWL groups. In the fall of 2000 UW-System created an Instructional Academic Staff (IRAS) Working Group to investigate and recommend titling options for non-tenure track instructional and research staff and to propose initiatives to facilitate the integration of IRAS into institutional life. The UW System Sloan Project for Academic Career Advancement pursued the recommendations of the IRAS Working Group and supported the recommendations to better address IAS concerns. Here on campus, the Women's Advisory Council also recommended that UWL better attend to academic staff concerns. Given the majority of academic staff are women, addressing these concerns also addresses gender equity concerns. Finally, UWL academic staff brought concerns about employment issues to Faculty Senate. Five procedures exist to add an item to the Faculty Senate agenda: 1) Senate Executive Committee action, 2) action by the Chancellor of the University, 3) faculty committee action, 4) one third vote of senators present and voting at a meeting, and 5) a petition signed by no fewer than 10 faculty members. Essentially, the only option open to the academic staff was a petition requesting Faculty Senate address the academic staff concerns. Anecdotally, many academic staff were reluctant to sign the petition for fear of negative retribution from their departments, programs, or the institution.

## Task Force Activities and Background Information

Our investigation consisted of several activities including: 1) a survey of all UWL academic staff, instructional and non-instructional,<sup>1</sup> 2) reviews of policies and procedures at UWL and other UW System schools, 3) consultation with the chairs of Faculty Senate and the Academic Staff Council, and 4) consultation with the Chancellor, the Provost, Academic Deans, and the Director of Human Resources.

IAS are a valuable resource at UWL. In fall 2003, IAS taught 28% of courses at UWL, up from 21% in 1994 (UW System Sloan Project Fact Sheet: *Faculty & Staff vs. Student Enrollment Trends – UW-La Crosse*). IAS perform numerous duties in addition to teaching. Only 16% of the IAS who responded to our survey reported their department expects them to teach as their only duty. Of those, 75% hold single-semester contracts. Individuals with at least one-year contracts are expected by their departments to engage in anywhere from one to 15 other activities (median = 4). The most common responsibilities include serving on departmental committees, advising, coordinating a course, and serving on college committees.

While IAS value teaching and working with students, clearly morale about other conditions of their employment, such as job security, is quite low. This is compounded by the fact that IAS are not kept in an electronic database by HR beyond the current academic year, so there is no easy way to determine length of UWL employment for any IAS. As one former IAS stated, "It's as if the contributions I made in the 6 years I was IAS aren't valued. I only began being 'counted' once I became a tenure-track faculty".

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<sup>1</sup> Brief descriptions of some results are summarized in the current report. For full results, please refer to supplementary materials.

Brief Recommendations. The Task Force recommends:

1. *Governance:*
  - a. All IAS, regardless of faculty status, are represented by Faculty Senate.
  - b. At least two additional seats, designated to be filled by IAS, are added to Faculty Senate.
  - c. A Faculty Senate committee is created to represent IAS. Specifically, the committee would consider and recommend policies affecting the academic staff status, salary, appointment types, titling, career progression, and working conditions. It also would consider and recommend the practices and procedures for implementing those policies. Finally the committee would be responsible for monitoring HR progress in collecting and disseminating information on these policies and procedures.
2. *Contracts.*
  - a. Whenever possible, IAS are offered multi-year fixed-term contracts as specified by Wisconsin Administrative Code, University of Wisconsin System/University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, Chapter 10.
  - b. The “not intended for renewal” clause in fixed-term contracts is replaced.
3. *Titling and Career Progression.*
  - a. UWL outline specific policies for titling and career progression of IAS.
  - b. Actual practices reflect these policies.
4. *Review of Academic Staff.*
  - a. University policy about the performance reviews of IAS are more specific and consistent with the expected responsibilities of academic staff, and clearly communicated by HR.
  - b. All academic staff are reviewed yearly to assure their classification as instructional or non-instructional remains appropriate.
5. *Communication.*
  - a. An IAS web page with links to resources both within and outside of UWL is created.
  - b. A mentorship program for new IAS is institutionalized.
  - c. An IAS Faculty Senate committee serves as a resource and advocate for IAS, and as a source of feedback for HR in its efforts to improve communication.
6. *Workload.*
  - a. The teaching load for full time IAS remains at the current level.

### Discussion of Recommendations

*Governance.* The governance of IAS is inadequate. The current policy is that academic staff without faculty status are governed by Academic Staff Council, while those with faculty status are governed by Faculty Senate. Academic staff achieve faculty status after they have held a .50 or greater teaching appointment for three semesters. Interestingly, our survey of the academics staff found that 69% of IAS were unaware of this policy. The policy is confusing and often misunderstood for IAS and their departments. We also asked respondents to rate the appropriateness of the current policy about governance of academic staff on a scale from 1 (totally appropriate) to 7 (not at all appropriate). Of the IAS who responded to our survey, most rated the current policy as “not appropriate” ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ).

Our investigation of other UW System schools suggests that UWL is unique in the policy of having IAS represented by two different governing bodies. Of the IAS who responded to our survey only 16% indicated they would prefer to be governed by Academic Staff Council. The remaining 84% were equally divided between Faculty Senate (44%) and “no preference” (40%). Additionally, most IAS do not feel well represented by their current governance group, regardless of whether they are governed by Faculty Senate or Academic Staff Council.

The Task Force recommends that IAS be governed by Faculty Senate, regardless of faculty status, although, only those IAS with faculty status would be allowed to serve on Faculty Senate. Additionally, we recommend structural changes in Faculty Senate to add at least two specified seats for IAS. Finally, we recommend the creation of a Faculty Senate committee to represent IAS concerns. This committee could continue work on other recommendations made in this report, as well as serve as a resource for IAS in the future. Specific responsibilities would include 1) considering and recommending policies affecting the academic staff status, salary, appointment types, titling, career progression, and working conditions, 2) considering and recommending the practices and procedures for implementing those policies, and 3) monitoring HR progress in collecting and disseminating information on these policies and procedures.

*Contracts.* Clearly, a primary concern of IAS is job security. The replacement of rolling-horizon contracts with, in many cases, single-year fixed-term contracts has exacerbated this concern. About 31% of IAS who responded to our survey have held rolling horizon contracts in the past. Currently, 54% hold single-year fixed-term contracts and 26% have single-semester fixed-term contracts. The remaining 20% have two- or three-year fixed-term contracts. These short term contracts do not reflect actual length of employment. Only about 7% of IAS who responded to our survey have worked at UWL for one year or less. Over 75% have worked at UWL for more than three years (median = 8 years). The large majority (86%) have been continuously employed. Additionally, the “not intended for renewal” clause in all fixed-term contracts further aggravates not only job security concerns, but morale as well. Again, given IAS generally are employed for many consecutive years, the contract wording does not reflect current employment practices.

The Task Force recommends that contracts better reflect current practice. Whenever possible, IAS should be offered multi-year fixed-term contracts and renewable fixed-term contracts according to UWL Policies and Procedures, Chapter 10, Academic Staff Appointments and the UW System report “Teaching Academic Staff In the UW System (A UW System Board of Regents 21st Century Study)”.<sup>2</sup> Recommendation #5 states that institutions “review the longevity of the instructional academic staff as a basis for planning and to ascertain the extent to which IAS may be given extended appointments.” Recommendation #6 states that institutions “consider, after the first year or two of appointment, making renewable appointments for positions that can be supported by the budget and programmatic needs. Fixed-term-terminal and one-semester appointments should not be used repeatedly in the absence of a plan that demonstrates such need.”

Furthermore, renewable appointments would eliminate the “not intended for renewal” clause in contracts. Other UW System schools choose to avoid the disingenuous practice of continual employment with fixed-term non-renewable contracts by using fixed-term renewable contracts. For example, in Madison, the policy is to give fixed-term renewable contracts to any individual continuously employed in the same department for three straight years as the longevity of the appointment demonstrates a need for that person’s skills in the department. Of course, these contracts can be non-renewed if circumstances change.

Further, we are concerned about the inconsistency in contracts across campus. One IAS reported teaching four 3-credit courses in one semester and being paid on a per-course basis, while other departments within the same college have IAS with the same workload being paid the much higher full-time academic staff salary. The capricious nature of these contracts in terms of both length and compensation is inherently unfair. Employment conditions should not be a function of the generosity of the department chair or dean. It is the committee’s recommendation that HR be more

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<sup>2</sup> The full report can be accessed at [Instructional Academic Staff Main Page](#) (to go to web page, right click and click on “open hyperlink”)

responsible for ensuring compliance with a set of fair standards to be consistently applied throughout the University.

*Titling and Career Progression*. Many IAS are worried about the lack of advancement/career progression opportunities at UWL. Titling and career progression has been studied by a minimum of three different committees in the past 5-6 years with no action taken. Most recently, in September, 2004, the College of Science and Allied Health Instructional Academic Staff Task Force completed a report and made recommendations about IAS titling and career progression. The report noted that UWL is atypical amongst other UW System schools in its lack of use of titling and career progression opportunities for academic staff. While UWL has not disallowed the use of different titles for IAS, current practice does not include the use of such titling and procedures about applying for career progression in titles are unclear. When asked about career progression, the Director of HR reported in an email to a member of this Task Force that the IAS do not have career progression processes outlined, like the non-instructional academic staff do, although there is one senior lecturer at UWL. (The Task Force is also aware that one IAS holds the title of Distinguished Lecturer as well). The email further defines what would qualify someone as a senior lecturer, including extensive teaching experience and extensive subject matter expertise.

The Task Force recommends that procedures for the career progression of academic staff be delineated. The SAH Academic Staff Task Force specified procedures in their report to the college, and the college identified institutionalizing those procedures as a goal for the 2004-2005 academic year. These procedures could easily be adopted by the other colleges and applied to all academic staff to reduce the unfairness inherent in different compensation and contract policies by college. We recommend that the procedures for career progression of academic staff be included in UWL Policies and Procedures Academic Staff Personnel Rules and clearly communicated to not only IAS, but UWL department chairs and deans as well.

*Communication about Policies and Procedures*. There appears to be no reliable resource for IAS to get employment information. Anecdotally, both faculty and IAS have reported receiving inconsistent and confusing answers from HR. Specifically, IAS have expressed confusion about many policies and practices at UWL including, but not limited to contract types, contract wording, titling/career progression options, merit review procedures, retirement and healthcare benefits, and grievance procedures. In addition, a review of other UW System schools web sites suggests that UWL's HR Department is in great need of improving how it communicates policies and procedures pertaining to IAS. The miscommunication extends beyond HR. Even as the Task Force investigated the concerns of IAS, we received different answers to questions from the Chancellor, the Provost, and the Academic Deans. We are in no way suggesting these inconsistent answers are intentional. Rather, given the complexity of various policies, without one comprehensive source, clear information is difficult to obtain.

The Task Force recommends better coordination and communication of information affecting IAS. The UW System report "Teaching Academic Staff In the UW System (A UW System Board of Regents 21st Century Study)", mentioned above, also recommends that institutions "identify personnel policies and practices that apply to instructional academic staff in a way that makes them easily accessible to department chairs, faculty, and instructional academic staff (Recommendation #9) and "orient department chairs to their role as supervisors of instructional...academic staff so they can implement academic staff employment policies in a consistent matter (Recommendation #11). We support both of these recommendations and believe they are the responsibility of HR. We recommend that HR be held accountable for addressing these recommendations.

Further, we recommend HR create an IAS web page with resources for IAS, both within and outside of the university. This is in accordance with the "UW System Integration of Academic Staff

Report” completed on 2000 regarding recommendations to improve integration of IAS.<sup>3</sup> Specifically the report suggests that institutions “develop or enhance a webpage that includes information specific and relevant to IAS. The webpage should be promoted widely across” the institution. In reviewing various UW System school web pages, the Task Force was especially impressed with the web pages at Oshkosh, Platteville, and Madison. We would encourage these web pages be used as models for any revisions of the UWL web page. Additionally, if an IAS Faculty Senate committee is created, this body could serve as a source of information for IAS. Finally, we recommend that, also in accordance with the UW System 2000 report, a mentorship program for new IAS be institutionalized. Ideally, mentors should be other IAS rather than non-instructional academic staff or faculty.

*Review of Academic Staff.* Our investigation revealed two distinct areas of concern about the review of academic staff. First, our survey of IAS suggested that performance review practices of IAS vary widely among departments and programs. According to the Academic Staff Employment Policies and Procedures, IAS “shall be annually evaluated in accordance with Faculty Personnel Rules, UWS 3.05 and UWL 3.05”. Given the premise that IAS have different responsibilities than faculty, these review procedures quite likely are inappropriate in many cases. Anecdotal reports do suggest that some IAS are subjected to identical review procedures and expectations for faculty, yet they do not receive the tenure and compensation benefits. In other cases, IAS are reviewed by different departmental constituents several times within a single semester or single year.

Second, at an institutional level, the appropriate classification of academic staff as instructional or non-instructional rarely is reviewed. Specifically, some individuals are hired as non-instructional academic staff. During the course of their employment, however, they have begun to teach classes as part of their workload and regularly teach more than one class. These individuals feel especially disenfranchised as teaching non-instructional academic staff.

The Task Force recommends that specific, unique, and consistent procedures for the performance review of IAS be specified, included in the Academic Staff Employment Policies and Procedures, and clearly communicated by HR to IAS, chairs, and deans. Additionally, we recommend that all academic staff reviews, both instructional and non-instructional, include a review of the classification title. Academic staff who teach courses as a regular part of their workload should be classified as instructional academic staff.

*Workload.* As previously noted, the large majority of IAS do much more than just teach. In the majority of cases, departments expect academic staff to serve on departmental committees and advise students. A substantial minority of departments expects IAS to serve on college, university or search and screen committees; coordinate courses; chair committees; and supervise undergraduate clinicals, internships, practica, etc. As with faculty, these activities are not included as an individual’s load.

While the Task Force recognizes the increased demands on all UWL employees, we are concerned about the potential institutionalized increase in IAS teaching loads. In general, we recommend that IAS teaching loads remain at current levels. Any discussions of increased teaching loads for academic staff must be mindful that, currently, IAS do much more than simply teach. If IAS teaching loads are increased, they should be accompanied by commensurate decreases in other responsibilities.

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<sup>3</sup> The full “Integration of Academic Staff Report” can be accessed at [Instructional Academic Staff Main Page](#)