



Effects of Faculty Workload on Cal Poly Pomona Students



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Introduction

In a society where a college degree is a requirement, and an expensive one at that, the California State University (CSU) remains one of the most affordable options available in the state. However, in a time of a mass wave of labor strikes, the CSU is under fire for a multitude of issues that are being faced by faculty, staff, and students. Workload is an important issue that has already been addressed multiple times at Cal Poly Pomona specifically via workload resolutions, rolling strikes, on-campus rallies, and more. Due to the way that the higher education system was established and has functioned for many decades, workload has consistently been an issue faced by faculty and staff at a global level. This has been compounded by issues faced by professors of marginalized identities, bringing intersectionality into the conversation as well. Due to this history, many studies focus on the effects of workload on faculty as well as the effects on universities as a whole. However, very little research, if at all, has been conducted on the effects on faculty members' counterparts: their students. This is the focus of the current study. The results show that the perceived faculty workload negatively impacts student success in a variety of ways throughout their college career. Some of the aspects of students' lives that are impacted range from grades to graduation delays to mental health struggles. These potential issues plaguing the student population at Cal Poly Pomona are important to address to provide a quality education for the population that the CSUs exist to serve: their students.

Motivation

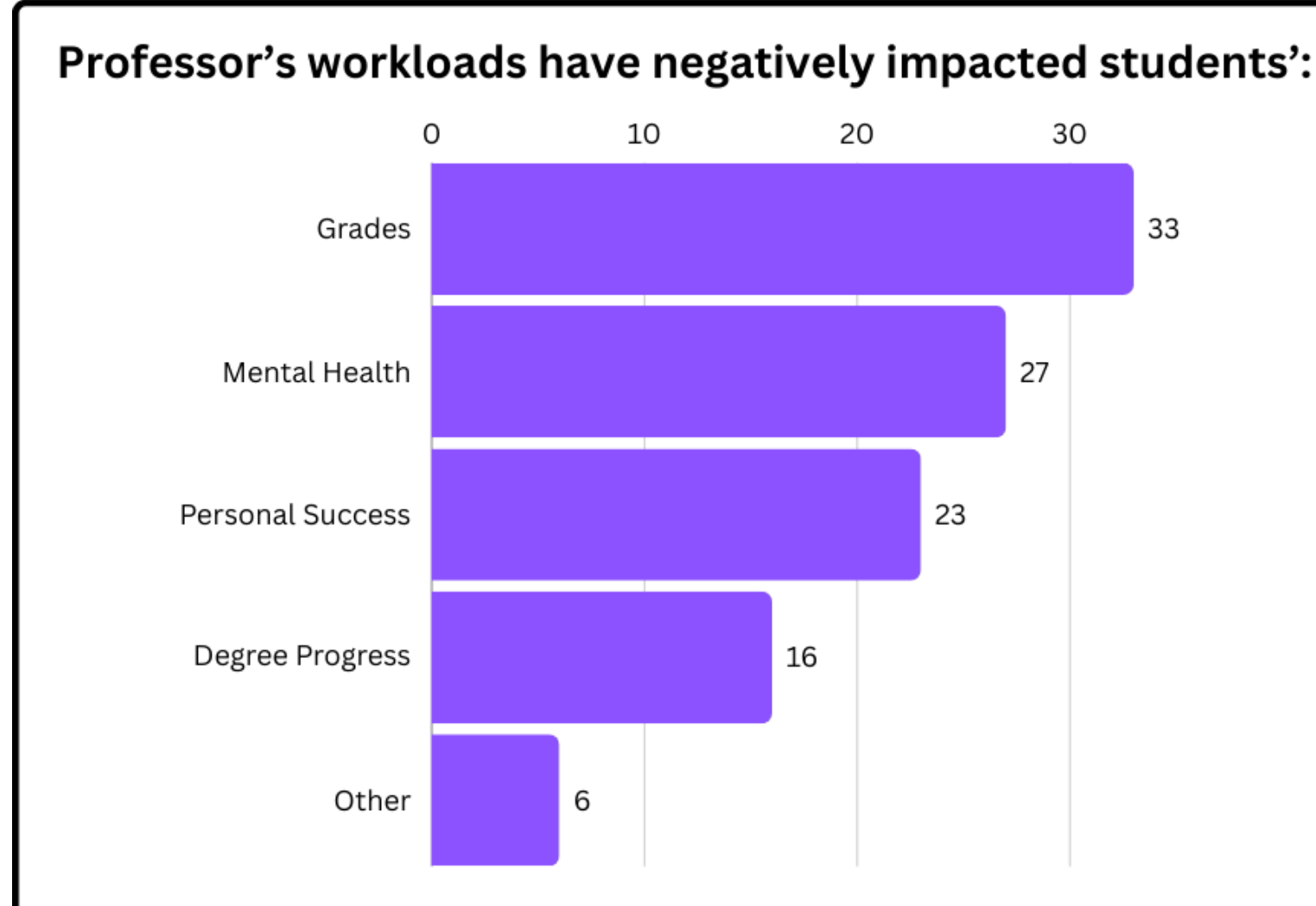
Attending college, specifically my time at Cal Poly Pomona, has opened my eyes to a variety of social justice issues. I have been a student in higher education for the past 5 years, attending multiple universities. In that time, I worked closely with Dr. Maya Stovall, a Liberal Studies professor in the College of Education and Integrative Studies. This is where I learned about the Unit 3 Workload Resolution that she worked on. I have also worked with a faculty union, the California Faculty Association (CFA), advocating for student and faculty rights as I pursue my degree to become an educator as well. Due to these experiences, I have a unique perspective on the issue at hand. During my internship with the CFA, I have seen the struggles that CSU faculty deal with from a behind-the-scenes perspective. I was able to support professors on the picket line as they went on strike two times to resolve their work issues. All of this allowed me to reflect on my experiences as a student through a different lens. Although most of my professors had been open about their overwhelming workloads, but in reality I had no idea what the workload actually entailed. I have now seen how it affects professors, as well as how it could be further affecting students' education. This research is important because as a future educator and a current student, we need to support both our faculty and students by setting us all up for success. Since I have finished this paper, circumstances have changed and improved, with a new agreement being reached by the CSU and the CFA, but this is just one of many necessary steps needed.

Literature Review

My findings were organized into five main themes. Historically, universities have had an issue with workload, as the roles that a professor is expected to fill have changed. Overwork is deep rooted in the university, going back over a century, according to Robert Connors. Roles have become more complicated as time has gone on, further adding to the issue of overwork. This overwork directly affects faculty in a variety of ways. Faculty are not supported enough by their institutions. This can be seen by faculty's overwork in regard to their own classes, class sizes, involvements in committees or boards, and more. Many professors have to drop their research and time supporting their students in order to just continue the bare minimum of teaching their classes. The issue can become worse when intersectionality is considered as well. Those of marginalized identities do a lot of "invisible labor", discussed by Gordon, Willink, and Hunter. This consists of largely unrecognized and unpaid work that professors do to further support diversity, community, as well as their students. While this isn't intentional, it is commonly experienced by professors and makes saying no to more work even harder than it was before. All of this ultimately reflects back on university and has rippling effects. There are many adjustments that must be made on an administration level because this method of overwork is not sustainable. Professors are more likely to leave work, negatively affecting retention rates. If students have a poor experience, this reflects back on the university, which means they may get less funding, which is why professors are overworked in the first place. The cycle continues. One effect of faculty overwork that is barely touched upon is actually its effects on students. Very few articles mentioned effects on students and when they did, the comments were minimal. Some comments mention that professors lack the time and resources to properly support their students and that burnout affects that. Additionally, the student population at the CSU and higher education as a whole is only getting more diverse, making the need for students support even more important.



Results



- 60% of students have heard their professors state that they have a lot of work
- 60% of students say their professors have no time to grade
- 65% of students have had their assignments graded late
- 54% of students have received little to no feedback on their assignments due to faculty workload
- 55% of students believe that their professor's workload has impacted their academics
- 34% of students believe that their professor's workload has impacted their degree progress

65 surveys were analyzed at the end of the research, coming from students from nearly every single college at Cal Poly Pomona. Participants were varied between current students and alumni, part time and full time, and across ages as well.

Most students stated that their professors have discussed their workload and the variety of ways that it affects them. Students were also able to notice their professors were overworked in the way that their professors were exhausted, unmotivated, sick, and stressed out consistently throughout their classes, citing workload as the reason.

Students also reported that their grades, feedback, and even graduation time were negatively impacted by their professors' workloads. This leaves one to question the quality of the education students are receiving due to mismanagement and lack of support provided for faculty. Not only is it negatively affecting faculty, it is also impacting the students, whom the CSU exists to serve in the first place.

Students also reported not being able to contact some professors due to their busy schedule, some of them reporting not ever getting a response. This work is extra work, also called care work, so it is not needed of professors, but most professors emphasize how important it is. College is a time where networking can be essential for one's future career and this is one of just many large opportunities that students may be missing out on due to their professors being too overworked.

Mental health was also one of the biggest factors students reported being affected. Students cited stress as something they experienced, whether it was due to a lack of email response, feedback, and more. An additional issue not mentioned in the study, but experienced by many students I have talked to, is the overwork and lack of counselors on campus as well. This in combination with students' professors being overworked is something important to note as students struggle with a variety of huge life changes outside of college as well. The feeling of disconnect, especially at a commuter college like Cal Poly Pomona, is very prevalent among its students.

Invisible labor done by professors is something that students may not have known about by name, but was commonly seen as an issue faced by Cal Poly Pomona students. With more support provided to faculty and a more even distribution of work, students' experiences at Cal Poly Pomona could be very positively impacted in a variety of ways.

Methodology

The current study focused on the effects of faculty workload on students. Data was gathered through online surveys sent out through social media such as Instagram and Discord as well as via email and Canvas communications. When sending out the surveys, I made sure to only focus on Cal Poly Pomona students, both past and present, in order to make the results more relevant to this specific campus. In order to make sure results weren't skewed, I made the surveys anonymous with the option to fill out demographic questions to further analyze the data received. Most survey questions were closed-ended, with a few open-ended questions for students to reflect on topics that may not have been an option provided since everyone's college experience is vastly different.

The questions asked are as follows:

- Have you heard professors talk about their workload before?
- What have you heard about your professors' workloads?
- Have you seen your professor(s) affected by their workload?
- If yes, what did you witness?
- Have your professors stated that their workload affects lesson planning?
- Have you heard your professors say their workload affects their grading?
- Have you had differing feedback on assignments due to professor workload?
- Have you had your assignments graded differently due to professor workload?
- On average, how long does it take your professors to respond to your emails?
- After answering these questions, do you feel like your professor's workload has impacted your academics?
- Has your professors' workload negatively impacted the following? (Select all that apply)
- Are there any other experiences that come to mind about your professors' workload that you would like to share here?
- Are you a full-time or part-time student?
- What year are you?
- What is your age?
- What college are / were you a part of?

An auto-ethnographic aspect was also used to integrate my own experiences as a CFA intern as well as a student into the data in order to further analyze the results. My position is a unique one and I think viewing the issue through multiple student lenses is important to make sure more experiences are heard.

Next steps

College is a time of immense change and immense stress, and more support is needed for both professors and students. The results are important to note as more students apply and begin their terms at Cal Poly Pomona. If universities like Cal Poly Pomona want to further support their faculty and students, action needs to be taken at an administrative level whether it be on campus or at a state level with the Board of Trustees.

While the statewide CSU strike on January 22 was an important start to resolving workload issues and improving support for those in the CSU, it is only the beginning. The current study proves that a wide variety of support is needed for faculty to support themselves and their students.

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