



How do we Address Faculty Burnout? Start by Exploring Faculty Motivation

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Abstract

The discourse around the discontent of faculty, staff, and students has been growing since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. While much of the conversation about how to address the issues facing higher education is well-intentioned, efforts to help faculty do not go deep enough to the core of their identity. In this work, we describe a survey we designed and implemented that explores faculty motivation and perceptions of the faculty job. What we have learned through this limited sample is that intellectual engagement and a passion for education motivate faculty rather than some of the more conventional dimensions of motivation such as money or benefits. Faculty find teaching to be enjoyable, interesting, and important—arguably the best part of their job—and they have positive views of their students. These findings suggest that faculty developers might rethink their approach to working with faculty and do so in a way that aligns with the faculty motivations revealed in this research.

Keywords Motivation · Faculty morale · Burnout · Faculty career progression · Perceptions of faculty

Campuses remain tumultuous places for faculty, staff, and students multiple semesters after the initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Listening to the chatter on campus, glancing at headlines in daily publications, or scrolling through academically minded social media feeds offer myriad sources of discontent. In some instances, we might see angst over the latest actions of state government stymying speech on campus; in other instances, we see adverse pressures on enrollments and budgets; in still others we note exhaustion over the evolving needs of students; and elsewhere we recognize skepticism or outright distrust of university leadership.

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Presuming that these sources of faculty malcontent all stem from the COVID-19 pandemic may be easy, but astute observers will note that many of these tensions were simmering long before face masks and social distancing were part of our daily lives. Just as the manifestations of these tensions on campus stem from complex origins, so too must the discussions about how to address them—because they cannot persist.

While much of the work to address these issues will need to be done at a systemic level, we contend that faculty developers still need to consider how best to help faculty successfully move through this tumultuous time in higher education. We argue that an important approach to supporting faculty through this time is to use their motivation: why do people become faculty members in the first place? What compels them to pursue *and* to maintain a professional life in the academy? How might these motivations be affected by the current environment on college campuses? Similar to how good teaching practice involves bringing students' interests and backgrounds into the classroom to make learning more meaningful (e.g., Bain, 2004; Weimer, 2013; Lang, 2016), getting back to the roots of why faculty chose to be faculty and tapping into those motivations can better support faculty to continue working through the tensions in higher education.

To this end, we designed and implemented a pilot survey exploring faculty motivation and what we have learned through this limited sample is that intellectual engagement, individually and with students and peers, motivates faculty rather than some of the more conventional dimensions of motivation such as money or benefits. We proceed by grounding our work in the sparse literature on faculty motivation and draw on other explorations of professional motivation. From there, we detail our sample strategy, survey approach, and design. Afterwards, we present the findings from our survey and consider the implications of these initial results for campuses.

Exploring Faculty Motivation

Given the academy's emphasis on research and investigation, we might expect that attention to faculty themselves might be commonplace in the literature, but it is not. Indeed, the existing research on faculty motivation is surprisingly sparse and dated (Gunersel et al., 2016). The literature that is available tends to focus on faculty motivation related to various aspects of the job, such as embracing a new pedagogical strategy, rather than a more general assessment of why faculty are motivated *to be* faculty (Berman & Skeff, 1988; Calkins, 2018; Colbeck et al., 2002; Gunersel et al., 2016; Herbert et al., 2022; Jacobson & Cole, 2020; Stupnisky et al., 2018).

Scholars have produced a considerable amount of research into how faculty can be motivated to use new and different teaching practices, and to embrace best practices in teaching (Berman & Skeff, 1988; Calkins, 2018; Colbeck et al., 2002; Gunersel et al., 2016; Jacobson & Cole, 2020; Stupnisky et al., 2018). Stupnisky et al. (2018) employ self-determination theory to investigate faculty motivation surrounding their teaching and efforts to improve their teaching and conclude that faculty are more likely to be motivated by intrinsic factors (e.g., making changes in teaching practice that they perceived as meaningful and beneficial to students) rather

than extrinsic ones (e.g., promotion, tenure, merit pay). Jacobson and Cole (2020) note that STEM faculty vary widely in receptivity to changing their pedagogical approaches due to many factors, such as policies and practices that encourage or discourage attention to teaching as a performance metric and time available to make changes. These conclusions mirror older work from Berman and Skeff (1988) that found via survey that faculty were motivated to improve in principle, but faculty interest in engaging in faculty development varied considerably.

A related stream of research explores why faculty may be inclined to engage in various faculty development programming and opportunities (Lowenthal et al., 2013; Serow et al., 1999). In their case study of faculty participating in instructional reform programs, Serow et al. (1999) conclude that faculty exhibited three distinct motivational patterns, shaped in part by the role of the faculty at their institutions. Some faculty were drawn to a vision of educational reform (first motivational pattern) while others sought financial and moral support for their endeavors (second motivational pattern). The third motivational pattern combines extrinsic motivations, such as grants that provide funding to further innovative teaching methods, with intrinsic motivations that initially led instructors to focus on teaching innovations.

More recently, discussion of the strain that the faculty face in all the dimensions of their work, including faculty workload, burnout, and the factors that compel faculty members to stay or to leave university life (e.g., Zahneis, 2022) has grown. Although the pandemic has exacerbated these aspects of faculty work, these aspects existed before the pandemic. Some of this discussion is found in trade publications such as *Inside Higher Education* (Diede et al., 2022; Flaherty, 2022; Toor, 2022; Vidra, 2022) and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (Doležal, 2022, 2023; McClure, 2022; Pope-Ruark, 2022a; Zamudio-Suarez, 2022). For example, Flaherty (2022) shares many examples of faculty noting that their workload is untenable and a major reason why many of them want or decide to leave academia. Although the faculty workload has always been heavy, some of the more recent demands on faculty time include increases in service requests, the need to advertise their classes to reach enrollment minimums, becoming emotional supports for their students, and the expectation to continually innovate and to update their teaching practices (e.g., increasing flexibility, responding to the surge of AI) (Doležal, 2022; Musgrave, 2022; Supiano, 2023).

Pope-Ruark (2022b) notably explores faculty burnout and how it may relate to motivations. She finds that often faculty pursue their profession from a place of idealism. Put differently, faculty want to make a difference, want to have an impact, and, as a result, are particularly prone to burnout. Efforts to combat burnout need to consider these motivations and underlying quest for purpose that faculty members bring to their roles on campuses. Noting that faculty have taken additional steps, such as strict boundary setting to stave off burnout, Doležal (2023) also observes that idealism and work increasingly misaligned with motivation play a role in young scholars' decisions to stay, disengage, or leave. Related to increasing concerns and possible trends of faculty leaving higher education in pursuit of other professional opportunities, Zong et al. (2022) explored the motivations of education faculty to stay or to leave their institutions and found that contractual situations, feelings towards an institution, anticipated future satisfaction, and pressures to stay or leave that come

from others' expectations are the most important factors in a faculty member's decision. Less important factors included alternative positions elsewhere, recognition and appreciation of their publications and other research outputs, and commitments to people at their institutions.

Finally, there are some additional areas of research that could inform our study of faculty motivation in particular disciplines. For example, a robust literature in public administration investigates public service motivation, or PSM. James Perry and Lois Recasino Wise first introduced the concept of PSM in 1990 as "an individual's predisposition to respond to motives grounded primarily or uniquely in public institutions and organizations" (368). In other words, PSM is occupied with trying to understand why some individuals are motivated for careers in public service—notably government service—and what the implications of these motivations may be for the work of government. Although these two professions undoubtedly differ, some clear parallels also exist between the work of government and the work of faculty. Pautz and Vogel (2020) conducted a small-scale study of political science and public administration faculty to determine if the widely used PSM indicators helped to advance understanding of faculty motivation. They found that faculty were motivated by a desire to make meaningful contributions to the world, an interest in working with students, and pursuit of intellectual stimulation and the autonomy that often comes with faculty life.

Missing in this research, however, is a rich and more generalized understanding of why faculty pursue faculty careers. Knowing why faculty may or may not be inclined to try teaching techniques or attend faculty development is undoubtedly important, but it does not address an increasingly important need to understand why they are even faculty in the first place. We argue that if we are going to help faculty—and therefore help students—at this pivotal time in higher education, we need to return to the roots of why faculty became faculty in the first place, and design faculty development relative to those motivations. While considering the stressors causing many of the issues in academia and working to resolve them is also important, those larger systemic changes can take a long time. In the interim, we need to develop an approach that supports faculty in the current system, and infusing faculty motivations into programming can create stepping stones for moving them successfully through the current climate of higher education. Therefore, we need to have a fuller understanding of faculty as individuals who have pursued higher education as a career. To do so is to acknowledge the human side of this work, which is an important step in preventing burnout (Malesic, 2022). With this deeper understanding, we will be better positioned to support faculty, potentially to retain them, and to serve the needs of students on our campuses.

It is worth noting some colloquial perceptions that exist of faculty and how they feel about the faculty job. One of these perceptions is that faculty find research and scholarship to be the most important parts of their job while teaching is just a necessary but less enjoyable part of the job (Wilson, 2011). Donald Hall, in 1999, starkly articulated the conflict between teaching and research: "Many would term those last two phrases ["professional life" and "teaching schools"] an oxymoron, assuming that professional death was the inevitable consequence of teaching four courses a semester" (1999, 193). This perception may stem from the fact that research and

scholarship are more important and more highly valued by institutions than teaching, shown through examples such as the negative ways in which universities treat contingent faculty such as adjunct professors (Doležal, 2022; Douglas-Gabriel, 2019; Flaherty, 2022).

Another perception of faculty is that they think poorly of their students. This perception is demonstrated by the persistence of classes designed to “weed-out” students and related evidence that some faculty value smart students over learning, reductions in standards or expectations to reduce overall teaching workload, the characterization of students’ visits to offices as “unwanted intrusions”, and the recent experiences of high student disengagement and increased instances of cheating (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Astin, 2016; Musgrave, 2022; Reis, 2000). However, without a strong body of research regarding faculty motivation, we do not really know whether these perceptions are true and align with faculty motivations.

To start pushing the field towards developing this deeper understanding of faculty, we describe our initial exploration of faculty motivation and their perceptions of the faculty job. First, we detail our methodological approach.

Methods

Study Context

This work was conducted within the context of a larger study on faculty motivation, perceptions, and barriers with data gathered through a survey. This work is approved under the Institutional Review Board protocol # FWA00015321.

Participant Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited using a snowball sampling method. We first began by creating a list of about 70 to 80 directors of centers for teaching and learning around the country that our research team knew of in some capacity. Next, we contacted these center directors and asked if they could help us recruit faculty at their institutions to complete a survey. This was a broad request for faculty across all ranks and disciplines to help us get as representative of a sample as possible. We provided our contacts with a template email they could send to faculty and provided additional information about the study when asked. We additionally used convenience sampling by advertising the survey via Twitter to expand the reach of our survey and potential sample size further. We chose to advertise over Twitter as it has become a popular avenue for faculty to communicate professionally with each other, more so than other social media sites, such as Facebook. Our three initial tweets were seen nearly 600 times, had 45 interactions, and 10 link clicks (and later tweets and retweets further increased our reach). In total, there were 144 complete responses, representing a range of roles, disciplines, levels of experience, institution types, and identities (Table 1).

Table 1 Demographics of survey participants ($n = 144$)

| Demographic | Number of Participants | Demographic | Number of Participants |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Current Role | | Public/Private | |
| Adjunct Faculty | 13 | Public | 89 |
| Lecturer | 15 | Private | 54 |
| Assistant Prof | 28 | Prefer not to answer | 1 |
| Associate Prof | 36 | Institution Type | |
| Professor | 40 | Baccalaureate college | 15 |
| Clinical faculty | 5 | Masters college & univ | 58 |
| Department Chair/ Program Director | 23 | Doctoral university | 64 |
| Other Admin role | 19 | Professional school | 7 |
| Other | 27 | Institution Focus | |
| Discipline | | Teaching focused | 64 |
| Arts & Humanities | 35 | Scholarship focused | 25 |
| Business | 5 | Equally teaching and scholarship | 45 |
| Engineering | 6 | Other | 15 |
| Interdisciplinary | 12 | Prefer not to answer | 2 |
| Law | 2 | Gender | |
| Natural & Health Sciences | 43 | Woman | 82 |
| Social Sciences | 36 | Man | 52 |
| Prefer not to answer | 5 | Non-binary | 2 |
| Teaching Experience | | Prefer not to answer | 6 |
| Less than a year | 5 | Race/Ethnicity | |
| 1 to 3 years | 13 | Asian/Pacific Islander | 8 |
| 4 to 6 years | 16 | Black/African American | 2 |
| 7 to 9 years | 17 | Hispanic/Latino/a | 5 |
| 10 to 12 years | 18 | Native American | 1 |
| 13 to 15 years | 14 | White | 120 |
| More than 15 years | 60 | Multi-ethnic | 3 |
| Prefer not to answer | 1 | Not listed | 3 |
| Student Make-up | | Prefer not to answer | 10 |
| All undergraduates | 79 | | |
| All graduate students | 18 | | |
| Mix of undergrads and grads | 46 | | |
| Other | 1 | | |

Survey respondents were given the option to choose multiple roles, institutional foci, and races/ethnicities. Respondents who did choose multiple options within these demographic categories are represented multiple times in this table

Data Collection

Data were collected through a survey that asked respondents about their motivations and perceptions of their jobs (Supplementary Materials). The survey was administered through Qualtrics, and it builds off the work of Pautz and Vogel (2020) who pulled validated survey questions from Stupnisky et al. (2018) and Calkins (2018, dissertation) to begin investigating faculty motivation. These questions related to public service motivation and faculty motivation, and we then modified these questions to better fit the higher education context of our study. All sets of Likert-scale questions had acceptable reliability levels (Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.7 to 0.9). Data were collected from mid-March to mid-May, 2022.

Data Analysis

All data analyses and figures were created using R (R Core Team, 2023). Average responses were calculated to assess respondents' thoughts on their motivations and perceptions of the faculty job. To determine whether respondents had different perceptions of the four main aspects of the faculty job (teaching, scholarship, campus service, professional service), a Kruskal–Wallis analysis was performed. Dunn's post-hoc test was used to explore significant differences between these four aspects within three different questions, and p values were adjusted using the Bonferroni multiple testing correction method.

Due to small sample sizes within our various demographic groups (see Table 1), we did not perform statistical analyses across demographic groups. However, we highlighted notable trends among the demographic groups using a few important cutoffs. For a difference to be highlighted, it had to represent a group of at least five respondents. For the ranking question, differences had to be at least two points away from the overall average rank to be highlighted as notable. For Likert-scale questions, differences had to be at least 0.5 away from the average value and round to a different value than the average. Finally, for the question asking respondents to provide time affordances for different job aspects, differences had to be at least 10% different from the overall average to be highlighted as notable. We chose all of these cutoffs to ensure we noted obvious differences and that we did not highlight idiosyncratic differences from individuals in our data set.

Results

Our survey respondents provided some insights into faculty motivation, and some of those insights might surprise readers. We discuss our results through three themes: faculty are motivated by intellectual stimulation; faculty find teaching enjoyable; and faculty have a positive view of their students.

Faculty are Motivated by Intellectual Stimulation

Our first survey question asked faculty to rank their motivations for choosing an academic career on a scale of most motivating (1) to least motivating (12). Faculty were given 11 different options, as well as an ‘other’ choice where they could write in their own responses. Overall, faculty ranked ‘Intellectual Stimulation/Engagement’ as the most motivating factor for pursuing academia with an average rank of 3.7 (Table 2), and 29% of respondents ($n=42$) giving ‘Intellectual Stimulation/Engagement’ the top rank. The second most motivating factor identified by survey respondents was ‘Passion for Education’ with an average rank of 4.3 and 22% of respondents ($n=31$) giving this option the top rank. Thirty respondents wrote in a motivating factor for the ‘Other’ option, and while there were a number of additional ideas shared, the most common response was about flexibility in scheduling and personal autonomy, which was mentioned by 10 respondents. However, this option was only ranked as the top motivator (i.e., #1) twice.

Some small differences in these rankings appeared based on certain demographics. Respondents who identified Engineering ($n=6$) as their discipline were much less motivated by ‘Intellectual Stimulation/Engagement’ (average rank of 8.4) and ‘Passion for Education’ (average rank of 8.3), and instead ranked salary/financial benefits, job stability, and fringe benefits as their top motivators (average rank of 3.0, 4.8, and 5.0 respectively). Faculty who have less than a year of experience teaching ($n=5$) ranked ‘Mentoring’ as more motivating than the overall average (average rank of 4.2 versus the overall average rank of 6.4). Additionally, respondents who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander ($n=7$) and Multiracial or multiethnic ($n=8$) were less motivated by ‘Intellectual Stimulation/Engagement’ (average rank of 7.1 and 6.7 respectively). The top motivator for respondents identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander was ‘campus/institutional climate’ (average rank of 4.8) and the top motivator for respondents identifying as multiracial or multiethnic was ‘Salary/Financial Benefits’ (average rank of 4.9).

Table 2 Average rank of factors motivating choosing an academic career

| Motivation | Average Rank |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Intellectual Stimulation/Engagement | 3.7 |
| Passion for Education | 4.3 |
| Campus/Institutional climate | 5.5 |
| Other | 5.6 |
| Relationships with colleagues | 5.7 |
| Job stability | 5.9 |
| Giving back to the community | 6.0 |
| Mentoring | 6.4 |
| Support system | 7.4 |
| Salary/financial benefits | 7.5 |
| Recognition/Prestige/Rewards | 8.0 |
| Fringe benefits | 8.2 |

These data indicate that the factors that most motivated our survey respondents to choose an academic career overall—‘Intellectual Stimulation/Engagement’ and ‘Passion for Education’—are factors that are not easily quantifiable or tangible. This insight is important to consider when thinking about reward structures in higher education, and whether they actually align with peoples’ motivations for the job. These data also lead to the question of how faculty motivations align with the day-to-day realities of their jobs.

Faculty Find Teaching to be Enjoyable, Interesting, and Important

Faculty were also asked to indicate their agreement with whether teaching, scholarly activities, campus service, and professional service (four major aspects of the faculty job) are pleasant to engage in, interesting, and important. Respondents indicated a significantly higher agreement for these prompts as they related to teaching over campus service [Pleasant to engage in: $M_{Teach} = 4.2$, $M_{campserv} = 3.5$, $p < 0.0001$; Interesting: $M_{Teach} = 4.4$, $M_{campserv} = 3.5$, $p < 0.0001$; Important: $M_{Teach} = 4.3$, $M_{campserv} = 3.9$, $p < 0.0001$], and professional service [Pleasant to engage in: $M_{Teach} = 4.2$, $M_{profserv} = 3.5$, $p < 0.0001$; Interesting: $M_{Teach} = 4.4$, $M_{profserv} = 3.7$,

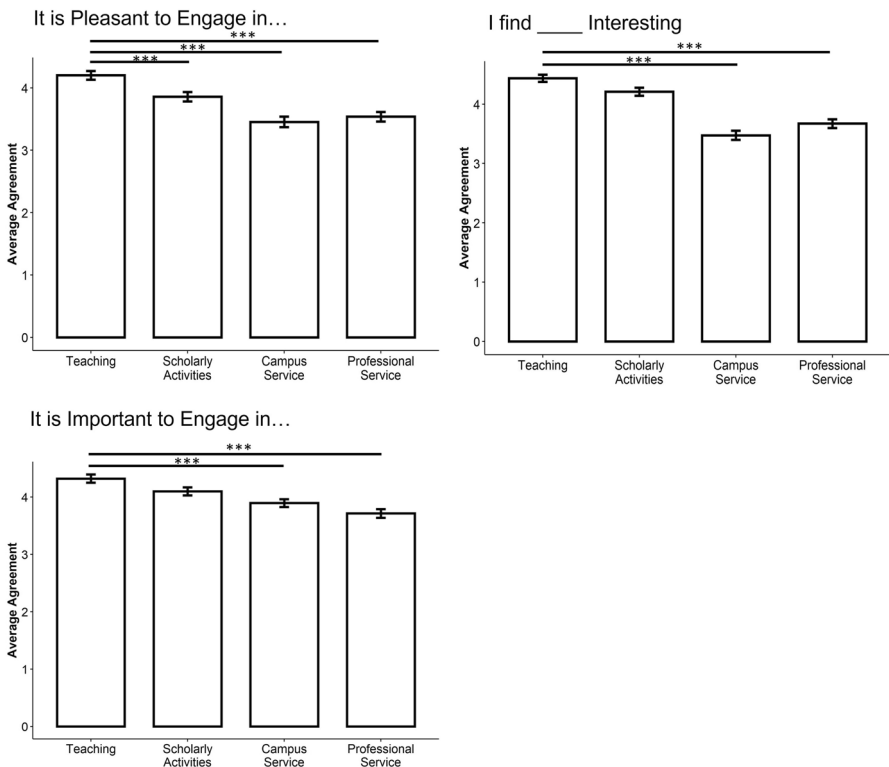


Fig. 1 Faculty find teaching to be enjoyable, interesting, and important. Dunn’s post hoc test with a Bonferroni correction was used to compare average agreement between the four contexts for each prompt. Bar ± error bar = mean ± SEM

$p < 0.0001$; Important: $M_{\text{teach}} = 4.3$, $M_{\text{profserv}} = 3.7$, $p < 0.0001$] (Fig. 1). Respondents also indicated that teaching was more pleasant to engage in than scholarly activities [$M_{\text{Teach}} = 4.4$, $M_{\text{scholarly}} = 3.9$, $p < 0.01$] (Fig. 1).

For these survey questions, some differences in average agreement based on our various demographic groups appeared. In response to the “it is pleasant to engage in...” prompt, respondents who identified Business as their disciplinary area ($n=5$) agreed less that teaching was pleasant to engage in ($M=3.2$ compared to an overall average of 4.2). Respondents who identified their role as lecturers ($n=10$) and those who identified themselves as interdisciplinary ($n=8$) agreed less that scholarly activities were pleasant to engage in ($M=3.2$ and 3.3 respectively compared to an overall average of 3.9). Respondents from professional schools ($n=7$) disagreed or were neutral about whether campus service and professional service are pleasant (*campus service*: $M=2.4$ compared to an overall average of 3.5; *professional service*: $M=2.9$ compared to an overall average of 3.5). Respondents from Engineering ($n=6$) agreed more that professional service is pleasant to engage in ($M=4.3$ compared to an overall average of 3.5). For the “I find ____ Interesting” prompt, the only difference found was that participants from professional schools disagreed that campus service is interesting ($M=2.5$ compared to an overall average of 3.5). In response to the “It is important to engage in...” prompt, respondents who have ‘other administrative roles’ ($n=6$), as well as respondents in the Business and Engineering disciplines agreed more that it was important to engage in campus service ($M=4.5$, 4.4, and 4.5 respectively compared to an overall average of 3.8). Finally, respondents from professional schools ($n=7$) disagreed that campus service is important ($M=2.7$ compared to an overall average of 3.9).

These data regarding four major aspects of the faculty job indicate that our survey respondents find teaching to be the most enjoyable aspect of their jobs overall and find teaching to be just as interesting and important as scholarship. These results align with our finding that respondents were most motivated by intellectual stimulation/engagement and a passion for education when deciding to become academics. Additionally, it is important to note that we did not find notable differences in the responses based on role, institution type, or level of experience. These findings push back on the perception that faculty find research and scholarship to be more important aspects of their job than teaching (Hall, 1999; Wilson, 2011) and suggest that faculty motivations do not necessarily align with institutional values.

We also asked respondents to indicate their agreement with a number of statements regarding their approach to teaching, and the responses to these prompts echo the overall results described above. On average, respondents agreed with the statements that they enjoy improving their teaching with new and challenging techniques ($M=4.4$), and that increasing their knowledge through teaching is exciting ($M=4.5$). Respondents also agreed that teaching is satisfying ($M=4.0$) and disagreed with the statement that teaching is not worth it ($M=1.8$). Respondents who identified Business as their discipline were closer to neutral regarding the statement that teaching is not worth it ($M=2.6$), but no other notable demographic differences for these prompts appeared.

The overall responses to these prompts again support the conclusion that our respondents value teaching and the intellectual stimulation/engagement that comes with teaching. These results are also important to consider from a faculty development perspective. Knowing that faculty value teaching and enjoy trying new techniques can suggest specific approaches that faculty developers can take when working with faculty. Additionally, these insights might help us shift the narrative in faculty development and professional learning that often frames teaching and improving student learning as a less important dimension of an academic’s work (Zimmerman, 2020; Cooper, 2012; Wilson, 2011; Reis, 2000; Hall, 1999).

Next, to help us understand how much time faculty would spend during the day on different aspects of their job, respondents were asked to identify the percentage (out of 100) of their time and energy they *would* afford for various aspects of the faculty job if given the opportunity to rebalance their professional obligations. On average, respondents would spend about 60% of their time and energy on teaching and research, with teaching (including delivering content, preparing for class, grading, etc.) being given nearly twice as much time as research (Table 3).

Respondents who identified their role as lecturers would spend more time teaching (51%) and less time doing research (5.5%). Respondents who identified their discipline as Business would also spend more time teaching (52%) and less time doing research (19%). Finally, respondents with less than a year of teaching experience would spend less time teaching (23%), and more time on professional development and learning (20%).

These results once again provide evidence that, overall, our respondents value teaching and would spend about 40% of their time on all aspects of teaching, even the not-so-fun parts (e.g., prep and grading). While we did see a small number of demographic differences for this question, most of them make a lot of sense: lecturers, who focus almost entirely on teaching for their jobs, would spend less time doing research, and faculty with little experience teaching would spend more time learning before devoting a larger portion of their time in the classroom. Perhaps the most important result here is that we did not find demographic differences

Table 3 Percent of time/energy afforded to various professional obligations

| Professional Obligation | Average Percent of time/energy to afford |
|--|--|
| Teaching (plus prep) | 39.2% |
| Research | 20.1% |
| Advising and mentoring students | 9.9% |
| Service to the campus | 8.8% |
| Professional development and learning | 7.3% |
| Service to the profession | 5.6% |
| Service to the community | 4.3% |
| Other campus requirements or expectations (religious services, etc.) | 1.0% |

based on respondent's role, institution type or focus, or levels of teaching experience beyond those with less than a year of experience, which altogether pushes back on common perceptions of the faculty body in higher education.

Faculty Have Positive Views of Students

Finally, faculty were asked to respond to prompts related to their views of students. On average, faculty agreed that students are engaged ($M=3.7$) and work hard to learn ($M=3.6$). Additionally, faculty disagreed with the negative prompts about students, specifically that students are not interested in the course ($M=2.4$), do not see the point of content ($M=2.5$), and that they are lazy ($M=2.2$). Respondents from the Business discipline were more neutral towards the negative prompts about students ($M=3.2$ for not interested in the course, $M=3.4$ for students do not see the point of content, and $M=3.2$ for students are lazy). Finally, respondents who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander were more neutral about the prompt that students work hard to learn ($M=2.9$).

The biggest takeaway from these data is that our respondents seemed to have a largely positive view of students, and we did not find notable differences in these views based on role, institution type or focus, or experience level. In sum, these data push back on the perception that faculty think poorly of their students (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Astin, 2016; Musgrave, 2022; Reis, 2000).

Discussion

As higher education grapples with the era in which it finds itself where faculty burn-out is high and anecdotes of faculty leaving the academy abound, higher education needs to wrestle with the questions of how better to support and to retain our faculty. The literature suggests that if we want to support our faculty, we might wish to reconsider why our colleagues, ourselves, and our students become faculty. Our study shows that opportunities to teach and to engage with others in intellectually stimulating ways are key parts of faculty motivation. Additionally, our respondents found teaching to be more enjoyable and just as important, interesting, and engaging when compared to scholarship. Respondents to our survey noted that campus and professional service are also pleasant, though not rising to the same levels as teaching and scholarship. We also found that our survey respondents would on average spend about 40% of their time on teaching, and 20% of their time on research. All of these findings conflict with the perception that research, grants, and other aspects are most important to faculty compared to teaching (Douglas-Gabriel, 2019; Fernández et al., 2022; Hall, 1999; Wilson, 2011). These findings also counter the conventional narrative that “failing” faculty members are those individuals who produce less research than their colleagues (Hall, 1999; Wilson, 2011). Our data suggest that the reality is that faculty value teaching, are motivated by teaching, and want to focus more on the teaching aspect of their job. Those faculty who prioritize

teaching over research may be, in fact, aligning their motivations with their actions, a choice which likely has burnout protections within it (Malesic, 2022).

Another perception of faculty is that they think poorly of their students (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Astin, 2016). As our findings suggest, quite the opposite is true. Faculty do not think ill of their students, and faculty think most students are interested in learning and are trying to learn. Because faculty do not actually think poorly of their students, they are in fact more susceptible to burnout due to the level of care that they devote to their students. Pope-Ruark (2022a, 2022b), among others, notes that ‘compassion fatigue,’ which comes from the emotional mental exhaustion many faculty experience because they care about their students, exacerbates burnout. Musgrave (2022) notes that faculty who hoped for a return to “normal” engagements with students have been significantly disappointed by student behaviors as the pandemic has become more endemic. The emotion of disappointment occurs with emotional hopes for those students to engage with faculty and to participate in the learning environment by coming to class. Such dashed hopes seem at odds with the idea that faculty think poorly of their students. The fact that our findings conflict with common perceptions of faculty is important to consider because it suggests a disconnect between perceptions of the faculty job and the reality of what faculty do and their attitudes towards the different aspects of their job. Perceptions of what faculty professional life includes and the ways in which it is conducted can develop from a variety of perspectives—students who imagine themselves as faculty, administrators who may or may not have been faculty during their career paths, and the public at large, including student parents and guardians. Each group may only see a portion of what faculty do. This means in the swirling conversations about faculty burnout, we have to be cognizant of the disconnect between perceptions and reality, and we have to look beyond the surface to discover where faculty want or need support to continue doing their jobs.

Throughout our results we found some differences in the responses of people from a small number of different demographic identities. For example, some respondents had different top motivators for choosing the academic job based on their discipline, level of experience, and racial/ethnic identity. We also found that respondents had slightly different perceptions of whether the four major aspects of their job were pleasant, interesting, or important based on discipline and role. We found slightly different time affordances based on discipline, role, and level of experience. And finally, we saw slight differences in respondents’ views of students based on discipline and racial/ethnic identity. The majority of disciplinary differences we found were from respondents in Business and Engineering and could be explained by the consumer-focused nature of these disciplines, or other disciplinary contours of these fields. The differences identified based on level of experience were solely from individuals with less than a year of teaching experience, and their responses align with that level of experience: They want to spend more time learning than teaching and find mentoring to be more motivating than most. It is important to note here that we did not specify what form mentoring could take on the survey. Therefore, our respondents with less than a year of teaching experience could be identifying that they find mentoring from colleagues to be motivating, or the ability to mentor others coming up as faculty themselves.

The differences we identified from our respondents of different racial/ethnic backgrounds are difficult to explain without further study, a wider, more representative data sample, and richer data. However, one important finding we do want to highlight is that our respondents who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander found campus/institutional climate to be the top motivating factor for choosing the academic job. This finding aligns with much of the discourse around recruiting and retaining faculty from underrepresented backgrounds, and the calls for change being made from those faculty (Diggs et al., 2009; Garrison-Wade et al., 2012; Hall, 2023; Wright-Mair, 2023).

Implications for Faculty Development

In this paper we argue that to better support faculty through the current climate of higher education, we need to step back and recall their motivations for becoming faculty in the first place. Doing so enables us, as faculty developers, to use those motivations as a stepping stone. Although this work is a first exploration of faculty motivation and perceptions of the faculty job, our results suggest some implications for the faculty development field since faculty developers are on the front lines of working with faculty. We recognize that some faculty developers have consistently and for a long time used these approaches, but here we are pushing for more systemic changes to programming. For the general approach of bringing faculty motivation into programming, faculty developers can start by designing events, such as guided reflections and open discussion forums, that focus on helping faculty reconnect with their passion for the field and their passion for teaching and learning. Making space for discussion and connection with colleagues can help to build community and further support faculty. Additionally, encouraging reflections on the year and highlighting valuable moments can help faculty remember the *why* behind their jobs. A program could also center on finding speakers that focus on how to help people get back to their vocation.

Our findings also indicate that faculty developers should develop programs that are more intellectually stimulating than the regular how-tos and just-in-time programming that are fairly commonly the main programs faculty see. Faculty are highly motivated by intellectual stimulation, so making our programming more exciting and intellectually challenging is a valuable way to work with faculty. One approach to infusing more intellectual stimulation into programming is to bring in empirical work, both disciplinary and related to the scholarship of teaching and learning, and challenge faculty to think through that work and how it applies to their contexts. Honoring the kind of academic work that authoring a class requires is an additional way to recall the intellectual stimulation inherent in teaching.

Nonetheless, recognizing that motivations and passion can only go so far if the larger, systemic issues causing faculty burnout and resignation are not addressed is essential. And while solutions to those issues are outside the scope of this paper, we do want to highlight a potential role that faculty developers, and centers for teaching and learning more broadly, can play in the longer-term. While centers for teaching and learning began as marginal, they have progressed and become essential to the

function of a campus (Schroeder, 2011), as the pandemic clearly showed. With this role and positioning within higher education institutions, we argue that centers for teaching and learning and their faculty developers are poised to become stronger advocates for faculty. For example, most universities lack structures that reward innovative teaching, even as it has become an expectation of faculty (Zimmerman, 2020, 233; see also Davidson, 2017, 212). As faculty developers continue to support faculty in improving their teaching, they can also work to advocate for structures that recognize and reward the work faculty are doing. Additionally, a focus can be placed on advocating for better support and working conditions for teaching-focused faculty, who frequently participate in and use faculty development to improve their teaching, yet face messaging and conditions from their institutions that diminish their work (Berke, 2023; Douglas-Gabriel, 2019).

Limitations and Future Work

Given the exploratory nature of this study, there are some limitations to consider. Although we have a good overall sample size, the sizes of most of our different demographic subgroups are small. As a result, we were unable to make statistical comparisons between the responses of people from those different demographic groups. We also were not able to compare respondents from multiple demographic groups (e.g., full professors at teaching-focused and scholarship-focused institutions) as these groups were too small to make meaningful comparisons. Future work should strive for a larger sample size with more representation from all of the various demographic groups (e.g., faculty at scholarship-focused or R1 institutions) to be able to make these comparisons.

Throughout our analysis, we have referred to ‘faculty’ as a monolith when we readily acknowledge that diversity exists among faculty, including within our sample, across roles, experience, institution types, and more. Although we did not see notable differences amongst most of our groups, the collection of additional data will help to clarify and confirm these results. Further, a majority of our sample identified as teaching-focused, meaning our findings may not be generalizable. The collection of data from a larger sample will help to establish evidence-based suggestions for faculty developers when working with faculty of different backgrounds.

Additional research methodologies should also be employed to cultivate a richer understanding of faculty motivations. Future studies should take a more qualitative approach to triangulate, enrich, and further understand faculty motivations (e.g., in-depth interviews, focus groups). Future research could further investigate not only faculty perceptions of their job, but their perceived expectations, to determine whether there are external pressures on faculty to prioritize certain aspects of their job. Finally, work investigating the barriers that faculty face in their positions could enrich our understanding of faculty, their motivations, and the support they need even further. While these limitations must be acknowledged, it is important to remember that this is an exploratory study that should spark additional work in this area.

Conclusion

Our study is a first look into the motivations of faculty for choosing to be faculty and their perceptions of the faculty job. Our findings suggest that many of the common perceptions we hear about faculty and the faculty job do not align with reality. Future work needs to dive deeper into faculty motivations, and well as the barriers that faculty face while doing their jobs. We need to identify meaningful ways to address the multitude of crises faculty are facing, and we must push deeper into what is clearly becoming a disjunct between the realities of faculty life and faculty motivation. If we cannot remedy this disjunct, we face a working environment in higher education that, research suggests, promotes burnout. Further, we might seek to explore how faculty develop their perceptions and expectations of their jobs. As a significant part of that effort, we must also remember and explore why faculty members become faculty members in the first place and use this information to support faculty better. This understanding of motivation will enable us to more deeply and sustainably address faculty burnout as faculty continue to struggle with the lingering effects of the pandemic and the more profound structural realities of higher education.

Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed to this study and manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Declarations

Ethical Approval The survey and methodology for this study were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Dayton (protocol # FWA00015321).

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