Results of the
2012 Faculty Workload Survey:
Summary of Comment Analysis

Sandra L. Schneider, Ph.D.

FDP Vice Chair; FWS PI and Task Force Chair
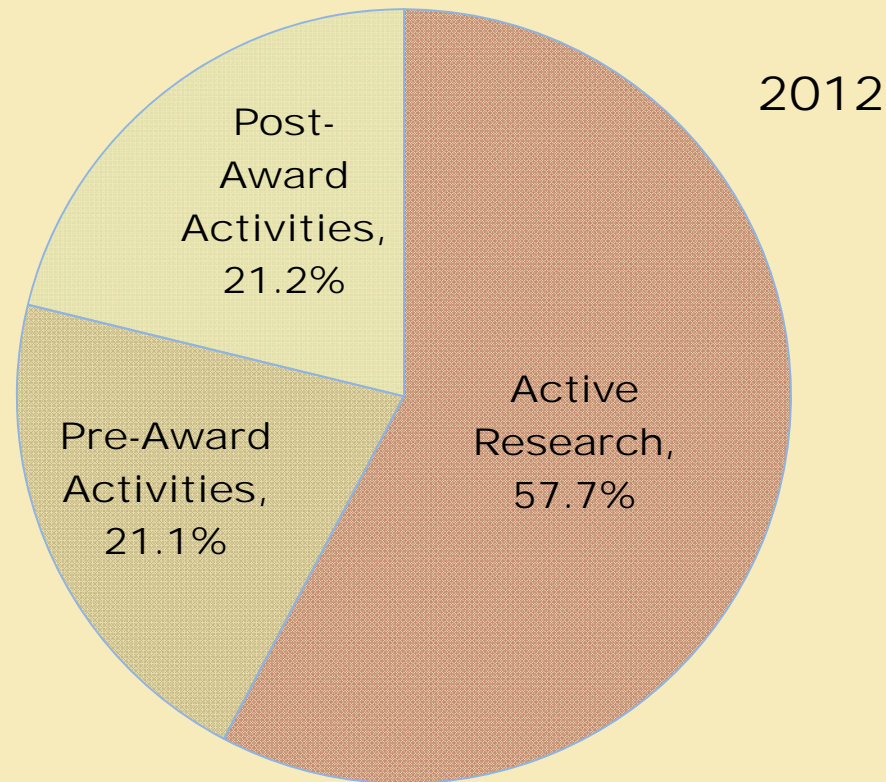
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2012 Faculty Workload Survey (FWS)

- **Jan 23 - Mar 22, 2012: Survey Open and Close**
- **Participants: PIs on Federal Grants/Contracts during 2010-2011 academic year.**
- **99 of the 119 (83%) FDP non-federal member organizations participated**
- **13453+ respondents (26%)/12816 with complete data**

- **6105 "Frustration" Open-ended Comments**
- **2965 General Open-ended Comments**

Question: On average, what percentage of a PI's time on federally-funded projects is spent on administrative responsibilities rather than active research?

Answer: 42%

2012

Post-Award Activities, 21.2%

Pre-Award Activities, 21.1%

Active Research, 57.7%

Just as we found in 2005, researchers still spend less than 60% of their research time actually engaged in research.
42% of their federal research time is spent completing administrative requirements.

Analysis of Foremost Administrative Frustrations

Frustration Item: *Please comment on the administrative responsibilities of federally-funded research that are most frustrating or problematic in your view.*

6,105 open-ended responses for "frustration" content analysis

Procedure

Step 1: Systematic keyword searches of comments for words or word stems related to 25 categories of

- proposal preparation,
- interim/final reports, and
- the 23 administrative areas listed in the survey.

Step 2: Coded comments were reviewed to

- determine whether each coded comment did in fact belong in the category, and if so,
- identify recurring themes within the category.

Procedure (continued)

Step 3: Potential themes were reviewed with particular attention to frequency of occurrence.

Step 4: Corroborating reviews by a second, and occasionally third, coder were conducted for subsets of comments, demonstrating high levels of coder agreement.

Comments could be coded as referring to one or more categories.

Procedure (continued)

Step 5: A follow-up review was conducted to identify potential **emergent themes**.
- Consensus of original four coders
- Through discussion and refinement, 11 emergent theme categories retained
- Keywords were identified for these emergent categories, and Steps 1-4 were repeated for these categories.

Comments could again be coded as referring to one or more categories.

Frustration Comments (n = 6,105)

	Comments	%		
Proposal Preparation	935	15%		
Interim/Final Reports	612	10%		
	Comments		Prevalence	Intensity
Finances	1375		88%	67%
Personnel	265		85%	67%
Effort Reporting	348		82%	48%
	Comments		Prevalence	Intensity
IRB/Human Subjects	843		44%	69%
IACUC/Animals	630		25%	79%

Frustration Comments: Finances

Summary of Content Themes:

- Unnecessarily Detailed Expenditure Justifications,
- Burdensome Expenditure Tracking,
- Unreasonable Purchasing Restrictions,
- Problems Related to Cost Sharing,
- Difficulties Making Budget Changes,
- Lack of Administrative Help,
- Financial Reporting Burdens

Frustration Comments: Emergent Themes

Institution & Agency Roles (n=2,195 of 6,105; 36%)	
Theme	Count
Institution-related Issues	967
Agency-related Issues	826
Need for Administrative Support	586
Risk Intolerant Audit/Legal Culture	204

Frustration Comments: Emergent Themes

Needless Complication and Wasted Research Time (n = 2,005 of 6,105; 33%)	
Theme	Count
Detrimental Loss of Research Time	924
Changes, Ambiguities, and Inconsistencies	774
Overwhelming Forms/Paperwork	690
Rigidity and Micromanagement	155

Frustration Comments: Emergent Themes

Other Specific Pervasive Issues (n = 636 of 6,105; 10%)	
Theme	Count
Issues Related to Training	296
Problematic Electronic Systems/Forms	214
Complications Related to International Issues	119

Analysis of General Comments

Final Item: *Please provide any additional comments you would like to share.*

2,964 open-ended responses for "general" content analysis;

Fairly lengthy, averaging 295 characters (median = 218; sd = 287), or roughly about 30-35 words.

General Comments

Administrative Workload (n = 1,868 of 2965; 63%)	
Theme	Count
Elaboration of specific administrative frustrations	1173
Corroboration of negative impact of administrative workload	599
Administrative workload not seen as problematic	270
Administrative workload accommodated by staff	55

General Comments

	Theme	Count
Broader Issues (n = 1,142 of 2,965; 39%)		
	Insufficient funding/unsuccessful proposals	748
	Threat to science/research productivity	514
	Disincentive for research career	334
	Dysfunctional system for supporting research	97

General Comments

FDP Faculty Workload Survey (n=417 of 2,965; 14%)	
Theme	Count
Recommendations for improvements	270
Gratitude for bringing attention to research workload	121
Concern over potential inaccuracy of rough estimates	65

Potential FWS Respondent "Wish List"

Improve Aspects of System for Funding Research

Find ways to:
- Improve funding opportunities
- Improve proposal success rates
- Focus on goal of research innovation and productivity
- Consider cost/benefit of research policies/practices
- Reduce disincentives for research positions/careers

Potential FWS Respondent "Wish List"

Promote a Healthy Research Culture

Work to ensure that audit/legal/CYA concerns do not override goal to support research and researchers
- Avoid fear as primary motivator;
- Foster trust in relationships;
- Focus protective policies/practices on high risk situations and high likelihood problems;
- Define and apply criteria for "materiality;"
- Emphasize competence and knowledge;
- Keep sight of the value of the research

Potential FWS Respondent "Wish List"

Address Pervasive Problems with Administrative Workload

Prioritize based on cost/benefit
→ avoid waste of valuable research time

Efficiency checklist?
- Minimize changes (and need for re-training)
- Respond to scale -> less work for minor issues
- Simplify
- Coordinate/unify
- Reduce delays
- Eliminate redundancy
- Strive for clarity; look for ways to disambiguate

Potential FWS Respondent "Wish List"

Appreciate Need for Creative Problem Solving

- **Minimize change –and- Stay up-to-date**
- **Simplify –and- Provide flexibility (or clarity)**
- **Coordinate/unify –and- Meet individual needs**

Concluding Comments

FWS results, especially comments, are rich with ideas that can contribute to FDP goals:

- To increase the likelihood of efficient and effective demonstration projects
- Provide information to FDP and federal agencies to facilitate targeted reduction of administrative burden

FWS results may also facilitate other related efforts and promote collaborative projects to enhance the quality of research.