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Our University – 51/49 Percent

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Our University – 51/49 Percent

Faculty members should spend 51 percent of their time serving the state and students, and 49 percent of their time serving themselves in personal intellectual development.

Faculty work is unique. Imagine any employment setting where leadership says split your time nearly 50-50 between our mission and your personal mission.

Faculty members serve two masters. They are state employees, but they are not like prison guards, officers of public safety, bureaucrats who manage the important and complex processes of human welfare, the State Highways, and other necessary arms of state government.

Excellent faculty members are cottage industries - mom and pop operations - that churn out insight and ideas and put them in the intellectual marketplace for students and the greater social good.

First, faculty serve the state. Serving the state means being committed to helping students achieve aspirations and become productive members of society. As a public university this is our mandate, and it is held in such high regard that private universities likewise place focus on this measure above all else.

Selflessness focused on students needs above even personal, professional aspirations.

Second, faculty serve self. That means building expertise, credence in the disciplinary world, knowledge and insight. Many times work that creates value for the university is solitary, inward-focused and not immediately shared with the student. It is selfish rather than selfless. For a faculty member to have high value to the university, he or she must contribute in a meaningful way to the body of knowledge enabling excellence at professing what is personally important.

The professor must own ideas. This is what makes excellent teaching.

A great teacher can never teach what he or she doesn't believe to be important, or true.

No exceptions.

To teach something not believed is a form of lying and counter to the essence of our university in seeking truth.

How does someone balance intellectual life, the outward idea of helping others grow and the inward idea of developing a strong, informed, tested professional

perspective so that distinction is brought to the university and excitement to the classroom? This is the magic formula.

I have known faculty members who were dedicated to self-development 90 percent of the time, and the needs of the state, i.e. the student, 10 percent of the time.

Ninety percent selfish - 10 percent selfless.

These are the self-centered professors whom many find it difficult to like but everyone tolerates for the prestige they bring the university.

These may or may not be the best teachers as the object of their work slants towards the selfish rather than the selfless.

I have also come across faculty members who split their energy in the opposite way. They devote 90 percent of their energy to students and service to the organization, but do not develop new insights and ideas. They can even be good teachers as long as they teach the same thing over and over again.

The 10 or less percent they devote to their own intellectual development does not serve the organization or the state when only lip service is paid to understanding the complexities of their own discipline, their own intellect, and their relationships to the larger world.

A really powerful faculty member should seek a 51/49 percent split of time and energy - a near balance of the selfless and selfish life - because it will make our university better in service to students, and simultaneously serve the individual knowledge worker and the state well.

Our university should be composed of hundreds of faculty who are cottage industries and, simultaneously, public servants.

Everyone profits. Mission accomplished. 51/49.