

Statement on the Proposed Change to Instructional Workload: A One-Page Summary

In October 2018 Academic Affairs announced a change to its Full-Time Faculty Workload Guidelines, reducing the compensation for Graduate Center (GC)-related teaching and supervision. Under the proposed policy, CSI faculty are to be compensated 3 hours (instead of 4 hours) for the teaching of doctoral courses, and .6 hours (instead of .8 hours) for the supervision of dissertations and independent studies. This change is to take effect starting Fall 2019.

Having carried out an examination of available facts at the request of the Executive Committee of Faculty Senate, the Research Committee has concluded the following:

- CSI benefits financially from having its faculty participate at the GC; for each GC course taught by a CSI faculty member, CSI receives \$16,400 from the GC. Because replacement of these courses at adjunct rates is far lower than \$16,400, a surplus is created. **We estimate that this surplus amounts to approximately one million dollars per year for the College.**
- By compensating CSI faculty one hour less per course, the College could save no more than an additional \$130K to \$173K per year, and these savings are quite fragile. **If GC activity drops by a mere 10% to 18% in a year as a result of the proposed reduction, these savings will not even be realized.** In such a case, all the proposed reduction in compensation will have achieved is to lower CSI's participation in (and status at) the GC.
- In addition to the lack of a compelling budgetary argument, our committee found little evidence that Academic Affairs in Fall 2018 explicitly took into account the many ways in which **GC activity enhances the research life of CSI faculty**, or the implications for the students that these faculty mentor and teach at CSI.

Our committee identified **the lack of effective consultation as a primary factor** in the proposed policy's problematic design. In particular, we found that limiting discussion to General Chairs resulted in uneven dissemination of information across campus, with many of the faculty most affected by the proposed policy left out of the discussion. Our committee therefore strongly recommends the following:

- A. The proposed reduction in compensation outlined in Item II.5 and II.6 of the October 2018 memorandum should not be adopted, nor should any similar workload-related policy change, until proper consultation with faculty governance has taken place.
- B. "Proper consultation with faculty governance" should be defined as, minimally, consultation with the Executive Committees of Faculty Senate and College Council. In matters likely to have a direct impact on faculty research, we also recommend engaging the Research Committee.

****The complete version of our committee's report follows below****

Statement on the Proposed Change to Instructional Workload: Full Report

I. Overview

In light of proposed changes to compensation for instructional workload at the Graduate Center (GC), the Research Committee of Faculty Senate reaffirms the importance of consultation with faculty governance in budgetary matters that impact the research environment at the College. Following an examination of the available facts, the Research Committee has concluded that the policy change announced to General Chairs in an October 2018 memorandum may pose unnecessary and unacceptable risks to the mission, vision and values of the College pertaining to research and scholarship. In light of this conclusion, and because we found the narrow approach to consultation to be at the heart of the problem, the Research Committee recommends the following:

- A. The proposed reduction in compensation outlined in Item II.5 and II.6 of the October 2018 memorandum (henceforth “the proposed reduction”) should not be adopted, nor should any similar workload-related policy change, until proper consultation with faculty governance has taken place.
- B. “Proper consultation with faculty governance” should be defined as, minimally, consultation with the Executive Committees of Faculty Senate and College Council. In matters likely to have a direct impact on faculty research, we also recommend engaging the Research Committee.

In the sections below, we report the findings that led us to make the above recommendations. Our study took place over the course of November 2018 to February 2019, and involved consultation with CSI faculty who have GC appointments (who, as far as we could determine, were never specifically engaged during the crafting of the proposed reduction) and administrative offices at both CSI and the GC. Should the recommendations in (A) and (B) be honored, we present the information below as a starting point for discussion within the shared governance framework.

II. The Economics of Faculty Participation at the Graduate Center

First, our committee discovered widespread confusion across campus regarding the origin of the policy currently in place, as well as its relation to the budget. Since the budget was cited by Academic Affairs as the motivation for the proposed reduction, we address this issue first.

It is our understanding that the additional hour awarded for GC activities was originally intended as an incentive for faculty to pursue those activities, established at a time when CSI was grossly underrepresented among the GC’s consortial faculty (and this underrepresentation was widely perceived to reflect poorly on the College’s research status within CUNY). It is therefore important for faculty to acknowledge that the current policy is correctly characterized as providing an incentive, and thus not a contractual obligation of any sort. However, it is therefore equally true that the workload credit in question is not properly characterized as a gift or privilege, but instead, like any incentive, serves a strategic purpose. Discussion of the matter should thus be framed in

terms of (i) whether or not the incentive is successfully serving that purpose, and (ii) whether its continuation is warranted.

With respect to the first question, we are currently evaluating whether CSI has in fact increased its GC participation relative to other CUNY campuses. While we were not able to find reliable historical and comparative data, CSI does seem, as of today, to have attained a level of appointments on par with other Senior Colleges. For example, the proportion of faculty with GC appointments at CSI is about 45%, which approximates that of Brooklyn College (44%), and is only slightly lower than that of Hunter (52%), Queens (52%), City (48%), and Baruch (52%). However, this is a relatively narrow measure of GC participation; there is range of other factors that needs to be taken into account, such as the relative number of actual GC course units, number of doctoral students advised, and so on. While we were not able to find reliable data on these either, we note that CSI does not seem to lag in terms of proportion of faculty with appointments, and we expect other forms of activity to correlate with proportion of appointments.

The question of whether the current policy's continuation is warranted is rather more complicated, since it depends not only on whether or not GC participation will decrease in the absence of the incentive, but also the extent to which GC participation affects CSI's budget. In Fall 2018, Academic Affairs, to our understanding, characterized the incentive policy as an unsustainable item on the College's budget; by the report of at least some Department Chairs, the motivation for the proposed reduction was simply "budget realities", which our committee finds far too vague to serve as an official budget-related justification. In any case, what we understand to have been asserted is that teaching and research supervision by CSI faculty at the GC is regarded by Academic Affairs as an unnecessary expense that the College could no longer support.

Having consulted with administration at the GC, however, a representative of our committee was only able to find evidence to the contrary. In particular, it was found that CSI is currently compensated \$16,400 for every course taught by a CSI faculty member at the GC. Each semester, these funds are transferred from the Provost's Office at the GC to the Office of Academic Affairs at CSI (although there is a lag with respect to which semester the funds are from), where they are then used to hire adjunct instructors to teach the courses not taught by the CSI faculty members. The Provost's Office at the GC (which was unaware of the proposed change at CSI) confirmed to a representative of our committee that the intention of this \$16,400 sum is in fact to cover the College's expenses for "one course". However, because CSI hires adjunct instructors within the range of \$4,000 to \$6,000, the arrangement results in a net financial gain for the College—*not an expense*—on the order of \$10,400 - \$12,400 per course. Having thus established the current arrangement as a producer of revenue for the College, the question is just how much revenue that is. In brief, we believe it to be approximately **\$1 Million a year**.

For example, we found that in the 2017-2018 academic year, there were approximately 100 course units owed to CSI by the GC (based on credit hours for courses taught, plus a small number of additional hours awarded to CSI faculty who fill administrative roles at the GC). At \$16,400 per course unit, this amounts to \$1.64M of incoming funds from the GC. If approximately \$500K to \$600K of this is used to fill the 100 courses not taught by the CSI faculty in question, there was a net gain of approximately \$1.04M to \$1.14M. While we do not know how this significant revenue has been spent (for example, we were not able to identify it as coming back to departments in any way), our committee finds it extremely concerning that what we found to be such a significant source of effective revenue for the College was presented to General Chairs as an expense.

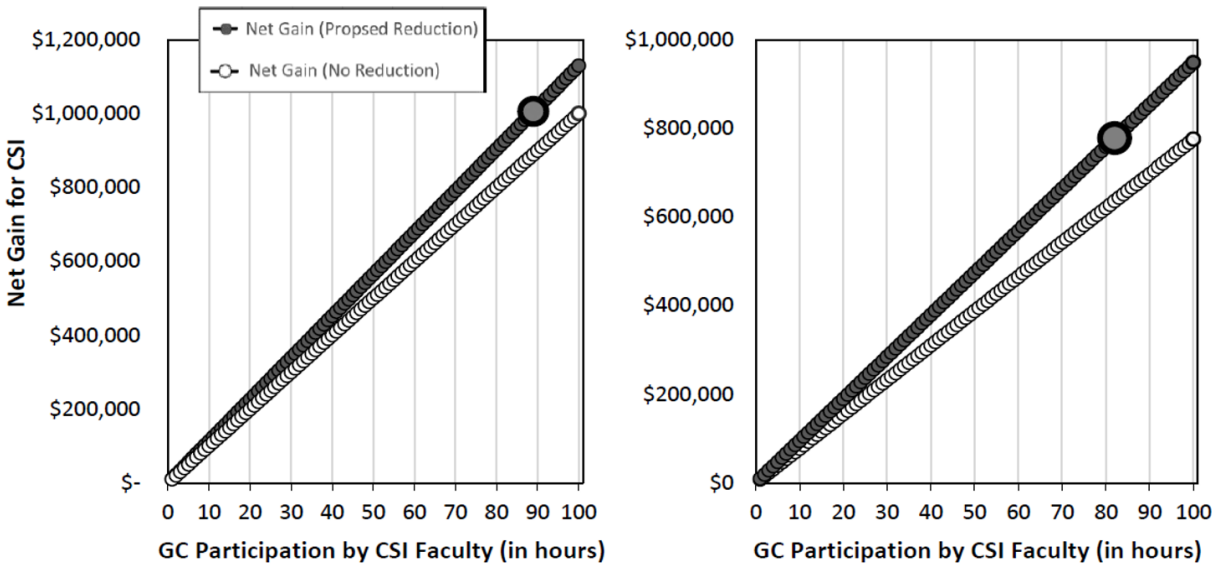


Figure 1. Net gain earned for CSI as a function of the number of GC course units under the current policy (white) or with the proposed reduction in compensation (dark gray), with the break-even point enlarged. The graph on the left assumes an adjunct expense of \$1,300 per credit hour, the graph on the right assumes the same, plus 33% for fringe benefits. The result is that the “savings” from the new policy disappear if GC participation by CSI faculty dips just 10% to 18% following the proposed reduction in compensation. Also apparent in the figure is that, even without a drop in GC participation, the amount saved by the new policy is modest, amounting to \$130K to \$173K per year at most.

Moreover, we were startled by the following realization: the gain just described is very sensitive to small changes in faculty participation. In particular, if the 100 hours just described for 2017-2018 were to drop to 90 hours as the result of less faculty enthusiasm for GC activity, the result is roughly the break-even point at approximately \$1.13M. That is, the approximately \$130K to \$173K that CSI saves by not providing the incentive is completely neutralized if GC participation drops by just 10%. Small differences in this break-even point depend on various details, such as the step in the pay scale chosen for adjunct salary, whether the course replaced is 3 credit or 4 credit, and so on. But even if we were to assume that CSI were paying fringe benefits (which we understand it not to be, as this is covered by CUNY), the break-even point for the new policy’s savings occurs at an approximately 18% drop in GC participation. This is illustrated in Fig 1, which plots incoming revenue for GC participation with and without the proposed 1-hour reduction, and depending on whether CSI’s adjunct cost per credit is \$1,300 (left) or—with fringe benefit added to the cost—\$1,729 (right). Our committee is more than willing to discuss how it arrived at the numbers that it did, which is what would occur in the context of proper consultation. However, the arithmetic here seems clear: GC participation needs to wane just a small amount for the proposed reduction’s savings to be neutralized.

Finally, this committee’s consultation with GC-active faculty on campus revealed different views regarding the likely impact the proposed policy would have on their GC activities, with some faculty reporting that their GC activities are unlikely to change as the result of the new policy, and others reporting that the reduction would be *certain* to affect their current level of participation. Our committee is therefore unable to share in the confidence expressed by Academic Affairs that faculty participation in GC teaching, and especially dissertation supervision (which is widely felt to be undercompensated for as it is), will not decrease. In our assessment, the risk is substantial enough that we, just on budgetary grounds, advise against the reduction in compensated hours for GC teaching and PhD research supervision.

Before concluding our budget-related commentary, we would like to point out that there are ways that CSI benefits financially from faculty participation at the GC that do not seem to have been taken into account at all, but which could have been identified had proper consultation with faculty governance taken place. One such way is the assignment of Graduate Center Teaching Fellows (commonly referred to as GCFs, although officially GTFs). GCFs are students admitted into a doctoral program at the GC with 5-years of full funding. As part of this 5-year funding package, at least in the humanities and social sciences programs at the GC, GCFs are assigned to a CUNY campus, where they must teach one class per semester during the second, third, and fourth years of their program. Our committee was unable to find any evidence that CSI sends funds to the GC for these GCFs the way that the GCF sends CSI funds for its faculty's instruction, suggesting that these GCFs are, from the perspective of CSI's budget, providing free instruction. The value of this instruction, assuming they teach 4-credit classes at adjunct rates of \$1,300 a credit hour, would thus be approximately \$31,200 over their three years. Important to the present purposes is that a GCF's assignment to a particular department at a particular CUNY campus is highly dependent on the participation of that campus's faculty at the GC. That is, although the decisions are officially made by the Provost at the GC, students are preferentially assigned to work at the campus of their chosen advisor, if that advisor is based at one of the CUNY colleges.

To give just one example of the financial impact of this arrangement, consider the Linguistics Program (housed in the English Department) at CSI, which has three faculty with appointments in the GC's MA/PhD Program in Linguistics. Since 2014, five GCFs have been assigned to teach in CSI's Linguistics Program, as the result of those faculty members advising the GCFs in question, and based on active participation on admissions committees at the GC. Based on the estimation above, that amounts to \$156,000 in savings to CSI's expenditures on adjunct instructors as a direct result of these faculty member's activities. And this particular case involves just one program at CSI, and just 3 of the approximately 165 faculty with GC appointments. And this is, of course without considering many other less-closely tracked benefits, such as the role that GC affiliation plays in faculty recruitment and retention, and the grant-related collaboration that results from interaction with other faculty at the GC. Our committee could find no evidence that issues like these were seriously considered when estimating the risks associated with decreased participation at the GC.

To summarize this section, our understanding is that Academic Affairs asserted in Fall 2018 that the current policy regarding instructional workload generates for expense to the College. In fact, although it is a part of an incentive program rather than a contractual requirement, we could only find evidence that it is a source of revenue. Moreover, the additional revenue obtained by ceasing to provide the 1-hour incentive is very fragile—neutralized if compensated GC activities drop by just 10% to 18%. It therefore seems highly probable that in two- or three-years' time, the only thing the proposed reduction will have achieved is to lower our faculty's participation at the GC. Like many CSI faculty, our committee could not understand why the risks seemed so acceptable to Academic Affairs in Fall 2018, especially given that the maximal savings that CSI could ever hope to achieve by the proposed reduction is less than \$200K per year.

III. Adverse Effects on Faculty Research

The dangers of the proposed reduction to the research status and overall reputation of CSI are best appreciated given some context regarding the unique functional and symbolic role that the Graduate Center plays within CUNY. Notably, it is the sole home of research doctoral programs in most disciplines taught at CUNY. It is also one of only two institutions designated as R1 research institutions within our university system (City College being the other), and the only one

that draws upon a consortium of faculty from across its many campuses. Through this consortium, CSI faculty have the opportunity to be part of both a primarily undergraduate institution and an R1 institution, which has served as a powerful tool for recruitment and retention that CSI's peer institutions are not able to match. GC-affiliated faculty are able to teach and advise doctoral students, organize and attend colloquia with national and international speakers, participate on graduate admissions and other committees, and contribute to governing the GC (since faculty governance there is also drawn from the consortial faculty). Through its participation at the GC, CSI faculty obtain all the benefits of an R1 university, and it should be emphasized that they bring these benefits with them when they teach and mentor students at the College.

Our primary conclusion is therefore that strong affiliation with the GC is one of CSI's most valuable research assets, and the proposed reduction in compensation for GC activities can result in only three possible outcomes: either (i) it results in faculty participation at the GC decreasing (and, again, only modest decreases are needed to neutralize the small fiscal benefit), (ii) it results in no decrease to GC activity, but does result an increase in teaching—and thus a decrease in time for research—by faculty members to compensate for the reduction, or (iii) some combination of the two. All three of these possibilities are obviously negative from the perspective of CSI's research profile and reputation.

While we acknowledge that it is likely that the most research-active among our faculty will strive to maintain their research output in the face of less time and fewer resources, it needs to be clear that it is exactly these research-active faculty who are most affected by the proposed reduction. This is extremely difficult to reconcile with CSI's stated commitment to enhancement its research profile—and difficult to reconcile with the recruitment and retention of faculty who are able to do the enhancing.

Also troubling to our committee was the following: the faculty who reported to us that they would be likely to decrease their GC participation as the result of the proposed reduction tended to be at the junior- and early associate-level. This is perhaps not surprising, considering that junior and recently-promoted faculty are in general more likely to have young children, and so have greater time restrictions related to family and childcare. Another likely uneven effect of the proposed reduction is related to department- and program-specific factors; faculty in some departments teach primarily 3-credit hour courses while others teach primarily 4-credit hour courses, and some faculty with GC appointments spend most of their time advising dissertation and independent studies rather than teaching in the classroom. Indeed, one of the most common comments submitted to our committee was that the current policy's compensation for dissertation and independent study supervision—arguably one of the most research-related activities that we engage in—is already too low. Again, we see a recurring theme in the proposed reduction's most likely effects: research-related activities—and research-active faculty—tend to be what its penalties most strongly target.

Finally, our committee believes it important to point out that the incentive provided by the current policy also serves to offset the fact that having an appointment at the GC comes with a categorical increase in service-related duties. Faculty are expected to serve on admissions committees (a very labor-intensive activity during January every year), faculty search committees, program Executive Committees, and other program-specific sub-committees. There are GC-wide service expectations as well, such as representing programs at Graduate Council. Moreover, if a CSI faculty member is a member of more than one GC program (and this is not uncommon), these expectations are compounded. In a number of cases (e.g., Nursing at CSI), faculty also have special service obligations related to directing programs; these activities are uncompensated, but a crucial part of the arrangement, and thus necessary and expected. The proposed reduction in

compensation for GC activities removes any chance of offsetting the categorical difference between having service expectations at one institution versus two. This is in addition to the increased commuting time that many faculty described to us as a burden. Again, because there are only so many hours in a day and so many days in a week, this means that GC-active faculty at CSI either work more hours or produce less research.

In summary, there are a number of relevant factors that have a direct or indirect impact on faculty's research capacity. Some of these factors do not seem to be taken into consideration, and this stems directly from the fact that faculty governance, and faculty with GC appointments, were not properly consulted. If the proposed policy is implemented in its current form, without incorporating any revisions based on proper consultation, our committee sees very predictable damage to the research output and reputation of the College.

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