The Challenges of Academic and Home Life: Current Reality and Future Hopes

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this presentation focuses on faculty academic/home life and our commitments to each other
academic life: the circus act

research!
teaching!
service!

...and: a mental health crisis with overwhelming urgency and importance to respond to student needs with emotional labor...

...and: emails forever, meeting culture, “I’ll just zoom in”, changing and multiplying tech platforms, grant writing and administration, stressful and expansive tenure and promotion guidelines, pressure to seek new collaborations and bring more revenue, seeking out new opportunities, creating “value”, workday, supporting a growing student body, event planning, growing interdisciplinary programs without balance or reward...
home life: chronic illness

navigating
multiple specialist visits ~ unpredictable day-to-day
invisible illness ~ exacerbating factors at work
inability to put in long hours ~ flare-ups near deadlines
misperceptions by students, colleagues ~ casual ableism

pandemic impact
delayed healthcare ~ overlapping symptoms
increased stress ~ high-risk groups
home life: raising children

navigating

childcare schedules ~ pediatrician visits ~ school closures
vacation week ~ evening social events ~ morning meetings
weekend info sessions ~ grandparent visits ~ distant family
early dismissal ~ homework help ~ IEP meetings

pandemic impact

removed a strained safety net ~ covid restrictions
kids’ mental health ~ explaining the news ~ vaccines
isolation ~ “flexible” work ~ teaching with the kids home
home life: long-distance partners

navigating
  travel schedules ~ competing commitments
  friends and family in two (or more) different places
  complexities rise when adding in caregiving
  dual career concerns and support from institutions

pandemic impact
  negative and positive
we dropped the community ball

we need actions, policies, and support to:
slow down and work less
reduce both self- and external expectations
prioritize our (and our colleagues’) home lives
support home life as the norm, not an accommodation
shift away from transactional communication models
mitigate disproportionate impact on vulnerable faculty
model the behavior we hope to see in our students
but instead we just add more balls

incentive structures reward more work

competition under resource scarcity and growth

the work never ends, but new work always begins

“flexibility” does not reduce our workload
core problem: time

time to be present at home

time to connect

time to work

time to think

time to hold in reserve for when things go wrong
core problem: no safety net

no built-in coverage; faculty emergencies lands on other faculty

pressure to support others without support for ourselves

pivoting in a crisis required (and still requires) overloading
core problem: the great resignation

not just about literally leaving the job

morale concerns, identifying shared values

time sense of self-efficacy
what can we build on?

positive lessons from pandemic: connecting virtually & in person

momentum to normalize several pathways to tenure, promotion

culture of experimentation and innovation / “try it on”

established governance structure

events and space to breathe (e.g. mental health day, etc.)

historically small community feel, caring and concern
future hopes: a culture of care

campus family days
celebrate our children, our extended families, and our chosen families

build local support networks
get to know faculty in your town and community

default to understanding without assumptions
embrace and trust faculty autonomy
future hopes: faculty community

keep lunch time open
eat together, play sports or games, go for walks, solve puzzles

prioritize informal interactions
end email and meeting culture, normalize and support social time

convert meetings to collaborative work time
don’t talk about the work, do the work
future hopes: rebalancing

build professional development into load
critically important opportunities shouldn’t be overload, even paid

proactively support personal and family time
course releases for family needs; backstop for financial support to graduate students; tenure should respect faculty as humans by default

align faculty culture change to current work
do what we can with the power we have; all of governance has a role
Thank you!

to many unnamed faculty, for commiseration and hope
to our families, who deserve better