

The Part-time Faculty Member Perspective: Improving the Workplace



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Introduction

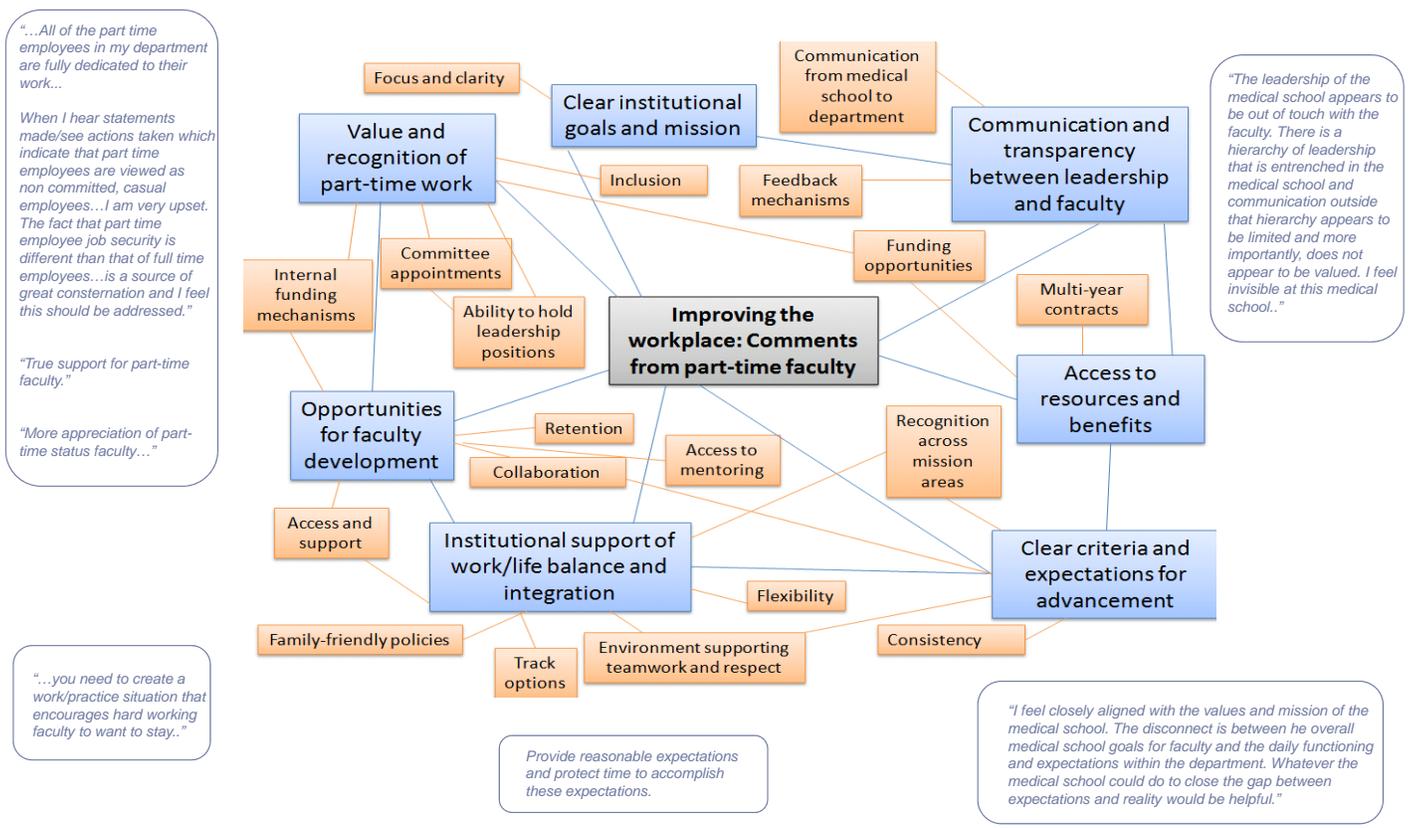
Context. Part-time faculty members represent a sizeable component of the faculty workforce at U.S. medical schools. Estimates suggest that they comprise approximately 17% of the total faculty population.¹ Academic medicine has used part-time work schedules as a mechanism to recruit and retain high-quality faculty members. Supporting faculty with part-time appointments can help yield high-functioning health care teams. Yet, scholars have a limited understanding of part-time faculty perspectives.

Purpose. This research is to explore, from the part-time faculty member perspective, what can be done to improve the medical school workplace. The resulting understanding can be used to continue to develop practices and policies that allow greater support and guidance for part-time work.

Method. Data are from open-ended responses from 632 part-time faculty members, reflecting 21 institutions, who participated in the AAMC Faculty Forward Engagement Survey—a survey that assesses satisfaction and engagement in the academic workplace—between 2011 and 2014. Faculty were asked to describe the top thing their medical school could do to improve the workplace. Theme identification and concept mapping of the responses were performed with the aim of describing, understanding, and illuminating the part-time faculty perspective. Concept mapping is a structured procedure to produce interpretable view of participants' ideas and concepts and how they are interrelated. Both authors generated themes independently to ensure inter-rater reliability, and then the concept map was developed to represent the themes and their interconnections reflected within the responses.

Results: Suggestions from Part-time Faculty for Improving the Workplace

Several salient themes for improving the workplace emerged from this analysis. Themes, examples of responses, and conceptual linkages are illustrated below.



Discussion

Discussion. These themes and their relationships from part-time faculty members suggest several things:

- Part-time faculty suggestions overlap greatly with those from their full-time colleagues, but have a unique voice highlighting some challenges faced because of their part-time status.²
- Comments convey that part-time faculty members are committed to their institutions and seek improvements that would enhance overall engagement for all faculty.
- Suggestions for improvements are not discrete items: Many speak to continued culture change to accept part-time status into the institutional fabric. Specific examples for considered institutional change include:
 - **Increase communication** from administration; increase transparency about institutional priorities; provide opportunities to be engaged in decision-making processes.
 - **Improve access to resources and opportunities**, including access to faculty development opportunities and access to mentoring.

In sum. Academic Medicine can continue to move toward a new faculty model that includes engaged members who remain professionally active throughout a career, which may include part-time work. By acknowledging and supporting flexibility, including part-time work, institutions demonstrate their commitment to individuals, which can, in turn, deepen faculty engagement and attract talented faculty in the future.

¹ AAMC Faculty Roster

² An Exploration of Part-time U.S. Medical School Faculty: Thematic Overview. (2011). Washington, DC: Association of American Medical Colleges.