"I wonder if we are set up to fail": Autoethnographic faculty insights from a public university

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Abstract: In this collective autoethnography, 14 faculty and staff explore our reflections about students' accounts of their challenging experiences and our own experiences interacting with students at a university in the western United States serving racially diverse and first-generaltion students. We found three key themes: (1) Balancing Expectations and Understanding, (2) It's More Than a Job, and (3) Feeling Overwhelmed Through Our Commitment. We argue that shifting campus climates, especially considering COVID-19, and resurgent civil rights movements, require that administrators choose a model of well-being over business models for higher education to better support students, staff, and faculty for academic, professional, and personal success. Faculty's reflections within this collective autoethnography have several implications for teaching,

administrative policy, and practice within colleges and universities.

Keywords: autoethnography, qualitative research, higher education, faculty, students

This collective autoethnography arose out of a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) in 2018-2019 at a diverse, public higher education institution in the western United States. The present paper is based on reflections after analyzing data from a needs assessment study conducted with students (our findings based on student interview data can be found in Guzzardo et al. (2021)). Reviewing this data provoked strong responses to students' experiences and perspectives. Moved by the richness and quality of our discussions, we developed autoethnographic reflections, which are discussed in this paper.

The FLC convened to analyze data related to student-faculty interactions and discuss implications for teaching. In the FLC, faculty (*n*=12) and staff (*n*=2) analyzed data from approximately 200 interviews with 53 students in a longitudinal needs assessment study (Khosla et al., 2020). The data was collected through surveys and four waves of open-ended, semi-structured interviews with undergraduate students conducted between January and June 2018. The needs assessment aimed to understand barriers and facilitators of student success, focusing on students experiencing food insecurity, housing instability, or other financial challenges. This was accomplished with a series of questions that asked about academic experiences, goals, goal attainment, and how these interact with students' access to basic needs as well as intersectionality related to disability, mental health, and family status. For example, in the interview, students were asked about what brought them to the university, what contributed positively or negatively to their academic experience, their current academic goals, what challenges would make it difficult to achieve those goals, and what students would like to see changed to facilitate their success. For a detailed discussion of the methods in the student needs assessment study, please see Khosla et al (2020).

The significance of this paper stems from concerns about the best ways to support students through higher education changes, especially related to student-faculty interactions. We found that student's academic progress could have been negatively impacted by challenges

meeting basic needs and increased caregiving responsibilities (Guzzardo et al., 2021). This is compounded by the likelihood of being first-generation college students and/or low-income (California State University, East Bay, n.d.). We serve many students of color, as demonstrated by our campus designations as an Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI)-serving and Hispanic-serving institution through the US Department of the Interior's Minority-Serving Institutions Program (Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights, n.d.). The trend toward larger numbers of university students of color and first-generation students parallels what is observed across the United States (Crispin & Nikolaou, 2019; Payne et al., 2017; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Moreover, our institution serves students who are considered "non-traditional," meaning they will likely be older and working. These characteristics influence students' experiences at the university, and faculty must consider this to better support them.

The health and economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising awareness of racial injustice, and regional environmental disasters have added more complexity for students and faculty to navigate. Faculty now deal with fewer tenure-track positions, more adjunct positions, and increased oversight and assessment alongside increased administrative positions as part of efforts designed to maximize efficiency. These shifts occur within a societal context of deep political and cultural tensions and growing socioeconomic inequality. Despite this, higher education remains a place of hope and aspiration expected to support social mobility (Bathmaker et al., 2016; Reber et al., 2020) and spirited debate among people with vastly different perspectives. In this autoethnographic analysis, we examine the structural factors that lead to a loss of work-life balance for faculty and students balancing their workload and personal responsibilities. Our reflections also consider how to balance the expectations faculty have of themselves and their students while acknowledging that they and their students can face a myriad of challenges that can impact their ability to meet those expectations.

Faculty Working Conditions

Over the past decade, the working conditions of faculty in higher education have changed dramatically. Decreasing state support for public institutions of higher education (Miller, 2020;

Pew Charitable Trusts, 2019; Webber, 2017) has led to a decrease in the hiring of tenure-track faculty (Zhang et al., 2015) and an increase in administrative costs and oversight (Zywicki & Koopman, 2017). Additionally, faculty at teaching-oriented universities are expected to do more research, often without a decrease in teaching load (Schimanski & Alperin, 2018). The overall impact of these changes is an increase in faculty workload, including teaching and advising responsibilities, within an atmosphere of less support (Owens et al., 2018). These conditions contribute to stress, burnout, and turnover (Sabagh et al., 2018).

Literature also suggests that faculty from traditionally underrepresented groups experience additional challenges, including microaggressions (Louis et al., 2016; Mena & Vaccaro, 2017) and a higher demand for advising and service obligations related to their under-represented status (Osei-Kofi, 2012; O'Meara et al., 2017). Though faculty may welcome these opportunities, they are often uncompensated and not given appropriate recognition in tenure and promotion decisions (Canton, 2012).

Changes in Student Needs

Universities serve students of all ages who may have long commutes, caregiving obligations, multiple jobs, and varying life and work experiences. Previous research also highlights challenges related to basic needs (i.e., food and housing insecurity) and how these challenges impact academic progress (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). These shifting demographic characteristics of students necessitate curricular and programmatic responsiveness that provide more flexibility, such as distance learning, accelerated course formats, and ease in transferring credits that can complicate curriculum development and advising processes (MacDonald, 2018; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Lotz-Sisitka (2009) calls for enhanced reflexivity and vulnerability from faculty, given current educational contexts. Additionally, Moll (2004) argues for both economic and cultural responsiveness to the curriculum that diversifies learning pathways while producing graduates who are "innovative, skillful, and competitive" (p. 3) However, demands on universities to realign undergraduate missions and environments to support adult learners that address their unique experiences (e.g., Kasworm, 2010) have not necessarily been supported through faculty

development.

Market Orientation of Higher Education Impacts on Faculty

Researchers argue that austerity measures and corporatization structures result in unequal distribution of "academic housework" - responsibilities associated with caring and service work - across gendered (Heijstra et al., 2017; Macfarlane & Burg, 2019) and racial intersections (Osei-Kofi, 2012). Neoliberal ideology and business models have shifted higher education away from consideration as a public good supported by government funding and have moved it toward privatization and marketization (Baez & Sanchez, 2017). Neoliberalism in higher education entails a business model that functions to reduce labor costs, and "it encourages people to perceive higher education as an asset that will lead to financial gains rather than develop the skills they need to function as democratic citizens" (Morgan, 2022, p. 8). Critiques of the neoliberal higher education model that reduces state funding in favor of business model education argue that academic understandings of time need to be decolonized (Shahjahan, 2015; 2020) and slowed down (Berg & Seeber, 2016) to center an ethic of care (Carpintero & González Ramos, 2018). Warren's (2016) autoethnographic work describes how neoliberal business model logics increase stress for academics as we struggle with performativity and increasing micromanagement of our time and productivity. Our study's autoethnographic reflections exist in these contexts and consider competing demands on our time, emotional investment, and professional knowledge.

Prior Autoethnographic Research of Faculty in Higher Education Settings

Autoethnography is an interdisciplinary qualitative method that uses the researchers' experiences as primary data to expand an understanding of social phenomena (Chang et al., 2016) and is "meant to resonate with others through their personal, emotional nature" (Pabian, 2014, p. 2). A review of autoethnographic research (Pabian, 2014) in higher education found it to be underutilized. Recent autoethnographic research includes a reflection on the stress and the needed self-care and resiliency for junior faculty entering academia (Wells et al., 2019). Trahar (2013) argues that previous autoethnographic research (e.g., Hernandez et al., 2010) in higher

education allowed faculty to gain additional insights into their own work and identity. While there is prior autoethnographic research focusing on the experiences of marginalized faculty (Duarte, 2007; Hellsten et al., 2011; Moule, 2005), there is a paucity of autoethnographic research conducted by a faculty collective in a reflective response to students' perceptions of student-faculty interactions.

Method

This autoethnographic approach explores our reactions to student experiences on our campus and our own experiences as faculty and staff members interacting with these students (California State University IRB approval number: CSUEB-IRB-2017-313-T). We engaged in a collaborative autoethnographic process (Ashlee et al., 2017) by developing a series of reflection questions that we individually answered in written form. Questions asked about how our backgrounds informed our experiences as faculty, and how we balance accountability, high academic expectations for students, supporting students, and practicing empathy for students struggling with various challenges. Finally, reflective questions attempted to crowdsource creative solutions for generating student success outcomes.

After each member of the 14-person team responded to the guiding questions, we met and discussed our answers over several sessions (see Table 1 for author details). We used collaborative cloud-based document sharing to highlight keywords and phrases to develop a codebook, and we later wrote memos on code patterns and used these to generate themes. The team reviewed the themes and assisted in choosing the quotations used as examples throughout the findings.

Table 1

Author Demographic and Professional Descriptions in 2018-2019 (n= 13)

Title or Position	1 Associate Librarian 1 Assistant Librarian 1 Program Coordinator

	1 Research Coordinator 2 Associate Professors 7 Assistant Professors
Field of Study	1 English 1 Educational Administration 1 Human Development and Women's Studies 1 Psychology 1 Social Work 1 Sociology 1 Speech, Language and Hearing Sciences 2 Library 4 Public Health
Gender	1 No response 2 cisgender male 10 cisgender woman or cisgender female
Race/Ethnicity	1 No response 1 Black 1 Middle Eastern 1 South Asian 1 Asian 1 white Latina/Boricua 7 White/ white
Country or Place of Origin	1 No response 1 Iran/United States 1 Puerto Rico 2 India 8 United States
Disability	1 No response 1 Yes 1 See other identities 10 No disability
First Generation College Student	1 No response 5 Yes 7 No
Immigrant family	1 No response 1 Yes, first generation

	1 Yes, came to US as refugee toddler 1 Yes, came as graduate student 1 Yes 8 No
Other identities that are important to you/relevant to your teaching/scholarship	• Practicing Christian • Cancer survivor; raised by lesbian parents in the Castro District in San Francisco during the AIDS epidemic (thus spent my teenage years helping care for dying friends/family members instead of going to school--got HS diploma through independent study instead) • Queer; Fat • First-generation college student; member of the Baha'i Faith, whose adherents are barred from higher education in the country of my birth • Parents struggled as refugees to India; I have no immediate family in the US; practice minority religion (Hinduism); held a precarious US visa status for years • First generation college student; Parent of a child with an intellectual disability; Bisexual • First generation immigrant, parent, non-religious

Note. This table contains 13 responses of the 14-member team that contributed to the autoethnographic reflections, while 12 contributed directly to the manuscript as co-authors.

Findings

The analysis of our collective autoethnography illustrates our varying perspectives, the complexity of our professional goals and how we endeavor to achieve those goals as faculty and staff. The following themes underscore our experiences: (1) Balancing Expectations and Understanding, (2) It's More Than a Job, and (3) Feeling Overwhelmed Through Our Commitment. We found that our university and faculty cultures push us to balance competing demands that often result in a sense of being overwhelmed. We strive for a balance between having high expectations for ourselves and our students while also being understanding of the challenges that arise in meeting those expectations. Moreover, the themes highlight our experiences with our distinctive student body, how we manage students' challenges, attempt to teach effectively, the meaning of these experiences for teaching at the college level, as well as

what structural changes should be made to improve teaching and learning conditions on our campus.

Theme 1: Balancing Expectations and Understanding

Faculty described struggles balancing expectations of learning goals and assessment while empathizing with students with complex challenges and wanting to adapt to those students' needs. Specifically, faculty discussed ways to make room for students' needs through pedagogical flexibility in grading policies, assignment design, extensions, or make-up assignments and activities. We considered how student life barriers like "car trouble or family drama" should not hinder academic success. One author described how she builds in, "enough flexibility and redundancy into the course that missing one session here or one session there won't 'doom the student to failure.'" There is a struggle between holding students accountable for their work while accommodating students' complex challenges. Faculty, therefore, feel compelled to strive for a precarious balance between empathic approaches to our students' lives and administrative pressure to focus on assessable academic standards.

Finding the "Sweet Spot" Between Academic Expectations and Understanding

One author explains that "the sweet spot" is the place where we have balanced high academic standards with flexibility and where the student is challenged but not overloaded.

> I think we need to be more transparent and explicit about how learning works (...), as well as "growth mindset". I also think faculty need to learn to recognize when the frustration level is simply too high – students may be physically present, but if they are not being reached, then education is not effective. How can we best use it to make work more accessible, collaborative, and flexible – yet retain the human relationship aspects of teaching and learning that make learning more effective and joyful?

It is important to note that students are not passively waiting to be reached by faculty, and that they must be interested and willing to connect with faculty and receive support. Finding a "sweet spot" is also apparent in another authors' approach to balancing expectations and understanding

through "wise mentorship" (Cohen et al., 1999):

> I trust in the capacity of the students to meet the needs of the situation as best as they
> can, and I think what I've seen in the excerpts [students' interview data] is that motivation
> is not an issue, but logistics are. But it is possible that by offering too much benefit of the
> doubt, it can seem watered-down or paternalistic. I think if I build in as much flexibility as
> I can into the course structure, that makes me feel more confident that I can, verbally, be
> more demanding. I try to do this in a sense of wise mentorship, aka "I will expect great
> things from you and I know you can achieve them."

For most of us, the "sweet spot" was quite elusive. Our attempts to balance expectations and
understanding also raised concerns of "watering down" or devaluing our students' degrees.

Being Flexible and its Potential Costs to Students

While authors shared their empathy with students at the "human level," several reported
wanting to uphold high standards, "pushing our students to be better and setting them up to
succeed in demanding work environments." Authors wondered if flexibility in testing or
assignment deadlines to solve immediate student needs will eventually hinder them in careers
where there may be less flexibility. Additionally, some considered how accommodations or
flexibility during students' education may result in knowledge gaps, negatively impacting the
students' quality of work and the lives of the community members those students will eventually
serve through healthcare or social services. Some authors worried about students not being held
up to the same standards as they were due to higher education increasingly becoming a business
transaction (paying for the degree rather than working for it). For example, one author explained:

> It's a desire to actually see my students successfully develop the skills they need to
> accomplish their life goals, and a frustration that many seem misguided about the skills
> they'll need to develop in order to succeed in life. I do think it's a cultural problem, part
> and parcel of the larger "war on expertise" that seems to be resurgent in the American
> consciousness at this point in time.

Adjuncts may face even greater challenges in balancing rigor and flexibility due to the structure of their own work, even when they feel passionate about their teaching. This is apparent through the limitations of adjunct positions and struggles they face, such as working at multiple campuses, or having several jobs, and might find it more challenging to both engage with students and include flexible deadlines or schedules for students.

Theme 2: It's More Than a Job

Faculty and staff authors discussed the enjoyment and fulfillment related to their work when they feel they successfully support students. They described working with students as "more than a job" and focused on the level of care they put into their work. The authors described wanting to build a relationship with students that

> transcends grades and performance in the classroom. They need to see you, and you need to see them (...) our professional relationships with our students should not prevent the sharing of our personal experiences, as we need to be human.

The authors discussed how connecting with students on shared personal experiences can enhance understanding and empathy on both sides. One author described her experience as an immigrant graduate student, dependent on a student visa, and that supportive faculty was key to her own success. Another author described how her disability motivates her to support students beyond just teaching a course:

> On a daily basis, my hearing loss compels me to be resourceful, adapt and find innovative solutions when communicating and navigating often-inaccessible social and physical environments. Towards that end, I strive to create a classroom environment that recognizes that my students are also navigating complex and overlapping circumstances.

However, this amount of time investment does not come without a cost to the faculty. Additionally, and most importantly, this work seems to be gendered, highlighted by one author who teaches gender studies:

> I do also have some concern about the level of caretaking that they seem to require -

especially thinking about the emotional labor put on women faculty (and women faculty of color in particular). And some faculty with their own personalities or neurodiversity may not be able to do this in the same way.

This concern about the expectation to engage in caretaking within the faculty role was perhaps reflected in several group members' descriptions of wanting or needing to be "approachable" so that students ask questions and become engaged with the course material. For example, one author explained: "I want to seem approachable to all my students. I want my teaching to be inclusive and equitable... At the same time, I want to be able to manage my work." Authors reflected on the boundary between being approachable and holding students to a high academic standard, even when they are facing personal challenges.

Teaching as a Humbling Experience

The theme of our faculty positions, "being more than a job," is directly connected to how we were humbled and respectful of students' pushing through exceedingly challenging personal circumstances to succeed in school and the "immense coping skills" students have developed. For example, one author wrote:

> I feel a lot of respect and appreciation for many of the students we serve. Some of these students are clearly motivated to get an education in the face of overwhelming odds such as poverty, learning disabilities, and/or other extenuating circumstances. They balance many complex demands on their time, play many roles in their life-and are determined to succeed here. I feel a sense of humility as I think about the rather straightforward path I have had to my own education and a desire to do what I can to help them succeed here. At the same time, I am overwhelmed with the nature of student expectations.

Part of this humility and respect for students has to do with some authors' familiarity with the struggles described by students, given their own backgrounds. Other authors reflected on their own privileges, such as being white, from a middle-class background, and having parents with college-level degrees. They noted that students face struggles that are more "expansive,

complicated, and intense." One author noted that having space for intellectual exploration in college was a privilege many students did not have. Authors who were humbled and respectful of the struggles and interrelated crises in students' lives discussed appreciation for students' resilience, leading authors to work harder at their jobs for those students. However, these motivational thoughts also often led to an overwhelming sense of responsibility and commitment. As one author explained:

> I am deeply committed to supporting students, but I can't possibly go the extra mile for every student. I wonder how we can create structures and supports for faculty and students that allow us all to have our needs met, thrive, and reach our goals in an intense and fast-paced world.

Theme 3: Feeling Overwhelmed Through Our Commitment

Feeling overwhelmed was a common byproduct of attempts to balance flexibility, rigor, and a drive to care for and help students in need, often without the training or time. Faculty described this in terms of worry about burn-out, feeling "inundated" with student requests, or feeling unable to balance students' needs with their own personal needs. Many students require much more time-intensive advising and mentorship and have high expectations of that mentorship. This can feel overwhelming for faculty at a moderately-sized teaching institution like ours with a high teaching load and low time allotment for mentoring. One author explains:

> The expectation for many of these students is almost impossible to achieve for faculty who themselves have many competing demands on their time. I think the burden of immediate responses, perfectly created syllabi and course instruction and the flexibility that many of the students crave is a lot to ask of faculty. We are constantly balancing teaching multiple classes to doing our own research and our lives. How then can we meet the implied expectations from many of our students who need additional support and help — and direct their frustrations to faculty when they don't get what they need.

Sometimes I wonder if we are all set up to fail.

For faculty, work-life balance has unique challenges during the tenure-track timeline, compounded by circumstances such as raising small children, caring for aging family members or managing personal health challenges.

Role of Technology in Feeling Overwhelmed

The fast-paced ability to communicate with students over several media, such as email, direct message, or video conferencing, opens possibilities for additional support. However, this also comes with expectations of quick or even instant responses for problems that may require time to address. One author described how students' email requests for extensions or extensive explanations were addressed by directing students towards synchronous interactions, such as office hours, but "[students] may perceive this as being unhelpful as their demand for feedback over email is not being met." When we do not meet students' expectations it may result in situations of students feeling disappointed and assigning blame to the professor. One author wrote: "(...) students seem to be blaming me personally for things that are actually the result of structural issues" (e.g., if a professor takes a full day or more to respond to emails, it's more a product of overcrowded classes with hundreds of students rather than indifference on the part of the professor).

Emotionally Overwhelmed Based on Level of Student Challenges

Several faculty members discussed how challenging it can be to meet students' expectations and address their needs. One author listed some of these expectations, which "can be exhausting":

> making available extra time, to be able to answer questions about different campus programs or policies outside the faculty member's purview, extra credit demands at the last minute, perfect syllabi, responding right away to emails, providing advising and mentoring and somehow staying fair to all students while making exceptions for individual cases.

Students' needs for additional support can impact personal time to rest or take lunch: "At one point, I had 180 advisees, maybe more; it was impossible to keep up with these demands."

Faculty and staff often receive little to no training for handling students experiencing mental health or basic needs emergencies like loss of housing, transportation, or a critically ill family member. One author who was a staff member noted that often the students' very challenging circumstances could be emotionally overwhelming. She said her perspective shifted after she took a trauma-informed teacher training a year after working with a struggling student, writing:

> I realized that I missed some of the signs that she was losing focus in the class, and I also realized that it might have been more helpful for me to reach out in person to her, just to check in and ask if she was okay. The result might not have changed, but I missed an opportunity there to possibly make a difference.

The authors discussed feeling "lost in how to handle the masses of students with complex issues." Moreover, the faculty discussed how the level of caretaking involved in supporting students impacts our ability to perform well in the other responsibilities of our position, such as research. Nevertheless, our research program and products are essential to retention, tenure, and promotion. Several faculty in our group agree that all this can be draining when one considers the conflict between students' expectations and the expectations of being on the tenure-track.

Discussion

The reflection process in this collective autoethnography creates an awareness of faculty's subjective experiences, especially in how we make sense of our roles and the tensions we face within them. Three main themes emerged after analyzing data on our work and responsibilities: the balance between upholding high academic standards while being flexible for students in need, the feeling that our work is more than a job, and the emotional, physical, and mental burdens we experience as professors. Our findings underscore the need for a deliberate "acknowledgment and interweaving of care and rigor" in our pedagogy (Marsellas,

2021, p. iv). It is central to our career trajectories and student success to maintain a rigorous assessment of student learning while also being concerned for students' futures and well-being, which is grounded in care logic.

Our themes focused on shifting, sometimes conflicting, expectations, including faculty's expectations of their students and themselves and the expectations students have of faculty. Additionally, students wanted professors to be skillful teachers who create opportunities for them to learn while accommodating their individual situations. Students' expectations for accommodations may lead to gendered care practices in which emotional and professional burdens are usually placed on female faculty members (i.e., "academic housekeeping"; Macfarlane & Burg, 2019). Expectations may require adjustment given the aforementioned changes in faculty's working conditions related to neoliberal university contexts and profit-focused business models, as well as changing student needs due to social unrest and crises (e.g., pandemic-induced anxiety, racial discrimination, political tensions, and climate change-related disasters). It is important to note that these reflections were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic and sudden shifts to remote teaching. The issues identified in this paper have likely been exacerbated by the pandemic, since faculty without previous online teaching experiences were asked to adjust to online platforms for teaching, be educated on trauma-informed practices, be flexible and compassionate, but still maintain a high-quality teaching environment.

Limitations

Study limitations include some authors' concerns regarding disclosing their feelings about students and being judged by their peers, as well as the limits on the generalizability of the findings given that most members of our team held privileged social locations of race, gender, and ability level or citizenship, and positions as unionized tenured/tenure-track faculty. Nevertheless, our research provides a novel use of autoethnographic design to explore our reflections on data gathered from students about their experiences of student-faculty interactions, as well as the difficult balancing act we face in supporting students and managing our own lives and careers. This study is also unique, given its origins as casual conversations

during meetings for a separate research study. This shows the promising flexibility of collective autoethnography to provide not just supplemental but new and insightful findings about faculty, student, and staff relationships. This collaborative endeavor of faculty considering students' reflections of faculty contributes to existing scholarship that identified competing demands on faculty time related to the work/life balance, as well as mentorship, scholarship, and teaching demands (French et al., 2020; Jacobs & Winslow, 2016; Wells et al., 2019).

Implications for Faculty and Administration in Institutions of Higher Education

Faculty reflections in this collective autoethnography have several implications for teaching, administrative policy, and practice in colleges and universities. These include conducting research to support students' basic needs, continued role reflection by faculty and administrators, support for pedagogical design and flexibility in course structure,

As part of the faculty and administration's responsibility to society and student development, there should be a commitment to supporting students' basic needs, including health, mental health, well-being, and sense of belonging. We suggest that faculty and administration conduct research with students in educational settings concerning students' basic needs.

This research deals with faculty perspectives on student-faculty relationships and fulfills the faculty and administration's need to engage in anti-racism, anti-ableism, diversity, equity, and inclusion. It also considers social justice principles related to power relations between students and faculty. We encourage continued role reflection and autoethnographic work by faculty and administration as a means for personal and professional growth and as part of the commitment to students' well-being in their departments and across the university more broadly.

Universities should provide equity-focused solutions that consider marginalization. These solutions should include support for pedagogical design and flexibility in course structure (times and delivery modes) to accommodate faculty and students' responsibilities and account for the often invisible emotional labor of faculty in supporting students with complex needs (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020).

Equity-focused solutions must also consider that an increasing number of adjunct faculty are more likely to be women (Duncan, 2014) and people of color (Flaherty, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Students from historically underrepresented groups are more likely to be drawn to them for mentorship, even though adjunct faculty are not compensated for mentorship or advising, are often not given campus offices, and work across multiple universities. Consider providing adjunct faculty who are mentoring and performing other tasks:

- parity in their compensation
- health benefits
- retirement plans commensurate to that of tenure-track faculty
- the opportunity to apply for additional pay for mentoring tasks that arise

Other policies that contribute to equity and well-being for adjunct faculty include:

- contracts that guarantee job security and return to work after leaves of absence
- the option to run for positions in faculty governance
- voting rights
- eligibility for faculty awards.

Issues of cultural taxation (Griffin, 2019; Irrera, 2019; Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011) also exist for tenure-track and tenured faculty of color who provide mentoring for the large numbers of students of color at our institution, which constitutes work that should be valued, compensated, and addressed in retention, tenure, and promotion. Work related to cultural taxation should not just be acknowledged, but also recognized in faculty evaluations for retention and promotion, and, ideally, financially compensated.

Working in a demanding academic environment where faculty must meet stringent accountability requirements can impact their morale, satisfaction, and dedication to their job, subsequently affecting their interaction with students. Therefore, university leadership must provide sufficient support to faculty members, such as implementing more flexible policies that provide grievance mechanisms and paid leave to accommodate personal needs. Halat et al. (2023) suggest that providing flexibility to faculty to balance their work and personal life can positively impact their mental health. There should also be flexibility in faculty evaluation for

retention and promotion, such as consideration of a variety of areas and types of contributions (e.g., inclusion of work that benefits students' well-being, such as mentorship). Faculty mentorship and faculty development programs can be a precious resource for junior faculty or those from historically underrepresented groups by improving career satisfaction and retention (Halat et al., 2023). Additionally, support for faculty should include technical assistance when teaching in multiple modalities, whether online, hybrid, etc. Professors who are supported will be better equipped to support students and perform the tasks related to their jobs.

Faculty alone cannot be responsible for a culture change toward an ethic of care for students because it requires shifting away from university ideals of privatization and viewing higher education solely as a pathway for increased productivity and income generation. We recommend reflection on innovative actions by university leadership and implementing administrative changes that focus on promoting the well-being of all members of a university campus. Some suggestions are as follows:

- Each university campus should have a robust mental health or counseling center with enough counselors based on campus size and a variety of services (group or individual counseling, online counseling, and workshops). The National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) makes recommendations for colleges that can contribute to well-being, including combating the stigma surrounding mental health and mental health disabilities, addressing campus culture to normalize discussions of mental health, educating faculty on how to identify students in distress and refer them to other resources on services on campus, and partnering with community resources when there are few campus options (Leshner & Scherer, 2021). Faculty can collaborate with counselors and university administrators to create mental health and wellness programs. These collaborations value faculty expertise and can empower faculty to contribute to the well-being of the campus community (Halat et al., 2023).

- Halat et al. (2023) provide several strategies to promote mental health among faculty, including professional development opportunities in all areas of tenure review and

demonstrating respect and appreciation for the work faculty do (e.g. hours of preparation and research, the emotional and time investment of mentoring and supporting students). There should also be equity in the distribution of tasks, how work is assessed, and when work is rewarded, as well as transparency regarding expectations for tenure and promotion. Halat et al. add that, to contribute to faculty's well-being, university administrators should engage in "leadership that embeds diversity and equity" (p. 15) and that communication with faculty should be timely, effective, and inclusive.

- Addressing well-being on campus also entails considering health disparities and having on and off-campus resources and options available for students that address housing insecurity, food insecurity (food pantries or food recovery programs) and assistance with navigating federal aid assistance. Emergency funds for students and employees should also be available on campus.

- Well-being can also be impacted through a dynamic center dedicated to anti-racism, anti-ableism, diversity, equity, and inclusion, that would contribute to a sense of belonging for historically underrepresented or non-traditional students on campus. These students also benefit from centers that cater to specific backgrounds and identities, where they can find common ground and build camaraderie and support systems on campus.

- University administrators should foster open communication and collaborate with faculty to develop ideas for campus improvements. A strong partnership between faculty and university leadership based on respect and trust is an essential aspect of shared governance; an authentic collaboration can enhance the well-being of everyone on campus. "When drafting policies, academic leaders at all levels should pause and check the impact of their policies, actions, and leadership style on faculty. When assigning new tasks and responsibilities, leaders should take the time to reconcile with their staff, considering their current career priorities and their personal circumstances and well-being" (Halat et al., 2023, p. 16).

Conclusions

Our authentic reflections as faculty and staff at a public university predominantly serving racially diverse and first-generation college students illustrate how we negotiate various positions within our role as faculty and how we strive for a balance between challenging students and being flexible and inclusive. We are committed to providing our students with more support than we may have received during our own education. Nevertheless, individual efforts related to an ethic of care with students must exist alongside university-wide and structural shifts in public and government understandings of education as a public good. When faculty are supported by the university leadership at their institutions, it facilitates more opportunities to work together with students, faculty, and staff on improving our campus community to make it more welcoming and empowering for all.

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