
Helping academic staff be successful – added VALUE - Workshop

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Overview

It is said that research competes with teaching for the attention of academic staff, and it often wins because success brings promotion. New staff may have little idea of the range of issues which must be dealt with by a successful academic and have little experience of juggling research and teaching. This is a particular challenge if they are trying to innovate. A course is being developed to help new staff, and their colleagues in support roles, to understand the issues likely to impact on their own careers. Part of this is a virtual environment which simulates a day in the life of a successful academic – VALUE (Virtual Academic Life in Universities – an Experience). A smaller version of this, VALUE-lite, is offered in this workshop. The workshop version is paper-based, rather than PC focused, and will enable all attendees to grapple, for an hour, with a few of the issues faced by a lecturer at the fictional University of Allerton. They will have to make decisions, write to a deadline, find time in their diaries, interact with colleagues but not (as would happen in the full version of VALUE) meet students face to face!

Workshop details

It is frequently said, most recently in the report from the Royal Academy of Engineering “Educating Engineers for the 21st Century” (King, 2007), that research competes with teaching for the attention of academic staff, and it often wins because success brings promotion. New staff often have little idea of the range of issues which must be dealt with by a successful academic and have little experience of juggling research and teaching. This is a particular challenge if they are trying to innovate. A course is being developed to help new staff, and their colleagues in support roles, to understand the issues likely to impact on their own careers. Part of this is a virtual environment which simulates a day in the life of a successful academic. I have called it VALUE – Virtual Academic Life in Universities – an Experience. A smaller version of this - VALUE-lite - will be offered in this workshop. The workshop version will be paper-based, rather than PC focused, and will enable all attendees to grapple, for an hour, with a few of the issues faced by a lecturer at the fictional University of Allerton. They will have to make decisions, write to a deadline, find time in their diaries, interact with colleagues but not (as would happen in the full version of VALUE) meet students face to face! We can also be fairly sure that the phone will not ring, and your Head of Department won't drop by.

Fifteen minutes at each end of the workshop will be used to set the scene and to share our experiences (successes and failures) of the tasks and challenges.

Activities will include prioritisation of tasks, writing text under time constraints, decision making on academic (research and teaching) and inter-personal issues. Sharing of information and mutual advice will be encouraged during the session, as in real life. However (again as in life) time spent consulting and sharing will not be available for completing tasks. All activities will be paper-based in this version but a description of the lengthier computer-based version will be given.

There appears to be little published literature on this topic and most of it concentrates on research productivity rather than managing the teaching/research balance (e.g. Fox, 1992;

Ramsden, 1994; Colbeck, 1998; Robertson & Bond, 2001). There is plenty of evidence for a tension between teaching and research but precious little advice on what to do about it. This workshop is intended to be a small step in this direction.

Learning outcomes

At the end of this workshop, participants should:

- Appreciate the range of activities, related both to teaching and research, which characterise a successful mid-career academic;
- Better understand their response to multiple tasks with short deadlines;
- Have developed an improved appreciation of the potential benefits of simulation and role play.

References

Colbeck, Carol L (1998) Merging in a Seamless Blend: How Faculty Integrate Teaching and Research, *Journal of Higher Education*, 69, 647-671

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Robertson J. and Bond C. H (2001) Experiences of the Relation between Teaching and Research: what do academics value? . [Higher Education Research & Development](#), 20, 5-19