Scholarly

Faculty Affairs Strategy

Best practices from across higher education

This is Scholarly's inaugural white paper on faculty affairs strategy and best practices. Scholarly is a higher education startup focused on building an innovative faculty lifecycle data platform. As part of that mission, Scholarly has built an expert advisory council with faculty affairs leaders from over 50 institutions across the country. These best practices are informed by that advisory council, along with hundreds of conversations and interviews with faculty affairs stakeholders.

Why Now and Why Faculty Affairs?

The higher ed landscape has gotten increasingly competitive in recent years due to a range of macro challenges. Total enrollment has been declining due to demographic changes, while inflation and cost of attendance are causing cost pressure, resulting in highly constrained budgets. This has been compounded by more negative public attitudes on the value of higher ed and legislative pressure on public institutions. Now more than ever, it is critical that institutions 'do more with less' to stay competitive and to achieve their strategic goals.

Faculty are the foundation of higher ed institutions and occupy critical leadership roles across teaching, research, service, and administration. Appropriately, faculty represent the largest annual cost across higher ed, with domestic 4-year institutions spending over $110B on faculty compensation. Faculty impact almost everything at an institution including the curriculum, student attraction and retention, institutional reputation, research and grant funding, important committee decision-making, and more. The role of faculty in shared governance, combined with their other activities, means that faculty are uniquely positioned to drive impact at institutions.

The Current Challenge

Despite how critical faculty are in higher ed, faculty affairs processes are often time consuming and manual with limited software support. Faculty time is a valuable and scarce resource, and in a recent survey 64% of faculty reported "feeling burned out because of work," and approximately 70% agreed with the statement "In the past 12 months, I have felt overwhelmed by all I had to do" (with 84% of women agreeing). Partly as a result of this dynamic, faculty affairs processes designed to collect additional information from faculty about their performance are met with resistance or low compliance. As one of our advisors stated, "any process that requires faculty members to restate information from their CV is going to be dead on arrival." This tension can leave faculty affairs processes in limbo, where they remain frustrating for faculty and also fail to generate meaningful data for the institution.

As a consequence, many institutions have minimal understanding of their faculty data, including important activities like faculty publications, grant funding, or committee service. For example, we have been surprised at how challenging it is for many leaders to easily access a list of their faculty's publications from the last year. This lack of easily accessible data extends to many other categories, whether it be upcoming faculty leaves, committee service, appointments, and the list

[1] https://www.chronicle.com/article/colleges-were-already-bracing-for-an-enrollment-cliff-now-there-might-be-a-second-one?sra=true
[2] https://news.gallup.com/poll/508352/americans-confidence-higher-education-down-sharply.aspx
[3] NCES data, Total salaries and wages on instructional staff
[4] https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/faculty-burnout-survey

goes on. As one of our Provost advisors noted, "It would take me over a week to get a basic list of our active faculty members. More complex planning reports aren't even on the table, and we have no way to access faculty CVs." It is challenging to lead and to plan effectively in any large organization with without access to reliable data.

Example: The Fragmentation of Faculty Data
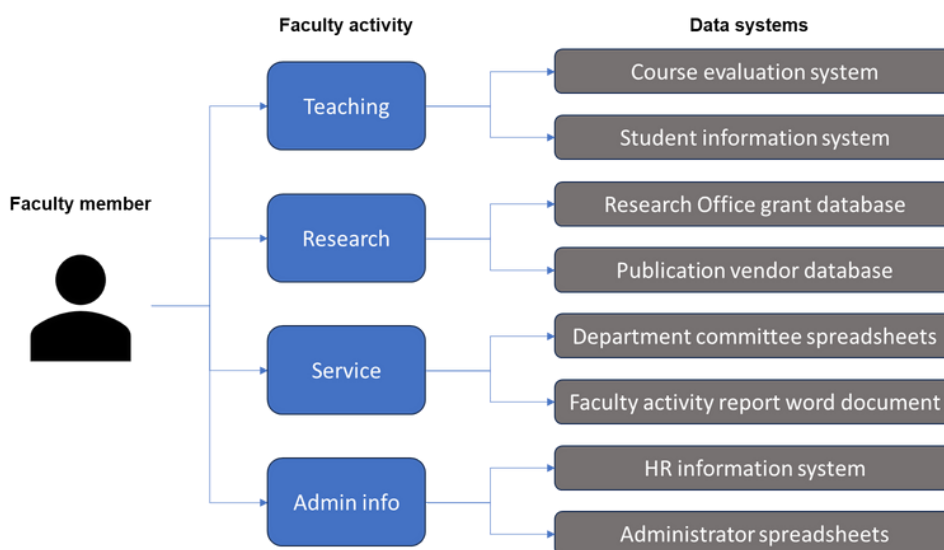
The concept of a faculty data strategy is still nascent in higher ed. Based on Scholarly's interviews with over 100 institutions, faculty data often lives in upward of six different disconnected systems. For example, an HR information system like Workday may contain appointment information, start date, and compensation data. Course data lives in a Student Information System, and course evaluation data and scholarly activities are in their own systems. This creates significant challenges for easily accessing, utilizing, and analyzing faculty data. However, faculty data is incredibly valuable for institutions internally and externally across a range of use cases. Example use cases that we have heard are listed below. Indeed, one of the primary use cases for a solid faculty data foundation is creating a streamlined faculty affairs experience.

Faculty Data Use Cases	
External	**Internal**
• Influencing institutional reputation and faculty prominence in their field • Enabling communication and marketing outreach • Supporting grant and funding opportunities • Supporting legislative affairs (for public institutions) • Engaging with students who are interested in faculty areas of experience	• Enabling faculty affairs workflows • Informing faculty hiring and retention approaches • Ensuring equitable workloads among faculty • Increasing research collaboration among faculty • Supporting accreditation processes • Supporting department and program reviews • Enabling Board and leadership presentations

Best practices in faculty affairs

Scholarly has had the opportunity to survey faculty affairs processes and systems across a wide range of institutions, from large public R1 universities to small private liberal arts colleges. Although the scale and the specific solutions will vary depending on the institution, we have identified a set of faculty affairs best practices that apply broadly.

In our conversations it also became apparent that at best-in-class institutions, faculty affairs processes and faculty data are fundamentally intertwined. In fact, nowhere did we observe streamlined faculty affairs processes without some degree of faculty data integration. As a result, this dynamic is reflected throughout the insights below.

<u>Insight 1</u>: **It is critical to integrate disparate sources of faculty data to enable faculty affairs workflows, generate real insights, and make important connections.**

- At multiple large institutions with best-in-class capabilities, this data integration involves a data lake or data warehouse environment that ingests multiple systems across the institution to create a source of truth. This data is then used to automatically power faculty affairs workflows (like annual activity reports or leave approval processes) and for rich analysis like faculty impact on student outcomes.
- At smaller institutions that don't require a multi-million-dollar data environment, that typically takes the shape of a few enterprising individuals manually creating integrated data sources. But without constant upkeep, these integrated data sources may become stale.
- At institutions that failed to integrate faculty data, we observed disconnected faculty affairs workflows and limited ability to perform holistic analyses on things like faculty workload.

<u>Insight 2</u>: **Related to the first point, faculty affairs software and tools need to be interconnected and dynamic.**

- At best-in-class large institutions, this often takes the shape of a robust homegrown system, although those systems have often taken a decade or more to complete and require significant overhead to maintain. For example, at one large R1 institution with an effective homegrown solution, they had been developing their system since the mid-2000s and had a team of full-time developers supporting maintenance.
- At smaller institutions, this typically looks like one or two prolific administrators who have built creative systems using advanced features in tools like Microsoft Excel or Smartsheet. In these cases, however, there is significant risk associated with retaining those individuals and a high degree of process complexity.
- Failure to connect these tools leads to software proliferation, which is both costly and inefficient. At one mid-sized private institution, they are using eight different tools for faculty affairs processes (Qualtrics, On Base, Tableau, Microsoft Excel & Word, Google Forms and Drive, and Symplectic Elements), each supporting different aspects of the faculty lifecycle.

<u>Insight 3</u>: **Faculty affairs processes must be streamlined and impose minimal burden on faculty to maximize adoption and to capture meaningful inputs**.

- At one mid-sized institution with high faculty completion rates on their annual assessment, administrators pre-populated faculty forms with data so that they required less faculty time to complete and allowed faculty to provide more meaningful reflections. This was highly effective for faculty, but it ultimately shifted the burden to administrators and assistants.
- Failure to prioritize a streamlined faculty experience means that adoption will suffer. At one liberal arts college for example, their annual process required a large amount of information from faculty, and the result was that the majority of faculty ultimately provided nothing at all.

<u>Insight 4</u>: **Holistic assessment is necessary to ensure faculty equity across teaching, research, and service and to accurately assess performance.**

- Best-in-class institutions are intent on contextualizing faculty performance, and to achieve that they track things like service and student advising, with some institutions quantifying service activity to better understand equity across their faculty. For those institutions, this approach has revealed important equity and performance insights that may otherwise have gone unnoticed.
- Failure to consider faculty work holistically means that institutions often undervalue high performing faculty simply because their technology and tooling does not allow for measurement of critical but harder-to-quantify work contributions (e.g., service, student advising, teaching effectiveness). This often disproportionately impacts women, faculty of color, and junior faculty, and it raises burnout and retention risk.

Additional insights we have observed include:

- <u>Transparency is critical</u>: It is important for faculty members to understand processes and key milestones in their career to increase trust in the administration. For example, at some institutions if you ask a faculty member when their deadline for tenure review is, they may only have an educated guess. For the most important review of their career, this is less than ideal.
- <u>Faculty expertise should be accessible</u>: This reduces the barrier to faculty collaborating across departments, and it helps faculty to feel more invested in the institutional mission. Especially at larger institutions, faculty may not know a colleague is doing research in a similar area.
- <u>Department chairs need support</u>: It is widely acknowledged that department chairs are important leaders, but chairs need the tools to effectively manage their department. In many cases department chairs receive minimal support with faculty affairs processes.

Our solution

Scholarly's mission is to offer an innovative solution to these challenges, and our platform has been built from the ground up informed by these best practices from faculty affairs leaders across higher ed. By creating a modern faculty lifecycle data platform that is dynamic and strategically leverages AI, we can streamline processes for faculty and staff, while enabling faculty data as an institutional asset.

Scholarly achieves this by integrating disparate faculty data sources into one flexible platform, and then powering a range of lifecycle processes from that data foundation. Today, we support customized faculty profiles with publication database integrations, annual faculty evaluations / activity reports that are customized and prepopulated with faculty data, service management tools, CV import capability using AI, a data reporting suite, and a robust set of administrative tools. Our roadmap is ambitious, and in the future we will be releasing functionality to support promotion and tenure, sabbatical and leave processes, search and hiring, workload management, course evaluations, and more.

If you would like to learn more about Scholarly or provide feedback on this white paper, please <u>click here</u> to schedule time. You can also reach out directly to the founders, CEO Rusty Cowher (rcowher@scholarlysoftware.com) or CTO Kelly Sutton (ksutton@scholarlysoftware.com).