



The Sentinel

UUP — Oneonta Local
2190

Special Edition: Advocating for a 3-3 Teaching Load

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Introduction

Mark Ferrara and Melissa Lavin
UUP Oneonta

In this Special Issue of *The Sentinel*, SUNY Oneonta faculty members have made a powerful case for UUP's advocacy for a return to a standard 18 credit, 3/3 load. Contributors include nineteen faculty members at different ranks across nine departments who represent a variety of academic disciplines. Many of our contributors have drawn on their experiences at other institutions with better pay and lighter teaching loads, while others have reflected on job candidates who took positions at our peer institutions and the loss of valued faculty members to other schools with better remuneration.

In our view, returning to the 3/3 load means putting us back on par with our peer SUNY comprehensive institutions. We remain near the bottom of our peer group in terms of salary—and our teaching load is among the heaviest (as the advocacy document reprinted at the end of this Special Issue attests). For that reason, we do not envision discussions with Management revolving around what extra work (teaching, research, service) faculty should take on in return for a load adjustment. We have simply been compensated too little, for far too long, for our work.

We believe that when we raise the quality of instruction by returning to the 3/3 load, the repercussions of that move will play out in courses across the university in ways that traverse units, provide a better experience for students and faculty, and raise our pride and self-esteem—all of which will translate into a greater commitment by faculty to the university over time and help to raise low morale.

Many thanks to all the contributors featured in this Special Issue of *The Sentinel*. Collectively, they make the case for a 3/3 more convincingly than we ever could alone.

Faculty Contributions

Matthew Hendley, Ph.D.
Professor
Dept. of History

Whenever I go to any academic conference curious conversations occur about my teaching load. “How can you possibly teach 7 courses a year?”, I am always asked. “How can you find any time to do research?”. Many of my conversation partners work at larger research universities or better funded liberal arts colleges where a 3:2 load is considered crushing (and is usually accompanied by graduate students helping with grading as TAs). Many of my friends at other institutions teach 2:2. “Well”, I always reply, “When I was first hired at SUNY Oneonta in 2001, I used to teach 8 courses a year, while the veteran faculty there were grandfathered in to teach 6 courses”. My final punchline to these conversations always is that when I entered the job market after getting a PhD in Modern British History from the University of Toronto I ended up being hired by SUNY Oneonta which had the heaviest teaching load of all the 100+ universities and colleges I applied to and the lowest pay. Gasps always ensue. Gallows humor at its best I suppose. I do eventually admit that after gaining tenure, SUNY Oneonta reduced its load to 4:3 in 2008, which I very much appreciated and helped my research productivity but that fact barely lightens the mood. I am looked on as a curiosity or someone to be pitied by my peers. These conversations in a nutshell reveal much about faculty morale at SUNY Oneonta.

Don't get me wrong. I have enjoyed working at SUNY Oneonta. I like living in upstate New York. Oneonta has been good for my family. My wife and I have fulfilling careers at SUNY Oneonta, my children grew up and graduated from local high schools. I have a great set of friends and colleagues. I have forged a meaningful career at our institution over twenty years. I like teaching. I have had many inspiring students. I have been able to create new courses on the histories of Britain, the British Empire, Canada, Hong Kong, Ireland and Jamaica. I have tried to undertake important service including serving five years total as a Department Chair. I have published a monograph, several edited volumes, many book chapters and articles. I have taken faculty-led overseas courses to China and Hong Kong. However, I have had several enduring frustrations.

One frustration is the simple unfairness that throughout my entire career I have had a considerably higher teaching load than my older colleagues who were hired before 1992-93. Despite this uneven teaching load, research expectations for my renewal, tenure and promotion were higher than that of veteran professors. Numerous colleagues from other universities have asked me “How is that legal or even allowed”?

Another frustration is that the expectations of teaching faculty have risen exponentially. When I first started teaching in 2001 survey classes in History were capped at 50. Numbers have been reduced from that high down to 40. However, workload per class

today is higher now. In 2001, there were no Learning Management Systems, class media was low tech, student reading and writing skills were stronger, student mental health was better and most students with an issue came by to talk in person during office hours. Assignments and tests were done on paper and grades were written by hand. None of that is true anymore. We have constantly changed LMS systems, grading needs to be instantaneous or near instantaneous online so students can have an up to the minute grade calculation, students come to study with numerous learning and other challenges and expect professors to resolve their issues remotely with numerous email exchanges rather than simple face to face conversations. All these changes take much more time than ever before.

A third frustration is that with my current teaching load it is very difficult to carve out time to pursue research. Except when I take students on a faculty-led overseas course in the summer I can try to use most of my summer hours on research and writing projects in addition to a bit of vacation. However, these few short weeks are not enough to plan, research, start, write and revise new projects. Once the semester begins (especially in a semester with 4 courses), it is almost impossible to get research and writing done after about the fifth week of semester.

A fourth frustration is that our teaching load makes it very difficult to attract and retain new hires. In the History Department we have lost many talented colleagues who went on to other institutions which instantly gave them higher salaries and a lighter teaching load. When we do a search, it is hard to be competitive when we get down to details of salary and course load, no matter how we present SUNY Oneonta as a good place to work or Oneonta as a great place to live.

A fifth frustration is that SUNY Oneonta administration has essentially eliminated course releases for research purposes. When I started at SUNY Oneonta it was relatively straightforward to apply for a course release if you were finalizing a finite research project (a book chapter, preparing book manuscript for publication, a research article). I benefitted from several course releases during my career which helped make several publications possible. Course releases for research basically ended about 6 years ago.

A final frustration is the impact of the 4:3 teaching load on faculty morale. As my opening anecdote indicates, it is not enjoyable being a figure of fun or pity amongst your peers due to a heavy teaching load. Beyond that, the 4:3 load leads to faculty burnout, disengagement and inability to balance all the other important parts of our job. Service expectations have risen along with research expectations for faculty, yet the teaching load has remained the same since 2008. Pay has lagged behind our peer institutions as well. Is it any wonder that faculty morale has been low?

So – how would a 3:3 load help? I argue it would reduce all the frustrations I have listed above. A 3:3 load would be a simple matter of job fairness, returning to the status quo as it existed before I was hired in 2001 (which was in an age of much lesser teaching, research and service expectations). A 3:3 load would help manage the increased expectations we have for teaching in managing the new world of LMS, student challenges and constant connectivity. A 3:3 load would make it possible to increase research productivity which would also help attract and retain new hires. A 3:3 load would show

the seriousness with which administration now considers research (as the regular course releases used to). A 3:3 load would put us on any equal footing with our peer SUNY institutions and do much to restore depleted faculty morale.

President Donovan said more than 15 years ago that 3:3 was the eventual goal for faculty. Most of our SUNY peer institutions have such an arrangement. Now is the time to move towards fulfilling the promise.

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Brett Heindl, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Political Science

“No More Missed Opportunities: Reforming the Teaching Load to Recenter Our Mission”

Moving to a conventional 3-3 system would be a great benefit to the SUNY-Oneonta community in general. Reducing the full-time teaching load would provide myriad benefits for students and faculty. In a time of demographic change, it is time to reconsider the costs and benefits of SUNY Oneonta’s full-time teaching load.

The 4-3 teaching load, combined with the increased course caps of recent years, comes with significant downsides. While this setup has increased the volume of contact hours per faculty member, it has diminished the quality of the student’s learning experience, which hurts retention, graduation rates, and later alumni engagement.

Our 4-course semester necessarily dilutes our attention to individual students. It leaves less time for mentoring, advising, and providing detailed feedback on course assignments. It leaves less space for co-curricular engagement in activities like inviting guest speakers or advising clubs. This reality is doubly harmful: students feel less connected to the academic mission of the university. Faculty members resent having to choose between investing time in our students and their own mental health, family lives, or participation in the larger community. In sum, the shift to higher volume contact hours has made the educational experience less relational and more transactional.

The benefits of a reduced teaching load would be the inverse of the high-volume approach and more. Faculty members would be better instructors, researchers, and participants in campus life. At the most basic level, students would benefit from instructors and advisers who have more time and cognitive bandwidth.

Innovative teaching and research directly improve classroom instruction and raise the university’s profile. With more time for professional development in pedagogy, leadership, or community engagement, instructors could transform the educational experience. They would have more time to experiment with high-impact pedagogical

practices (HIPs) which are so critical for engaging students, especially first-generation students and students of color. HIPs can include site visits, immersive simulations, arranging guest speakers from industry or public service, setting up COIL collaborations, and arranging faculty-led study-away experiences. These experiences are demonstrated to be highly effective. They're also labor-intensive; pulling them off effectively requires a great deal of preparation and behind-the-scenes work. HIPs work because they show students how to apply class material to the real world, they help them explore career paths, and students build bonds with their peers, coworkers, and instructors. These opportunities develop undergraduates' professional skills, give them valuable experience, and help smooth the way into the workforce or graduate school.

With more time to build and maintain professional connections with other scholars, faculty would be able to keep up with innovative practices and to seize opportunities for collaboration. Some of the highlights of my career have started out as conversations after conference panels that then turned into partnerships on co-curricular activities like Model UN or coauthored research papers. Maintaining these networks is critical for professional advancement, both in seeking tenure and promotion and within the discipline. Faculty members also would have more time to carry out field research which generates new knowledge, sparks new ideas, and enriches their teaching. Fieldwork experiences often generate a wealth of examples and anecdotes that breathe life into classroom discussions of abstract concepts. Giving faculty members more space to explore nourishes our creativity and encourages us to continue to grow personally and professionally.

Finally, this move could improve the cohesiveness of the campus community. Under the current system, we see similar patterns every year. Hardworking committees of faculty and staff pour energy and resources into organizing great events, only to have no one show up the big day. I've been on both sides of this: both dispirited by a weak response and too absorbed in my own day-too-day churn to attend my colleagues' events. This is a symptom of the larger issue: a workload that crowds out participation in activities or commitments that aren't directly related to teaching or research. Would College Senate and its committees function better if we all had more time to discuss and deliberate the issues in front of us? I think so, and I'd also like to think this would spread responsibilities around in more equitable ways.

When faculty members have the space to take advantage of these invigorating experiences, we are better at our jobs and feel greater satisfaction in doing them. This in turn builds a stronger culture of partnership among faculty members and makes us feel invested in the institution and committed to its future success.

In short, a reduction of the fulltime teaching load would better allow us to Grow, Thrive, and Live. It would realign the college with its stated goal of creating a holistic, well-rounded, student-centered environment.

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Benjamin Y. Dixon, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Geography & Environmental Sustainability

“5 Key Advantages of a 3/3 Teaching Load for Faculty per Academic Year”

I have taught college for more than 30 years, and I have had the great pleasure of teaching here at SUNY University at Oneonta for 23 of those years now. A few months ago, I was asked if I would write a letter of support for a proposal by UUP to SUNY, to consider the idea of a 3/3 teaching load for faculty per academic year.

Based on my experience, having taught more than 6,000 college students so far, I am delighted to write such a letter, because I have come to believe there are 4 **KEY ADVANTAGES** to keeping faculty teaching to a 3/3 academic year load, as follows:

1. Student Engagement:

When I was first hired at SUNY Oneonta, in 2001, new faculty had to teach a 4/4 load. The 4 course load each semester was really a 3 prep with an extra section of one of those preps (thus, 4 courses total each semester). I did that for seven years (but I nearly quit after my third year). It was **EXTREMELY HARD** to connect with students, and engage them, for two main reasons – 1. It was extraordinarily difficult to learn **ALL** of their names, in 4 class sections each semester, and 2. I was so busy preparing for 4 classes, as well as handling the usual student issues and needs of students that come along with every section – that 4 courses simply proved overwhelming.

When President Donovan changed faculty teaching load to 7 courses per year (3/4 load), the first semester I taught 3 courses, it changed my ability to engage far better with students. It was still 3 preps, but the load of students had crossed a threshold for me. With 3 preps/3 courses in a semester, just having **ONE LESS SECTION** to teach meant I could now get to know **ALL** of my students by name, spend more time meeting with those who needed to hold office hours with me, and not rush them out the door to handle the next waiting student. Ever since then, I always find that I can give the necessary attention to students, far better, when I am teaching on a 3-course load per semester.

2. Student Retention:

Perhaps the most fascinating observation I have made, is when I teach a semester with a 3 course load (instead of 4), **MORE** of my students feel like they can approach me easier (because I am **NOT** so swamped by too many students & too many classes). In addition, **MANY** more of my students feel “less lost” because they can talk to me without being rushed by the demands of too many other students vying for my attention. This collectively translates to **BETTER RETENTION**. Why, you say? Easy. Show me students who are able to connect with, and meet with, our faculty, which is better in a 3/3 load environment, and that will mean **MORE** students will **STAY WITH SUNY ONEONTA** and return each semester. I am completely convinced of this.

3. Student Behavior:

From a teaching standpoint, if you want to get students to listen to you, to put their computers away, to keep their phones away, and to be nicer to our faculty, give them faculty who can devote more attention to class rather than feeling “stretched too thin”. For example, whenever I observe a fellow colleague exasperated, exhausted, and “beaten down” mentally by “disrespectful” student behavior towards them, that behavior problem is ALWAYS WORST in the semester when a faculty member is having to teach MORE than a 3 load. Students are much more considerate and respectful to faculty, in the classroom, when they feel they are getting the full attention of their professors and instructors.

When our teaching faculty are stretched thin, under a 4 course load in a semester, students can sense it. Although many students will always be respectful, when faculty are stretched to 4 courses in a semester, there are often greater instances of student behavior problems in the classroom – including cheating attempts on tests - that occur when faculty are “worn down” by having to teach too many courses. Students see this, and some react either by cheating, by skipping class more, or ignoring the teacher, because ultimately, they feel ignored.

4. Faculty Energy & Enthusiasm & Quality of Teaching:

A 4 course (even if the 4 sections only require 3 preps) is a draining load, and this saps faculty energy and enthusiasm, for both teaching & research. Period. With every semester I have taught a 3 course load, I have ALWAYS felt I had outstanding energy for ALL of my courses, that I could handle student issues and needs much better, that I could learn all students’ names more quickly, that I had ADEQUATE time to prepare new material and update existing lessons for every class, and STILL manage to find time for reading & research that is absolutely essential to being a good teacher. BOTTOM LINE: Show me a faculty member who can concentrate on 3 courses every semester, and I will show you a better-quality, more-enthused, less-stressed, and more-relevant teacher, because they have the time to devote to the necessary requirements that come along with truly successfully teaching each class.

Final Point:

In my opinion, having worked at SUNY Oneonta for 23 years, I am emphatic to express my full support for a 3/3 teaching load. Our university actually had a 3/3 teaching load for many DECADES until it was increased to 4/4 in the 1990s. I know this, because former Provost Dan Larkin told me about their “regretful need to make the increase” when I was a new faculty member stressed over the demands of a 4/4 teaching load. At the time, Provost Larkin and President Donovan genuinely wanted to eventually return SUNY Oneonta to a 3/3 teaching load for all faculty. I hope someday their goal can be realized. I believe that the students, the faculty, and our university as a whole, would greatly benefit by a 3/3 faculty teaching load. Thank you for reading this.

Lisa Curch, Ph.D.
Professor
Sociology, Human Services & Crime Studies

“Why a 3/3 teaching Load is a Necessary Tool and Philosophy”

What would a three-three (18 credit hours) teaching load mean to me? As poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning said, “Let me count the ways.” For me, there are at least a few important ways that a three/three teaching load would be meaningful in my professional life, practically and philosophically speaking. These include the ability to better meet the needs of today’s students, and the ability to better connect and serve with colleagues and the community, all with a renewed sense of purposefulness and value. This is what over 20 years of experience in teaching undergraduates tells me.

Allow me to use our university’s stated goals as an initial framework for further explication, since as a member of this organization, they are my goals, too. Our Mission, Values and Vision as posted on our website:

We nurture a community where students grow intellectually, thrive socially and live purposefully... Three core values support our mission:

Inclusivity — making sure that everyone feels welcome here;

Service — committing to making a difference in the lives of others; and

Sustainability — stewarding resources to foster a just community in ecological balance.

...Together with the mission, these values now guide SUNY Oneonta’s pursuit of a clear vision: **to become the exemplar residential community, providing relevant educational experiences in and outside of the classroom.**

SUNY Oneonta will challenge the status quo, test assumptions, and ask difficult questions about relevancy and impact...Our campus and all of the opportunities it can offer should revolve around students and evolve with them...

(<https://suny.oneonta.edu/about-oneonta/mission-values-vision>)

Since faculty are integral to achieving the mission (though recognizing that we are not the only ones working towards it), it could be argued fairly that an unstated sub-mission then is: *We nurture a community where **faculty** grow intellectually, thrive socially and live purposefully.* In which case, the core values support that sub-mission and guide a vision for an exemplar community, evolving with the students. And in the semester that I teach three classes, I’m able to actually accomplish more for my students, my colleagues, and myself. I can much better grow, thrive, live, when my job provides the conditions for doing so.

I know from having a four-four (24 credit) load previously that the move to a four-three was a key step in helping me better manage my role and responsibilities. But since then, my role and responsibilities have changed as teaching, students, SUNY Oneonta, and

higher education itself have changed. In a world of rapidly changing technology (instructional, social, artificial intelligence), changing higher education approaches, and changing students, one important tool for faculty is a balanced workload. As the mission statement says, “Our campus and all of the opportunities it can offer should revolve around students and **evolve** with them.” To achieve such evolution, and be an exemplar community that provides relevant educational experiences and opportunities, faculty need to be able to evolve to manage the impacts of this changing world, to support students and their learning, to be the teacher-scholars that are worthy of university-level designation, and to serve our campus and local communities. This necessary evolution is hampered if we aren’t supported in making it.

Years ago, I lost a good colleague to SUNY-Cortland, whose own statement on this appeared in the advocacy document for a 3/3 (18 credit-hour) standard teaching load that was presented by UUP to the administration). Sam Applin was in a visiting position in our department and doing well. She was a very capable faculty member, good with students and professors. When we were able to do a search for a full-time position, she was our top choice, as her qualities ranked her above all the candidates. But she ultimately reluctantly and sadly turned us down, because she was offered at position at a similar institution where she’d be able to teach a three-three load (and at better salary). No one blamed her; we would have all made the same decision. She wanted to stay and the chances of that happening would have been significantly better if we had been able to offer a comparable teaching load. She would have been a valuable addition to the department, and we lost out. From her view, she would be better equipped to do the job by the other institution, and better supported in fulfilling her primary responsibility of teaching.

The three-three (18 credit hour) teaching load is one needed tool for improving morale and productivity, my own and my colleagues, but also for improving student engagement and retention, since with a sustainable workload, we can work on addressing 21st century issues for student learning. It also represents a vital philosophical approach. Our mission statement recognizes the need for alternatives to business as usual, to “challenge the status quo, test assumptions, and ask difficult questions about relevancy and impact.” Let’s do that regarding faculty teaching loads. It works not just for me, but for all of us.

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Sallie Han, Ph.D.
Professor
Anthropology Department

There is a simple reason why SUNY Oneonta should move to a 3/3 load for teaching faculty: It creates the conditions for all of us to accomplish our work in teaching, research/scholarship, and service without compromising our chances of flourishing

professionally and personally. I say so as a colleague who has amassed a record of meaningful professional effort. Since joining the full-time faculty in 2006, I have been tenured and promoted (first to Associate Professor, then to Professor), received a Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching, published three books and been named School of Sciences Scholar of the Year, and served as chair of my department and of Promotion & Tenure Committee. In addition, I am a spouse, parent, child, sibling, and friend. Listing these highlights from my vita, I feel proud of my professional record and grateful for all the support that enabled me to do my work successfully. Also, I am exhausted and, to be honest, more than a little injured by what it has taken, indeed extracted, from me. Doing my work cost me other moments of my life. I wish I had spent more time fully embracing the opportunities of just doing nothing with my family and my friends and less of it feeling anxious and stressed that I should have been preparing a class or revising a paper instead. I wish it had not been so hard to both do good work and live happy. I do not believe it needs to be. We can and ought to do better.

What is clear to me is there are serious problems with the structures of academic work. With a 4/3 teaching responsibility, there is only so much time in a day, week, or semester for faculty members to do what is needed and wanted for our students and colleagues, not to mention our families, friends, and ourselves. What we need is not a new or different calendar or productivity training that merely takes more of our time or other projects to change our individual habits—what we need is a change in the institutional policies and practices that will enable our best efforts.

While the aims and goals of faculty members largely remain the same as they ever were, the efforts required to meet them have changed and become particularly intensified, not only in teaching, but also in research/scholarship and in service to university, profession, and community. For me—and, I imagine, for a lot of my faculty colleagues and our students—there is nothing more demoralizing than being set up to do less than good work. My perception is that my faculty colleagues are willing to evolve and put in the time and care that are needed, but we also need and expect the institution's support and respect for our efforts.

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Paul French, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Dept. of Physics and Astronomy

I am writing in support of converting our campus from a 4-3 to a 3-3 teaching load. This change makes sense in many ways, but improvement in the recruitment and retention of students, faculty and other staff is fundamental to the justification of this change.

I joined the Physics and Astronomy Department at SUNY Oneonta in 1995 as an Assistant Professor, back when the standard was a 4-4 load. I was encouraged by my Chair and

other mentors to take on multiple service duties, and quite often had more than 24 contact hours per year. In fact, there was at least one semester when I had 18 contact hours. This was somehow normalized as “protecting” the position and/or ensuring that the administration valued my service to the institution. When I looked around and compared my situation with other young faculty at Oneonta and at other schools, I felt somewhat demoralized.

I worry that our young faculty might also feel a similar way, especially seeing that several of our fellow comprehensives within SUNY already have a 3-3. Changing our teaching load to match these sister schools would help with morale among faculty in general. But I believe the effect is most critical for young faculty who are just embarking on their scholarly pursuits. This includes Assistant Professors already at Oneonta, but also those we wish to recruit to our institution. Our department is currently doing a search, and I am recalling how difficult it has been over the past few searches to recruit many strong applicants, given our combination of high teaching load and low starting salary, compared to the conditions at similar institutions.

The quality and quantity of students that we can attract and retain at SUNY Oneonta are closely connected to their experiences interacting with the faculty. The reduced load will allow faculty to spend more time helping students within their courses. But also, faculty will have more time to spend on research, publication, grant-writing, and other scholarly pursuits. The likely greater outputs will, in turn, allow us to attract better students, who will enjoy the benefits of participating in higher caliber experiences, such as undergraduate research projects, and presenting their work at regional or national conferences.

While there are myriad ways to imagine why moving from a 4-3 to a 3-3 load would benefit our institution, I believe that some of the essential elements are the improvement of the student-faculty interactions, the raising of SUNY Oneonta’s profile due to increased scholarly activity, and the attraction and retention of better students, faculty, and staff (which follow, in part, from the previous two effects).

Annette M. Mackay, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Sociology, Human Services, and Crime Studies

I support a 3/3 workload because it will bring several tangible benefits to the faculty and the institution. As we strive for academic success in challenging times, efforts to improve teaching, mentoring, and scholarship are essential.

I was hired in 2023 as an Assistant Professor of Sociology, Human Services, and Crime Studies specializing in medical sociology. I teach a required course in applied statistics:

Research and Analysis (R & A) SOC 3009. The course has a high workload. Students have in-class activities, homework, and semester-long research projects. The skills developed in this class prepare students for thesis, capstone projects, and post-bac education.

The applied structure of the course requires successive skill-building. In the interest of skills-building, I offer a "Revise and Resubmit" option on all assignments so that students will take another try at assignments to improve their work. This requires more time to review assignments multiple times, but the results are worth it. Students who take advantage of the R & R option show growth and improvement in their applied statistical skills. In 2023-2024, I taught one section of R & A in the fall and two in the spring for 63 students. If I have a 4-course semester, I may need to reconsider the R & R option especially if I have two sections of R & A.

Another reason for supporting a 3/3 workload is that I have students interested in doing undergraduate research. I willingly mentor students on projects within and outside my research area. Advising student researchers is tasking in several ways for a faculty member, but the rewards are many. I need to read up on current research if the project is out of my area of expertise. Preparing students for conferences, student research symposia on campus, and student publications takes time but is important to their professional development. Students who receive encouragement to pursue their interests develop self-confidence leading to success after Oneonta. Showcasing undergraduate research draws positive attention to the institutional value of an undergraduate degree. Therefore, the 3/3 workload would work in my favor by allowing me to be a better teacher and mentor, which are my priorities as a faculty member here.

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Gustavo Arango, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of World Languages and Literatures

“A Reflection Without an ‘If’”

Twenty years ago, in August 2004, I arrived at Oneonta with plenty of enthusiasm and illusions. I remember seeing some incredulous faces when I tried to express, with my heavily accented English, how excited I was to be part of the SUNY Oneonta community. A year prior, I didn't even know about the existence of the City of the Hills, and now — at that moment— I was ready to make it my home.

I was born in South America, in Medellín, a city also known as The Mountain's Capital. My journey from the mountain to the hills was not an easy one. During the 1980s and 1990s I grew up and survived (some of my relatives did not) one of the most violent cities

in the world at the time. Determined to become a writer, I escaped to Cartagena de Indias, a more beautiful and peaceful city in Colombia.

In Cartagena, things were better, but not easy. I had become a parent, I worked full-time as a journalist, and—to make ends meet—I taught twelve weekly hours of college classes in the evenings. To keep alive my dream of becoming a writer I had to overexert myself and write between midnight and 3 in the morning. Things were bad, but not that bad. At least I was in no imminent risk of being killed.

My effort to write bore beautiful fruits. Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, offered me the opportunity to come to the United States and pursue my Ph.D. degree. Since my income as a graduate student wasn't enough for a family with two kids, I had to keep recurring to my reserves of energy (by the time I had read and been inspired by William James' "The Energies of Men") and to take any side job I came across.

I have always been proud to say that I went from being a newspaper editor in Colombia to working as a newspaper carrier in the very cold New Jersey mornings in winter. Without intending to do it, I became an imitator of my beloved St. John of the Cross, since I got to spend weeks in a row just sleeping two hours a night. Things were difficult, but not as difficult as they had been in Colombia.

So, when I arrived at Oneonta, I felt deeply in my heart that I had arrived at a place where I would be able to teach and write without living in agony. By that time, I had realized that my teaching and my writing were complementary activities that nurtured each other. Some friends would point to the fact that the 4/4 teaching load was too much, but I would recall the difficulty of my journey and think that I would be able to manage it.

Many years ago, I don't remember how many, when the teaching load went from 4/4 to 4/3, everyone considered the change a transitional period, before moving to the standard 3/3. The transition, however, is taking a little too long.

I only have gratitude for what I have experienced and received here. Here I have grown as a person, as a teacher and as a writer. Here I have seen appreciated and valued my creative work. Here I have had the freedom to teach, create, and share with students and colleagues my view of the world. As an institution, we have had difficult times, but the present is promising. I still consider it a privilege to live and work here.

My friends at *The Sentinel* have asked me if I would write something advocating for a 3/3 (18 credit-hour) teaching load. This is such an easy task to do. The only thing that concerns me is the fact that there is a need for that kind of advocacy. But, living in times where common sense is kind of lost, I guess we might keep stating the obvious.

Perhaps the entire situation is a matter of terms. For someone unfamiliar with what the faculty do, talking about "lowering" or "reducing" our teaching responsibility might sound like a request for idleness and free time. But the fact is that, with the adjustment, SUNY Oneonta will "emerge" as an institution that values and honors its faculty. Among the multiple benefits of the "increase" will be the fact that, instead of risking being considered a steppingstone, we can consolidate ourselves as an appealing institution for brilliant scholars, like the ones who have arrived in recent years.

One of the best things about an academic community is the fact that the learning goes in every possible way. We, the faculty, hope that our students learn something from us. We, for sure, learn a lot from them. Each generation comes to us with fresh views of life, with lessons to navigate a world completely different from the one in which our journey began.

There is a lesson that has taken me decades to learn. I always thought about my capacity to work as a strength, as a positive trait of my personality. Beyond my basic teaching responsibility, I always have been willing to be part of committees, to advise my students, to offer them the independent and individual enrollment courses they need to graduate on time, and to have and share meaningful scholarly work. Only recently, my children and my students have taught me that my disposition to overexert myself, my willingness to work beyond what is expected from me, is a response to trauma. Life is hard, we don't need to make it harder. Sometimes we submerge ourselves in our obligations to evade more important challenges, like the challenge of having a life.

We shouldn't be advocating for people to have a better, healthier life. Who wouldn't want that? I am convinced that, when the teaching load is dignified (not using the word "if" here), we the faculty will continue giving much more than is expected from us, not only because many of us grew up while healing trauma, but because being a teacher in our time is by itself a very conscious act of generosity.

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Benjamin T. Kuettel, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Sociology, Human Services, and Crime Studies

Dear President Alberto Cardelle and Provost Enrique Morales-Diaz:

It has come to my attention that there is a proposal to move all SUNY Oneonta tenure-track faculty from a 4-3 to a 3-3 teaching load. As an alum (B.S., Criminal Justice, 2015) who is now an Assistant Professor at SUNY Oneonta, I am writing to provide my unique and personal viewpoint about the effects a 3-3 load would have on our institution, along with my personal endorsement of this change.

Moving to a 3-3 load would improve student learning experiences at SUNY Oneonta. As someone who has taken multiple classes with professors who are now my faculty colleagues, my most pivotal learning experiences as a student at Oneonta came from extra-curricular events with faculty. For example, as Sociology club president I was fortunate to help organize several academic conferences on campus, including a "2014 Annexation of Crimea" academic panel with Sociology Professor Ho Hon Leung. This event provided me a valuable learning experience during my formative years as a student, and it was a significant factor in my subsequent decision to apply to graduate school.

Now as an Assistant Professor at SUNY Oneonta, my goal is to continue supporting these types of extra-curricular events with students on campus. For example, this past Fall semester I participated in a “mock trial” event hosted by our Criminal Justice club, which was a great success. Several students came up to me afterwards and commented how “fun” and “interesting” it was to participate in this event. Although a significant time investment for faculty, these “experiential learning” events create moments to connect with students directly and opportunities to shape their intellectual journey. The truth is, however, that between juggling my other professional obligations, my participation in this mock trial was only possible because I was teaching a provisional 3-3 load my first year as a faculty member. Extra-curricular events like this are vital for a student’s intellectual development, and moving to a permanent 3-3 load would help faculty like myself facilitate these types of events with students more often.

Moving to a 3-3 load would improve faculty retention and attract strong prospective faculty. Anyone familiar with higher education recognizes the competitiveness of the academic job market. Not only do candidates compete for the best jobs, institutions also compete for the most qualified candidates. When attracting the best candidates, faculty are often poached by other employers offering higher salaries or other monetary incentives. Moving to a 3-3 load is a nonpecuniary way that SUNY Oneonta can compete in the academic market for the best candidates. A 3-3 load is more attractive because it allows faculty greater flexibility to balance their teaching and research interests, allowing them to closely follow the “teacher-scholar” model that SUNY Oneonta has historically embraced. This change would not only attract future faculty, but also help retain current faculty as well.

As outlined in the 2023-2024 strategic plan and institutional agenda, one challenge our institution faces is a slow but steady decline in retention over the last ten years. Faculty attrition is a significant concern for my department, as we recently had one colleague retire and another one decline to go up for continuing appointment just in the past year. If left unaddressed, faculty attrition creates additional work for other faculty like myself, who must teach their classes and provide service work to the institution on their behalf. Faculty attrition produces a snowball effect in the form of piling work, making it difficult to produce quality work, resulting in personal frustration and burnout, which leads to additional employee attrition, rinse and repeat. Moving to a 3-3 load would reduce workload creep and boost employee morale and productivity.

Finally, moving to a 3-3 load makes practical sense in this moment of time. There are large changes happening to both the landscape of higher education and to SUNY Oneonta as an institution. Many have noted the upcoming “demographic cliff” where the college-age population is expected to shrink across the next ten years by as much as 15 percent. A reduction of students applying to colleges means a reduction in the number of students enrolled in classes on campus. Therefore, it makes sense that the number of courses offered will mirror the student population, and a stagnant or declining student enrollment signals an ideal moment to reduce the teaching load of SUNY Oneonta faculty without compromising our class offerings. Moreover, my department recently had approved a Masters in Community, Crime and Justice degree program to be rolled out over the upcoming years. Teaching graduate-level classes is an important endeavor that requires

significant time and commitment on behalf of faculty to maintain our institutional reputation at both the graduate and undergraduate level. Keeping our 4-3 load while adding a graduate program would contribute to work-load creep and lower employee morale and productivity. In fact, it is rare in my field for a Masters-granting institution to have their faculty on anything greater than a 3-3 teaching load. Relatedly, it is also critical to consider this change from a social-equality lens. Other departments and faculty on campus, even those without a graduate program, are currently teaching a 3-3 load. It should be the same for all. Given the upcoming demographic cliff and ongoing institutional changes at SUNY Oneonta, it makes practical sense to switch to a 3-3 load sooner rather than later.

I hope that you will consider this proposal to adopt an institution-wide 3-3 teaching load for full-time tenure-track faculty at SUNY Oneonta. I realize that administrative decisions are often a reflection of complex and competing institutional priorities, but it is my belief that any negative consequences resulting from this change would be miniscule and entirely offset when considering the overall positive and reverberating effects this change is likely to have on our institution. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance. Thank you for taking the time to consider my letter.

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Adam Kent, D.M.A.
Associate Professor
Music Department

Historically, SUNY Oneonta's greatest strength has resided in the quality of instruction and personal attention we provide to our students. Even in our largest classes, students have come to expect substantial access to faculty. The need to provide accommodations to students for a wide range of medical, learning, and personal issues has grown in recent years, and standards of inclusivity and accessibility require more and more preparation from faculty. In many cases, students arrive without the study, reading, writing, and organizational skills necessary for success on the college level; it falls to faculty to supplement their traditional pedagogical work with remedial attention to many students. New technologies designed to support organization and pedagogy continue to roll out constantly; faculty must devote time and energy to mastering them.

While SUNY Oneonta is not an R-1 university, mastery of subject matter and ongoing professional growth are priorities in the renewal, tenure, and promotion processes. Clearly, faculty who are actively engaged in their fields of expertise transmit their enthusiasm and model scholarship to our students. The world of academic publishing, conference participation, and field work and research also requires a substantial time investment.

Advisement and committee work are also important responsibilities undertaken by full-time faculty at SUNY Oneonta. Advisees demand considerable time as they navigate the complex, bureaucratic maze of degree requirements; they rely upon the ongoing availability of full-time faculty to reconcile the pragmatics of degree completion with personal attention to their educational needs. Departmental and school-wide committees ensure continued curricular development, comprehensive staffing, and support for student growth and learning. This work, too, requires a significant time commitment from faculty.

Good teaching requires ongoing growth and innovation. As technologies roll out at unprecedented rates, as new insights into students' diverse learning styles proliferate, faculty must have adequate time to reimagine their teaching. We need to refresh materials to comply with current accessibility standards, as we essay new approaches to engage students with a range of backgrounds and attitudes towards their educations.

SUNY Oneonta faculty value our students; we want to support the institution's goals of creating an environment where students live, grow, and thrive. However, attracting and retaining talented, dedicated full-time faculty has become increasingly difficult in recent years. Many long-serving faculty members complain of burn-out and exhaustion. If SUNY Oneonta is to continue to maintain the highest standards of teaching and attention to student needs, it will need to adjust the cumbersome workload it imposes upon many full-time faculty. A restoration of the 3/3 teaching load, the universal standard at Oneonta before 2008 and still the norm in the Business, Economics, and English departments, would be a crucial step towards helping the institution to achieve its mission and continue to sparkle as a star in the SUNY firmament.

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Gina Keel, Ph.D.
Professor
Political Science

“Unload to Grow”

Teaching is mission-critical in this university and faculty are committed to it. But the job of teaching has expanded greatly in the past 20 years and faculty members are straining to bear the weight. The teaching load of 7 courses (4-3 for me) has not decreased, many classes are larger, and overloads are not uncommon. Every class takes more time to prep and deliver each semester because of more complex course management systems (Brightspace is my 4th) and expectations of accessible digital materials and everything designed up-front for students' ease of use. The last year has further challenged our assignments and policies with artificial intelligence tools embedded in the technology we use every day. We have become part-time designers and programmers, perhaps too often focused on how to use and control technology. The focus on the means of delivery can crowd out attention to the ends of education.

The COVID years required big shifts in how we deliver courses, communicate with and support students. We have learned to be more flexible, compassionate, intentional, and less demanding of student initiative, but at a cost to our own health and productivity. For example, many students struggle to understand and follow directions, so we must craft and revise assignments, personalize messages, communicate repeatedly, make exceptions to policies, and give extensions constantly. Advising is another area that has grown beyond academic boundaries to include personal coaching and career counseling. The apparent push for bespoke education is unrealistic and to seek it is exhausting!

High impact, high contact education is not sustainable without a reduction in teaching load and administrative commitments. Academic and administrative departments constantly create new initiatives for student engagement and faculty are expected to know about them and participate. “Recruit, refer, tell your students about...” “Please volunteer to help.” The requests are unrelenting and many faculty feel uncertain about expectations and how much to do, especially those seeking tenure and promotion. This is workload creep with disparate impacts among faculty and it is a fundamental issue of fairness. Reducing teaching loads to 3-3 for all can help mitigate the inequity.

Scholarship is the source of faculty authority and identity in our disciplines. Yet scholarship is undermined by increased teaching challenges, student support expectations, and administrative tasks. It is emotionally wrenching to put scholarship last in the daily grind. I find it hard to do much research or writing while teaching full classes and shuttling to meetings, especially during fall semesters. As I have gotten older, I can’t put in the late nights and weekend work I once did. Like many faculty, I rely on holiday and summer breaks for focused scholarship and intellectual exploration. We used to have more time, even whole days, for reading, analysis, and writing each week. How do we get back to time for life of the mind?

Lastly, shared governance is a double-edged sword. Faculty want input on policies and decisions, but we cannot sacrifice our primary teaching responsibilities and or neglect our disciplinary expertise. Administrative leadership enlists faculty involvement in planning, programming, hiring, assessment, and a raft of new initiatives and events each year, but do they consider whether constant organizational and technology changes are sustainable? The university must value and enable core faculty competencies or risk academic quality and institutional reputation. Reducing teaching loads to 6 classes per year could enhance faculty capacity to meet the expectations that are already upon us.

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Brian Lowe, Ph.D.
Professor
Sociology, Human Services, and Crime Studies

There are many compelling reasons for advocating the 3/3 teaching load. This response will speak to three: the need for faculty and students alike to conduct research, the advantage of a reduced teaching load for encouraging quality teaching and independent work with students, and the realities of the mental and academic needs of our current cohort of undergraduates.

Research: One of the obvious reasons for promoting a 3/3 teaching load is that reducing teaching would provide more time for conducting research. While this statement is self-evident, the benefits for SUNY Oneonta from additional research extend beyond the researching faculty. Firstly, it would encourage faculty to pursue external grants for both funding and the prestige associated with winning them. This only makes sense in the context of a reduced teaching load—competing with researchers at institutions with more privileged teaching loads has always made it unlikely for us to win such grants. Secondly, conducting research with a more manageable course load fosters more collaboration with student research assistants. Faculty would have more space to train undergraduates to be effective in this capacity, providing them the opportunity to present their research at conferences. While we currently collaborate with students on research, a reduced teaching load (especially for faculty in larger departments) would increase these collaborations.

Quality Teaching and Independent work: Futurists like Bryan Alexander (author of *Universities on Fire*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2023) have claimed that higher education must necessarily innovate in response to economic, social, political, and cultural forces. We as faculty must have the breathing room to innovate. We must reinvent materials within our courses, evolve pedagogical tools, and acclimate to the shifting landscapes in which we teach. This can be accomplished in by removing the seventh class that makes our annual load lopsided. With a standard 3/3 teaching load, opportunities would also increase for partnership with other community members.

Assisting the Emerging Adults of SUNY Oneonta: It is common knowledge in higher education that our current, traditional-age undergraduates (18-25 years of age) are diminished in academic preparedness, less resilient, and have more mental health challenges than their peers of even a decade ago. For these and other reasons, faculty are now instructed to engage in a sort of “benevolent surveillance,” reporting concerning behaviors in the student body to appropriate help workers on staff. These new challenges have been tacked onto our traditional responsibilities to help students surmount their academic difficulties. We can manage both new and existing expectations more effectively when we are managing three, rather than four, courses in a single semester. Grant this shift now. It would arm us to face the reality that the emotional and academic needs of our current cohorts are heavier than ever.

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Michael Brown, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

Psychology

I am Associate Professor in Psychology, and I write to support the Union initiative to move the tenured and tenure-track faculty to a standard 3/3 teaching load (18 credit hours). This shift would greatly benefit SUNY-Oneonta. Moreover, faculty in some departments already have a 3/3 teaching load. Extending this to all departments would create a more equitable workplace, which is an important step in addressing the low morale we see across campus.

If we wish to maintain a diverse student body, it is essential to attract and retain diverse faculty. SUNY Oneonta has difficulty attracting and retaining faculty, particularly from underrepresented populations. A 3/3 teaching load would render us more attractive to prospective hires, especially given our (objectively and comparatively) low salaries. Serving on hiring committees is a time-consuming task across departments. It is demoralizing to see our investment result, time and again, in failed searches and turnover. Fewer failed searches will save university resources and help faculty to allocate our time and attention to teaching, scholarship, and service and shared governance.

Besides, teaching itself has changed considerably. We need time and space to keep up with intrusive technologies. With the rise of ChatGPT and other AI tools, faculty must spend more time developing tools and strategies to dodge their influence. For me, this requires one-on-one evaluation that far exceeds our contractual time for office hours. This is *in addition to* the time that we are expected to meet with advisees under the Administration's new academic advisement model. "Academic advisement" does not appear by name in our contract and is traditionally recognized as "service." Without a normative 3/3 course load, faculty must reassess our commitments, giving priority to teaching, scholarship, and service – in that order.

In sum, faculty with a healthy work-life balance is a faculty that will not turnover. And ultimately, what's good for the faculty is good for the students. A 3/3 course load for tenured and tenure-track faculty will boost faculty morale by helping to address issues involving equity, will help the college recruit and retain talented and diverse faculty, and will allow faculty to dedicate quality time to teaching, scholarship and personal growth, and service.

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Danny Noorlander, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
History Department

"On a 3/3 Teaching Load"

I don't have to speculate about the difference in teaching three classes vs. teaching four because, like all my colleagues, I switch between the two every semester. I usually teach three classes in the fall and four in the spring. I'll focus here mostly on what a difference it makes in my grading and my ability to give thoughtful feedback to students.

Because my extra class in spring semester is a Gen Ed class, I teach roughly 40 more students than I do in the fall. Yes, that only means three extra hours in the classroom per week, but it also means 40 more reading quizzes whenever I administer a reading quiz, 40 more papers when I assign papers, and 40 more exams with each Midterm and Final Exam. Since I do three exams instead of two in my Gen Ed classes, I have to read and mark 120 more exams in the spring than I do in the fall. I also have more students in office hours and more emails to answer every day.

With a lighter load in the fall, I guesstimate that I have on average five to eight extra hours per week. I use part of that time on my writing projects, but I also use it to increase my feedback and contact hours with students: I slow down and write more on papers and exams. I require rather than suggest that students visit me in office hours to chat about assignments. I organize extra, optional workshops and review days for students who are struggling. And I reach out to advisees rather than just waiting for them to come to me.

Some of this I try to do every semester, of course, but it's impossible to do it all in semesters with four classes, especially when the grading starts to pile up. Teaching three classes every semester will allow me to be the kind of teacher I know I could be, if there were only enough hours in the day. Teaching three classes will allow me to be the kind of teacher *year-round* that I have been mostly from September through December.

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Matt Murphy, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Dept. of Political Science

I enthusiastically support the UUP proposal for a 3/3 standard teaching load at SUNY Oneonta and I agree with the points made in the UUP letter of May 16, 2024. My comments below reinforce a few of those points, based on my own experiences with different teaching loads.

I've taught in SUNY Oneonta's Political Science department for six years with a 4/3 teaching load. Before that I worked for many years at teaching-focused institutions with one 4/3 teaching load that changed to 3/3 during my time there, as well as a 3/2 load at two different colleges. The advantages of moving to 3/3 for faculty are well explained in the UUP proposal. Below I will focus on some benefits for students and the University.

I doubt that many students know or care about their college's teaching load per se, but it has numerous consequences that students absolutely do see and that affect their success. First, a 3/3 load allows for more experiential learning classes. Even a domestic travel class such as the Model UN requires substantial planning and paperwork over two semesters, well beyond most conventional classes. At a previous employer I was one of many faculty who found that leading an international travel class became feasible once we moved from 4/3 to 3/3. Second, the change in teaching load will allow for more engaging and interactive experiences in conventional classes, such as guided research projects, role playing simulations, and small group activities. While I use such tools at SUNY Oneonta now, they are not the kind of regular fixtures of my classes that they could be when I was navigating a 2 or 3-course semester. Especially in 4 course semesters I have struggled to set aside time for the preparation and debriefing that makes these activities most effective.

Third, a 3/3 load enables different types of classes such a meaningful capstone experiences and unique first-year seminars. In my first 3/2 job faculty advised year-long senior theses. For students, that capstone was probably the single most formative and memorable experience of their college career, made feasible by what faculty considered a reasonable overall teaching load that allowed them to build more training and practice into earlier courses, i.e. scaffolding. Similarly, my other employer's shift from 4/3 to 3/3 corresponded with the introduction of a new first year seminar program, which about a third of all faculty volunteered to teach. First year seminars and capstones are high impact experiences with well-established benefits for students. Faculty like me also enjoy them when we have the space to create and deliver them as effectively as we can. Of course, not every instructor and department will participate in the same way, but they'll all have the same opportunities to better distribute their time and energy throughout existing and new learning activities. This is not just hopeful optimism, but personal observation.

For the University, the benefits of a 3/3 load are also clear. It's self-evident that it will help SUNY Oneonta's market competitiveness. In my experience, job candidates have generally been concerned with the teaching load in 4/3 environments, only occasionally with 3/3 teaching loads, and very rarely with 3/2 loads. Moreover, we are seeing many ideas for curricular innovation including certificates, microcredentials, interdisciplinary collaboration, and expanded graduate studies. These are indeed happening, gradually, within the 4/3 teaching load, but a reduced teaching load will allow faculty to shift their time and energy where they're needed. Within 3/2 and (a newly reduced) 3/3 teaching loads I have collaborated in the past to build successful pilot programs in Peace & Conflict Studies and Legal Studies, in part because I was confident I could sustain my commitments. I didn't suddenly have free time to devote to these with a lower course load, but I was less burdened and able to more effectively shape my own time and energy. Can these innovations happen with our current teaching load? Certainly, to some degree. Will more of them happen with a 3/3 load, and with greater faculty buy-in? I believe the answer is "yes."

Pete LaVenia, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science

Returning Oneonta to a 3-3 teaching load would immediately benefit the university, its faculty, and students. Faculty currently face the dilemma of providing consistent guidance and instruction to students, producing world-class scholarship on a consistent basis, and ever-increasing service time expectations, as well as maintaining creative campus community involvement.

For junior faculty, the benefits of moving to a 3-3 load would be immediate especially in regard to tenure and promotion: more time to devote to teaching, research, and service each semester. The accumulation of a *campus-wide* shift would appear as a multiplier effect: more time to focus on teaching and student guidance would reflect in student learning outcomes. More time for research, collaboration, and writing would bring the results of even more high-level scholarship into our classroom teaching and potentially provide undergraduates with opportunities to aid in that research, and more time for service would mean more creative campus-community faculty-led work. It would also mean better recruitment, retention, and most importantly morale amongst *all* faculty, but again especially junior members that face pressure from the current 4-3 load which would be immediately alleviated through a shift to the 3-3.

On a personal level, I have considered organizing an in-semester service-learning project for students, which would become far more feasible with a decreased teaching load. My research and creative production – crucial now as a junior faculty member – would clearly benefit; the time for research and writing, during the semester I have three sections rather than four, is palpable. Including the morale boost, this seems like a win-win for the university on all levels.

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Matthew Unangst
Assistant Professor of History
SUNY Oneonta

A reduction in my teaching load from twenty-one to eighteen hours would improve both my teaching and my scholarship. With my current load, I have more time to spend meeting with students and attending to their individual needs during semesters when I am teaching nine credits as compared to the semesters when I am teaching twelve. Twelve hours in the classroom means at least three times that many hours doing the work of teaching – preparing lesson plans, student activities, and powerpoints; responding to student emails; grading student work; and meeting with students – leaving little time for the scholarship and service aspects of my job. A heavy teaching load makes service to my

department, the university, the SUNY system, and the community feel like more of a burden.

The 21-hour teaching load has slowed the progress of my scholarship. This summer, I spent six weeks in Tanzania doing archival and oral history research for a book project. In addition to advancing my individual work, my meetings with Tanzanian colleagues and the presentation I delivered at the University of Dar es Salaam publicized SUNY Oneonta on another continent. But I do not expect to be able to devote time to writing up my research into a publication until the winter break and spring semester because the fall is the semester when I teach twelve credits. This will slow down the progress of research and publication and limit the time I have available to apply for external grants. An eighteen-credit load would allow me to continue to progress with my scholarship while giving my students the attention they need and deserve.

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Jonathan Sadow, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Dept. of English

I write to support SUNY Oneonta moving from a 3-4 to a 3-3 course load. Although I am chair of the English Department, I speak here only for myself; a university-wide change would involve English renegotiating its composition responsibilities with an uncertain outcome.

However it affects English, I certainly think it is a good move for the university. Most obviously, it brings us in line with the majority of our peers. It will help to attract and retain faculty who currently have a large workload with poor compensation.

Mainly though, it makes me think about the joke currently circulating in meme form: "What is the difference between an academic and a lightbulb? A lightbulb stops working when it burns out." Over the last few years I have seen a great increase in the level of exhaustion and burnout among my peers who are overwhelmingly dedicated to the success of our students. There are a number of reasons for this. One is certainly some fallout from the pandemic, which greatly increased workload during that time and had a detrimental effect on both faculty and student mental health as well as student learning. Our students' needs have increased, and faculty bear the brunt of that.

More than that, over time faculty have encountered a creeping burden of service from the university—death by a thousand ducklings, as one of my colleagues puts it. That means we are increasingly finding it hard to make time to do our research, much less maintain a healthy work-life balance. That is bad for morale, but also we cannot be a healthy university without faculty who are able to excel in their disciplines.

These problems cannot be addressed with seminars and words of support; they can only be addressed by taking pressure off workload. Moving to a 3-3 would be an excellent start.

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Kirstie Kemmerer, Ph.D.,
Assistant Professor
Sociology, Human Services & Crime Studies

I strongly support SUNY Oneonta moving to a 3/3 teaching load. As an assistant professor on the tenure-track, the current 4/3 teaching load is nearly impossible to manage, especially while attempting to maintain any semblance of work-life balance. Not only is work-life balance important to me, personally, work-life balance has also been shown to be positively associated with job and life satisfaction (and negatively associated with anxiety and depression) (Haar et al., 2014). Yet, “balance” is extremely difficult to accomplish here at SUNY Oneonta as a tenure-track faculty member teaching a 4/3 load.

Not only is moving to a 3/3 load important for faculty well-being, but it would greatly benefit our students and our college. Research has illustrated that the increase in academic resignations has continued to trend upwards in recent years (Schmiedehaus, et al., 2023). Low perceived organizational support and high exhaustion have been found to be primary contributors of faculty resignations. Evidence shows that to improve retention of faculty, higher education institutions need to increase faculty support and to improve overall working conditions. We have recently seen evidence of this academic resignation trend on our campus and in my department (Sociology). As illustrated in the research, one way to address this trend is to improve working conditions by moving to a lighter teaching load.

Our mission at SUNY Oneonta is admirable. “*We nurture a community where students grow intellectually, thrive socially and live purposefully.*” How are faculty expected to contribute to this mission while also juggling the many additional responsibilities associated with accomplishing tenure and teaching a 4/3 load? Moving to a 3/3 teaching load would benefit the faculty, the college, *and the students*. It’s no brainer and a win-win for everyone.

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**The Case for a 3/3 Teaching Load
UUP Oneonta Chapter
May 16, 2024**

Dear President Alberto Cardelle and Provost Enrique Morales-Diaz,

Last semester, after department visits by you, several faculty members brought to our attention that Management had expressed interest in a pitch from UUP Oneonta for returning tenured and tenure-track faculty to a 3/3 (18-credit hour) standard teaching load from the current 4/3 (21-credit hour) model. UUP confirmed in April that Management would review any such submission in good faith.

UUP Oneonta has generated this document with the assistance of tenured and tenure-track Oneonta colleagues across departments and schools. Melissa F. Lavin made the initial case for the 18-hour load in the May 2023 issue of *The Sentinel*. This document develops that initial framework in the form of a direct petition to Management.

There is widespread agreement among tenured and tenure-track faculty at Oneonta that a shift from a 4/3 load to a 3/3 load is merited for many reasons. A 3/3 load will elevate the quality of education and prestige of the institution by creating conditions that support high quality education, improving recruitment and retention of faculty by bringing teaching obligations in-line with those of our peer comprehensives, respecting the occupational identity of research-trained scholars, and honoring our commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for students and faculty by implementing just policies.

The 18-hour load is also aligned with the goals identified in the “Forward Momentum” institutional strategic plan and the outcomes that concern faculty. Shifting to a 3/3 teaching load would contribute directly to the ten-year outcomes in the “Forward Momentum” agenda. They include being “a center of academic excellence that extends experiential learning opportunities to all students”; fostering “a welcoming campus community where every member experiences a genuine sense of belonging and thrives”; “offering varied educational pathways and opportunities that meet the needs of all

students”; and maintaining “flexible formats and degree delivery models that respond to the needs of all students.”

Equity and Justice in Policies and Practice

The shift from a 4/3 load to a 3/3 load is a matter of equity. Full-time faculty in the departments of Business and Economics (for accreditation) and English already have a 3/3 teaching load, as do faculty members who teach graduate students exclusively. These differential teaching loads contribute to low morale among faculty who perceive that their work is not valued equitably.

Historically, Oneonta had a standard 3/3 (18 credit-hour) load—and the entire faculty should return to it in the name of workload equity. In fact, faculty hired before 1992-93 (when Oneonta went to a 4/4 load) are “grandfathered in” to a 3/3 load. The current 4/3 load was instituted under President Donovan in 2008.

A return to a standard configuration of six courses per-year would also put us in accord with many of our peer institutions with whom we compete for faculty, resources, and student enrollments. Consider, for example, these regional SUNY comprehensives with 3/3 (or better) teaching loads:

SUNY Brockport: 3-3

Total Average 9-Month-Equivalent Salary: \$71,422¹

SUNY Buffalo State: 3-3

Total Average 9-Month-Equivalent Salary: \$75,078

SUNY Cortland: 3-3

Total Average 9-Month-Equivalent Salary: \$63,642

SUNY Geneseo: 3-3

Total Average 9-Month-Equivalent Salary: \$73,319

SUNY New Paltz: 3-3

Total Average 9-Month-Equivalent Salary: \$69,828

SUNY Oneonta: 4-3

Total Average 9-Month-Equivalent Salary: \$65,591

SUNY Oswego: 3-3

Total Average 9-Month-Equivalent Salary: \$67,863

SUNY Purchase: 2-3 + Senior Project (15 credit hours + senior project)

Total Average 9-Month-Equivalent Salary: \$69,132

¹ Salary data come from the U.S. Department of Education’s Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), which comprises degree-granting U.S. colleges that participate in Title IV funding, as cited in: Brian O’Leary, “How Much Has Faculty Pay Changed Over Time?” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 5, 2024.

Our current 4/3 load not only disadvantages Oneonta faculty and students compared with our peer SUNY institutions, it also brings to light outstanding compensation inequities between campuses.

Quality of Undergraduate Education and Student Success

The move to a 3/3 teaching load would demonstrate that we are serious about the quality of teaching at SUNY Oneonta and are invested in the success of our students. Faculty want to offer all the advantages of a robust faculty/student relationship, e.g., offering teaching and research assistantships, independent study opportunities, letters of recommendation, and other high-intensity (but invisible) labors of teaching and learning. A 3/3 load would foster this heightened level of student engagement by faculty.

The current mandate to teach four classes every other semester does not support individualized attention to first-generation students. Rather, such students are at risk of being lost in the priorities of an overwhelmed faculty. Teaching four classes may mean that faculty offer fewer “high impact” practices, assign less work, and grade it more superficially.

Promoting Teaching and Research at SUNY Oneonta

Moving to a 3/3 teaching load will allow us to grow into our new designation as a university. The 4/3 teaching load is uneven, destabilizes workflow, and postpones faculty attention to research and service every other semester. Moving to a 3/3 load will demonstrate that our commitment to research and creative activity is steadfast, not episodic. Scholarship is a crucial piece of our tripartite role of professor, researcher, and community servant. We have recently invigorated our standards for promotion and tenure through a new RTP Agreement that “raises the bar” in every aspect of faculty performance, most notably publication and creative output. Oneonta faculty must have time to keep pace with these elevated standards.

Moreover, as a new university, we have graduate programs being conceived and implemented across campus. Instructing graduate students requires more time and increased mentorship from graduate faculty. A 3/3 teaching load in line with our peer institutions will increase our capacity to deliver one-on-one mentorship in our nascent 4 +1 programs² and will help those programs to succeed. How well we launch and administer graduate programs will be an important feature of how our institution is perceived in decades to come.

Faculty Recruitment and Retention

Higher education in the United States is in dire straits in terms of mission, identity, and resources. Since the onset of Covid-19, enrollment has declined at Oneonta by 10%, going from approximately 6,100 students to 4,900. Fortunately, we are rebounding. To continue regaining our momentum, we are generating assorted cutting-edge credentials, such as unique minors and micro credentials, to draw in and retain students. When the faculty are teaching more than 3 classes per-semester, it risks losing a focus on quality to

² 4+1 programs add one year to bachelor’s degree programs to create a master’s degree for pre-existing students.

quantity and alienating students, particularly first-generation and at-risk students who are more likely to drop out or transfer to universities with better faculty workloads.

Faculty retention is a longstanding problem at SUNY Oneonta. Moving to a 3/3 load will make us more competitive with the SUNY campuses with whom we vie for faculty. The Department of Sociology, for instance, has hired and lost six tenure-track professors and one prestigious visiting faculty member (Ph.D., Cal-Berkeley) since 2014. These departures are directly attributable to our uncompetitive salary and working conditions, most notably our heavy teaching load. Sociology also lost visiting criminology professor, Samantha Applin, to SUNY-Cortland in 2016. Cortland offered her a 3/3 teaching load and a \$59,000 starting salary, while we offered a \$54,000 starting salary with a 4/3 load. She comments:

“It never made sense to me that Cortland’s course load was lower, and the offer was higher (they brought me in at \$59,000). Teaching 4 courses a semester is too much, especially at a place that is more teaching-oriented, or that at least tries to maintain a teaching emphasis.” *Samantha Applin, Associate Professor of Criminology, SUNY-Cortland.*

Moving to a standard 3/3 load also addresses flagging engagement among the teaching faculty at SUNY Oneonta. Because morale is an *egregore* (a thoughtform that arises from the collective thoughts and emotions of a group), it can be difficult to define and hard to measure. Nonetheless, low morale haunts our academic corridors and takes many forms—including faculty disengagement. According to the UUP Quality of Life Survey Part 1, our low morale stems primarily from dissatisfaction with three interrelated areas: *low salaries, DSI (how, when, and to whom these monies are given), and working conditions*. This document focuses on terms and conditions of employment. A 3/3 load will allow teaching faculty to keep our classes current, to revamp our preps and assignments, to create novel and exciting learning modalities for students, and to render all courses DEI supportive.

Justice and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

SUNY Oneonta is proud to be at the cutting edge of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We are honored to serve increasing numbers of these students along with “first-generation” learners. As a future Hispanic-serving institution, Latinx students are currently at 19% and rising. Many Latinx students are first-generation learners who will benefit from the extra attention that faculty on a 3/3 load can give.

Due to structural and cultural inequality, precarious students are often under-socialized and unprepared for university life. Moreover, Generation Z lacks the vocabulary and reading skills that earlier generations possessed, is addled by cell phone and social media addiction, and suffers from disengagement and chronic absenteeism. Such students require more leeway from professors, more reminders, and more repetition. This remedialization of the university body is time-consuming, stressful, and increases the toll on faculty members’ emotional lives. One professor supplied the following representative

example of an email from an Oneonta student *in week 7* of the spring 2024 semester, with no salutation and a disregard for syntax and punctuation:

“what is the name of the book for the class I cant find the book.”

In short, if tenure and tenure track faculty have fewer course obligations, we can focus on at-risk students, thereby more effectively educating and retaining them. These emotionally demanding roles are our reality in new landscapes of higher education. According to Provost Morales-Diaz, “the university students of today are not the ones who we were teaching 15-20 years ago.” We couldn’t agree more. A 3/3 load will allow teaching faculty to better meet the needs of all our students by keeping our classes current, revamping our preps and assignments, creating novel and exciting learning modalities for students, and rendering our courses DEI supportive.

Yes, We Can! / Si, Se Puede!

In sum, we *can and should* move to a standard 3/3 load. In 2008, when President Donovan announced that “the time has come for our institution to consider moving to a configuration of seven courses a year,” he cited an ongoing effort to make Oneonta a “college of first choice.” “I am convinced,” wrote Dr. Donovan, “that eventually this change will keep Oneonta both more vibrant and competitive in the years ahead. And I believe the benefits of moving in this direction should be obvious: more time for research, new course preparation, and other duties.” In the Notes from the special Labor-Management meeting on faculty course load reduction on June 25, 2008, UUP concurred with Dr. Donovan—but noted that the union “looks at a 4-3 course workload as an interim step toward a 3-3 course workload, which remains UUP’s ultimate goal.”

Between the Covid-19 pandemic, the enrollment cliff, and New York State’s depopulation trends, the time is now to move to a 3/3 (18 credit-hour) teaching load. It will be an elixir for our flagging morale and burnout. It would demonstrate a modicum of respect for the delicate and sacred enterprise of the teacher/student relationship. It would make visible the diverse forms of labor that comprise our professorial roles. And we would be grateful for it. And our gratitude is like our morale; hard to measure, but impossible to live without.

Testimonials from Teacher-Scholars at SUNY at Oneonta and Beyond:

“Teaching expectations from administration and students have exploded over the past decade. Course design and delivery in analog and digital dimensions requires many more prep and maintenance hours. Most students need continual guidance, explanation of basic college-level work practices, and reinforcement of how and what to do. Teaching 4 courses in a semester with this level of expectations is taxing and crowds out time and intellectual space for scholarship and creative activities, which are required for tenure and promotion. Ever-expanding service initiatives, new campus systems and processes also demand more time and crowd out time for a life of the mind. Our quality of life along with our freedom and status have declined. We need and deserve a lighter load to sustain us.” *Gina Keel, Professor of Political Science, 19 years at SUNY at Oneonta*

“Yes, I agree a 3/3 is a good idea - especially when we already make less and do more than comparable institutions; this is a huge hit for morale for those of us that have been here so long that we can't afford a jump to another institution and are trapped—for lack of a better word. If there are added costs to campus to accommodate this, it would be worth it, as the quality of instruction and productivity would likely increase. With the heavy teaching and service responsibilities (for example, I advise 76 students), we are so busy ‘doing’ that we don’t have time for ‘dreaming.’ And it is in the dreaming that great scholarship, collaboration, and program development emerge.” *Anonymous Professor, Education*

“A shift to a 3/3 course load could become foundational for a serious effort to make SUNY Oneonta into a regional institution. With the potential degrees of freedom that a 3/3 load would offer, faculty would have greater capabilities to conduct research (both as academics and collaborating with students), respond adroitly to the ongoing mental health concerns with our students, and develop partnerships with other regional organizations – activities that have all been identified as part of the regaining momentum initiative.” *Brian Lowe, Professor of Sociology*

“I discouraged my kids from going to R1 institutions because professors prioritize research, and students are often taught by T.A.s. I also discouraged them from choosing schools where professors teach too many classes. The best teaching schools are where students have access to teaching-focused faculty that are on a 3/3 or a 3/2 load.” *Anonymous Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Connecticut*

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