

CFA's Final Recommendation on Faculty Office Hours

Charge Background

Following a request to Steering from Student Government, as well as the fact that the current policy is 9 years old, CFA was charged with reviewing the Faculty Office Hours Policy.

Issue #1: Under the current policy, adjunct faculty are not required to hold in-person office hours. Based upon feedback from Student Government, the outcome of this intended flexibility is that many students have no synchronous access to their adjunct professors outside of the classroom. As such, students in these classes are at a disadvantage relative to their peers; there are also inherent inequities among adjunct faculty who invest variable amounts of time and effort into being accessible to students outside of the classroom. Structural barriers to requiring adjuncts to hold in-person office hours include the limited time that many adjuncts are able to be on campus, and limited office space that many adjuncts are provided.

Issue #2: Although students benefit from synchronous interaction with faculty, it is not clear that synchronous office hours must occur in person. For example, virtual meetings between students and faculty in some cases might be at least as productive as in-person meetings, due in part to the scheduling flexibility it offers (e.g., a benefit for both adjunct professors and commuter students). Online courses might especially benefit from virtual interactions, which can leverage the interactive, online systems inherent to those courses.

Issue #3: Steering asked CFA to consider whether the substance and title of the policy should be broadened to cover both office hours and general faculty accessibility to students.

Final Recommendation

CFA reviewed the 2011 "Office Hours – Faculty" document, and also met directly with Student Government to solicit student input. Subsequently, we developed first a preliminary, and then final recommendation, for which we gathered campus testimony. Based upon this feedback, we have drafted the accompanying document, which attempts to meet student needs within the confines of logistical constraints.

Substantive changes to the policy include the following:

- A statement indicating that students should have access to their course instructors on a consistent, regular basis.
- Revised, clarified language regarding faculty accessibility.
- Acknowledgement that students should have synchronous access to their instructors, which can sometimes take the form of virtual meetings.
- A recommendation that departments provide space for adjuncts to meet with students outside of scheduled class time.

- A recommendation that departments/programs should post office hours schedules for all faculty in the department office and website.
- A recommendation that departments/programs should support adjunct faculty through dedicated space for office hours.

In order for students to access the instructors teaching their specific course sections, an ideal office hours policy would include a requirement that adjunct faculty be available to their students for a specified amount of office hours (preferably in-person, but virtual would suffice to accommodate adjunct schedules). However, any such change in policy would constitute a change in the terms and conditions of adjunct employment, and thus would require negotiation either between the Administration and the TCNJ AFT (for a local MOA), or between the State of NJ Office of Employee Relations and the AFT Council of NJ State College Locals (for a change to the master contract). CFA recommends that such a negotiation take place in order to meet student needs while providing fair compensation to adjunct faculty.

CFA recommends that the scope of the policy should consider only "office hours" that are related to course instruction. Students seek faculty for many reasons (e.g., to learn about scholarly/creative/professional opportunities, to seek advising, etc.). Faculty often meet with students during regularly scheduled office hours or they make specific appointments to meet student needs. A policy to specify these interactions is problematic when there are many types of advising models (e.g., group advising, cohort advising, advising courses, etc.) and when students have not expressed a problem meeting faculty for these activities.

COVID-19 Considerations: CFA also recommends that the requirement for in-person office hours be suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, virtual office hours can be used exclusively.