

Academic Workplace Wellness:
“I would have come today, but I was
too busy...”

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“The university as ‘anxiety machine’ produces intolerable working conditions that drain academic workers of their health, creativity and will power”

(Andrea Brady, 2018)

- Neoliberalism & managerialism dominate
 - Individual responsibility for productivity
 - Corporate mentality: outputs, return on investment, products, innovation, impact
- Learning and teaching are commodified, transformed into products

Accountability

Benchmarking

Quality
improvement

Key Performance
Indicators

Efficiency

Productivity
targets

Return on investment

Public impact

Commercialization

Metrics

International reputation

Strategic plan

Economic impact

Outputs

Marketing

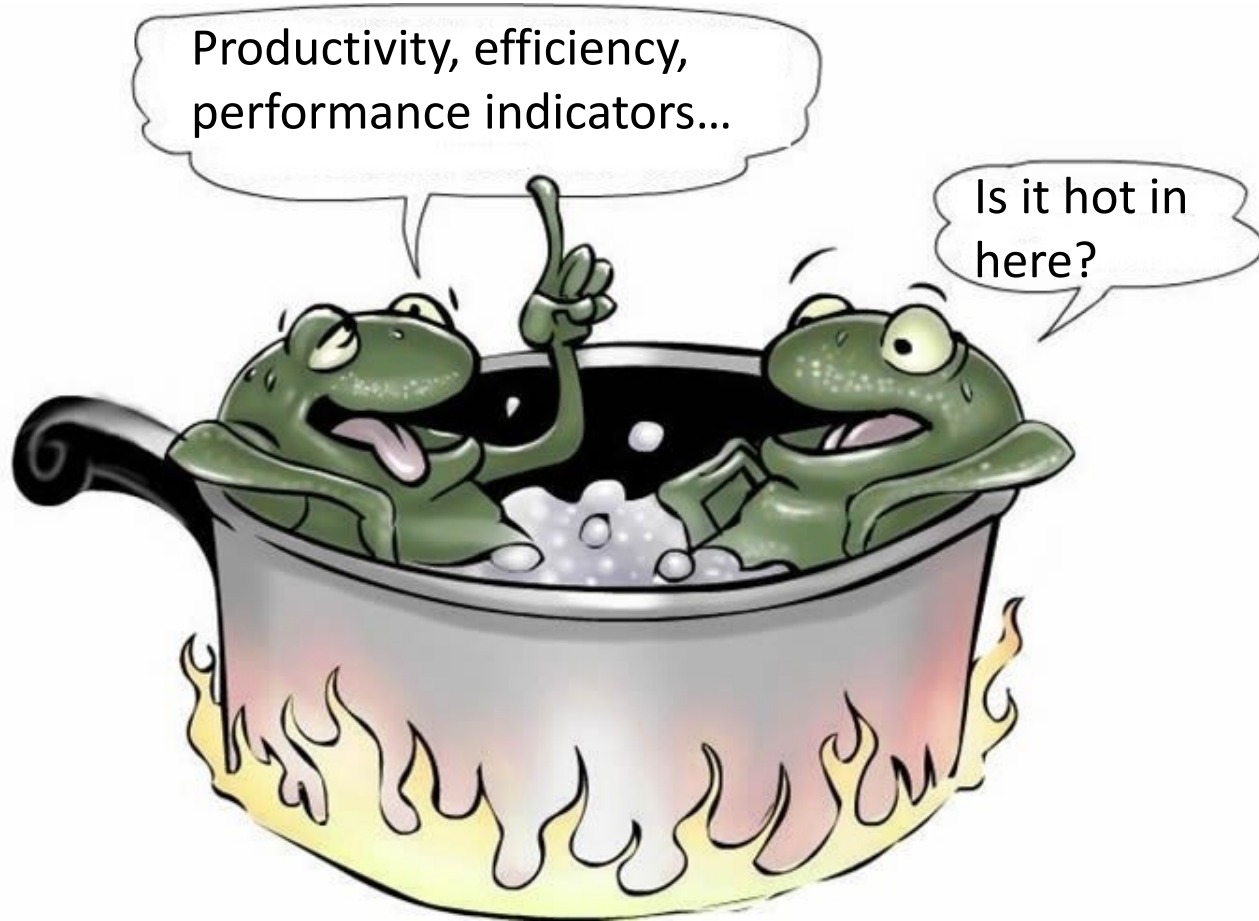
Innovation

Fiscal responsibility

U15 ranking

“The narrative of economic growth... the reduction of our capacities to just another commodity in the market.... demands we overcome our present imperfections; our present lack of impact; our present lack of student satisfaction; our present lack of staffing efficiency”

(Richard Hall, 2014, The University as anxiety machine)



It may not be true... but the old fable is if you put a frog into boiling water, it will jump out. If you put the frog in cool water and gradually raise the temperature, it'll boil to death.

- Some structural determinants of academic wellness
 - Workload expansion
 - Performance measures
 - Time/space continuum

Workload expansion

- Increases in class size
 - 48 → 54 → 66 → ?? 25% increase since 2006
 - Grading, meeting with students... 18 extra students = 1 extra week/course each term
- Students with increasingly diverse needs (yay!)
 - Exponential increase in expectations of faculty (e.g. accommodations) ... positions those students as 'the problem'
- Increase in university bureaucracy

Workload expansion

“Another factor driving the professoriate’s drift into middle management is a significant increase in administrative demands. In part, this is due to the growth of university bureaucracy, which, once established, inevitably consumes the time and attention of its subjects to justify its existence.”

(Cal Newport 2019)

Workload expansion

- Technology shifting tasks to faculty
 - “Computers made administrative tasks *just easy enough* to eliminate the need for dedicated support staff — you could now type your own memos using a word processor or file expenses directly through an intranet portal... professors spend an increasing amount of time dealing with the administrative substrate of their institutions through electronic interfaces.” (Newport, 2019)
- 30% of average 60 hour work week = email & meetings (Ziker, 2014)

Common CV

SSHRC Research Portal

Research Net

NSHRF Grants
Management System

Uniweb

Graduate Studies
Information System

ROMEO

Camtasia

Soft Chalk

Blackboard

Collaborate

Relay

Power Point

Brightspace

WebCT version 1 & 2

Top Hat

Skype

Zoom

Sharepoint

Outlook calendar

Facebook

Office 365

Manuscript Central

RefWorks

Twitter

e-library

Workload expansion

- Contract staff (LTAs, sessionals)
 - No one left with appropriate seniority for key committees. T&P, Faculty Council, Appointments, curriculum, program coordinators, Senate...
 - LTAs and very junior people appointed
 - Can't say no, jeopardizing job future
 - Lack of people to sit on graduate committees
- Admin demands way higher for faculty who are Indigenous, racialized, disabled, women in non-traditional fields...

Performance measures

- Constant surveillance, metrics, measuring up

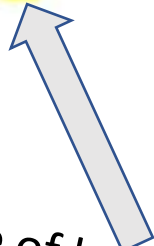
“numerous sadistic aspects of the contemporary university, with its constant surveillance and persecutory attacks masquerading as critical scrutiny... ‘the hidden injuries’ of neoliberal academia” (Brady, 2018)

- Research measured by impact; research as instrumental, goal-oriented



Impact Together

Dalhousie University Research & Innovation



(Language of business
infiltrates even the name
of our research office)

1 Canada First Research Excellence Fund (\$94M)

1 Canada Excellence Research Chair

1 Network of Centres of Excellence

5 Industrial Research Chairs

60 Canada Research Chairs

27 Research Centres and Institutes

2 Affiliate Teaching Hospitals

928 Faculty
18,827 Students

10 Royal Society of Canada College Members and

37 Royal Society of Canada Fellows

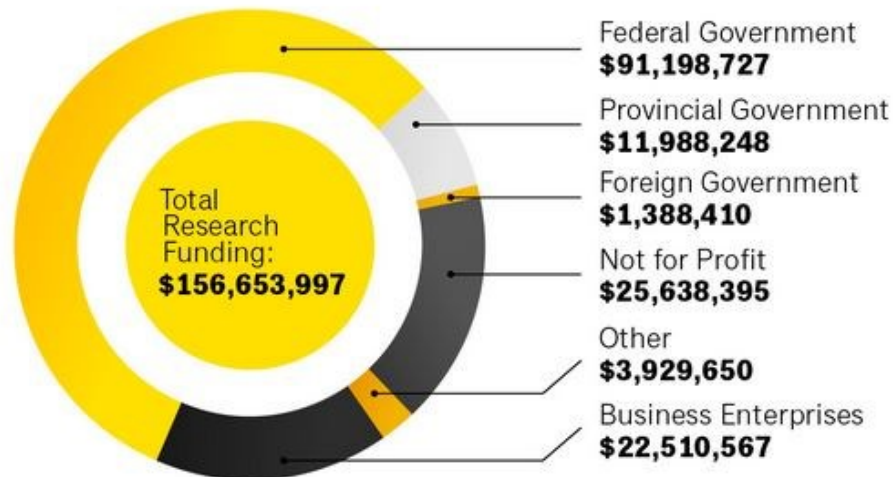
21 Canadian Academy of Health Sciences Fellows

3 Gerhard Herzberg Canada Gold Medals for Science and Engineering since 2013

4 Killam Prize Recipients since 2005

7th In the U15 for Scholarly Output

2017–2018
Research Funding



\$\$

of publications

h-index

Altmetric

i10-index

grant \$\$\$

Scopus

Web of Science

g-index

grant application
scores

journal impact factor

Twitter followers

Academic.edu

citations

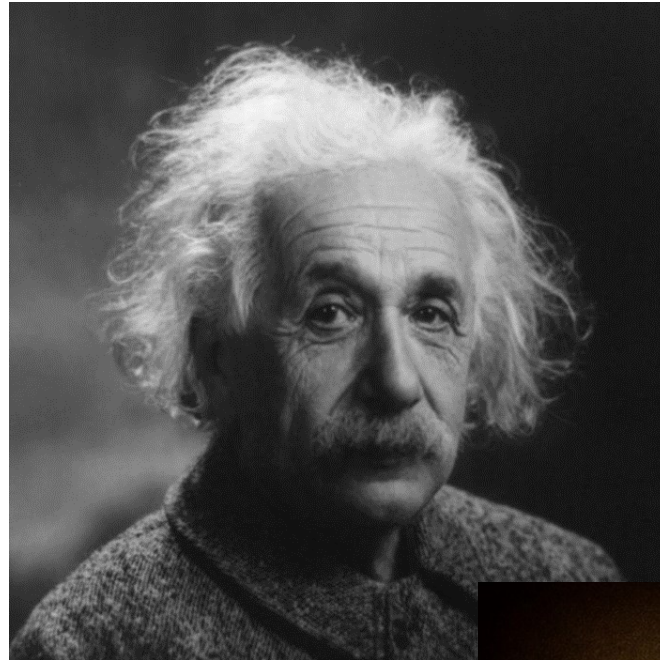
Eigenfactor

Research Gate

Individual measures of worth, value...

Performance measures

- Discovery doesn't always have immediate economic impact... or even application

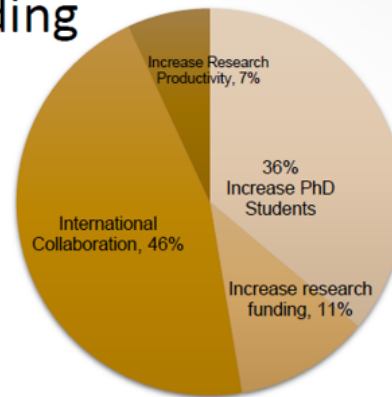


$$E=mc^2$$

Recent Senate meeting... University targets to increase Dal's rank among universities

The impact factors of greatest potential to impact Dalhousie's excellence and consequently rankings are:

- International collaboration
- PhD students
- Research productivity
- Research funding



Potential Point Gain for
Each Impact Factor

So: write more with international colleagues; get 0.34 more PhD students per faculty; publish 8.5% more papers; 12% increase in research \$\$, esp industry

(!)

Performance measures

- Peer review of grants, articles, books, SRIs (not good enough, not good enough, not good enough...)
- Never productive enough, never good enough
 - Which part(s) of your job will you choose to suck at?
 - Who will you choose to let down? students, colleagues, research participants?

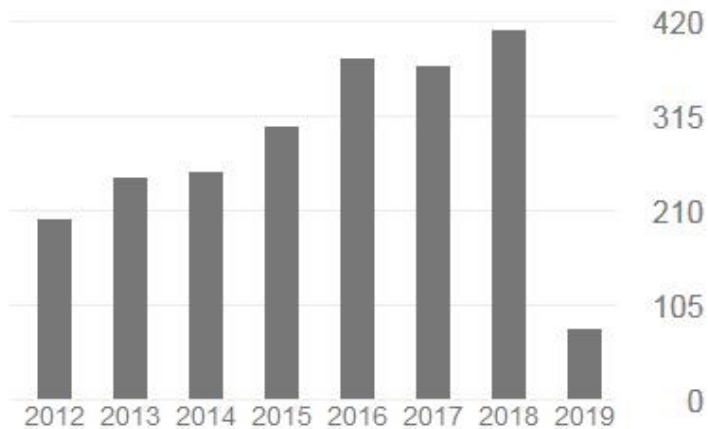
Performance measures

Google Scholar

Cited by

[VIEW ALL](#)

	All	Since 2014
Citations	3191	1799
h-index	32	25
i10-index	56	50



ResearchGate

Stats overview

1,135

Total Research Interest ⓘ



1,858

Citations ⓘ

10

Recommendations ⓘ



26,140

Reads ⓘ

Performance measures

TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS - Department Statistics

The teaching effectiveness report is based on a 5 point Likert scale with 1 being "Strongly Agree".

Question	Course			
	Mean	Interpolated Median	Response Count	Standard Deviation
STIMULATION OF LEARNING: The instructor conducted the class clinical in such a way that I was stimulated to learn.	4.87	4.93	39	0.34
ORGANIZATION: The instructor organized the class clinical well.	4.69	4.78	39	0.47
COMMUNICATION: The instructor communicated clearly during the class.	4.85	4.91	39	0.37
ENTHUSIASM: The instructor showed enthusiasm for the subject matter of the class.	4.95	4.97	39	0.22
FAIRNESS: The instructor used fair evaluation methods to determine grades.	4.56	4.72	39	0.64
FEEDBACK: The instructor provided constructive feedback (considering the class size).	4.49	4.61	39	0.64
CONCERN FOR LEARNING: The instructor showed genuine concern for my learning.	4.63	4.74	38	0.54
OVERALL TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS: Overall, the instructor was an effective teacher.	4.92	4.96	39	0.27
Overall	4.75	-	-	0.49

Do you have any suggestions for what the instructor could have done differently to further assist you in your learning?

Measuring, measuring, measuring...

Performance measures

Whether we put in 40 hrs per week or 80,
no one ever seems to feel they are doing all parts of
their job well enough

That's demoralizing, sickening

‘Time-space continuum’

- We no longer have **time** for the **spaciousness** of mind needed to think, create, imagine, solve...
- “the knowledge economy is systematically undervaluing uninterrupted concentration”
(Newport, 2019)
- Email 24/7, relentless, always working
- We can choose not to respond... but risk being perceived as ‘uncollegial,’ ‘unavailable to students’

‘Time-space continuum’

- “This is the story academics tell ourselves as we flip open the laptop on Sunday mornings: we tell ourselves that the boundarylessness of our time and service is a privilege and even a practice of freedom” (Bowles, 2013)

Time-space continuum

- Booking flights to a conference rather than reading
- Documenting worth in an annual report rather than thinking or writing
- Fighting with Brightspace rather than checking with a student whether accommodations are okay
- Managing Uniweb CV rather than doing a peer review for a journal
- So much of what we do now has so little to do with what drew us to academia, with what matters

Time-space continuum

- People are buying in to governance models that centre on efficiency (managerialism...)
 - Streamlining decision-making at the cost of debate, because we are so tired, stretched too thin
 - Precarious employment limits available people
 - Less admin is appealing!
- But... loss of collegial governance
 - Collegium (partnership) of scholars charged with regulating matters where scholars are experts: academic matters, the central mission of universities
 - Decisions supposed to work their way up from department to Faculty to University
 - Guided by the scholarly mission of the university

Time-space continuum

- Collegial governance not more efficient, but more transparent, more engaged
- Not meant to be efficient – checks and balances are part of professional self-governance
- What makes work meaningful? autonomy, some control, some decision-making authority, involvement, purpose, mastery
- In the absence of time to think, in the absence of meaningful engagement in governance, in the proliferation of administivia, **academia often feels meaningless**

Academic workplace wellness?

“Each person feels these struggles as indictments of themselves, as individuals who are uniquely wrong.... Surely everyone else is coping, what is wrong with me?”

(Brady, 2018)

Neoliberalism... we are individually responsible...

Academic workplace wellness?

- ‘Just work smarter, not harder!’ – suggests individual failure
- A crisis of mental health in academia; nearly half of academics show signs of psychological distress (e.g., Shaw & Ward, 2014)
- The luxury of flexible work hours, yet the boundary-less-ness of never enough (and never good enough)

Academic workplace wellness?

- Wellness \neq sleep, exercise, mindfulness, nutrition, emotional health, resilience, time management, yoga, stress management...

“Resilience is a technology of will, or even functions as command: be willing to bear more; be stronger so you can bear more... Resilience is the requirement to take more pressure, such that pressure can be gradually increased”
(Ahmed, 2017)



Remember the frogs in the hot water?

Academic workplace wellness?

- Structural problems require **structural** (not individual) solutions
- Structural solutions require collective action
- We need new models of what universities could be: generous, open, survivable; focused on excellence in teaching, learning and knowledge, rather than metrics, outputs, rankings

“the work of revolutionizing the university must involve a commitment to *care*, for ourselves, for our students and each other” (Brady, 2018)

From a university wellness campaign:

IT'S OKAY TO TAKE A BREAK.

Taking breaks improves well-being
and increases productivity.

Sources: *Cognition* 2011; *Organizational Dynamics* 2013

Feel better. Be better.

Could we get to this?:

IT'S OKAY TO TAKE A BREAK.

Taking breaks improves well-being
~~and increases productivity.~~

which is worth it... even if it decreases productivity!

Feel better. ~~Be better.~~

Andrea Brady, blog: Stillpoint spaces, July 4, 2018

Cal Newport, Is email making professors stupid? *The Chronicle Review* 2019 <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/is-email-making-professors-stupid>

John Ziker, The Long, Lonely Job of Homo academicus, 2014
<https://thebluereview.org/faculty-time-allocation>

Kate Bowles blog, Musicfordeckchairs, Dec 9, 2013

Richard Hall's Space. (blog). Notes on the University as anxiety machine, July 10, 2014

Claire Shaw and Lucy Ward, 'Dark thoughts: Why mental illness is on the rise in academia', *Guardian* Mar 6, 2014

Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017

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