

Reflection on Coordinator Responsibilities

In order to imagine an alternative to the current Program Coordinator system, it is important to examine the current Program Coordinator's responsibilities, and the extent to which these duties, as they are currently articulated, accurately and thoroughly describe the work that coordinators are doing. To organize our thinking, we revised the questions posed by Deb Figart's survey of program coordinators and posed them to the task force members, to consider the currently articulated (and unarticulated) expectations for coordinators. A few general themes emerged from process.

- 1) Very few duties/expectations in and of themselves, were considered onerous or widely outside the purview of a Program Chairperson. However, when considered as a whole, the sum of these duties is often a far greater burden on a Program Coordinator than the position was ever intended to be.
- 2) In some ways related to point #1, It is clear that there has been a kind of general mission creep both in expanding expectations for coordinators within specific articulated duties, and in the increasing host of unarticulated responsibilities and expectations **not** addressed in the current agreement.
- 3) It is also clear that, in the last decade, Stockton has grown from a small liberal arts college for the public-school student, to a multi-site university, focused on a well-rounded liberal arts foundation for a career-driven practical education. As our identity has shifted, our needs have changed. The egalitarian ideals that were key to Stockton's foundation were also key to our iteration of the Program Coordinator position. When Stockton was a smaller liberal arts college, this rotating, first-among-equals approach to program leadership was effective. Now, the growing diversity of our programs and their disparate needs means both that many coordinators are taking on far more responsibility than a first-among-equals should, and that the compensation (in time or money) for these positions is largely misaligned with the actual amount of time and energy it takes to perform these tasks thoroughly and effectively.

Below, we summarize the responses to the posed questions, and point to the themes above as they are represented in the responses

A) Can any of the current coordinator responsibilities (in whole or in part) be *better* or at least *as well done* by a non-faculty member?

Although at least some part of each of the existing duties are really a coordinator's responsibility, aspects of some responsibilities could be carried out by others. However, in order for these persons to be truly effective, they might need to be consistently program-dedicated, work closely with the coordinator, and know the program and program faculty and affiliated staff. Smaller programs might be able to share a staff member. The articulated coordinator's duties that were identified as potentially partially completed by non-faculty include:

- ***Serve as steward of program records and facilitate a smooth transition to the Coordinator's successor, other duties around record keeping.***
Program records could be kept by a non-faculty member, but some parts of facilitating a smooth transition should be the out-going coordinator's purview. (calendar of responsibilities, hand over of projects in-progress, update on the political realities).

Consistency in transition is essential. Perhaps the expectations/obligations for the transition need to be laid out in a statement of coordinator's summer responsibilities.

- ***Serve as the point of contact of the program for the Dean, Assistant Dean, and other school and University personnel. Assist with the transmittal of information, as needed, from the Dean and other officials of the University to members of the program.***

A non-faculty member could disseminate important program information, particularly if this staff person works closely with the program coordinator, so that the coordinator is the primary "point-of-contact," but the staff member is taking care of the dissemination. But we need to be conscious of the fact that using professional staff in this capacity doesn't necessarily work with more politically challenging things for which staff often feel less safe than tenured faculty to push back, and some information needs push back. Also, this could result in a duplication of effort rather than be labor-saving.

- ***Coordinate program faculty participation in activities related to the recruitment of students, such as open houses and other on-campus recruitment events, during the academic year. In the case of new programs, this may include the development of promotional materials and representation at off-campus events.***

While it is important for faculty to participate in Open Houses, etc., recruitment perhaps would be better done by professionals with specialized training.

- ***On behalf of the program, act as the liaison or appoint liaisons as needed with other programs, University units, and external constituencies for the purposes of representing the Program in arranging articulation agreements with other institutions; representing the program to donors, potential donors, and partners; and other similar activities.***

Part of this can be done by specific program-dedicated non-faculty persons who know the program. As it stands, each school's staff serves all of that school's programs, and as such is "jack-of-all-trades, master of none." Further, our professional staff sometimes report that they (unfairly) need the additional prestige of a faculty member, both internally and externally—which tends to default to the coordinator.

- ***Ensure that program reporting requirements are met in a timely manner, e.g., review and update annually all official program information for publications such as the Bulletin, relevant portions of the Stockton website, and other materials to meet program, School, and University goals,***

Again, a non-faculty member could work with the coordinator on this. It could make the coordinator's job easier, or lead to duplication of effort rather than be labor-saving.

- ***Prepare an annual report that summarizes program activity and achievement of its mission and goals, and that presents the program goal Is for the upcoming year. A copy of the annual report shall be forwarded to the Dean and program faculty prior to June 15 of each academic year.***

Again, a specific program-dedicated non-faculty person could work with the coordinator. (The nuts and bolts aspects--updating information on gender/race/number of majors, etc. could be done by a non-faculty person, but the big picture, planning, etc.) would need to remain the work of faculty.

B) Which individual tasks which strike you as excessively burdensome?

- ***Inform the Dean as to when the Coordinator will be available during July and August for completing relevant responsibilities as described here and in preparation for the fall term...***

The issue is not that we shouldn't inform the schools and deans of summer availability... of course we should. However the Coordinator's Summer Responsibilities have experienced mission creep. It is important to fully and clearly articulate Summer Coordinator Duties. What specifically are is expected? What constitutes "above and beyond?"

- ***Coordinate program faculty participation in activities related to the recruitment of students, such as open houses and other on-campus recruitment events....***

As it stands, the expectations for this role have increased and typically fall on the coordinator. Some of this is certainly the program/coordinator's job, but we are neither appropriately trained nor appropriately compensated for the time it would take to do this part of the job effectively. The expectations continue to expand beyond the Open House events (eg, Program specific open houses for accepted students, "instant decision days," "a day in the life" events, personal "program information/recruitment" meetings with prospective students and their families throughout each semester with personal tours of our facilities, requests for help with athletic recruits; requests from area high schools and community colleges for recruitment visits from our program faculty to their schools; and requests from perspective students who just want to know more about the program etc.) This can be too much for one faculty leader, and does a disservice to the programs in that recruitment cannot be given the attention it deserves, and hence cannot possibly be reaching the fullest potential audience. The expectations for recruitment and marketing continue to grow without university resources to meet these expectations.

- ***Coordinate the faculty activities that fulfill the program's responsibilities with regard to a student learning outcomes assessment plan through collaboration with program faculty and the Director of Academic Assessment.***

This shouldn't be burdensome but does become so if the coordinator is the only one working on assessment. One idea to make this less of a burden might be to suggest multiple options used by some Schools or Programs now. For instance, the School of Business essentially selects 1 or 2 ELOs that will be assessed each semester. Courses with those ELOs then participate in that semester's assessment activities (facilitated by the program Coordinator). Another program might ask one question in a given year and the Coordinator might facilitate assessment related to that question.

On behalf of the program, act as the liaison or appoint liaisons ...for the purposes of representing the Program in arranging agreements with other institutions... donors, potential donors, and partners; and other similar activities.

This shouldn't be burdensome but this task is overwhelmingly the coordinator's, and the current phrasing of the task ensures that it stays that way. "Appointing liaisons" from among program faculty is not always effective, especially given how under-staffed most programs currently are. These are important tasks, and if given the resources to carry them out properly, could be key to Stockton's overall profile and future success. But when left to the coordinator with a plethora of other responsibilities, this task is usually not given adequate attention. Also, with new initiatives, these tasks have increased in quantity and quality.

- **Ensure that program reporting requirements are met in a timely manner, e.g., review and update annually all official program information for publications such as the Bulletin, relevant portions of the Stockton website, and other materials to meet program, School, and University goals.**

This may depend on the program; for example if you have to do this for both undergrad and graduate programs you have to do this for your school and also for Graduate Studies. For programs that have a program handbook of policies and procedures, this adds to the task. Again, the coordinator is both reviewing/editing/amending the documents, and trying to get the faculty to respond to/approve/agree upon the changes. The larger responsibility for this task should be on the coordinator, but dedicated non-faculty persons might help.

- **Prepare an annual report that summarizes program activity and achievement of its mission and goals, and that presents the program goals for the upcoming year...**

Annual reports are important and potentially very valuable. When done thoughtfully, they can yield excellent insights and guide programs into the future. But, to be meaningful, coordinators must invest time and attention interpreting institutional and program data. The way the reports are currently structured means that to get meaningful information from them, coordinators need to put significant detailed effort into them. However, the more effort one puts into it, the less likely anyone will read it--because then the report is longer, more data-heavy, and more complex to read. There is little reward for doing a good job in this task, and little or no penalty for doing the report poorly--or not at all--so the expectations need to be changed.

- **Coordinate the completion of a program review every five years. With the approval of the Dean, the program may delegate the responsibilities for developing the five-year program review to a person other than the Coordinator.**

Five-year reports. The compensation for the five-year report seems fair. However, it sometimes seems that few people read, digest, and meaningfully respond to the reports, and that few meaningful major changes are made as a result of the recommendations. Either the University needs to work with the programs and schools to make the most out of these reports, or the university should simplify the expectations for these reports to match the amount that they actually matter.

C) What tasks are essential to have in the hands of a program faculty member?

- **Convene at least two meetings of program faculty per academic term to deliberate and make recommendations on matters relating to the program's mission. Keep a record of all program minutes...transmit a copy of these to the Dean.**
- **Inform the Dean in a timely fashion of resources and support needed to accomplish the program's goals.**
- **Coordinate the faculty activities that fulfill the program's responsibilities with regard to a student learning outcomes assessment plan through collaboration with program faculty and the Director of Academic Assessment**

- ***Coordinate the advising activities of the program to ensure that all advising obligations, including graduation certifications and program distinction, are met in a timely manner.***

This depends on program size and advising intricacies. Non-faculty members could take on grad certifications, program distinction, and the occasional CAPP adjustment. With regard to precepting, it gets trickier. The coordination of program advising, and frequently a disproportionate number of preceptees/other advisees, tend to fall on the coordinator. Some of this should be handled by non-faculty members. For example, individual coordinators do not have access to the advising needs across the school and cannot fully coordinate this. Being able to coordinate/assign responsibilities should reflect the big picture information. Further, the distribution of actual advising responsibilities is widely disparate both within and among programs with some people having more preceptees than entire programs have students. The BSHS program has 1200+ UG students compared to other programs of 30-40 students. And within programs, if you are a good preceptor you get “punished” with larger numbers of students, while those whose gifts lie elsewhere are “rewarded” with fewer advisees. It also depends upon the University’s expectations--are we supposed to track down students who did enroll in courses properly and try to rectify that in a timely manner, or simply put registration holds on students and make it their responsibility to fix the problem in the next term? This has implications for labor but also for student success, especially retention and time-to-graduation. Also, this depends upon the division of labor across faculty, Academic Advising staff, and School staff.

Definitely, some advising tasks--like determining whether a unique transfer course or student situation will have met program or major requirements, should remain with faculty members.

- ***Serve as the first level of appeal in all matters relating to the academic activities of the program and its faculty. This would include but is not limited to such matters as appeals regarding program degree requirements, assessment of transfer credit, and, where possible, informal resolution of grade appeals and complaints regarding faculty. Inform the Dean, with an explanation, when resolution at the program level is not possible.***

It is crucial for program faculty to be the first level of appeal in most (if not all) of these circumstances. Clearly most grade disputes can be settled quickly, but in those cases more difficult to resolve, it can be tricky. With coordinators as “first among equals,” as in our current iteration, it makes little sense to pretend to adjudicate grade disputes. In fact, the whole process makes some faculty a little resentful. Given that the coordinator actually has no authority to do anything about the disputed grade, it seems a “smoke screen” to “shield” the Dean from extra work, and perhaps a way to “tire the student out” before they get to the Dean.

- ***Consistent with applicable University policies and procedures, lead the program in fulfilling its personnel responsibilities ..., coordinate the recruitment and hiring of program faculty {including adjuncts}, make recommendations on the appointment of program faculty, and transmit recommendations on program staffing needs to the Dean.***

Faculty need to have a primary role in the scheduling process since the faculty understand the nuances of their program (labs, studio, linked courses, faculty member’s strengths, etc.) However, there could be more support from non-faculty members, or in larger programs with multiple tracks that do not already have track coordinators/convenors, track coordinators could help immensely with scheduling.

Also, some adjunct faculty member on-boarding could be facilitated by non-faculty or track coordinators, at least things like sending out calls for adjuncts, collecting the CVs, weeding out clearly unacceptable applicants, etc.

D) Is part of the problem many coordinators face the *cumulative* effect of these duties and responsibilities? That is, is it the case that if a coordinator had only a *subset* of these duties/responsibilities it would be doable?

This is a universal and resounding YES. All of these tasks are important, but not all of them can be done by one person effectively with the current coordinator compensation. The issue is not one specific onerous task. Instead it is the fact that there are so many onerous tasks, very little support to get them done effectively, and a constant “mission creep” in terms of the expectations. All of these tasks are important, but as things are, there is no way to do them all effectively. We need more people doing the work and/or more compensation and time for those doing it. It is impossible to expect faculty leaders to coordinate each of these tasks while also being primarily responsible for carrying them out.

E) Do any of the articulated coordinator’s duties present *uniquely* challenging issues for a particular program in your school?

- ***Coordinate the advising activities of the program to ensure that all advising obligations, including graduation certifications and program distinction, are met in a timely manner.***

Particularly challenging for BSHS.

- ***Lead the program faculty in creating a recommended teaching schedule for each academic term... over a 2-year cycle consistent with University and School needs as outlined by the Dean.***

This begins to get out of hand in programs that have labs, studios, or other unique scheduling structures. Also as the number of adjunct faculty increase this becomes quite a challenge. This issue is also compounded by faculty shortages. The demands of this task also vary when faculty apply for internal & external grants, course releases, sabbaticals and / or leave of absences for other reasons. In some programs a course may not be offered in certain semesters for these reasons while in other programs the coordinator must scramble to recruit coverage by adjunct faculty and then orient the adjunct faculty to all of their responsibilities.

F) Is there any particular duty which you think is particularly susceptible to an "economy of scale" problem? (that is, a duty/responsibility is not particularly difficult for a smaller program but becomes very challenging for larger programs)

This is a crucially important question. It gets at the crux of the issue at hand. Program needs and obligations are disparate. Many of the issues outlined in relation to the above questions come down to economies of scale. Recruiting obligations, scheduling, assessment, advising, grade appeals, etc. are all directly related to the size (faculty and students) and complexity of each program.

G) Are there other “unspoken” or “unarticulated” coordinator expectations/responsibilities?

This was another vitally important question that is fully articulated in another white paper.