

2024 CTE Faculty Fellow
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How have you experienced the last few years as a member of LMU's faculty? After facilitating a series of talks at the CTE over the 2022-2023 year on the theme of "Student Mental Health and Wellness," this year I wanted to shift the focus to faculty morale. After 20 years at LMU, I've never seen faculty struggle so much with multiple and proliferating challenges (nor struggled so much with them myself!). In our discussion in Spring 2024, numerous faculty from all colleges and schools expressed a shared sense of frustration and even, at times, despair. What are we all feeling, and what can we do? This meeting wasn't the only forum for this conversation, but I offer a snapshot of what many highly engaged faculty members from across campus and at varying stages of their careers shared at that meeting (held 15 February, 2024).

While some complaints are perennial—we don't get paid enough! LMU shouldn't rely on so many poorly-compensated non-tenure-track faculty! Students don't do the reading!—a number of the concerns faculty shared at the event are new, related in particular to the pandemic and the culture shifts around it. Faculty reported feeling that they are working hard to create conditions in their classrooms that meet the needs of their students but in increasingly challenging conditions. I introduced this as the idea of a faculty "tax" that we are paying as we do more to support students but also to cope with additional burdens on our time.

The group saw the LMU administration as responsible for creating conditions where faculty needs are met, ultimately in support of our students. Yet, faculty expressed feeling that those conditions are not tended to by our administration, which heightens the tax on faculty. They perceive that tax both in the philosophical differences between faculty and admin AND the day-to-day bureaucratic hassles that increase time/labor/energy by faculty to accomplish tasks. These rifts and the "slow drip" of additional work consistently seem to express a lack of care for faculty or their time. Changing expectations since the pandemic, for instance the increased

build-out of online learning management systems (Brightspace) or flexibility for deadlines, have not gone back to pre-pandemic norms. At the same time, there have been increases in the number of students overall as well as in numbers of students needing special kinds of support—e.g., students with disabilities, international students—that the university has not sufficiently supported. This work, then, falls to the faculty.

In combination with an increasingly large and distinct upper administration, faculty reported feeling doubly isolated, separated from both the upper administration and from their students. University communications are dominated by marketing efforts, athletics, US News and World Report Rankings, and announcements about new administrators. Faculty very rarely see themselves, their efforts, or their broader goals of a mission-driven Jesuit/Ignatian education highlighted or celebrated. This seems to reinforce the transactional approach that many students seem to take to their education, taking courses just to check boxes toward a degree. In contrast, many faculty at the event see themselves as working to form students to be thoughtful and active citizens in this ever-changing world. That human-centered approach (*cura personalis*) is what our faculty are known for in the classroom but does not appear to be the same approach or care taken by university administration toward faculty or what they see as the strength of the university. In fact, many faculty report feeling that university administrators treat them as a barrier rather than as partners in finding the best ways to support students. As a result, faculty articulated the pressure they feel to solve all the various problems coming out of COVID, the problems of artificial intelligence, and the crisis in student mental health *on their own*.

Faculty offered specific and achievable actions to address many of these ongoing and thorny issues in higher education and at LMU. These suggestions will be shared with our university administration, and we look forward to continued dialogue in the fall semester.