Why did you get into academia in the first place?

Breakout Discussion (3 min.)
Burnout defined:
The experience of being stretched across the gap between your ideals for work and the reality of your job.
Du Haut en Bas... ou les Causes et les Effets.
Three dimensions of burnout:

- Exhaustion
- Cynicism / depersonalization
- Sense of ineffectiveness

Burnout prevalence:

Sources: Leiter & Maslach (2016); Schuldt et al. (2018); Yanchus et al. (2015)
How frequently do the following statements apply to you?

- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day
“Being in direct contact with people at work is too stressful.”

- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day
“I feel students blame me for some of their problems.”

- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day
“I feel that I influence other people positively through my work.”

- Never
- A few times a year or less
- Once a month or less
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Every day
Maslach Burnout Inventory

Your MBI-ES Percentile Scores

- Emotional Exhaustion: 98
- Depersonalization: 44
- Personal Accomplishment: 18
Key “mismatches” in workplaces

- Excessive workload
- Lack of autonomy
- Insufficient reward
- Breakdown of community
- Absence of fairness
- Mismatch of values

The Burnout Spectrum

Prevalence of Burnout Profiles

- no burnout: 40%
- frustrated: 25%
- overextended: 15%
- cynical: 10%
- burned out: 5%

Sources: Leiter & Maslach (2016); Schuldt et al. (2018); Yanchus et al. (2015)
“However we explain all these complaints [about students], I certainly felt them deeply. By the time I received tenure in 2002, I was not sure I could go on. My disappointment was profound, constant, and personal. How could I possibly make myself plan courses enthusiastically, only to have students evaluate them on the basis of how little work they’d been able to get away with? Sure, there were good students, those who cared, worked hard, actually read everything. But I was focused on the numerous others. And it felt bad.”

– Susan Blum, *I Love Learning; I Hate School* (2016)
“If I were to do my career over, I would take better care of my instructional health. I beat my head too long against walls that didn’t give. Disheartened, I became disillusioned and cynical. I never lost my love of teaching, but I struggled to stay alive in the classroom. At the first possible opportunity I retired – before I was ready to quit working but well after being seriously infected with institutional burnout.”

Academic burnout emerges from the gap between your academic vocation and your academic job.
“Every one in his particular mode of life will, without repining, suffer its inconveniences, cares, uneasiness, and anxiety, persuaded that God has laid on the burden.... In following your proper calling, no work will be so mean and sordid as not to have a splendor and value in the eye of God.”

– John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*
“When young students come to me to seek advice about qualifying as a lecturer, [I ask them:] Do you believe that you can bear to see one mediocrity after another being promoted over your head year after year, without your becoming embittered and warped? Needless to say, you always receive the same answer: of course, I live only for my ‘vocation’—but I, at least, have found only a handful of people who have survived this process without injury to their personality.”

– Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation” (1917)
“Language like *family* and *vocation* are used to impose vicious expectations of self-sacrifice. This type of language is often used to intentionally obfuscate workers’ rights and administrators’ responsibilities.”

– Brandy Daniels and David Turnbloom, “The Virtuous Professor?” (2023)
Thank you for attending this session!

College is under pressure

College fails at its mission

College tries to do more

Workers burn out

Workers have to do more
“Projectitis”

“That pursuit of ‘whatever’ is self-defeating, if not suicidal, for the institution. When you seek to be ‘all things to all persons,’ you likely mean nothing that matters to anyone.”

– Wendy Fischman and Howard Gardner, The Real World of College (2022)
Rethinking the academic vocation

“[The Lord] knows the boiling restlessness of the human mind, the fickleness with which it is borne hither and thither, its eagerness to hold opposites at one time in its grasp, its ambition... And that no one may presume to overstep his proper limits, he has distinguished the different modes of life by the name of callings.”

Closing the Gap

1. Understand the faculty
2. Take (less) action
3. Clarify and live your values
1. Understand the faculty

- Patterns of satisfaction / dissatisfaction / burnout
- Their motivations and vocations: Why they got into academia
- What they feel they’ve been promised
Key “mismatches” in workplaces

• Excessive workload
• Lack of autonomy
• Insufficient reward
• Breakdown of community
• Absence of fairness
• Mismatch of values

2. Take (less) action

- Do one less thing this year...and next year...and the year after...
- Ask faculty to do one less thing and stick to it
- Talk about mission and vocation as limits
3. Clarify and live your values

- Recognize good work
- Favor values clarification over strategic planning
- Hold honest conversations about ideals and conditions
- Show compassion for all
“A college...is less a collection of programs than a gathering of people.”

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