



Faculty, Academic Careers, and Environments (FACE)

# Conceptual Framework Report

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## FACE Framework Overview

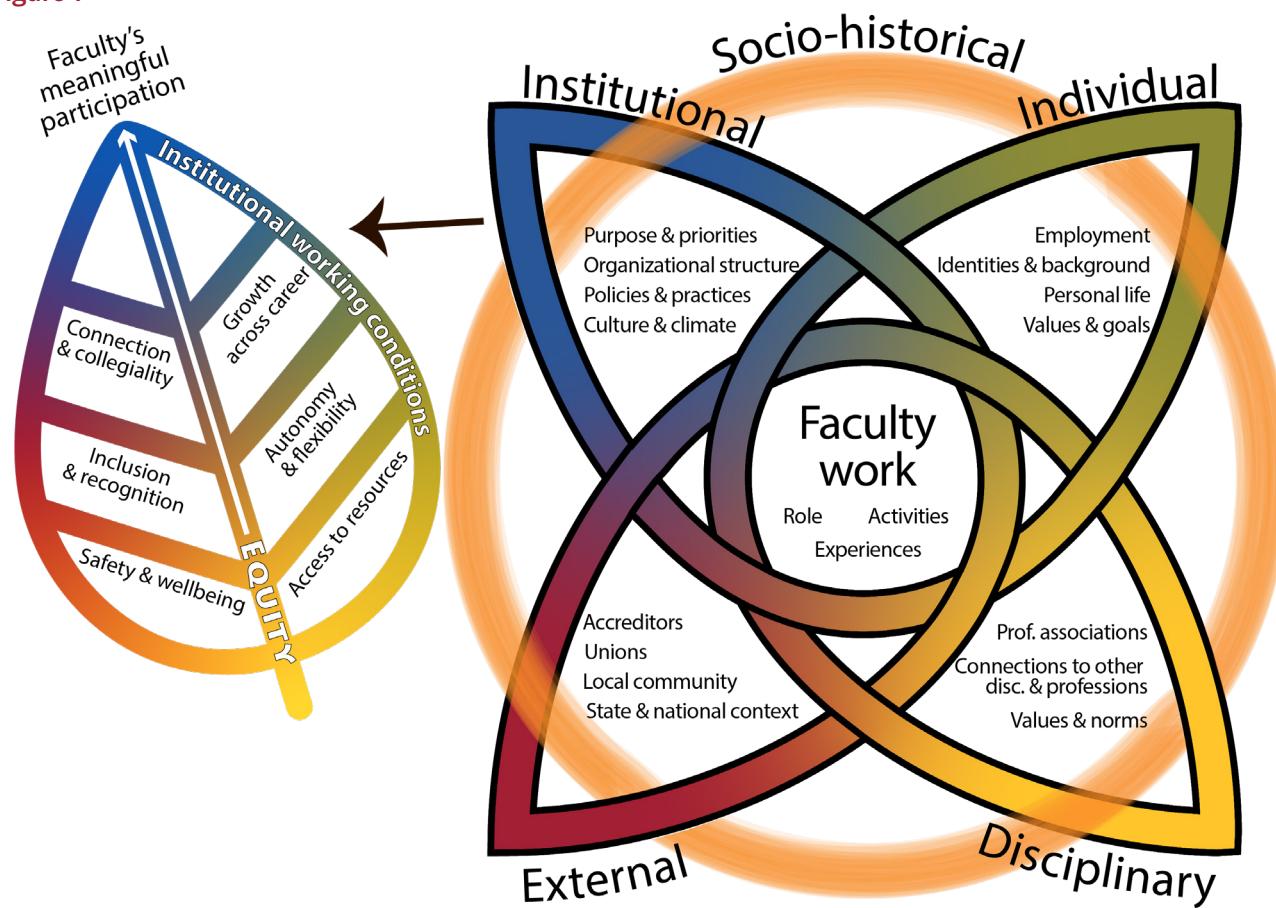
This report provides an overview of a new conceptual model of faculty work in the 21st century, one that addresses today's context, where academic capitalism and the gig academy have impacted faculty's work and work environments and where demographic shifts have led to a change in the makeup of the academic workforce. This framework explores dimensions of faculty experiences, roles, and working conditions across various societal, institutional, and individual contexts. We use the term "faculty" broadly to capture part-time and full-time employees in higher education whose primary responsibilities are focused on one or more areas of the academic triad model: teaching, research and scholarship, and/or service and community outreach. In some contexts, the term "faculty" is reserved for tenured and tenure-track employees or for full-time instructional staff. We believe that such distinctions create false hierarchies among members of the academic workforce that are unproductive.

The level of complexity in this framework — with a focus on faculty work in the context of individual identities and external, institutional, and disciplinary settings/factors, with detailed consideration of working conditions and acknowledgement of the multi-directional interaction of influences and faculty work within these various contexts and including both descriptive and value-based approaches. It allows for wide use by institutional leaders and policymakers, researchers studying faculty, and faculty and graduate students seeking to understand the academic profession. This framework offers a theoretical tool to help higher education institutions rethink their academic workspaces and provides support and contextual grounding for future research on faculty that reflects current and changing realities. The framework might be used to design surveys, identify programming needs, and assess equitable faculty working conditions for faculty across roles and identities.

The Faculty, Academic Careers and Environments (FACE) conceptual framework draws on past frameworks of faculty including Gappa et al. (2007), O' Meara et al. (2008), Austin (2011), Kezar & Maxey (2015), and Finkelstein et al. (2016). Additionally, the framework is influenced by several frameworks not typically used to study faculty in higher education. These include the U.S. Surgeon General's Framework for Workplace Mental Health & Well-Being (2022), Blumberg & Pringle's (1982) work performance theory, Alcoff (1988), Collins (1986) positionality theory, and Pendakur et al.'s (2019) conception of engagement.

**Figure 1** presents a diagram of the FACE conceptual framework. At the heart of our model is faculty work, which we define through the day-to-day lives of faculty members that emerges at the nexus of faculty members' roles, activities, and experiences (Kezar & Maxey, 2015; O'Meara et al., 2008). We use the term VITAL faculty, introduced by Levy (2019) as an acronym for Visiting, Instructional, Teaching, Adjunct, and Lecturer as an asset-minded term for faculty in these and research positions. The framework identifies four dimensions that influence faculty work: individual, disciplinary, institutional and external. Our depiction emphasizes the direct, reciprocal influence of each dimension and faculty work: Over time, the ways that individual faculty members enact their work shapes each of the four leaves, while these dimensions simultaneously determine the opportunities and constraints that faculty face. Further, the dimensions overlap and also influence one another, as with the role of state political context in shaping institutional structures and practices.

**Figure 1**



Our conceptual framework uses an ecological, dynamic mindset for how the dimensions impact each other. The integration of ecological and social perspectives also allows for greater attention to the systemic nature of privilege and oppression. For instance, socio-historical contexts related to systemic racism and sexism have shaped disciplinary contexts through the genderization of specific disciplines. The framework also emphasizes the reciprocal nature of individual and organizational influences. In other words, the meaningful participation of individual faculty members has both direct and indirect influences over the working conditions and contexts that faculty experience over time. Additionally, our framework reflects our holistic, humanizing focus on faculty's individual experiences and well-being.

We expand on the institutional influences that most directly shape faculty's opportunities for meaningful participation using an aspirational perspective. These working conditions most directly impact equity and inclusion among diverse faculty, with far reaching impact in terms of student learning, societal advancement of knowledge, and the sustainability of higher education. In adapting Pendakur and colleagues (2019)

conceptualization of the meaningful engagement of students for faculty, the framework positions faculty's meaningful participation as the dual responsibility of individuals and organizations, situated within the larger contexts and history of higher education in the United States. In other words, the socio-historical contexts, institutional contexts and working conditions, and disciplinary and external contexts shape meaningful participation. At the same time, individual faculty members' personal and professional identities and backgrounds as well as socialization also shape their meaningful participation.

On the next few pages, we describe each dimension of the framework, beginning with individual influences and concluding with institutional influences, so that we can connect the overall model with our aspirational expansion of the ways institutional working conditions shape faculty's opportunities for meaningful participation. We discuss theoretical underpinnings in the ways we approach the dimension and use existing scholarship to justify its relevance to the study of faculty in higher education. The examples listed in Figure 1 are not exhaustive; however, given their relevance, we italicize them here to highlight the connection to our diagram.



## Dimensions of Influences on Faculty Work

### Individual contexts

This dimension encompasses the *identities and backgrounds*, *personal lives*, *employment characteristics*, and *values and goals* that faculty bring to their roles. *Identities and backgrounds* include faculty's racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, religious affiliation, disability status, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation and educational background. Faculty's *personal lives* (relationships, family, hobbies, community commitments) shape their choices around work. *Employment* refers to the specific characteristics of an individual's role, including disciplinary affiliations, whether they are part-time or full-time and tenure-line or contingent. *Employment* also includes concurrent positions outside academia; these experiences impact faculty work, roles, and activities. Finally, the *values and goals* faculty bring to their work directly shape their choices, such as whether the courses they teach should have a community-engaged component.

We understand faculty's *individual characteristics* through positionality theory, which posits that faculty's

many social and professional identities shape their relative power and privilege in different contexts (Alcoff, 1988; Collins, 1993). It also demonstrates that these various aspects of *identity* are shaped by power conditions in society and also locally within institutions and departments. For example, faculty of color may feel tokenized within their department or institution, especially if they are surrounded by White peers (Neimann, 2016; Settles et al., 2019). They may take on additional responsibilities to mentor students of color or experience microaggressions and racial battle fatigue within their professional ecosystem (Hartlep & Ball, 2019; Smith, 2014).

### Disciplinary Contexts

Earlier frameworks tend to focus on disciplinary influences in terms of departmental policies (Gappa et al., 2007) and the practical impact of disciplines in terms of compensation differences (Finkelstein et al., 2016). We instead build from Austin (2011), who argues that disciplinary influence operates primarily through culture to shape faculty work. The various cultures become more visible through the grouping of disciplines into departments and colleges, as well as into *disciplinary societies* that provide opportunities for dissemination of research and practice as well as socialization. The bi-directional nature of influence is evident, as conference presentations given by faculty about their work both convey existing disciplinary *values and norms* and shape their future trajectory. Previous scholars have also conceptualized disciplines according to their *connection to other fields and professions* such as alignment within professional fields and structural components (Biglan, 1979; Becher, 1989; Stark, 1998). The types of knowledge and inquiry that are accepted and the normative principles and assumptions conveyed the types of questions asked within disciplines (Lattuca & Stark, 2009).

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## External Contexts

External influences shape faculty work through oversight and accountability, as well as through less visible forms of pressure (Finkelstein et al., 2016; Gappa et al., 2006). For instance, *regional accrediting organizations* regulate institutional accountability through attention to specific measures and the requirement of continuous improvement plans. *Accreditors* also shape faculty work attention to by conveying the relative value placed on teaching, research, and service. Austin's (2011) framework, for example, highlights the influence of accreditors through the example of ABET, which accredits engineering programs in the U.S., in fostering changes to faculty teaching practices in engineering that better support student learning. Collective bargaining through *unions* has been gaining attention and support over the last several decades with the goal of improving faculty's working conditions (Kezar et al., 2019). Additionally, *state and national contexts* have both direct and indirect influences on faculty work through legal, fiscal, regulatory, and advocacy pathways. Faculty also influence their *local communities* and external stakeholders through their work. In the U.S., the largest proportion of federally-funded basic research (46%) is conducted by faculty in higher education institutions (National Science Board, 2022).

## Institutional Contexts

Institutional influences include institutional *purpose and priorities*, *organizational structure*, and *cultures and climate*, many of which are enacted through *policies and practices* that shape the faculty role (Finkelstein et al., 2016). These policies and practices most directly determine faculty's working conditions and their opportunities for meaningful participation. The relative value given to aspects of faculty work is influenced by institutional missions, resources, and priorities. Dimensions of *organizational structure* such as institutional size, the number of programs, and the role of faculty governance bodies shape the opportunities that faculty have to contribute to institutional decision-making and for developing relationships with institutional leaders. Faculty also have varied experiences based on the different *cultures and climates* operating within an institution; institutional, college/school, and departmental contexts can be inclusive or antagonistic towards specific groups of faculty and can serve to promote equity or perpetuate hierarchies among various faculty roles. Contingent faculty may teach at multiple institutions and work within multiple institutional contexts simultaneously.



## Aspirational Framework for Fostering Equity and Faculty's Meaningful Participation

While each of the four dimensions detailed in Figure 1 contribute to faculty work, institutional *policies and practices* have the most direct influence over the working conditions that faculty experience on a daily basis. The leaf in the top left corner of Figure 1 uses an aspirational perspective to highlight how faculty's working conditions can foster their meaningful participation. Faculty's perceptions of institutional support vary according to the opportunities they are afforded based on their appointment and role (Culver et al., 2020); institutional structures and policies also often implicitly advantage faculty with privileged identities while devaluing the labor of faculty of color (Griffin et al., 2020). Thus, equity-centered *policies and practices* are critical to create supportive working conditions that facilitate faculty's contributions to the institution and their meaningful participation at work.

### Working Conditions

Working conditions result from the various policies, programs, and practices that institutions enact. In our asset-based model, we identify six categories of working conditions that define faculty's role, support or constrain different activities, and shape the experiences they have at work:

- *Safety and well-being*,
- *Access to functional resources*,
- *Autonomy and flexibility*,
- *Inclusion and recognition*,
- *Connection and collegiality*, and
- *Growth across the career span*

Our conceptualization of working conditions is grounded in previous work by Gappa et al.'s (2007) essential elements for rethinking faculty work experiences as well as the Office of the Surgeon General's (2022) framework for workplace mental health and well-being,



which recommends operationalizing diversity, equity and inclusion and normalizing mental health needs in the workplace.

### Safety and Well-being

*Physical, financial, and psychological safety and well-being* are basic human needs (Office of the Surgeon General, 2022). This includes employment security across roles, safety from harassment for faculty from underrepresented groups, and working conditions that promote work-life balance rather than burnout.

### Access to Functional Resources

Faculty cannot do their jobs well without *access to functional resources* such as office or lab space, computers, and other technology and supplies. In addition to infrastructure needed to do faculty work, these resources and physical spaces provide opportunities for communication and collaboration. VITAL faculty in particular often lack these resources which are crucial to supporting faculty work.

## ***Autonomy and Flexibility***

*Autonomy and flexibility* refers to the amount of control faculty have over how, when, and where their work is done (Gappa et al., 2007). Policies that allow flexible scheduling and paid leave, for example, impact faculty's perceptions of being supported at work. Like safety and well-being, autonomy and flexibility are core aspects of work-life balance that may mitigate burnout and increase productivity (The Office of the Surgeon General, 2022).

## ***Inclusion and Recognition***

Inclusion and recognition are working conditions that promote a culture of gratitude and recognition for all faculty. This component includes recognition in the form of awards, ceremonies, and profiles in alumni magazines, to name a few. VITAL faculty have often been excluded from, rather than included in, institutional decision-making, inhibiting their ability to contribute (Kezar, 2013). Policies and practices that foster *inclusion and recognition* support positive experiences of work, including faculty's sense of mattering as well as their ability to manage stress (Office of the Surgeon General, 2022).

## ***Connection and Collegiality***

This component refers to relationships and networks that provide faculty with support, information, and advice. In addition to relationships with peers and supervisors, the decision-making and communication practices of institutional leaders also impact connection and collegiality and may instill a sense of trust or insecurity among faculty (Gappa et al., 2007).

## ***Growth across Career Span***

Faculty across roles should have clear, equitable pathways for career advancement, including opportunities for leadership (Kezar & Maxey, 2016). *Growth across career span* refers to access to quality training, education, and mentoring for faculty of all types and at different stages of their career (Culver et al., 2023). Clear, equitable pathways for career advancement support faculty's interests, professional identity and sense of self-efficacy (Austin, 2011; Kezar & Maxey, 2016; Kezar et al., 2019).

## ***Meaningful Participation***

Our model employs a humanistic perspective that acknowledges the cognitive and affective dimensions of faculty work. By adapting Quaye and Harper's (2019) consideration of student engagement in the context of faculty, we situate meaningful participation as the dual responsibility of institutions and individual faculty. From an institutional perspective, meaningful participation emphasizes ways that individuals within the organization develop and uphold the institutional and departmental mission, values, and policies in practice. For faculty, meaningful participation reflects individual agency in deciding whether, where, and how to put forth effort in organizational initiatives, intellectual pursuits, disciplinary and professional communities, and local communities so that their efforts promote their sense of connection and fulfillment. Faculty who meaningfully participate are less likely to experience stress and burnout and are more likely to be satisfied, to feel a sense of belonging, and to invest in professional development that facilitates support student success and organizational success (Larson et al., 2017; O'Meara et al., 2016).

## The FACE Framework

The FACE framework incorporates current political, economic, and social forces that have been understudied in the past through a comprehensive understanding of faculty work and environments. Additionally, it presents an opportunity for examining the intersection of identity and faculty work in terms of agency and positionality which accounts for systems of privilege and power and is important for enriching research on the experiences of specific subgroups of faculty.

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## About the Pullias Center for Higher Education



### Promoting Equity in Higher Education

The world’s leading research center on student access and success in higher education, the Pullias Center for Higher Education advances equity in higher education and provides innovative, scalable solutions to both improve college outcomes for underserved students and to enhance the performance of postsecondary institutions. The Pullias Center is located within the USC Rossier School of Education.

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