

MPH and MHA Full-Time Faculty
Distance Work Pilot Project
October 1 - 31, 2008

"This is how life in academia is supposed to be"
Faculty participant

Final Report
December 27, 2008

Wendy Ringgenberg, PhD

On behalf of the MPH and MHA Full-Time Faculty

Carla Stebbins, PhD

Ann York, PhD

Denise Hill, J.D.

Fritz Nordengren, MPH

Simon Geletta, PhD

Mary Mincer Hansen, PhD

Roxane Joens-Matre, PhD

The MPH and MHA programs have experienced a high level of growth in course delivery with both online and on-campus students who have information needs around the clock (see Table 1). Responding to these non-traditional student needs, instructors teach during evening (5:30 - 9:30 p.m.), or weekends (Friday night 5:30 - 9:30 p.m. and Saturdays 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.) and online. Instructors in these programs find that student engagement, participation, and learning increases if the faculty frequently check into courses during all seven days as well as after the traditional working hours. This frequent instructor participation increases both instructor presence and social presence, two essential, evidenced based factors in learner success. In addition, advising online students is most effectively completed with this schedule of frequent checks on email during every day of the week. For example, Dr. Ringgenberg, while gone for 2 weeks in November 2007, received approximately 100 emails each day. Conversely, in this same time frame, she received only 4 voice mail messages. Many of the MPH ad MHA faculty reported this same level of email activity.

Table 1.

FA07	FA08
387	613

Total Registrations

FA07	FA08
200	295

Total Students Registered

FA07	FA08
1020	1726

Total Credits Sold

This high level of dedication has resulted in a problem becoming known as "work-life balance." Full-time faculty who serve on committees for the MPH or MHA programs, College of Health Sciences, Des Moines University, or community agencies find that their day-time hours are filled with meetings. This has left evenings and weekends for teaching, grading, answering email, and pursuing publication/scholarly activities. Faculty report that they feel

overwhelmed with work responsibilities and that they feel cheated out of time with their families. This work-life balance has been a topic of discussion among MPH and MHA faculty since July, 2007. One possible solution generated by MPH and MHA faculty was to create a distance work option. After all, the philosophy behind distance education - the niche of DMU's MPH and MHA programs - is that quality work and education can be accomplished using the internet, email, and telephone calls. It was a natural evolution to accept this philosophy for faculty work schedules.

In order to assess the idea of distance working, MPH and MHA faculty proposed one month where they were challenged to work on campus for no more than 2 days each week. This number was chosen because the intent of this pilot project was to challenge the systems that require on-campus presence. Faculty determined that October 2008 would be the best month for this pilot project.

The MPH and MHA faculty developed guidelines for their pilot project.

- Faculty must meet student needs.
- Faculty must meet teaching obligations.
- Faculty must meet service needs. If coming to campus is required, then faculty must use one of their days on campus to attend. However, if conference calls or other innovations can be arranged, faculty are challenged to work with the committee to do so.
- For the pilot 30 days, faculty will determine their schedules so that their on-campus days will be known to all other faculty, program assistants, and dean's office. The goal is to ensure that there is always an MPH faculty and an MHA faculty on-campus to help address issues that may develop during the week.
- Faculty must create a professional off-campus environment where they can answer the phone without background disruptions (e.g. no dogs barking, no children screaming).
- Faculty must participate in the program operations via email, telephone, and Groove conversations. Remember, the work continues even if faculty are not on campus.
- Faculty must document their daily activities, time spent in work, outcomes or accomplishments, and pros and cons of their daily experiences. Faculty are required to produce weekly evaluation reports and share with directors.

- Program staff, dean's office, and enrollment management will be asked for their feedback weekly.
- Faculty will review the DMU pilot policies for telecommuting and address specified items in their work logs and final report. Faculty may transfer their DMU phone calls to their home or cell phones.
- Outlook calendars need to reflect when faculty are off-campus.
- A Microsoft Groove site was created for all MPH and MHA faculty and staff. This is where a calendar was posted including all faculty's schedules, as well as a site for photos and discussion board.

Two hypotheses were generated by MPH and MHA faculty.

Hypothesis 1: Teaching, research, and service work for the MPH and MHA faculty can be accomplished using a new model of the work week where objectives are accomplished through distance communications, technology-assisted collaboration, and fewer days spent on the physical campus.

Null Hypothesis 1: Teaching, research, and service work for the MPH and MHA faculty cannot be accomplished using a new model of the work week where objectives are accomplished through distance communications, technology-assisted collaboration, and fewer days spent on the physical campus.

Hypothesis 2: Administration of the program and management of faculty can be accomplished using a new model of communication and performance-based evaluation that uses technology and less frequent days on the physical campus.

Null Hypothesis 2: Administration of the program and management of faculty cannot be accomplished using a new model of communication and performance-based evaluation that uses technology and less frequent days on the physical campus.

Methodology

MPH and MHA faculty knew that the greater DMU community would be interested in this proposed work schedule. DMU has a traditional, on-campus culture and faculty and students in clinical programs are expected to be on campus Monday-Friday. Any move toward a formal distance work schedule would need approval from the CHS dean and DMU human resources. Therefore, a comprehensive communication plan was initiated.

- Human Resources - Human Resources asked that all members of the MPH MHA faculty complete the Telework Agreement forms. These forms were drafted in August 2004 and assume that the employee will work 100% off campus. While this did not accurately reflect the MPH MHA Pilot Project, the forms were completed and submitted to HR.
- CHS Dean Cahalan - Dean Cahalan supported pursuit of the pilot project and encouraged ongoing communication with faculty and the DMU community.
- Council on Education for Public Health - Wendy Ringgenberg contacted CEPH to investigate if they had any opinion regarding the MPH program participating in this pilot project. CEPH has no opinion regarding this pilot project, but showed support for innovative efforts to resolve problems.
- DMU VP Steve Denge - Mr. Denge supported pursuit of the pilot project and wondered about possible benefits regarding parking and space utilization at DMU.
- CHS Program Directors - Program directors were supportive.
- DMU Institutional Technology Services - Dave Pierce and Deb Johnson were supportive.
- DMU President Branstad - Dean Cahalan presented the pilot project to Gov. Branstad who was supportive.
- DMU President's Cabinet - Dean Cahalan presented the pilot project to the DMU President's cabinet who were supportive.
- CHS Faculty - Wendy Ringgenberg presented the pilot project to the CHS faculty. While supportive of the pilot project, two concerns were voiced. One, working from a distance did not seem to directly address the work-life balance issues. Two, a pilot project should not be needed since all faculty have the right to establish their own schedules.

Beginning October 1, 2008, all eight faculty members of the MPH and MHA programs initiated the distance work pilot project, with being on campus only 2 days each week.

MPH and MHA faculty created two questionnaires using Survey Monkey online software. The first questionnaire was to be administered weekly to a selected group of participants, including MPH and MHA support staff, faculty, students, CHS program directors, CHS Dean's Office, Human Resources, Accounting, Financial Aid, Registrar, and Enrollment. Twenty-four individuals were surveyed weekly during the pilot project. They were asked:

As you know, MPH and MHA faculty are conducting a pilot project to see what working from a distance "looks like." As part of this pilot, we are interested in feedback from key people (namely, you) to let us know how our absence from the physical campus affects students, staff, faculty and college and university operations.

- 1. During this past week, what has been effective for MPH and MHA program operations or the operations of support departments?*
- 2. During the past week, what has not been effective?*
- 3. What recommendations do you have for the MPH and MHA program faculty to make the distance work efforts more effective?*

The eight MPH and MHA faculty participating in the pilot project were sent an additional survey each week regarding their time spent on teaching, research, and service activities. These faculty were also asked to rate their experience on the pilot project and to comment on their work/life balance.

Findings

The survey administered to all faculty and support departments generated useful information each week. All survey participants were given the option of choosing "No opinion" for each question. Comments were often descriptive of "no changes" in daily program

operations. Comments that provided insight for improvement are noted as these are actionable.

Table 2. Provides tabulated results. Comments are found below the table.

Table 2.

	Oct. 3	Oct. 10	Oct. 17	Oct. 24	Oct. 31
Effective	16/16 no opinion	5/15 no opinion	7/11 no opinion	<i>Survey was not deployed</i>	10/14 no opinion
Ineffective	8/16 no opinion	7/15 no opinion	7/11 no opinion		5/14 no opinion
Recommendations	9/16 no opinion	6/15 no opinion	7/11 no opinion		6/14 no opinion

*During this past week, what has been **effective** for MPH and MHA program operations or the operations of support departments?*

*During the past week, what has **not been effective**?*

*What **recommendations** do you have for the MPH and MHA program faculty to make the distance work efforts more effective?*

Comments:

For those departments and staff on campus:

- We need a schedule of when faculty members will be in the office.
- Student applications are not being processed as quickly as they do when faculty are in the office.
- We are having difficulty in scheduling prospective student visits because so many faculty are out of the office.
- Some days we have a fast email response from MPH and MHA faculty, and some days we don't.
- When faculty are not responding, we do not know if they are working offline, or if this is one of the times they are not working.
- MHA did not have a rep faculty one day on campus. Not a big deal, but different than my understanding that someone would be here for each program each day.
- This past week there was less communication and it was more difficult to contact the off-campus faculty. Additionally, there was some switching of schedules which impacts what students are told. For instance, when someone asks when someone will be in the office and you tell them one thing, but then the schedule is switched and the student has inadvertently been told the wrong thing.
- There were some negative remarks made by both students and other departmental faculty about having problems contacting off-campus pilot project participants.

- Access to documents and information on common drives and on-campus items is limited. I've received requests for information and assistance on projects when that info is readily available to faculty when they are on campus.
- I needed to speak with one person and was unable to reach them by phone. This was after I had been waiting for a couple days for a response to an email. I was so disappointed that I couldn't even leave a voice message. I had to contact the secretary, who then had to try and reach the faculty member. Finally, the faculty member returned my call. If phones don't roll to the person's home number, they should at least have voice mail and check both email and voice mail messages regularly. This was very disruptive to me and the secretary.

For those MPH and MHA faculty participating in the pilot project:

- I need to education our family members that just because we are home, does not mean I am free to play.
- We need to give ourselves permission to not work day and night.
- We need a dedicated office at our homes.
- We are getting to better know each other on a more personal level.
- Honestly, it doesn't feel much different.
- When conference calls work, they are very effective. However, we need a more convenient way to access conference calls.
- Fileway was not working, and off-campus faculty need to be able to access I drive files.
- As a faculty member, I do not want to give out my personal cell phone number.
- I am more effective in getting reports and manuscripts done.
- Sharepoint has been down, so unable to access/use electronic student folders.
- Now that I am reserving only 2 days per week for meetings, I often have 16 hours of meetings contained within those 2 days. Is 16 hours of meetings a week realistic? During those two days, I am unable to respond to emails or phone calls because my meetings are back-to-back, or even scheduled over each other. However, I can then undertake bigger projects on the days where I do not have meetings because I can work uninterrupted.
- I was able to help an adjunct by calling security from my home, get the door opened to Munroe, participated in a number of conference calls, and called people to discuss issues.

The second survey was administered weekly to MPH and MHA faculty participating in the pilot project. The intention of this survey was to collect information regarding teaching, research, and service activities for comparison to on-campus activities. Faculty completed the

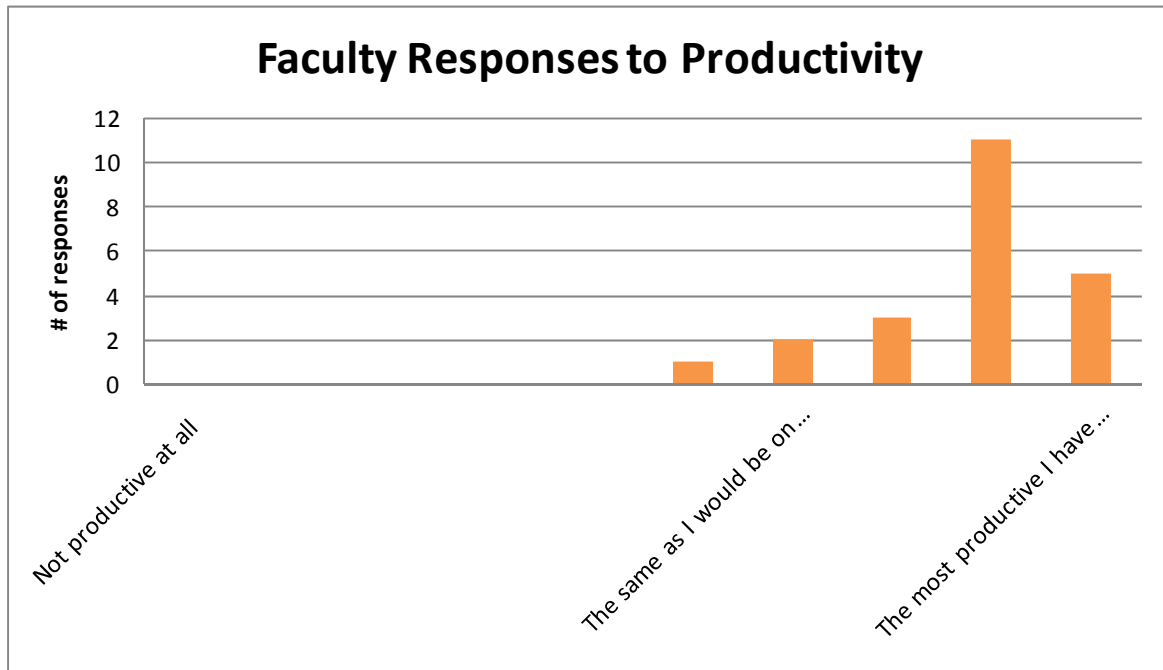
questionnaire, but it was soon discovered that the distance work arrangement was just like "regular" work, only without as many interruptions, and with an increased feeling of connection with home. Faculty continued to meet teaching, research and service activities (acknowledging the limitations already listed above).

Faculty were asked to comment on the work-life balance each week. Overall, faculty found the new work schedule to meet their needs for work and for family. Below are some of the comments shared:

- Great flow between home and work. Feels more comfortable all the time.
- I became better able to find a balance as the pilot project progressed. I found that I could concentrate and then take short health breaks and then stop working for a period of time for dinner and then only get on the computer for a short time to check message, and then focus on family. That way I was able to be responsive to both work and family and my own need for relaxation and exercise.
- I kept up on emails via Blackberry. If I had not, then I would have over 400 emails when I returned. In contrast, I had one phone call.
- My friends and family have commented that I seem less stressed and happier with this new arrangement. I feel like I am getting more done in all areas of my life.
- I found this week that I was even more productive at home and truly enjoyed the ability to focus without distractions in a comfortable environment. The issue became knowing when to break from work. I made a conscious effort not to work on Saturday and that worked well.
- I store many of my emails and correspondence with students on the I drive. I do not know how to access these things on the I drive from home especially when Fileway and Sharepoint are down. Also, my outlook and my Word have been freezing up on me, leaving me without access to campus and inability to write on my computer. I am finding that my focus when I am off campus is to work, uninterrupted, on big projects. This is wonderful. And yet, when I am not online, then I feel that I am not accessible. Perhaps the off-campus work for me needs to look like check email in the morning, check email after lunch, and otherwise, have people call me.

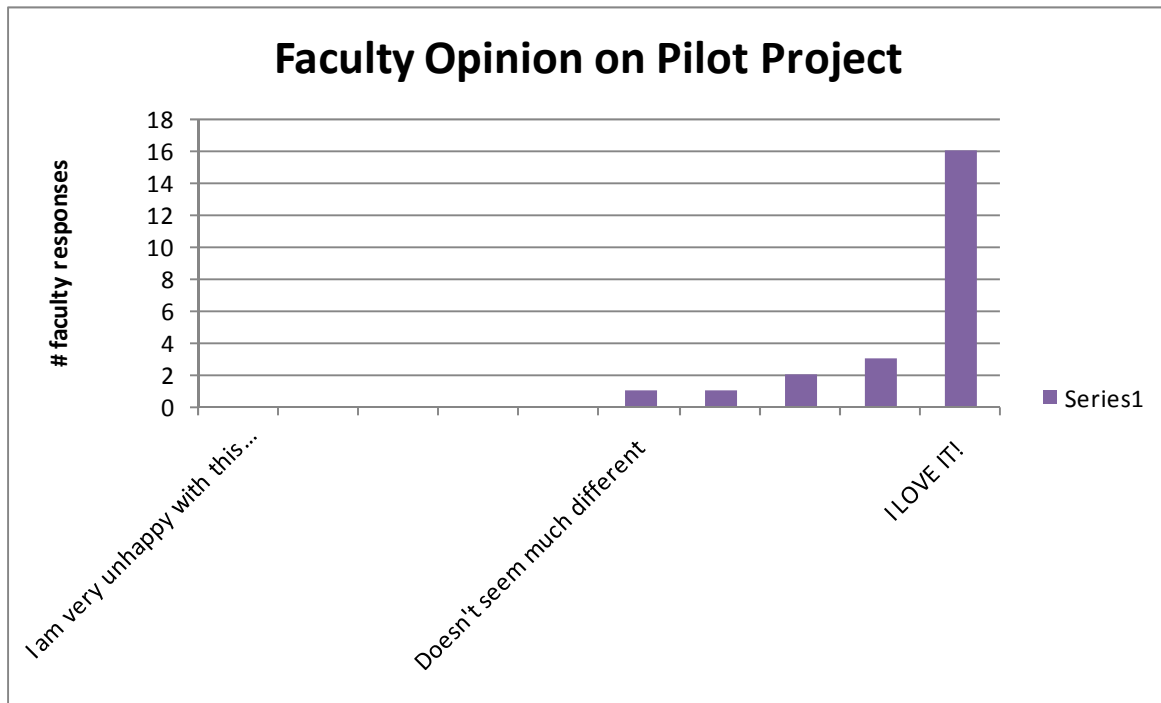
Faculty were also asked to rate their week's productivity. Graph 1 illustrate faculty's responses. Faculty believe they were as productive as they are on campus and most responses reflected that faculty in the pilot project perceived they were more productive than they are on-

campus. When asked their thoughts on why, themes of responses included the ability to work uninterrupted which has increased the opportunity to concentrate more on projects.



Graph 1.

MPH and MHA faculty were also asked to rate their personal satisfaction regarding the pilot project work arrangement. Faculty responses ranged from "it doesn't seem much different" to a majority who reported "I love it!" When asked to name the reasons, themes included autonomy, flexibility, suits personal work style, ability to work uninterrupted means I am more productive, the reduced activity of my work at home days means no need to get ready for work, drive to campus, look for a parking spot, lug heavy bags to the office, and then at the end of the day, lug bags back home to work at home, etc. Potential drawbacks included the need for a designated and supplied office, as well as use of cell phone minutes or long-distance phone call charges for taking care of business at home. In addition, many faculty mentioned that they missed seeing people on campus, but the trade-off for effective work at home two-days each week was worth it.



Graph 2.

Conclusions

The purpose of this pilot project was to experiment with faculty taking back their own schedule and seeing how it fits with the DMU traditional, M-F, 8 a.m.- 4:30 p.m. schedule. First, it was shown that faculty who participated in this project felt an ability to be more productive, less "out of control", and to better balance work and family life needs because of an ability to gauge evening and weekend work hours and then not work during day hours in exchange. Faculty found that research activities, such as grant proposals, presentations and manuscripts, and grading of assignments, can be done more effectively in the quiet surroundings of their homes or other locations versus the physical office space at DMU.

Second, the feeling that there is pressure from all of the support departments at DMU for MPH and MHA program faculty to respond to emails during day-time hours is real. The M-F

corporate culture does exert the feeling that faculty are to be working during each day and to be available for meetings as needed during the day. The difference in work hours for MPH and MHA faculty is also real, and continued conversations need to address the university operations and the recognition that a full-time work week for faculty is intended on being 40-50 hours per week, not 60-70 hours which is what many faculty end up putting in while they work during each day, each evening and each Saturday and Sunday. Posted work hours for faculty, showing when they are available for meetings is one way to resolve this. However, email and phone responses may need to be discussed because if faculty work on a weekend, then they may take 2 days during the week and not work (including not responding to emails and phone calls). This would be actual time off, and not "working from home."

Third, this pilot project showed that program operations can continue and the needs of all parties can be met with better communication regarding when faculty will be available in the office.

Fourth, innovation in communication (conference calls, Skype, Groove) are the burden of the party requesting the change, and they can be difficult to ensure that all key stakeholders have the appropriate equipment. Emails and phone calls continue to be normal mode of communication. There was one comment that MPH and MHA faculty were saying they could attend meetings, and then not attending because the meeting fell on days when they were off campus. This would need to be resolved.

Fifth, campus voicemail messages did not convey to callers that faculty were not on-campus and faculty did not check in to voice mail daily. This situation would need to be remedied. However, since voicemail can only be set-up for forwarding from campus, it would need to be done daily by the program assistants which seems an incredible burden on them.

Sixth, there would need to be accommodations made for obtaining signatures on documents so that program operations can continue.

Finally, other than responsiveness to email and phone calls, it seemed as though this change in faculty scheduling did not affect program operations nor the operations of other departments. In fact, many of the support departments said that they didn't notice any differences in their interactions with MPH and MHA faculty during the pilot project.

Recommendations

DMU should continue to support the non-traditional programs to find work-life balance through innovation in both their course delivery and faculty schedules. The MPH and MHA programs should continue to strive to find work-life balance while meeting student, teaching, research, service, and program operation needs.

The MPH and MHA faculty should post faculty office hours, and make sure these do not change. Perhaps an on-campus physical posting, online posting, and including the hours in their voicemail would communicate the hours most effectively.

Faculty showed great satisfaction in the distance work arrangement, and have identified home office needs if the arrangement would result in shared office space on the DMU campus. For example, reimbursement for at home telephone needs, printing, faxing, and internet costs would be necessary.