Sludge in academia – what it is

- Cass R. Sunstein, Harvard University law professor & tech advisory group to WHO on behavioral insights and sciences for health
  - Recently highlighted in Inside Higher Ed.
  - Sludge can be “understood to consist of frictions that separate people from what they want to get.”
  - Sludge represents the extra (and often unnecessary) time and energy need to do relatively straightforward tasks
  - Origin may be well-intended (e.g. self-governance, accountability)
  - Leads to a decrease in morale, leaves less time and energy for other thinking and creativity
Sludge in academia – where do you see it

• Take 5 minutes to talk with your table

• Identify at least three sources of sludge either in your workload or the workload of your faculty
  • Ask:
    What do we do here that makes no sense to you?
    What are the biggest obstacles to getting things done?
    Which of our practices seem stricter than they need to be?
    If there is one thing you could change, what would it be?

• Identify commonalties, low-hanging fruit

• Be ready to report back to the room by table
Sludge in academia – what we can do about it

**Simple 5-step process**

- **Announce**
  - Define, create awareness
- **Identify**
  - Redundancies, over burdensome committee work, processes too long or too frequent, inequities in workload
- **Prioritize**
  - What can you work on now, what is most needed
- **Focus**
- **Reduce**
  - Teaching innovation, committee term limits, committee → 1 person, change staff/faculty balance of workload

**Benefits**

- Improve morale and climate
- Address inequities in workload, especially service → COACHE
- Identify under-supported efforts
- Better use of resources, right-sizing tasks
- Allows unit leaders to be more efficient (e.g. performance review, budget, faculty workload, hiring)
- Build trust within and across units

- *Trickle down effects can lead to better student, staff, and faculty recruitment and retention*