



**Missouri State**<sup>™</sup>  
U N I V E R S I T Y

## Faculty Concerns Survey 2008

### A Biennial Report from the Faculty Concerns Committee

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## **2008-2009 Missouri State University Faculty Concerns Survey Executive Summary**

Overall satisfaction with being a faculty member at Missouri State University is the highest on record. A majority of items measured showed statistically significant improvements in comparison to the 2006 ratings, with the largest, most tangible improvements observed concerning faculty satisfaction with their deans' performances, their base salaries, and the merit system.

While the overall picture is brighter, faculty still register dissatisfaction on several items, most of which concern compensation, especially inequities in pay and teaching loads, and the merit pay system. While satisfaction improved in many compensation-related areas, typically the changes do not represent that the faculty are satisfied, but more that they are less dissatisfied.

In terms of associations with overall satisfaction, all assessed areas are significantly and positively related. However, several areas stand out such as the direction the University is moving, the level of shared governance, the perceived performance of the University President, and the degree to which administration follows written university policies. Each of these areas has a strong association, i.e., large effect size, with overall faculty satisfaction and thereby warrants continued attention or improvements.

Results on turnover pressures or threats to faculty retention, showed a brighter picture than previously seen. Fewer faculty members are considering leaving, are actively looking, or plan to leave or retire in the imminent future. Correlation analysis shows that some areas are particularly associated with turnover pressures, excluding the intent to retire, such as the degree to which administration follows written university policies, content of college policies and the procedures by which those policies are made, the way discretionary monies are used to reward merit/equity, future salary prospects, current nine-month salary, and level of shared governance. Continued attention or improvements made on these conditions hold promise for retaining talented personnel.

Integration of the public affairs mission components into faculty's work were among the most endorsed items, indicating broad engagement with the mission. Approximately 30% of respondents felt pressure to inflate grades and 10% to deflate grades, with female faculty more frequently feeling a pressure to deflate than male faculty. The clearest sources of pressure for inflating grades were student retention concerns and merit evaluation concerns. When faculty did identify experiencing grade inflation or deflation pressures, they identified student retention initiatives and the merit/faculty evaluation process as the most frequently occurring sources of that pressure.

Some groups of faculty appear to have similar perceptions as other groups. For example, analyses by gender, tenure status and rank largely show a pattern of consistency for each of these groups. However, analyses by college and department show more varied pictures. College results and interpretation is included in this report. Tables conveying Departmental

results are available in the Appendix under Additional Tables. The departmental tables may be very useful for department heads, deans, and interested faculty members, particularly concerning approximately 15 items that measure most clearly the faculty perception of departmental climate and Head performance.

The qualitative results from one open-ended question yielded useful information about sources of dissatisfaction for some faculty, which clustered around concerns about administrator performance, a bad working environment, and sufficiency of resources and resource allocations. There were also some positive comments about faculty satisfaction in this data. Although generally the faculty is more satisfied than last year, the qualitative data illuminates some details of specific areas in need of improvement for the few who are less satisfied.

The report concludes with recommendations that focus on the relatively high faculty satisfaction, the correlations between specific areas and this overall satisfaction, the correlations between specific factors and turnover/faculty retention pressures, and an invitation for further review by Deans, Heads, and interested faculty at the departmental level where results show significant variability.

# Narrative Report

## INTRODUCTION

### PURPOSE

The *Faculty Concerns Survey* (FCS) reports faculty perceptions of university conditions that support faculty morale and university productivity. This survey is administered biennially, and is one way of meeting the Faculty Concerns Committee's mission to serve as a board for continuous review of faculty rights and responsibilities, invite items of concern, and initiate and advocate for faculty and administrative discussions. Data collected over a 12-year span (1997 to 2008) are reported within this summary. The Faculty Concerns Committee (FCC) conducted the present survey in November 2008.

### CURRENT CONTEXT AND PARTICIPATION RATE

In 2006, two primary initiatives publicized by the University President included instituting a merit and equity based compensation system and enhancing the diversity climate of the University community. Another significant change initiated in 2006 was the University moving to a college-cost-structure model, enhancing budgetary and strategic discretion and thus increasing accountability at the college level of the University. The 2008 survey was expected to get faculty feedback and opinion on how these 2006 initiatives have fared. More recently, two additional issues have been brought into focus: concern about grade inflation and deflation and maturation of the public affairs mission. Accordingly, the current survey added questions related to pressures faculty might be feeling to inflate/deflate grades under the new merit pay system and questions related to the definition and integration of the recently articulated three components of the Public Affairs mission into faculty work. Across the University, a total of 421 faculty participated in the 2008 Faculty Concerns Survey representing an estimated participation rate of 59%.

### MEASURE

The survey contained 89 items. For questions 1 through 82, about University Conditions, scale anchors ranged from (1) *extremely dissatisfied* to (5) *extremely satisfied*. For questions 83 to 89, response options ranged from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*. For the first time on the FCS, faculty members were invited to provide additional comments, which served as a qualitative component. Since some of the questions in the 2008 survey were new, the committee was unable to report longitudinal data on those items. Longitudinal data is also provided for all other items on the survey. The Faculty Concerns Committee received IRB approval to advance protection for faculty participants. This was the first time the survey was administered electronically. Four hundred twenty-one faculty members responded to the survey. Tables corresponding with all discussions are at the end of this report. Additionally, several new questions were added to gauge faculty perception about both the existence and source of grade inflation pressure and to what extent they believe they have integrated the Public Affairs mission

into their work. Along with very minor changes to questions 1 – 54, the FCC added the following items to the survey:

*Q55: I feel pressured to inflate grades*

*Q56: I feel pressured to deflate grades*

*Q 57: I feel pressure from administrators*

*Q58: I feel pressure from peers/department cultural norms*

*Q59: I feel pressure from student evaluations*

*Q60: I feel pressure from the evaluation process (merit pay, promotion and tenure).*

*Q61: I feel pressure from student retention concerns.*

*Q87: I clearly integrate the community engagement component of the public affairs mission into my work for the University*

*Q88: I clearly integrate the cultural competence component of the public affairs mission into my work for the University*

*Q89: I clearly integrate the ethical leadership component of the public affairs mission into my work for the University*

## **OVERALL RESULTS**

### **AREAS OF MOST SATISFACTION**

Table I reports all questions related to faculty satisfaction. Areas of most satisfaction appear at the start of the table. These show that in 2008 the top ten items were as follows:

- The assignment of classes and the extent to which they matched the interests and backgrounds of faculty members.
- Congeniality of colleagues
- Quality of faculty
- Computer support for faculty
- Services and faculty use of Taylor Health and Wellness Center
- Library facilities and its support to faculty
- General quality and performance of department heads
- Computer support for students
- Overall satisfaction with being an MSU faculty member
- Library facilities and its support for students

Class assignments, appreciation for colleagues, and services available to faculty and students ranked towards the top of the satisfaction rankings.

### **AREAS OF LEAST SATISFACTION**

Areas of least satisfaction appear near the end of Table I. The items that ranked at the bottom on the list of satisfaction, with the least satisfied presented first in this list are:

- Salary differentials that exist across campus

- Abolition of cost of living increases in favor of replacement pay for performance and equity
- Differential teaching loads across campus
- Future salary prospects
- Procedure by which equity adjustment salary decisions are made
- Compensation for overload courses
- Compensation for per-course faculty
- Procedures by which performance and merit salary decisions are made
- Rate of pay for summer teaching
- The way discretionary monies are used to reward merit equity

Thus, one can see that salary and merit pay related issues generally ranked towards the bottom of the satisfaction ranking list.

### **CORRELATIONS WITH OVERALL SATISFACTION**

There were positive and significant correlations between all assessed areas of satisfaction and respondents' overall satisfaction with being a faculty member at Missouri State University. Hence continued attention or improvements made on any of the assessed factors hold promise for maintaining or increasing faculty members' overall satisfaction. However, certain areas stood out by the strength of their correlations. The four highest correlations with overall satisfaction, all above  $r = 0.5$ , were found for satisfaction with

- The direction the University is moving
- The level of shared governance
- The perceived performance of the University President
- The degree to which administration follows written university policies

The next highest correlations with overall satisfaction, above  $r = 0.40$ , were satisfaction with

- The content of general university policies, policies of your college, and policies of your department
- The procedures by which general university policies and priorities are made and communicated to faculty
- The future salary prospects
- The availability of research opportunities
- The way discretionary monies are used to reward merit/equity
- The congeniality of colleagues
- The perceived performance of the board of governors and Provost
- Committee assignments and duties.

Focus on the above factors hold greater promise for maintaining or increasing overall satisfaction.

## **FACULTY RETENTION/TURNOVER PRESSURES**

Table II reports descriptive statistics for the extent of agreement questions. The results indicate that there were fewer faculty members who agreed with questions related to their consideration or intent to leave Missouri State University. As one might expect, many more people think about leaving than actually plan to leave, look for other positions, or retire from the University. In particular, relatively few people plan on retiring from MSU within the next five years. This appears to correspond with faculty satisfaction with being an MSU employee seen above, but also could be interpreted in light of the extraordinary global economic recession.

Table XXXI reports correlations between the satisfaction items and the questions related to turnover pressures/faculty retention. One finds high and negative statistically significant correlations between overall satisfaction and the three main turnover related questions. The highest correlation is related to overall satisfaction that faculty members feel about being at MSU and his/her thoughts about leaving the university. This show that the more satisfied a faculty member is the less likely he/she is to contemplate leaving the University. The second highest correlation is between overall satisfaction and faculty members actively looking for other academic positions elsewhere while the third highest correlation is between overall satisfaction and whether the faculty member plans on leaving MSU within the next year.

In terms of other factors associated with the turnover pressure items, the strongest associations with the turnover pressures were:

- The degree to which administration follows written university policies
- Content of college policies and the procedures by which those policies are made
- The way discretionary monies are used to reward merit/equity
- Future salary prospects
- Current nine-month salary
- Level of shared governance

The associations were generally larger, above  $r = 0.40$  for often thinking about leaving and smaller, usually in the range of  $r = 0.20 - 0.30$ , for planning to leave or looking for other academic positions elsewhere. In other words, continued attention or improvements in the above areas may be most helpful in retaining excellent faculty.

## **LONGITUDINAL COMPARISONS**

### **TWELVE-YEAR COMPARISONS**

Table III compares longitudinal results for the last 12 years. Questions 1 and 6 assess perhaps the broadest dimensions. Results on these items show that faculty perception of the direction the university is moving and their overall satisfaction are the highest on record. Faculty satisfaction with the general quality of MSU faculty, congeniality of colleagues, assignment of classes, and services at Taylor Health Center and the Libraries have generally remained stable among the most satisfied areas.

A trend for most items receiving the lowest satisfaction ratings in 2008— mostly concerned with compensation— is that they represent improvements over the course of 12 years, especially in the last two years. In other words, though faculty members are still not satisfied on average, faculty members are not as dissatisfied historically speaking. Another trend that emerges from the data is the reduction in the likelihood of faculty members considering leaving the university, especially as compared with 2006.

### **SIGNIFICANT CHANGES FROM 2006**

There were 52 changes in faculty perception between 2006 and 2008 that reached statistical significance using Mann-Whitney U Tests. In order to explain the “meaningfulness” of these changes, effect sizes, (i.e., Cohen’s *d*) were utilized, revealing that there were 37 changes that reached the 0.2 threshold of a “small” or greater effect size. Only two of these changes were not in a desirable direction (e.g., more satisfaction) and both of these were small. In other words using the concept of minimal meaningfulness, there were many positive changes in the climate for Missouri State University. Table IV lists the top 10 positive changes and the top two negative changes. Hence, most people could probably sense that there has been a positive change in the performance of their college deans (Q74), their current nine-month salaries (Q55), the way discretionary monies are used to reward merit (Q39), procedures by which policies are made in your department (Q 38) and future salary prospects (Q56). The two meaningful, but still small, negative changes concerned faculty perception of the performance of the Provost (Q71) and distance learning instructional support (Q22). The other changes listed in Table IV represent some practical significance compared to changes on most other items.

## **CURRENT ISSUES**

### **PUBLIC AFFAIRS MISSION**

As Table II shows, faculty generally responded favorably to the integration of the public affairs mission into their work. The greatest agreement among faculty members is on the question of integrating the ethical leadership components of the Public Affairs mission into their work for the University.

### **GRADE INFLATION AND DEFLATION PRESSURES**

The 2008 survey included questions related to pressure faculty feel to inflate or deflate grades and the sources of those pressures. Table XXIX presents data on sources from which faculty felt pressure to inflate grades. Table XXX presents analysis of sources from which faculty felt pressure to deflate grades. These show that 128 respondents, 30%, feel pressure to inflate grades. In contrast, 41, 10% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt pressure to deflate grades. Hence, a large minority of faculty identified themselves as feeling these pressures.

Faculty members were also asked about the different sources of pressure to inflate/deflate grades. Top two sources of pressure to inflate grades:

- Student Retention (57%)
- Merit/Faculty Evaluation process (53%)

All suggested influences, including the above two sources, student evaluations, administrators, and departmental cultural norms/peers and an “other” category showed very similar endorsements (near 25-30% each), suggesting that sources of pressure to deflate grades are more diffuse. Female faculty, more frequently than male faculty, were amongst the group feeling pressure to deflate grades. Rank, tenure status, or gender did not appear to have a relationship with inflation or deflation in any other configuration.

## **RESULTS BY COLLEGE**

Table V- Table XI provides comprehensive information about how satisfied faculty members are in the various colleges. The top and bottom two satisfaction items by College were as follows:

### College of Arts and Letters (COAL)

Top two

- Assignment of classes
- Quality of faculty

Bottom two:

- Salary differentials that exist across the University
- Differential teaching loads

### College of Business Administration (COBA)

Top two

- Assignment of classes
- Services and faculty use of Taylor Health and Wellness Center

Bottom two

- Procedure by which performance and merit salary decisions are made
- The way discretionary monies are used to reward merit/equity

### College of Education

Top two

- Library facilities and support to faculty
- Library holding of books and journals

Bottom two

- Salary differentials and exist across MSU
- Procedures by which equity adjustment and salary decisions are made

### College of Health and Human Services (CHHS)

Top two

- Assignment of classes
- Computer support to faculty

Bottom two

- Salary differentials that exist across MSU
- Differential teaching loads across campus

College of Humanities and Public Affairs (CHPA)

## Top two

- Personal office facilities
- Classroom facilities

## Bottom two

- Future salary prospects
- Salary differentials that exist across campus

College of Natural and Applied Sciences (CNAS)

## Top two

- Assignment of classes
- Congeniality of colleagues

## Bottom two

- Salary differentials and exist across campus
- Future salary prospects

Libraries

## Top two

- Use of Taylor Health and Wellness facilities
- Quality of faculty

## Bottom two

- Abolition of cost of living increases in favor of replacement pay for performance and equity
- Salary differentials that exist across campus

Table XII – Table XVIII provides the mean responses relating to agree/disagree related questions for the seven colleges. These show that across all colleges the item on which they agree the most is in incorporating one of the three components of the Public Affairs Mission into their work at MSU.

The particular component of the Public Affairs Mission most agreed on by College:

- College of Arts and Letters
  - Cultural component of the Public Affairs Mission
- College of Business
  - Ethical component of the Public Affairs Mission
- College of Education
  - Community engagement component of the Public Affairs Mission
- College of Health and Human Services
  - Ethical component of the Public Affairs Mission
- College of Humanities and Public Affairs

- Cultural component of the Public Affairs Mission
- College of Natural and Applied Sciences
  - Community engagement component of the Public Affairs Mission
- Libraries
  - Ethical leadership component of the Public Affairs Mission

## **GENDER, RANK, AND TENURE STATUS**

### **SATISFACTION BY GENDER**

Table XIX and Table XX reports satisfaction questions segregated by gender across the University. This shows that congeniality of colleagues, quality of faculty, and computer support for faculty ranks among the four highest ranked items for both male and female faculty members. There appears to be much agreement across gender in terms of the lowest ranked items as well.

Top satisfaction items by male faculty:

- Assignment of classes
- Congeniality of colleagues

Top satisfaction items by female faculty:

- Congeniality of colleagues
- Quality of faculty members

Lowest satisfaction items by male faculty:

- Differential teaching load across campus
- Salary differentials that exist across MSU.

Lowest satisfaction items by female faculty:

- Abolition of cost of living in favor of replacement pay for performance and equity
- Salary differentials that exist across MSU.

### **SATISFACTION BY TENURE STATUS**

Table XXI and Table XXII reports satisfaction questions segregated by tenure status with similarities generally found between the two groups.

Top satisfaction items by tenured faculty:

- Assignment of classes
- Quality of faculty

Top satisfaction items by untenured faculty:

- Congeniality of colleagues
- Overall satisfaction with being a MSU faculty member

Lowest satisfaction items by tenured faculty:

- Abolition of cost of living for replacement pay for performance and equity
- Salary differentials that exist across campus

Lowest satisfaction items by untenured faculty:

- Future salary prospects
- Salary differentials that exist across MSU

### **SATISFACTION BY RANK**

Table XXIII – Table XXVI reports satisfaction questions based on rank, again reflecting general agreement in the top and bottom satisfaction items for the different ranks of faculty.

Top satisfaction items by rank:

Full Professor:

- Assignment of classes
- Quality of faculty.

Associate Professors:

- Assignment of classes
- Computer support to faculty

Assistant Professors:

- Congeniality of colleagues
- Assignment of classes

Instructors:

- General quality of performance of department heads
- Computer support for faculty

The lowest satisfaction items by rank:

Full Professor:

- Differential teaching load across campus
- Salary differentials that exist across MSU

Associate professors:

- Future salary prospects
- Salary differentials that exist across MSU

Assistant Professors:

- Compensation for overload courses
- Salary differentials that exist across MSU

Instructors:

- Future salary prospects
- Salary differentials that exist across MSU

### **ANALYSIS OF RANK AND TENURE STATUS BY GENDER**

Table XVII provides a cross tabulation between gender and tenure status. This shows that among tenured faculty 60.8% are male while 39.2% are female. Among untenured faculty, 36.3% are male and 63.7% are female. Another way of presenting the data would be among male faculty members a little over 74% are tenured and about 26% are untenured while among female faculty about 51% are tenured and the about 49% untenured. Thus, one finds some disproportion when considering tenure status by gender.

Table XVIII provides cross tabulations between gender and rank. This shows that among full professors 73.4% are male while 26.6% are female. Among Associate professors, 54.3% are male while 45.7% are female. Among assistant professors 49.4% are male and 50.6% female, and among instructors 19.5% are male while 80.5% female. This shows again that the distribution is disproportionately skewed towards males as the rank status gets higher.

### **QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT**

Respondents were given an opportunity to provide a brief qualitative comment at the end of the survey, an invitation not previously extended in the Biennial Faculty Concerns Survey. Some of the assessments that faculty concerns committee conducted last year (e.g., assessment of president and provost, departmental climate) however did have qualitative data. Emergent themes and the grounded theory process utilized in the 2007 surveys informed the approach used in this 2008 survey.

There were 91 respondents who wrote a comment. The committee defined 158 units, that is, separate ideas within those 91 comments. Those 158 units were then combined into 33 emergent themes. The most prominent themes that are reflected by the most number of units were defined as:

- The Merit System is negative
- The Public Affairs mission is unclear, confusing, and/or negative
- The Provost's effectiveness is questioned, sometimes tied to the public affairs theme
- Faculty are generally happy and/or satisfied, sometimes qualified with limiting factors
- Faculty are underpaid

The 33 themes were then further combined into four composite themes. The composite themes from the 2007 Faculty Concerns Surveys were used as a template for 2008. These themes help organize the data and create a better understanding of commentators' feelings. The composite themes in their order of occurrence were:

- Administration performance concerns (51/32.4%)
- Perceptions of a bad working environment (46/29.2%)
- Resource concerns (36/22.9%)
- Positive responses (11/7%)

As seen from the list, the fewest comments were made by participants about their happiness or satisfaction. This was predictable as voluntary general comments at the end of a survey are more likely to be made by those who are dissatisfied than those who are satisfied. Those who were satisfied indicated this in two ways, 1) happiness with their department leadership and collegiality, and 2) an overall sense of happiness with working at the university. Faculty who indicated that they are satisfied at the university, by virtue of being satisfied, often will comment less frequently in an open-ended survey unless directly asked to explain their satisfaction.

When considering the qualitative assessment results in relation to the quantitative results, one can surmise that generally, faculty are more satisfied with being a faculty member at MSU, with the performance of the deans, and the merit pay system. However, those who are not satisfied, are concerned with the utility and fairness of the merit system, the articulation and clarity of the public affairs mission, and the performance of administrators, most frequently the Provost. Therefore, these comments are utilized by the committee as points of clarity in an attempt to understand what faculty dissatisfaction looks like when there is dissatisfaction.

## **RESULTS BY DEPARTMENT**

Tables conveying the results by Department, with 5 or more respondents, are available in the Appendix of Tables. In general about 15 of the 90 items may be very useful for interested persons to explore, as they concern departmental faculty members' perceptions of policies and procedures within departments and the performance of departmental and college level administrators, respectively. These results may be particularly interesting to college and departmental administrators and departmental faculty interested in understanding faculty perceptions as they relate to morale and university productivity. By way of overall interpretation, a few departments have very different results from other departments, representing very different faculty satisfaction levels. Differences by department appear to more meaningfully explain differences in faculty perceptions than other group differences, such as gender, tenure status, rank, or college.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Convey pride in the improved university climate from faculty perceptions. Overall satisfaction and satisfaction with several areas of the university has never been assessed as being this high. The administration, faculty and staff can all be grateful for this good news.
2. Many of the areas of least satisfaction (p. 8) showed improvement over time, particularly as compared to results from two years ago. Continued attention to these items would reflect attention to areas of faculty concern, particularly regarding compensation and workload issues.
3. Observe the factors strongly associated with overall faculty satisfaction (p. 8-9), such as the direction the University is moving, the level of shared governance, the perceived performance of the University President, and the degree to which administration follows

written university policies. Continuing to address, or even improving, faculty satisfaction in these critical areas may contribute to overall faculty satisfaction.

4. Observe the factors strongly associated with faculty retention (p. 9-10), such as the degree to which administration follows written university policies, content of college policies and the procedures by which those policies are made, the way discretionary monies are used to reward merit/equity, future salary prospects, current nine-month salary, and level of shared governance. Continued attention or improvements made on these conditions may hold promise for retaining talented personnel.
5. Faculty, staff, and administrators could benefit from reviewing the specific levels of satisfaction with each of the specific areas, especially as found in Table I. For example, personnel in the library, physical plant, computer support, etc. would likely be interested in seeing the level of faculty satisfaction regarding their areas.
6. Address specific departmental concerns about the integration of public affairs mission, merit system, grade inflation and deflation pressures, and other potential problems. For these areas, a great deal of variation across departments was evident. This requires attention to detail in the final Additional Tables of the Appendix by the deans, heads, and faculty members in their specific departments.
7. Give continued attention to equitable practices in recruitment and promotion in light of differences in gender that were found at the highest levels of rank and tenure status, i.e. full professors and tenured faculty.
8. There were only two satisfaction decreases in areas that reached minimally meaningful significance. The first was the perceived performance of the Provost which exists despite broad evidence indicating successful leadership (e.g., improved perceptions of academic and non-academic aspects of the university in many ways). Likewise, the limited qualitative data set suggests a specific perception of the Provost's performance, relating a concern with the rapidity of change related to policies and the method of defining the public affairs mission. Attention to these perceptions is warranted.
9. The other area that decreased in satisfaction at a minimally meaningful level concerned perceived support for distance learning and instruction. Of note is that an Associate Provost to oversee these areas and an Acting Director of Online learning began near the time of the survey and that a search for Director for the Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning is being reopened. Also, the Faculty Senate is currently considering a resolution related to online compensation considerations. These actions clearly address a perception of decreased satisfaction regarding distance learning and instructional support though continued attention to these areas may be considered.