

FACULTY MORALE SURVEY 2016

BIENNIAL REPORT

from the

COMMITTEE ON FACULTY CONCERNS

Presented to the Faculty Senate at Missouri State University

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Purpose	3
Measure	3
University Directions and Priorities.....	4
University Facilities and Assistance.....	5
University Policies.....	8
Teaching Loads and Teaching Policies.....	9
University Benefits.....	11
University Satisfaction.....	12
Conclusion and Recommendations	13

Executive Summary

Depending upon the particular question, anywhere from 125 to 173 individuals responded to the 2016 survey. There are seven hundred forty seven (747) faculty members (full-time instructors, all level of professor, and clinical faculty). So, the response rate varies from about 17% to 23%, depending upon the question. The average response was about 21% (.207 = 155/747). Participation in the survey has been dropping for several years.

Results from the 2016 Faculty Morale Survey indicate that the faculty is divided or perhaps conflicted is a better word. The average level of satisfaction or agreement hovers around neutrality, which is 3.0 on the Likert scale employed. However, written comments are generally negative. Expressions of disappointment are directed at issues such as salaries, athletic funding, and application of administrative policies.

Purpose

The Faculty Morale Survey (the Survey) 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 five survey periods (an eight-year span from 2008 to 2016) are reported within this summary. The Survey can provide useful information to determine successes and improve conditions for faculty morale and university productivity.

Measures

The 2016 Survey contains 77 items. There are two types of questions. "Satisfaction" questions (44 total questions) offering responses arranged as follows: (1) strongly dissatisfied to (5) extremely satisfied with (3) being neutral. Also included were 33 "Agreement" questions, offering responses scaled as follows: (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree, with (3) being neutral. Longitudinal data is also provided for most items on the survey. The survey was administered electronically online.

The survey was administered in January using the list of faculty provided by the Faculty Senate office. It should be noted that the completed surveys do not comprise a random or representative sample of the faculty and as such, results may be interpreted with caution. However, the committee believes that these results provide at least some level of insight into the perceptions of our university faculty.

For the 2016 version of the survey, the committee deleted some items and added a few new items. The deleted items were viewed as redundant or superfluous, and were deleted to shorten the survey. The new items were developed using the concerns identified in the written comments from the 2014 survey.

University Directions and Priorities

Questions 1-6

Average in group 3.01

The 2016 Survey questions 1 through 6 sought responses of the faculty on their confidence in the direction the university is moving. The questions were posed on an “agree/disagree” Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 3=neutral; 5=strongly agree). **Faculty respondents appear to be indifferent, because the overall mean response is 3.01, neutral. This outcome may be attributable to a bi-modal distribution or to the fact that a five-point Likert scale mathematically limits variation.**

Of the six questions in this group, only responses to Question 1 (“University priorities are where they need to be”) have been consistently tracked since 2008. The trend is variable, that is, both up and down in the various years. Here is a summary of the results for Question 1 by year:

Table 1.—Mean Survey Result for Question 1, by Year.

Question 1 “University priorities are where they need to be.”					
	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008
Mean	3.35	3.41	3.37	2.82	3.36

In case of question 1 on university priorities, the faculty on average over the tracking period are marginally above being indifferent but trending toward agreement that the university priorities are where they need to be (average 3.3).

The data shows on average the faculty disagreed with the statements that the university spends an appropriate level of the budget on instruction of students, administration and peripheral services (academic support, student services and athletics among others). The faculty were indifferent on whether the university spends an appropriate percent of its budget on the core mission (instruction, research and public affairs).

There were 56 anonymous comments with respect to this group of survey questions. Perhaps the most succinct offering were these two observations:

Ultimately, growth in administration and peripheral services likely comes at a cost to instruction

In good times, we add administrators. In bad times, we cut professors.

Several comments criticized the funding for athletics, the increase in administrative personnel positions, and the persistent lack of funding for increases in faculty salaries. A few comments did support the efforts of administrators to practice increased transparency in their campus dealings with faculty, staff and students

University Facilities and Assistance

Questions 7-21

Average in group 3.56

From the survey numbers, most of the items in the University facilities and assistance programs seem to be on par with former surveys in the mid-3 range. Median is 3.62 on 11 of the 15 questions that fell between 3.0 and 4.0 in this section. This means that either faculty do not have a strong opinion on these survey items, are fairly satisfied, or feel as though they have expressed concerns that have gone unmet. Although there are some thematic comments within those areas (*see below*).

Some areas show a slight improvement over the last survey like classroom facilities, office space, and renovations. Custodial service, security, building maintenance and clerical service have remained consistent or are scored slightly lower than previous surveys. Several areas where faculty seem to appreciate services are computer help (mean= 4.31) which continues to trend upwards, and the library (mean=4.04), albeit with several caveats expressed through comments (see below).

The results for Questions 7 and 17 are reported in Table 2. Both questions have been tracked since 2008. It could be said that Question 7 represents survey results for the physical support of faculty and teaching, while Question 17 represents intellectual support for faculty and teaching.

Table 2.—Mean Survey Results for Questions 7 and 17, by Year.

	Question 7 "Classroom Facilities."				
	Question 17 "Faculty Development through sabbaticals and educational leaves."				
	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008
Question 7 Mean	3.75	3.42	3.58	2.25	3.19
Question 17 Mean	3.31	3.89	3.27	3.10	3.23

There were 53 total comments regarding this group of questions. Below are some of the common themes extracted from this section.

Buildings and Custodial. Custodial service in some buildings seem to be a huge concern for faculty members, while others believe their custodians are doing a good job with the resources they have. Faculty comments include the need for custodial improvement like taking out the trash, vacuuming offices and keeping common areas and bathrooms cleaner. However, since surveys are anonymous, it is hard to determine what buildings are specifically problematic. Two resounding themes is that building security should be revisited, especially at night, and that there should be clear plan with transparency of building renovations, and technological upgrades. Here are two comments:

Our buildings and campus look much better than they were 10 years ago, but still have a lot to get done.

Our buildings are trashy and dirty.

There are several mentions that certain buildings have priority over others in terms of appearance, cosmetics and maintenance

Please continue to next page)

University Facilities and Assistance (continues here)

Questions 7-21

Average in group 3.56

Clerical support is also mentioned as an area of inequity.

Not enough clerical support.

Too much clerical support of administrative duties, nothing to help faculty.

Not enough equitable distribution of administrative and clerical help in departments.

[When departments grow] there is no additional clerical or administrative support to enhance the department's ability to do their job.

Library. Many faculty comments noted that librarians are very helpful to faculty, but that holdings, especially journals, and several prominent databases have been dropped and are not adequate for the type of research expected. Here is one comment:

I frequently find that the library does not have many of the journals in my field, and when they do the archive is not complete.

Meyer [is] not a serious research library and I don't see a commitment to making it one.

The Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning (FCTL) is a love/hate entity. Overall, however it was scored a 3.98, which is close to "moderately agree." FCTL may need to make its mission more widely known to faculty in regards to what they do. However, it is worth noting that FCTL is unable to email faculty directly which hampers its ability to communicate what they provide to the faculty at large.

Some faculty members saw FCTL as a valuable service provider that helps faculty work on pedagogy, creating online courses, and money for creative teaching projects.

FCTL has great resources available to faculty. I've been impressed to see the quality of speakers... workshops they are offering for bringing courses up to speed.

Others criticized FCTL as a waste of money that could be better spent elsewhere.

FCTL seems to give disproportionate attention to online programs at the expense of professional development for teachers of seated classes.

Two major areas of concern (i.e., falling below 3.0 in the survey) receiving many comments were lack of support/time for research and creative activity (mean=2.71), and in reimbursement for attending professional development and discipline conferences (mean=2.88).

Comments included observations about an imbalance between teaching load, summer teaching and service.

More research time and reduced student loads for faculty research.

Reimbursement for professional development appeared to be a significant issue across campus. Thematic comments suggest that reimbursements for transportation, lodging and conference fees are nowhere near actual costs. Selected comments:

Reimbursements don't come close to covering costs of conferences, even when presenting at them.

University Facilities and Assistance (continues here)

Questions 7-21

Average in group 3.56

Comments About reimbursements continue here...

If conference fees are paid ahead of the conference, we have to wait until after the conference to be reimbursed, and sometimes this is months, whereby faculty are paying interest on credit card in the meantime and cost even more money unnecessarily.

The reimbursement process is not simplified and the costs of conferences, lodging and flights to continue to climb, while reimbursement has not increased.

There are very unequal distribution of travel funds across campus. Some departments don't even give out more than \$600. That is a huge problem for faculty development and many people cannot afford to attend more than once every several years. This is not conducive to our research and creative activity expectations either.

University Policies

Questions 22-36

Average in group 3.22

The average results for this group of questions was 3.22. The questions can be grouped into two rough categories: pay and procedures. Question 25, which asks about the faculty perception of the way discretionary monies are used for equity, has been tracked since 2008. It fairly represents pay or “money” issues. As can be seen from the results presented below in Table 3, faculty disagree with the suggestion that merit pay is handled well. The disagreement is moderate, as reported by the numerical result. On the other hand, faculty agree that promotion and tenure criteria (Question 31) are defined and well known. However, written comments (see below) suggest otherwise.

Table 3.—Mean Survey Results for Questions 25 and 31, by Year.

	Question 25 “The way discretionary monies are used for equity.”				
	Question 31 “Extent to which promotion and tenure criteria are defined and made known.”				
	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008
Question 25 Mean	2.73	2.91	2.56	2.25	2.74
Question 31 Mean	4.00	4.15	3.98	3.66	3.62

Thirty-seven of 246 written comments in the survey were directed toward University Policies. Overall these results are more pessimistic than the faculty responses to the specific question. Of the 37 responses, 2 can most accurately be considered highly positive or strongly positive and 3 are essentially neutral. The remaining comments run the gamut from critical to extremely critical. Of these, a strong majority fall into three overlapping categories: Lack of transparency in decision-making, concerns about merit and equity pay policies, and unequal application policies or workload.

Dissatisfaction with transparency and concern with unequal application of policies is directed at all levels of administration although it is greatest at the college and University level. Interestingly, of the positive comments three mentioned satisfaction with transparency at the university level (includes two neutrals with positive elements).

The most common opinion regarding merit is summed up well by one respondent: “We need to get rid of the merit system, its busy work for nothing.”

Concern over uneven application of policies and workloads are directed mostly toward Department Heads and Deans with a slight majority identifying the Dean as the source of the problem.

The numeric response to most of the questions indicate faculty are essentially neutral regarding university policies. However, the greatest levels of satisfaction in written comments regard the extent to which T&P policies are known and followed. This result in the comments portion stands opposed to the numeric outcome of 4.0 for Question 31. Here is a typical comment:

“Are you serious? No one, except an elite few, know how policies are made or implemented in the department anymore. We are not made aware of searches in progress, or decisions made regarding personnel, curricular, teaching assignment alterations or just about anything that matters. Laxest T&P process in the country; farcical. We have teachers who miss class on a regular basis while half the faculty never keep office hours. Like I said, ‘What policies?’”

Teaching Loads and Teaching Policies

Questions 37-56

Average in group 2.79

Faculty respondents are not satisfied with issues regarding teaching. The average value in this group of questions was 2.79. This is the lowest reported average of all question groups in the survey. Faculty express neutrality about the different teaching loads across campus (Question 39). Faculty do support the assertion, stated in Question 40, that assignment of classes seems appropriate. This value has consistently been reported as “4=moderately agree” since 2008. However, faculty moderately disagree, consistently across the years, about future salary prospects (Question 45) and justification of salary differentials across campus (Question 46).

Table 4.—Mean Survey Results for Questions 39, 40, 45 and 46, by Year.

	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008
Question 39 “Differential teaching loads across campus is reasonable.”					
Question 40 “Assignment of classes (extent they match your interests and background) seems appropriate.”					
Question 45. “Future salary prospects look good.”					
Question 46. “Salary differentials that exist across Missouri State University are justified.”					
Question 39 Mean	2.93	3.36	2.83	2.58	2.52
Question 40 Mean	4.21	4.21	4.23	3.98	4.06
Question 45 Mean	1.83	2.11	1.76	1.85	2.53
Question 46 Mean	2.16	2.50	2.01	1.93	2.15

Of the 20 items in the section on teaching loads and teaching policies, 14 had means below the neutral point. Only one item (Assignment of classes seems appropriate; match interests and background) received a mean in the agree range (4.21). The lowest scoring items were (starting with the lowest):

- Future salary prospects look good (1.83)
- Salary differentials that exist across MSU are justified (2.16)
- Compensation for per-course faculty is appropriate (2.34)
- Faculty who teach an overload receive consistent compensation (2.36)
- I know how decisions to increase salary are made (2.37)
- Compensation for overload courses is appropriate (2.42)
- Procedures by which equity adjustment salary decision are made is justified (2.46)
- Current nine-month salary is appropriate (2.51)
- My department has an adequate number of ranked (tenured and tenure-track) faculty for the current number of students (2.75)
- Rate of pay for summer teaching (2.5% per hour) is adequate (2.80)

There were 34 comments, which were distributed approximately as follows:

Merit and Equity pay:

These funds to not seem to be available or availability and decisions about their use is unclear to some.

Workload:

The load seems uneven among graduate faculty, instructors and per course, across campus, from department to department and college to college. Pay for overload also varies across campus.

Teaching Loads and Teaching Policies (continues here)

Questions 37-56

Average in group 2.79

Comments continue here...

Advisement & service uneven or too high & not compensated.

Should be opportunity to decrease teaching for research.

Load is too heavy in relation to pay & teaching standards.

Per course faculty:

Too many used and too many are underpaid. However, they are not used in summer, when senior faculty who are paid more get priority.

Summer school:

More courses need to be offered at lower cos".

Flat rate for courses should be used; pro-rated pay based on class-size and faculty status seems unethical.

Class sizes:

Too large for upper-level.

Salaries:

Not competitive in one department so that there are no tenure track faculty"

Salary here is horrible. Do something or quit asking.

Athletic personnel/coaches have too high salaries compared to faculty.

University Benefits

Questions 57 to 65

Average in group 3.81

While faculty generally scored their MSU benefits as between “neutral” and “somewhat satisfied”, the ratings in all benefit categories in 2016 were all lower than those from 2014 with the exception of vision benefits as this is a new for MSU employees and there is no basis for comparison. Supporting comments about the benefits were mixed.

Many survey respondents expressed satisfaction with the medical care and prescription care that they receive. These comments were consistent with the numerical ranking for Taylor Health (see Table 5), as the, “Services Available at Taylor Health & Wellness Center” scored amongst the highest in the survey. Similar to 2014, survey respondents continued to express concern about privacy with their medical information. One wrote, “*Why is my Department Chair given data about which faculty members did not fill out an HRA?*”

Table 5.—Mean Survey Result for Question 63, by Year.

Question 63 “Services available at Taylor Health & Wellness Center.”					
	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008
Mean	4.30	4.36	4.35	3.96	3.84

Thirty-seven individuals offer written comments. Various respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their experiences at the Foster Recreation Center. Respondents questioned how it was considered a “benefit” if faculty had to pay for it. Some faculty members wrote that the Foster staff was rude to faculty and to families. They also questioned having to pay for membership at Foster. Some wrote that by attending Foster they were less likely to draw upon health benefits later, and so offering free membership to Foster would offset medial costs.

Various faculty members were dissatisfied with the 15 credit hour education benefit. They felt these hours should increase.

Respondents wrote that adding perks such as more education benefits and free Foster memberships could help offset the lower salaries that MSU employees earn.

University Satisfaction

Questions 66-68

Average in group 2.95

As shown in Table 6, the response to Question 68 has dropped since the previous survey taken in 2014. In fact, the 2014 survey result is the only time overall satisfaction reached “4=moderately agree.” However, the values for the other two questions in this group indicate most faculty are not thinking about leaving the university or seeking employment elsewhere. These results seem to be conflicting.

Table 6.—Mean Survey Result for Question 68, by Year.

Question 68 “ Overall, I am satisfied being a Missouri State University faculty member.”					
	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008
Mean	3.68	4.00	3.93	3.52	3.74

Twenty-nine faculty wrote comments regarding this issue. Respondents indicated that both budget cuts and what is going on “*at the state government level*” were of concern, especially regarding lack of decent salary increases, or possible downsizing of their position. Here are three typical comments:

...it is not a matter of greener pastures elsewhere. It is a matter of being able to put food on the table at the end of the day.

I am mostly satisfied but waiting with trepidation for the complete response to budget cuts.

I love MSU students. Love my colleagues. Appreciate administration. Love the Ozarks...would rather stay and finish my career at MSU. Will only consider leaving if state legislature reduces salaries, removes tenure or if administration continues to add to the administration side of being a faculty member. Let me teach, research, and serve!

Conclusion and Recommendations

First, the consistent reduction of faculty participation in the survey is remarkable. Table 7 shows that in 2008, when the first survey was offered, 414 faculty made the effort to respond. By 2016, the response, as measured by Question 1, had dropped to 167. Keep in mind that the number of responses varies by question. For 2016, the average response was 155. The highest response was 173 and the lowest 125.

Faculty respondents were reluctant to disclose demographic particulars. For example, only 107 individuals posted a response to the query “Years of Service.” The average reported was about 12 years. Moreover, just 134 individuals disclosed the college in which they served.

The consistent reduction of participation in the survey combined with a reluctance to disclose years of service and college affiliation, may support for a working hypothesis that both outcomes indicate a low level (or declining level) of faculty morale.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many faculty do not respond, because they do not believe anything constructive will happen after the survey results are released. Moreover, technical problems likely reduced participation in 2016, because the e-mail from Faculty Senate which provided the link to the survey was sometimes directed to the “Clutter” portion of the mailbox. The chair of this committee never received an e-mail reminder, but was able to get the link and respond the last day the survey was available.

Table 7.—Tracking Faculty Response to Morale Survey. Number of responses by Year for Question 1.

Question 1 “University priorities are where they need to be.”					
	2016	2014	2012	2010	2008
Number	167	248	275	397	414

Second, the level of angst or even bitterness expressed in the written comments is notable. Reading the 246 comments might lead one to believe that the campus is divided against itself. Very few offered positive comments, other than the fairly strong support for employment (medical) benefits. On the other hand, the central theme of many comments was an ongoing passion to teach. As shown in Table 8, most written observations concerned the directions of the university in general (22.7%) and facilities ((21.5%).

Table 8.—Written Comments by Question Group. 2016.

Written Comments Total 246 as Distributed Below						
	Direction	Facilities	Policies	Teaching	Benefits	Satisfaction
Number	56	53	37	34	37	29
% of Total	22.7%	21.5%	15%	13.8%	15%	11.8%

Given the despondent nature of comments, the declining level of participation, and the serious issues identified in specific items, the Committee on Faculty Concerns would like to focus their investigative efforts in the coming year, as per the Resolution to follow.

Recommendation in the form of a Resolution that Calls for an Internal Action

Whereas the report from the Committee on Faculty Concerns 2016-2017 Faculty Morale Survey has identified several serious issues; and

Whereas the Committee on Faculty Concerns is charged with gathering ‘data from appropriate individuals or groups to be used in making a determination as to whether each item submitted warrants consideration by the Faculty Senate,’ and using ‘surveys and other appropriate instruments to provide information to supplement informal communications about faculty concerns,” (Faculty Senate Constitution and Bylaws),

Therefore, be it resolved, that the Committee on Faculty Concerns focus their 2017-2018 investigation on specific serious issues identified in the 2016-2017 Faculty Morale Survey.