

The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) Summary of University of Wyoming Results (2010-2011)

Introduction

The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) is a consortium of over 160 universities and colleges across North America who are committed to improving the academic workplace for faculty. The COACHE initiative includes the development and administration of several surveys to assess job satisfaction among faculty. The University of Wyoming joined COACHE in 2007 and administered the Tenure-Track Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey in 2007 and 2010. Participation in the COACHE project provides UW administrators and faculty with a diagnostic tool to summarize faculty perceptions about job satisfaction. It also helps provide perspective by comparing the perceptions of UW faculty to those of faculty from comparable institutions across the nation. In 2010, 101 UW tenure-track faculty responded to the COACHE survey for a 60% response rate. Respondents were 52% male compared to 48% female; and 74% white/non-Hispanic compared to 26% faculty of color.

Results-Highlights from 2010 COACHE Survey

The University of Wyoming Institutional Report provides detailed results for each survey item (dimension) and across several thematic areas. Results are also provided by item for selected peer and other comparator institutions and for various subgroups of faculty (e.g. by race, gender, and discipline). UW selects the peer group from participating institutions and the COACHE administrators determine the comparator institutions based on institutional characteristics. The highlights that follow characterize UW areas of strength or concern based on significantly different results between UW and peer/comparator institutions or from differences among groups within the university.

One area of strength where UW results were better compared to peer and other comparator institutions was tenure practices. This included clarity of the tenure process, criteria and standards, tenure body of evidence considered in decision-making, as well as personal sense of achieving tenure. UW tenure-track faculty were also more positive about receiving consistent messages about tenure requirements from their tenured colleagues and the reasonableness of various tenure performance expectations related to the faculty job description. In particular, UW faculty were more positive compared to faculty from other institutions about their performance expectations as an advisor and as a campus citizen.

A second area of strength where UW results were better compared to peer and other comparator institutions was with specific aspects of work and home-life balance and compatibility. UW tenure-track faculty were more positive about the spousal/partner hiring program and that colleagues do what they can to make having and raising children compatible with being a tenure-

track faculty member. Moreover, faculty perception that the chief academic officer (provost) cares about the quality of life for pre-tenure faculty was also more positive compared to other institutions.

With regard to the overall survey results, there were three items of concern, meaning UW tenure-track faculty had less positive perceptions compared to faculty at peer and other comparator institutions. While UW faculty were more positive compared to others about the number of students they teach, they were less positive about the discretion they have over course content. The other items of concern included the intellectual vitality of tenured colleagues and more globally, overall satisfaction with their department as a place to work. When asked to choose the best aspects of working at UW, the support of colleagues, academic freedom, the spousal/partner hiring program, and a sense of “fit” were selected the most.

Within the UW faculty community, there were several group differences based on race/ethnicity and gender of the respondents. For example, faculty of color at UW were more positive than white/non-Hispanic faculty about the upper limit on committee assignments, professional assistance in obtaining grants, research services, paid/unpaid personal leave, elder care, and tuition waivers. In contrast, white/non-Hispanic faculty were more positive than faculty of color about the spousal/partner hiring program, colleagues do what they can to make having and raising children compatible with being a tenure-track faculty member, the amount of personal and professional interaction they have with tenured and pre-tenure colleagues, and opportunities for participation in governance of the department.

There were also several differences in responses based on gender. For example, male faculty at UW were more positive about their access to TAs and RAs and the amount of time available to conduct research compared to their female colleagues.

Comparison of 2007 and 2010 COACHE Results

Generally speaking, the results for the two COACHE surveys were fairly similar (e.g. UW results were consistent from 2007 to 2010). UW had more positive responses in two survey dimensions in 2010 compared to 2007 and no worse responses. The two items showing improvement were (1) the clarity of tenure expectations with regard to performance as an advisor, and (2) colleagues do what they can to make having children compatible with being a tenure-track faculty member.

Some of the group differences identified in 2010 were also found in 2007. One consistent finding, for example, was that white/non-Hispanic faculty were more positive about their interactions with senior colleagues compared to faculty of color. In contrast, there were several group differences identified in 2007, mostly with regard to gender differences, that were not significant in 2010. Examples include satisfaction with work-life balance and the institution doing what it can to make raising children compatible with a tenure-track position. In both cases, male faculty were more positive than female faculty in 2007.

Use of COACHE Results

UW administrators have already used COACHE results in several ways. There were discussions of the results among the faculty after the first administration, and plans are in process to hold open discussions with faculty in fall 2011. The results from the COACHE survey also assisted in informing two action items identified in UP 3, including retaining women and people of color on the faculty (action item 34) and clarification of policies governing faculty reappointment, tenure, and promotion (action item 64). One accomplishment was the Faculty Senate project in 2010 to determine the unmet childcare needs among the university community via a survey. Recommendations for improvement will be forwarded to the administration in fall 2011 based on these survey results. Another accomplishment was the year-long project to identify best practices for promotion to full professor. A paper summarizing these practices is now widely available to faculty via the Academic Affairs website. These are just two examples of how COACHE is being used to making positive changes at UW in hopes of increasing faculty job satisfaction.

For more information on COACHE:

The full COACHE results can be found on the Office of Academic Affairs website at <http://www.uwyo.edu/acadaffairs/coache>.

The selected UW peer institutions for the 2010 COACHE administration were North Carolina State University, Iowa State University, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Washington State University.

Prepared by E. Prager, Office of Academic Affairs, September 2, 2011

Sources:

COACHE University of Wyoming Tenure-Track Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey Institutional Report 2010-2011

COACHE University of Wyoming Tenure-Track Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey Institutional Report 2007-2008