Morale Survey
Appalachian State University
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Executive Report:
Faculty Morale Survey

As part of its responsibility to the faculty, the Welfare and Morale Committee of the Faculty Senate conducted a survey to assess the morale of the faculty at Appalachian State University (ASU). Invitations for the survey (with follow-up reminder messages) were sent by Email to all ranks of faculty across campus beginning January 29th, 2013, and closing February 12th, 2013.

The survey was focused on three general areas identified as components of overall morale at the institution: resources for the missions of teaching and research, salary and benefits, and institutional governance. The data collected indicates that there are morale issues at ASU. Significant numbers of faculty expressed their overall morale as “bad.” What is equally disturbing are the high numbers of respondents that say their morale has gotten worse over the last 5 years. This is also reinforced by the large number of faculty that responded that are looking for positions at other institutions.

However, the data also shows that the factors having a negative impact on morale are mixed within the three areas examined. In the area of Resources, the library generally receives high marks for its support of both the teaching and research mission of the university. Less support is found for the adequacy of classrooms and material resources for teaching, but both of these issues remain in positive territory. Where attitudes are generally quite negative is in the areas of support for research and faculty development.

The responses on questions regarding Salary and Benefits were uniformly negative in both the quantitative and qualitative responses to the survey. This negative perception is reflected both in the general questions regarding overall salary and benefits, but also in the questions regarding “rewards” for teaching, research, and service. However, it should be noted that on the question of “rewards” there is wide variation across the colleges, with the highest levels of satisfaction in the College of Health Sciences and the Walker College of Business and the lowest levels of satisfaction in Fine and Applied Arts and the Reich College of Education.

There are wide disparities on the issues of institutional governance, largely relating to what level of administration is discussed. While there may be some individual differences that the aggregate measures do not capture, there is general agreement that the Department Chairs are responsive and fair with the faculty in their respective departments. The same holds true for the Deans of the various colleges. However, there is a significant drop with regard to faculty attitudes toward the Chancellor and Provost. These concerns are reflected in both the quantitative and the qualitative data. Dissatisfaction with the administration was the most discussed topic among the responses to the open-ended questions contained in the survey.
Methodology

On January 29 the survey was sent to 1408 faculty across the instructional ranks. The faculty were given two weeks to complete the survey, with several “reminder” notices sent out to those who had not yet responded. Of the 1,408 eligible faculty members at ASU who were contacted to participate in the survey, 675 faculty members completed the questionnaire for a response rate of 47.9%.

The survey was comprised of 12 sections: Demographic Data, Teaching Conditions, Research Conditions, Service Activity and Rewards, Attitudes toward the Chancellor, Attitudes toward the Provost, Attitudes towards the Deans, Attitudes toward the Department Chairs, Overall Morale, and three open-ended questions regarding morale.

Most of the substantive data was coded on a 7 point scale, with possible responses from: completely disagree, mostly disagree, somewhat disagree, neutral, somewhat agree, mostly agree, and completely agree. The quantitative data was analyzed in STATA and SPSS statistical programs. Most of the data was analyzed using simple cross-tabs and frequencies. Most of the data is presented as percentages in the report.

Of the 675 people that responded to the survey, 550 chose to respond to the open-ended questions. This qualitative data was organized in the Excel spreadsheet program and the responses coded in order to give an indication of frequency with which various topics were mentioned. The coding allowed another means by which to validate the responses found in the quantitative data, but also allowed for the articulation of sentiments and depth that are not always conveyed in the quantitative responses.

Sample characteristics indicate that the survey is representative of the faculty at ASU. Broken down by academic rank, 32% of respondents identified themselves as Professors, 22% as Associates, 24% as Assistants, 10% as Instructors, and 12% as Adjuncts. Gender was evenly split among respondents, and faculty hailed from all academic units across campus: 46% of faculty listed their unit as the College of Arts and Sciences, 14% as the Reich College of Education, 13% as the College of Fine and Applied Arts, 10% as the Walker College of Business, 9% as the College of Health Sciences, 5% as the Hayes School of Music, 2% as University College, and 1% from Belk Library.
Survey Findings

The General “Climate” at ASU

The findings from this survey clearly indicate that there is a morale problem at ASU. To begin, nearly half (45%) of all respondents reported that their overall morale at ASU is negative, with a modal response of “somewhat bad.” Among academic ranks, full professors were the most likely to report a low overall morale (55%); however, 43% of associates and 47% of assistants also responded that their overall morale was negative (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Morale at ASU, by Academic Rank](image)

Differences in levels of morale at ASU by academic unit are even starker: 60% of faculty in the College of Fine and Applied Arts (FAA) and 55% of faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) expressed negativity when asked to rate their overall morale (see Figure 2).
It is also quite striking to note that faculty at ASU perceive their overall morale to have deteriorated over the past few years (see Figure 3). In particular, 67% of the faculty who have worked at ASU for more than 5 years stated that they felt “worse” or “much worse” about their morale compared to 5 years ago.

Moreover, only 42% of the campus community agreed that “the climate at ASU supports and promotes academic freedom.” There are differences in sentiment by academic rank—for
example, only 33% of full professors indicated agreement with the statement. Similarly, less than half of the faculty housed within the five largest units on campus agreed that ASU promotes academic freedom (see Figures 4 and 5): The CAS (35%), FAA (31%), Reich College of Education (RCOE; 38%), and Walker College of Business (WCB; 46%).

![Figure 4: ASU Promotes Academic Freedom, by Rank](image1)

![Figure 5: ASU Promotes Academic Freedom, by College](image2)

Most alarmingly, 30% of tenure-track faculty revealed that they were currently seeking employment at other institutions. This includes 39% of assistant professors, and perhaps even more striking is that 28% of full professors are also actively searching for positions at other universities (see Figure 6).

A typical statement from the open ended responses suggested concern, and captured a broad sentiment expressed by many:

*Although I am generally content at ASU, the concern over funding, the lack of information about and clarity of why certain decisions are being made by the administration and the provost, a lack of a clear vision for where this university is going and what I will be asked to do as a faculty member, and inadequate compensation are the reasons I am willing to listen to offers from other organizations.*
Every institution would expect some movement by faculty, especially Assistant Professors, as they find the right mix of conditions to develop their careers. However, such a large number suggests widespread discontent with the institution on a broader level. With 52% of the Assistant Professors in Arts and Sciences and 42% in the College of Education seeking other employment the ability of departments and programs to develop a stable curriculum is diminished. Such large numbers raise concerns about ASU’s future.
Resources for Teaching and Research

In general, the faculty seemed satisfied with the resources for teaching at ASU (see Figure 7). For example, 86% of the faculty agreed that the library collection is adequate to meet their teaching needs, while 62% of respondents agreed that classrooms at ASU meet their respective departments’ teaching goals. Finally, although more of the faculty took issue with funding for instructional materials and equipment, a majority (52%) agreed that it was adequate.

![Figure 7: Adequacy of Resources for Teaching](image)

Turning to attitudes toward research, the sentiment is much different. Faculty overwhelmingly indicated that the funding for research and faculty development is inadequate at ASU. For example, 59% of respondents reported that they did not find “resources supporting faculty research” adequate, while 60% stated that “financial support for faculty development (e.g., travel, research support, etc.) does not meet their research needs. Faculty do, however, seem to find the library adequate for their research goals. (see Figure 8)

In the qualitative responses, 52 people identified the lack of support for research as a problem. A typical answer was expressed as follows:

*Recently, the emphasis on more and more research without any resources to offset the added time associated with the research is infuriating. I have to do essentially as much research as my colleagues at R1s and they only teach 3 credits a semester where we have to teach 9, and my salary is lower. If research is going to be a priority, there MUST be more release time associated with it. When I was hired I was told 1 scholarly product per year for tenure. I am now being told that might not be enough.*
Another component of resources is its connection to workload. It is clear from the qualitative responses that the faculty identify teaching and research as part of the mix of expectations that include “service” as part of the general topic of “workload.” The lack of support for research was often identified as a “workload” issue, with 66 of the faculty speaking directly to the increased expectations for teaching, research, and service as having a negative effect on their morale.

The following comments speak to the resource issue as a matter of workload, its overall effect on morale, and the perception that overwhelming workload expectations are eroding the quality of the education and the educational experience of students.

[I am] [d]oing more and more with less and less, and the unbelievable amount of "busy work" within the department, college, and university that drains time away from my academic research, class preparation and time with students.

[A negative issue for my morale is] [t]he constantly increasing administrative component of the job. The increasing student population, and decreasing faculty, has increased the size of classes and advisees to the point where I really cannot effectively teach and get to know the students. I am regularly telling students now that I cannot write a letter of recommendation because I just don’t know them.

I spend way too much time doing clerical and administrative work, endlessly inputting data required by administration that could be done better and cheaper by a secretary. I love teaching and scholarship, and I feel like I am doing those on the side. Every faculty member I know, from the newest to the oldest, feels stressed that the workload is overwhelming and resources are inadequate. Some have silently withdrawn into distrust and cynicism. I feel that pull too.
Salary and Benefits

One major concern of the faculty at ASU is salary and benefits. Three-quarters (76%) of tenure-line faculty reported that they feel that the salary and benefits at ASU are insufficient to attract and retain a high quality faculty. And, while there is some variation in levels of dissatisfaction across campus units (see Figure 9)—for example, 88% of FAA faculty were dissatisfied compared to 52% of the WCB—there is little variation among academic ranks for tenure-track faculty (see Figure 10).

Salaries were also the second most mentioned category in the open-ended responses, with 128 faculty stating that salary is a contributing factor to low morale. Below is a sample of the typical responses on this issue of salary.

*It is hard to make ends meet in a high cost of living area, especially when faculty salaries are lower than I could earn elsewhere.*

*[What negatively affects my morale is]* [c]hronic inadequate and uncompetitive salaries especially in view of university increases in success, improved professional recognition in many areas, higher student tuition and fees and expanded enrollment.*
No salary increases while medical insurance and other costs have increased is an effective cut in salary. I realize these are difficult times, but in the last 15 years ASU salaries have fallen behind a number of peer schools that we used to be equivalent to or higher than.

The salary and benefits are simply not competitive and the lack of a union negatively impacts our position in a dramatic way. If I receive an offer from an institution with better compensation and representation I will have no choice but to accept it.

Among tenure-line faculty, only 33% of respondents agreed that recognition and rewards for research and creative activities are satisfactory at ASU. This broad dissatisfaction with the reward structure at ASU is universal among tenure-line ranks (see Figure 11), although there is some variation across academic colleges (see Figure 12). In addition, only 24% of the faculty felt that the reward structure for university service was satisfactory.

Finally, a majority of the faculty (53%) feel that the overall conditions at ASU are not good enough to attract and retain a high quality faculty. Discontent varies somewhat by rank (see Figure 13) and more by academic college (see Figure 14), but overall it is widespread.
Within the general category of salary and benefits of number of faculty also mentioned the related issue of “salary compression.”

*Over many years I have worked long and hard for essentially no financial reward beyond keeping my job. The University has escalated salaries and benefits for new hires so much more rapidly than it has for us old hands. Regardless of the fiscal realities of the system, none of us can continue to regard ourselves and our contributions to ASU as truly valuable if there is never any "reward" for our work.*

*Salaries are not what they should be. Faculty in my college and even in my department with fewer or no years of experience are being hired for higher salaries in comparison to productive junior faculty. Additionally, faculty in other departments with equivalent years of experience are also being paid more. It is concerning. We, as productive junior faculty, plan to seek employment at universities that can more fairly compensate our efforts.*

It is clear from the data that salary and benefits are a major factor contributing to low morale and the corresponding search for employment at other institutions.
Respect for Faculty Governance

The issue mentioned most often in the response to the open-ended question asking respondents to identify what aspect of working at ASU has the most negative impact on their morale was expressed as dissatisfaction with the administration. General dissatisfaction with the administration was mentioned 171 times in the open ended responses. In addition to that, specific dissatisfaction was mentioned in the Chancellor (11 times), Provost (57 times), Deans (19 times), and Academic Affairs (14 times).

However, the numerical data suggest that Department Chairs and Deans are generally well regarded by the faculty in their units. With regard to governance, the question of following procedures in the Handbook is illustrative.

The aggregate numbers for Department Chairs are very positive, with a total of only 11.4% of the faculty saying that their Department Chairs do not follow the Faculty Handbook. The mean score is 5.69 with a standard deviation of 1.69. (see Figure 15)
The mean score on this question for Deans is a 5.48, with a standard deviation of 1.6. While this does not account for variation in individual Colleges, the scores indicate generally high levels of satisfaction for the performance of Deans across the University. (see Figure 16) These numbers generally hold strong for the Deans across the various questions.

It should be noted, however, that there is some variation by college, with the highest scores in the Hayes School of Music, with 91.7% of the total faculty saying that the Dean follows the rules and procedures in the Handbook. The lowest total was in Fine and Applied Arts, with 65.9% of the faculty responding positively to the question. Despite these variations, the numbers are consistently positive for the Deans across the college. (see Figure 17) The numbers are also fairly consistent across the various questions regarding the Deans.
While the positive responses for Department Chairs and Deans are relatively high, a different picture develops with regard to the Chancellor and the Provost, with particular concerns focused upon the Office of the Provost. The problems identified are particularly acute among the tenure-line faculty. Since these ranks are responsible for the majority of “governance” participation on the campus, these numbers are particularly troubling.

For instance, a majority (52%) of tenure-line faculty indicated that they felt the Provost did not “respect the participation of the faculty in university governance.” Perceptions of the Chancellor on this item are mixed, with an equal number of respondents agreeing (38%) and disagreeing (37%) that the Chancellor respects faculty governance (see Figure 18).
More importantly, 55% of tenure-line faculty indicated that they felt the Provost is unresponsive to faculty concerns, while 42% perceived the Chancellor to be unresponsive (see Figure 19). In stark contrast, the faculty appears to be quite satisfied with the responsiveness of their college-level deans—only 21% of respondents reported negativity to this item.

A similar pattern emerges when we consider how well various administrative units communicate with faculty across campus. Of the roughly 515 tenure-line faculty in the sample, only 33% agreed that the Provost “communicates well with the faculty,” compared to 42% for the Chancellor and 70% for their respective dean (see Figure 20).
Discontent among faculty is less clear when it comes to perceptions of whether various administrators “follow the rules and procedures outlined in the faculty handbook.” On the one hand, only 29% and 38% of respondents agreed that the Provost and Chancellor, respectively, follows appropriate rules and procedures; yet, approximately one-third of respondents selected the middle option (“neutral”) to this item (see Figure 21). On the other hand, tenure-line faculty once again expressed near universal support of their college-level deans when it comes to following the rules and procedures outlined in the Faculty Handbook.
Another method for comparing faculty perceptions of different administrative units is to create a scale from the 3 items that were asked consistently across administrative units (i.e., responsiveness to faculty concerns, ability to communicate with faculty, and willingness to follow the rules and procedures outlined in the Faculty Handbook). The resulting scales indicated excellent internal consistency with scale alphas above 0.90. For ease of interpretation, the scales were centered at the neutral midpoint so that mean scores above 0 indicate a positive evaluation, while values below 0 reflect a negative evaluation of that particular administrator.

Looking at the composite scales (see Figure 22), tenure-line faculty members evaluate their college-level deans very positively, and these evaluations do not seem to vary much by academic rank (although there is some variation across colleges: Scores range from a low of 0.78 to a high of 1.63). The results also indicate tepid evaluations of the Chancellor, with interesting variation by academic rank: Evaluations of the Chancellor are highest among Associate Professors (0.25), followed by Assistant Professors (0.08), and lowest (and negative) among full Professors (-0.30). Finally, evaluations of the Provost are negative across the tenure-line ranks. However there is some variation among the tenure-line faculty: Full Professors rate the Provost the lowest (-0.88), followed by the Associates (-0.44) and Assistants (-0.32).
It is also noteworthy that the intensity of the negative views on the Provost’s respect for faculty governance spike among Professors, with 38% saying that they “completely disagree” with the statement that the Provost respects faculty governance. (see Figure 23) Combing the negative scores for the Provost yields a total of 62% responding negatively to the statement. For the Chancellor the combined negative score is 44%.

This score is particularly troubling since the Full Professors are engaged in many of the administrative tasks and committee work carried out at the department, college, and university level. In addition to the negative effects on morale, these negative attitudes would be expected to have an overall effect on the efficiency and smooth operation of the institution.

![Figure 23: Chancellor and Provost, Respect Faculty Governance (Full Professors)](image-url)

Of the negative attitudes expressed toward the Provost, the following is representative:

*I am very concerned about academic freedom & faculty governance at the higher levels of the University. I think that the Provost should represent the concerns & voices of the faculty to the upper echelons of the University administration. Unfortunately, I do not believe that this is the case at present. I do not have confidence that the Provost understands the problems faced by faculty nor do I believe that the Provost respects faculty expertise, competence, and the vital need for faculty participation in governance.*
Although fewer, negative comments about the performance of the Chancellor included his lack of visibility on campus and the inability to articulate a clear vision for the university. A number of respondents expressed the following concern:

_The present administration runs roughshod over faculty governance. The fact that the chancellor rules against the faculty in every single grievance proceeding tells you all you need to know._

Finally, since participation in University governance is generally the responsibility of the tenured and tenure-line faculty, the data on the faculty attitudes toward the efficacy and perceived worth of such activity is important. When asked whether “participation on committees, councils, and task forces is very worthwhile,” the faculty expressed mixed opinions, with roughly an equal number of respondents agreeing (45%) and disagreeing (40%) with this statement (see Figure 24). One of the reasons for this mixed sentiment may be that only 32% of tenure-line faculty members agreed that “the Administration listens to the recommendations of the committees, councils, and task forces. Moreover, only 36% of respondents agreed that the faculty is “adequately involved in decisions to develop, change, and/or eliminate faculty programs.” Lastly, only 24% of the faculty is satisfied with the reward structure for university service.
Conclusion

This is a snapshot of the academic community at ASU. It is clear from the data that the faculty are committed to the teaching, research, and service that are at the core of the university’s mission. When asked to comment on what aspects of life at ASU make a positive contribution to a faculty member’s morale the same answers come up over and over again. Faculty are committed to the university, feel personal satisfaction in teaching and research, are committed to the campus community and their colleagues, and want to feel that their service to the institution is valued and rewarded. Many faculty also cite the quality of the students and working directly with students as major positive factors at the university.

Representative comments on the most positive impact on morale include:

- *having a good class, seeing my undergraduate or graduate students achieve some measure of success, whether it is working for and earning a good grade in my class or getting into a program that was their goal.*

- *the support from my other faculty, my Chair, and Dean. Without the chair's and dean's support I probably would have tried to leave.*

- *The Department Chair and Dean have done a great job of creating a positive climate geared toward creating a much stronger program. They have supported future research potential and fostered the growth of research. If ASU is to become better that is what it must do.*

To put it simply, the issues that interfere with the realization of the measures of job satisfaction tend to show up in the survey as negative influences on morale. This survey has highlighted some of those negative influences on morale in the hope that recognition is the first step toward rehabilitation. The institution clearly has some areas where it needs to improve.

There were other areas of concern that were mentioned with some repetition in the open-ended responses that are worth noting: high health care costs, excessive bureaucratic reporting, problems with the transition for transfer students, the inappropriate use of the business model to organize a university, and the high cost of living in Boone. In fairness, it should also be noted that 3 people mentioned the Faculty Senate as negatively impacting their overall morale.
Appendix A: Faculty Morale Survey Question Wording

Q1. How long have you been at ASU?
Q2. What College are you in?
Q3. What is your current rank?
Q4. What is your gender?
Q5. The Library collection is adequate to support my teaching goals.
Q6. Classroom facilities are adequate to support my department’s teaching needs.
Q7. Funding is adequate for instructional materials and equipment.
Q8. Faculty are adequately involved in the decisions to develop, change, and/or eliminate academic programs.
Q9. The library collection is adequate to support my research goals.
Q10. Financial support for Faculty Development (travel, research support, etc.) is adequate.
Q11. Recognition and rewards for research and creative activities are satisfactory.
Q12. Resources supporting faculty research are adequate.
Q13. On how many committees, councils, and task forces do you serve?
Q14. I am satisfied with ASU’s rewards for university service.
Q15. In general, participation on committees, councils, and task forces is very worthwhile.
Q16. The administration listens to the recommendations of the committees, councils, and task forces in which I participate.
Q17. The chancellor is concerned about my needs and interests.
Q18. The chancellor is looking out for the best interests of the university.
Q19. The chancellor is communicating well with the faculty.
Q20. The chancellor is responsive to the concerns of the faculty.
Q21. The chancellor respects the participation of the faculty in university governance.
Q22. The chancellor follows the rules and procedures outlined in the faculty handbook.
Q23. The provost is concerned about my needs and interests.
Q24. The provost is looking out for the best interests of the university.
Q25. The provost is communicating well with the faculty.
Q26. The provost is responsive to the concerns of the faculty.
Q27. The provost respects the participation of the faculty in university governance.
Q28. The provost follows the rules and procedures outlined in the faculty handbook.
Q29. My dean is fair in the allocation of resources to my department.
Q30. My dean is communicating well with the faculty in my college.
Q31. My dean is responsive to the concerns of the faculty in my college.
Q32. My dean fosters a climate of mutual respect within my college.
Q33. My dean follows the rules and procedures outlined in the faculty handbook.
Q34. My department chair is fair in the distribution of salaries.
Q35. My department chair is fair in the distribution of research support.
Q36. My department chair is fair in the distribution of travel funds.
Q37. My department chair fosters a climate of mutual respect with my department.
Q38. My department chair follows the rules and procedures outlined in the faculty handbook.
Q39. The overall conditions at ASU are such that the university can attract and retain quality faculty.
Q40. Salary and benefits at ASU are sufficient to attract and retain the highest quality faculty.
Q41. The climate at ASU supports and promotes academic freedom.
Q42. Compared to five years ago my overall morale is:
Q43. How would you rate your overall morale?
Q44. Are you currently involved in seeking professional employment elsewhere?
Q45. Briefly explain what aspects of working at ASU have the most positive impact on your morale.
Q46. Briefly explain what aspects of working at ASU have the most negative impact on your morale.
Q47. In your opinion, what steps could be taken to improve the overall morale at ASU?