

The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Education (COACHE): 2019 Survey of Faculty Satisfaction at the University of Pittsburgh

The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) at the Harvard Graduate School of Education is a research-practice partnership and network of peer institutions dedicated to improving outcomes in faculty recruitment, development, and retention. Under COACHE, more than 300 universities have strengthened their capacity to identify the drivers of faculty success and implement informed changes. One of the resources that COACHE offers is a Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey. This survey captures faculty sentiment with regard to teaching, service and research, tenure and promotion, departmental engagement and collegiality, and other aspects of the academic workplace. Survey items are aggregated into 25 benchmarks that provide a general sense of how faculty feel about a particular aspect of their work.

The University of Pittsburgh first partnered with COACHE to administer the Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey in 2016. The results provided a roadmap for programmatic improvements at all levels, and the administration at Pitt has been working hard to enhance and strengthen the environment for all faculty ever since. Pitt chose to administer the survey for a second time in spring 2019 to see if these efforts have been successful, and to again gauge the satisfaction of faculty.

Nearly forty-two percent of the University of Pittsburgh's non-clinical, full-time tenured, tenure stream, and appointment stream faculty members completed the online survey administered by COACHE. Pitt's responses include 467 tenured, 186 tenure stream, and 591 appointment stream faculty. This response rate is slightly lower than the 46% response rate for faculty from all 103 universities that participated in the 2019 survey, but higher than the 40% response rate of our selected peers¹.

High levels of satisfaction

Pitt faculty expressed positive views of the University of Pittsburgh. Almost 94% indicated that they would recommend or strongly recommend their department as a place to work, while 74% agreed or strongly agreed that if they had to do it again they would still choose Pitt. When asked to identify the two 'best aspects' of working at Pitt, the quality and support of colleagues topped the list.

Looking at the twenty-five benchmarks, compared to all participating institutions Pitt faculty were more satisfied, or in the top third, in ten. Compared to selected peers, Pitt scored in the top third in nearly half of these benchmarks. Importantly, Pitt showed an increase in satisfaction from 2016 to 2019 on four benchmarks: Health and Retirement Benefits, Leadership: Divisional, Tenure Clarity, and Tenure Expectations Clarity.

Pitt faculty responded favorably about their time spent on research compared to faculty from all institutions and compared to our peers. They also were optimistic about the support for faculty in leadership roles. Personal and family policies once again received high scores, most notably in terms of tuition waivers or remission, eldercare, family medical/parental leave, and flexible workloads/modified duties. Across the board Pitt faculty scored in the top third among all institutions and among peers in all health and retirement benefit questions. These included questions about health benefits for themselves, health benefits for their family, retirement benefits, and phased retirement options.

Pitt faculty also felt more favorable about interdisciplinary work overall and that this type of work is rewarded in merit and promotion. Among all institutions and peers, faculty were especially positive about opportunities for collaboration within their department and the effectiveness of mentoring

¹ For purposes of this report, peers were considered Indiana University – Bloomington, the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill, Purdue University, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Virginia.

outside their department. Pitt faculty had positive things to say about senior and divisional leadership, where they ranked in the top third among all institutions and peers. Faculty were satisfied with the pace of decision making, statement of priorities, and communication of priorities by the Chancellor. Similarly, they were satisfied with the statement and communication of priorities by both the Provost and by their Dean.

Pitt faculty scored in the top third on nearly all questions related to shared governance. When it comes to trust, respondents felt that faculty and administration follow rules of engagement, have an open system of communication, and discuss difficult issues in good faith. Pitt faculty also felt that there is a shared sense of purpose. Faculty responded favorably that important decisions are not made until there is consensus, the administration ensures sufficient time for faculty input, and that faculty and administration respectfully consider each other's views and have a shared sense of responsibility. Additionally, Pitt faculty highly agree that the administration communicates their rationale for important decisions and that faculty and administration have equal say and define the decision criteria together.

Pitt faculty were more favorable about the recognition that they received from colleagues, the Provost, and their Dean than faculty from all institutions and peers. Faculty also felt that their particular school and their specific department are valued by the Provost.

Low levels of satisfaction

In addition to pointing out the strengths of Pitt's faculty, the COACHE survey also helps to identify places of concern. Doing so helps pinpoint specific areas deserving closer examination to improve the work life of faculty. Compared to all participating institutions, Pitt ranked in the bottom third in only the departmental leadership benchmark. When looking at our peers, Pitt faculty were less satisfied (in the bottom third) in five benchmarks.

There were only three areas of overlap where Pitt ranked in the bottom third among both peers and among all institutions. Faculty were less satisfied in the clarity on the timeframe for promotion to full professor and on their understanding of how to voice opinions about policies. The third aspect that faculty were less satisfied was on discussions of undergraduate student learning.

There were low levels of satisfaction evident in faculty teaching schedules, the number of courses taught, level of courses taught, and support for teaching. Among peers, Pitt faculty were less favorable on facilities and work resources. These included equipment, classrooms, library resources, and computing and technical support.

Among all institutions, Pitt faculty were less favorable on departmental quality and leadership. Pitt scored in the bottom third on satisfaction with their chair stating or communicating priorities, ensuring faculty input, and fairness in evaluating work.

Moving forward

The results of the COACHE Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey show that Pitt has much to be proud of, but they also suggest that there are some areas to work on to help improve job satisfaction. In collaboration with the Council of Deans, the University Senate, and other faculty governance groups, Pitt will continue to work to strengthen the environment for all faculty.

