Benchmark
Best Practices:
Department Engagement,
Quality, and Collegiality

This series of white papers is offered freely to member institutions as part of our project's three-year support and engagement plan.

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> **COACHE Benchmarks**
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> Our surveys of college faculty produce data that are both (a) salient to full-time college faculty, and (b) actionable by academic leaders. The survey items are aggregated into 20 benchmarks representing the general thrust of faculty satisfaction along key themes.
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> The COACHE benchmarks are:
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> |---|---|---|
> | NATURE OF WORK: TEACHING | TENURE CLARITY | DIVISIONAL LEADERSHIP |
> | NATURE OF WORK: RESEARCH | TENURE REASONABLENESS | DEPARTMENTAL LEADERSHIP |
> | NATURE OF WORK: SERVICE | PROMOTION | **DEPARTMENTAL COLLEGIALITY** |
> | INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK | FACILITIES & WORK RESOURCES | **DEPARTMENTAL ENGAGEMENT** |
> | COLLABORATION | PERSONAL & FAMILY POLICIES | **DEPARTMENTAL QUALITY** |
> | MENTORING | HEALTH & RETIREMENT BENEFITS | APPRECIATION & RECOGNITION |
> | TENURE POLICIES | SENIOR LEADERSHIP | |

What is measured in these benchmarks?

DEPARTMENTAL ENGAGEMENT

How often do you engage with faculty in your department in conversations about:

- Undergraduate student learning
- Graduate student learning
- Effective teaching practices
- Effective use of technology
- Use of current research methodologies

Satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with:

- The amount of professional interaction you have with pre-tenure faculty in your department
- The amount of professional interaction you have with tenured faculty in your department

DEPARTMENTAL QUALITY

Agreement (or disagreement) with the following statements:

- My department is successful at recruiting high-quality faculty members.
- My department is successful at retaining high-quality faculty members.
- My department is successful at addressing sub-standard tenured faculty performance

Satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with:

- The intellectual vitality of pre-tenure faculty in your department
- The intellectual vitality of tenured faculty in your department
- The research/scholarly/creative productivity of pre-tenured faculty in your department
- The research/scholarly/creative productivity of tenured faculty in your department
- The teaching effectiveness of pre-tenure faculty in your department
- The teaching effectiveness of tenured faculty in your department

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DEPARTMENTAL COLLEGIALITY

Agreement (or disagreement) with the following statements:

- My departmental colleagues do what they can to make personal/family obligations (e.g. childcare or eldercare) and an academic career compatible.
- Department meetings occur at times that are compatible with my personal/family needs.
- My departmental colleagues "pitch in" when needed.
- On the whole, my department is collegial.

Satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with:

- The amount of personal interaction you have with pre-tenure faculty in your department
- The amount of personal interaction you have with tenured faculty in your department
- How well you fit in your department (e.g. your sense of belonging in your department)

Why Support for Departmental Engagement, Quality, and Collegiality Is Important

Faculty are employed by institutions, but they spend most of their time in departments, where culture has perhaps the greatest influence on faculty satisfaction and morale. We have highlighted three broad areas in which faculty judge the departments in which they work: engagement, quality, and collegiality.

Engagement. It is increasingly common to talk about student engagement, but less so faculty engagement. Yet, it is difficult to imagine an engaged student population without an engaged faculty. COACHE and the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) complement one another in that FSSE considers the faculty-student connection, while COACHE measures faculty engagement with one another—by their professional interactions and their departmental discussions about undergraduate and graduate learning, pedagogy, the use of technology, and research methodologies.

Quality. Departmental quality is a function of the intellectual vitality of faculty, the scholarship that is produced, the effectiveness of teaching, how well the department recruits and retains excellent faculty, and whether and how poor faculty performance is handled.

Collegiality. While many factors comprise faculty members' opinions about departmental collegiality, COACHE has discovered that faculty are especially cognizant of their sense of "fit" among their colleagues, their personal interactions with colleagues, whether their colleagues "pitch in" when needed, and colleague support for work/life balance. There is no substitute for a collegial department when it comes to faculty satisfaction, and campus leaders—both faculty and administrators—can create opportunities for more and better informal engagement.

Getting Started

- As arbiters of departmental culture, chairs especially are well-served to pay attention to departmental collegiality. Have an open-door policy so that faculty members can stop in and chat about departmental issues. Likewise, drop in to offer help, and intervene when necessary.
- Be especially careful to ensure that those who are in the minority—whether by gender, race/ethnicity, age, subfield, political views or some other factor—are not excluded or marginalized in the department; one person's autonomy might be another's isolation.
- Create forums for faculty to play together: schedule some social activities and ensure everyone knows about important milestones in each other's lives. Celebrate! (All four institutions in this report foster departmental engagement, quality, and collegiality by hosting social gatherings once or twice a month.)
- Create forums for faculty to work together: convene to discuss research, methodology, interdisciplinary

ideas, pedagogy, and technology.
- Provide chair training for handling performance feedback for tenure-track faculty members (e.g., annual reviews, mid-probationary period reviews), tenured faculty members (e.g., post-tenure review, annual or merit review, informal feedback); and non-tenure-track faculty members.
- Discuss the vitality of the department by using COACHE benchmarks and analytical data whenever possible to keep these matters from becoming overly-personalized.
- Be an advocate for faculty participation in activities in the campuses' center for teaching and learning.
- Use department meetings as more than just a review of a list of chores, but as an opportunity for generative thinking. Enlist colleagues to discuss new teaching and research methods or to present case studies for faculty to problem-solve. Using this structured time to initiate departmental engagement may encourage continued engagement outside of departmental meetings. As often as possible, ask departmental colleagues to volunteer to co-present.

What's Working

COACHE researchers interviewed leaders from member institutions whose faculty rated items in this theme exceptionally well compared to faculty at other participating campuses. While the highest ratings were found at baccalaureate institutions, the lessons derived from our interviews with their leaders are transferrable to universities at the school-, college-, or division-level.

Hamilton College

In explaining Hamilton faculty's satisfaction at the department level, leaders there pointed to the Dean's guidelines for department chairs (page 3):

"In leading a department, effective communication is critical to establishing your role as facilitator. The style and content of the conversations that you conduct can have a crucial impact on the culture of your department. You can help foster departmental collegiality by maintaining open communication at regular departmental meetings, circulating meeting agendas in advance, and setting agenda items that invite direct, frank and respectful discussions related to department policies, decision-making processes and collective vision."

Hamilton also makes a point of recognizing and honoring retiring faculty members with a presentation and reception at the last faculty meeting of the year. Such events support the leadership's stated commitment to growing and maintaining a culture where people celebrate and respect each other's accomplishments.

College of the Holy Cross

As a small intimate campus, Holy Cross enjoys an advantage for faculty to get to know one another as individuals as well as professionals. The result, as the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean put it, "is a very high level of mutual support and acknowledgement and appreciation." Beyond size, governance matters. One feature that distinguishes Holy Cross from others is its faculty assembly. "Instead of a faculty senate of elected, typically senior faculty, we have an assembly, and everybody comes," offered the Dean. "Junior faculty, if they are so inclined, can get up and speak and be heard by their colleagues… At other institutions, very often, it takes a decade or two to get to the point where your peers elect you to governance positions, but here it can happen very fast."

Kenyon College

Kenyon credits its search process for finding the "right people" who want to be at Kenyon. The provost coaches search committees to seek out candidates who understand (or otherwise demonstrably committed to) what it means to be a faculty member at a residential liberal arts college and to live in a place like Gam-

bier, Ohio for 30 years. The college also hosts retreats and organized conversations on teaching and pedagogy to provide many opportunities for faculty to get to know one another. For example, "Common Hour Events" feature faculty speakers more than once each month; "common hour" is a time when no classes are scheduled and the community can come together. Finally, leaders at Kenyon noted the success of its Campus Community Development Fund, which provides financial support for projects involving student collaborations with faculty and staff members.

Stonehill College

Stonehill holds several Dean's Forums on Fridays each semester where faculty members present their research in a social atmosphere (and, importantly, with wine and cheese).

Resources

Ambrose, S., Huston, T., & Norman, M. (2005, November). A Qualitative Method for Assessing Faculty Satisfaction. *Research in Higher Education*, 46(7), 803-830.

Gappa, J., Austin, A., & Trice, A. (2007). *Rethinking Faculty Work: Higher Education's Strategic Imperative*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Johnsrud, L. K., & Rosser, V. J. (2002). Faculty members' morale and their intention to leave. *Journal of Higher Education*, 73, 518–541.

Norman, M., Ambrose, S., & Huston, T. (2006, March 3). Assessing and Addressing Faculty Morale: Cultivating Consciousness, Empathy, and Empowerment. *Review of Higher Education*, 29(3), 347-379.

Woods, S. E., Reid, A., Arndt, J. E., Curtis, P., & Stritter, F. T. (1997). Collegial networking and faculty vitality. *Family Medicine*, 29(1), 45–49.

About COACHE

The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) is a consortium of more than 200 colleges and universities across North America committed to making the academic workplace more attractive and equitable for faculty. Founded in 2002 with support from the Ford Foundation and Atlantic Philanthropies, COACHE is based at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and is now supported by its members.

Designed to generate not simply "interesting" data, but actionable diagnoses, COACHE's suite of faculty job satisfaction surveys have been tested and continuously improved across multiple administration sites and cycles. Institutional reports and executive dashboards provide college leaders with a lever to increase the quality of work-life for their faculty; to advance a reputation as a great place for faculty to work; to provoke better questions from and more informed decisions by prospective faculty; and to generate ideas and initiatives from faculty that enrich and expand the range of possible improvements.

COACHE also brings academic leaders together to advance our mutual goals of maximizing the impact of the data, with many opportunities to meet with counterparts from peer institutions and to discuss COACHE findings on faculty affairs.

Call (617) 495-5285 to request your invitation to participate.

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