Survey of Academic Professionals:

Summary and Recommendations

by

University Professional Personnel Advisory Committee

October 2000
Introduction

"I am grateful to work with the outstanding faculty and staff members who have done, and continue to do, so much for our campuses. Your constructive criticism, as well as your cooperation and teamwork, are appreciated. In the end, whatever our disciplines, whatever our jobs, we share the same goal: to create and serve the finest public university in the world."

President James J. Stukel, 8/18/99 email

Purpose

During the 1997-98 and 1998-99 academic years, the academic professional advisory committees (APACs) on all three campuses conducted surveys of their constituents to determine the job-related issues of greatest concern to academic professionals. This report provides a brief summary of the key findings across the three campuses and offers some recommendations for follow-up. The full report of each survey is available at the respective APAC’s web site.1

The general consistency in survey questions and responses across the three campuses offers the University Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (UPPAC) and the university administration an opportunity to address issues and policies of concern to many.

Methodological Note

The APACs at Springfield and Chicago sent the survey to all academic professionals (APs) on their campus. Urbana drew a representative cluster sample by PAC district that totaled 561 APs. The response rate for both Springfield’s and Urbana’s survey was 71 percent, while Chicago’s survey received a 27 percent response rate. A total of 849 academic professionals across the three campuses completed the survey.

Chicago and Urbana sent paper questionnaires; Springfield sent the survey on computer disk. Urbana completed the survey during the summer of 1997, Springfield during the fall of 1998, and Chicago during the winter of 1998-99.

Each of the three surveys contained a core set of identical questions to permit comparison across the three campuses. The questions were first developed by the Urbana PAC in 1976 and repeated in their recent (1997) survey. The common set included questions on job-related issues of greatest concern, unit and personal morale, feeling secure and valued in the position, and

1 Web addresses:
Chicago: www.uic.edu/orgs/apac/
Springfield: www.uis.edu/~apac
Urbana: www.scs.uiuc.edu/~mainzv/PAC/survey/index.htm
support for a policy of release-time for professional development. Support for a job exchange program to learn new skills was asked on the Chicago and Urbana surveys but was not included in Springfield’s because the campus is too small to make the program feasible.

Urbana’s survey report includes analysis of the open-ended comments related to morale and comments related to not feeling valued or secure in their position. The Urbana report also includes trend analysis comparing the 1997 responses to the previous survey results. An appendix summarizing some of the literature on job satisfaction is also included.

This survey represented the first survey of academic professionals at UIS and therefore it was designed to also collect information to form a baseline demographic profile of APs and their perceptions of APAC’s role. In addition, because APAC has made enhancing professional development opportunities a priority, extensive questions concerning professional development needs and interests were also included.

Major Overall Findings

Looking at the survey results as a whole across all three campuses, four issues emerge as the most significant for academic professionals:

- Professional development
- Salary
- Advancement
- Training of supervisors.

Following are highlights of the findings on these and the other top concerns.

Highlights of the Findings

Professional Development

Academic professionals were asked if they would support a policy providing for release time from work with pay for professional development purposes. A sizeable majority on all three campuses indicated support for such a policy: Chicago, 90%; Springfield, 92%; and Urbana, 88%.

There was also support for a job exchange program to learn new job skills, with about half (52%) of respondents at Urbana and three-fifths (60%) at Chicago favoring this. (This question was not included on the Springfield survey.)

Professional development was a major focus of the Springfield survey. The topics of most interest to respondents were:
- Supervisory skills
- Managing change in the workplace
- Teamwork & collaborative skills training
- Employee performance evaluation
- Creating an effective public image for your unit
- Changing the office to use the new technology/ becoming paperless
- Mediation techniques.

While we cannot generalize these results to the other two campuses, they are suggestive of topics of possible interest to academic professionals throughout the university.

**Top Job Related Concerns**

Table 1 reports the percentage of respondents at each campus who ranked an item among the top four issues of greatest concern to them. The results are displayed in Figure 1. Note that professional development was not included in this list, although continuing education was. The list was first developed by the Urbana PAC for their survey in the 1970s, and it was decided to re-administer the same list for the recent survey on all three campuses.

- **Salary** was the most frequently cited concern, ranked among their top four concerns by 77 - 79 percent overall.

- **Opportunities for advancement** was the second most frequently cited concern, with 54 percent on each campus ranking this among their top four concerns.

- **Retirement package** was the third most frequently cited concern, ranked among the top four concerns by over half of APs (52 - 59%).

- **Job security** was a concern of just over half (52%) of APs on the Springfield and Urbana campuses, and of over two-fifths (44%) of APs at the Chicago campus.

- **Health insurance** was a top concern of nearly half of APs on the Chicago (48%) and Urbana (49%) campuses, while it was cited by more than one-third (38%) on the Springfield campus.

- **Continuing education** was among the items of greatest interest to over one-fourth of APs on the Springfield (28%) and Urbana (29%) campuses, and somewhat under one-fourth (22%) on the Chicago campus.

- **Child care** was cited by over one-fourth (28%) of APs on the Urbana campus but by only one in eight in Chicago and relatively few (6%) in Springfield.

*Table 1. Survey of Academic Professionals
Top Job Related Concerns (1997-99)*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Chicago</th>
<th>Springfield</th>
<th>Urbana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salary</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advancement</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retirement package</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job security</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health insurance</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing education</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>373</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey of Academic Professionals

Top Job Related Concerns (1997-99)

- Salary: UIC (77%), UIS (54%), UIUC (53%)
- Advancement: UIC (54%), UIS (54%), UIUC (53%)
- Retirement Package: UIC (53%), UIS (59%), UIUC (52%)
- Job Security: UIC (44%), UIS (52%), UIUC (52%)
- Health Insurance: UIC (48%), UIS (38%), UIUC (49%)
- Continuing Education: UIC (22%), UIS (28%), UIUC (29%)
- Child Care: UIC (12%), UIS (6%), UIUC (28%)

N: UIC (373), UIS (80), UIUC (396)
Morale

As seen in Table 2, a greater percentage of respondents at each of the campuses reported that the morale of their unit has become more negative rather than more positive in the past five years. Fewer at Urbana (26%) than at Springfield (37%) or Chicago (31%) reported that their unit’s morale is more positive than it was five years ago. Some respondents indicated "no change."

As seen in Table 3, about one-third of respondents at each campus reported that their personal morale has become more positive in the past five years. More at Springfield (39%) than Chicago (30%) or Urbana (36%) reported that their personal morale is more negative than it was five years ago.

Analysis of the open-ended comments in the Urbana survey found that the need for training of supervisors was a common theme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. How Unit Morale Has Changed in the Past 5 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chicago</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More positive or much more positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More negative or much more negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. How Personal Morale Has Changed in Past 5 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chicago</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More positive or much more positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More negative or much more negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feeling Valued and Secure in the Position

As seen in Table 4, a majority (74%+) of academic professionals on all three campuses feel valued in their position. Nearly one in five (19%) at the Chicago campus does not feel valued compared to one in eight (12%) at the Springfield and Urbana campuses.

Fewer, however, feel secure in their present position. About three-fifths of academic professionals at the Chicago (62%) and Springfield (63%) campuses feel secure in their position compared to just over half (55%) at the Urbana campus. Nearly one in four at the Springfield (24%) and Urbana (23%) campuses indicated they did not feel secure, while more (30%) at Chicago indicated this. Some respondents marked "neutral."

Table 4. Feel Valued in Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chicago</th>
<th>Springfield</th>
<th>Urbana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree or strongly agree</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree or strongly disagree</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Feel Secure in Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chicago</th>
<th>Springfield</th>
<th>Urbana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree or strongly agree</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree or strongly disagree</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations

Based on these survey results, the University Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (UPPAC) offers the following recommendations. These recommendations may be viewed as ways and means of achieving "Strategy 1" of the S3 strategic planning project, that is, "Develop and maintain a highly competent and adaptable workforce," funding for which can come from the "special 1 percent" budget increment for recruiting and retaining top-quality faculty and staff.

- Hold a roundtable discussion with President Stukel, Associate Vice President Todd, and other appropriate university officers with UPPAC members to discuss the survey results and proposed avenues for follow-up.

- Disseminate this report to the chancellors and the constituency on each campus.

- Appoint a task force with representatives from UPPAC and each campus to generate strategies for following-up the survey results. The task force would report to UPPAC and to the President through UPPAC.

- Provide salary enhancement funds to address market or internal inequities for academic professionals, as is currently done for faculty. Allocate additional funds for annual merit increases so that those who receive extra merit do not do so at the expense of others.

- Job security can sometimes be increased through skill enhancement. Encourage supervisors to support and encourage APs to take advantage of opportunities to enhance skills that are valuable to their units. Supervisors themselves should be encouraged and supported by their campus administration to allow APs to pursue professional development.

- Professional development can be enhanced in the following ways:
  - Provide a central fund for professional development at each campus to help defray the costs for units, similar to the faculty scholars travel fund.
  - Provide professional development leaves (PDLs), akin to sabbaticals, to APs.
  - Provide each academic professional with $500 at the beginning of each contract year to spend on professional development.
  - Increase HR training offerings geared especially for academic professionals, such as management skills, managing change, collaboration, negotiation, mediation, etc.
• Introduce evaluation and managerial training of supervisors to improve the work environment and enhance productivity and effectiveness. Training of supervisors should emphasize communication skills and interpersonal skills.

• Develop career ladders for appropriate academic professional positions to afford greater opportunities for advancement both within and across units. Information should be disseminated on the standard title categories for academic professionals to afford the flexibility to create these career ladders.

• Encourage AP employees to take advantage of Supplemental Retirement Accounts. The university is urged to provide an employer match to these 403(b) accounts, as is being discussed in Senates Conference.

Conclusion

The consistency in the survey results across the three campuses affords an opportunity to address issues of concern to many academic professionals. UPPAC welcomes feedback on its recommendations for follow-up and looks forward to working with the university administration in addressing the issues raised by the survey results.