

2016 JANUARY RESPONSES

CPI REQUEST FOR INFORMATION REGARDING FACULTY MORALE

A. Background/Summary

In August 2015, the Council of Principal Investigators (CPI) conducted a survey of the ~2200 research active faculty represented by the CPI. 781 members of the research community answered this survey (35%). Although this survey queried many aspects of the conduct of research at TAMU and the agencies, several questions were designed to assess faculty morale (scored as Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor). ***In 8 colleges (COALS, CVM, COEHD, COG, COM, COLA, COS, COA) over 40% of the respondents rated morale across campus as Fair or Poor.*** These faculty members contributed hundreds of comments that described issues that affect morale, and suggested improvements to enhance research programs. The results of this survey were made publically available on the CPI website in September 2015. In January 2016, CPI representatives of these 8 colleges were tasked by the CPI leadership to review input from their respective colleges from the 2015 CPI survey and to gather a current snapshot of morale from research active faculty in their colleges (text of the request itself is listed under Section B). Each college used their own methodology to gather current information but all were given access to the list serves the CPI maintains for research active faculty in the respective colleges. The material provided by each colleges CPI members is appended below (Section C).

B. Text of the Request for input regarding faculty morale sent to CPI representatives of 8 colleges listed above:

Colleagues-

President Young requested that the CPI provide him with a 1-3 page summary on faculty morale. The CPI Executive Committee has scheduled a meeting with President Young on February 15, and we would like to provide him with feedback on this topic at that meeting.

Thus, I am writing to request your help.

Over 40% of PIs from your college who answered the survey reported faculty morale to be fair or poor. I'd like your help in distilling out of your individual college data the most prominent reasons cited by your faculty from the CPI survey.

IF you could assist me by doing the following for YOUR COLLEGE DATA ONLY (SEE the attached excel file which contains a separate page for each college):

1. Distill from the survey results from your college the top 3-5 reasons for low morale among your colleagues.
2. Place these in the context of events in your college/the university over the last 5 years (or so) that may have contributed to low morale (with as much factual information as possible, years of budget cuts, years without faculty raises, cuts in administrative staff etc).
3. Add to that any CURRENT EVENTS in your college that may be strongly influencing faculty morale (positively or negatively) that have occurred after completion of the survey (after August 2015).

4. Write me a SHORT paragraph containing this information that can be synthesized into the larger document.

Each of you is in a different department, and thus you may have somewhat different perspectives on this. If you could synthesize your thoughts and give me one document from your college- that would be most helpful to me.

I request that you provide me with some feedback by this coming WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10. This will give me and the CPI leadership time to generate a cohesive document prior to our meeting with the President on the following Monday.

I very much appreciate your help with this, your active participation at the CPI, and your commitment to improving the research environment at TAMU.

C. 2016 JANUARY RESPONSES BY COLLEGE

1. COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES

Erosion of morale within COALS appears to stem from the interplay of budgetary and top-down administrative trends that together create increased effort with concomitant reduction in compensation. Over a period of years, technical and support staff positions have been reduced, and faculty have assumed increased teaching responsibilities, administrative burdens, and other demands on time and effort. Cumulative losses of benefits (annual leave), stagnation in salary (lack of COLA or merit increases), and for some units, actual salary cuts (12-month appointments reduced to 9- or 10-month without salary compression). The salary reduction is especially problematic because of its uneven distribution and long-term impact on overall morale. The mission of the college is such that many research & teaching faculty view their duties as 12-month positions, and when combined with elimination of annual leave, these cuts elicit a somewhat emotional response from faculty, because the implication of a reduced appointment extends beyond financial aspects of the change. Moreover, needed growth and research investment in units has been hampered by lack of funds and upper administration priorities. College leadership is viewed by faculty as top-down and autocratic, faculty-led initiatives are often not encouraged, and communication with both faculty and department leadership is poor.

The faculty largely are highly collaborative and happy with their own work. Faculty and department leadership are frustrated by upper administration – one must consider COALS, AgriLife Research, and to some extent AgriLife Extension together. Faculty- or department- initiated efforts and requests are ignored or blocked in favor of initiatives that are mandated from the top, and slow. Survey responses repeatedly addressed “lack of respect” for faculty and “inability to be heard.” These types of comments reflect leadership and communication problems.

2. COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

The responses given by CVMBS faculty as to the reasons for “poor” or “fair” faculty morale fell into the two general areas.

1. The compliance issues at TAMU are due to excessive interpretation of regulatory requirements resulting in unnecessary paperwork/training courses and delays in obtaining approvals (especially AUC, IBS and IRB). The compliance environment appears to be focused more on regulation than service.

2. There is a general feeling that recent hiring decisions of senior faculty members under chancellor/president's initiative and other initiatives has been made by higher administration without much input from faculty. The faculty feel there would have been better outcomes if faculty were involved early in the process. The faculty also feel the TAMU strategy to gain instant visibility by recruiting highly successful senior faculty from other universities is expensive and counterproductive in the long term; they think that such resources could be better utilized to invest in current promising faculty who are likely to be tomorrow's superstars.

3. COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Top reasons for low morale:

- a. Themes that emerged from 2015 Survey: (1) SRS, (2) IRB, and (3) Poor leadership and lack of support in the College.
- b. Themes that emerged from 2016 follow-up survey: (1) SRS, (2) IRB, and (3) Poor leadership, increasing workloads and pressures, but lack of support in the College

Events in the last 5 years that impacted morale:

- a. Need for an Associate Dean of Research in the College, rather than combining or consolidating that role into the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies.
- b. The "Red and Black" report that posted faculty salaries and teaching loads that gave the public a negative impression of faculty.
- c. Multiple changes at SRS.
- d. Exposing faculty and staff social security numbers online to the public, and only providing 1-year Life-Lock Protection.

Events since August 2015 (last Fall) that impacted morale:

- a. Changes and problems at SRS
- b. College's efforts to restructure and centralize college-level pre- and post-award research services without faculty/PIs input.

In the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD), faculty morale appeared to have declined somewhat over the past several months. The average rating on faculty morale from the Fall 2015 CPI survey completed by 83 faculty members was 3.71 (3 = good and 4 = fair), while a follow-up survey completed by 15 faculty members in February 2016 was 4.20 (with 4 = fair and 5 = poor). Top reasons for low faculty morale included changes and problems at SRS, slow response time and issues at IRB, and poor leadership and lack of support but increasing pressures on PIs in the college.

Faculty expressed that continual and multiple changes along with incompetence and problems at SRS in recent years have negatively impacted faculty morale. Other recent events that negatively impacted morale include the “Red and Black” report on faculty salaries and teaching loads and exposure of faculty and staff private information to the public online. CEHD’s plans to restructure and centralize grant and research services is also causing a lot of concern amongst faculty.

4. COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE

Methodology: All tenured and tenure-track CPI members in College of Architecture (excluding administrators) were contacted and asked to provide a detailed analysis, after assurances that information would only be used anonymously. Fourteen individuals from four different departments responded. All identifying information was removed and the data were organized by department. Centers and Institutes were kept in a separate category as they are not directly tied to departments.

Findings: Based on the responses it appears that the factors that contribute to morale vary by individual. The issues related to tenure and promotion, salary discrepancies, lack of administrative vision, space allocation seem to be major factors that cause low morale. No specific set of events over the last 5 years appears to have influenced faculty morale. Similarly, no particular event in the college that may be strongly influencing faculty morale (positively or negatively) appears to have occurred after completion of the original survey (August 2015).

Observations and Explanations: Based on faculty input, low faculty morale comes from problems that are endemic to College of Architecture, one of the most interdisciplinary Colleges in Texas A&M University consisting of designers, artists, engineers, psychologists, historians, social scientists and even lawyers. This fact, alone, can be most contributing factor in faculty morale. The most frequently occurring complaints (with some context) are listed below:

- 1. Tenure and Promotion:** Because of the interdisciplinary environment, it is slightly more complicated to get tenure and promotion in College of Architecture for almost all disciplines. For instance, an engineer is evaluated by external reviewers who are also engineers. However, engineers in the College of Architecture do not have the same support system that might exist in engineering departments. Historians are judged by standards of historians, however they do not enjoy the same kind of mentoring support exists history departments. Because of the other fields, artists and designers are internally evaluated by the standards that are influenced by other fields. It is possible to view Architecture experience a challenge that can positively influence promoting interdisciplinary research.
- 2. Salary Discrepancies:** There are significant salary discrepancies in the College. Two factors appear to impact salary discrepancies.

- a. **Seniority:** In terms of salary, seniority hurts. New hires get significantly higher salaries. According to one internal study, longevity is the single most contributing factor of low salaries. This is most likely caused by low raises.
 - b. **Job Market:** In some disciplines salaries are higher than other. To attract people from those disciplines, it is necessary to offer higher salary. This creates additional salary discrepancy within the same department.
3. **Space Allocation:** Architecture requires studio space allocated to undergraduate students as a cold desk. The college also has strong research focus that also requires space. Space requirement by both teaching and research makes it harder to allocate the existing limited space.
4. **Leadership Issues:** Leadership expectations of such a diverse faculty also significantly differ. In particular, some researchers who are partially independent from College like their current status, which they feel gives them freedom. On the other hand, other faculty prefer to be involved in making decisions with strong communication channels along and stronger leadership/vision from administration.

5. COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

1. Distill from the survey results from your college the top 3-5 reasons for low morale among your colleagues.

- Lack of shared governance and unilateral decision making by the upper administration.
- A lack of commitment to high-quality humanities research. There is a sense that non-science faculty are not respected.
- Poor funding for the graduate program.
- The number of individuals requesting faculty development leave, and whose research programs would benefit from it, is far greater than the number of slots available.
- A continued need to bolster diversity within the college and at TAMU.

2. Place these in the context of events in your college/the university over the last 5 years (or so) that may have contributed to low morale (with as much factual information as possible, years of budget cuts, years without faculty raises, cuts in administrative staff etc).

- Our college, like others, has been pushing to move forward on issues concerning the representation of women and diversity, with the aim of getting past the “good old boy” system of the past. Yet, much remains to be done.
- A number of administrative issues have contributed to the low morale within the college, including a prior dean who was widely seen as problematic. The

replacement of that dean has improved morale and we anticipate that trend to continue..

- Budget cuts, faculty salaries, and a shift in administrative burden continue to impact morale. After years of low raises, it has been difficult to make up ground and salary compression for mid-career faculty remains a serious problem. So too is the continued administrative burden placed on departments and faculty (associated with the dissolution of the Research Foundation) and the endless series of new regulatory requirements associated with conducting animal and human research.
- The college includes a diverse group of researchers. While those that lie in fields aligned with the natural sciences may feel appreciated, those working within the humanities do not. Many departments also have some mid-career faculty that have become unproductive.
- The number of individuals that receive a Faculty Development Leave each year is far below what is needed. This occurs even though some colleges cannot use all of the slots allocated to them.
- There is not even an illusion of shared governance. Administrative decisions appear to be pushed upon the college from above with little to no faculty input.
- The current climate at TAMU impedes faculty recruitment.

3. Add to that any CURRENT EVENTS in your college that may be strongly influencing faculty morale (positively or negatively) that have occurred after completion of the survey (after August 2015).

Recent events that are impacting faculty morale include:

Positive: The appointment of a new Dean.

Negative: The implementation of BAM for purchasing.

4. Write a SHORT paragraph containing this information that can be synthesized into the larger document.

While morale within the College of Liberal Arts has improved since the appointment of a new Dean, there is continued need to address long-standing issues, including a lack of shared governance and a continued need to enhance faculty diversity. Liberal Arts includes a wide-range of research, from neuroscience to philosophy. Those doing strong work within the humanities do not feel that their work gains the same level of respect as science-oriented endeavors. Funding issues also pose obstacles, with cuts in graduate student lines and salary compression for mid-career faculty, some of whom feel disenfranchised. The administrative burden with conducting both animal and human research continues to increase.

6. COLLEGE OF GEOSCIENCES

The College of Geosciences includes the academic elements of the Departments of Atmospheric Sciences, Geography, Geology and Geophysics, Oceanography, the

Environmental Programs, Water Programs, the Geochemical and Environmental Research Group, Texas Sea Grant, and IODP.

1. How would you describe overall faculty morale on campus?

Score: mean 3.79/5; standard deviation 0.86

1 Excellent	0
2 VG	1
3 G	11
4 Fair	10
5 Poor	7

Respondents: 29

2. Distill from the survey results from your college the top 3-5 reasons for low morale among your colleagues.

From the survey response comments (23 comments, some had more than one issue raised):

a. Poor (University/College/Department) leadership is mentioned	15 times
b. Lack of resources, low pay	11 times
c. Increased work-load, salary compression	9 times
d. Political interference, lack of support (climate/envIRON. issues)	5 times
e. Reduced local, state and federal agency funding	4 times

2. Place these in the context of events in your college/the university over the last 5 years (or so) that may have contributed to low morale (with as much factual information as possible, years of budget cuts, years without faculty raises, cuts in administrative staff etc).

a. Geosciences, like many colleges at A&M has endured relatively long periods of wage stagnation or worse. College of Geosciences faculties are consistently underpaid at all levels relative to peer institutions and departments (0.78 Rel. Mkt. 2014-2015 to Vision 20/20 peers). Within TAMU the College of Geoscience is among 2 or 3 colleges with the largest salary discrepancies. The budget problems of ~ 2009-2011, when merit increases were non-existent (or very small) exacerbated the salary problem and also led to cuts in administrative staff in the College increasing faculty workloads. There is also dissatisfaction with teaching and salary parity across both the college and in departments, which is negatively impacting moral for some faculty. Finally, there is a perception that administrators within the college are not experiencing these same issues.

In Oceanography, the 2005 retirement of the NSF-UNOLS research vessel operated by TAMU (R/V Gyre) has led to the loss of a critical component of field research, student training, national reputation as an oceanographic institution, and institutional pride. Many in the department still lament this loss as highly impactful on productivity and

morale; the Department owned and operated one or more vessels for 55 of its 67 year history.

b. The number of tenure/tenure-track faculty has remained relatively constant while there has been a decrease in departmental administrative staff and an increase of staff and administrators concentrated in the Dean's office. This expansion of the Dean's office is viewed as unnecessary (and often inefficient) centralization and has had a negative effect on morale. To the lay faculty, it is not clear how these additional staff and administrators are improving or positively impacting faculty on the front lines of the University's teaching and research missions.

c. For a college with ~ 100 tenure/tenure track FTEs - communication between the Dean and faculty on many issues is poor. In Geosciences this may in part be a consequence of being spread over three-buildings, which has caused communication issues between professors, staff, and students. As an example the way the change in vacation policy was communicated was poor for morale and the tax implications were costly to some faculty. Further, the O&M building, which houses the departmental offices of Oceanography, Atmospheric Sciences, and Geology, is outdated and non-conducive to interaction and collaboration. A standing joke is the building is stratified by discipline and inhibits mixing.

d. It appears that the college continues to struggle to support basic functionality (e.g. websites, advertising, development) required for teaching and promoting of units, research etc.

The issues appear to come down to a lack of meaningful shared governance. The overall perception is that communication is not effective, input is not sought before decisions are made, and administrators do not see their job as facilitating faculty success. To some extent this criticism can be applied at the departmental, college, and university scales.

3. Add to that any CURRENT EVENTS in your college that may be strongly influencing faculty morale (positively or negatively) that have occurred after completion of the survey (after August 2015).

The status quo of the last several years has continued since August 2015. This is perhaps emblematic of the problem in that low morale has appeared as a problem in several surveys over the last 5 years and yet morale or the issues associated with moral have not been widely discussed within the College and the College certainly has not expressed how it will address it. It doesn't give one the sense that addressing the morale issue has been a high priority.

4. Write me a SHORT paragraph containing this information that can be synthesized into the larger document.

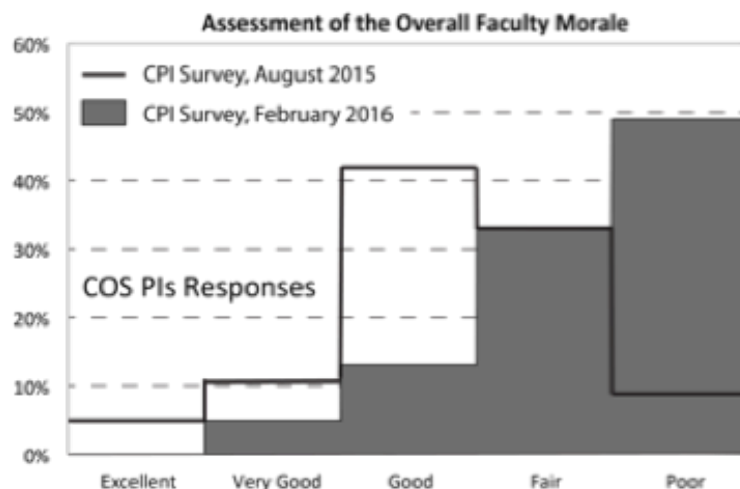
Low morale within the College of Geosciences has been identified in the recent CPI survey (August 2015) and in the last two University climate surveys. The primary reasons for the low moral appear to center around administration issues (leadership, vision, communication, treatment and support of faculty), salary issues, and the growth in the number of administrators and staff in Deans office. The primary salary issues center on the fact that College of Geosciences faculties are underpaid at all levels relative to peer institutions and departments and that there are salary parity issues both across the college and within departments. Despite centralizing many resources and expanding staff in the College offices, it appears that the college continues to struggle to support basic functionality required for teaching, research and promoting of units, and it is not clear how this growth is helping improve research and teaching productivity. The issues appear to come down to a lack of meaningful shared governance. The overall perception is that communication is not effective; input is not sought before decisions are made, and administrators do not see their job as facilitating faculty success. To some extent this criticism can be applied at the departmental, college, and university scales. Finally there has been little discussion of how to improve moral despite it being a long-standing problem.

7. COLLEGE OF SCIENCE

The recent survey of the assessment of the morale among the PIs in the College of Science has revealed an exceptionally troubling picture: 82% of the 156 PIs responding to a recent survey reported fair to poor morale, a significant change from the August survey, in which 42% of 55 responders reported such low morale, as illustrated in the Figure below. The survey indicates that the college is in a serious crisis.

As both surveys revealed that budgetary situation as a key factors behind these numbers, we briefly describe the background of the budgetary concerns and the developments that occurred between the two surveys.

Figure 1: Results of two surveys among the PIs in the College of Science assessing the overall morale. The first survey has been taken in August 2015, the second in February of 2016.



For much of the past decade, the Dean supplemented each department's budget to cover shortfalls and maintain course offerings. This grew each year with increasing enrollments. The 10% budget cuts of 2010 were absorbed by loss of staff, reduced

facility maintenance and general support costs. The next few years saw additional cuts of 1-3%. At the same time, departments in the College have seen significant increases (up to 20%) in enrollment while faculty numbers have been static or declined. In 2015, Dean Newton informed departments that the college would no longer be able to provide supplemental funds to cover operational expenses. A consequence is that ROIC savings for start up funds were spent to cover teaching budgets. These developments are likely behind the general malaise recorded in August of 2015.

In October 2015 Dean Aronson was appointed. All on-going searches were canceled, and it became known that she accepted the position without securing commitments or developing a plan to overcome this situation. The departments must absorb cuts as large as 6% to their budgets in mid-year. Morale plummeted, especially with the effective resignations of the department heads of Chemistry and of Physics, and recent indications that the story is likely to repeat in mathematics.

While the surveyed PIs have identified a number of reasons for the low levels of morale, strong trends emerged from the 128 responses in the most recent survey taken in February 2016. About 1/4 found the budget situation disheartening; this was split between the historical cuts, reflecting university priorities, and the abrupt cuts of this year. About 40% have identified actions of the current administration as being part of the problem. Of these, more than half explicitly referred to the actions of the new Dean, and a slightly smaller number associated the low morale with the Provost. Comments about both Dean and Provost mentioned lack of leadership, poor engagement with the faculty, inadequate plans for the future, and indifference to the harm the budget cuts have caused the College. There is an apparent widespread feeling among those surveyed that the College is underfunded relative to its teaching mission, that the Provost's actions show intentional disregard for the needs of the college, and is in fact are hostile towards it and the research mission of the College of Science.

8. COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

The morale thermometer of the College of Medicine faculty is evenly distributed between the very good, good and fair categories (about 30% in each). Perhaps most telling, none surveyed identified in the excellent category while a few identified themselves in the poor category (>10%). The factors that contribute to this malaise almost certainly are related to the difficult funding climate at the NIH, the fact that the HSC/COM budget has been flat for the past 4 years or so, and sequellae of what is viewed as declining institutional support for research. This is suggested by comments related to concerns regarding insufficient bridge funding (presumably a concern of historically NIH-funded investigators), pilot funding (could be an issue raised by historically NIH-funded investigators and/or investigators with a weak record of success in securing funding from extramural sources). There is also a sentiment that resources are being taken from investigators by higher administration with no explanation for how those resources will be reinvested. These include loss of paid leave, no support for sabbatical leave, cutbacks in administrative support, and 'years of budget cuts'. Also prominent is the opinion that a culture of 'over-compliance' pervades the institution with

the effect that the administrative burden is increased on the most research-active faculty, and the obvious instability in HSC leadership is a major concern.