

Appendix B: Summary of Comments by Category

1. Awards and Rewards (14 reviewed comments)

Departmental awards: Some departments seem to be doing a good job of recognizing the efforts and accomplishments of fixed-term faculty while others seem to be actively excluding their FTF from any types of recognition.

Several respondents felt that there should be university-wide criteria for awards and more university funding to departments to use in recognizing their employees.

Some respondents felt that the awards/rewards questions on the survey were limiting in response options—more ways to qualify the responses (maybe, sometimes, etc.) were needed.

2. Salary/increases/PERS/benefits/promotion (41 reviewed comments)

Not surprisingly, many comments dealt with frustrations about the university-wide salary cap/salary freeze. Those on grant funds are additionally frustrated that even though there were cost of living salary increases built into their grants, and funded by their granting agencies, they are unable to use these funds.

Eroding benefits and the uncertainty of retirement (PERS) were other sources of concern. Some respondents felt that they had been “had” by sticking with a low-paying job for the promised good retirement benefits which may now be less attractive. Others are frustrated with the higher costs of out-of-pocket health care benefits, especially when linked with the pay freeze. Lack of benefits (vacation, merit increases, etc) accorded to those on a 0.49 FTE appointment were also noted.

Several fixed-term faculty expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of promotion opportunities afforded them. This was noted most by instructors and FRAs who felt that few could achieve the Senior Instructor and Senior FRA classifications. Some expressed the feeling that university-wide guidelines for promotion would be helpful rather than relying on departmental instigation and review. There is little acknowledgement of the achievements of long-term fixed-term faculty.

Salary compression was another point brought forward. It is frustrating for long-term FTF to see new hires brought in at close to the salary they make after many years on the job.

Concern was expressed for lack of recognition of FTF contributions to technological intellectual property (e.g., new software, graphics development, etc.) in promotion and salary increase decisions.

The need for university-wide guidelines and involvement in salary determinations, raises and promotions was expressed by several. There is a feeling that there are have and have-not departments and that some departments actively discourage grant applicants from asking for competitive salaries for fear that the granting agencies will deny the application based on dollars requested rather than technical/scientific merit. A suggestion was made for a Staff Compensation Committee through HR to review all requests for mid-cycle salary increases.

Those individuals totally on grant-funded positions and those in Extension who lost the state-funded portion of their positions may feel that the rest of the university is unsupportive of their situations. Lack of a safety net of support and empathy can be demoralizing.

Lack of departmental or university support for newly-hired FTF with relocation concerns was noted.

Finally, the comment was made that in order to be considered a top-tier university, salary, benefits and appointments for FTF should be increased to the level of those accorded community college faculty.

3. Performance reviews/evaluations (13 reviewed comments)

Comments varied. Some are very happy with their department's evaluation methods, which seem to range all the way from a letter of evaluation to a standardized form. Those who were not reviewed were not happy about that.

Frustrations were expressed by individuals whose department supervisors said that evaluations were not needed because of salary freeze/lack of promotional opportunities/lack of time/lack of resources. Others, particularly those in Extension, felt that they could be reviewed by too many people (university departments plus one or more county offices, etc.).

Some felt that university-wide criteria were essential as departments seem to have no set criteria and may be too subjective and too dependent on the whim of one supervisor/chair.

Some Professional Faculty expressed dissatisfaction with the revised performance appraisal form. Suggestions were to use another model from state government, to allow an option for employee comment/rebuttal, and to make the criteria more specific (too vague now..."meets standards" but what are the standards?)

Others felt that little had been achieved by the earlier Professional Faculty task force in the area of performance reviews and until there is a change in administration, university financial situation, etc., no progress can be expected.

4. Hiring/annual contracts/renewal/termination/job security (26 reviewed comments)

Not surprisingly, many respondents were dissatisfied with the annual contract format. Comments expressed included the fact that many good people would not come to a place that offered them no security, and good people already here would leave if a more secure job were available. Annual renewal is not compatible with a secure family life and long-term commitment to OSU.

Several comments expressed a perception of capriciousness in the part of their supervisors as to termination and renewal. An interest in university-wide guidelines and structure was expressed. Some were dissatisfied with the timing and sensitivity of termination announcements.

Faculty Research Assistants (FRAs) noted that they can lose their positions if their PI retires and little effort is made by department or college to help them transition to another department or group.

Professional Faculty felt that they should be accorded two-year or longer contracts similar to others in their positions in state government with DAS contracts. Long-term contracts are more reflective of the long-term nature of many Professional Faculty positions.

Some respondents expressed appreciation of their department chair's determination to do all possible to provide timely notification of termination. Others felt that they could be terminated or non-renewed with very little notice.

Respondents with professorial rank felt that fixed-term appointments bred discontent, not loyalty, in that their position in the department provides no security for them yet also has many uncompensated expectations.

Long-term Fixed-Term Faculty issues: Many respondents felt that there is little recognition of the contribution made by fixed-term employees who have been on annual contracts for 20 or more years. They perform at a high level and make significant contributions to their departments and programs yet are accorded no security. Little distinction is made administratively between those who are "passing through" the university on their way to another job and those who decide to make a career at OSU.

A suggestion was made that a “guaranteed” 0.5 FTE position would provide the health care and retirement benefits important to long term commitment by FTF to the university.

It was suggested that contract renewal should be dependent upon the importance of the individual’s contribution to the program, not upon seniority.

Many people felt that the lack of timely renewal was demeaning and demoralizing and created excessive personal stress to the employee and family. If an employee’s contribution is appreciated, it is respectful and courteous not to wait until the last minute to let them know if they will be reappointed next term or not.

5. Issues of off-campus employees (6 comments)

University employees based off the main campus may feel isolated from issues and events going on at OSU.

There were several suggestions made to set up an electronic mailing list or other forums for sharing ideas and issues that would be relevant to both off-campus and on-campus FTF.

One respondent expressed frustration with the 2003-2004 parking regulations. In the past an employee could buy a 10-pass parking permit for \$15. Now the only option is a \$5/day permit that must be purchased at the Parking Office. Appeal of parking tickets has been unsuccessful. (The return of the 10-pass permit with the 2004-2005 academic year should help resolve this issue.)

Employees assigned to multiple units on a part-time appointment may feel pulled in too many directions as each unit wants their time.

6. Professional development (9 comments)

In general, respondents who participated in professional development did so at their own expense or when the programs were free.

Little funding is available from departments, either due to being under-funded themselves, because the training was not viewed as essential or because heavy teaching loads precluded time needed to keep abreast of new developments in the field.

Some respondents were not aware that funds for professional development were available until they happened to discover this through their own research or were informed about it by this survey.

A Professional Faculty member felt that more than one trainer should be recruited to provide professional development trainings.

7. Faculty Senate representation (6 comments)

Many respondents felt that fixed-term faculty’s issues and needs could and would not be addressed by the Faculty Senate because they would not be considered peers of tenured and tenure-track faculty, that they don’t belong in a Faculty Senate, and that issues of tenured and tenure-track faculty would get more consideration and debate.

However, it was not felt that a “fixed-term faculty senate” would be useful either, because it would be deemed “second class” and powerless.

Professional Faculty expressed views that their needs would best be met by continued representation by Faculty Senate rather than realignment with classified staff.

Fixed-term faculty unionization was also an option, but respondents who mentioned this felt that it would not best serve the educational mission of the university.

8. University committees (3 comments)

Respondents had all volunteered for university committees but were not selected and were not notified that they had not been chosen. They assumed that there was ample number of volunteers to choose from in addition to themselves.

9. Grant-specific issues (15 comments)

Some fixed-term faculty who provide much or all of their support through grants feel that their contribution to the department and university is not appreciated or recognized though everyone benefits from the overhead/indirect costs that these “cash cows” bring in.

The fact that most university-supported and internal grants are open only to tenured/tenure-track faculty and that FRAs and Professional Faculty are rarely encouraged to be principal investigators on grants cripples productivity and limits potential contributions of fixed-term faculty.

Termination for grant-supported FTF is often determined by when grant funds run out. Continued support is often dependent upon the character and decency of individual principal investigators.

Again, as detailed under salaries, there is considerable frustration in the inability to utilize grant-approved yearly salary increases due to university pay freeze.

10. Instructor-related issues (11 comments)

This category drew some of the most outspoken comments. Instructors in particular seem to feel the “us versus them” faculty split very deeply.

There is a perception that tenured faculty view instructors as a “stop gap” to meet an immediate need until tenured faculty can take over. Their concerns and opinions are not regarded as they are looked upon as being short-timers, though many have been teaching here for a long time.

Due to heavy teaching loads and large classes, instructors feel that they do not have the time or support to participate in service and scholarship opportunities that would enhance their contributions to their students nor do they receive recognition or award for their efforts. “Burn-out” is of particular concern.

Instructors who teach baccalaureate-core classes to students throughout the university are not considered for college teaching awards because the balloting is open only to students in their college. Some instructors are told that they cannot be promoted without having received college-level awards, that good teaching evaluations are not enough.

Even departments where instructors are valued for the “body count” of students they teach (for several, this amounts to hundreds per year) tend to be too stressed out and under-funded to mentor instructors, look to their welfare and note their contributions.

Tenured faculty are perceived to be resentful of instructors. Instructors used to be eligible for tenure once promoted to Senior Instructor, but the Faculty Senate repealed that option a few years ago.

Like other FTF, instructors feel that while they have made a commitment to their students and their department, OSU has not made a commitment to them in terms of job stability, respect and benefits. “If non-tenure-track faculty left today, most research (and much of teaching) would stop.”

11. Comments on questionnaire/FTFTF and PFA similarities/other (49 comments)

Twenty-two respondents expressed appreciation for the survey and for the efforts of the Task Force to help fixed-term faculty.

Two respondents expressed concerns about confidentiality and anonymity, while four encouraged the committee to contact them.

Three respondents wondered if we were aware of the Professional Faculty Issue Group report and if we were duplicating their work. That committee was perceived as “administrative assistants for administrative assistant issues”—excluding grant-funded people. It was pointed out that this report would go to the same interim Provost that reviewed the Professional Faculty Issue Group recommendations and nothing happened then, so why expect something to happen now?

Six people had concerns about the format of the survey, particularly that the lack of options for anything other than “yes/no” in some questions might bias the FTTF perception of responses.

Six people wondered about the composition of the Task Force: why there was nobody from Student Affairs or Forestry; is the Task Force all Professional Faculty like the previous one; and are Faculty Research Assistants and Associates were represented?

There were also some philosophical queries: What will be done with the results? What is the mission of the Task Force? There is a perception that this Task Force will not be able to accomplish much right now given the current salary freeze.

Twelve respondents expressed interest in a list-serve, mentoring meetings or other ways of sharing information among FTF. Several noted that this survey was the first time that they had become aware of opportunities and issues that could affect them.

12. PI, department, college issues/respect from colleagues (49 comments)

This category brought some of the most passionate responses. Many centered on the apparent diversity between colleges, departments and individual supervisors in how important matters such as hiring/dismissal, promotion, merit increases, working conditions, and many others were handled. Many wished that OSU provided more oversight and standardization in these areas so that FTF status would be more consistent across campus. Comments by some respondents were of concern because they indicated lack of compassion and privacy protection by supervisors that adversely affect FTF ability to perform effectively.

Twelve respondents were very happy or at least mostly happy with their roles as FTF and felt that they had respect and appreciation from their colleagues, department and OSU.

Twenty-four respondents felt that there was a major negative “them vs. us” gulf between tenured faculty and FTF. FTF are not perceived as “real” faculty or accorded the respect of collegiality. FTF who were not encouraged to participate in departmental meetings feel undervalued. Those who have comparable experience and education to tenured and tenure-track faculty but are FTF feel like they are considered a “short-term solution” and opportunities for publication, participation in long-term departmental planning and grant applications are limited. FTF are the “invisible” and unrepresented members of the university community—tenured faculty members have their colleagues and classified employees have their union. Being “kept in the dark” perpetuates the perception that FTF are not the same quality as tenured/tenure track faculty.

Several respondents expressed concern that “second class status” accorded to FTF could eventually cripple the productivity and limit the contributions of bright, talented individuals. Lack of respect and appreciation provides little incentive to achieve. Does the use of “assistant” in job titles imply lack of professional knowledge and inability to think and act independently?

Two respondents felt that administrative support people at departmental, college and university levels did not act professionally in dealing with FTF. The opportunity for annual, anonymous reviews of administrative personnel might help make OSU a better workplace.

Two respondents felt that PF and FRA promotion and hiring should be based less on highest academic degree obtained and diversity issues than on experience and accomplishments.

Several respondents felt that the perception of FTF as “short timers” by colleagues and the university was not fair to the many who have worked here several years. Long-term FTF make a commitment to OSU that is not recognized or appreciated. The continual, annual anxiety about reappointment was of particular concern to long-term FTF.

Comments compiled by Gayle Orner.