

How Perceptions of Faculty at WSU are Changing: Results from the 2012 All Faculty Survey



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ABSTRACT

In spring, 2012, an All Faculty Survey was conducted to assess faculty members' perceptions of changes in opportunities for career advancement for faculty at the university. The main purposes of the All Faculty Survey were to obtain baseline estimates of gender differences among WSU faculty in perceptions of opportunity for faculty's career advancement, perceptions of change in these views, and factors affecting the changes. The inclusive nature of the survey makes it possible to analyze how faculty member characteristics and their location in the university, i.e., their department or college, may affect perceptions of opportunity, discrimination and other related issues. The analyses indicate that gender differences exist among WSU faculty. Women are more likely than their male counterparts to assess the trend as trending a little worse rather than better.



INTRODUCTION

Research indicates that "climate" plays an important role in people's satisfaction, productivity, engagement, and decision to remain at or leave a university or area of study, yet there is no simple definition of organizational climate. A recent survey of 4,500 tenure-track faculty at 51 colleges and universities found that faculty place great value on departmental climate, culture, and collegiality and that these qualities are critical to retention (Callister, 2006, Harper and Hurtado, 2007). For the purposes of this study, climate is defined as:

The current, common patterns of important dimensions of organizational life or its members' perceptions of and attitudes toward them.

Organizational climate, therefore, is the individual's perception of the organization's policies, practices, and procedures. Although such perceptions may or may not accurately reflect climate, they are critically important because they shape individuals' behavior at work and their feelings about the organization (Seibert et al., 2004). In addition, individuals within a work unit are thought to share perceptions of the climate of the work unit (Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1996; Seibert et al., 2004). A substantial amount of research exists regarding the relationship between individual variables including age, gender, and rank on perceptions of climate (Thoreson et al., 1990). We extend this line of research by gender-disaggregating from the 2012 All Faculty Survey to understand how faculty university-wide feel about changes that occurred at WSU between 2009 and 2012 across various dimensions of organizational climate including collegiality, workplace climate, opportunities for promotion, and leadership.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To assess how climate and interactions with colleagues in one's primary department/unit changed between 2009 and 2012
- To assess faculty's perceptions of how opportunities for faculty at WSU changed between 2009 and 2013
- How the changes differ, if at all, for male and female faculty

METHODS

An All Faculty Survey was implemented in April and May, 2012, by the WSU Social and Economic Sciences Research Center. The questionnaire consisted of 64 separate questions. However, each respondent was asked to respond to up to 227 individual items. The population for the study was described as the Washington State University faculty from which a random sample of 1,167 faculty was selected. The survey introduction indicated that participation was voluntary and that all data collected would be maintained as confidential. Each respondent was informed about the purpose of the study. Four e-mail reminders were sent to non-respondents only. The survey averaged about 50 minutes to complete. The survey began on March 26, 2012 and continued through May 29, 2012. Of the 1,167 faculty members invited to participate, 451 completed and 177 partially completed the survey for a response rate of 53.9%.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The respondents were representative of the university population of faculty by age, gender, race/ethnicity, and rank. Slightly more men participated in the survey (58%) than women (42%), but that difference was not statistically significant. The distribution of respondents by rank shows that full professors had the highest participation rate (33%), followed by associate professors (30%) with assistant professors (21%), non-tenure track faculty and other faculty having the lowest participation rates (11% and 6% respectively).

Gender	Full professor	Associate professor	Assistant professor	Non-tenure track	Other faculty	Total
Male	135 (71%)	94 (54%)	70 (58%)	26 (42%)	13 (41%)	338 (58%)
Female	56 (29%)	80 (46%)	50 (42%)	36 (58%)	19 (59%)	241 (42%)
Total	191	174	120	62	32	579 (100%)



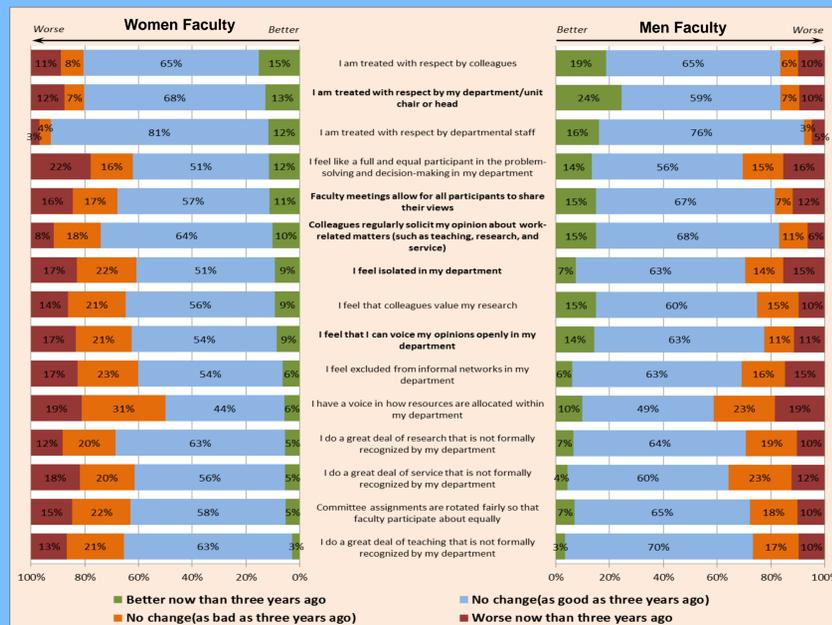
Gender	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Male	1 (50%)	14 (64%)	24 (52%)	32 (63%)	66 (52%)	86 (57%)	27 (73%)
Female	1 (50%)	8 (36%)	22 (48%)	19 (37%)	62 (48%)	64 (43%)	10 (27%)
Total	2	22	46	51	128	150	37



In 2012, the average faculty respondent at WSU was 51 years old (S.D.=10.75). The youngest faculty member who participated in the survey was 27 years old. The oldest was 86 years old at the time of survey implementation. Within each age group, more men than women participated in the survey.

RESULTS

How Climate & Interactions Changed in the Last Three Years (2009 - 2012). There is a considerable similarity in faculty answers to the 15 items, which concern various aspects of feeling respected. For example, the percent of faculty who believe the situation is as good as or better than three years ago ranges from 50% to 92% across the 15 items. On average, respondents are about twice as likely to think things were already good three years ago or have gotten better than to think that things were bad or have gotten worse. The item to which women and men responded most positively was: "I am treated with respect by departmental staff." Nearly the same percent of women and men (94% and 92%, respectively). At the same time, male and female faculty express a similar degree of negativity on the item, "I have a voice in how resources are allocated within my department;" (42% and 50%, respectively). Only a few female-male comparisons regarding climate and interactions reaches statistical significance with women expressing more negative views (see items in bold).

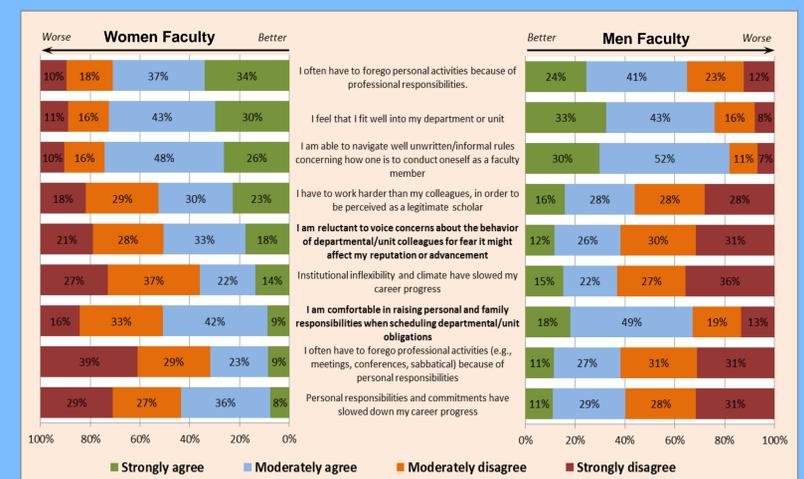
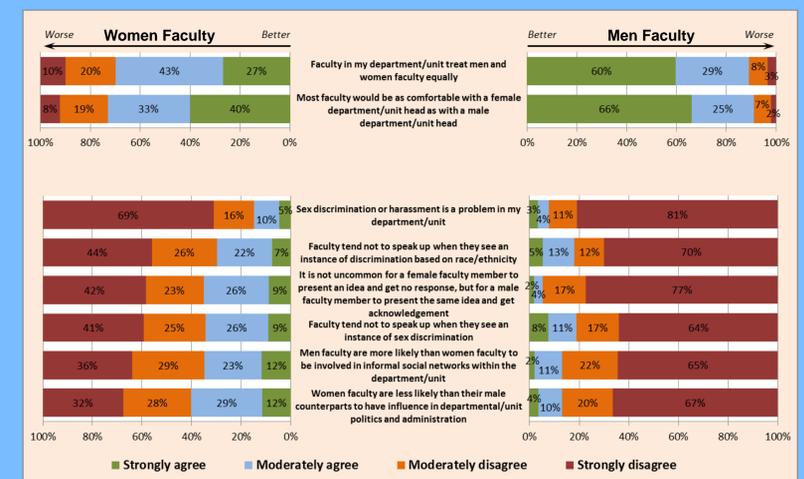


Female Faculty	Male Faculty
1. Increased numbers of women faculty	1. Leadership
2. Women leadership	2. Aggressive recruitment
3. Institutional initiatives	3. Good candidates
4. Actions taken to bring about desired results	4. Institutional initiatives
5. A mindset of equitable treatment	5. A mindset of equitable treatment

Female Faculty	Male Faculty
1. Sexism or discrimination	1. Mentoring
2. Leadership problems	2. Leadership problems
3. Infrastructure-related problems (e.g., location, budget, etc.)	3. Infrastructure-related problems (e.g., location, budget, etc.)
4. Insufficient support	4. Insufficient support
5. Resistance to change	5. Resistance to change

Five themes emerged from open-ended comments offered by 57 faculty respondents (in descending order of percent citing). With respect to gender for faculty overall, men cited leadership (36%), while women mentioned both leadership (33.3%) and an increase in the number of women faculty (33.3%) as critical factors for improvement climate. More female faculty mentioned sexism or discrimination than any other factor as the reason for challenges for improvement climate.

Faculty Perceptions about Treatment, Discrimination, and Work-life Balance: Responses to the items shown below suggest that women faculty recognize and may experience more episodes of differential treatment and blatant discrimination than male faculty. Women faculty also worry about the consequences of speaking up about these issues. They also find it difficult to raise issues about family-related obligations that affect work and career.



CONCLUSION

Our analysis elicited a strongly positive assessment of the climate at WSU from 2009 to 2012 with 57% to 92% describing the situation as good or better than three years ago. Large percentages of both male and female faculty felt that the climate had stayed the same or gotten better during that period. However, it is also clear that male faculty are considerably more positive in their assessment of climate, interaction, inclusion, and differential treatment than are women faculty with a mean of 14% choosing that category compared to about half that many (8%) women. Similarly, female faculty are slightly more likely (17% for women compared to 11% for men) to see things as having gone from bad to worse in the last three years. Although the current analysis conveys a consistent pattern of differences that is common across issue areas, it provides little insight into potential explanations for the more negative assessments reported by women faculty. This is a question that requires more detailed analysis of the survey data.