

Staff Senate Staff 2014 Opinion Survey

Overview

The Staff Senate administered the annual Staff Senate Opinion Survey March 2014. Initially conducted in 2013, the survey asks staff (including all SPA and EPA Non-Faculty employees) to rate their overall satisfaction and engagement on campus, their work environment and relationship with their supervisor. The survey also asks respondents about work – life balance and their feelings about diversity. In addition to the Likert scale questions, respondents are given the opportunity to add comments after several sections of the survey. It is important to note that, while very similar, the 2014 survey contains updated questions and the Likert scale used is different than that used in the 2013 survey. Any comparisons included in this report are meant to indicate possible trends rather than direct comparisons. The response rate for the survey was respectable. The race and ethnicity, gender, division and years of service for respondents was very similar to the percentages in the 2013 survey.

Executive Summary

Overall, staff satisfaction with their experience at WCU is trending in a positive direction. Respondents enjoy working and living in this area and are very positive about those they work with and the work that they do. Salary and all the complexities therein remain the single most significant issue for staff. Of concern from the data is the experience of under-represented minority staff members and the fact that more staff are saying that they need more than forty hours a week to accomplish their jobs.

Recommendations

1. Continue to address salary issues with a focus on equity and, if possible, create and share a plan to address the various complexities of salary.
2. As appropriate, encourage supervisors to work with employees to create career paths with concrete steps to promotion through SPA banding levels.
3. Continue to streamline and clarify business processes.
4. Work with under-represented minorities on campus to learn more about their experience as employees and seek ways to improve their satisfaction levels.
5. Consider creating targets for satisfaction levels of respondents to the survey.

Section 1: Overall Satisfaction and Engagement

	2013	2014		2013 (minority only)	2014 (minority only)
Section 1. Overall Satisfaction and Engagement (% that Agree or Strongly Agree)					
I am proud to say I work for WCU	80%	89%		67%	88%
I have access to the resources I need to do my job	75%	87%		71%	82%

I am valued as an employee	52%	75%		46%	53%
My work is personally satisfying	76%	86%		71%	94%
My work is directly connected to the university's mission	81%	91%		71%	88%
I enjoy my job and look forward to coming to work	72%	80%		67%	76%
I would recommend my unit/department as a good place to work	71%	77%		67%	65%
WCU is a good place to work	77%	88%		71%	76%
I am satisfied with my access to the WCU Ombudsperson, should I have a need to resolve a work conflict.	n/a	58%		n/a	88%

Data Trends

- Overall, the data trend is positive.
- Satisfaction levels for respondents identifying as under-represented minorities are improving from 2013 but still lag lower than non-minority respondents.
- Employees with over 20 years of service are consistently more satisfied than employees with fewer years of service. Employees with 6 – 10 and 11 – 15 years of service feel less valued than other employees and are more likely to be seriously considering leaving their jobs (69% and 60% respectively).
- Under-represented minority employees are more likely to be seriously considering leaving their jobs (65%, similar to 2013) than non-minority employees (51%, similar to 2013).
- IT employees seriously considering leaving their jobs dropped from 74% (2013) to 61% (2014). Additionally, employees saying they were seriously considering leaving their jobs dropped in all divisions except Academic Affairs.
- The actual percentage of respondents saying they had seriously considered leaving their job remained steady from 2013 (52%). Reasons for considering leaving remained the same as well – better salary/compensation elsewhere and more promotional opportunities elsewhere. Open ended responses cited poor working environment or issues with co-workers as well as poor management or issues with a supervisor as reasons for looking for another job. Respondents also talked about a lack of equity in the way staff is treated and paid as well as the lack of raises and opportunities for advancement. Others said they didn't feel valued in their work environment.
- Not surprisingly, all respondents overwhelmingly rank 'priority hiring/promotion of current staff' as the single most important issue to them as staff members.

Quotes:

"Have worked at WCU for 5 years with no raise in pay. When I received a job offer in a different division at WCU with a raise I was not able to get the raise due to HR policies. I feel very misled and taken advantage of by HR at Western."

“I'm an hourly worker that is used like a full-time worker. The only reason my position would be full-time anywhere else. I feel like a second class citizen, but I love my team and we do a vital service for the students, faculty and staff.”

Section 3: Working Relationships and Supervision

	2013	2014		2013 (minority only)	2014 (minority only)
Please rate your agreement with the following statements. (% that Agree or Strongly Agree)					
I can openly communicate with my supervisor about work-related issues	80%	83%		79%	59%
I am free to speak my mind without fear of retaliation	67%	71%		63%	47%
My immediate supervisor values my input	75%	80%		63%	41%
My supervisor is qualified to supervise me	73%	82%		63%	59%
I am satisfied with how my supervisor gives me feedback	n/a	74%		n/a	47%
My supervisor respects me as an individual	79%	82%		71%	59%
My immediate supervisor keeps me informed on important developments at WCU	65%	76%		42%	59%
I am satisfied with the working relationship with my supervisor	n/a	78%		n/a	59%
My annual performance evaluation is helpful	47%	52%		33%	29%

Data Trends

With the changes in the survey from 2013, a direct comparison isn't possible but the overall trend in this section was favorable. The biggest difference was the significant drop in satisfaction of under-represented minorities with their working relationships. Across the board, minorities reported lower satisfaction with their work relationships and relationship with their supervisor as compared with non-minorities in the 2014 survey. The same is true with the perceived helpfulness of annual performance evaluations.

Respondents were also asked to rank order a list of topics in order of importance. Consistent with 2013, 'priority hiring/promotion of current staff' and 'professional development/training opportunities' are the two top issues of importance for staff. From the write in responses, we learn that staff are concerned about all aspects of salary and want the university to address not only pay raises, salary compression and market adjustments, but fairness and equity in pay and opportunities for promotion. Staff are also interested in receiving more support for flex schedules. While there are policies in place allowing for the possibility of flex schedules, staff do not feel supported by their supervisors to ask for flex schedules. Other concerns were Banner training and training for supervisors.

Quotes:

“Regulating the amount of additional duties added to current positions without compensation.”

“Inequities regarding salaries and budget funds within university department/units/divisions.”

“Develop a true sense of value and appreciation among staff and faculty -- 2. Truly address salary issues - including inequity (bringing people to a minimum salary level when they are banded incorrectly isn't fixing - it's insulting)”

Section 4: Personal Life and Work Balance

	2013	2014		2013 (minority only)	2014 (minority only)
Please rate your agreement with the following statements. (% that Agree or Strongly Agree)					
I am supported when I need to take time off for personal reasons (illness, doctor's visits, elder care, child care, etc.)	88%	92%		96%	94%
My department allows a varied work schedule (flex schedule, telecommuting, etc.)	49%	61%		63%	47%
I often feel the need to work over 40 hours in a week to finish my work	38%	49%		25%	53%
My department supports me when I want to attend a wellness program on campus during work hours	50%	56%		71%	59%
The WCU campus culture supports health and wellness activities for staff	n/a	74%		n/a	76%

Data Trends

This section is trending positively with the following exceptions:

- Under-represented minorities are less likely to feel their department allows for a flexible work schedule
- The percentage of staff stating that they often feel the need to work more than forty hours in a week to finish their work is trending upward
- Chancellor’s Division/Athletics and IT are more likely than other divisions to report their department allows for a flexible work schedule

Section 5: Diversity on Campus

Overall, this section is trending in a positive direction. However, under-represented minorities consistently report less satisfaction in this section and are more likely to report experiencing insensitivity to diversity issues on the job than non-minority respondents. The staff in the Administration and Finance division report experiencing the most insensitivity to diversity issues (36%) than any other division.

	2013	2014		2013 (minority only)	2014 (minority only)
Section 5. Diversity on Campus					
Please rate your agreement with the following statements. (% that Agree or Strongly Agree)					
My co-workers are aware of diversity issues	64%	75%		63%	65%
WCU offers a variety of diversity related programs for staff	48%	71%		46%	53%
I am comfortable in addressing diversity related issues in my department	60%	73%		63%	59%
My supervisor addresses diversity related issues in a timely and professional manner	54%	59%		38%	47%
Diversity is valued at WCU	60%	76%		42%	71%
WCU is committed to diversity related issues	60%	75%		42%	53%
I have experienced insensitivity to diversity issues while on the job	27%	25%		38%	35%
It is important for WCU to be committed to diversity issues	78%	86%		88%	88%

Section 6: Work Environment

	2013	2014		2013 (minority only)	2014 (minority only)
Section 6. Work Environment					
Please rate your agreement with the following statements. (% that Agree or Strongly Agree)					
I have the supplies/ materials/ equipment I need to do my job effectively	n/a	87%		n/a	88%
I have access to the necessary continuing education/training required to do my job	58%	76%		63%	82%
I get along well with the employees in my department/unit	88%	95%		88%	88%
My department/unit deals effectively with poor performance by staff	38%	45%		29%	53%

Data Trends

The overall year to year trend in this section is positive. Under-represented minorities have also made gains from 2013 but continue rate their relationships with co-workers lower than non-minorities.

Respondents were also asked what caused them the most stress at work. Consistent with last year, respondents overwhelmingly ranked salary as their single biggest stressor at work. 'Unnecessarily complicated administrative processes' ranked as the second most significant stressor at work. Write in responses primarily cited the lack of adequate staffing to get necessary work done and added responsibilities without compensation as stressors in their everyday work life. Others felt that the lack of a flexible schedule caused them the most stress. Lack of communication within departments and between departments was also noted as a cause for stress.

Quotes:

“Unclear or inaccessible admin processes. Just when you think you have completed everything required for a task, you receive an email asking for another document. It is usually an HR document that is not available on the web or a new and as yet unpublished document from A&F.”

“The continuous changing of workload/responsibilities is inconsistent & changes multiple times.”

Open Ended Questions

Q 10 – What do you like most about working at WCU?

Summary: A majority of respondents cite the campus community, culture and co-workers as strong positives. Other positives include working with students, interesting and ever-changing job responsibilities and good benefits (vacation, sick, retirement and health insurance)

Quotes:

“WCU is still small enough to be personal and large enough to be a 'real university' The atmosphere and culture of the school are also some of the things I enjoy.”

“Sense of community, genuine caring about student success, going the extra mile, great people to work with in my department”

“The community. Several people across campus show a lot of passion for the university and make work inspiring and fulfilling. Issues such as healthcare and salary are decimating for morale, but having altruistic, inspirational duties and extracurriculars make the struggle more personally validating.”

“I have worked in higher education for over twenty years. I enjoy the challenges of the higher education work environment. I also enjoy the campus culture. Working with students has brought me a great deal of pleasure and job satisfaction. I have also enjoyed a great deal of variety in the types of administrative jobs I have had in higher education.”

Q 11 – What do you like least about working at WCU?

Summary: Salary, equity in salary and promotional opportunities were overwhelmingly the biggest response from respondents. Respondents also cited favoritism, ‘the gold old boys’ network and a culture of mediocrity as reasons they didn’t like working for WCU. Poor supervisors were also noted as a negative to working at WCU as was parking. A sizeable number of respondents noted that unfilled staff positions and slow search processes were causing increased, uncompensated workloads for remaining staff. Some respondents cited concerns regarding the university’s commitment to inclusiveness especially for under-represented minorities, women and those without a religious affiliation.

Quotes:

"I can't survive on the salary I'm paid. I've done all the right things (or so I thought) to acquire a high enough level of education to work in a field I'm passionate about and to financially support my rather frugal lifestyle. I often feel like a hypocrite when encouraging students to pursue a 4-year degree. I've also observed a significant degree of nepotism in hiring practices at WCU, as well as a very obvious lack of support for internal advancement."

"The extraordinarily inflexible bureaucracy and policies. The large number of in-person training sessions required where an email or handout or video would suffice."

"Salary. The cost of living goes up every year, and the governor gives raises to the folks in Raleigh all the time. Yet I haven't had a (decent) raise in about seven years. I overheard a conversation shortly after I started working at WCU. They were saying that the only way to make more money working for the state is to change jobs every couple of years. I've found that it's true because the last raise I received, that was worth anything, was when I changed departments seven years ago."

"Bureaucratic processes, too many rules and regulations and hoops to go through to get things done. I am so tired of the IT division telling me that I can't do anything that I am trying to accomplish. There may be good reasons for not allowing what we would like to do, but always telling someone "no" instead of "Let me see what we can do" would be better customer service. / / I also do not like being told that I will have to pay more money to work here through the new parking fees."

"Performance evaluations that are effectively meaningless. Some processes seem very inefficient and take far more staff than in private industry. The fact that most employees are "permanent" leads to a lack of effort by some employees."

"Jobs have evolved through the years due to the changing nature of how information is shared (social media, etc). So much more is required of our time and expertise. It is in my opinion that job descriptions, reduced workforce and unchanging salaries have not kept up with demand and continues to create a much more stressful environment to work within. I also feel it is necessary that budget be provided for professional development so that we can remain educated with our expertise for it is always changing."

"There is little support across campus for flex scheduling among staff. Not everyone has to be at work from 8am-5pm, and in fact it creates problems for students who work and need access to staff after 5pm."

"I worry that Western doesn't do enough to recognize the contributions of its staff. I'm also concerned about equality issues for women and minority groups. In the past 10 years, Western has eliminated the women's center, the women's studies program, and the graduate TESOL program. A gender-based salary equity study was initiated by Western's chapter of AAUW but has been bogged down by administrative bureaucracy for over a year. What message do these actions send to the women and minorities of Western...not just to our talented faculty and staff, but to our students, too? We have a fantastic

administration that is committed to these issues, and the time is right for Western to become a model for equality in the UNC system. I hope we will seize the opportunity.”

“WCU does not operate as a team with a single mission. Divisions compete over basic needs to provide base services that should be a given. The culture is not one of equality, equity, or value. It's truly sad that we have settled for less. Good employees leave to seek better professional and working conditions. Without an outside infusion of new ideas, new methods, higher expectations - there can not be a culture shift that will raise WCU to a true leader in the region. We're just getting by, with an ingrained culture that is from the 60's, 70's, and 80's.”

“WCU does not pay as well as other universities across the state and it has been a comparable leader in the region therefore WCU has contributed to the low wages prevalent in the western part of the state.”

“I worry that as a "non-believer" I may lose my job if I don't sit and pray at dinners, or if I can't quote the Bible perfectly I'll be ostracized. I believe in separation of church and state, but I'm afraid if I say anything about how I don't really want to talk about God, or I don't bow my head at prayer at our dinners, it will make my job very difficult. I'm terrified of even typing it here, but something needs to be said. I really don't mind prayer at dinners, I believe in the freedom to practice what you believe in, that's what our country is founded on...but I don't want to be dishonest. I don't want to feel like I'm required to bow my head. Right now I do. And I don't like that at all. I'm not saying I want to have conversations with people about religion, I'm here to work, that's all, but I've had people here ask me if I was Christian, and I felt VERY VERY pressured to lie and say yes at the risk of my job. Not by my superiors, but by my peers who have some influence with my superiors. Be they friends, or by just having been here longer.”

“Western still uses the good ole boy system. People are promoted to positions based on who you know and not what you know. Although a small portion of the is moving in the right direction, but there still remains alot of people in supervisory/management”

“The culture. WCU has developed a class based culture that contributes to an unhappy working environment for many. Morale is at an all time low and I believe many would leave WCU if they had other options. The poor economy and limited job opportunities could be considered a blessing for WCU given the current climate. WCU constantly reminds me of the true meaning of "lost opportunity". WCU has the potential to be a great resource, a great place to work, and great institution but it's only potential. Culture change is difficult for the most skilled leaders when the organization leadership is on the same page. It's impossible to achieve when we operate in silo's with different agendas and missions.”

Q 12 – What changes would you make to improve the work environment at WCU?

Summary: The primary suggestions for improving the work environment at WCU are equitable pay increases, encourage flex scheduling, increasing accountability and training for supervisors. Increasing communication within and across departments was also noted.

Quotes:

“Raises. Being told I'm appreciated by my supervisor and flexibility as a parent really, really helps. But the main way we're compensated, salary, is not keeping up with inflation and it makes me feel devalued.”

“have a process to weed out inefficiencies in procedure and in employees. we have dozens of folks on campus who are known to be ineffective and poor employees, yet instead of being removed from WCU, they are shifted from job to job and department to department.”

“More Banner training opportunities (beginner, intermediate and advanced levels) / Better salaries / Flexible work schedules (not just 8-5)”

“Better communication between departments. I feel overall there's a pretty big communication gap.”

“The salaries for staff are abominable. WCU takes advantage of the folks in this community to work for nothing. Many of us have 2 and 3 jobs to make ends meet. EVEN PROFESSIONAL LEVEL JOBS. The HR processes and procedures are secret, and raises are unequal and secretive. Nothing is forcing me to stay here, but you will just hire another hamster.”

“A real performance evaluation system that is connected to real monetary rewards for your best performers. This means that you have to be willing to allow supervisors at some level within the departments to be allowed to make that call. We pay them to supervise - let them do their jobs.”

“WCU needs to actually work on creating a truly accepting and diverse culture - not just lip service. Correct inequity issues and breakdown barriers between divisions. We have to work together and have one mission and eliminate the "class war" that is plaguing our campus and keeping us from moving forward.”

“Supervisor reviews, supervisor training programs”

“I don't exactly know how to fix this issue that I'm having...I just want to be heard by someone. I'm so terrified of losing this job, it's the best job I've had so far in my life, and I'm not willing to give that up, but I'm also not willing to compromise who I am for others. I suppose I could talk to my boss, or maybe HR, but I'm too scared honestly. Here in Western North Carolina, if you say anything opposed to what the general populace thinks, you'll not only lose your job, you may never get another one around this area. I like to think Western is not like that, but I think my department IS like that.”