2012 APA Work Life Satisfaction Survey
of Western Michigan University Employees

Summary Report

In May and June 2012, the WMU Administrative Professional Association administered its Work Life Satisfaction Survey, the first such survey it has done in six years. Approximately 162 APA members were sent an invitation to participate in this online survey, and 94 complete responses were received for a response rate of approximately 58%. (A total of 99 members began the survey, so some questions received up to 99 responses.)

When asked to rate WMU as a workplace, 49% of respondents said WMU is a great place to work, 43% said a good place to work, and 8% said an adequate place to work. No respondents said WMU was a poor place to work.

Demographics of the Respondents

Of the individuals who responded to the survey, 6% identified as under the age of 30, 22% are ages 30–39, another 22% are ages 40–49, 39% are ages 50–59, and 10% are 60 or older. Seventy-two percent of the respondents identified their gender as female.

Respondents were asked how long they have worked at WMU. Twenty-six percent report 5 years or less at WMU, 26% report 6–15 years, 30% report 16–25 years, 12% report 26–35 years, and 4% report more than 35 years. One hundred percent of the respondents report that they are full-time employees.

Respondents were asked to identify their pay grade in the SCS system: 25% are grades 14 or 15, 45% are grades 16 or 17, 23% are grades 18 or 19, and the remaining 7% are grade 20 or above, or “not sure.” It was assumed that all respondents are salaried, although this was not verified with a question. Respondents were asked to look at the SCS pay scale that has been in effect since June 2009 and identify where in their pay grade their salary falls. Thirty-five percent of respondents report that they are between the minimum to bottom of mid-range of the scale, 38% report being within the midrange, 19% report being between the top of the midrange of maximum, and 8% report being over the maximum.

Respondents were asked to identify their contribution to household income. Thirty-six percent report that they are the “sole provider of household income,” 22% report being the “primary provider of income in a dual-income household,” 14% report being a “secondary provider of income in a dual-income household,” and 26% report being an “equal provider of income.”

Benefits

Respondents were asked “Over the past two years, do you perceive that your benefits (health insurance, annual/sick leave, free parking, Miller access, SRC, tuition discount, etc.) have: improved? stayed the same? been cut back? or not sure?” Three percent responded that benefits have improved, 33% respond they have stayed the same, 56% respond they have been cut back, and 8% were not sure.

When asked “Are you the sole provider of health insurance coverage for your household?,” 74% responded yes and 26% no. In response to the question “How many people do you cover on your WMU health insurance, including yourself?,” 37% responded 1, 30% responded 2, 27% responded they have family coverage, and 6% responded none.
At least two respondents mentioned that when they transferred from an hourly to a salaried position, the amount that they pay for the family health insurance plan effectively swallowed up any increase in pay they received, summarized in this comment:

The cost for health care for those at the bottom of the salary classification or salaried versus nonsalaried staff is unfair.

Several respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the change in annual leave carryover to 24 hours starting in 2013. A summary expression of the comments from this area is:

Going from being able to carry over one week (40 hours) to 24 is too low. A 40-hour carry over would be more reasonable.

When asked about participation in WMU’s two flexible spending account plans, 32% respond they participate only in the medical savings plan, 2% participate only in the dependent care plan, and 5% participate in both. Sixty percent of respondents participate in neither plan. Of those who do not participate, 32% said they do not understand the plans and how they might save money using them, 13% are unsure of how and when to enroll, 30% cannot afford to have money deducted and wait for a reimbursement, 38% believe they do not have qualifying medical expenses, 50% do not have qualifying dependent care expenses, and 7% already participate in a spouse’s plan.

Respondents were asked to review a list of various job benefits and rank the items on their importance to why they work at WMU. Based on averaged ratings, the responses ranked from highest to lowest are:

- Job security
- Salary
- Health insurance
- Tuition remission/discount
- Leave time (annual and sick)
- Retirement plan—university contributions
- Enjoy who I work with
- Retirement plan—benefits during retirement
- Access to facilities (health center, recreation, Miller, etc.)
- Other insurance programs (life, long-term disability)
- Safety

**Compensation**

Respondents were asked how well they felt their compensation at WMU has kept up with inflation the past two years. Zero percent responded that compensation had exceeded the rate of inflation, 5% responded it had kept pace with inflation, 88% percent responded it had not kept pace with inflation, and 7% were not sure or the question was not applicable.

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of several compensation enhancement programs without regard to feasibility. By a wide margin, “merit increases based on performance” was the top choice. “Longevity (rewards years of service to the institution)” and “progression (designed to move lower paid employees toward middle of the salary range)” were second and third, respectively, but virtually tied (however, progression received more first-place rankings).
When asked their agreement with the statement "I am adequately compensated for my work (salary and benefits),” the averaged rating was 3.20 on a scale of 1 = Agree to 5 = Strongly Disagree. The averaged rating was 3.49 on the statement “The compensation (salary and benefits) for my position is consistent with similar positions outside the University.”

The survey elicited many comments regarding compensation. An overall summary of the comments is:

It seems as if WMU works to hire and keep staff at the minimum range for salary. Inflation is rising and not keeping pace with the small raises that are given. WMU staff salaries are lower than other comparable institutions. Multiple occurrences or perceptions of staff being hired outside of the current HR policies are widely known. APA should fight more for salary equity with faculty.

**Job Opportunity Program/Advancement Opportunities**

When asked if they have applied for other WMU positions within the past two years, 27% of respondents said yes and 73% no. Of those who responded yes, 4% applied for transfer to a lower grade, 29% applied for a lateral transfer, and 67% applied for a promotion. Those who had applied for a transfer cited the following reasons for doing so (multiple responses were possible):

- Opportunity to better use my existing knowledge and skills = 68%
- Opportunity for professional advancement and/or development = 60%
- Opportunity for wage increase = 48%
- Wanted a change in environment or culture = 48%
- Unhappy with supervisor = 40%

When respondents were asked “Which of the following do you see as obstacles to the advancement of professional/administrative (salaried) employees through the Job Opportunity Program at WMU?,” there was strongest agreement with the statement “Lack of professional development opportunities within WMU.” The next highest agreement was with the statement “Lack of professional development opportunities outside of WMU.” The most common response was “Neutral” for the statements “Current salary is an impediment to advancement,” “Favoritism,” and “Bias against current employees in favor of outside hires.”

When asked if they had applied for positions outside of WMU, 24% responded yes and 76% responded no. Of those who responded no, 40% had looked at positions outside of WMU. The top three reasons for looking outside WMU were “desire for better pay” (63%), “desire for job that better matches my interests, knowledge, or skills” (33%), and “desire to work for employer with more or clearer advancement opportunities” (29%).

A representative comment about the Job Opportunity Program is:

The JOP program is not widely known. Positions posted can be confusing for employees who do not understand the pay structure and if a new department can afford the salary a person is moving over with. The program of position reevaluation is not widely known or explained to staff so as they understand how it works which leads to negative misconceptions.

**Performance Management System**

Respondents were asked several questions about the Performance Management process and forms. Eighty-two percent of respondents report they had their last performance review using the PM forms in 2011, 8% had
their last PM review 2 years ago, 2% had their last PM review 3 years ago, 2% said it was more than 3 years since their last PM review, and 5% report they have never had a PM review (the survey was written to exclude the present year because PM forms were due for 2012 at the time the survey was in progress; also, there was no response “not applicable” so some of the “never” responses could have been from new employees).

When asked if they had received a performance review not using the staff PM process and forms, 11% report they had last year, 2% report two years ago, 12% report more than 3 years ago, and 75% responded never.

When asked to express their level of agreement with a series of statements about the PM system, the highest level of dissatisfaction occurred with the statement “The performance evaluation system contributes to positive employee morale” (3.43 on a scale where 1 = Strongly Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree). The highest level of agreement was with the statement “I was in agreement with my most recent evaluation” (1.94 on the same scale). There was slightly more disagreement than agreement on the statement “The performance evaluation system is adequate” (3.15).

The performance management system also elicited a lot of comments to the statement “Suggestions for improving the performance management system.” A representative summary of the comments include:

- The current system should be removed. A merit pay system would be much better. Supervisors vary way too much when giving ratings to staff—meeting expectations of any level is different to every supervisor. Not even HR takes the performance management system seriously.

**Work Hours/Workload**

When asked about hours they work, 50% of respondents report that on average they work 40–45 hours/week, 31% report 46–50 hours/week, 16% report 51–60 hours/week, and 4% report more than 60 hours/week. When asked how often they work weekends, 14% report never, 47% report occasionally, 17% report sometimes, 18% report often, and 4% report always.

When asked the reason for their work hours increasing or decreasing in the past year, 55% of the 74 respondents said workload has increased due to loss of positions or unfilled positions, 31% point to a reorganization of work responsibilities within the office or unit, 26% said there was a change in office staffing, 15% said a change in supervisor resulted in change in workload expectations, and 15% said they transferred to another position and are learning new responsibilities. A representative summary of the comments include:

- Workloads have consistently increased due to loss of staff. Supervisors have to fill in more and efficiency of work is decreasing.

**Additional Themes That Emerged From the Survey**

There was strong disagreement by respondents with the statement “Non-bargaining staff are treated by the University comparably with other employee groups” (3.72 on a scale where 1 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Disagree). A representative summary of the comments include:

- Non-bargaining staff should have the same rights and pay increases as faculty. When negotiations happen staff should be at the table also. WMU is a great place to work, but benefit cuts have been directed at staff more than faculty.
Respondents also commented on the job classification system. A representative summary of the comments include:

The current system is outdated. Any position regarding is more dependent on how effective the applicant and supervisor are at using the right language. Staff members in some VP areas have it easier than others when it comes to getting a position upgraded.

Positive Aspects

Not all in the survey was negative. Some comments recognized more positive aspects of working at WMU. A representative summary of the comments include:

Working at WMU is wonderful. Many have left the university and regretted it or when coming to WMU really appreciate the benefits and people who work here.