

UW Professional Staff Organization 2004 Survey Results

Background

The UW Professional Staff Organization (PSO) conducted this survey to inform strategic planning. PSO sent surveys to approximately 6,100 professional staff in June 2004. 485 staff responded with completed surveys, which were then compiled by Negin Almassi, Laura Pierce Consulting, during the month of July.

Survey Results

Membership and Contributions

The majority of respondents (68%, Appendix, Table 1) replied that they are aware that they are PSO members, yet a minority (18%) contribute to PSO via payroll contribution. The four greatest reasons for not contributing are that professional staff (Table 2):

- Don't know what PSO does (17%)
- Did not know that PSO existed (16%)
- Cannot afford to (13%)
- PSO is not effective (9%)

The first two reasons suggest the need for better communication with PSO members. In this and other parts of the survey, many respondents reported that they do not know how PSO currently spends its funds.

Other Professional Groups

Most staff report participating in national professional organizations as opposed to campus organizations. A sizable portion of staff (academic counselors) are involved in the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) and the Association for Professional Advisors and Counselors (APAC). Other organizations were mentioned only by a single respondent.

Likes and Concerns

Overall, respondents express greatest appreciation for their benefits, which include health, retirement, vacation, and sick leave benefits in additions to the tuition exemption (Table 3). They also deeply enjoy their colleagues as well as the intellectual atmosphere at UW. Other notable advantages of working at the UW include: the location (scenic, the short commute), the stimulating nature of their work, the university's honorable mission, and the flexible environment—particularly FlexTime.

At the same time, professional staff are also very concerned about erosion of their prized benefits. The top three concerns/issues about working at the UW reported are (Table 4):

- **Salary issues:** These concerns center mostly on the lack of cost of living adjustments and on the disparity between university and private sector salaries in comparable jobs.
- **Eroding benefits:** Respondents are particularly concerned about health benefits and their retirement packages. Higher co-pays, higher deductibles, and less coverage contribute to health care worries. Retirement worries range from the PERS I early retirement package to the difference in retirement packages between new and existing employees.
- **Budget cuts:** Respondents are frustrated with the budget cuts, constant scrambling for money, and lack of support from the legislature. These frustrations are expressed in other categories as well (salary issues, job insecurity, inadequate staffing, and feeling overworked), as seen in Table 3.

Other notable concerns include frustrations with bureaucracy and institutional inertia, the limited opportunities for advancement or promotion, and parking issues. The largest parking concern is the rising cost of parking, but staff also report concern about having to park farther and farther away from their work.

Prioritization of Topics

From a list of 14 topics that respondents were asked to rank (Table 5), the four highest topics of priority are:

- Salary issues
- Professional staff representation to UW administration
- Opportunities for promotion and career advancement
- Salary survey

In general, respondents agree more strongly on the higher topics of importance, while there is less agreement about the topics that were not ranked as highly (see standard deviation). It is telling that legislation for collective bargaining was the lowest ranked topic. Overall, roughly 7% of respondents expressed vehement opposition to or deep concern about unionization and 3% of respondents expressed a strong desire for a union or collective bargaining.

Additional Suggestions

In general, the rankings of important topics reflect the areas that respondents think PSO should focus and spend its funds on—particularly professional development, advocacy to the UW administration, lobbying in Olympia and D.C., due process for grievances, and workshops allowing staff to interact with each other across campus. Below are some additional comments and suggestions made by a few people that PSO leadership may also want to consider.

- Many respondents emphasize the importance of engaging with the new president and express a sense of a “limited window of opportunity” to talk with him and communicate the importance of professional staff.
- Some respondents believe that PSO’s challenge or ineffectiveness lies in the extreme variety of professions that it represents. Suggestions for addressing this focus on either splitting up PSO around more natural divisions (eg. counselors, computer specialists, etc.) or on holding smaller meetings that are divided by position type.
- There is a fairly even split between people who believe that the scholarships a good use of PSO’s funds and people who believe that PSO should focus its funds on efforts that benefit professional staff as a group.
- Research scientists and staff in temporary positions express particular frustration with their positions being tied to a specific window of funding, and the accompanying job instability. One recurring suggestion for addressing this is providing transitional support for these staff and creating a system that enables these staff to more easily apply for (and even be considered for) other jobs within the UW. This could improve morale and cut down on training required for new staff.
- Although this ranked relatively low among the concerns about working at the UW (5%), it is notable that many professional staff express frustration with the unevenness of job classifications between departments, in terms of both job responsibilities and salaries. PSO may want to work on making job responsibilities and salaries more consistent with job titles.

Appendix: Tables

Table 1. PSO Membership Questions

Question	Frequencies			Total
	Yes	No	No response/ Don't know	
Did you know that you are a PSO member?	329 (68%)	145 (30%)	11 (2%)	485 (100%)
Are you involved in other professional groups on or off campus?	162 (33%)	312 (64%)	11 (2%)	485 (100%)
Do you currently contribute to PSO by payroll deduction?	88 (18%)	377 (78%)	20 (4%)	485 (100%)

Table 2. Reasons respondents who do not contribute or do not know if they contribute gave for not contributing.

Why do you not contribute to PSO via payroll deduction?	Frequency	Percentage
Don't know what PSO does, its benefits to me, what it does with its money	66	17%
Did not know PSO existed	64	16%
Can't afford to	50	13%
PSO does not accomplish anything important with its money, doesn't benefit me directly, has no power, is unsuccessful, unable to address my concerns	37	9%
Did not know PSO operates on contributions, did not know about payroll deduction option	27	7%
I don't know	19	5%
Other	15	4%
Other donation priorities	14	4%
Skeptical, bad experience with UW union, don't like unions	10	3%
Not interested, don't see a need for PS advocacy	8	2%
Not required	5	1%
Prefer single check donation	5	1%
No response or don't know if donate	77	19%
Total number who do not contribute / don't know if contribute	397	100%

Table 3. The top things that respondents report liking about working at the UW. Because respondents gave multiple responses (sometimes over 3), the frequencies do not add up to 1455 (485*3).

Likes about working at UW	Frequency	Percentage
Benefits	229	47%
<i>Benefits in general</i>	157	32%
<i>Tuition exemption, classes</i>	37	8%
<i>Health benefits</i>	15	3%
<i>Retirement benefits</i>	13	3%
<i>Vacation & sick leave benefits</i>	7	1%
Colleagues	197	41%
Intellectual atmosphere	124	26%
Overall location	119	25%
<i>Scenic, beautiful location</i>	62	13%
<i>Location in general</i>	28	6%
<i>Location: short commute</i>	28	6%
<i>Close to family</i>	1	0%
Stimulating, challenging, collaborative nature of my work	108	22%
University's mission, I believe in my work	107	22%
Flexible hours, environment	92	19%
Available resources	49	10%
<i>Libraries in specific</i>	14	3%
<i>Equipment, computer support</i>	7	1%
Students, working with students	55	11%
Work environment in general	39	8%
Security, stability	42	9%
Salary	25	5%
U-PASS, Commuting options	23	5%
Relaxed, informal, casual atmosphere	20	4%
University's reputation	20	4%
Cutting-edge research, research centers	18	4%
Diversity in workplace	18	4%
Autonomy in work	18	4%
IMA/Gym	22	5%
Cultural and athletic opportunities	10	2%

Table 4. The top issues that respondents report being concerns about at the UW. Because respondents gave multiple responses (sometimes over 3), the frequencies do not add up to 1455 (485*3).

Concerns/issues about working at UW	Frequency	Percentage
Salary issues: no/poor cost of living adjustments, doesn't match private sector	258	53%
Eroding benefits	106	22%
<i>Health benefits: higher co-pays, deductibles</i>	27	6%
<i>Inadequate tuition waiver</i>	3	1%
<i>U-PASS cost increasing</i>	2	0%
<i>No short-term disability/must use sick leave</i>	1	0%
<i>Retirement issues: PERS / early retirement, new employees get worse package, logistics</i>	15	3%
Budget cuts, lack of legislative support, legislature's control	81	17%
Bureaucracy, institutional inertia, extreme paperwork, change is slow	72	15%
Limited opportunities for advancement/promotion	69	14%
<i>Bias against hiring from within</i>	8	2%
<i>Existing employees not given priority</i>	2	0%
<i>Must move to Seattle to advance</i>	1	0%
Parking: rising costs, spots are farther away	63	13%
Overworked, inadequate staffing	44	9%
<i>No/inadequate overtime</i>	6	1%
Job insecurity, job not officially recognized, job security, threat of reorganization	34	7%
Don't pursue a union, fear of union	32	7%
Lack of respect for/recognition of professional staff, faculty disregard	29	6%
Scandals, declining reputation of UW	24	5%
Unequal & inconsistent classifications and salaries across campus	24	5%
Long commute/lack of available buses, lack of nearby affordable housing	22	5%
Lack of interdepartmental communication, collaboration; inconsistent policies among them	19	4%
Lack of support for training, lack of professional development opportunities	16	3%
Poor management, faculty need training	16	3%
Need a union/collective bargaining unit	15	3%
Space issues: inadequate	14	3%
Lack of opportunity for merit pay increases	12	2%
Insecure, unsafe, dirty facilities	12	2%
Classified staff are treated badly, tensions between professional and classified staff	10	2%

Table 5. Average ranking (on a scale of 1-5, 1=Not important, 5=Very important) for each of 14 potential topics of importance.

Topic			Frequencies							
	Average*	Standard Deviation	Eligible responses**	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know	No/ineligible response
Salary issues	4.42	0.88	466	7	12	44	119	284	11	8
Professional staff representation to UW Administration	4.28	0.98	429	11	12	60	109	237	46	10
Opportunities for promotion and career advancement	4.22	0.99	467	11	15	77	122	241	11	7
Salary survey	4.17	0.95	454	6	19	79	136	212	23	8
Training and professional development opportunities	3.97	1.09	468	16	33	91	136	192	9	8
Due process for grievances/terminations/layoffs	3.94	1.12	447	18	35	81	135	178	26	12
Advocacy at State legislature	3.90	1.13	435	18	31	98	117	171	41	9
Training for staff with supervisory responsibilities	3.68	1.11	461	19	49	121	143	129	17	7
Access to information about Human Resources processes	3.61	1.07	456	20	45	131	158	102	19	10
Representation to Faculty Senate	3.59	1.13	393	23	33	130	104	101	80	12
Training for faculty with supervisory responsibilities	3.52	1.27	433	43	43	114	112	121	42	10
Mentoring programs for employees	3.33	1.16	451	32	71	146	118	84	22	12
Networking/meeting colleagues	3.27	1.13	460	33	72	170	104	79	17	8
Legislation to enable collective bargaining	2.85	1.46	403	107	66	84	69	75	76	6

*The average here is only for the eligible responses; thus, the N for each average varies.

* *The number of eligible responses is not the total of the 1-5 frequencies because of other responses (2.5, etc.) not shown here.