

Executive Summary: Final Report and Recommendations
Ad Hoc Committee on Faculty Retention and Recruitment
College of Arts & Sciences, Idaho State University
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Chair: Brian Norman (English); Members: Patrick Brooks (Music), Erika Kuhlman (History), Shannon Lynch (Psychology), Shannon Novak (Anthropology), René Rodriguez (Chemistry), Rosemary Smith (Biology), Michael Thomas (Biology)

Mission

This Committee sought to consolidate and increase faculty retention and recruitment efforts throughout the College of Arts & Sciences (CA&S) at Idaho State University (ISU). We think our work can also inform efforts to address faculty morale, faculty motivation, and institutional quality.

Scope and Process

ISU has a strong record in attracting superior candidates to faculty positions. However, ISU's retention record is not as strong, which will persist without a plan and substantive action. Losing faculty represents a significant loss of invested time, funding, energy, and other resources. The committee focused primarily on faculty retention and its twin: faculty satisfaction. Recruitment is a related, but separate set of issues. Improvement in retention and satisfaction is key to recruiting the best faculty possible. We knew that funding would be a key issue, but we also sought creative solutions that could augment calls for increased salaries. 2005-2006 is a key year of transition for ISU, so we think the time is ripe for positive change.

We gathered information in three steps: an open-ended survey in November 2005 (37% participation rate), focus groups in February 2006 (25 faculty members, 6 sessions), a quantitative survey in March 2006 (53% response rate). We presented a final report with recommendations to the Dean on April 18, 2006. All are invited to consult the full final report, which includes detailed discussions of our findings and recommendations (available on the CA&S website).

Key Findings & Recommendation Areas

Most faculty want a comprehensive and coherent vision for the College's future, rather than disconnected recommendations or policy decisions. We identified seven areas that affect retention and satisfaction, ranked here in descending order of importance (attached visuals may also be of practical use in implementation). Making headway in one area can alleviate grievances or increase satisfaction in another area, depending especially on individual faculty circumstances.

Area One: Compensation (Salary and Benefits)

Low salaries are by far the most important factor contributing to faculty dissatisfaction; faculty are acutely aware that most ISU salaries fall below market averages. It is important to distinguish between two interrelated, but distinct components of salary and raises: equity and merit. *Recommendations:* 1) comprehensive pay schedule [equity and merit]; 2) goal of 100% average of market-based salaries [equity]; 3) department-specific merit-based raise criteria [merit]; 4) improved benefits [equity].

Area Two: Administration-Faculty Relations

Concerns include perceptions that faculty are devalued in the university and lack voice in key decisions. There are also widespread concerns about competence and qualifications in key administrative posts and areas. *Recommendations:* 1) improved channels of communication; 2) faculty in key decision-making processes; 3) clarified administrative hiring process.

Area Three: Professional Development and Excellence in Teaching and Research/Creative Activity

"Nurturing a culture of engaged and motivated faculty" and "enhancing the infrastructure for teaching and research" were in the top 5 categories cited by the faculty for priority action. Also in the top half were providing more resources for professional development and travel. *Professional development recommendations:* 1) increased research/creative activity travel support; 2) transparent, qualitative policy for funding distribution; 3) clear outline and procedures for supplemental travel funds; 4) improve

responsiveness in research-related support services; 5) short-term administrative opportunities for faculty; 6) library development grants. *Culture of excellence recommendations:* 1) Reward meritorious careers; 2) recruit high-performing and out-of-state students; 3) more cross-departmental engagements

Area Four: Workload

While faculty value autonomy in their positions, they consistently express concerns about their current workload in terms of equity and “crushing” amount. *Recommendations:* 1) equitable workload policy; 2) flexibility in workload; and 3) shorten the semester in line with peer institutions.

Area Five: Family Accommodation

Family accommodation is an increasingly urgent and widespread concern in the academy and a Family Accommodation Ideas and Resources Plan (FAIR Plan) can address serious concerns in individual cases. *FAIR Plan addresses:* parental/family leave policy, tenure clock policy, tuition benefits, childcare, partner un-/under-employment, partner hire policy, dual career couples events, partner benefits, housing services.

Area Six: Culture of Recognition

Beyond salary, faculty are very concerned by a lack of recognition (and reward) for academic/creative accomplishments. *Recommendations:* 1) reward excellence in faculty achievements; 2) public recognition for key faculty achievements; 3) public-oriented annual report on major faculty accomplishments.

Area Seven: ISU-Local Community Relations

ISU suffers from traditional “town-gown” issues, though many faculty are quite active in the community and ISU contributes greatly to the local economy. *Recommendations:* 1) More community-oriented CA&S events (PR and outreach); 2) Stunt to highlight CA&S role in the community.

Conclusion

Salary issues were the primary, but not the sole area identified. Very generally, neither CA&S nor ISU overall are perceived to reward excellence, support continued professional development and engagement with one’s field, or offer experiences to become re-energized about teaching, service, and especially research. Our findings are in line with those at other colleges, especially regarding salaries, recognition for faculty achievement, research and teaching infrastructure, merit-based compensation, and workload. Conclusions regarding “What increases faculty satisfaction?” may point to assets that can be amplified or harnessed: CA&S faculty are happy with a sense of collegiality, a sense of autonomy or flexibility in their positions, and local outdoor opportunities or location in a small, Western town. Perceptions about whether ISU is “turning the corner” may be especially relevant for junior and/or new faculty, many of whom sense that ISU is improving in terms of research profile and overall university quality.

We are confident that we have identified and ranked areas most crucial to retention and satisfaction; we encourage CA&S to consider our specific recommendations while also pursuing other ways to address each area. CA&S should conduct formal exit interviews and add faculty retention and recruitment to administrative position descriptions at the Dean and University levels.