Cornell University
Faculty Work Life Survey

Response Rates and Patterns

November 2006

Prepared by Institutional Research and Planning
in consultation with the Provost's Advisory Committee on Faculty Work Life

In November of 2004, Provost Biddy Martin charged an Advisory Committee on Faculty Work Life "to examine the tenured and tenure-track faculty work life and working climate, with a special emphasis on the experiences of women faculty." A Faculty Work Life (FWL) Survey grew out of this effort. The survey was designed to gather information concerning faculty work loads, faculty members' feelings about the work they do and how Cornell does or does not support it, perceptions of the social climate of departments, and the ways in which life outside of Cornell meshes with faculty responsibilities.

The FWL Survey was administered to Cornell faculty in the Fall of 2005. Nine-hundred and sixty-two faculty—or 65% of those invited to participate—responded to the web-based survey. This document looks more closely at the response rate to better understand how non-response may influence the generalizability of survey results.

With a narrow focus on response and non-response, this document does not present much in the way of actual survey results. For an overview of how our respondents answered a wide variety of questions of the survey, see the companion document, "An Overview of Responses." A more indepth examination of faculty satisfaction is in the companion document, "Understanding Faculty Satisfaction."

Comments and suggestions are welcome and may be shared with a member of the committee (see right); Marin Clarkberg in Institutional Research and Planning, <mec30@cornell.edu>; or Patty Ard in the Office of the Provost, <pma2@cornell.edu>.

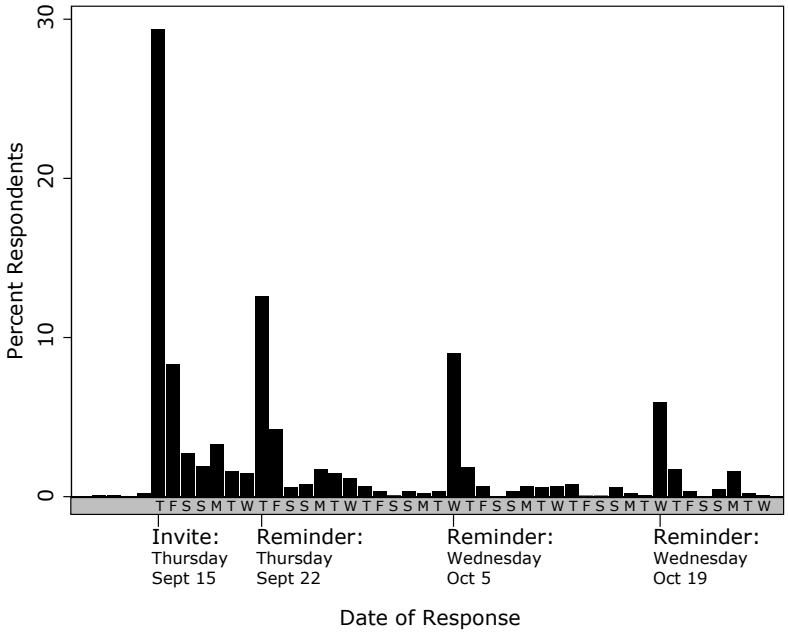
Contents

Membership of the Provost's Advisory Committee on Faculty Work Life:

Provost Biddy Martin, Chair
Dorothy Ainsworth, dma2@cornell.edu
Cynthia Ruth Farina, crf7@cornell.edu
Herbert Wilson Gottfried, hwg2@cornell.edu
Michael Jones-Correa, mj64@cornell.edu
Teresa Eileen Jordan, tej1@cornell.edu
Ronald Kline, rrk1@cornell.edu
Amy Villarejo, av45@cornell.edu
Elaine Wethington, ew20@cornell.edu
Carolyn Ainslie, cna1@cornell.edu
Francille Firebaugh, fmf1@cornell.edu

A. Response to the FWL Survey

Figure 1. Response to the FWL Survey, by Date

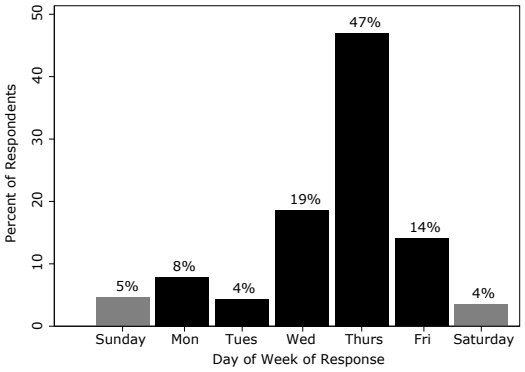


The FWL Survey was conducted during the fall semester of 2005. All tenured and tenure-track faculty not in the first year of their contracts (n=1,486) at Cornell were invited to participate in the web-based survey though an email from the Provost. Paper versions of the survey were made available to those who requested them.

More than 200 faculty responded to the survey within the first four hours of the survey opening, with the pace of responding diminishing after the initial surge (see Figure 1). Over the next several weeks, three reminders were sent to non-respondents, coming from "Academic Deans" (on September 22nd), and the "Provost's Advisory Committee" (October 5th and October 19th). The survey closed Monday, October 25th.

Out of the 1,486 tenured and tenure-track faculty invited to participate, 962 faculty answered at least some part of the survey, for a response rate of 65%. Ninety-three percent of all respondents who started the survey persevered to the final page of the lengthy survey instrument. These figures are comparable to the best response rates achieved with other faculty surveys at Cornell and elsewhere.

Figure 2. Response to the FWL Survey, by Day of the Week

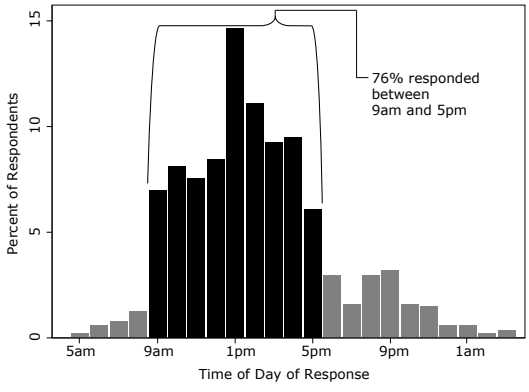


B. Timing of Responses

While there is a notable spike in the response rate on the day the survey opened, more than half of all responses were returned after at least one reminder.

There is no evidence that more or less satisfied faculty were especially quick to respond to the invitation to provide the administration with their opinions of the quality of their work lives: the correlation between the date of response and overall satisfaction with being a faculty member (the first question of the survey) is quite small (r = 0.04) and is not statistically significant (t=1.12).

Figure 3. Response to the FWL Survey, by Time of Day



The survey invitation and reminder notices went out on Wednesdays and Thursdays (see Figure 1). Ninety-two percent of responding faculty completed the survey on a weekday (see Figure 2), though the percent was as low as 82% among responding faculty from Architecture, Art & Planning.

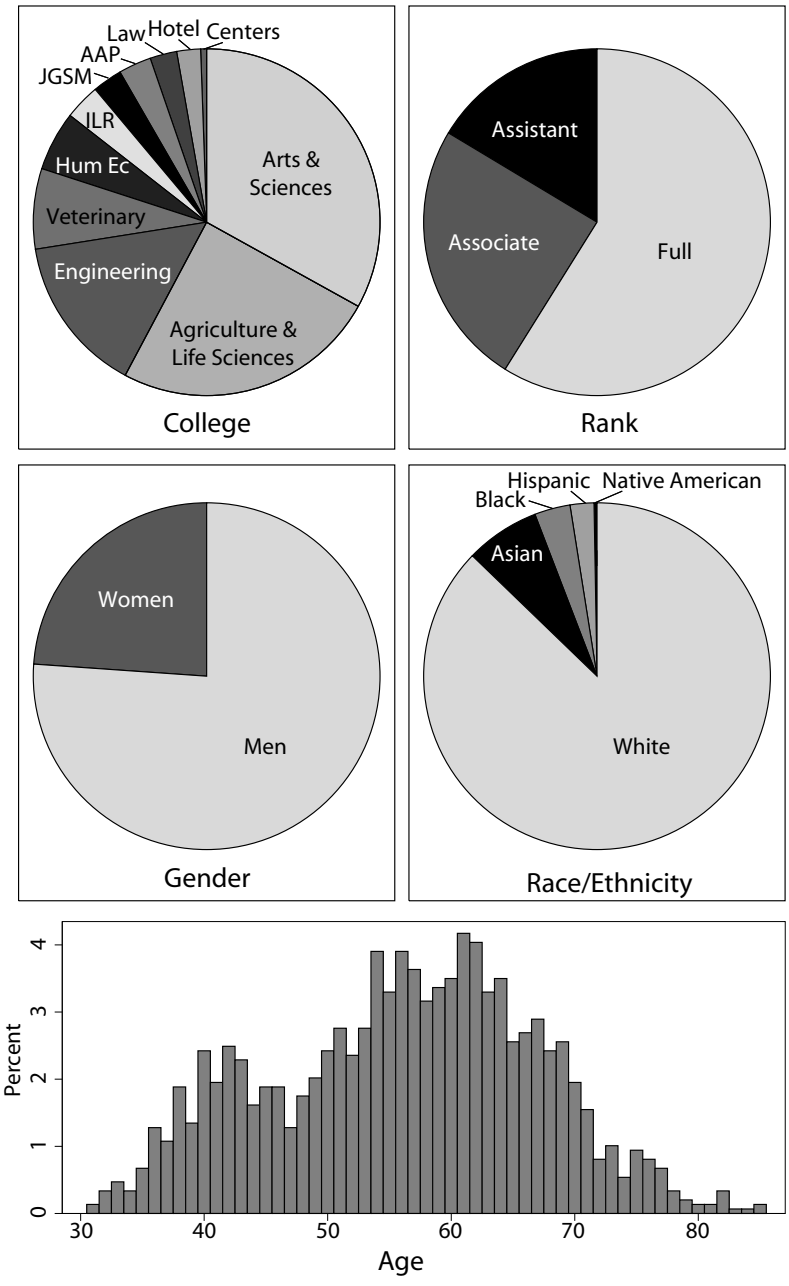
Seventy-six percent of responding faculty responded between 9am and 5pm; 11% responded in the evening between 5pm and 10pm, and 6% of faculty responded to the survey during the night hours after 10pm and before 7am (see Figure 3). Full professors were most likely to respond outside of "business hours", with 27% responding before 9am or after 5pm, as compared to 19% of assistant professors and 23% of associate professors. There were no substantial differences by gender or by overall level of satisfaction in the propensity to respond to the survey at night or on weekends.

C. Respondents and Nonrespondents

Demographics of Cornell's Faculty

Figure A-1 portrays some of the basic characteristics of the 1,486 faculty members invited to participate in the survey. Nearly three-quarters of Cornell's faculty are in one of the three largest colleges: Arts & Sciences (33%), CALS (25%), and Engineering (15%). Fifty-nine percent are full professors, 25% are associate professors, and 16% are assistant professors. A substantial majority of faculty are male (76%) and white (87%). Half of faculty not in their first year are 57 years old or older; only one-in-ten faculty members is 40 years of age or younger.

Figure 4. Demographics of the Faculty Population: College, Rank, Sex, Race/Ethnicity and Age*



*Note: Faculty in the first year of their contract at Cornell are excluded.

Characteristics of Respondents

Compared to the survey population, survey respondents were somewhat over-representative of faculty from CALS, assistant professors, women, and younger faculty.

Males and full professors each constitute a majority of the population of interest (see Figure 4 and Table 1). The figures in Table 1 also indicate that these two groups also dominate the *survey* data (as the sample is 56% full professors, and 73% male). However, both men and full professors were less likely to respond to the survey than were women and assistant/associate professors (see Table 1).

Response rates also varied by college, with CALS having the highest response rate at nearly 75% (see Table 1). Two colleges had response rates substantially below 60%: Architecture, Art & Planning (53%), and the Johnson Graduate School of Management (56%).

Faculty on leave during either the '04-'05 academic year (the reference year in the first section of the survey) or on leave when the survey opened were less likely to respond than faculty not on leave.

Some of the demographics are linked, such as gender and rank: 26% of women faculty are assistant professors, as compared to 13% of male faculty. Age is also related to response rates, and to rank and gender.

In a model where rank, gender, salary, college, leave status, and age were considered simultaneously as predictors of response odds, sex and age remained significantly associated with the likelihood of responding (such that women and younger faculty were more likely to respond); salary, rank, and leave status did not. In this model, faculty from CALS were significantly more likely to respond to the survey than faculty from every other college, but there were no other significant differences by college.

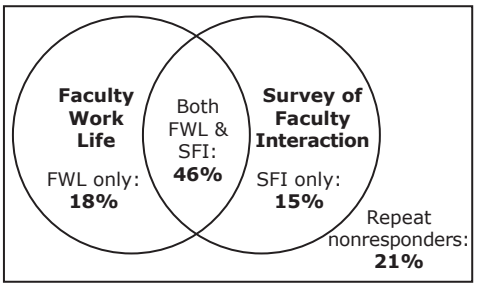
Table 1. Characteristics of Population and Respondents to the FWL Survey

	Survey Population		Survey Sample		
Population	N	as % of population	N	as % of respondents	**Response Rate**
Overall	1486	100.0%	962	100.0%	**64.7%**
By Gender					
Men	1132	76.2%	699	72.7%	**61.8%**
Women	353	23.8%	262	27.3%	**74.2%**
By Race					
White	1297	87.3%	849	88.4%	**65.5%**
URM	85	5.7%	51	5.3%	**60.0%**
Asian	103	6.9%	61	6.4%	**59.2%**
By Rank					
Assistant	244	16.4%	182	18.9%	**74.6%**
Associate	366	24.6%	244	25.4%	**66.7%**
Full	875	58.9%	535	55.7%	**61.1%**
By College					
CALS	369	24.8%	271	28.2%	**73.4%**
AAP	45	3.0%	24	2.5%	**53.3%**
Arts	490	33.0%	316	32.9%	**64.5%**
Engineering	218	14.7%	130	13.5%	**59.6%**
Hum Ec	85	5.7%	57	5.9%	**67.1%**
Hotel	35	2.4%	21	2.2%	**60.0%**
ILR	46	3.1%	28	2.9%	**60.1%**
Centers	7	0.5%	4	0.4%	**57.1%**
JGSM	45	3.0%	25	2.6%	**55.6%**
Law School	35	2.4%	21	2.2%	**60.0%**
Vet	111	7.5%	65	6.8%	**58.6%**

D. Repeated Nonresponse: Two Surveys

A year-and-a-half prior to the FWL Survey, many of these same faculty were asked to participate in a Survey of Faculty Interaction with Undergraduate Students (SFI). That survey achieved a 62% response rate. Of the 1,411 faculty who were invited to participate in both surveys, 46% responded to both instruments and 21% responded to neither (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Overlap in the Response to the FWL and SFI Surveys



Did the faculty who chose to respond to one survey and not the other tend to answer the surveys in systematically different ways than those who responded to both? Such a pattern might suggest that some faculty decide to participate in surveys only when they hold non-normative views. The results presented in Table 2 suggest that there are few differences in variables of interest between those who responded to one survey and not the other as compared to those who responded to both surveys.

Though only suggestive, this brief analysis suggests that non-normative views regarding the topic of the survey content is not a powerful factor in influencing faculty decisions to participate in a given survey.

Table 2. Mean Responses to Selected Survey Items, by Participation in SFI and FWL

	Item mean among faculty responding to:				Statistically significant
Survey Item	FWL Only	FWL & SFI	SFI Only	t	difference?
Faculty Work Life Survey:					
Overall satisfaction with being a faculty member	3.96	3.94		0.25	no
Importance of teaching	3.29	3.29		0.06	no
Survey of Faculty Interaction:					
Research v. teaching orientation		2.38	2.47	1.14	no
Do you have any children?*		75%	77%	0.56	no

* The FWL Survey asked a similar question, "Are you a parent or legal guardian?," and also found 75% answering "yes."

E. Imputation of Overall Satisfaction

It is impossible to know how non-respondents would have answered the survey. However, we can use the data from those who did respond to predict how those who did not respond might have answered a particular question on the survey on the basis of their sex, race, age, rank, salary and other characteristics. The first question of the survey—overall satisfaction—may be particularly interesting to examine in this way given that it is highly thematic. It is important to emphasize that such an exercise can only be suggestive, as demographics and other institutional variables give us a limited basis for understanding something as complex as someone's overall satisfaction with being a faculty member.

The results of the exercise point towards the conclusion that nonrespondents are remarkably similar to respondents in terms of their overall satisfaction with being a faculty member: the observed mean among respondents of 3.95; the imputed mean among nonrespondents is 3.96. This difference of 0.01 on a five-point scale does not approach statistical significance (t=0.15).