

Staff Considerations for BAC March 3, 2006

Introduction

Using the comprehensive “Staff Considerations for BAC” report of March 4, 2005 as a foundation, with an eye toward to the Benefits Review Committee report of September, 2003 (revised, December, 2003) and the current college climate, we constructed an online survey for staff to evaluate the relative importance of working conditions, issues and benefits that have been deemed important for budgetary planning by Wheaton staff.

The survey consisted of three major sections. The first listed five topics related to working conditions and environment and asked the respondent to indicate the relative level of importance of each using a five-point Likert scale ranging from highest priority to lowest priority. The second section listed nine topics related to salaries and benefits using the same scale. The third section listed all fourteen topics and asked the respondent to arrange them by level of importance “for budget allocation” from 1 (Most Important) to 10 (Least Important.) Other comments were solicited on the survey and several conversations and emails to BAC representatives are also included.

Section 1: Working Conditions/Environment

109 individuals responded to the survey, representing 28% of the Wheaton staff (using headcount rather than FTE figure.) Responses in this section are as follows:

	Highest Priority	High Priority	Neutral	Low Priority	Lowest Priority	Highest (%)	Highest & High (%)
Investment in technology (computers, printers network etc.)	41	51	7	4	3	39	87
Work space/physical environment (office space, storage, meeting space, etc.)	19	52	26	5	5	18	66
Investment in equipment/tools necessary for job (vacuums, cell phones, etc.)	10	44	47	6	1	11	50
Amount of work expected in relation to a full work week	25	33	40	6	3	23	54
Professional Development Opportunities (training conferences seminars etc.)	8	42	41	12	3	8	47
Total Respondents	109						

Technology: It's no surprise that investment in technology is high on our list again this year. In fact, things have gone from bad to worse since our last report.

68% of all equipment (PC's, Mac's and printers) is out of warranty, with an age of 6 – 12 years old. 28% of the equipment is 2 – 5 years old with just 2% of all equipment less than 2 years old. We are finding ourselves wasting a lot of money and time keeping this equipment running, in many cases spending more in maintenance than the equipment is worth. Loss of productivity in nearly all offices across campus due to slow or malfunctioning computers cannot be estimated.

The college has 1 FTE position to maintain all college owned equipment, an impossible job with the state of things. Our 2 FTE's that are supposed to perform user support are performing maintenance on a daily basis to keep things running.

Work Space/environment: We just need more room. Many departments struggle with finding the right spaces for staff to work efficiently, for resources to be accommodated and for services to be offered from appropriate, convenient locations. Productivity is also impacted by crowded conditions, moves to maximize available space, and considerable time spent on space planning.

Investment in equipment/tools: We'd like to acknowledge improvements in this area. The college has purchased new vehicles and equipment for grounds (John Deere grounds equipment and snow removing equipment). New equipment was purchased for house keeping including some heavy duty cleaning equipment for large areas.

Amount of work expected: This is an area that continues to be a source of frustration at Wheaton and perhaps a result of lower morale felt by staff. In a nutshell heroic efforts are the normal operating mode for many staff. To make matters worse, many feel that the Administration isn't aware of this issue since it appears that the day-to-day business of the college is being accomplished. However what's not seen are the extraordinary efforts required to accomplish all that is expected within the normal work week.

For example, last year it was pointed out that combined staff in Media Services were working an average of 61 hours a week above and beyond their staff resources. This has been alleviated to some degree by adding a position to Media Services. But, this was not a new position, it was created by substitution from another area of LIS when a vacancy arose. Some of the work of the vacated position is no longer done, but some was distributed to the remaining staff in that department.

Over the past several years the size of the faculty has increased by nearly a third, and administrative/professionals have been added in new areas like the Global Center, the Multicultural Center, the College Learning Center, Development and, most recently, the Office of Service, Spirituality and Social Responsibility. However, virtually no support staff has been added. We are adding new requirements to many job descriptions with the expectation that staff have unlimited resources to get everything done at the same or better levels of service. We combine elements of what should be two or three distinct jobs into one, and expect the individual to be an expert in all of them. We caution that: a person can be an expert in one thing, very good at a few, but if asked to do too many things, he or she becomes a master of none.

Section 2: Salaries/Benefits

Salaries and benefits continue to be of critical importance to the staff. The table below represents the results from the “Salaries/Benefits” section of the staff survey.

	Highest Priority	High Priority	Neutral	Low Priority	Lowest Priority	Highest (%)	Highest & High (%)
Tuition Remission (dependent attending Wheaton)	26	22	41	9	7	25	45
Tuition Exchange Program	25	26	42	5	6	24	48
TIAA/CREF Contributions	41	50	14	0	1	39	86
Tuition Grants (for dependents to attend other colleges)	15	26	43	12	6	14	39
Tuition Reimbursement (for staff to take job-related courses)	13	44	39	4	5	12	54
Staff Salary Increases	64	37	3	1	1	60	95
Short Term Disability Insurance	16	45	35	7	3	15	58
Medical/Dental Benefits	41	48	13	4	0	39	84
Medical Benefits for Retirees	33	29	33	6	4	31	33
Total Respondents	106						

While most of the issues identified in the survey are of serious concern to the staff, a number of issues rise to the top.

60% of the staff surveyed feel that staff salaries should receive the highest priority for the FY07 budget. Additionally, of the 106 respondents, 95% feel that staff salaries are either high or highest on the list of budgetary priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

What continues to concern the staff is the implicit policy that differentiates between staff and faculty raises in the proposed salary pool. We suggest and encourage that the college adopt one employee salary plan and do away with an unfair and unjustified two salary pool approach.

As an institution of higher education and a community, Wheaton tries to address and combat important issues, for example, issues of class, racism, and sexism. These social constructs are embedded in the current dual approach to salary distribution between faculty and staff. We believe it is time for the paradigm to change and evolve with the views and opinions of the greater college community. We believe that the current salary differential devalues the role staff plays on this campus as well as promotes a negative class structure on the campus. Wheaton Staff, regardless of years of service, provide a high quality of service and are integral to the mission of the college and its momentum. Additionally, Wheaton has benefited from the longevity of a dedicated staff, and we believe that this loyalty should be recognized. It is an

artificial notion to draw any distinction between faculty and staff; the college would not succeed without dedicated members in both groups. In these times, highly skilled staff is as valuable a commodity to the college as faculty. They deserve equal recognition for their investment in the college.

A few quotes from the survey regarding salaries include:

Staff morale would benefit from raises equal to faculty raises.

Faculty and staff should have the same salary increase scale unless, of course, the college truly values staff less than faculty.

Staff salary increases should be directly linked to the performance evaluations. Not everyone should receive the same raise...

Salary comparisons: It's not fair to compare our titles with those in our comparison group. Let's compare our job descriptions and the actual work we do.

[Staff pool should] parity the faculty [salary increases].

Salaries for staff should have a market analysis done on a yearly basis.

There are people who have been working at Wheaton for 5 yrs [earning] only \$12 an hour, [while] others working 7 or 8 [years] are making \$16 an hour. EQUAL WORK, EQUAL PAY...

I think that benefit differences between faculty and staff need to be equitable. This is something that continues to perpetuate the faculty and staff divide on the campus.

One thing that should be looked at is shift differential. If I'm not mistaken Wheaton's differential is a lot below other businesses. I realize this is an issue that is not a concern for most people because they don't even realize there are people working 3-11 and 11pm-7am but for those who do, it is an issue.

A differential of just 1% over a 25 year span amounts to substantial lifestyle changing dollars. The table below illustrates this point.

	Start	5 years	10 years	15 years	20 years	25 years
Staff (5% annual increase)	\$30,000	38,288	48,867	62,368	79,599	106,670
Faculty (6% annual increase)	\$30,000	41,147	53,725	71,897	96,214	128,756

In addition to salaries; medical, dental and TIAA/CREF contributions are among the other issues that staff feel should take priority for the upcoming resource allocation. Rising health costs make the higher co-payments and contributions an increased burden for many members of the staff. The college continues to talk about "employee benefits," when in fact there is inequity within the benefit packages for faculty and staff. Most notably is maternity leave. As it stands

now, faculty through unregulated ad hoc arrangements within departments are typically able to take a full pay maternity leave, while staff are required to use sick and vacation time, and take unpaid leave if there is not enough accrued sick and vacation time in the staff member's bank. This is an unacceptable practice of preferential treatment.

A few quotes from the survey regarding medical/dental TIAA/CREF benefits are:

Wheaton's staff is dedicated to the students it serves. To prolong decisions about health care benefits, short term disability, TIAA-CREF contributions, and all the other areas of discussion that happened a couple of years ago regarding benefits, is inappropriate and inexcusable.

We seem to be paying more and more out of pocket for prescription and co-pay. The dental benefits family plan stinks because it doesn't pay half of things needed at times.

[G]iven the state of what is facing retirees, perhaps [medical and dental benefits for retirees] should be a higher priority [over tuition benefits] for fixed income reasons, and prescription nightmare reasons.

While the majority of staff do not agree that tuition benefits of various kinds (save tuition reimbursement) are either high or highest priority in the budget allotment process, we would be remiss not to include the comments regarding these benefits:

Who doesn't want a salary increase but for me it is not the most important thing. I would rather make a little less and have good benefits than make a little more and lose the tuition benefit, retirement contribution or health insurance. It would be great to have insurance for retirees.

Tuition remission and grants are discriminatory since they are not open to everyone. Anything that is strictly designed for dependents is discriminatory and a large benefit that many employees don't get and don't get compensated for in any other way. Remember, having children is a choice not a mandate.

While the tuition remission and exchange programs are an important incentive for staff commitment to their work, it should be remembered that there are some of us who have never, and will never, be able to benefit from this program. There is no comparable compensation or benefit for childless employees.

Tuition remission was a key reason for taking a position at Wheaton. My children are on the younger side, but my intention is to be at Wheaton a great many years. If tuition remission was not a benefit, I would re-think my employment options.

It is important to maintain and improve the benefits package presented when we were hired. I would like to see more money toward tuition grants to help parents who's child may not have been accepted to Wheaton or chooses to attend a different school not on the exchange list... Tuition Reimbursement should be at least 85% and not the 70% Tuition Exchange to be more of a percentage than the current standings.

The Tuition Remission/Exchange program is a big incentive for staff/faculty with dependents. If retention of good staff/faculty is a number one priority then Wheaton must sell this benefit above all the rest to differentiate [the college].

I strongly feel that the Tuition Remission and Tuition Exchange Program are important benefits that should continue. I left a job that paid nearly three times my current salary and accepted my position at Wheaton specifically for the tuition benefits. The tuition benefits help to attract and retain good employees.

Section 3: Budget Allocation

There were slightly fewer respondents for Section 3, 99 as opposed to 109 for other sections, with some comments that this section was very difficult to respond to since it imposed the difficult task of pitting one important issue against another. We anticipated that this would be a challenging question but thought it would be valuable in that it forces difficult decision making – a process required in constructing the actual college budget. If resources are limited, how can we make decisions about budget allocation without wrestling with this question?

This table lists the issues ranked as numbers 1 through 8:

Staff Salary Increases	33
Investment in technology (computers, printers, network etc.)	23
Medical Benefits for Retirees	11
Medical/Dental Benefits	7
Tuition Exchange Program	6
Work space/physical environment (office space, storage, meeting space etc.)	4
Amount of work expected in relation to a full work week	4
TIAA/CREF Contributions	4

If we aggregate rankings to include the top 2 positions, the top 8 remain the same with some reordering, but “Staff Salary Increases” and “Investment in technology” continue to occupy positions No. 1 and 2 as seen in this table:

Staff Salary Increases	49
Investment in technology (computers, printers, network etc.)	29
TIAA/CREF Contributions	21
Medical/Dental Benefits	20
Medical Benefits for Retirees	14
Tuition Exchange Program	13
Work space/physical environment (office space, storage, meeting space etc.)	12
Amount of work expected in relation to a full work week	12

And finally, if we aggregate rankings to include the top 3 rankings, the top 8 remain the same with some reordering, but “Staff Salary Increases” and “Investment in technology” continue to occupy the top spots.

Staff Salary Increases	90
Investment in technology (computers printers network etc.)	61
Medical/Dental Benefits	43
Medical Benefits for Retirees	37
TIAA/CREF Contributions	35
Amount of work expected in relation to a full work week	24
Work space/physical environment (office space storage meeting space etc.)	22
Tuition Exchange Program	22

Salaries and updated technology clearly are seen as the highest priorities by Wheaton staff participating in the survey and the remaining six issues consistently follow close behind despite minor rearrangements in order. The fact that Wheaton staff chose salary as the Number One issue, by any measure, is not a surprise. The fact that “investment in technology” holds the next position is a surprise and shows convincingly that Wheaton staff believe they can be more productive if the college provides the technology needed to do their jobs well.

It is worth noting that most of these issues are broad-based benefits yet the benefits landing lower on the list have huge impact on individuals who work at an educational institution and expect that educational benefits should be available to compensate for somewhat lower salaries and other benefits.

Community spirit is truly represented in the responses to the survey; many people reported that it was difficult to respond to Section 3 because they, as an individual, would prioritize some benefits over others but felt that, as a member of a community, other benefits should have the highest priority. We applaud the generous spirit this response exemplifies.

Finally, we recognize the limitations of the survey, and would suggest that if it were to be used again, we recommend the following:

- The survey directions should clearly state that the responses reflect what the respondent considers important for his/her own situation;
- We should include an indication of the classification of the individual;
- The survey should be available for a longer time for respondents to do the survey; and
- A reminder should be sent a few days before closing the survey.

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