

Faculty Working Conditions at CSU

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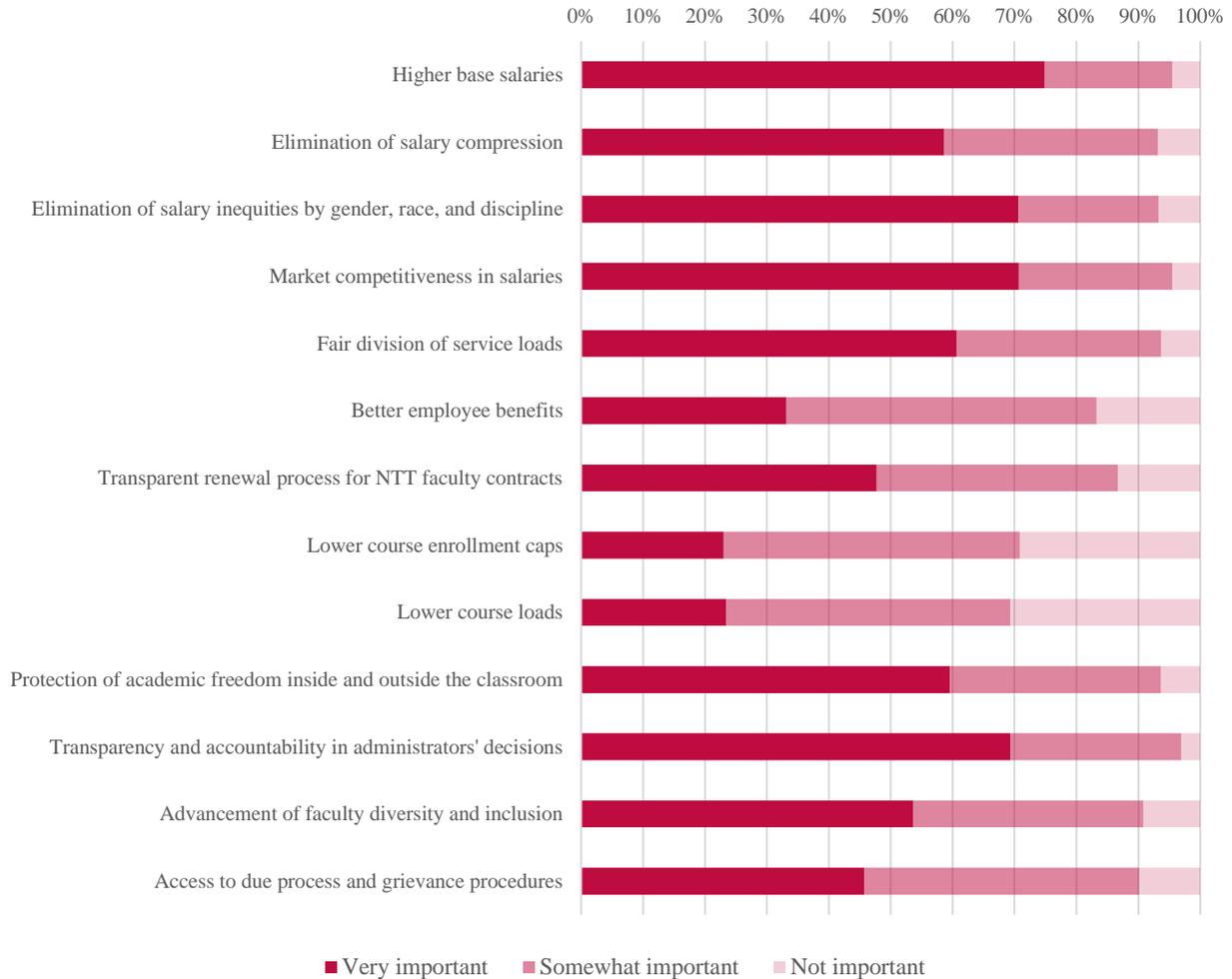
Survey Design

In the spring of 2022, the Colorado State University chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP-CSU) created a survey to assess faculty views of their working conditions and identify areas for improvement. The intent was to gauge the emotional and occupational climate among instructors and to provide a space for them to voice their concerns. To all who contributed - thank you! To those of you who have not had a chance to respond, the [survey is still active](#) and we encourage you to respond, as we will continue to use it as a source. This report briefly summarizes the survey results and identifies potential action items.

Taken in conjunction with CSU's Employee Climate Survey, which provides valuable longitudinal data, the survey results paint a bleak picture of faculty morale. We hope that faculty members will feel less alone when they see that many people share their experiences. We also hope that CSU's administration will take these concerns to heart and implement changes to improve our working environment. We strongly believe that to produce a great student experience, CSU needs to provide great working conditions for its employees.

We distributed the survey via email to 1,800 non-tenure track and tenure track faculty, and it garnered 467 responses, which amounts to about one quarter of all faculty. It included 17 questions which asked respondents to rate each issue as very important, somewhat important, or not important. These questions included such topics as salaries, service, courseloads, academic freedom, and administrative transparency. Respondents were also asked if they felt they were treated respectfully and fairly by their immediate supervisors and by the administration at large. A second component of the survey included open-ended questions that required written responses, such as identifying the single most important change that they would like to see at CSU. Finally, some basic demographic information about rank and department was gathered from those who volunteered the information.

Figure 1: How important is it to address each of the following issues to improve the working conditions of faculty at CSU?



The primary themes that emerged in the survey results include compensation, respect and fairness, equity and bias, and administrative transparency and accountability. Additionally, the fair division of service loads, protection of academic freedom, transparent renewal process for NTT faculty contracts, and access to due process and grievance procedures were regarded as very important by a large number of respondents (see Figure 1).

Compensation

Higher base salaries were ranked most important by 75% of respondents, making it the most salient issue identified by the survey. This assessment was repeated in answers to the open-ended questions. One faculty member wrote:

Salaries are the most important issue right now in my opinion. All of these other issues have importance but with the higher living costs in Fort Collins and the surrounding area it is very important that faculty are paid a living wage.

Another commented that:

I am a tenured faculty member and beginning to look for other positions and careers because I cannot afford to support my family on my current salary. . . My skills, training, and qualifications command higher salaries in other fields right now.

One instructor recently left because of unsustainably low compensation:

I just resigned from the university because I can't support my family on CSU wages. I'm also a Senior Instructor of 5 years, and I'm making \$2,500 less than the Senior Instructors I just voted to promote. I'm leaving to find a job that compensates me for what I'm worth.

Salary compression and leapfrogging were also identified as problems:

I'm in my 9th year at CSU, but my salary is the same as a non-tenure track instructor that just started, so all of my promotions feel essentially erased. I also received my PhD with no additional compensation or promotion. I could work at Poudre School District and start at \$75,000 a year, which doesn't make that much sense. Additionally, I would prefer to work more at CSU to earn more money, rather than seeking a second job outside of the university, but salary maximas prohibit this. I wish I could do more of what I love (teaching) at the place I love to do it (CSU).

Many tenure track faculty (TTF) expressed a lack of fairness regarding compensation of non-tenure track faculty (NTTF). One faculty member wrote:

I would like to see greater respect and compensation provided to NTT members of our faculty. Much of the work is the same, and the educational investment is identical for both tracks---pay gaps should not be so incredibly large.

Overall, there were hundreds of objections regarding low salaries, with most NTTF simply asking for a living wage. Feelings of financial insecurity were rampant, and there was clear resentment on the part of some faculty members who felt marginalized and/or mistreated. A number of full-time faculty have expressed concerns about working second jobs, even during the school year. This professor succinctly expressed a common concern:

Right now, I'm at a point where I don't know how much longer I can afford being a professor. I'm currently at the rank of Associate Professor, but because I'm NTT, I make less than most high school teachers in the area. With increases in the cost of living and inflation significantly outpacing annual salary increases, each year (in inflation adjusted dollars) I make less than the previous year. This is not sustainable.

Poor compensation is a problem for many, but most severely affects the non-tenure track faculty. Low salaries have historically been a problem at CSU, and the increased cost of housing and other costs have caused a marked decline in real income over the last few years. This has resulted in a financial crisis for many households for whom CSU wages are simply not sustainable.

Respect and Fairness

Of the 460 people who responded to the survey, fewer than 100 gave an unqualified “yes” when asked whether they were treated respectfully and fairly. Many faculty indicated that they felt respected by their department heads, but not by the administration more generally. Another frequent response was that people feel that they are respected, but not treated fairly, and these faculty almost invariably pointed to discrepancies in compensation and workload. Others equated this lack of fairness with a lack of respect. While many of those who answered “yes” were tenured professors, some of them qualified their answers with statements like, “My experience as a TTF is so different than NTT colleagues.”

However, most revealing is that hundreds of people answered negatively, and then provided numerous, sometimes painful, examples of why they feel they are disrespected or treated unfairly. The most common complaints regarding fairness were about the differences between NTTF and TTF, as expressed in these statements:

My course load is outrageous - teaching 8-12 classes per year, advising 35-50 students, plus committee obligations. Meanwhile, a tenured professor earning 3-times my salary teaches 4 classes per year (all low enrollment), does not advise students, and serves on one committee.

My Department isn't supportive of NTT faculty. Our contributions are not recognized, we are not given opportunities to do meaningful service in the Department, our path to promotion isn't clear, and we are not treated with respect. NTT faculty in my Department refuse to attend faculty meetings because we have been treated so poorly in open meetings.

Many also complained of inequities among the salaries of tenured faculty depending on department or college. For instance, according to the 2021-2022 CUPA data, an assistant professor in Business Administration (\$145,660) makes more than twice as much as an assistant professor in Languages, Literatures, and Cultures (\$63,834).

The sentiment that faculty are not respected, particularly by upper administration, is common at CSU and appears to cross-cut appointment types and rank. This is summed up in one person's assertion: "I don't feel valued. I feel disposable." Another faculty member expressed a similar sentiment:

Faculty seem to be the lowest priority. We've become a commodity, easily replaced with little respect for our skills and abilities. Students are being treated as customers, and we've lost sight of our mission as an institution of higher education.

Many survey respondents also expressed outrage at wage increases that do not keep pace with inflation. One respondent noted:

When we are offered a 3% "merit" raise when inflation is 8% and housing prices are increasing 20%, I do not feel respected.

These economic concerns often overwhelm other aspects of the job, as illustrated by this response:

I feel I am treated respectfully during in-person interactions and with respect for my work. However, the inaction from CSU on equitable pay that allows staff and faculty to keep up with the cost of living does not convey respect. I will have to seek other employment outside of the academy in order to continue living here as a single parent.

Respect is demonstrated by paying sustainable salaries and expecting a reasonable workload. A common criticism referenced the extremely high wages of people working in administration and in the athletic programs. Respondents also highlighted respect in terms of the nature and degree to which faculty are involved in workplace decision-making, an issue that is addressed towards the end of this document.

Equity and Bias

Seventy percent of respondents ranked elimination of salary inequities by race and gender as very important, and over half indicated that advancement of faculty diversity and inclusion was essential. However, written responses appeared to vary widely by department. Some respondents felt that they were treated equitably and fairly by their department chairs, while others described experiences of discrimination. One colleague shared that:

Some people treat me respectfully. Others (including faculty and students) don't treat me respectfully and this is clearly based on my skin color.

Numerous respondents stated that women carried a greater burden in terms of workload and administrative services. One faculty member wrote:

As a woman of color, I've had to produce more than my colleagues, defend the value of my work and beg for fair compensation. I am overburdened with service and simply not seen by administration at various levels. As a highly productive member of my department, I am still considered less than my less productive white male counterparts. I do not receive the recognition, base salary, or additional perks that they enjoy.

Another stated:

There continues to be inequity in salary due to gender. In my many year career, they would give me a raise to try to fix the issue and then give men who are less successful than I am higher salaries than me. Then they would correct it and the cycle continues. Women should NOT have to fight for equitable salaries. I know 4 tenured female faculty at CSU who have quit or will quit very soon due to this issue.

Some faculty who identified with the LGBTQ community also reported being invisible to administration, writing that “We [in the LGBTQ community] are never counted and so the inequities we experience at this university are never documented.”

A common observation was a variation of “CSU has an urgent need to match its rhetoric of diversity and inclusion with actions.” Others noted that promises of a “flourishing community” fall short when applied to many CSU faculty and staff.

Administrative Transparency and Accountability

Attitudes toward the administration varied, but a common sentiment was that “the administration takes the faculty for granted and has continually increased workload demands without appropriate compensation at both the department and individual levels.” Another major complaint regarding the administration is that they have failed to “walk the talk” and live up to claims of sustainability, diversity, inclusion, and a thriving community. For example, one professor wrote:

The lack of accountability for administrators is a significant problem. While CSU speaks of its commitment to DEISJ, administrators opposed to this commitment and actively harassing, bullying, and retaliating against women and other minoritized identities are not held accountable. These behaviors have been reported all the way to upper administration. Reporting has resulted in an escalation in destructive behaviors by the administrator.

Reducing administrative bloat was also a common suggestion, with one faculty member writing, “The number of upper administration positions and the amount of money spent for them appears to significantly outpace other positions and expenses.” The salaries of the chancellor, president, vice presidents, athletic personnel, and other administrators were all referenced as illustrative of misguided priorities. Lack of transparency and faculty inclusion in governance were also described as problematic, with the following quote expressing a common sentiment: “Faculty are ignored in making big decisions and these are left to administrators and big money donors.”

Conclusions and Recommendations

The data yielded by this survey reveal a high level of discontent among a significant portion of CSU faculty. This discontent falls into clear categories, specifically concerns about compensation, respect and fairness, equity and bias, and administrative accountability. Overwhelmingly, salaries are the number one concern. The discrepancy between CSU’s stated commitment to diversity, equity, and sustainability and faculty working conditions is stark. CSU must live up to these ideals within the university community before it can more fully extend them beyond campus.

Based on the survey results summarized above, AAUP-CSU recommends the following course of action:

1. Bring base salaries for the lowest paid faculty members up to the national average of \$70,000 for full-time non-tenure-track faculty at peer institutions according to [data](#) from College and University Personnel Association.
2. Address salary compression at all ranks.
3. Eliminate discrepancies in the salaries of women, people of color, and other historically marginalized groups.
4. Implement a cost of living increase for all faculty earning less than \$150,000.

5. Work with faculty to create contract standards for what constitutes teaching, research, and service expectations.
6. Provide detailed and transparent budgetary information and involve faculty in budget planning.
7. Meaningfully include faculty – particularly Faculty Council – in decision-making, rather than relying on listening sessions for “input.”

We believe in CSU’s mission to “set the standard for public research universities in teaching, research, service and extension for the benefit of the citizens of Colorado, the United States and the world.” We want to participate in the task of making this university a great place to work and study. The current administration has the potential to make progress on these issues even before the new administration takes over. We hope they will listen to the faculty voices expressed in the survey results and use them to inform substantial changes.

Until then, we invite all faculty to participate in these conversations with each other, with us, and with the public. The CSU chapter of AAUP meets the first Thursday of every month at 4:00pm at Avogadro’s Number on Mason Street. Come talk with us! If you can’t make that time but want to get involved, email aaupcsu@gmail.com.