

## Quality of Work Life (QWL) Survey-2009

The Quality of Work Life Task Force conducted a survey of George Mason University employees in April 2009 to ask them a series of detailed questions regarding work/life at George Mason. A total of 5,518 employees were contacted across eight job categories on each of the three campuses and the Loudoun location. Most were contacted via a web survey contractor but 84 paper surveys were collected from employees who don't have regular access to personal computers at work. A total of 1,531 surveys were returned, yielding a response rate of 27.7 percent, marginally lower than the 29% rate in 2006, although the response rates for Administrative Faculty (51%), Classified Staff (37%) and Tenure-track Faculty (35%) were substantially higher. The response rates for these groups were similar in the 2006 survey (47.9%, 38.3%, and 38.7%, respectively). Indeed, the response rate for salaried categories (all but adjunct and wage) was 34.6% (comparable to 36.2% rate for salaried groups in 2006).

The 2009 QWL survey was the second time all Mason employees were invited to participate. Surveys prior to 2006 only included a sample of employees. Thus, in terms of sheer number of responses, the current total of those participating in the survey is well over three times larger than in 2000 and 2003. The complete survey can be found on line at <http://qwl.gmu.edu>

### Results

#### **A. General Job Attitudes: Satisfaction, Organizational Support & Commitment**

After rising over the first three administrations of the QWL survey, **overall job satisfaction** appears to have stabilized at a level just short of three quarters (73.8%) of employees indicating they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their jobs.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Combined
2000	12.9%	49.5%	63.4%
2003	19.8%	47.6%	67.4%
2006	21.2%	53%	74.2%
2009	24.7%	49.1%	73.8%

Similarly, the levels of **Perceived Organizational Support (POS)**-the degree to which employees feel the organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being assessed across 4 items; sample item: “my organization cares about my opinions) and **Affective Organizational Commitment (AOC)**-the degree to which employees feel connected to the university assessed across 4 items; sample item: “this organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me”) remained at virtually the same levels as they had been in 2006.

Scale: 1=strongly disagree    3=neutral    5=strongly agree

	<b>POS</b>	<b>AOC</b>
2000	3.08	3.08
2003	3.34	3.31
2006	3.24	3.67
2009	3.28	3.62

Although this “no change” finding isn’t particularly dramatic, one should remember that this survey was conducted during a time when there was (and is) considerable concern about the university budgetary situation. In contrast, although in 2006 the university budget was also “tight”, that survey was conducted in the afterglow of the Final Four. Indeed, there was circumstantial evidence that the significant increase in AOC from 2003 to 2006 may have been partially due to the publicity generated by that year’s basketball team success story.

Generally, employees in each job category indicated that they had more support from and connectedness to their individual departments or offices (i.e. there were higher levels of Perceived Support and Affective Commitment for their respective work units) than for the university as a whole. This parallels the findings from all previous QWL surveys and is not surprising, as it is easier for the local work unit to show support on a day-to-day basis.

**B. Satisfaction and Stress Items: Job Category Comparisons**

Generally employees in each job category expressed satisfaction with most aspects of their jobs. As in past surveys, employees at all levels particularly valued the autonomy they have in their jobs. This satisfaction can be seen in several areas including support for flexible work options, the opportunity to use a variety of skills, and the chance to work independently.

With respect to aspects of the job where people were least satisfied, salary fell below the neutral point for 5 of the 8 job categories. This was followed by availability of on-campus child care which was below the neutral point for 4 of these categories. The only other items that were below the neutral point were health care and retirement benefits for those two groups (adjunct and wage categories) that are not covered by such plans.

It was in the area of reactions to the stress items where the greatest differences were found between this year’s survey and the previous one. In 2006 only a few stress items reached the 50% level of moderate or extreme stress. For example, that year adjunct, administrative and term faculty and classified staff all reported no moderate or extreme stress factors which represented a significant decrease overall from 2003. However, this year nearly all job categories reported concern about university and department budget issues. Similarly, workload and parking/commuting also frequently reached this 50% threshold. In addition, classified staff, wages, and term faculty indicated significant stress with respect to personal finances.

### **C. Campus Comparisons (see appended tables)**

All campuses (Arlington, Fairfax, & Prince William) generally showed very similar patterns with each location indicating dissatisfaction with salary and availability of on-campus childcare while reporting budget concerns as the strongest stressor. One aspect that differentiated the Arlington campus employees from those at the other two locations was their lower satisfaction with access to recreational, sporting, and cultural events.

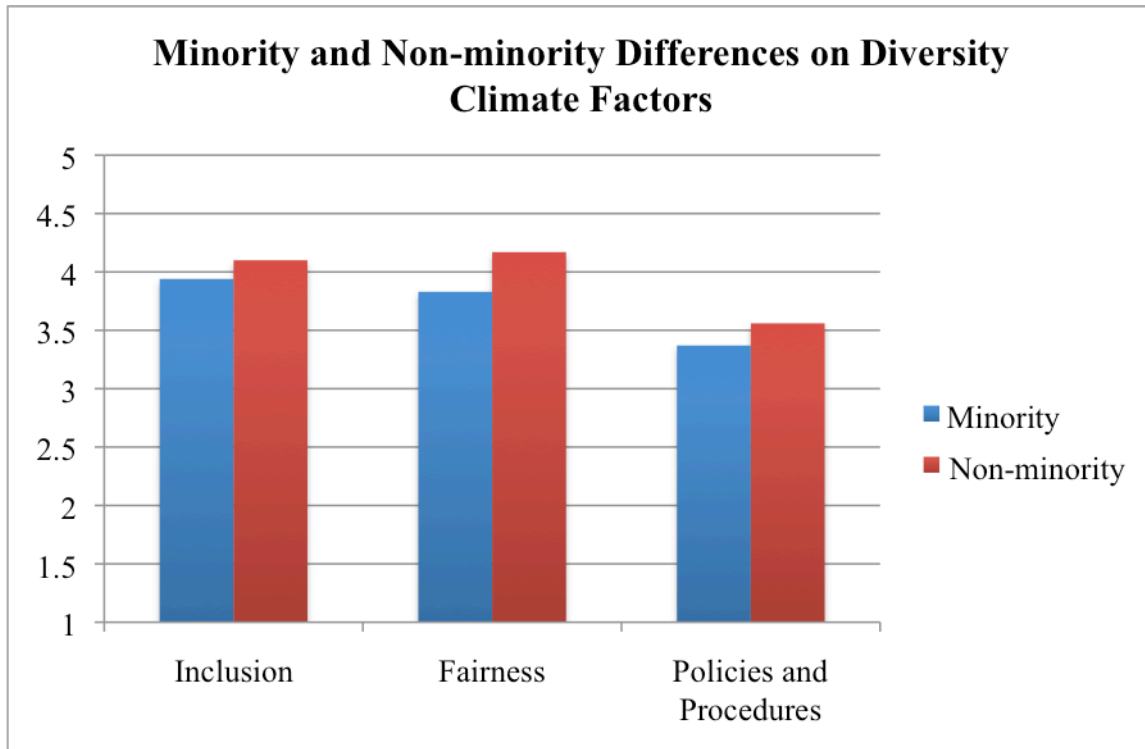
With respect to levels of POS and AOC, administrative faculty and classified staff at each campus were comparable. Interestingly, the combined tenure-line & tenured faculty job category at the Arlington campus was the lone group that reported POS and AOC levels slightly below the neutral point. It should be noted that this is a small sample (N=19) and the means were affected by very low scores provided by 2 people, neither of whom added any comments on the open-ended parts of the questionnaire to allow a more detailed explanation for this finding.

### **D. Ethnic and Gender Differences**

This year in developing the survey, the QWL Task Force incorporated suggestions for additional items from the university's Minority & Diversity Issues Committee. A more detailed statistical analysis of these items, along with a few relevant items that regularly appear on the QWL survey, indicated 3 components to Diversity Climate:

- **General atmosphere of inclusion**
  - e.g. opportunity to interact with and know individuals from diverse backgrounds; treated by others with dignity and respect, etc.
- **Fairness**
  - e.g. my work unit (university) evaluates employees fairly regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, religion, or social background, etc.
- **Policies & Procedures: Sufficient attention/resources expended on diversity**
  - e.g. My work unit (university) spends enough time and money on diversity, equity, awareness, and related training; etc.

Although significant statistical differences were found between minorities and non-minorities on each of these components, it is important to note that *all* means fell on the positive (satisfied) side of the neutral point. In addition, the first two dimensions were just as important in determining non-minority (all non-Hispanic Caucasians, N=884) POS as minority (N=205) perceptions of organizational support. Only the attention/resources dimension appeared more influential of minority POS than non-minority POS levels.



**Minority N= 205**  
**Non-Minority N= 884**

The items that form these 3 components will serve as an excellent benchmark to track in future QWL surveys.

It should be particularly noted that *no* differences between minorities and non-minorities were found on the broader job attitudes measures of POS or AOC. Thus, no racial/ethnic differences were found in employee perceptions that Mason cares about their well-being and values their contribution to the university or in employee identification with and connection to Mason.

With respect to gender, there were 3 satisfaction items where significant differences were found (controlling for education differences). Females were more satisfied with the climate of respect for individual differences, special recognition for achievements and the opportunity to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds. Despite these differences, all item means were on the positive side of the neutral point.

There were 5 stress items where significant gender differences were found but only 2 of those items attained averages that indicated more than minimal stress: Males reported higher stress for parking/commuting whereas females reported higher levels of stress for managing household responsibilities.

## **E. Perceived Impact of Various Developments at Mason**

For the first time, the QWL survey asked employees their perceptions of how various events/developments over the years at Mason enhanced a) the public's perception of Mason and, b) their own attitudes about working at Mason. The events included Mason faculty winning the Nobel prize, the basketball team advancing to the Final Four, Mason ranked as the #1 Up-and-coming national university, Mason named on various "best places to work" lists, Mason ranked highly for diversity, and appearances at Mason by major political figures.

Employees indicated that the Final Four had the strongest impact on enhancing the public's perception of Mason while the #1 Up-and-coming university ranking had the biggest impact on enhancing their own attitudes about working at Mason.

### Areas For Improvement

- Clearly salary and financial issues were the most common sources of dissatisfaction or stress. Across all job categories, people expressed least satisfaction with salary. Indeed, it is the lone satisfaction item to fall on the "wrong" side of the neutral point. Echoing this result, generally speaking, personal finances, managing household responsibilities, and finding affordable housing were seen as sources of stress for Mason faculty and staff.
- Although the percentage of participants who indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied in the area of salary increased from the 2003 to the 2006 survey (when we were just coming out of a state pay freeze) from 25% to 36%, no change was found in that number from 2006 to 2009 survey. Hence the modest progress made from 2003 to 2006 appears to have leveled off and might be expected to erode with the announcement of a probable furlough.
- Parking and commuting issues were a particular source of stress. – perhaps the opening of new parking facilities at both the Fairfax and Arlington campuses will help address this concern.
- Availability of on-site child care is a source of dissatisfaction for many employees. Although Fairfax has such a facility, this concern may be seen as an argument for its expansion. Access to non-work activities (fitness, cultural, and sporting events) were particularly dissatisfying to those on the Arlington Campus. Very few other differences among Arlington, Fairfax, and Prince William Campuses were evident.

## Action Items

1. The Task Force will consult with the Minority and Diversity Issues Committee to further review and analyze the QWL data and develop exemplars, strengths, and best practices for benchmarking.
2. The Task Force would like to convene a working group to conduct a review of child care on campus with an assessment of expanding services.
3. To respond the salary and financial issues that arose as a point of dissatisfaction and concern, the Task Force encourages that:
  - Drs. Stearns and Scherrens continue their budget town halls providing timely information on how the State and Mason budget situations impact the Mason community.
  - Prior to any pricing increase to internal constituents in the immediate future, serious consideration should be given to the budget reductions incurred by all university departments and units. In those cases where a price increase is unavoidable, the task force recommends that organizations ensure that increases are broadly communicated with enough lead time to ensure that faculty and staff have time to budget and plan for any increase.
4. To address the stress that results from a challenging economic climate the Task Force recommends that faculty and staff consider the many resources currently available from Human Resources and Payroll including:
  - referrals for personal and financial support services
  - assistance in accessing benefits through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
  - one-on-one financial counseling provided by retirement vendors Fidelity, TIAA-CREF, and ING
  - flexible work options that can potentially reduce commuting and child care costs (e.g. a flex schedule that eliminates before school care)
  - a range of discounts to help faculty and staff keep more of what they earn

Information on these resources and more are available on the Human Resources & Payroll website at <http://hr.gmu.edu>. Please also stay connected by reading eFiles, the Gazette, and Today@Mason.

The Task Force also encourages the Wellness by Mason partners (of which HR & Payroll is one) to continue to address wellness (including nutrition), exercise, and preventive screenings as a means to promote faculty and staff health and well being. Specifically, the Task Force hopes that Wellness by Mason can consider additional ways in which exercise can be used as a stress reducer with special emphasis on low cost or no cost options.

5. To address concerns on the Arlington campus regarding access to non-work activities including fitness facilities and cultural and sporting events, the Task Force plans to convene a working group to further research the issue in consultation with representatives from Arlington and make recommendations to university administration.

If faculty and staff are interested in participating in any working groups or would like to offer suggestions on any of the action items, they are encouraged to visit the Quality of Work Life webpage at <http://www.gmu.edu/qwl/> to submit a comment form.

### Conclusion

It is intended that the 2009 QWL survey and this summary document continue the dialogue between George Mason and its employees, a conversation that was begun with the first QWL survey in 2000, with respect to the quality of work life at the University. The QWL task force will work with the University Administration to address and respond to the issues of concern raised by the survey participants.

### Technical Details Regarding the Survey

- The survey is theoretically grounded on Eisenberger's construct of Perceived Organizational Support (POS), the extent to which employees perceive that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being. Empirical research has demonstrated that POS is a key factor in influencing employee commitment to the organization, job satisfaction, and general quality of work life.
- In addition to measuring POS, the survey included measures of Affective Organizational Commitment (AOC), Work-Family Culture (WFC), sources of satisfaction, and sources of stress.
- Both POS and AOC are standardized measures that have a substantial research base.

## QUALITY OF WORK LIFE SURVEY CHART

Year	Response Rate	Total Population	Comments
2000	65.8%	600	First survey; paper survey
2003	35%	760	Sent to sample population; paper survey
2006	29%	5379	Sent to all employees*; web-based survey
2009	27.7%	5518	Sent to all employees*; web-based survey

\*all employees but student wage, GTA, GRA



# **QUALITY OF WORK LIFE COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

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### Demographics by Job Category

	Adjunct	Administrative	Term/ Instructional	Term/ Research	Tenure-Track	Tenured	Classified	Wages	Total
Number Responding	89	332	79	28	88	132	536	46	1330
Mean Age	46-55	46-55	46-55	46-55	36-45	46-55	36-45	36-45	36-45
% w Children living at Home	25.8	19.9	21.5	35.7	30.7	18.9	23.7	21.7	22.5
Mean years at GMU	1-5	6-10	6-10	1-5	1-5	11-20	6-10	1-5	1-5
Percent Male	40.0	31.3	27.0	67.9	51.2	55.4	31.5	29.5	36.6
Modal Level of Education	Master's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Doctoral Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree
% Caucasian	83.5	87.8	83.6	80.8	82.9	85.8	76.5	78.6	81.6
% Married or Living with Partner	82.8	70.9	74.7	78.6	68.7	81.5	68.4	57.8	71.3
% Fairfax campus (N)	88.8 (79)	88.6 (294)	93.7 (74)	75.0 (21)	79.5 (70)	88.6 (117)	88.1 (472)	89.1 (41)	87.5 (1164)
% Arlington campus (N)	6.7 (6)	6.6 (22)	1.3 (1)	3.6 (1)	10.2 (9)	7.6 (10)	5.8 (31)	8.7 (4)	6.5 (86)
% Prince William campus (N)	3.4 (3)	4.5 (15)	5.1 (4)	21.4 (6)	10.2 (9)	5.0 (7)	5.6 (30)	0.0 (0)	5.8 (77)
% Loudoun campus	1.1	.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	2.2	.3
% Full-Time	1.1	97.9	97.5	82.1	100.0	99.2	94.6	17.4	87.2

**Most Stressful Items by Campus (Note: does not include branching items)**

	<b>Arlington</b>	<b>Fairfax</b>	<b>Prince William</b>
1	University budget concerns	University budget concerns	University budget concerns
2	Departmental Budget Concerns	Departmental Budget Concerns	Departmental Budget Concerns
3	Personal or family-related physical health issues	Personal finances	Personal finances
4	Promotion opportunities	Promotion opportunities	Promotion opportunities
5	Personal finances	Workload	Workload

**Top Five Most Satisfying Items by Campus**

	<b>Arlington</b>	<b>Fairfax</b>	<b>Prince William</b>
1	Opportunity to work independently	Opportunity to work independently	Opportunity to work independently
2	Relationship with supervisor	Relationship with coworkers	Relationship with coworkers
3	Relationship with coworkers	Relationship with supervisor	Opportunity to use a variety of skills
4	Opportunity to use a variety of skills	Opportunity to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds	Relationship with supervisor
5	Opportunity to interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds	Opportunity to use a variety of skills	Treated by others with respect

