

Spring 2021 COACHE Faculty Satisfaction Survey

Overall Results: Summary, Peer Comparisons, and Trends

Introduction

The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) Survey is a national survey administered by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, designed to collect information on a wide range of issues identified as critical to faculty satisfaction and engagement, and therefore, to recruitment and retention. The survey consists of more than 200 questions, which are categorized into 25 different benchmark areas. When appropriate, questions are tailored specifically for sub-groups of faculty (e.g., only for full professors, only for pre-tenured faculty). A copy of the questionnaire is available on the ISA website for the project.

NC State has participated in the COACHE Survey every three years since Spring 2006, most recently in Spring 2021. This document provides results from the AY20-21 COACHE Survey for faculty overall. Specifically, it includes a summary of what faculty identify as going well and where there are opportunities for improvement, NC State faculty results compared to those of our COACHE peers, and a comparison of the results of the AY20-21 survey to those when we last participated in AY17-18. Other reports available on the website focus on detailed results for each benchmark area, and on results for various demographic groups (e.g., by gender, by race/ethnicity, by rank).

A Note about Response Rates

Of the 2,090 tenure track and professional track faculty invited to participate in the survey in spring 2021, 606 did so, for a response rate of 29 percent. More information about the survey administration is available online in the Introduction and Research Methods report. However, a couple of important points to keep in mind when reading this report are described below.

First, for the spring 2021 survey, it is important to remember that NC State, like all other institutions around the world, was still dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. The vast majority of classes switched to online delivery in March, 2020, and almost all employees began working remotely. Classes started in-person for the fall 2020 semester, but within just a few weeks were again switched to remote and the campus again depopulated. While students and faculty returned for the spring 2021 semester, and the majority of classes were in-person, extensive safety precautions were in place throughout the semester, creating a challenging environment for faculty (and others) who were attempting to work in the ongoing pandemic during the spring semester when the COACHE survey was administered.

Second, NC State's response rate is notably lower than in past years, dropping from 49 percent in the spring 2018 survey, to 29 percent in the spring 2021 survey, and is notably lower than that of our COACHE peers. While overall response rates of our COACHE peers also declined from those found in the 2018 survey, from 48 percent to 41 percent, the drop was not as severe as that for NC State.

The decline in participation varied slightly between groups. At both NC State and our COACHE peer institutions, drops were most significant for pre-tenured faculty, men, and faculty of color. Whereas in past years pre-tenured faculty were notably more likely than tenured faculty to participate, in the spring 2021 survey the response rate for both groups at NC State was 30 percent. And, while response rates for faculty of color have always lagged behind that of white faculty, and the response rates for men lower than that for women, the difference in participation rates between these groups is even larger in the 2021 survey than in the past.

It is important to note that despite the decline in participation, ratings from faculty overall in the 2021 survey generally align with those from the 2018 survey. As is shown in the "trend" reports, while ratings on most of the approximately 200 items in the survey tend to be slightly less favorable in 2021 than in 2018, for only three of those items are ratings notably lower for faculty overall.

Summary: What's Going Well and Opportunities for Improvement

More than two-thirds of faculty overall indicate they are either “very satisfied” (29%) or “satisfied” (40%) with NC State as a place to work, while 12 percent indicate they are dissatisfied. Faculty are more likely to be “very satisfied” with their department as a place to work (33%), with another 38 percent saying they are “satisfied.” Fifteen percent, however, are dissatisfied with their department as a place to work. That said, only seven percent said they would not recommend their department as a place to work, while 53 percent would “strongly recommend” it. Just over 70 percent of faculty agree that if they had to do it over again, they would choose to work at NC State, but 15 percent disagree they would do so, and the other 15 percent were not sure. The most common reason faculty give for leaving NC State, other than for retirement, is to improve their salary and benefits.

When asked to identify the best aspects of working at NC State from a list of 26 possibilities, faculty were most likely to select things related to their colleagues (e.g., “quality” and “support of colleagues,” “opportunities to collaborate with colleagues”), the geographic location of NC State, the quality of our graduate and undergraduate students, and “academic freedom.” Average ratings given to specific aspects of their job support this latter finding, with among the most favorable ratings of the approximately 200 items included on the survey being given to “discretion over course content,” “influence over focus of research,” and “level of courses taught.” Pre-tenured faculty are also given among the highest ratings on the survey, specifically for their “intellectual vitality” and “scholarly productivity.” Full professors give high ratings to various aspects of promotion, while pre-tenured faculty generally give high ratings to the clarity of policies and processes related to the achieving tenure. Faculty overall give positive evaluations to support for and commitment to diversity and inclusion. Faculty give especially high ratings to “library resources” and “classrooms.” One item related to personal and family policies, “meeting times compatible with personal needs” also receives top ratings.

When asked to identify the two worst aspects of working at NC State from a list of 26 possibilities, one-third of the faculty selected “compensation.” Also selected by sizable number of faculty were “too much service/too many assignments” (14%), “quality of the facilities” (12%), lack of support for research/creative work” (10%), and, contrary to the relatively high ratings for specific measures of diversity and inclusion noted above, to “lack of diversity” (10%). Faculty frequently mention things like benefits, family and personal policies, lack of resources, and need for more appreciation and respect as areas that NC State should work on in order to improve their satisfaction working here. Average ratings given to specific family and personal policies (e.g., childcare, tuition waivers, and spousal/partner hiring programs) are among the least favorably rated of all areas asked about. Faculty also give consistently less favorable ratings to various aspects of governance, especially to “important decisions are not made until there is consensus,” “faculty and senior administration have an equal say in decisions,” and the institution regularly reviews the effectiveness of governance.” Professional track faculty give among the least favorable ratings of all aspects of work asked about to the clarity of various features of the promotion process for professional track faculty. Support for and mentoring of faculty is another area that gets relatively less favorable ratings by faculty overall. Finally, also ranked among the least favorable aspects of work is the “availability of course release for research.”

Benchmarks

COACHE categorized the majority of the approximately 200 specific items on the survey into one of 25 different benchmark areas, and calculated average ratings for each of the individual benchmarks.¹ Average ratings for NC State faculty overall ranged from a high of 3.87 (on a 5-point scale) to a low of 2.94. The complete list of benchmarks, along with NC State faculty overall rating on each, is found in Figure 1. Benchmarks with the most favorable ratings were:

- Clarity of promotion to full (*tenured faculty only*) (mean = 3.87)

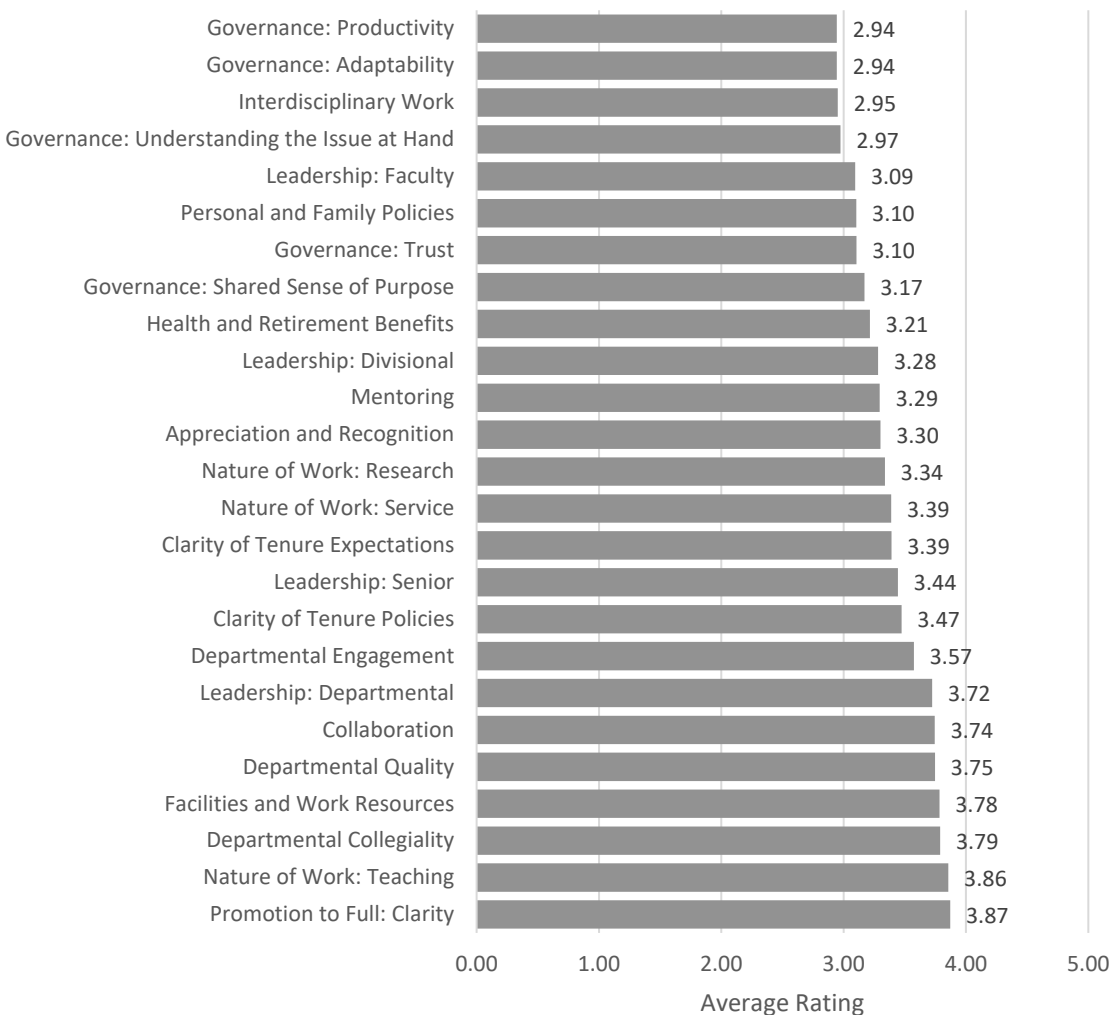
¹ Responses to all questions included in the benchmarks were based on a 5 point scale, where a “1” represents the least favorable response (e.g., “strongly disagree,” “very dissatisfied,” “not at all interested,” “very unimportant”), and a “5” the most favorable response option (e.g., “strongly agree,” “very satisfied,” “extremely interested,” “very important”). Responses also included a “don’t know,” “not applicable” and/or “prefer not to answer” options, which have been excluded from the analyses.

- Nature of work: teaching (3.86)
- Department collegiality (3.79)
- Facilities and work resources (3.78)
- Departmental quality (3.75)
- Collaboration (3.74)
- Leadership: departmental (3.72)

Benchmarks with the least favorable ratings were:²

- Governance: productivity (mean=2.94)
- Governance: adaptability (2.94)
- Interdisciplinary work (2.95)
- Governance: understanding the issue at hand (2.97)

Figure 1: NC State faculty overall average ratings on benchmark measures
(Average ratings are based on a 5 point scale, with “5” being the most favorable rating)



² An example of an item included in the “governance: adaptability” benchmark is *this institution regularly reviews the effectiveness of governance*. An example of “productivity” is *there is public recognition of progress*. An example of “understanding the issue at hand” is *faculty and administration have equal say in decisions*.

Specific Question Items

Average ratings from faculty overall on the approximately 200 different specific aspects of their work they were asked to evaluate ranged from 4.36 to 2.29 (on the 5-point scale). NC State faculty overall give the most favorable ratings to the following:

- Library resources (mean = 4.35)
- Discretion over course content (4.34)
- Influence over focus of research (4.22)
- Being a mentor is fulfilling (*tenured and professional track faculty only*) (4.19)
- Intellectual vitality of pre-tenured faculty (4.17)
- Scholarly productivity of pre-tenured faculty (4.16)
- Teaching effectiveness of professional track faculty (4.13)
- Level of courses taught (4.12)
- Meeting times compatible with personal needs (4.11)
- Visible leadership for support of diversity (4.08)
- Teaching schedule (4.06)
- Colleagues are committed to diversity and inclusion (4.05)
- Effectiveness of mentoring outside the institution (4.04)
- Department is collegial (4.03)
- Clarity of promotion process (*tenured faculty only*) (4.03)
- Reasonable expectation: Promotion (4.02)
- Department culture encourages promotion (*tenured faculty only*) (4.01)
- Teaching effectiveness of pre-tenured faculty (4.01)
- Time spent on teaching (4.00)

NC State faculty overall gave a rating of 3.0 or lower on about 35 of the specific items asked about. Lowest average ratings were given to the following:

- Childcare (mean = 2.19)
- Housing benefits (2.35)
- Support for faculty to be good mentors (*tenured and professional track faculty only*) (2.56)
- Important decisions are not made until there is consensus (2.59)
- Eldercare (2.61)
- Department addresses sub-standard performance (2.67)
- Mentoring of professional track faculty in department (*professional track faculty only*) (2.67)
- Availability of course release for research (2.70)
- Faculty and senior administration have equal say in decisions (2.70)
- Health benefits for family (2.71)
- Clarity of department standards for promotion of professional track faculty (*professional track faculty only*) (2.72)
- Tuition waivers, remission, or exchange (2.72)
- Budgets encourage interdisciplinary work (2.78)

Peer Comparisons

The national COACHE survey provides the opportunity for NC State to compare our results against those of both all universities with doctoral or master's programs participating in the survey (i.e., our "COACHE cohort"), and to a small group of peers we select from among all participating institutions. In providing these comparisons, however, COACHE will include results from surveys administered over a number of years. Of the 80 universities included in our cohort for the 2021 survey, just 14 of them participated in the survey in the spring of 2021, and 22 in the spring of 2020. Thus, the majority of those included in our COACHE cohort comparison group participated in the survey in either 2019 or 2018, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, of the five institutions included in our COACHE peer group, two of them participated in the survey in 2021 (Iowa State University and University of California - Davis), two in 2020 (University of Maryland - College Park, Virginia Tech), and one in 2018 (Purdue University). Given the essentially certain impact of the COVID pandemic on faculty experiences during and immediately following the height of the pandemic, any cohort or peer comparisons should be interpreted with caution.

When compared to the entire cohort of universities participating in COACHE, NC State faculty are among the most satisfied on a wide range of aspect of their jobs. Average ratings are in the top 30 percent of all participating universities for just under half of the approximately 200 specific areas asked about, including the benchmark areas of:

- Nature of work: service
- Nature of work: teaching
- Facilities and work resources
- Interdisciplinary work
- Collaboration
- Mentoring
- Promotion to full
- Leadership: senior
- Departmental quality

NC State faculty satisfaction ranks in the bottom 30 percent of all participating research universities on three benchmark measures and 24 of the 200 specific areas asked about, most notably those related to health and retirement benefits, and, not surprisingly given when our faculty were doing the survey compared to the majority of the other participants, those relating to interacting with others. Those areas where we rank in the bottom 30 percent are:

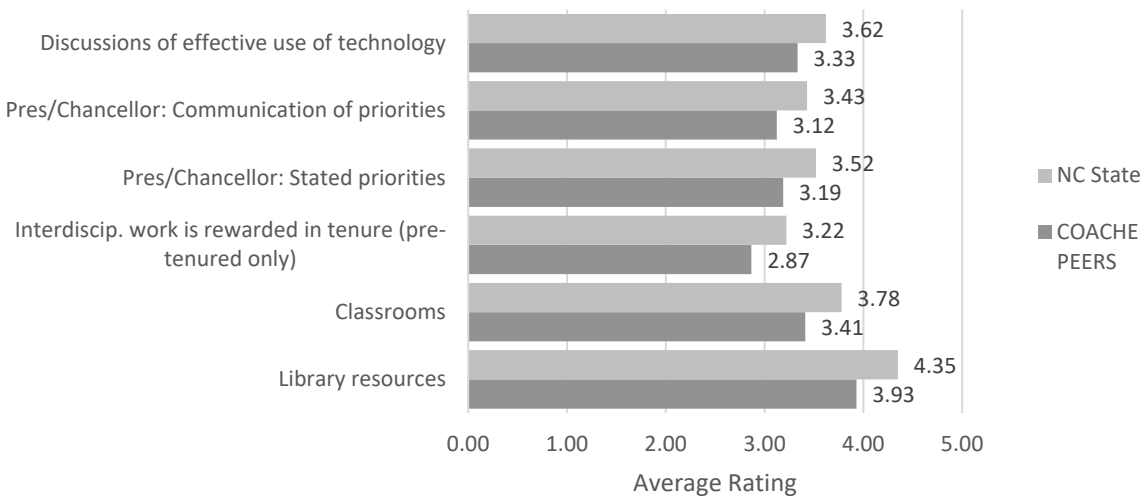
- Health and retirement benefits (*benchmark*) (mean = 3.21)
- Leadership: Faculty (*benchmark*) (3.09)
- Governance: productivity (*benchmark*) (2.94)

- Being a mentor is fulfilling (4.19)
- Colleagues support work/life balance (3.71)
- Amount of personal interaction with pre-tenured faculty (3.57)
- Amount of professional interaction with tenured faculty (3.65)
- Amount of personal interaction with professional track faculty (3.62)
- Recognition from colleagues (3.60)
- How well you fit (3.53)
- Amount of personal interaction with tenured faculty (3.51)
- Retirement benefits (3.38)
- Family medical/parental leave (3.36)
- Health benefits for yourself (3.32)
- Right balance between professional and personal life (3.18)
- Faculty leaders: ensuring faculty input (3.13)
- Faculty leaders: stated priorities (3.12)
- Faculty leaders: communication of priorities (3.09)
- Faculty leaders: Pace of decision making (3.03)
- Consistency of messages about tenure (3.02)

- I understand how to voice opinions about policies (2.96)
- Time spent on administrative tasks (2.89)
- Overall effectiveness of shared governance (2.83)
- Health benefits for your family (2.71)
- Eldercare (2.61)
- Childcare (2.19)
- Outside offers are NOT necessary in negotiations (2.05)

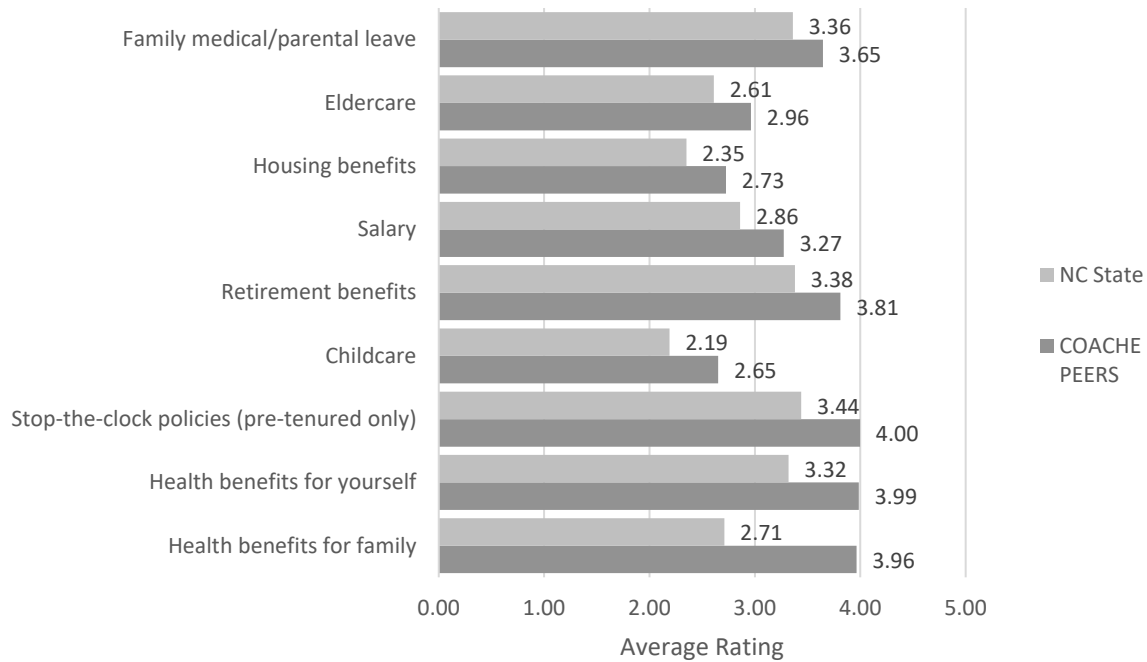
There are relatively few differences in average ratings between NC State faculty and those of our aggregated select peer group (i.e., Iowa State, Purdue, UC-Davis, University of Maryland, and Virginia Tech). As seen in Figure 2, NC State faculty give much more favorable ratings than our peers to library resources. NC State faculty are also more positive than our peers when it comes to classrooms, various aspects of our senior leadership; the extent to which faculty have discussions about the effective use of technology; and for pre-tenured faculty only, interdisciplinary work being rewarded in the tenure process.

Figure 2: NC State average ratings more favorable than those of our COACHE peer group



NC State faculty on average gave notably lower ratings than our COACHE peers to only a few areas asked about on the survey. Most notably, rating for health and retirement benefits were much lower than those given by faculty at our COACHE peer institutions. NC State faculty also gave less favorable ratings than our peers to personal and family policies, such as stop-the-clock policies (pre-tenured faculty only), family medical/parental leave, and childcare.

Figure 3: NC State average ratings less favorable than those of our COACHE peer group



Trends: AY20-21 vs AY17-18 COACHE

Results from the AY20-21 survey, administered during the spring semester, are remarkably similar to those from when the survey was last administered in spring 2018. For only three of the more than 200 individual items on the survey was there a notable difference in average ratings, each of which were slightly less favorable in AY20-21 than in AY17-18. Each of the three items related to the clarity of the tenure process, with pre-tenured faculty giving slightly lower ratings to the clarity of expectations as a scholar, the consistency of the messages they receive from tenured faculty about the tenure process, and the clarity of the body of evidence for deciding tenure.

Figure 4: Noteworthy difference in ratings: AY20-21 vs AY17-18

