

Ontario Public Service
Employees Union



Syndicat des
employé-e-s de la fonction
publique de l'ontario

Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology

Les collèges d'arts appliqués et technologie

College Compensation and
Appointments Council

EERC

Support Staff Employee/Employer
Relations Committee

CREE

Comité des relations employé-es-employeur
Le personnel de soutien



Conseil de la rémunération
et des nominations dans les
collèges

Workplace Wellness Findings

Executive Summary

April 21, 2005

Background

During the last round of Support Staff negotiations in 2003, the parties agreed to a Letter of Understanding entitled "Workplace Wellness", which assigned the Support Staff Employee/Employer Relations Committee (EERC) the responsibility to:

1. investigate components of workplace wellness
2. identify sources of workplace stressors
3. assess mechanisms for relieving existing workplace stressors
4. review Colleges' current practices
5. gather and analyze information on employee concerns
6. gather and analyze information on management concerns.

EERC was to report its findings to the parties by March 31, 2005 (six months prior to the expiration of the current Collective Agreement).

After examining the task at hand, EERC decided the best approach would be to seek expert assistance and in May 2004, contracted Georgian College's Institute of Applied Research and Innovation to collect primary and secondary data regarding the components of workplace wellness and the perspectives of Support Staff and Supervisors on these issues.

The research project comprised two phases:

- Phase 1 - secondary research collection to determine Canadian workplace wellness trends and issues, workplace stressors, and components of workplace wellness.
- Phase 2 - primary research collection to acquire information directly from Support Staff and Supervisors working in the college system.

The Phase 1 report, titled "Workplace Wellness: Issues and Stressors" was issued on June 22, 2004. Based on the issues raised during the 2003 contract negotiations and findings in the Phase 1 report, EERC determined the scope of Phase 2 should encompass workload, work-life balance, organizational culture, effects of stress, and wellness initiatives.

Survey Methodology

In consultation with Georgian College's Institute of Applied Research and Innovation, two separate surveys were designed for self-completion by Support Staff and Supervisors in the college system. Both versions of the surveys were translated so that respondents could complete the survey in either English or French.

The Support Staff survey document included questions relating to perceptions of the respondent's own work-life balance (and the respondent's top stressors associated with work-life balance), the College's working environment (and the respondent's top stressors associated with the working environment), the effects of stress, and wellness initiatives that respondents thought a supportive workplace should offer, as well as demography (age, gender, college region, classification, etc.).

The Supervisor survey instrument included questions relating to the Supervisor's perceptions of Support Staff's work-life balance and the College's working environment, Supervisors' perceptions of the wellness initiatives that a supportive workplace should offer, and demography (age, gender, college region, etc.).

To ensure respondents carefully considered each question and to prevent respondents from automatically choosing one response category, questions were presented in both a positive and negative tone; similarly, the statements were purposely mixed so that they didn't follow a theme or topic sequentially. Where Support Staff and Supervisor perspectives were being sought on the same issue, similar questions were asked in the two surveys.

Data Collection

Packages containing the Support Staff and Supervisor surveys (in the applicable language) were distributed to key contacts at the 24 Colleges in October 2004. The packages also contained instructions for completing the survey(s), a list of the general college areas or departments. (Note - at least 2 Colleges did not distribute this list to respondents therefore EERC attempts to correlate survey questions to the "general area you work in" were inaccurate.) Envelopes were provided so that respondents could seal their completed survey before returning it to the designated contact at the College. Each College and

the Local Union, selected the best method of distributing and collecting the surveys for their College. During the first week of November 2004, the key contacts returned the sealed envelopes to Georgian College's Institute of Applied Research and Innovation.

Survey Processing and Analysis

Completed and returned surveys were cleaned and scanned by staff in Georgian College's Institute of Applied Research and Innovation. Using "college region" as a filter, a statistician performed a "frequency analysis" for each question and produced an initial report that was presented to EERC in January 2005.

Using these initial results, EERC requested two and three-way cross-tabulations for both the Support Staff and Supervisor surveys. These cross-tabulations were performed to determine whether correlations existed between variables. While correlations do not necessarily indicate that a response to one variable causes a response to another question, it does indicate a relationship between variables that can help form predictions.

Participation Rate

Overall Response Rate

A total of 3,361 usable surveys were received from Support Staff respondents, which represents approximately 50% of the population.

A total of 776 usable surveys were received from Supervisor respondents, which represents about 49% of the population.

Regional Response Rate

Region	Colleges in Region	Support Staff	Supervisor
Central	Centennial, George Brown, Georgian, Humber, Seneca, Sheridan	30%	37%
Eastern	Algonquin, Durham, Fleming, La Cité, Loyalist, St. Lawrence	22%	20%
Northern	Boréal, Cambrian, Canadore, Confederation, Northern, Sault	20%	18%
Western	Conestoga, Fanshawe, Lambton, Mohawk, Niagara, St. Clair	28%	25%

Note: There was very little variation in responses among the four "college regions" for both the Support Staff and the Supervisor surveys.

Gender Distribution

Among Support Staff, males represented 26% of respondents; females represented 74%.

Among Supervisors, males represented 42% of respondents; females represented 58%.

Findings

Support Staff

Overall Observations

While workload has increased over the past year, Support Staff look forward to coming to work, believe they are responsible for their own work-life balance, care about the future of their College, and are proud to tell others they work at the College. They find their work interesting, stimulating, and meaningful, and believe they make a difference to their College's success. Support Staff are generally satisfied overall with their professional development and continuous learning opportunities, but only a very few use their allocated professional development time each year.

However, many Support Staff perceive that morale is low in both their workgroups and in their Colleges. These perceptions have a predictable relationship with other variables, including whether the College supports work-life balance, feeling positive about their futures at the College, believing they are paid fairly, and believing information provided by Management. Support Staff also expressed concerns about how their work is viewed at the College. Only one-third agreed that all people are treated with respect, and nearly half believe they are made to feel inferior to those in other employee groups. Many Support Staff were critical of College administration, citing that administration tends to say one thing but do another, that they cannot believe the information provided by administration, and that administration does not spend College funds wisely. Most Support Staff respondents agreed that they have effective working relationships with their Supervisors and colleagues.

Generally, Support Staff did not see their family or personal lives as major stressors. Just 14% agreed that they feel burned out from their personal/family responsibilities. Staff who indicated they feel burned out (although not a majority) cited a combination of both work and personal/family responsibilities rather than either work or personal/family responsibilities alone. This finding supports the research conducted by Duxbury, Higgins, & Coghill (2003) which concluded that "work and life are not separate domains" (Duxbury et al, 2003, p. 75) as outlined in the report produced in Phase 1.

Supervisors

The majority of Supervisors who responded to the survey agreed that Support Staff workload has increased, that staff care about the future of

the College, find their work interesting and stimulating, have the freedom to make decisions that relate to their positions and understand how their position contributes to the College's success.

Generally, Supervisors also agreed that if morale was low in the College, morale in the department or workgroup was more positive. Supervisors differed with Support Staff about how they perceive the work environment, with 70% agreeing that all people are treated with respect. Supervisors noted that staff have effective working relationships within their workgroups and other departments in the College.

Differences in Perceptions

While Support Staff and Supervisors perceive some aspects of workload and work environment issues differently, the topics of widest variance of perception concern Support Staff giving input because they know their opinions count, staff receiving regular feedback on their performance, staff receiving credit for their ideas and suggestions, whether Supervisors provide the time and resources necessary for the staff to pursue professional development activities, and whether staff's workload is predictable.

Synopsis

In the section of the survey entitled "Balancing Workload, Work, and Life", Support Staff most frequently stated "workload increasing over the past year" and "uneven distribution of workload" caused them to feel the most stress.

Workload

- Approximately three-quarters of Support Staff agreed that their workloads have increased over the past year. Supervisor also tended to agree that staff's workload has increased.
- While half of Support Staff agreed that the workload was distributed fairly among the individuals in their work groups, three-quarters of Supervisors agreed that the workload is distributed fairly among the staff.
- Support Staff were closely divided as to whether they can complete their work during their normal working hours. More than two-thirds of Supervisors felt that the staff could always or almost always complete their work during their normal working hours.
- Support Staff were also very closely divided over feeling they must always or almost always work before or after their normal working hours although they are not required to do so, while 62% of the Supervisors disagreed with this statement. The majority of both Support Staff and Supervisors agreed that staff are not required to work beyond their normal hours in order to complete their workloads.
- Nearly half of Support Staff respondents agreed that they struggle to keep up with their workload, and 34% stated they could not keep up with their workload no matter how hard they tried. Supervisors responded somewhat differently, with one-third agreeing that the staff struggle to keep up and only 17% agreeing that the staff cannot keep up with their workload no matter how hard they try.
- Both Support Staff and Supervisors tended to agree that the workload comes in predicted peaks and valleys and that staff are busier at certain times of the year than at others. Support Staff and Supervisors differ significantly, however, on whether the workload is predictable: 60% of Support Staff feel their workload is unpredictable, while 62% of Supervisors feel staff workload is predictable.

- While two-thirds of the Support Staff respondents agreed they have the flexibility in their jobs to take breaks as required, almost half indicated that they find it difficult to do so because of their workloads. Nearly every Supervisor respondent agreed that Support Staff have the flexibility to take breaks as required, but one-quarter agreed that the staff find it difficult to take breaks during the day because of their workloads.
- Finally, 40% of Support Staff stated they found it difficult to take their allotted vacation days because of their workload. In contrast, 24% of Supervisors agreed to this.

Work / Life Balance

- Both Support Staff and Supervisors strongly agreed that staff are ultimately responsible for achieving their own work/life balance.
- Support Staff stated if they felt "burned out" it was more from a combination of both work and personal/family responsibilities than from either work or personal/family responsibilities alone.
- Less than half of Support Staff respondents agreed that they don't have enough time in the day to look after both their personal/family matters and their jobs. The majority disagreed that they don't enjoy their time away from work because they're worried about their work demands. They also strongly disagreed with the statement, "I don't mind if work interferes with other areas of my life."
- Considerably more Support Staff than Supervisors tended to agree that staff can keep their personal/family life separate from their work life. Overall, however, both agreed that Supervisors don't mind if staff handle occasional family or personal situations during work hours. Support Staff were divided as to whether the College supports their work-life balance.
- the majority of Support Staff feel physically healthy. There was a strong correlation between getting sufficient exercise and children living at home: Support Staff who agreed they do not get sufficient exercise tended to have children at home (and vice versa).
- a significant number of Support Staff respondents agreed that they look forward to going to work each day.

The College Working Environment

- Support Staff respondents agreed that they use their vacation days when they need time to look after their personal/family matters, more so than they use sick days or a Personal Leave. There was no correlation between using vacation days to look after personal/family matters and single parent status. In contrast, less than half of the Supervisor respondents agreed that staff use their vacation days when they need time to look after their personal/family matters.
- Support Staff respondents, who were asked to choose up to three statements in the "Working in the College Environment" section of the survey that caused them to feel the most stress, most frequently cited the following statements: "I believe I am paid fairly for the work I do", "I usually feel rushed trying to meet deadlines or complete assignments", and "I am fearful about my job security".
- Nearly every respondent in both the Support Staff and Supervisor surveys agreed that staff care about the future of their College. Support Staff also agreed that they are proud to tell others they work at their College and that the College is one of the best places to work in their communities. Most agreed that they feel positive about the future of their College overall, and over one-half agreed that they felt positive about their own futures at the College. Both Support Staff and Supervisors agreed that staff understand how their positions contribute to their College's success. Nearly all Support Staff respondents agreed that their work is interesting and stimulating, that it is meaningful, and that it makes a difference to the College's success.
- Most Support Staff respondents and nearly every Supervisor respondent agreed that the staff are informed about college-wide activities. However, the level of agreement that the staff give input whenever they can because they know their opinions count was considerably lower for Support Staff than for Supervisors. Support Staff respondents agreed more strongly that they are able to participate in planning or decision-making activities in their departments if they choose to do so than in the College overall. Most respondents in both surveys agreed that Support Staff have the freedom to make decisions in their positions.

- The majority of Support Staff agreed that they are satisfied with the professional development or continuous learning opportunities that the College provides, that they are ultimately responsible for seeking out their professional development opportunities, and that both the College and their supervisors provide the time and resources necessary to pursue these activities. However, only about one quarter agreed that they take some or all of their professional development time as per Article 9.5.
- While over one-half of Support Staff respondents agreed they never experience derogatory, racist, or sexist remarks or behaviours among the people who work at the College, only slightly more than one-third agreed that all people are treated with respect at their College. Seventy percent of Supervisors, however, agreed that all people at the College are treated with respect. Nearly half of the Support Staff stated they were made to feel inferior to those in other employee groups; again, this was in contrast with Supervisors with almost 70% disagreeing.
- Half of Support Staff respondents disagreed that moral is high within their work groups and within their College overall. The majority of Supervisor respondents tended to agree that moral is high among the staff but less than half agreed that morale is high within the College overall.
- Over half of Support Staff respondents felt that College administration tends to say one thing but do another. More respondents disagreed than agreed that they can always believe the information provided by administration and that administration spends funds wisely. About 60% of Supervisors disagreed with this perception.
- Most Support Staff agreed they are concerned about how their College's financial situation might affect them, and this was strongly correlated with feeling fearful about their job security.
- Over half agreed that if they left the College, they could be easily replaced, while the majority of Supervisor's disagreed with this finding. Forty-one percent stated they feel prevented from advancing at their College.

- Overall, 47% agreed and 44% disagreed that he/she was paid fairly for the work done. Over three-quarters of Supervisor respondents agreed that they believe the staff are paid fairly for the work they do.
- Most Support Staff respondents felt they have effective working relationships with their colleagues. However, more than half agreed they are frustrated by unresolved problems in their work groups.
- The majority of Support Staff disagreed that they have difficulty managing the pace of change in their College or in their jobs. In contrast, nearly half of the Supervisors thought that staff had difficulty managing the pace of change in the College and 43% felt staff have difficulty managing the pace of change in their jobs. More than half of Support Staff respondents agreed they felt rushed trying to meet deadlines or complete assignments.
- Just over one-third of Support Staff agreed that their workload and the workload of others are adequately addressed when they are away or absent. Over half of the Supervisor also agreed that staff workload is adequately addressed when away or absent.
- While nearly all Support Staff agreed that they know what is expected of them in their positions, over 50% stated they do not receive regular feedback on their performance. Less than half agreed that their Position Description Forms are current. In contrast, three-quarters of the Supervisors felt that staff do receive regular feedback on their performance and that their Position Description Forms are up-to-date.
- Fifty-three percent of Support Staff respondents agreed they receive credit for their ideas and suggestions. However, at 91%, considerably more Supervisor respondents felt that staff do receive credit.
- Most Support Staff agreed that their workstations were comfortable to work in and that the College provides them with the appropriate resources required to do their jobs.

Effects of Stress

As detailed in the report produced in Phase 1, healthy workplaces benefit both the employer and employees: employees at healthy workplaces have reduced rates of absenteeism, fewer incidence of disability, and better morale (University of Michigan, as cited by Buffett, 2002). Health

Canada (1999) has performed research to support the premiss that employees with long term exposure to a demanding workplace or to a job where they can exercise little control are at risk for depression, anxiety, and heart disease. Duxbury adds that employees in that type of workplace also tend to have stress-related illnesses, experience burnout, be unhappy with their jobs and their lives, be absent from work, suffer mental health problems, and forego leisure time (Duxbury & Higgins, 2001). Research conducted by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto revealed that employees who experience stress in unhealthy workplaces have more than twice the rate of cardiovascular and heart problems and considerably higher rates of drug and alcohol use, anxiety, depression, and infectious diseases (Shain, as cited by Buffett, 2002; Dyck & Roithmayr, 2001; Lowe, 2003).

In this study, Support Staff respondents identified the ways in which they have felt the effects of stress over the past year. The most frequent effects noted are:

- Headaches
- Felt nervous, edgy, or tense
- Could not fall asleep or stay asleep during the night
- Felt tired or sleepy during the daytime
- Felt grumpy or crabby

Wellness Initiatives

Both employee groups identified the wellness initiatives that they believed a healthy workplace should offer. The following 8 responses appeared on both the Support Staff and the Supervisor "Top Ten" list:

- Flexible work hours
- Exercise, weight lifting, or aerobics classes
- Stress management seminars
- Working with difficult people seminars
- Retirement planning programs
- Improving personal health seminars
- Conflict management seminars
- Time management seminars

Next Steps

EERC has agreed that a joint recommendation to the Bargaining Teams is not needed.

In reviewing the results of the survey, EERC has agreed that there are some interesting outcomes and unusual inconsistencies. In "hind sight", some of the survey statements could have been phrased differently or more direct questions asked. Once bargaining concludes and EERC resumes meeting, the committee will have further discussions about workplace wellness as it pertains to the college system.

EERC will develop a joint protocol so that a College and the Local Union can request a copy of their own survey results.