



**CLASSIFIED
PERSONNEL COUNCIL**
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY



FACULTY COUNCIL
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY



**ADMINISTRATIVE
PROFESSIONAL COUNCIL**
COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

2017 Employee Voice Survey

Executive Summary

The Employee Councils embarked on an effort to share the voices of employees on experiences related to salary and benefits. In recent years, the Councils anecdotally have heard increasing concerns from employees and felt compelled to find a way to formalize the collective employee voice and share their perspectives with the leadership team at Colorado State University (CSU). Between academic years (AY) 2010 and 2018 an average salary increase of 1.6% was allocated to employees. The average increase in the Denver-Boulder-Greeley Consumer Price Index between 2013 and 2016 was 2.374% (<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/dola/inflation-denver-boulder-greeley-consumer-price-index>). These low increases in salary and high increases in cost of living have caused challenges for many CSU employees – across each of our employee groups. This survey captures some of those challenges as described by employees themselves.

The goal of the survey was to provide CSU leadership with a better understanding of some of the issues employees face and the corresponding impacts on the CSU workforce. In order to attain that goal, the Employee Voice Survey included two open-ended questions where employees had an opportunity to share their firsthand experience, “tell us your story”. As CSU develops future budgets, we hope the findings of this survey can be informative of the needs of our workforce. We are seeking a strong commitment from the leadership at CSU to improve employee salary increases and to strengthen benefits.

Process

The Employee Voice Survey is an example of a highly collaborative effort that was initiated and led by the employee councils. During the fall 2016 semester the Administrative Professional Council (APC), Classified Personnel Council (CPC), and Faculty Council (FC) leadership teams began the process of creating a survey that would capture employees’ experiences related to CSU salary trends and rapidly rising living costs. The purpose of the survey was to ensure that employees’ voices are heard and that administration has a broader picture of the impact of salary trends as they relate to living expenses and quality of life.

In a collaborative spirit, the employee councils discussed the creation of the survey with the following groups: APC, CPC, Faculty Council, the President’s Office, the Provost’s Office, the Office of the Vice President for University Operations, the Office of the Vice President for Diversity, External Relations, Institutional Research, and Human Resources. Additionally, a formal memo was submitted to Chancellor Tony Frank, Vice President of Operations and CFO Lynn Johnson, Provost Rick Miranda, Vice President for Diversity Mary Ontiveros, and Associate Vice President for Human Capital and Chief Human Resource Officer Diana Prieto to announce that the employee councils would be conducting a communication exercise to gain a better understanding of employee concerns regarding salary trends.

The survey was created with guidance and support from the Department of Statistics and was sent to all CSU employees on February 2, 2017. The survey was open for 6 weeks, remaining live through March 8, 2017. 2,010 employees responded to the survey (1,094 administrative professional employees, 504 state classified employees, and 412 faculty).

The employee councils worked closely with the CSU Department of Statistics faculty for guidance in processing the data. Drs. Julia Sharp and Jean Opsomer provided employee council leadership with direction on reviewing the data.

The core of the Employee Voice Survey included two key open-ended questions:

- How do these financial hardships or insecurities/vulnerabilities impact quality of life for you/your family? Tell us your story.
 - o 1,240 total respondents (663 AP, 357 state classified, and 220 faculty respondents)
- What other type(s) of benefits/compensation would you value that are not currently offered at the University?
 - o 1,014 total respondents (551 AP, 254 state classified, and 209 faculty respondents)

The open-ended data was divided into sections of 300-500 respondents. Employee council executive team members and AP volunteers coded the data into categories that mirrored categories listed in the survey. Data was reviewed by a second coder to ensure consistency and accuracy. Council leadership then reviewed the items that were marked as “other” and created additional categories to code responses originally marked as “other.” Julia Sharp coordinated the analysis of the data through SAS v. 9.4. This report outlines the main themes and specific anecdotes from employees as a way to represent their voice and provide additional context on issues. The report also provides the summary of survey responses, highlighting specific areas of interest.

Respondent Demographics

All Colorado State University employees were invited by their respective Councils to participate in the Employee Voice Survey. As of the end of September 2016, there were 7,224 active CSU employees, and 2,010 employees completed the survey for a response rate of 27.8%. Response rates were highest for State Classified Staff with 30% completing the survey, followed by Administrative Professionals with a 29.6% response rate and Faculty with a 22.3% response rate. Response rates by employment category are presented in Table 1.

Among the respondents, 58.9% were female, 37.2% were male, .3% were transgender, non-binary, or self-identified, and 3.6% preferred not to answer. Only 7.1% of respondents identified as underrepresented. Most of the respondents were full-time employees (68.9%). Among the faculty, 58.6% were tenure-track faculty and 41.4% were non-tenure track. An overview of respondent characteristics is presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Response rate summary, by employee category.

Employee Category	# of Respondents	# of CSU Employees	Response Rate
All Employees	2,010	7,224	27.8%
Administrative Professionals	1,094	3,696	29.6%
Classified Personnel	504	1,682	30.0%
Faculty	412	1,846	22.3%

Table 2. Overview of respondent characteristics.

Employee Characteristics	# of Respondents	# of CSU Employees
Gender	1,966	7,224
Female	58.9%	52.4%
Male	37.2%	47.6%
Transgender, Non-Binary, Self-Identify	0.3%	nd ¹
Prefer Not To Answer	3.6%	nd
Underrepresented Status (Race and Ethnicity)	1,958	7,224
Underrepresented ²	7.1%	14.9%
Non-Underrepresented	81.6%	85.1%
Prefer Not To Answer	9.3%	nd
Other	2.0%	nd
Years Employed at CSU	2,001	7,224
0-5	36.9%	nd
6-10	20.6%	nd
11-15	16.2%	nd
16-20	10.7%	nd
21-25	5.9%	nd
26-30	9.7%	nd
Appointment Status – All Employees	1,992	7,224
Part-Time	7.2%	nd
Full-Time	68.9%	nd
Temporary	1.0%	nd
Permanent	16.0%	nd
Appointment Status – Faculty	401	1,846
Tenure-Track	46.1%	58.6%
Professor	23.2%	43.0%
Associate Professor	20.7%	33.6%
Assistant Professor	12.0%	23.4%
Non-Tenure Track	27.3%	41.4%
Sr. and Special Appointments	18.3%	65.0%
Temporary	4.2%	35.0%

The Employee Voice Survey was comprised of 11 total questions. Five questions captured demographic information and four questions (Q1, Q3, Q5, and Q6) provided a list of specific items for respondents to select from. In addition, two open-ended questions (Q2 and Q4) worked to capture the direct “voice” of employee experiences on campus.

Survey Results/Feedback

Several themes were identified within the survey data. The following thematic sections represent consistent topic areas that were identified through the data analysis process. These themes are meant to highlight commonalities of the employee experience at Colorado State University while providing anonymity to survey respondents.

Salary/Cost of Living

Under this broad theme, several sub-themes emerged throughout employees' stories, including a lack of feeling valued, employee retention, and impacts to quality of life. Further, employees expressed that their salary and/or low raises lead to a lack of being able to provide food, medical care, adequate housing for their family, and experiencing significant stress and anxiety, and frustration with the costs of parking. Several employees acknowledged that they are reluctantly seeking opportunities elsewhere in order to provide a better quality of life for their family. Ultimately, the ways in which employees are impacted by low salary is compounded by the high cost of living in Fort Collins and the surrounding areas.

Housing

Housing is one of the leading factors causing financial vulnerabilities for CSU employees. Challenges with housing availability and affordability often results in employees seeking work opportunities outside of Fort Collins despite feeling committed to working at CSU. Employees shared how the high cost of housing forces them to live farther from campus, which in turn creates other financial constraints. Many experience housing as a significant strain on their budget, sometimes taking up 50% of their monthly budget, while others are frustrated by their inability to save enough to purchase a home. Employees report experiencing significant stress due to housing challenges. Overall, the common themes that emerged for APs related to their housing experience include budget and affordability concerns, location impacts, and negative consequences related to employee retention.

Medical Health Care

APs report that medical costs cause significant strain on their budgets and mental health. For SC employees – outside of the general salary/cost of living category, medical health care expenses have the greatest impacts. Employees shared experiences with how large medical costs put strain on their families and jobs as they are experiencing high levels of stress due to these challenges. There were several voices that expressed situations where they have had to postpone or be more selective with appropriate medical care due to the high costs. Some employees felt that CSU's benefits are too costly and do not provide adequate coverage.

Credit Card/Student Loan Debt

Student loan and credit card debt compose a significant part of many APs' stories. APs share that their student loans affect other financial decisions they would like to be able to make, including saving for retirement, establishing a rainy day fund, and buying a house, among other things. Compounding matters is the timeline for paying off debt is daunting which is creating a feeling of always being behind and never getting ahead.

Childcare/Eldercare

Childcare/Eldercare is a significant concern for employees and especially APs. Employees share stories of how the cost of childcare has prevented them from having children or growing their family. Employees are faced with making decisions around managing debt, owning a home, and quitting their jobs in order to cut costs and pay for childcare. These decisions often cause significant stress on individuals and their families. Adding to the cost challenges, employees sometimes struggle to find available care options.

Parking

Parking is a charged issue. It is often described as a tipping point within the larger context of housing, debt, childcare, medical, and other expenses. The tone when employees share their stories related to parking is severe frustration often due to tight budgets. Employees are interested in seeing deep discounts or even free parking. These options could have the potential to improve morale and eliminate an additional financial burden on APs' budgets. Parking rates have increased more than salaries have increased and employees have noticed. Related to parking is a desire to see more support from supervisors in allowing flexible work schedules and telecommuting options. Alternative transportation options are not feasible for APs with children. This group is particularly noticing the high costs of parking because it compounds the high costs of childcare and afterschool care.

Employee Council Recommendations

Based on the feedback gathered through the employee voice survey, the three employee councils, in the spirit of shared governance, recommend the following areas be pursued in an effort to improve the overall employee experience at Colorado State University:

- 1) Create a strategic, long-term plan regarding compensation that strives to keep pace with increases to area cost of living expenses, in addition to peer institution comparisons.
- 2) Continue to work toward providing a Living Wage to all full-time CSU employees.
- 3) Create opportunities for employees to strengthen their financial literacy skills and gain assistance to a range of knowledge inclusive of basic budgeting to home buying and financial planning processes.
- 4) Work to provide information to employees about resources that already exist on campus that may meet various expressed needs.
- 5) Continue looking at healthcare options including the creation of additional support resources for care givers.