

CSUSM Mid-Career Survey Summary
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“I’m totally comfortable and confident in my teaching, scholarship and service and can work on the things that interest me most and in which I find most meaning”

“[The best part of being mid-career is] greater understanding of all the workings of the university and playing a bigger role in its direction”

“The best part is not having to worry about what other people think and to be freer to do the kinds of research and service that I find meaningful and important”

Background on project

Mid-career is defined as the lengthy period between the end of a professor’s probationary period years and preparation for retirement (Baldwin, DeZure, Shaw, & Moretto, 2008). Mid-career faculty are a growing population within academia, and yet their career issues have been surprisingly under-researched. Nationwide over half of faculty are considered mid-career and this number comprises the largest segment of the academic workforce (Baldwin, et al. 2008; Strage, Nelson, and Meyers, 2008). The average age for all tenured professors is 55 and the number of professors 65 and older doubled from 2001 to 2011. Faculty, therefore, will not only have longer careers, but will face a large gap of time where they have essentially received the highest promotion possible.

Mid-career faculty are often expected to continue to maintain high levels of performance that earned them tenure, while taking on new roles and duties related to service, leadership and advising (Mathews, 2014; Baldwin, et al., 2008). Although certain pressures disappear once faculty have tenure, new ones emerge, and while some faculty expected that tenure would bring an opportunity for a more balanced life, they do not always find this to be true (Baker-Fletcher, Carr, Menn, Ramsay, 2005). Similar to mid-career employees in other professions, faculty at this stage are also facing important concerns related to their development stage of life -- caring for both aging parents and children, promoting their own health, reflecting on the meaning of their careers, and trying to find a balance between work demands and personal life (Baker-Fletcher, et al., 2005). While in other industries there are opportunities for promotion, in academe, there is a very short ladder for growth and only one clear promotion opportunity from associate to full professor (Baldwin, et al., 2008; Mathews, 2014). In addition, after years of clearly defined goals, career goals for later associate professors or full professors become much less clear (Strage & Merdinger, 2014; Baldwin, et al., 2008).

In order to better understand issues for mid-career faculty at CSUSM, an online survey was sent to all associate and full professors during spring 2015. **60 mid-career faculty members** responded (about **40% response rate**). All faculty were tenure line and included **40% associate professors and 56% full professors**. The majority of respondents were female (60%) and from the social sciences and humanities. Expected years until retirement ranged from 5 to 35 years with an average of 15.5 years. The survey questions addressed faculty engagement generally and focused on work behaviors related to teaching, research, and service. A series of **41 questions** were asked to measure the **frequency with which faculty participated in numerous behaviors over the past 5 years**. **Teaching-related** questions centered on new teaching techniques, modifying courses, and presenting research on teaching. **Research-related** questions inquired about how often faculty have attended professional conferences,

applied for grants, and set goals related to scholarly activity. **Service/leadership-related** questions focused on participation in service activities and mentoring students and faculty.

In addition to asking about work behaviors, several **pre-existing measures were used** as a source for survey questions including:

- **Work Engagement** (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) with items such as “my job inspires me”
- **Person-department fit** (Campbell & O’Meara, 2012) with items such as “I have a sense of fit between my values and those in my department”
- **Collegiality** (Campbell & O’Meara, 2012) with items such as “major decisions in my unit are made with adequate input from faculty”
- **Flourishing** (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2009) with items such as “I am engaged and interested in my daily activities”
- **Career Satisfaction** (Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990) with items such as “I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career”

Three open-ended questions were also asked:

1. What is the **best part of being mid-career faculty?**

- **46% reported that job security and the freedom to choose which activities to focus on** was the most enjoyable part of being mid-career faculty
- **36% reported that the sense of accomplishment achieved by maintaining their current position** was one of the best parts of being mid-career faculty
- **26% reported that the lack of pressure to achieve tenure or promotion** was one of the best parts of being mid-career faculty
- **13% reported that having helpful and supportive colleagues** was one of the best parts of being mid-career faculty

2. What is the **most challenging part of being mid-career?**

- **58% reported that burnout and an extremely high workload** is the worst part about being mid-career faculty, **especially in regards to service (55%)**

3. What could the **university do to better support mid-career faculty?**

- **34% suggested appropriate compensation** compared to newer faculty
- **32% suggested appropriate internal and external funding** when compared to newer faculty
- **16% suggested non-monetary recognition** for their years of service to the institutions

Overall Work Behaviors and Experiences

Mid-career faculty continue to be engaged in **teaching**:

- **90% made significant revisions to a course**
- **60% attended a professional development activity related to teaching**
- **75% of faculty have developed and taught a new course** in the past two years
- **90% tried a new teaching technique** in the past two years
- **~70% collected data related to teaching and learning**
- **60% presented research related to teaching and learning**

Mid-career faculty have active **research programs**:

- **99% discussed research or creative activity** informally with colleagues

- 50% **discussed research/creative activity** informally with colleagues on a **regular basis**
- 90% started a **new scholarly project and attended a professional conference**
- 92% had **attended a professional conference** related to their scholarly area
- 67% **set new goals** related to scholarly activity
- 90% at least **occasionally set goals** related to research

Mid-career faculty continue to be actively involved in **service**:

- 90% **mentored junior faculty** formally or informally
- 65% frequently **participated in service activities** on campus
- 75% actively **mentored students** beyond a typical advising role

Career satisfaction table

How much do you agree with these statements? – Scale: 0 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree)	Average
I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.	4.15
I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my overall career goals.	3.98
I feel that I can voice my opinions openly in my department even if my colleagues disagree with me.	3.92
Major decisions in my department are made with adequate input from faculty.	3.82
I feel isolated in my department.	1.93
I am satisfied with the amount of professional interaction I have with colleagues at my university.	3.54
I have a voice in decision making that affects the direction of my department.	3.89
I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for income.	2.62
I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for advancement.	3.84
I receive useful feedback from my colleagues at my institutions that improves my work.	3.41
I have been effectively mentored by someone in my department or college.	3.30
I have a sense of fit between my values and those in my department.	3.77
Faculty in my department value my teaching contributions.	3.93
Faculty in my department value my research/scholarship/creative activity.	3.54
Faculty in my department value my service contributions.	3.77
I am satisfied with the progress I have made towards meeting my goals for the development of new skills.	3.82
Faculty in my unit are aware of the service I do for the department.	3.56

Although the majority (about 75%) of faculty reported “I am enthusiastic about my job”, “I am proud of the work I do” and “I am immersed in my job”, some areas of concern included:

- Low compensation
- Not feeling that their contributions were valued by those in their department
- Not feeling mentored
- Not having enough informal social interaction with colleagues

This survey suggests mid-career faculty continue to be highly engaged in research, teaching and service. Overall, faculty who perceived higher levels of person-department fit and higher levels of work engagement, reported higher levels of overall career satisfaction.

Some recommendations for mid-career development include

Individual strategies:

- 1) Teach a new course or try a new technique in your course
- 2) Teach a service learning or special topics course
- 3) Explore the opportunity to teach abroad
- 4) Collaborate on a new project
- 5) Join a new committee or take on a leadership role
- 6) Explore a new research area, grant opportunities, or a community engaged project
- 7) Mentor junior colleagues

Development/Institutional Strategies:

- 1) Offer mid-career retreats, workshops, and Faculty Learning Communities to provide faculty with an opportunity to share experiences and ideas for growth
- 2) Provide mini-grants targeted to mid-career faculty to retool or explore a new research area
- 3) Make annual review a more meaningful process- have mid-career faculty set new goals for the year
- 4) Consider leadership development training
- 5) Sponsor teaching awards - master teacher programs
- 6) Include info about mid-career development in Department Chair training; encourage department chairs to discuss mid-career goals with faculty

**adapted from DeZure, Baldwin, Shaw, and Moretto (2012)

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