

HSU FACULTY INTEREST AND INVOLVEMENT IN RESEARCH AND CREATIVE PROJECTS

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Two surveys of faculty interest in research and creative projects were carried out at the beginning of this academic year. The College of Creative Arts and Humanities (CCAH) surveyed its faculty while the Institute for Research and Creative Projects (IRCP) surveyed the permanent teaching faculty in the rest of the University. These surveys turned up some interesting and somewhat unexpected results, most importantly, a greater than expected interest and involvement in research and creative activities.

Only 51 per cent of the faculty returned their questionnaires. Of the possible 340 responses, 172 were received and form the basis of the calculations reported here. A crucial question that always exists when response is incomplete is to what extent the responding group is different from the non-responding group in the characteristics being investigated. In this case we would like to know if the faculty that responded are more interested and involved in research than those who did not. If they are, the calculations reported here would overstate the faculty's interest and involvement. An examination of the results of the survey does not provide convincing evidence of a strong bias in either direction. For example, it might be thought that full professors are less research-oriented than those in the lower ranks and, therefore, relatively fewer professors would respond to the survey. A tabulation of the institute's survey reveals, however, that full professors had the highest rate of return, 57 per cent, of those polled at that rank. There were differential return rates for departments but, once again, no *a priori* bias seemed to prevail. The three departments having the lowest return rate in the Institute survey were Business Information Systems, Ethnic Studies and Engineering, a mixture of departments with, presumably, high and low research orientation. The three departments with the most complete returns were Speech and Hearing, Fisheries and Chemistry; once again a mixture having presumed differences in research orientation. It seems that while some upward bias in the calculated percentages may exist, the results cannot be dismissed as representative of a small unique segment of the faculty.

Both questionnaires attempted to ascertain how interested the faculty respondent was in "doing research" (Institute survey) or "securing grant monies (for) . . . research" (CCAH survey). The possible responses were: very interested, moderately interested, slightly, or not interested. The responses for permanent teaching faculty were divided into two groups: a highly interested group if they answered "very interested" and a low interest group if they checked the moderately, slightly, or not interested category. Sixty-five per cent of the responding faculty described themselves as very interested in doing research or creative projects. The two surveys make it possible to compare the intensity of interest between faculty in the "creative" areas of Art, Theatre, Music and English and those in the more "research" areas such as the social, natural, and physical sciences and some branches of the humanities such as philosophy and foreign language. A "high interest" was expressed by 61.5% of the faculty respondents in the "creative" category compared to 65.8% in the other.

The Institute survey asked if the faculty member was currently engaged in research. 72.1% of the respondents reported themselves as currently "doing research." Unfortunately, the survey did not probe deeper to ascertain the respondents' definition of research or the level of commitment to this research. Some respondents who answered probably were not in fact actually engaged in research. A cross tabulation between research and current research activity revealed that more than one-third (37.2%) of those who rated their research interest as low reported themselves as doing research. Only 12% of those with high interest were not currently doing research.

Another section of the questionnaire asked respondents if they had received support for their research activities. Fifty-three per cent of the responding faculty reported that they had received support for their research interests. For the Institute survey, the questionnaire also provided a time dimension for the response. It asked if the faculty member had received support during the past five

years: fifty-seven per cent of this slightly different population had received support within the specified time period. Since the questionnaires asked the respondent to name the source of the support, it was possible to analyze the frequency of external versus internal support. For this classification, support in the form of sabbatical leaves and small grants received from the Humboldt State University Foundation were considered internal. The CCAH questionnaire was less specific in its questions and failed to elicit any reports of internal support and thus may understate the level of total support. The results show that 44.6% of all respondents had received external support for non-degree research. For the faculty covered by the Institute survey, of those receiving support, 68 per cent was from external sources. Support, both internal and external was received by 27.8% of the faculty respondents in the "creative" areas listed above and by 47.1% of the rest of the faculty.

The Institute survey also asked respondents to list the three most important constraints limiting their research efforts. Not surprisingly, time was the most often mentioned constraint. A related constraint, the intensity of the teaching commitment, was frequently mentioned, suggesting that available time and energy are the most important factors limiting faculty research and creative activity. A variety of other factors were mentioned, however, such as financial support, facilities (including library facilities) and/or equipment, remoteness of our location, lack of graduate student research assistance, lack of colleagues for discussion and/or collaboration, laziness, publishing difficulties, secretarial support, absence of a supportive institutional environment, lack of stimulation, inadequate rewards, and more.

The faculty was requested, in the Institute survey, to suggest what they thought the Institute should try to do. These suggestions tended to be closely linked to the research constraints felt by faculty members. Thus, the most often suggested task was to try to get release time for faculty members who wished to be involved in research and creative activities. The second most frequently mentioned role was to help faculty identify potential funding sources and help in developing grant proposals. A somewhat different theme was often mentioned: that as institutional atmosphere needs to be created in which research and creative activities are seen as important, beneficial and respectable activities. This view was expressed in a number of ways in suggestions to create a

favorable climate for research, give research a good name, make research respectable, create an environment in which research is not looked down upon, get research recognized, and foster an attitude among the faculty that research is important, desirable, and possible. Other requests for the Institute were to put together research teams, to motivate the faculty, to supply secretarial services, to finance reprints, duplication and page costs, and promote faculty interaction.

The single most important task the Institute needs to undertake is to loosen the time constraint. Unfortunately, little progress has been made in this direction. My optimism on this issue is not completely gone, however, because there are some things we are working on and some that can be done, although they will probably be in the nature of rather minor adjustments rather than revolutionary breakthroughs into a new world.

Many of the additional suggested activities of the Institute are rather further along in the implementation process. As a result of the survey, information on each respondent's research or creative interests has been recorded on cards in a research interest file system. From this, a second card system of key words has been developed. These systems make it possible to efficiently channel information on available support or requests for proposals to the particular faculty members who have the appropriate interests. These systems will also help the Institute assist faculty in assembling teams to respond to external requests and link together faculty with similar interests. The Institute is able to offer limited secretarial assistance and has worked out a system for graphics assistance. It also has expanded its capacity and developed a program to help faculty identify possible sources of financial support. It continues to review, critique and help improve faculty members' proposals for research and creative project support. As a strong believer in the value of research for the faculty member and the University, I am attempting to provide a source of real support for research and creative activity, increase the recognition given to it and promote a supportive attitude toward it. It would seem that the higher-than-expected research interest and involvement revealed by the surveys reported indicates a more positive attitude toward research among the faculty than previously suspected.