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INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Assessment News

February 7, 2013

Volume 12, Issue 3

How do Students/Faculty Describe Their Academic Experiences at St. Norbert College?

by Alex Yurk, OIE Research Assistant and Political Science Major

The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) has compiled and summarized results from national surveys of both faculty (458 colleges - Faculty Survey) and students (89 colleges—Student Survey) at the country's colleges and universities. This year's report (for data collected in 2010-11) highlight faculty stressors in the workplace, such as job security, total time spent teaching and preparing, research demands, and relationships with other faculty. In addition, HERI's report also summarizes data regarding faculty views on the purpose of college (e.g. being able to write effectively, mastering knowledge of a discipline) and the nature of faculty's classes, such as the types of courses taught and course content. These national faculty data can be compared to the responses of the 54 St. Norbert College faculty who responded to the same survey, and to the responses of faculty at Catholic and/or four year private colleges.

HERI also surveys full and part time graduating seniors at many of the same institutions. These data document students' experiences at their institutions (e.g. satisfaction with coursework, satisfaction with faculty, interactions with other students). The data also summarize student views about the perceived outcomes of college, such as the ability to think critically or to secure stable employment. The data provided by St. Norbert College graduating seniors can also be compared with that provided by seniors at other Catholic and private institutions.

This article compares the perspectives of full time faculty and graduating seniors regarding their academic and social experiences at (Continued on Page 2)

Tenure and Promotion: A View from the Faculty

by Charles Jacobs
Assistant Professor of Political Science

In August of 2012, the Tenure and Promotion Review Task Force, a committee established by Dean Jeff Frick to examine the form and function of the tenure and promotion process, invited faculty of all ranks to participate in a survey that mined opinion regarding the operation of the system currently in place at St. Norbert College. The following article offers a brief review of select data from the study that was completed by 66 members of the tenure-track faculty (21 assistant, 25 associate, and 20 full professors). Fifty-nine respondents indicated that they had received tenure. Six remained untenured. Full results are available for review on the OIE Website in [OIE Documents](#) » [Survey Data](#) » Tenured Voting Faculty Survey.

The survey posed a series of questions regarding the clarity of the guidelines for tenure and promotion (to both to the ranks of associate and full professor) as described in the Faculty Handbook. The trend evident in the data suggests that the greatest ambiguity regarding the requirements for tenure exists for those among the ranks of assistant professor. Clarity about tenure standards increased for those who hold the position of either associate or full professor, suggesting that as one moves through the ranks and completes the process, the guidelines for tenure come in to clearer focus. Among the four criteria for tenure, assistant professors are most befuddled by the guidelines for scholarship and professional productivity, where nearly 61 percent of the respondents found the standards somewhat or very unclear. In only one area, teaching effectiveness, did more than 50 percent of assistant professors rate the guidelines very or somewhat clear. Half or (Continued on Page 4)

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The 13th Annual Texas A&M Assessment Conference, It's Time to Show Your Stuff, College Station, TX, February 17-19, 2013.

General Education and Assessment: A Sea Change in Student Learning, Network for Academic Renewal Conference, Feb. 28-March 2, 2013, Boston Park Plaza, Boston, Massachusetts.

North Central Association Higher Learning Commission's 2013 Annual Conference, April 5-April 9, 2013.

Institute on General Education and Assessment, June 1-5, 2013, The University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont.

National Conference on Student Assessment 2013, Gaylord National Resort, National Harbor, MD, June 18-22, 2013.



Assessment Resources

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How do Students/Faculty Describe Their Academic Experiences at St. Norbert College?

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St. Norbert College. Faculty responded to the HERI National Survey of College and University Faculty in February 2011. Senior data used in this summary were provided by the class of 2011 and collected in April 2011. When substantially different, mean responses for male and female students are reported separately.

This analysis begins by highlighting a series of items for which the responses of SNC faculty and students differ substantially from those of faculty and students nationally. This includes items asking about the purpose of college for the faculty and students, sources of student and faculty satisfaction, faculty descriptions of their classes and sources of faculty stress.

Sources of Faculty Stress/Satisfaction

Among sources of faculty satisfaction, 93% of full-time faculty at St. Norbert College report satisfaction or high satisfaction with job security compared to 79% of faculty at other Catholic colleges and 76% at all other private colleges. A similarly high percent of faculty are also very satisfied with tuition remission for children and dependents as well as retirement benefits, both of which rank higher than other Catholic intuitions and private colleges. This could be due to the fact that other schools don't have as generous a tuition remission program. Also, over 65% of SNC faculty report being satisfied or very satisfied with salary compared to less than 50% of faculty at other colleges. Could this mean that faculty are paid higher at St. Norbert than at other private schools? That could be the case, however it is also possible that SNC faculty are paid similar to other private school faculty, but are simply more satisfied with their salary.

About three-quarters of SNC faculty report high overall job satisfaction compared to about 80% of all other private and Catholic schools. Faculty at SNC as well as national faculty report high satisfaction with lab/office space, autonomy and independence, and freedom to determine course content. Finally, 75% of faculty at SNC report high satisfaction with course assignments which is on par with faculty from other colleges.

SNC faculty report somewhat greater dissatisfaction regarding opportunities for scholarly pursuits, with 28% of faculty expressing a lack of satisfaction compared to 20% nationally. Similarly, SNC faculty more frequently report research and publishing demands as a source of stress than faculty at other private schools. Only half of faculty surveyed said they were satisfied with the quality of students at St. Norbert College compared to 60% at all other private schools. A lower percentage of SNC faculty report satisfaction with their social relationships with other faculty. Less than 10% of faculty says that they are very satisfied with their social relationships, compared to 23% of faculty at private Catholic schools and 24% of faculty at all other private schools.

The Student Experience and Satisfaction

The next set of questions summarize graduating seniors' experiences at St. Norbert College and across the nation. Nationally, over 89% of all students at Catholic or four year private schools reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the amount of contact with faculty. St. Norbert College reported even higher student satisfaction with faculty contact (92%) than seniors nationally. One reason why so many seniors report high satisfaction with faculty contact could be due to the fact many private and Catholic schools are small in size and have lower faculty to student ratios, allowing for more contact between faculty and students. Along the same lines, class size was an area of high satisfaction at St. Norbert College as well as at other private and Catholic schools (95% nationally). In regards to the question about courses in major field, both Catholic schools and other national private schools reported relatively high satisfaction although St. Norbert seniors reported lower satisfaction with course offerings in their major field. This could mean a few different things. St. Norbert College may lack the variety of classes that other schools have a) because of its strong commitment to general education, b) because departments are small and include faculty representing a limited number of specializations, or c) because there aren't enough professors to offer the wide variety of classes seniors want. Over 72% of St. Norbert College seniors report high satisfaction or satisfaction with academic advising compared to 63% of seniors at Catholic schools and 65% of seniors at all other private institutions.

Housing is an area for which students report greater dissatisfaction with only 38% of St. Norbert College seniors reporting satisfaction or high satisfaction with student housing compared to over 50% of students from other Catholic and private schools. Furthermore, students at St. Norbert College report greater dissatisfaction with laboratory facilities and equipment. Only about 33% of graduating seniors were satisfied with laboratory facilities and equipment whereas close to 60% of seniors at other Catholic and private schools were satisfied or very satisfied with their facilities. While this suggests that students at St. Norbert College currently lack the laboratory facilities present at other colleges, a newly renovated science building seems likely to mitigate that concern in the near future. Also, when comparing St. Norbert College seniors with seniors from other Catholic and private schools, SNC seniors are not as satisfied with the racial/ethnic diversity of the student body. Only about 30% of seniors were satisfied or very satisfied with racial/ethnic diversity compared to 46% at other Catholic schools and about 50% of students from other private colleges. Still, when rating their overall college experience, 92% of St. Norbert College seniors report being satisfied or very satisfied with their experience, which is noticeably higher than the 86% satisfied or very satisfied at other Catholic and private colleges.

Faculty Descriptions of How They Teach Their Classes

Another set of questions asks faculty to describe what they do in their classes, e.g. different evaluation methods, types of courses taught, and what kinds of assignments faculty give to their students. For evaluation methods, full time St. Norbert

How do Students/Faculty Describe Their Academic Experiences at St. Norbert College?

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College faculty use quizzes more than faculty at other Catholic and private colleges. 56% of SNC faculty respondents said they used quizzes all or most of the time compared to 39% of Catholic school faculty and 38% of other private school faculty. Likewise, 61% of St. Norbert College faculty use essay exams most or all of the time compared to only 45% of Catholic and other private college faculty. Similarly, 65% of St. Norbert College faculty utilize short-answer essay exams compared to only 47% of Catholic college faculty and 46% of other private school faculty. There seems to be more frequent use and emphasis on essay and writing as forms of evaluation at St. Norbert College compared to other schools.

In terms of types of courses taught, almost 50% of St. Norbert College faculty teach at least one general education course compared to only 27% of Catholic college faculty and 34% of other private college faculty. More St. Norbert College faculty responded that they teach at least one course required for an undergraduate major than did faculty from Catholic and other private colleges. This suggests a greater emphasis on teaching general education and major courses at St. Norbert College as opposed to teaching pure electives. More faculty at St. Norbert College engage undergraduates in their own research projects than do faculty at other Catholic and private colleges. Also, twice as many St. Norbert faculty reported having taught at least one honors course compared to faculty from Catholic and private schools.

What is College For?

The last group of questions focuses on the purpose of college from both the faculty and graduating senior perspectives. In terms of the faculty perspective, 90% of St. Norbert College faculty and faculty from Catholic and other private schools believe it is essential or very important to help student's master knowledge of a discipline. Over 90% of faculty from all schools regard the ability to write effectively as essential or very important and about 99% of faculty from all schools said that critical thinking was an essential or very important purpose for undergraduate education. For many of these items, there seems to be a high degree of agreement about education goals among faculty from all schools. St. Norbert College differs slightly from other Catholic and private schools in that faculty rank the goal of instilling a basic appreciation of the liberal arts higher than other schools. About 82% of SNC faculty say that this goal is essential or very important compared to 76% of Catholic college faculty and 78% of private college faculty. That a higher percent of St. Norbert College faculty respond in this way may reflect the College's recent development of a vision

statement as well as ongoing discussions of the college's core traditions.

Like students elsewhere, St. Norbert College students report that a stable, secure future is an important or very important outcome for their education. Likewise, students from all Catholic and private four year colleges report availability of jobs to be an essential factor in thinking about a career path after college. Over 80% of all seniors rated this aspect to be essential or very important in their decision making. However an interesting thing to note is that when asked about the importance of being well off financially, 61% of St. Norbert seniors reported this as essential or very important compared to 69% of seniors from other Catholic colleges. Although a stable, secure future and availability of jobs is rated high across the board, St. Norbert seniors report that it is slightly less important for them to be well off financially. It seems as if a stable and secure future is important to St. Norbert College seniors but it is not as important to be very well off financially. Only 29% of St. Norbert College seniors said it was essential or very important for them to have social recognition and or status when thinking about their career after college compared to 38% and 36% of Catholic and private schools seniors respectively. Finally, when asked about the importance of becoming successful in their own business, only 31% of St. Norbert seniors reported this to be essential or very important compared to 43% of seniors from other Catholic colleges and 41% of seniors at other private schools. This may reflect the emphasis the college places on service or simply suggest that St. Norbert College students as a group define future success more broadly than simply financial success.

The HERI surveys of full time faculty and graduating seniors offer an interesting picture of the academic and social experiences of both groups. Full time faculty at St. Norbert are satisfied with job security, salary, and overall job satisfaction, but are less satisfied with the quality of students and their social interactions with other faculty compared to other schools. Graduating seniors report similar experiences compared with graduating seniors from other schools. St. Norbert College seniors report similar high satisfaction with class sizes and contact with faculty to seniors from other schools but reported higher dissatisfaction with racial diversity, housing, and laboratory equipment compared to other schools. Faculty at St. Norbert use more quizzes and essays as evaluation methods compared to faculty at other Catholic and private schools as well as teach more general education and major classes. Furthermore, SNC faculty share similar views with faculty from other schools in regards to the purpose of college; mastering a discipline, writing effectively, and thinking critically were all viewed as important. St. Norbert faculty rate higher the importance of instilling a liberal arts education in students compared to faculty from other schools. Graduating seniors at St. Norbert College and students elsewhere report that a stable, secure future is very important however St. Norbert College seniors viewed being well off financially and having social recognition and status as less important than their peers.

Tenure and Promotion: A View From The Faculty (Continued from Page 1)

more of the entire faculty that responded indicated that the tenure guidelines for teaching effectiveness, advisement and collegial service were either very or somewhat clear. Only 48.5 percent, however, felt similarly about the scholarship criterion.

Assistant professors remained the most mystified when it came to interpreting the qualifications necessary for promotion to associate or full professor. Among assistant professors, 63 percent of respondents indicated uncertainty about the criteria for teaching and collegiality. But the data also reveal a rising, although not substantial, doubt by associate professors regarding evaluation in the area of scholarship and collegial service. Similar data were also reported for the requirements for promotion to full professor.

Despite the vagueness perceived by many, the faculty did not indicate that any obtuseness in the guidelines delayed application for tenure. Clarity or lack of clarity had no impact on the decision of 57 percent of assistant professors, 71 percent of associate professors, and half of the full professors who applied or will apply for tenure. More than one fifth of all respondent indicated that they applied for tenure early to either gain additional information about the process or to seek earlier promotion.

Data regarding the impact of the promotion guidelines on the decision to apply for higher rank, however, are not as positive. A third of assistant professors and 32 percent of associates indicated that they delayed an application for promotion for fear of being denied. An additional 22 percent of assistants and 24 percent of associates indicated that they have decided to never apply for promotion because the guidelines make it too difficult for someone in their position to earn promotion. Decisions regarding promotion may be additionally influenced by the effort required to make an application. Nearly 85 percent of assis-

tant professors and 70 percent of associate professors indicated that the work required is too great. Large majorities of both assistant (77.7 percent) and associate (64.7 percent) professors also indicated that the lack or quality of the necessary evidence affected the decision to pursue promotion either to some, or to a great, extent.

Although this discussion offers only a cursory glance at the data, there appear to be as many, if not more, questions regarding the standards for promotion (in particular to the level of associate professor) as for tenure. This may be the result of the bifurcated system of tenure and promotion utilized at St. Norbert College. These two processes are typically fused at a vast majority of other higher education institutions and such questions are not universal among higher education faculty nationally. Therefore at St. Norbert College evidence indicates pre-tenure and pre-promotion faculty struggle to gain clear and consistent understanding of expectations for tenure and promotion.

Survey results seem to indicate that as St. Norbert College faculty serve time in rank, they become increasingly comfortable in their respective understanding of expectations for promotion. Applicants for promotion to Professor report the least level of ambiguity in their understanding of promotion expectations. However, it is interesting to note that even at the Associate Professor rank, almost a third of respondents were unclear about expectations for promotion in at least one of the four criteria. It is during the earliest stages of faculty careers, however, that the survey indicates a lack of clarity regarding expectations for tenure and promotion.

Note: "Dr. Stephen Correia, Chair of the Task Force on Tenure and Promotion, indicates that the Task Force continues to discuss all of the issues raised by the data and will likely place a motion before the faculty assembly later this spring."

