

2012 OCUFA Faculty Survey

**Part 1 – Views on university quality and
faculty priorities**

OCUFA

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des Associations des Professeurs des Universités de l'Ontario

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations

INTRODUCTION

Ontario's professors and academic librarians are on the front lines of Ontario's universities. They are uniquely positioned to assess the performance of the sector, and to identify trends that affect the quality of university education.

To take advantage of this insight, the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) surveyed Ontario faculty to gauge their opinions on the quality of university education in our province. The survey was also designed to assess the priorities of university faculty, particularly in regards to the balance of teaching and research in their work.

The survey was conducted online between March 21, 2012 and April 16, 2012. Responses to the questionnaire were received from over 2,300 faculty members, with a total of 2,015 complete responses from professors and academic librarians from all Ontario universities and a full range of disciplines. The following report presents the survey findings and provides additional commentary about key results.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The following questions were designed to assess faculty perception of changes in university quality over the past five years.

Question 1

Thinking about the last five years, the quality of undergraduate education provided by my institution has declined.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Strongly agree		15%	321
b. Agree		27%	563
c. Neither agree or disagree		21%	431
d. Disagree		21%	446
e. Strongly disagree		7%	154
f. Don't know		8%	170
Total Responses			2085

A significant proportion of surveyed faculty – 42 per cent – believe that the quality of undergraduate education has declined in Ontario. OCUFA has long argued that declining public funding and rising enrolment has led to a variety of negative quality outcomes at Ontario universities. This includes larger class sizes, reduced student-faculty interaction, and deteriorating labs, libraries and classrooms.

Question 2

Thinking about the last five years, the quality of graduate education provided by my institution has declined.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Strongly agree		10%	205
b. Agree		16%	335
c. Neither agree or disagree		21%	447
d. Disagree		29%	605
e. Strongly disagree		12%	241
f. Don't know		12%	253
Total Responses			2086

Although 26 per cent of surveyed faculty believe that the quality of graduate education has declined, professors and librarians appear less concerned about graduate studies than the undergraduate experience.

Question 3

Thinking about the last five years, the average class sizes I teach has increased.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Strongly agree		33%	677
b. Agree		30%	628
c. Neither agree or disagree		17%	348
d. Disagree		15%	320
e. Strongly disagree		2%	39
f. Don't know		3%	70
Total Responses			2082

Of those surveyed, 63 per cent of faculty believe that class sizes have increased over the past five years. Class size serves as a proxy measure for quality. Smaller classes offer more student interaction with faculty, a key determinant of good learning outcomes. Ontario universities have long had Canada's highest student-to-faculty ratios, and this finding supports the position that this high ratio means larger classes – and a diminished experience - for Ontario's students.

Question 4

Thinking about your own department or library, the majority of new hires over the past five years have been full-time / tenure-stream.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Strongly agree		17%	353
b. Agree		29%	597
c. Neither agree or disagree		11%	223
d. Disagree		21%	427
e. Strongly disagree		19%	387
f. Don't know		4%	90
Total Responses			2077

Faculty appear split on the question of full-time/tenure stream hiring: 46 per cent agree that full-time/tenure stream faculty comprise the majority of new hires, and 40 per cent believe that this is not the case. This suggests that the use of full-time/tenure stream vs. part-time/contract faculty may vary by institution.

Question 5








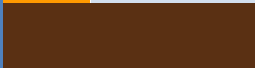


Thinking about the last five years, I have the resources I need to provide a high quality education to my students.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Strongly agree		6%	135
b. Agree		36%	744
c. Neither agree or disagree		13%	281
d. Disagree		29%	615
e. Strongly disagree		14%	301
f. Don't know		1%	18
Total Responses			2094

It is worrying that 43 per cent of surveyed faculty believe they do not have the resources they need to provide a high quality education to their students. This suggests that strained university budgets are increasingly unable to cope with the rising number of students in Ontario.

Question 6

Universities across Ontario are changing in response to constrained budgets. Please check ALL of the changes you have observed at your university over the past five years.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Increased use of part-time/sessional faculty		76%	1656
b. Larger class sizes		77%	1661
c. Fewer course choices		53%	1155
d. Delayed maintenance of older facilities		64%	1381
e. Departmental budget cuts		83%	1804
f. Reduced library acquisitions		45%	972
g. Reduced investment in information technology		26%	573
h. Reduction or freezes in hiring of new full-time faculty		76%	1643
i. No Change		1%	32
j. Other, please specify:		14%	306
Total Responses			2166

The vast majority of surveyed faculty – 83 per cent – indicate that their departments have faced budget cuts. It is also clear that constrained budgets are leading to larger class sizes (77 per cent), hiring freezes (76 per cent), increased use of part-time or sessional faculty (76 per cent), delayed maintenance of older facilities (64 per cent), and fewer course choices (53 per cent).







WORKLOAD

Faculty workload is an important indicator of broader trends within and institution and the university sector. If workloads increase, this may mean that there is insufficient hiring to cope with rising enrolment. In addition, increased workload pressure may have negative effects on educational quality – if faculty members do not have enough time, they may be forced to reduce their interaction with students and employ less-effective teaching techniques.

The questions in this section are designed to assess whether faculty members believe that workload has increased, and how this pressure might be affecting their work.

Question 7

Thinking about the last five years, I believe my workload has increased.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Strongly agree		34%	724
b. Agree		39%	819
c. Neither agree or disagree		15%	315
d. Disagree		9%	196
e. Strongly disagree		1%	28
f. Don't know		2%	36
Total Responses			2118

The majority of faculty – 73 per cent – believe their workload has increased. This is likely due to the slow rate of faculty hiring and steadily increasing enrolment.

Question 8

My current workload is manageable.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Strongly agree		5%	99
b. Agree		40%	857
c. Neither agree or disagree		15%	315
d. Disagree		28%	603
e. Strongly disagree		11%	233
f. Don't know		0%	10
Total Responses			2117

Again, faculty appear split on managing their workload, with 45 per cent of surveyed faculty agreeing that their current workload is manageable, and 39 per cent who believe that their workload is unmanageable.

Question 9

If you feel your workload has increased, please select from the list below all of the reasons why you think your workload has increased over the past five years.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. Increased student enrolment		62%	1073
b. Lack of financial resources at my institution		49%	845
c. Departmental budget cuts		55%	943
d. Increased pressure to do research		40%	687
e. Increased teaching responsibilities		49%	839
f. Lack of replacement for retiring/departing faculty		50%	853
g. Organizational restructuring within your university		31%	539
h. Other, please specify:		30%	520
Total Responses			1720

According to surveyed faculty, the top three factors driving workload increases are increased student enrolment (62 per cent), departmental budget cuts (55 per cent,) and a lack of replacement faculty (50 per cent).

Question10

Some faculty report making changes to their pedagogy in response to increasing workload pressures. Please select all of the changes you have made to your classroom activities due to workload increases.

Response	Chart	Percentage	Count
a. More multiple choice tests		29%	594
b. Use of online instructional options		22%	438
c. Reduction of one-on-one time with students outside of class		41%	834
d. Use of instructional aids, such as Clickers		8%	156
e. Fewer writing assignments		50%	1008
f. No changes		29%	584
g. Other, please specify:		13%	257
Total Responses			2024

Surveyed faculty are responding to workload pressures with fewer writing assignments (50 per cent), reduced interaction with students outside of class (41 per cent), and more multiple-choice tests (29 per cent). In the literature on teaching and learning in higher education, none of these are considered effective pedagogical practices. It would appear that rising workload is compromising the student experience.

PRIORITIES

The following questions were designed to assess how faculty value different aspects of their job, how they view the priorities of their institution, and how they would allocate resources within the university sector.

Question 11

Rank in order how much you value these different aspects of your academic career from 1 to 4, where 1 is the aspect you most value, and 4 is the aspect you value least. Please rank all the items.

	1	2	3	4	Total
a. Teaching	864 (47%)	842 (46%)	87 (5%)	44 (2%)	1837
b. Research	882 (48%)	651 (35%)	180 (10%)	127 (7%)	1840
c. University Service	45 (2%)	220 (12%)	1044 (57%)	529 (29%)	1838
d. Community Engagement	55 (3%)	138 (7%)	534 (29%)	1132 (61%)	1859

Surveyed faculty indicate a strong value associated with both teaching and research with 93 per cent ranking teaching as a first or second career priority with 83 per cent indicating for research. Respondents were given the option to provide comments in addition to their rankings. It is worth noting that many objected to the forced-choice nature of this item, as they valued teaching and research equally and would have ranked them equally had they been given the option to do so.

Question 12

Rank in order how much your institution values these different aspects of your academic career from 1 to 4, where 1 is the aspect they most value, and 4 is the aspect they value least. Please rank all the items.

	1	2	3	4	Total
a. Teaching	566 (30%)	914 (48%)	309 (16%)	115 (6%)	1904
b. Research	1175 (61%)	404 (21%)	185 (10%)	147 (8%)	1911
c. University Service	113 (6%)	513 (27%)	1127 (59%)	143 (8%)	1896
d. Community Engagement	53 (3%)	83 (4%)	287 (15%)	1496 (78%)	1919

Interestingly, only 78 per cent of faculty believed teaching was a priority for their institutions, in contrast to 93 per cent who felt that teaching was a primary personal value. Professors and institutions appear to place a similar emphasis on research.

Question 13

How would you describe the resources at your university to support these aspects of an academic career?

	Very poor	Poor	Good	Very good	No opinion	Total
a. Teaching	126 (6%)	518 (25%)	1024 (49%)	370 (18%)	46 (2%)	2084
b. Research	194 (9%)	579 (28%)	855 (41%)	367 (18%)	87 (4%)	2082
c. University Service	141 (7%)	500 (24%)	921 (44%)	228 (11%)	290 (14%)	2080
d. Community Engagement	324 (16%)	643 (31%)	562 (27%)	125 (6%)	421 (20%)	2075

Surveyed faculty report that 67 per cent would describe the resources to support teaching as good or very good while 59 per cent reported good or very good support for research.

Question 14

Imagine that the provincial government had \$400 million in new funding that it wanted to invest in Ontario's universities. Rank in order you priority for the following proposals from 1 to 10, where 1 is the proposal you value most, and 10 is the proposal you value least. Please rank all of the items.

Top Faculty Priorities (Chosen as first, second, or third preference)

	First Choice	Second Choice	Third Choice	Total
a. Funds to hire and retain full- time, tenure-track faculty	1001 (63%)	197 (12%)	123 (8%)	1321 (83%)
b. Funding to support greater basic- and curiosity-driven research	172 (11%)	322 (20%)	240(15%)	734 (46%)
c. Funds to hire full-time teaching stream faculty	127 (8%)	247 (16%)	121 (8%)	495 (32%)
d. Renewal of university facilities	56 (3%)	140 (9%)	204 (13%)	400 (25%)

Surveyed faculty overwhelmingly (63 per cent) indicate that the first priority for any new funding should be allocated to new full-time faculty hires. This reflects the widespread belief that Ontario's universities do not have sufficient full-time faculty to cope with rising student demand.

CONCLUSION

The 2012 OCUFA Faculty Survey suggests that Ontario's professors and academic librarians are concerned about the quality of higher education in Ontario. They are also experiencing workload pressures that may be compromising their ability to deliver the best possible educational experience to students, despite their commitment to doing so.

These concerns are all linked to resource constraint within the university system. Declining per-student funding, and rising student enrolment, mean that the student experience is at risk. OCUFA believes the results of this survey support our ongoing call for increase public investment in universities to protect and expand educational quality.

The survey also shows that Ontario faculty place an equal emphasis on teaching and research, and tend to believe that they value teaching more than their institutions. Faculty also believe that more faculty hiring is needed within the university system in order to cope with rising enrolment.