

Survey of College Administrative Employees in Paybands 5 to 8

February 2011

Executive Summary

A recent survey by OCASA shows that college administrative employees in the lowest paybands face increasing pressures from the rapid pace of change affecting their jobs and work environment. Employees in paybands 5 to 8 say they are assuming new responsibilities, working longer hours, and dealing with more demanding and complex challenges, while their compensation pay and job description classification have not kept pace. Although generally satisfied with their jobs, this group nevertheless perceives inequities in compensation, working conditions, and opportunities for advancement relative to others at their college working at the same level in similar jobs, as well as salary compression compared with college support staff. Together, these factors are creating a growing sense of frustration for this employee group.

Introduction

OCASA conducted an online survey to identify issues affecting administrative employees in paybands 5 to 8. According to data provided by the College Employers Council, about 294 employees held jobs rated in paybands 5 to 8 across the province in 2009.

In September 2010, OCASA sent an email to all members, inviting those in paybands 5 to 8 to complete the survey. After an initial period, OCASA sought to increase the completion rate by resending the invitation to its members, with a request that members invite persons within their college network to participate. As a result, a total of 60 persons started the survey (20%) and a total of 49 persons completed the full survey (16%).

While the survey cannot be considered statistically valid, its findings do provide indicators about issues and trends affecting the experiences of these employees within the colleges system, and suggest directions for further research and future actions.

Key Findings

Compensation not keeping pace

Overall, the most consistent theme was compensation and, more specifically, the pressure on the compensation scheme from increased responsibilities and longer hours.

Several respondents said their daily work has become more complex, requiring them to assume greater responsibility; their compensation and job classification, however, have not kept pace with these changes.

- More than half (57%) did not feel their job was in the right payband.
- More than half (57%) disagreed or strongly disagreed when asked if they thought they were paid fairly relative to their qualifications, experience and responsibilities compared with other positions at their college.
- Just over half (53%) were satisfied that they were moving through the range of their payband in a reasonable time frame.

Furthermore, the survey indicates that less than half (41%) of employees do not understand how their compensation is determined and administered. More than half (51%) said they were uncomfortable asking questions about the compensation policy.

Asked to identify issues relating to compensation, respondents focused on perceptions of inequity for workers in lower paybands. Sample themes include:

- A perception that they are underpaid relative to others in their profession
- Concerns about salary compression with college support staff
- There is no recognition for overtime or added responsibilities, including work done on special projects
- Inherent inequities (e.g., the wage freeze) disadvantage those in lower paybands
- The job evaluation process lacks transparency, consistency and fairness
- Job fact sheets are either not reviewed or, if so, not regularly
- Paybands and job titles are outdated

An engaged, but stressed, workforce

Generally, respondents said they enjoy the challenging work environment, particularly the interactions with people, the variety of work experiences, and helping students. Most expressed satisfaction with their job, and two-thirds said they felt as satisfied or more satisfied than they did three years ago. Most generally feel their efforts are appreciated and recognized by their supervisors and by their college.

The survey suggests that for staff in paybands 5 to 8, the pace and volume of their work has increased in jobs that are becoming increasingly complex and more demanding.

- About 38% of respondents reported working more than 45 hours per week, including 14% who are working more than 50 hours per week.
- The greatest reason for extra hours was “keeping up-to-date with daily tasks,” followed by college committee meetings or special events after regular business hours where attendance was required. Some said they are working more hours during peak periods to cover vacancies in their department.
- Working extra hours without overtime or lieu time was a common theme.
- Slightly more than one-third (37%) felt their college could keep them better informed about matters affecting their work. Several noted that because of their classification, their employer does not always provide them with access to the kinds of information they need to perform some of the new demands being placed on them.

Work-life balance

Respondents identified several issues pertaining to work-life balance and workload.

- Two-thirds said they were satisfied with the balance between their work and personal life. However, only slightly more than half believe their department or office is adequately staffed (54%) or their work volume is reasonable (55%).
- One in three said they did not feel comfortable discussing their workload situation with their supervisor.
- According to the survey, the top three factors influencing work engagement for these employees are enjoyment of work, compensation and benefits, and recognition of performance.

Advancement and professional development

- 83% said they hold a college diploma or certificate, and 23% hold a university degree (either in conjunction or alone). However, only 19% believe that there are advancement opportunities given their current education. Slightly more than half (55%) believe that there are no advancement opportunities.
- Two-thirds felt that their college provides adequate resources (funds, training, work time) to help them with continuing education and professional training.
- Many (82%) said professional development is encouraged or sometimes encouraged in their workplace and most (92%) said funding is or sometimes is available.
- There is strong interest in taking courses in topics such as leadership, budgets, conflict management, and motivating people, as well as in attending conferences that would provide interaction with peers.
- Some believe there are fewer resources available for training, and even less opportunity for advancement. Others say shrinking budgets or rising work volumes have limited their access to training opportunities.

Survey Questions

1. What do you enjoy most about your job?

Of 63 comments received, the following elements were highlighted as most enjoyable about working in the college environment:

- Working with people, including students, colleagues, and retirees; helping students in particular
- Diversity and variety of tasks
- A varied and fast-paced work environment that requires them to multi-task, use problem solving skills, and be creative.

2. What are the greatest challenges you face in your job currently?

Some of the enjoyable qualities of the job also create the strongest challenges. A changing work environment that generates a diverse, challenging workplace with lots of people also creates:

- too many conflicting priorities (sometimes from too many people)
- an abundant work volume that is increasingly difficult to manage
- challenging work dynamics (difficult people/unions).

With their jobs becoming more complex, requiring them to rely on more people and information, respondents express:

- being kept “out of the loop”
- not being considered fully administrative staff
- Having expectations of meeting deadlines like administrative staff, without compensation that support staff get for overtime.

The comments suggest a growing frustration, without having a voice in resolving the conflicts and not receiving respect for the importance of their job.

3. How has your job/role changed in the past 3-5 years?

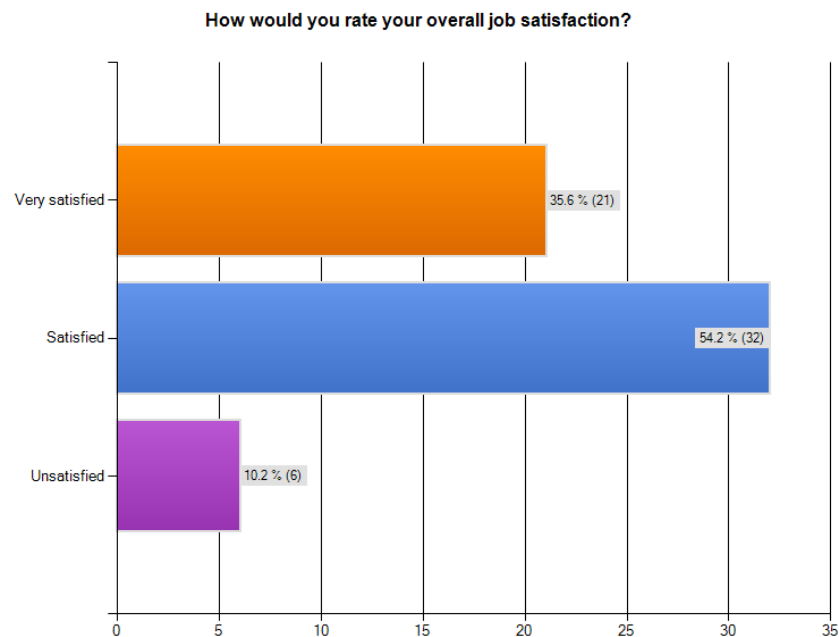
Building on Question 2, the changes noted included the following key comments:

- The pace and volume of work has increased, including covering vacancies
- Additional duties have brought greater responsibility (including college committee work) and more complex files
- Despite increased duties and responsibilities, there has been no change to the Job Fact Sheet

Greater responsibility was the most significant comment, although respondents did not specify what the added responsibility includes. A few people said there has been no change, while some noted that change in leadership has brought about change. Comments suggest that while this group may tend to have fewer direct reports (if any), they do seem to rely on and interact with many people throughout the organization to complete their tasks and responsibilities.

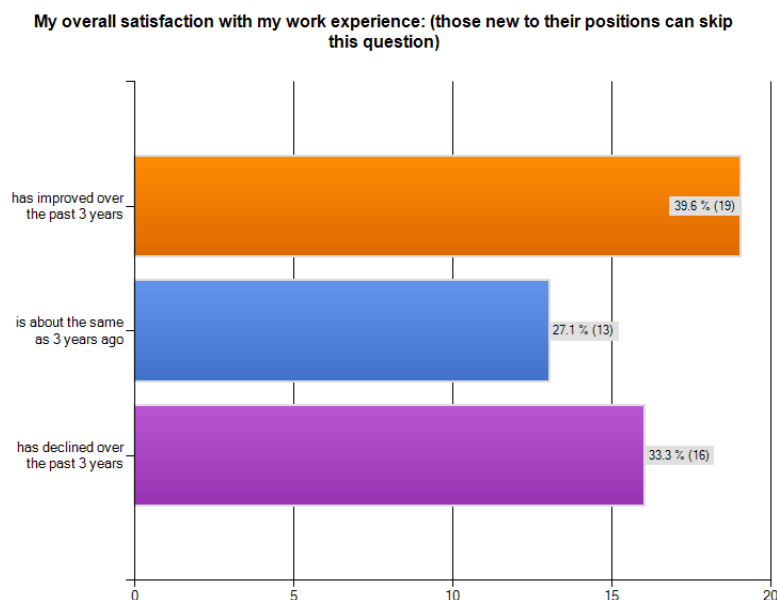
4. How would you rate your overall job satisfaction?

Almost 90 per cent of respondents are either very satisfied or satisfied with their job.



5. My overall satisfaction with my work experience:

The majority (66.7%) of respondents feel at least as satisfied as they did three years ago.

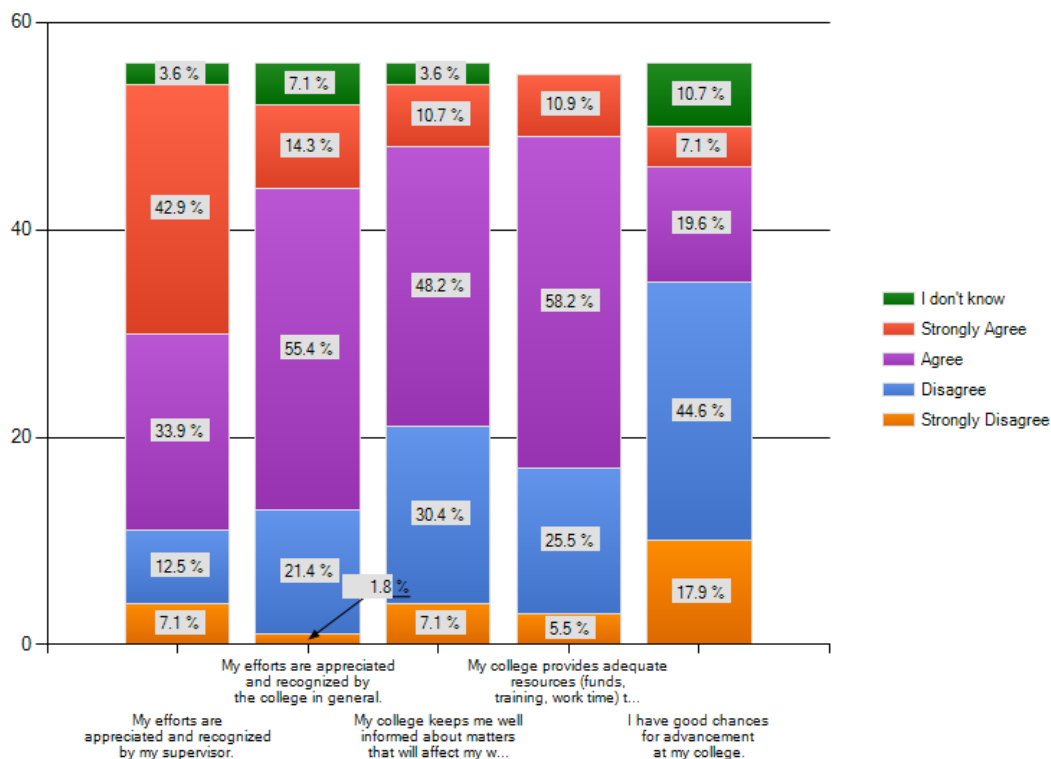


6. Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

Summary of ratings, percentage that Agree or Strongly Agree:

| | |
|---|-----|
| My efforts are appreciated and recognized by my supervisor. | 77% |
| My efforts are appreciated and recognized by the college in general. | 70% |
| My college keeps me well informed about matters that will affect my work. | 59% |
| My college provides adequate resources (funds, training, work time) to help me with continuing education and professional training. | 69% |
| I have good chances for advancement at my college. | 27% |

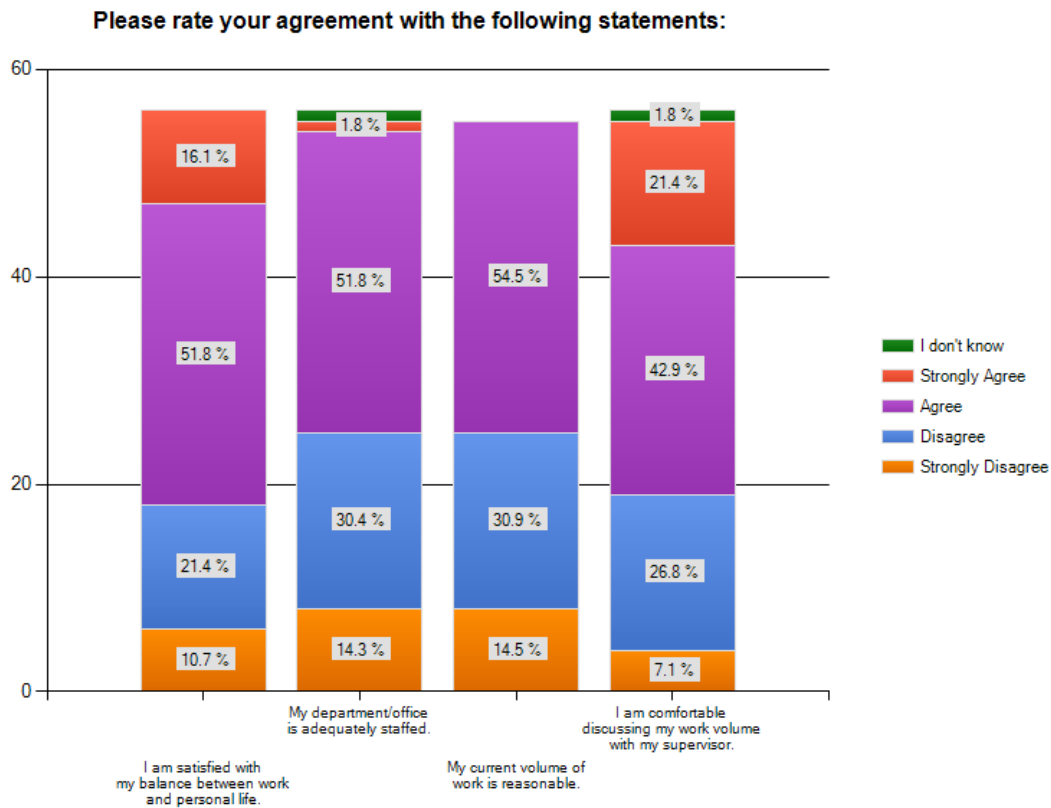
Please rate your agreement with the following statements:



7. Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

Summary of ratings, percentage that Agree or Strongly Agree:

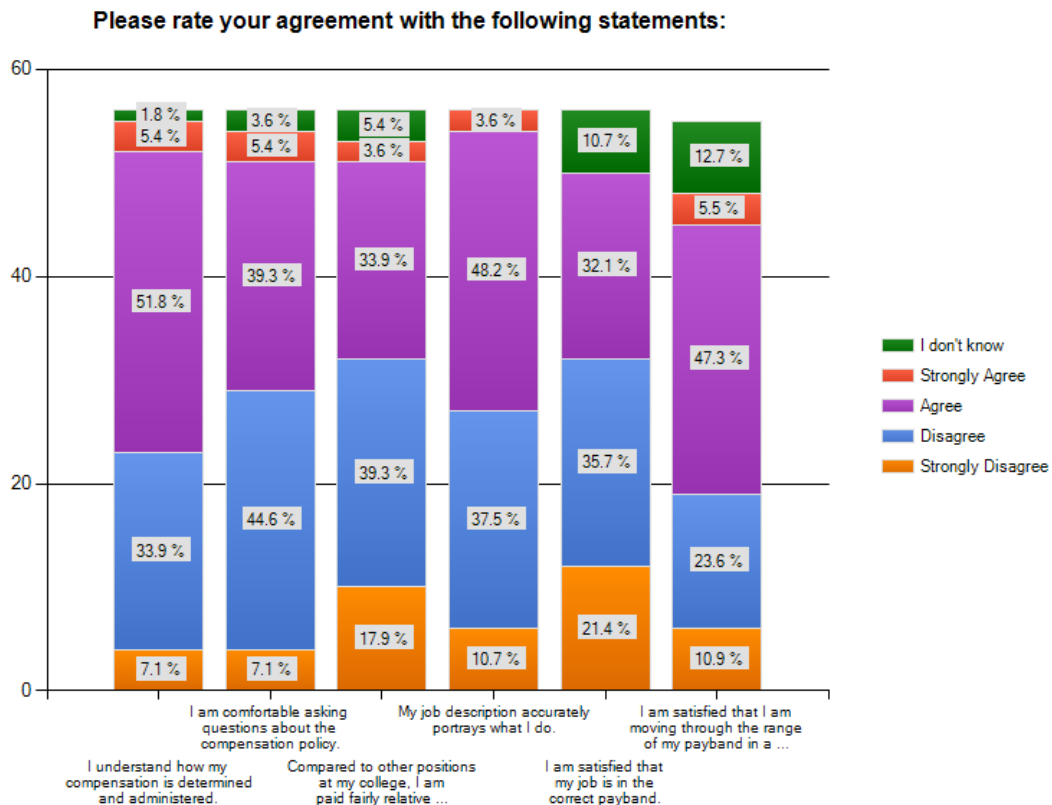
| | |
|--|-----|
| I am satisfied with my balance between work and personal life. | 68% |
| My department/office is adequately staffed. | 54% |
| My current volume of work is reasonable. | 55% |
| I am comfortable discussing my work volume with my supervisor. | 64% |



8. Please rate your agreement with the following statements:

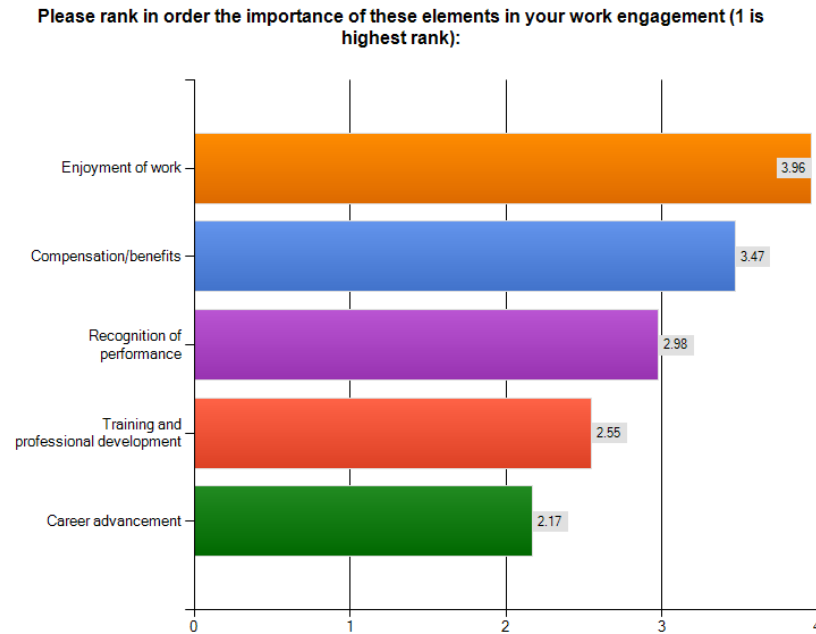
Summary of ratings, percentage that Agree or Strongly Agree:

| | |
|---|-----|
| I understand how my compensation is determined and administered. | 57% |
| I am comfortable asking questions about the compensation policy. | 45% |
| Compared to other positions at my college, I am paid fairly relative to my qualifications, experience and responsibilities. | 38% |
| My job description accurately portrays what I do. | 52% |
| I am satisfied that my job is in the correct payband. | 32% |
| I am satisfied that I am moving through the range of my payband in a reasonable time frame. | 53% |



9. Please rank in order the importance of these elements in your work engagement (1 is highest rank).

The results are listed in order of descending importance, average score out of 5:



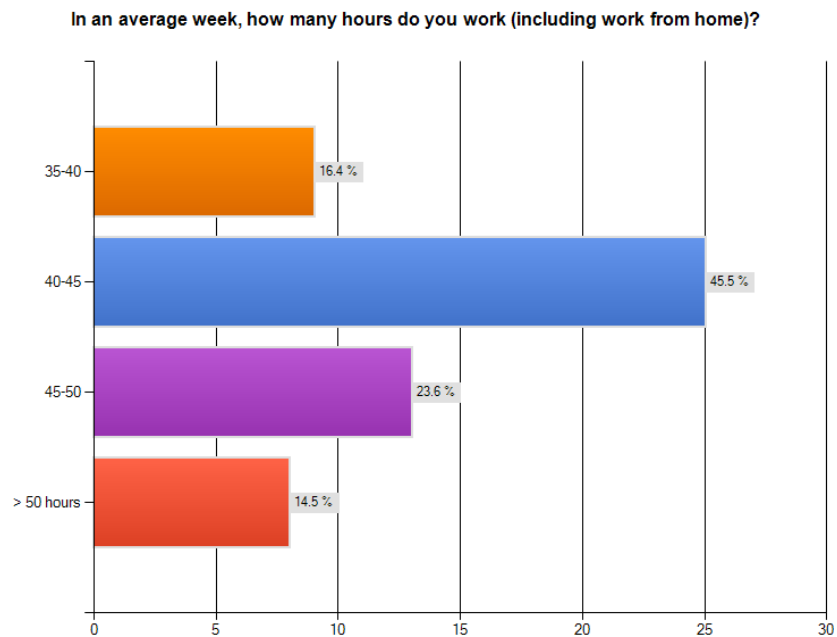
10. I am concerned about the following issue(s) relating to compensation:

Key phrases/issues heard from respondents include:

- Perception of inequity in payband levels and increases; inequity in relation to other positions at college; including support staff; sense of inequity compared with industry
- No recognition for overtime or added responsibilities
- Compensation structure is perhaps limiting or outdated. Performance management isn't working with compensation; the paybands and job titles are outdated
- Exceptional pay incentive doesn't tend to apply to lower paybands; lower percentages seem unfair
- Sitting at max with no raise, performance reviews don't seem relevant
- Job fact sheet not reviewed, and if so, not regularly; special projects above regular duties not included in job performance; job evaluation process doesn't seem transparent or fair or consistent and at times non-existent; seems to focus on title and report structure, rather than actual job and responsibilities; perception that it is adjusted when convenient
- Tenure and work experience not valued in current system, with increase in value of university degrees for advancement
- Lack of understanding of job such that role is under-valued
- No negotiation possible, little control
- Work overtime without compensation
- Some revisions to organizational structure have resulted in a drop in paybands for a few individuals
- Slow progression through the payband
- Little advancement opportunity

A few comments also referenced the provincial wage freeze, and its impact. The more pervasive comments reference the sense of inequity inherent in the compensation structure used by colleges, and that it disadvantages those in lower paybands.

11. In an average week, how many hours do you work (including work from home)?

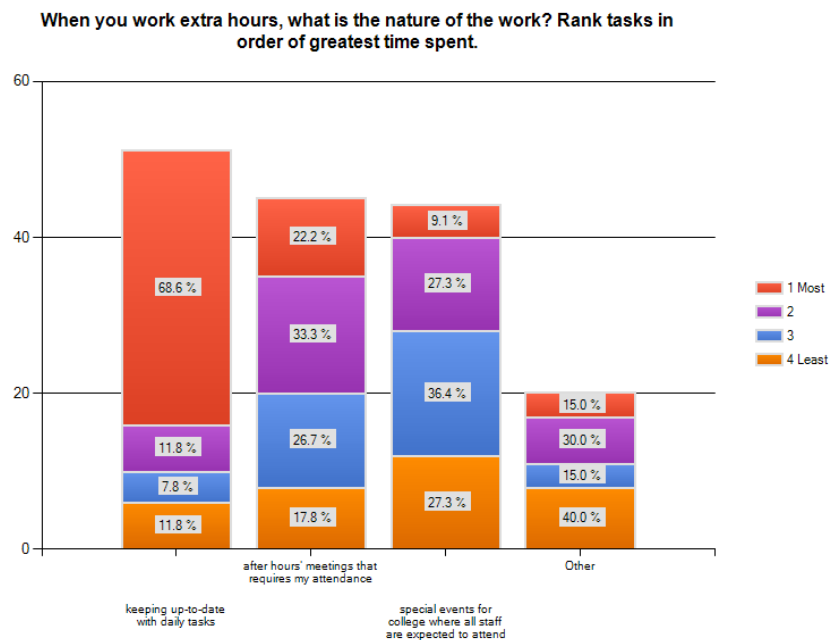


Additional comments include:

- Sometimes more hours during peak periods
- Extra hours must be reported to supervisor, but no further action (i.e., no lieu time)
- Working 50 to 60 hours and no time for vacation
- Includes night classes/weekend activities.

12. When you work extra hours, what is the nature of the work? Rank tasks in order of greatest time spent (see chart below).

Clearly, the greatest extra hours component is “keeping up-to-date with daily tasks,” followed by after hours’ meetings that require my attendance.” (Feedback suggests this increasingly is the result of supervisors having later meetings where the attendance of workers in this employee group is required.)

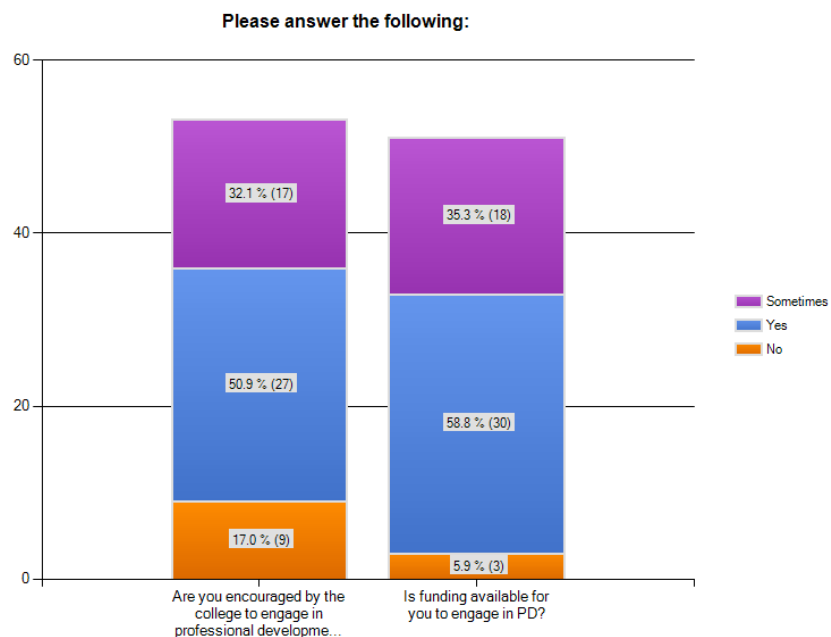


13. Professional Development

- Are you encouraged by the college to engage in professional development (PD)?
- Is funding available for you to engage in PD?

The chart below represents their answers. More than 50% of respondents stated that PD is encouraged, and 58% of respondents said that funding is available. Twelve (12) people offered further comments, which are summarized here:

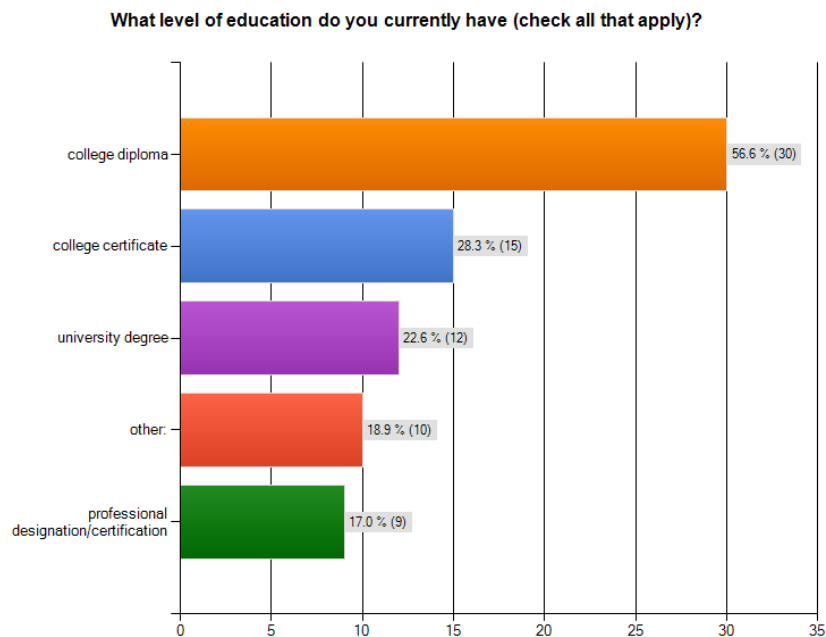
- PD offered typically for managers (not Admin. Asst.)
- Funding limited to degrees; sometimes travel expense not allowed
- Very small PD budget, inadequate
- Work volume too high to attend PD events
- Permission varies by department and by position



14. What PD would you like to see offered for someone in your role?

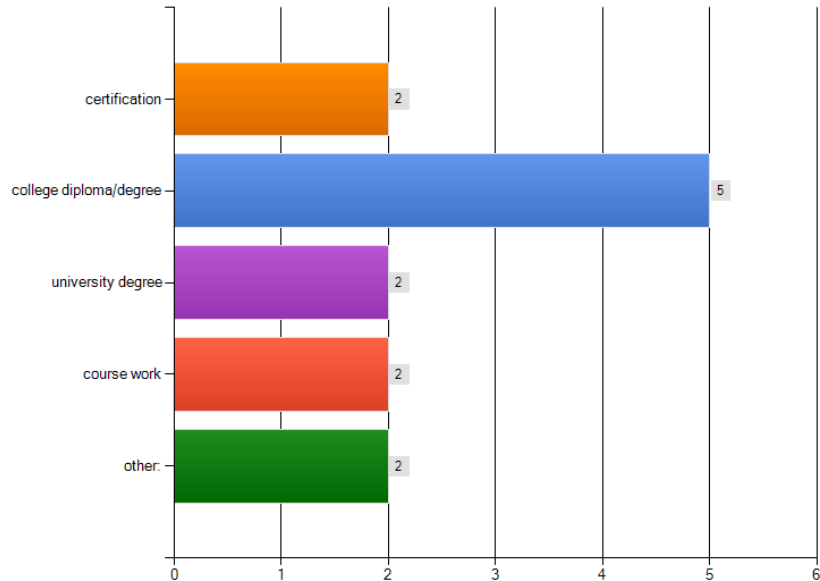
A wide variety of comments were made, including leadership, budgets, conflict management, motivating people, outside conferences/with those in similar roles, software refreshers. A few suggested that they do have access to pertinent PD. Others suggested that access is very limited.

15. What level of education do you currently have?



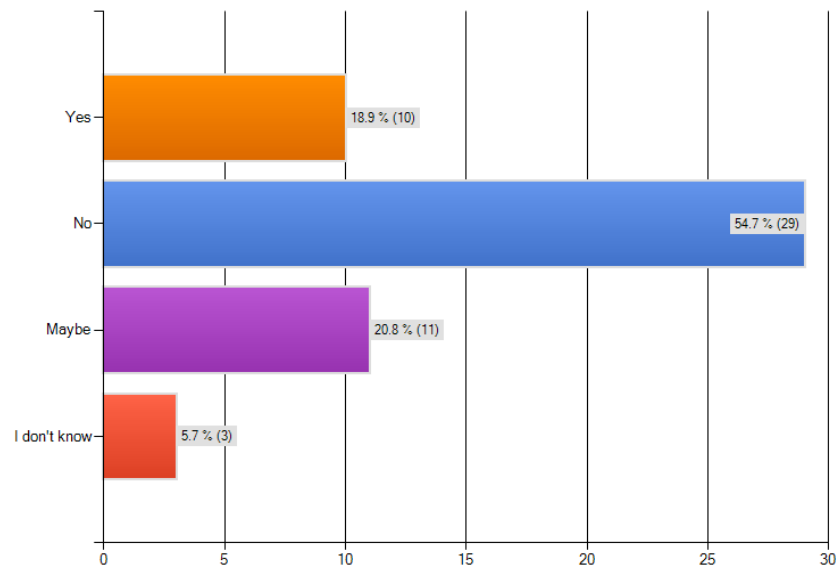
16. Are you currently working on advanced studies?

Are you currently working on advanced studies? If NOT, please proceed to Question #17.



17. Do you believe there are advancement opportunities at the college based on your current education level?

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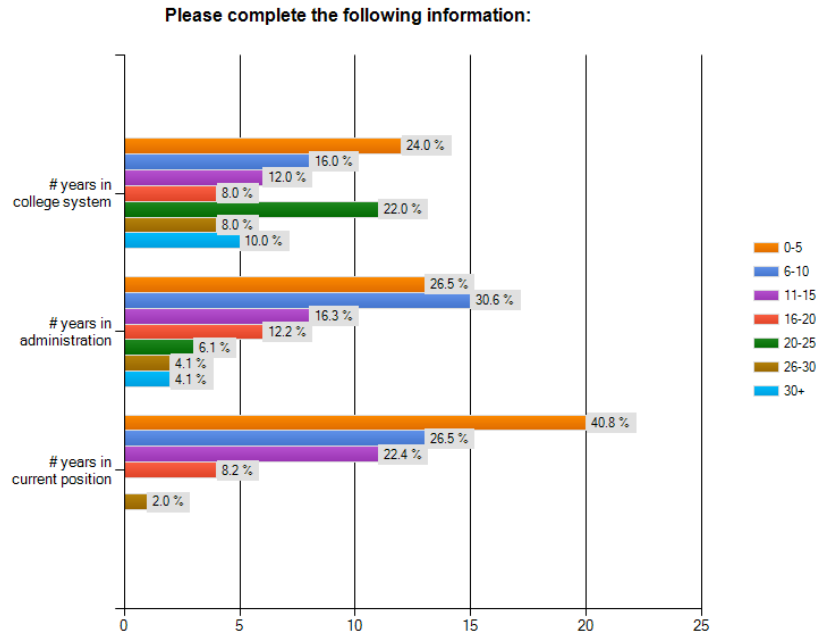


18. General comments are summarized/paraphrased here:

- Concern about impact of wage freeze on \$50,000 salaries, versus \$100,000+ salaries.
- Confusion between Support Staff and Admin that share the same title (Admin. Asst.)
- Concern about the lack of value of college experience, when compared with education experience in terms of advancement opportunities.
- Extremely interested in the upcoming training/courses for administrators in colleges
- Interested in seeing a different form of compensation for the payband 5 through 8 individuals, as it is very unlikely that these positions would ever qualify for and receive the "bonus" compensation
- I would like to see a better way of performance goal-setting for our paybands (particularly when we play a support role)
- And I would like to see more recognition of our workloads and understanding that for many it's difficult to take time off and come back to the expectations that we can immediately pick up and hit the decks running...
- Concern expressed about confidentiality (when applying for a position); Also concerned about being questioned about intention to retire
- I would like to see a college association of Admin. Assistants to get together annually with the breakout session(s) according to responsibility
- Perceived inequity of administrators' compensation when compared with faculty and support staff. Administrative staff continue to have work downloaded without proper remuneration or recognition. We seem to be constantly reminded about how important support staff and faculty are to the college, when Admins are becoming increasingly overworked and wages get frozen, or we are with the college long enough to reach the top of our payband.
- Past experience almost seen as a detriment to advancement. Looking outside for administrators.
- Concern for older workers' value to college.
- At this stage in my life/career, I am not looking for PD, training or career advancement. Just want to be compensated accordingly for the work performed.

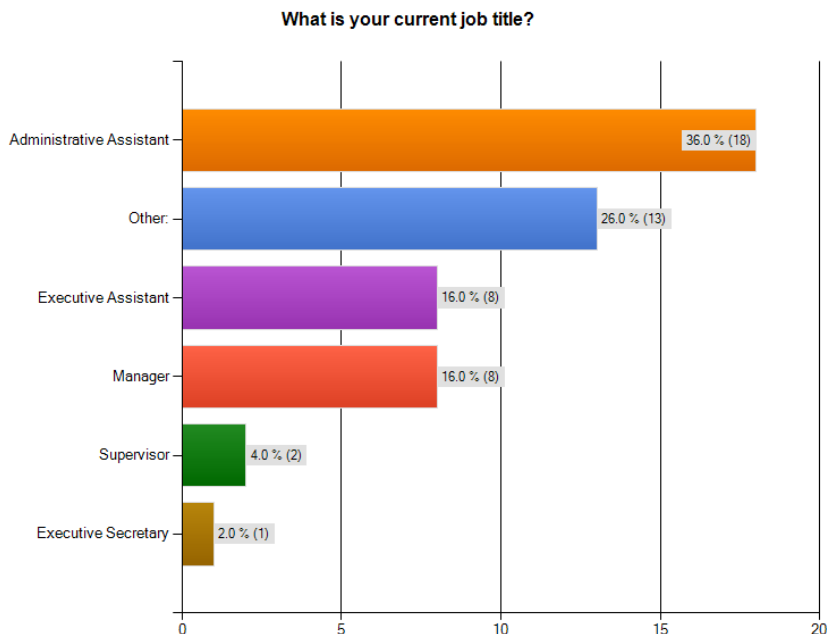
Demographic information

19. Experience in college system:



20. Current Job Title:

We know that some members who are part of an administrative assistant network forwarded the survey to those colleagues in particular. Without having data about job titles in these paybands, it is difficult to know what the breakout would be for the population.

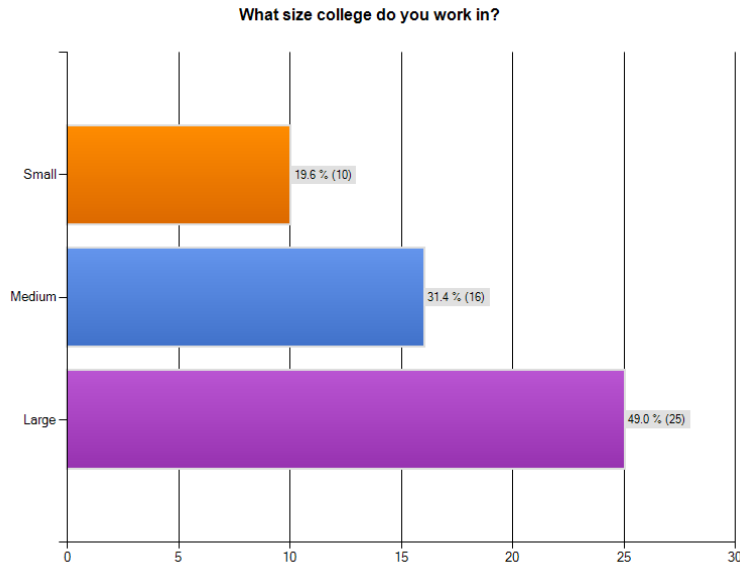


The “other” category included the following (any specific title that might be identifying has been put into general terms):

- Administrative officer
- Board secretary
- Coordinator
- Secretary
- Administrative secretary
- Special constable
- Administrative associate

21. What size of college do you work in?

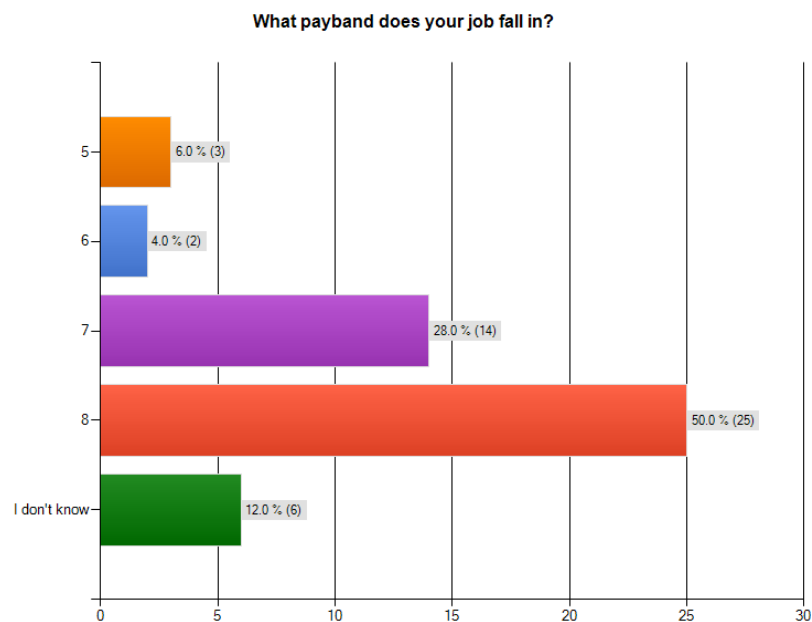
Almost half the respondents were from a large college while the rest were from small or medium college.



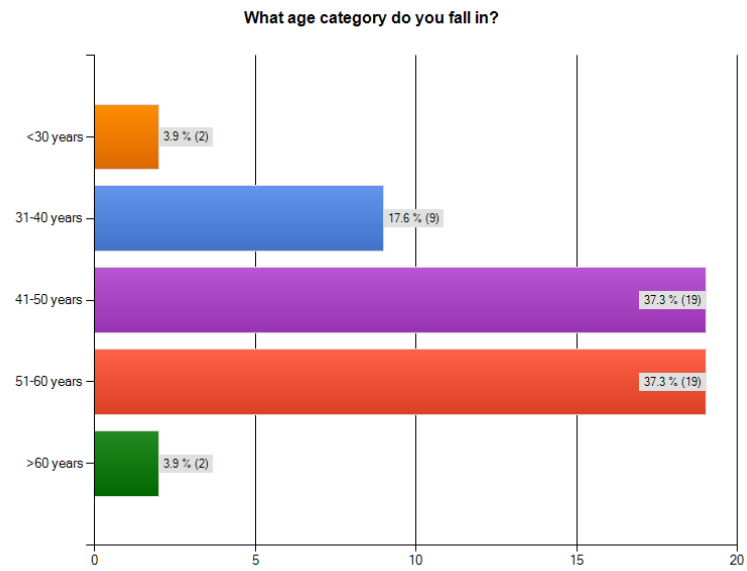
22. Paybands of respondents:

According to October 2009 data collected by the CEC, the percentage split of those in paybands 5 to 8 across the province provincially at that time was:

- Payband 5: 1% (4)
- Payband 6: 6% (82)
- Payband 7: 28% (4)
- Payband 8: 65% (190)

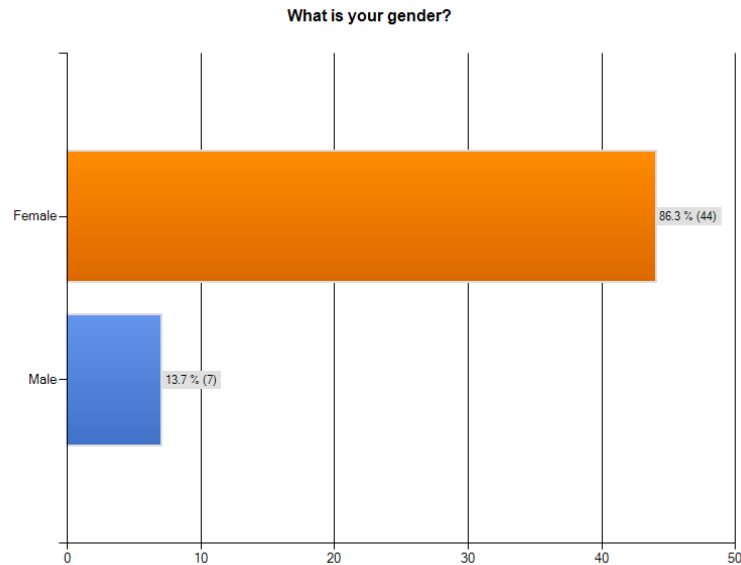


23. Age Category



24. Gender

The overall gender split in administration provincial for all paybands is roughly 60 per cent female and 40 per cent male. Even though the data below is based on a sample of just 51 respondents for this question, it is clear that the percentage of females in the lower paybands is significantly higher than the overall average.



25. Are you an OCASA MEMBER?

OCASA members received this survey and were encouraged to forward it to colleagues.

