

4-17-2013

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## Recommended Citation

"The Graying and the Disgruntled: A Needs Assessment of Associate Professors" (2013). *Stander Symposium Posters*. 324.  
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# The Graying and the Disgruntled: A Needs Assessment of Associate Professors at the University of Dayton

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## ABSTRACT

Recent national surveys of associate professors (Modern Language Association 2009; Jaschik, 2012) present a bleak picture: associate professors receive little support from institutions. Without this support, they frequently lose focus, motivation, and experience professorial burnout or melancholia (Baldwin, 1990; Karpiak, 2000). The first part of this study reframed the definition of faculty development, reviewed the related literature, and investigated three themes: the portrait of the associate professor, the results of national surveys, and recent institutional programming efforts for these professors. Through an online survey, the second part focused on the collection and analysis of data regarding the needs of associate professors at the University of Dayton. Ultimately, this study sought to assess the climate for associate professors and to propose strategic initiatives for institutional programming and administration to support these professors, encourage their self-authorship, and engage them as vital faculty.

## SELECT LITERATURE

- **Mid-career faculty** have been “expected to fend for themselves” since “habits created during this (pre-tenure) will last an academic lifetime” (Baldwin & Chang, 2006; Mills, 2000).
- **Vital faculty**, as defined by Mills (2000), “invest more time in research and service ...work longer hours and have more diversified and more balanced work lives...are consistently more professionally active and productive” (p. 182).

## SELECT REFERENCES

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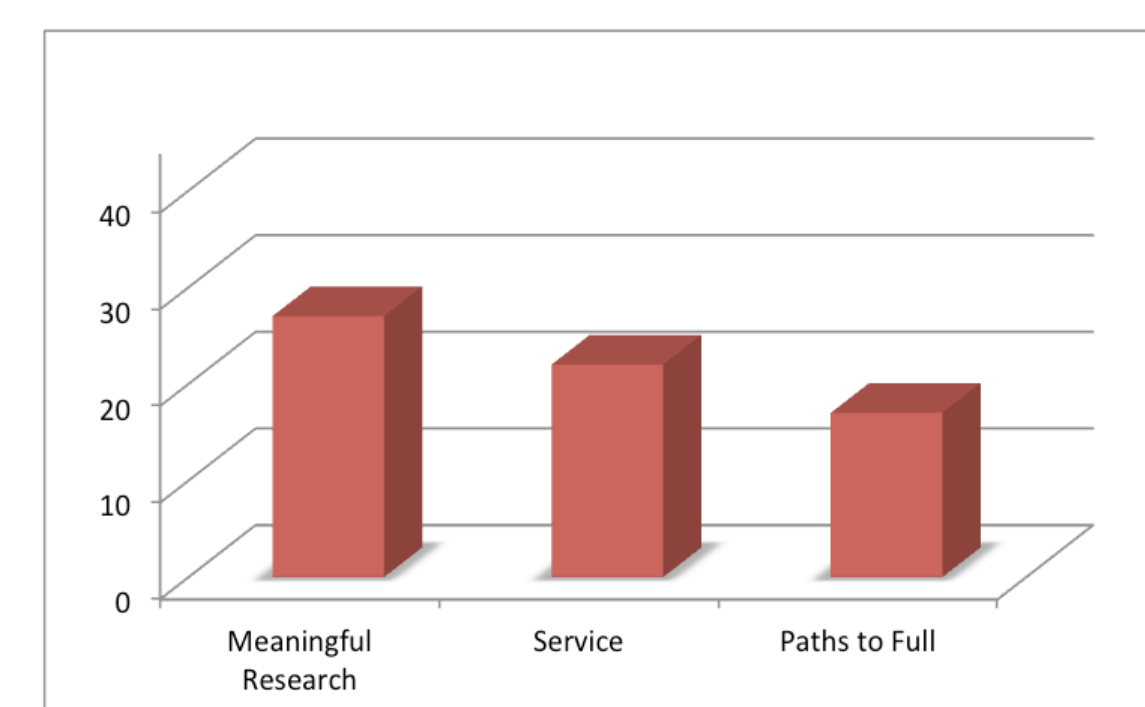
## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 30% of full-time faculty hold the title associate professor (Digest of Educational Statistics, 2011). Including a consideration of full professors, Karpiak terms the phenomena of half of the aging instructional staff in higher education as “the graying of the professoriate” (2000, p. 125).
- Overall, when compared to assistant and full professors, associate professors report being less likely to choose to work at the same institution and less satisfied with their work (Jaschik, 2012).
- While various programming initiatives attempt to address the disgruntled majority of their professors, Baldwin and Chang (2006) argue that no “coordinated and comprehensive” model exists for associate professor development (p. 32).
- Thus, associate professors remain unsatisfied in their work and without guidance to reengage as vital faculty.

## Research Questions

- What are the needs of UD associate professors and do these needs correspond with the needs of associate professors as reported on a national level?
- How can programming, such as the AsPIRE program (Associate Professor Inquiry, Reflection, and Exploration), and the administration at UD address these needs?

46 professors answered open ended questions regarding challenges they face at UD and suggestions for administration. The results show that the challenges correlate with those of associate professors nationally in three areas: decreased time for **meaningful research**, heightened **service**, and no clear or realistic **paths to full professor**.



UD associate professors offer **six recommendations**: monetary aid, course releases, formal mentors, helpful department chairs, student workers, and improved facilities.

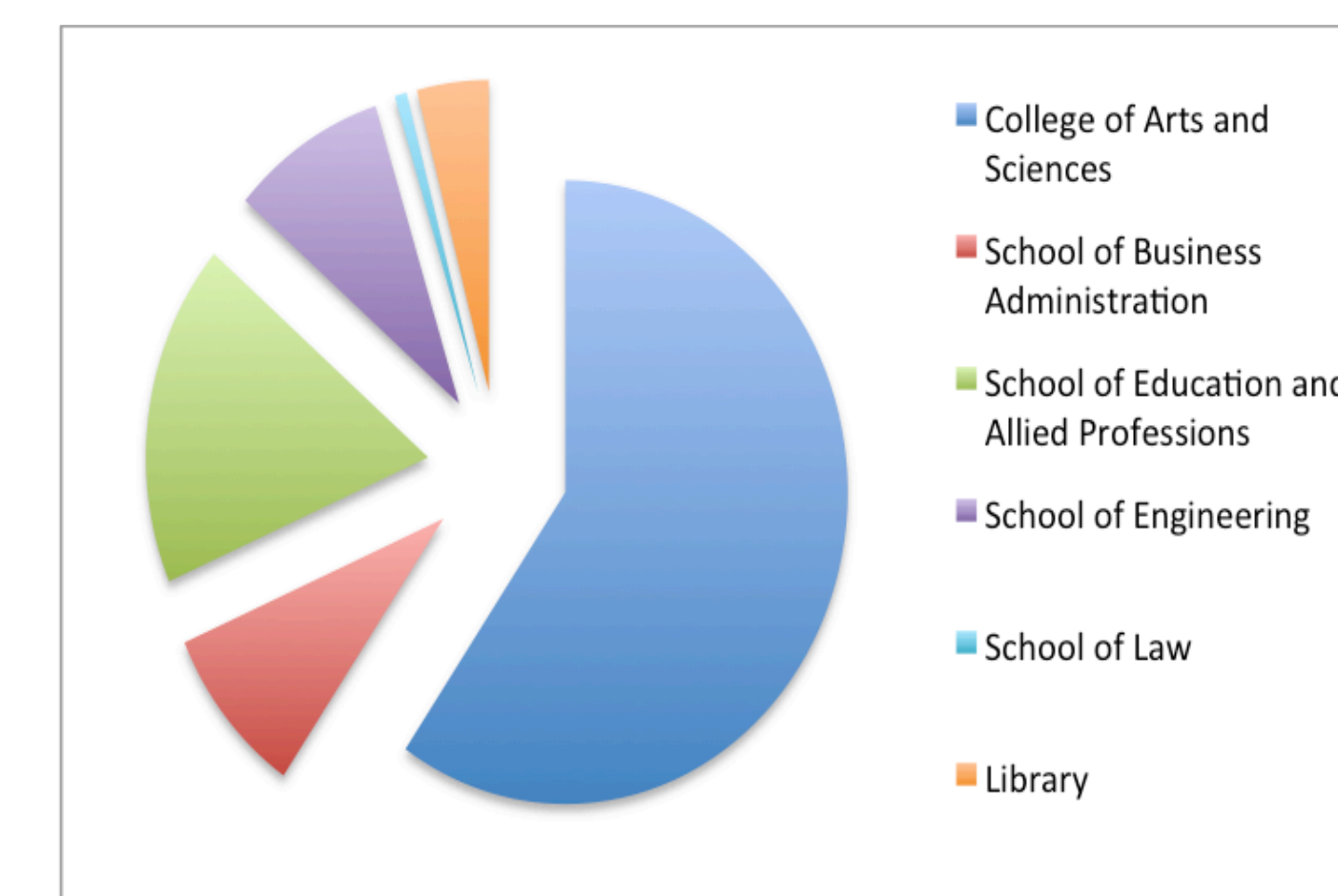
While the AsPIRE program assists with personally navigating the challenges, the UD administration needs to support these professors by addressing both the challenges and the recommendations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- ✧ Dr. Steve Wilhoit
- ✧ Dr. Sawyer Hunley
- ✧ Dr. Nasser Razek
- ✧ The First AsPIRE Cohort and all the Associate Professors at UD who generously participated in this project.

## METHODS

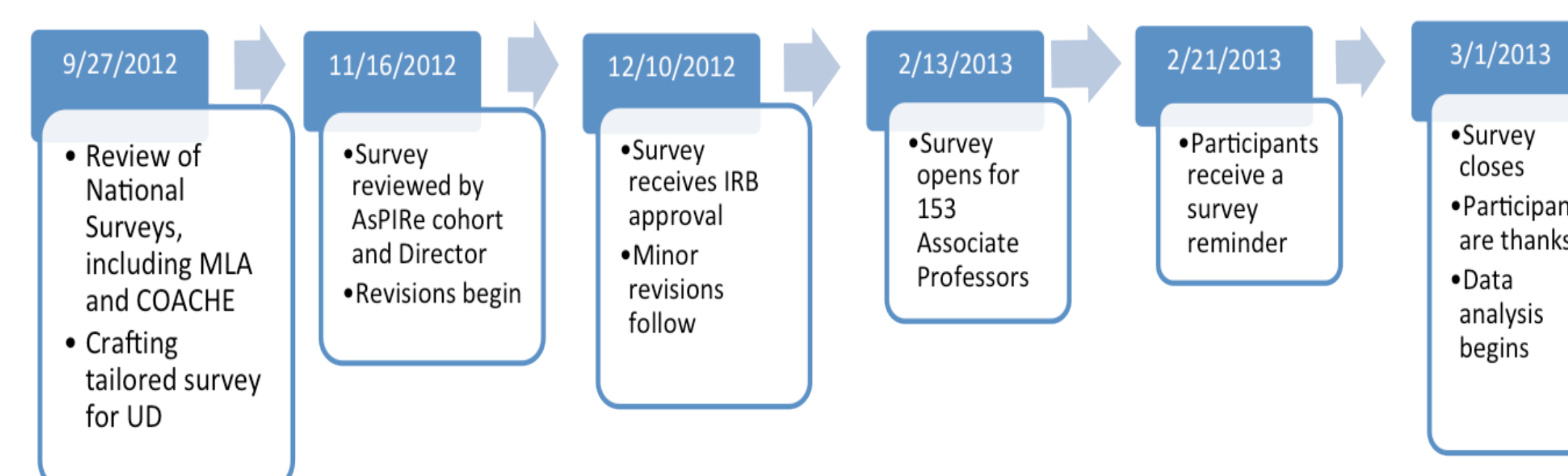
To assess associate professor needs at the University of Dayton, all associate professors not in the first AsPIRE cohort were sent an electronic survey. The selected 153 professors reflect the amount of professors in the schools, the college, and the library:



Beginning on September 27, 2012, national surveys of associate professors were reviewed and tailored for project use.

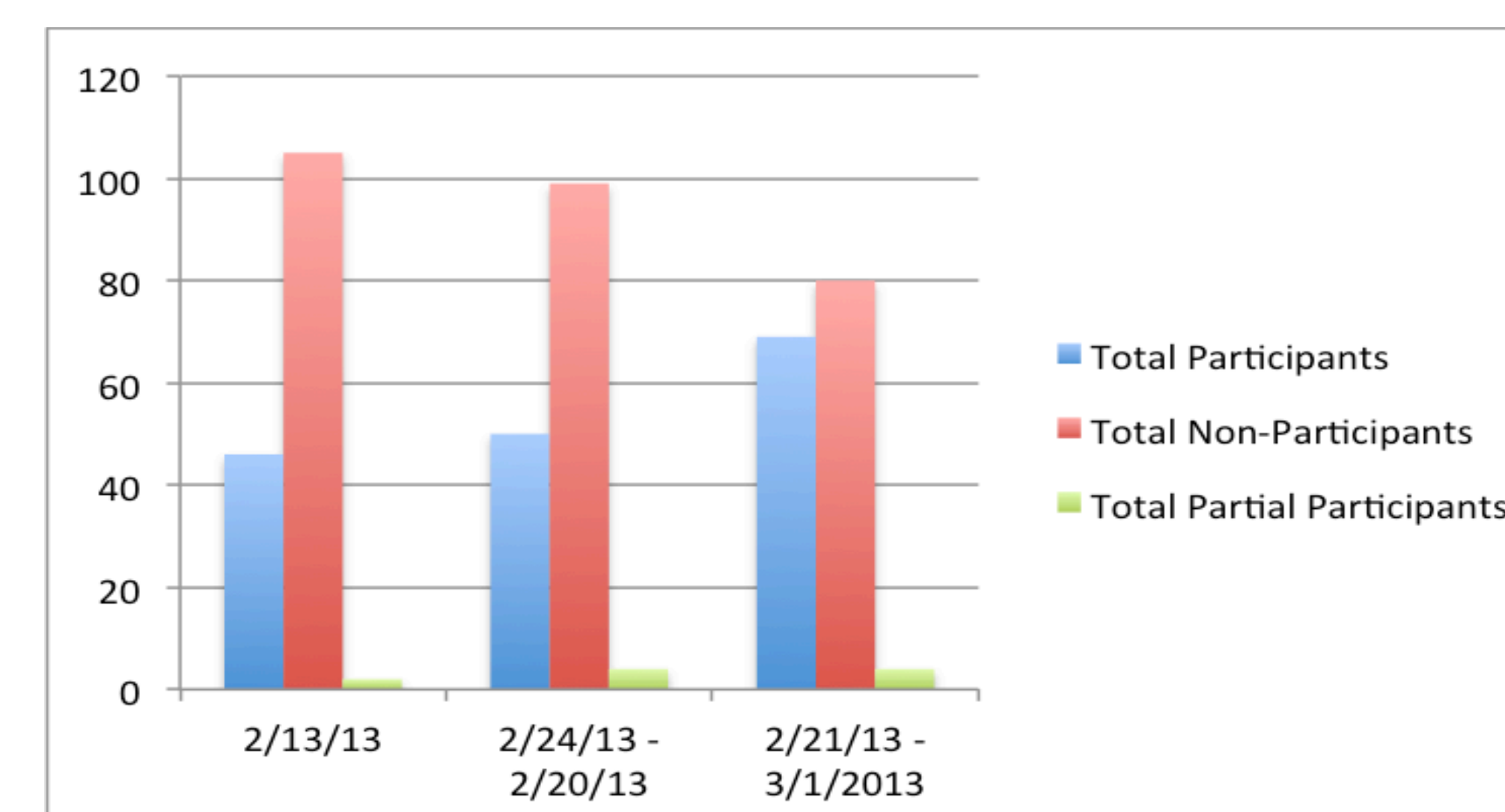
On November 16, 2012, the first AsPIRE cohort and the Director of the Office of Writing, Research, and New Media reviewed the survey and provided feedback on format and content.

The project received IRB approval on December 10, 2012.



On February 13, 2013, the remaining 153 associate professors received an electronic survey with questions on five areas: career trajectory, teaching and research, appreciation and recognition, support, and work-personal life balance.

42.5% associate professors completed the survey within the response time window from February 13, 2013 to March 1, 2013.

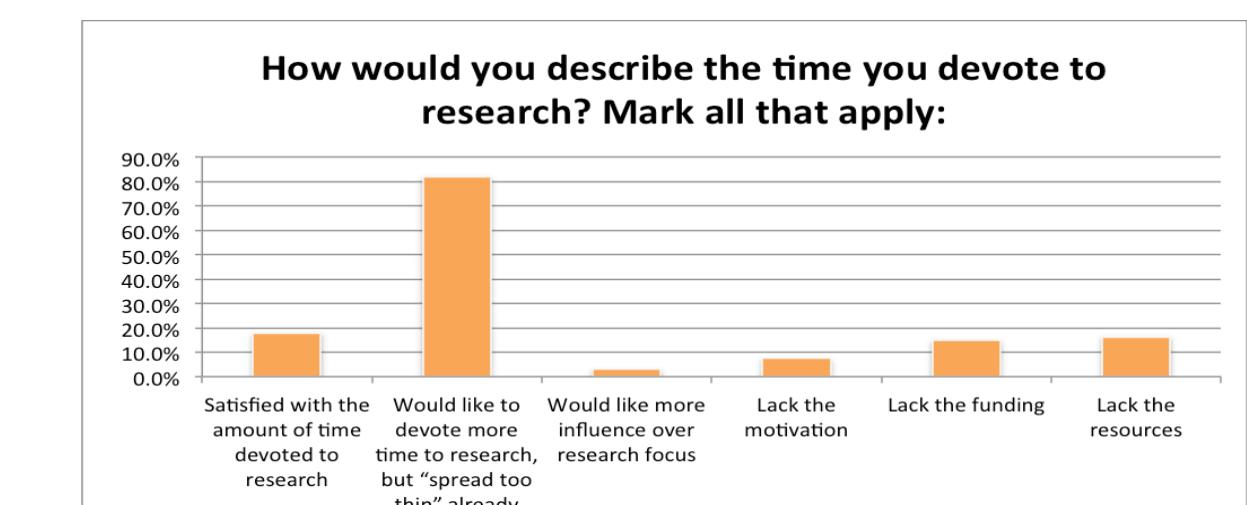


From March 1, 2013 to April 1, 2013 the responses were compared to the literature and analyzed for primary themes before considering suggestions for programming and administrative support.

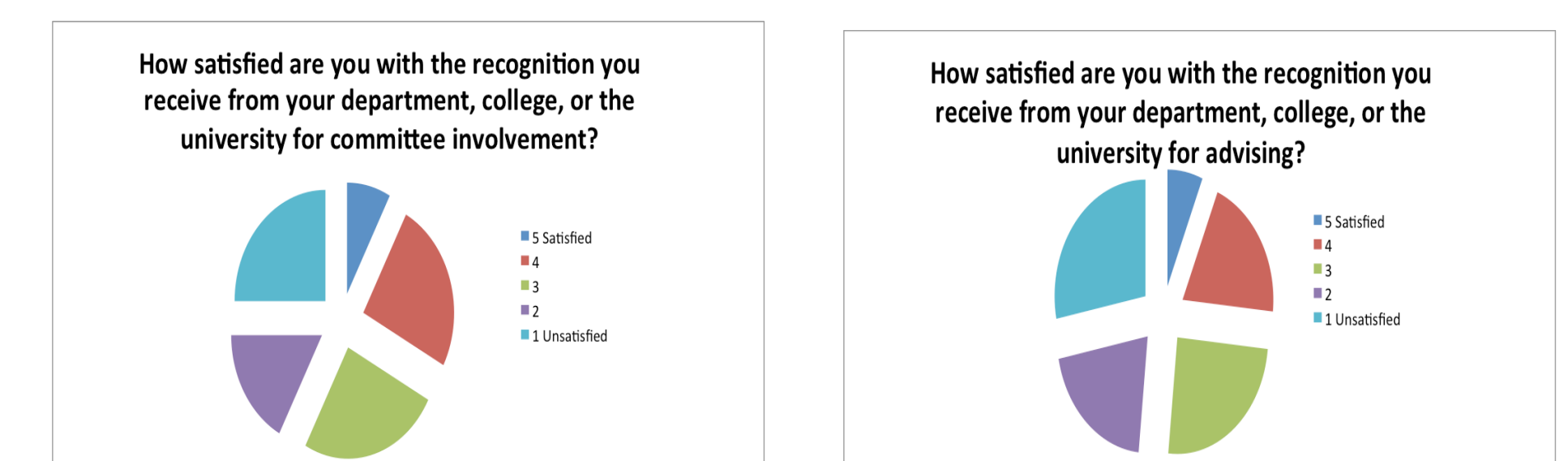
## RESULTS

The results show that the challenges of UD associate professors correlate with those of associate professors nationally in three areas:

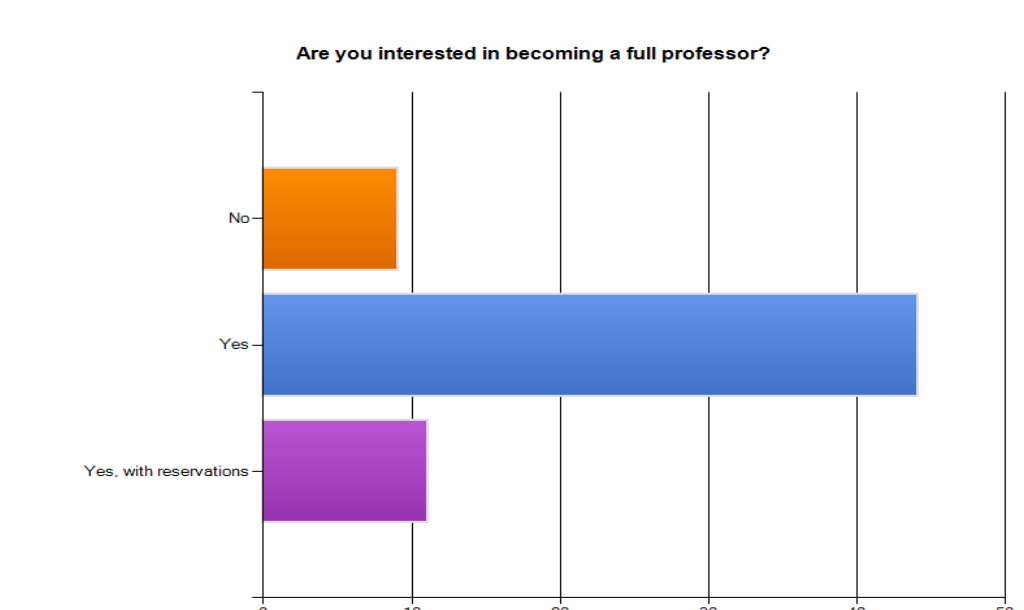
1. Meaningful research: the pressure for research increases while the time for research decreases



2. Service: heightened service responsibilities are unrecognized and conflict with research and teaching



3. Paths to Full: 68.8% of professors report that they are interested in becoming a full professor, and 17.2% report reservations, which range from “unclear process” to “shut down by chair.” 14.1% are not interested.



## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Unaddressed needs of UD associate professors create a chilly if not toxic climate; descriptions from these professors of UD range from “disingenuous” and “inconsistent” to “racist” and “hostile.”

Surprisingly, 42.4% report spending the least amount of time on spiritual well-being, and only three mentioned time for family as a concern.

For associate professors at UD to become engaged as **vital faculty**, the AsPIRE program should continue to refocus career trajectories while the administration considers the recommendations--monetary aid, course releases, formal mentors, helpful department chairs, student workers, and improved facilities--keeping in mind the reported dissatisfaction of these professors:

- “Are we then to be cast adrift, left to languish?” (Prof. 45)
- “The university doesn’t care about us” (Prof. 64)
- “A lack of valuation of human capital” (Prof. 69)
- “Hostile work environment” (Prof. 30)