SENIOR FACULTY VITALITY

Cathy Ann Trower
Research Director, Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education
Harvard Graduate School of Education
TIAA-CREF Institute Fellow

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Has there ever been a worse time for faculty and university administrators? Faculty and administrators alike are under siege on multiple fronts—huge budget cuts have been made in most states with more expected, collective bargaining has come under attack in some states, and an underlying threat to tenure permeates academe. A historian might simply attribute this to a poor economy and conclude that such conflicts, cyclical in nature, will pass. But it is far from clear that this storm will subside as others have. Higher education is at a critical juncture and many legislators, donors, trustees, and tuition-payers are fed up with academe's perceived excesses and excuses.

At the same time, pressures felt by presidents in responding to such attacks may trickle down to faculty in less than positive ways. Decisions must be made regarding institutional mission and markets, where to grow and what to prune. But such decisions are often made with little or no input from faculty who typically must *de facto* implement the decisions. This report examines the workplace satisfaction of senior faculty members (associate and full professors) at seven public research universities. One-quarter (27 percent) of senior faculty surveyed feel that the single most important thing colleges and universities can do to improve the workplace revolves around leadership stability and consistency of mission, focus, and priorities. Sixteen percent feel that increased salaries are most important and 14 percent would like more research support.

INTRODUCTION

A 2011 survey of college and university presidents, *Presidential Perspectives* (Green, Jaschik and Lederman 2011), highlighted many crucial issues confronting higher education. Presidents at public institutions reported that the "most important areas/challenges" facing their institutions were budget shortfalls (62 percent) and changes in state support (43 percent), while those at private colleges and universities cited rising tuition/affordability (42 percent) and increased competition for students (35 percent). When asked what strategies they would use to address the financial challenges facing their institution, absent political consequences, 36 percent of presidents would outsource various campus services, 36 percent would mandate the retirement of older faculty, 35 percent would alter tenure policies and 34 percent would increase teaching loads. "Any way you slice the numbers, a significant number of presidents would like to change policies that are highly valued by faculty members" (Lederman and Jaschik 2011). The report also stated that presidents "rely on senior administrators, followed by trustees, deans, and department heads – and only then faculty leaders" – as they confront such economic challenges. Academic historian John Thelin, author of *A History of American Higher Education* (JHU Press), comments that it's "sad" that presidents have this view of faculty and noted that while the provost was once "first among equals on the faculty," that is no longer the case; rather, "provosts and deans are lieutenants." With an entire layer of administrators between the president and faculty at large universities, it is no wonder that there is little contact and few opportunities to discuss critical issues facing the institution.

To this very current and sobering view from presidents, we can now add several unsettling headlines, such as:

- "State Budget Proposals Would Reduce Benefits for Future Retirees" (Quizon, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 27, 2011) about efforts in 20 states to cut public employees' benefits, including retiree health care.

- "U. of Louisiana Weakens Tenure Rights" (Jaschik, *Inside Higher Ed*, February 28, 2011) reporting that the board of the University of Louisiana System approved changes that make it easier and speedier to eliminate the jobs of tenured faculty members.

- "New Tactics to Kill Faculty Unions" (Jaschik, *Inside Higher Ed*, March 3, 2011) about barring unionization of faculty at public institutions in Ohio that have a faculty senate.

- "Defeat for Academic Labor" (Jaschik, *Inside Higher Ed*, March 10, 2011) about the approval by Wisconsin's senate of legislation that would end the right of University of Wisconsin System faculty to unionize.

- "Flagships Just Want to Be Alone" (Stripling, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 13, 2011) about efforts by the chancellor of the University of Wisconsin at Madison to separate the flagship campus from other state institutions, thereby removing many regulatory constraints (as is happening in Louisiana, Ohio, and Oregon).

- "A Heavier Load in Ohio" (Berrett, *Inside Higher Ed*, March 22, 2011) about Governor Kasich's plan to mandate that public university professors teach an additional course every two years.

Academic institutions and faculty are under fire from multiple directions as the federal government demands greater accountability, states cut budgets, tuition payers demand more for their money, granting agencies, including NIH and NSF, become more selective, trustees apply more pressure and scrutinize more closely, and presidents feel the heat.

COACHE BACKGROUND

The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE), based at Harvard University, is a research center and consortium of colleges, universities and state systems committed to making the academic workplace more attractive and equitable for faculty. COACHE measures, reports and provides policy and practice advice for improving the faculty workplace in order to help institutions recruit and retain top faculty talent.

COACHE was founded for several reasons, including:

- Lack of a common language regarding faculty workplace satisfaction and an instrument to measure it.
- Lack of comparisons of faculty satisfaction across institutions.
- A plethora of climate studies conducted with poorly conceived and worded instruments that had never been validated.

COACHE began by studying tenure-track assistant professors because numerous studies indicated that junior faculty members experience significant stress and dissatisfaction, yet the internal market to reform academic work-life had been weak and uneven. The thinking was that a constructive competition among top-tier institutions to earn a reputation as a great place to work would bring market forces to bear in the academy as similar surveys had done in law and business, particularly with respect to women and racial and ethnic minorities. Enlightened self-interest might lead institutions to modify rigid policies and practices and possibly introduce multiple career paths to provide greater flexibility for early career faculty; this would, in turn, help prevent further brain drain from the academy.

Current research discussed in this report focuses on senior faculty. Senior faculty play an important role in facilitating intellectual exchange and building collegiality within their respective departments and across institutions. Students rely on their breadth of knowledge and professional contacts; junior faculty members benefit from their mentoring and research and teaching collaborations; and senior administrators depend on their institutional memory, leadership and capacity to affect change. Senior faculty members are integral to the progress and success of higher education. Understanding senior faculty has never been more relevant given today's demographic shift among the ranks of faculty on college campuses. With no mandatory retirement age, increased life expectancy combined with guaranteed lifetime employment for tenured faculty results in speculation that many professors will work longer and delay retirement. Likewise, the recent economic downturn and overall market instability may cause a disproportionate number of senior faculty members to postpone retirement indefinitely, as they rebuild their retirement savings. Many predict that the 'graying and staying' of faculty on campus will have a profound impact on the ability of colleges and universities to attract top-notch students, maintain a relevant curriculum, recruit a diverse faculty and preserve a stable balance of faculty governance.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The project's overarching objective is to better understand the changing role of associate and full professors, i.e., senior faculty, at U.S. four-year colleges and universities in helping to ensure the progress and success of the academy. More specific objectives include:

- to assess satisfaction among senior faculty across institutions
- to identify policies and practices that produce satisfied employees and facilitate faculty engagement across the institution
- to identify the institutional characteristics and personnel practices associated with the highest faculty satisfaction levels.

FOCUS GROUP THEMES

Eight focus groups, two hours in duration, were hosted with 73 randomly selected, tenured associate and full professors at six public universities. Focus groups were conducted on campus by a professional moderator with a research team observing. The discussions were semi-structured and based on questions such as—

- What constitutes an engaged, vital senior faculty?
- What are the primary sources of your workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction?
- What single most important change could your university make to significantly improve your workplace satisfaction?

Faculty members were quite clear about what constitutes a "vital" senior member of the faculty on their campus— someone with many of the following attributes: strong reputation; high producer of scholarly or creative work; excellent teacher; overseer of student work; producer of grant funding; mentor of junior faculty; and who engages in service to the university and their discipline.

> *Vital professors typically are individuals who challenge students academically and contribute to their overall development. Usually they participate in the governance and intellectual life of their institution and are involved in the debates of their discipline and professional field. Vital professors are curious and intellectually engaged. They enjoy the respect of their colleagues and are effective in the multiple roles of members of the academic profession. Perhaps most significant, vital professors grow personally and professionally throughout their academic career, continually pursuing expanded interests and acquiring new skills and knowledge...Vital professors may be campus leaders, inspiring teachers, prolific scholars, excellent advisors, but they do not necessarily perform all faculty roles with equal zest or skills* (Baldwin 1990, p. 180).

Baldwin raised an important point in his discussion of vital professors, a point echoed in the focus groups—not everyone can perform all roles to the same high degree and very few want to. But this doesn't mean that faculty do not feel pressure to be "all things to all people" and with increasingly less institutional support to do so.

When tenured faculty were asked what most affects their level of workplace satisfaction, they talked at length about institutional leadership, including their confidence and trust in the president, chief academic officer, deans, and chairs. Senior faculty are seeking consistency of priorities over time and support when expectations change. Many, though certainly not all, wish to be included in shared governance and decision-making. They want a say in how they allocate their time; in fact, autonomy is a major attraction of academic careers. They want to feel valued and appreciated for their work. They desire clear performance expectations for promotion and merit pay. Ideally, they would like institutional support for interdisciplinary work, research and teaching, and they want work-life balance.

Other factors affecting satisfaction among senior faculty include: colleagues and collaboration; engagement in departmental activities; having good mentors; departmental climate; equitable distribution of work (e.g., teaching load, committee assignments); attractiveness of the work expected; an appropriate (and, ideally, rewarded) mix of research, teaching, and service. Resources, salary and benefits were also raised during the focus groups.

SURVEY FINDINGS—IMPROVING THE WORKPLACE

Focus group findings were used to construct a survey examining how senior faculty experience their academic workplace on factors of paramount importance. During the fall of 2010, COACHE conducted a pilot survey of over 1,700 associate and full professors with tenure at seven public research universities. The purpose of the pilot was to help those institutions understand their tenured faculty by measuring their satisfaction in several key areas: support for teaching, research and service; policies, salary and benefits; collaboration; leadership; mentoring; departmental engagement; appreciation and recognition. The pilot also served to test the survey's viability prior to national rollout in 2011.

An overarching open-ended question asked respondents, "What is the number one thing that you, personally, feel your institution could do to improve your workplace?" Table 1 shows number of responses for categories with 25 or more responses. While improving salaries was the most mentioned item, when the various categories related to leadership (senior, divisional and departmental) are combined, those numbers far outweigh the salary issue (457 v. 261).

TABLE 1
TOP CHANGE TO IMPROVE THE WORKPLACE FOR SENIOR FACULTY

	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
Increase salary	261
Provide stable senior leadership (President and Provost)	243
Improve support for research (e.g., course release, graduate students, sabbaticals, travel)	220
Improve support for work and working conditions (e.g., office, labs, classrooms, facilities, support staff, technology)	206
Improve teaching aspects (e.g., reduce course load, improve equity, reduce class size or hire more faculty)	125
Improve divisional leadership (e.g., better communication, transparency, consistency of messages, and greater autonomy)	119
More appreciation and recognition	110
Improve departmental leadership (e.g., chair who does not play favorites; chair who communicates effectively; desire for checks and balances to department chair authority; chair training; chair term limits)	95
Improve departmental quality (e.g., chair who provides helpful feedback and evaluations; chair who removes dead wood; hire and retain top talent)	86
Reduce service expectations	53
Improve departmental collegiality (e.g., bullying, infighting, cronyism, discrimination are issues; isolation, fragmentation also issues)	37
Improve personal and family support (e.g., work-life balance; eldercare; spousal hiring; personal leave time)	29
Improve clarity of promotion process	27
Improve diversity (especially gender and race)	27

INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP

No one is well-served when faculty members feel at sea concerning the direction of the institution and their role in it. While it could be argued that there will always be misunderstandings between faculty and administration and that missteps cannot be avoided entirely, most institutions can do a better job building bridges across the chasm. What do senior faculty want?

First of all, senior faculty desire stability in senior leadership and with that, consistency of purpose and expectations. With every change in president or provost comes changes in purpose, goals, and expectations for faculty work. Based on survey comments, this appears to matter greatly to senior, tenured faculty.

> *We need to stabilize the leadership of this University. We've had 11 presidents and interim presidents in 16 years. We get a president and – POOF – they're off to a more prestigious place. We get another interim, a search happens, someone is hired and the priorities shift again.*

> *Within the system, create an environment for a stable long-term president and provost so there is not constant administrative change which results in new initiatives, new goals, adjusted strategic plans, revised policies, and varying levels of control on budgets. More time is spent on adjusting and meeting the 'new' initiatives than on moving forward with some college/department autonomy to 'get things done.'*

Become more stable. We have had five department chairs, two deans, three provosts, and three different presidents in the last six years. Administrators come and encourage initiatives, but don't stay to see them through. Regular faculty must then try to manage what they have started.

Be clearer about expectations, procedures, and resources as our college is being dissolved and departments/ schools are being transitioned to new/other units.

Senior faculty also want senior leadership to seek and use input from both faculty and students. They take issue when faculty are not consulted by administration regarding factors that affect the workplace and their work, or when they are asked but their suggestions go unheeded.

Focus more on faculty and student needs. Rather than adopting college and university goals and forcing faculty and students to adjust to them (and re-adjust every time a new dean or provost comes in), why not try and determine what student and faculty needs are (by asking them) and adapting policies to that. This is a great institution, but it becomes less great as more and more mandates are handed down from on high.

The administration should abandon its 'top-down' philosophy and listen to the needs and concerns of faculty and students.

Actively seek input from faculty and staff on the current challenges and collaborate with these groups in the development of an action plan to address those challenges.

Stop ruling with such a heavy-handed, top-down mentality. The majority of faculty and staff love [this institution]. Simply treat us as adults and allow us to become valued team members who work in partnership with the administration to build the university.

When asked to rate different levels of leadership, senior faculty gave the highest marks to departmental leadership followed by senior and then divisional leadership. Full professors gave statistically significantly higher ratings to senior leadership than did associate professors. Associate professors gave higher ratings than full professors to departmental leadership, though not significantly so.

TABLE 2
LEADERSHIP RATINGS

	ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS	FULL PROFESSORS
Senior Leadership (Overall)	3.19	3.33*
My institution's president's pace of decision making	3.25	3.36*
My institution's president's stated priorities	3.26	3.40*
My institution's president's communication of priorities to faculty	3.29	3.42*
My institution's provost's pace of decision making	3.15	3.28*
My institution's provost's stated priorities	3.08	3.25*
My institution's provost's communication of priorities to faculty	3.12	3.25*
Division Leadership (Overall)	3.09	3.18
My dean or division head's pace of decision making	3.18	3.20
My dean or division head's stated priorities	3.09	3.18
My dean or division head's communication of priorities to faculty	3.12	3.16
My dean or division head's ensuring opportunities for faculty to have input into school/college priorities	2.97	3.19
Departmental Leadership (Overall)	3.56	3.46
My department head or chair's pace of decision making	3.57	3.47
My department head or chair's stated priorities	3.49	3.41
My department head or chair's communication of priorities to faculty	3.53	3.41
My department head or chair's ensuring opportunities for faculty to have input into departmental priorities	3.63	3.55

* Denotes a statistically significant difference between responses of associate professors and full professors.
Scale: 5 = Very satisfied; 4 = Satisfied; 3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 2 = Dissatisfied; 1 = Very dissatisfied

The survey also measured faculty views regarding consistency of mission and institutional priorities, as well as leadership support when missions shift (table 3). Senior faculty report a lack of consistency from senior leadership (president and provost) to deans to department chairs. Associate and full professors alike gave low marks to all levels of leadership when it comes to stating and acting upon priorities in a consistent fashion. This can create confusion and anxiety among faculty. Associate and full professors agree that institutional priorities have changed in ways that affect their work and they give lower marks to their deans than to their chairs in terms of receiving support for those shifting priorities.

TABLE 3
LEADERSHIP RATINGS ON MISSION AND PRIORITIES

	ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS	FULL PROFESSORS
My institution's priorities are stated consistently across all levels of leadership (i.e. president, provost, deans/division heads, and department chairs/heads).	2.80	2.94
My institution's priorities are acted upon consistently across all levels of leadership (i.e. president, provost, deans/division heads, and department chairs/heads).	2.63	2.71
In the past five years, my institution's priorities have changed in ways that affect my work.	4.04	3.98
In adapting to the changing mission, I have received support from my dean or division head.	2.89	2.98
In adapting to the changing mission, I have received support from my department head or chair.	3.41	3.25

Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree

JOB SUPPORT AND RESEARCH

The granting of tenure is, for all intents and purposes, a lifetime commitment on the part of the college or university. It is in an institution's best interest, therefore, to support faculty post-tenure so that they remain productive and vital. Support to do the faculty job means resources and attention devoted not only to research, teaching, interdisciplinary work, and mentoring, but also to overall working conditions and facilities.[1] With that said, greater support for research emerged as the number one change that would make for a better workplace according to senior faculty. It is apparent in faculty comments that the focus at these institutions has or is shifting from teaching to research, but in many cases without corresponding institutional support for such a change.

> *Provide sabbaticals on a regular basis, as a guaranteed aspect of employment, not on a competitive basis. Colleagues at other institutions get sabbaticals every 6-7 years; I've been here a long time and have never had one.*

> *Secure adequate resources to support and reward research productivity and contributions to the university. As it stands now resources, support, and university actions are inconsistent with the stated mission.*

> *As a Carnegie 1 Research University, we need to act like it. The administration needs to recognize that research is a passion for a lot of faculty, that this passion is to be respected and supported, and that creativity in research endeavors be encouraged. This includes all aspects of research from proposal formation to implementation to fiscal assistance. This place acts small, and so it is.*

> *There needs to be a greater match between what we say we are and what we actually are...we tend to say we're a research university, but this institution is not set up to maximize this aspect. Other institutions that are not even our peers have teaching load reduction options to encourage higher research quality. I'm not sure we can't do so well given our aspirations for more high quality publications and grants.*

> *Provide 1) substantial support for pilot research projects and bridge funding for successful investigators with a lapse in funding; 2) more library resources – databases and books; 3) more graduate assistants; and 4) sabbaticals for research faculty.*

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1   Support for interdisciplinary work and mentoring are covered in detail in a forthcoming TIAA-CREF Institute Research Dialogue,
     "Senior Faculty Satisfaction: Perceptions of Associate and Full Professors at Seven Public Universities."

If research at a Tier 1 level is expected, then the institution should provide resources (funds, graduate assistants, reassigned duties) so that faculty can accomplish their goals...in our department, we must stop trying to meet every demand for a new program.

The survey asked satisfaction levels with regards to nine research items (table 4). Associate professors are statistically significantly less satisfied than full professors regarding all but one research item (post-grant support), indicating room for improvement in the realm of support for faculty research.

TABLE 4
SATISFACTION WITH RESEARCH FACTORS

	ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS	FULL PROFESSORS
The influence you have over the focus of your research/scholarly/creative work	4.26*	4.41
The portion of your time spent on research	3.17*	3.60
Institutional support for traveling to present papers or conduct research	3.14*	3.32
The quality of graduate students to support your work	3.05*	3.21
The amount of external funding you're expected to fund	3.01*	3.21
Institutional support for securing graduate students assistance	2.87	3.04
Institutional support for obtaining externally funded grants (pre-award)	2.83*	3.04
Institutional support for managing externally funded grants (post-award)	2.75	2.85
Availability of course release time to focus on your research	2.47	2.80

* Denotes a statistically significant difference between responses of associate professors and full professors.
Scale: 5 = Very satisfied; 4 = Satisfied; 3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 2 = Dissatisfied; 1 = Very dissatisfied

TEACHING

The high expectations for excellence in research and teaching may be unrealistic as it is difficult to excel at both since time is finite and both require a lot of it. Therefore, a number of faculty wrote comments about changes in the teaching aspects of their work lives as being the most important the university could make. Those who did so felt that course release time is crucial (mentioned in the previous section regarding support for research), but so are smaller class size and hiring more faculty, as well as improving equity in the distribution of teaching load. Some courses require a lot more time than others but this isn't typically recognized in promotion decisions.

Clearly define and equitably execute a workload policy that includes both teaching and service.

We are expected to compete with research universities but our teaching load is ridiculous and worst of all, it is also inequitably distributed among departments. Unlike most research universities, we don't have sabbaticals. We are expected to be stellar teachers to hundreds of students, run programs and serve on college committees, publish only in the best journals, and bring in millions in grants; unfortunately, this is not realistic.

At the university level, everything is focused on growing enrollment, and it has grown rapidly...too fast, in fact. I think we're admitting too many disinterested students or those attracted by our football program rather than academic potential. All the priorities are toward getting students here and cashing their checks.

FACILITIES, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL

In terms of support beyond research and teaching, a number of faculty felt that the number one change to make a better workplace involved either facilities or support personnel.

Provide the clerical, administrative and technical support staff to do the ever-growing number of tasks that faculty must do in addition to their teaching and scholarship.

Have all the support services (research offices, budgeting, purchasing, etc.) revise their mission from serving the university to servicing the faculty. There are too many things that are set up to act as roadblocks and hindrances to research rather than facilitating it.

Many of the buildings on campus are old and need maintenance. Providing a nicer, more comfortable, more secure workplace would help a lot.

Provide financial support to upgrade our existing laboratory space.

Renovate the building to better address the pedagogical objectives of the curriculum.

RECOGNITION

A number of survey items about recognition reveal that faculty are most often recognized for scholarly work, followed by teaching, and outreach for associate professors and service for full professors, while they are least often recognized for student advising (table 5). Full professors report significantly greater satisfaction than associate professors with the recognition they receive on all dimensions. Full professors report the greatest satisfaction with recognition from their colleagues, while associate professors are most satisfied with recognition they receive from their department head or chair.

TABLE 5
SATISFACTION WITH RECOGNITION

	ASSOCIATE PROFESSORS	FULL PROFESSORS
How satisfied are you with the recognition you receive for your…?		
Teaching efforts	3.15	3.37*
Student advising	2.91	3.09*
Scholarly/creative work	3.20	3.46*
Service contributions (e.g., committee work)	2.93	3.17*
Outreach (e.g., extension, community engagement, technology transfer, economic development, K-12 education)	2.97	3.12*
How satisfied are you with the recognition you receive from your…?		
Provost or chief academic officer	2.71	2.96*
Dean or division head	2.94	3.15*
Department head or chair	3.48	3.52
Colleagues/peers	3.45	3.61*

* Denotes a statistically significant difference between responses of associate professors and full professors.
Scale: 5 = Very satisfied; 4 = Satisfied; 3 = Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 2 = Dissatisfied; 1 = Very dissatisfied

CONCLUSION

The vitality, productivity and satisfaction of senior faculty is extremely important to colleges and universities in fulfilling their missions and achieving their goals, whether that involves the quality of research and knowledge production, outreach in the community, teaching excellence, student learning outcomes, undergraduate student persistence, graduate student engagement and success, or any number of other measures. Key takeaways from the research discussed in this report include:

- Faculty care and feeding is required. It's easy to fall into thinking that once a faculty member has tenure, he or she doesn't need much more attention, but this is absolutely not true. Associate professors need mentors, support, and guidance to be promoted to full professor and full professors need support and encouragement to remain vital, productive and engaged.

- Staying vital, in part, means being able to strike a meaningful balance between one's work life and one's life outside of work. This is extremely important to physical and emotional health. Faculty careers are stressful because the pressure to perform is constant and the work itself is infinitely expandable. Academic institutions have a responsibility to their workforce to help foster mental and physical health and wellbeing.

- Leaders at all levels affect faculty morale, satisfaction and performance. Effective leaders engage the faculty in meaningful conversations about institutional mission, direction, strategies and priorities, as well as help them understand the external and internal pressures the university faces.

- Open communication between constituents should be encouraged. This includes the administration, faculty, the governing board, parents, students, alumni and, occasionally, legislators. The more the various players use a common language and are striving toward the same goals, the better off all will be.

- If changes to mission and priorities must occur, the administration and faculty should together think through the ramifications for the workforce and workplace. Transparency is essential to success. The same is true of accountability. The better faculty understand their role in the institution's success – however that is defined – the greater the likelihood of accountability in all directions.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cathy A. Trower is Senior Research Associate and Research Director, The Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE). Trower has a well-established national reputation as an expert on faculty work/life issues, including faculty diversity and generational issues, faculty in STEM disciplines and health professions, interdisciplinary work, and general trends in faculty employment. She is currently heading up the COACHE Research Institute for scholars interested in using COACHE's robust faculty satisfaction database in their research. Trower has published numerous articles and several book chapters about faculty work life, and edited a book entitled *Policies on Faculty Appointment: Standard Practice and Unusual Arrangements* (2000). Prior to coming to Harvard, she was a senior-level administrator of business degree programs and an adjunct faculty member at Johns Hopkins University. Trower has a B.B.A. and an M.B.A. from the University of Iowa and earned her doctorate in Higher Education Administration from the University of Maryland, College Park, in 1996,