

Under the direction of the University of Kentucky College of Medicine Faculty Council – and with assistance of the College’s Student Assessment and Program Evaluation division - an exit survey was developed in 2001-2002 to better understand the retention of basic science and clinical faculty. Responding to faculty turnover which, at the time, was perceived to be excessive and (to some degree) preventable, the process was undertaken independently and largely without the blessing or involvement of upper-level College administration – and was intended to elicit unbiased, objective data from departing faculty.

In addition to demographic information (including faculty rank, tenure, research productivity, etc.), the questionnaire consisted of 60 Likert-type attitudinal items dealing with respondents’ assessments of: (1) professional relationships; (2) professional status; (3) professional advancement; (4) compensation; (5) institutional governance; (6) department governance; (7) unit/division governance (clinical faculty only); (8) clinical resources and activities (clinical faculty only); (9) teaching activities; (10) service to College and community; (11) research activities; and (12) infrastructure issues. Circumstances surrounding individuals’ departures were also examined in detail, including: (1) reasons for leaving; (2) future plans; (3) strategies to prevent turnover; and (4) the influence of various issues in faculty members’ decisions to leave the university (e.g., family, gender, racial, etc.).

Initially designed as a “paper-and-pencil,” interviewer-administered instrument, the confidential questionnaire was subsequently adapted for electronic use – whereby it could be accessed, completed, and submitted remotely. This option arose after gaining timely access to departing faculty became increasingly problematic – with exiting faculty identified only after they had physically left the university. Even in this format, however, many faculty interviewers (usually members of Faculty Council) continued to prefer administering the questionnaire in person, whenever possible.

Information from approximately 68 exiting faculty were collected between the years of 2001-2004. Summary results were periodically presented to Faculty Council – and have been used in at least one instance in a required six-year departmental review. As a platform for gauging faculty satisfaction and motivations for leaving, this survey great potential to be further modified to focus on specific recruitment and retention issues relative to women faculty and staff.