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### **97 Colleges Are Recognized as Great Colleges to Work For in Chronicle Survey**

*By Josh Fischman*

The results of *The Chronicle of Higher Education's* third annual Great Colleges to Work For survey, published [today](#), capture some of America's most valued institutions at some of their most challenging moments. About 43,000 people at 275 campuses responded to the survey. It found that colleges continue to do well at creating work that makes a difference, providing jobs that fit the individual, and fostering a high degree of institutional pride. But now colleges are accomplishing those things in an economy that has been in a long slump, and tight budgets seem to be eroding confidence in college leadership, the survey found.

The 97 colleges whose employee ratings and institutional policies won them recognition as great places to work this year appear to know that. "With the economy going through difficulty and concerns about enrollment, our senior leadership was really upfront about communicating the consequences and the plans that were being considered," said Jeffrey Knapp, assistant vice president for human resources at the College of Saint Rose, in New York, one of the top-rated institutions.

Indeed, communication seems to be a major factor that distinguishes colleges on the Great Colleges to Work For Honor Roll, those that are rated as excellent across several categories of the workplace. The percentage of employees who agreed with the statement "Senior leadership communicates openly about important matters" was about 67 percent at large Honor Roll institutions and 77 percent at small ones; the comparable figures for all other colleges were about 54 percent and 56 percent.

This year's survey is *The Chronicle's* biggest yet. The 275 colleges that participated reflects an increase from the 89 that did in our first survey, in 2008. Four-year colleges and universities accounted for 221 of the institutions, and two-year colleges for 54. For the survey, faculty and staff members, and administrators were given 60 statements and asked to respond to them using a five-point scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." They were also asked to rate their satisfaction with 18 workplace benefits.

Their answers help form 12 Great College recognition categories, such as collaborative governance, and compensation and benefits. High ratings in those categories are regarded as the core attributes of a great academic workplace.

Colleges were placed in one of three size groups—small, medium, or large—based on overall student enrollment. Recognition in each Great College category was given to the 10 highest-scoring institutions in each size group for four-year colleges, and to the three highest-scoring institutions in each of those size groups for two-year colleges. (We don't rank the institutions but list them alphabetically. Read an explanation of our methodology [here](#).)

Campuses as diverse as Duke University, the State University of New York at Buffalo, and Valley Forge Christian College were recognized in at least one category.

The 30 four-year and nine two-year colleges on the Honor Roll were cited in the most categories in their size divisions.

Approximately 20,000 of the college employees who responded to the survey were faculty members, more than 14,800 were professional staff members, and 8,100 were administrators. (The survey was sent to more than 100,000 people.) It was administered by ModernThink LLC, a human-resources-consulting firm in Wilmington, Del. The survey instrument is based on an assessment that has been used in 55 Best Places to Work programs involving more than 4,000 organizations. A panel of higher-education experts helped customize the survey to reflect issues unique to colleges.

Over all, the survey results indicate that people like very much to work in higher education. Some of the highest-scoring statements in the entire survey were items such as "I have a good relationship with my supervisor/department chair," "I am given the responsibility and freedom to do my job," and "I am proud to be part of this institution."

The benefits of working at a college were also praised by survey participants. Five items—vacation time, retirement plans, medical insurance, tuition reimbursement for employees, and life insurance—were all rated highly by respondents.

Kathryn Neff, human-resources director at Mineral Area College, which was recognized in four workplace categories including work/life balance, said that "all of our supervisors are flexible with folks that are trying to schedule vacation time. You just don't hear folks say I'm struggling to get my vacation approved."

Darin Jones, human-resource director at Westminster College, in Utah, which was recognized in the category of compensation and

benefits, says his institution is aware of how much employees value those features. "Over the past couple of years, Westminster has remained committed to providing excellent benefits and pay increases to our faculty and staff," he said. "Especially in these challenging economic times, when many schools are cutting budgets and enacting furloughs," maintaining benefits becomes extremely important, he said.

#### Waning Trust in Leadership

Indeed, at many colleges, the lingering effects of the recession have forced budget cuts that continue to affect employees. Salaries have been trimmed, people have been laid off or told to take unpaid furloughs, and hiring has been frozen at many colleges and universities.

All of this has contributed to an atmosphere of some uncertainty. In the survey, one key statement was "Senior leadership shows a genuine interest in the well-being of faculty, administration, and staff." The percentage of positive responses to that statement in 2010 was lower than in 2009, dropping to 63 percent from nearly 67 percent.

For administrators, the drop was to 72 percent from about 75 percent. For faculty members, positive responses dropped to 59 percent from 62 percent, and for staff members, they dropped to 63 percent from 67 percent.

Other statements, having to do with maintaining a work/life balance, received some of the lowest average scores in the survey, perhaps indicating the stress of increased workloads, said Richard K. Boyer, a principal and managing partner of ModernThink.

However, the generally positive responses about job satisfaction and pride in the workplace indicate that many colleges are continuing to find ways to make employees happy, said Mr. Boyer, even if they can't offer large raises. Positive responses to statements about job satisfaction, he noted, were above 88 percent, in any age category or by gender. "Sometimes programs focusing on career growth can show that the institution is strongly committed to employee welfare," he said.

Widener University was one of the colleges recognized for the professional and career-development category. Stephen W. Thorpe, the university's director of institutional research, said those programs are a way for Widener to attract and retain the most talented people, a top university goal. "Part of our strategic plan is to be an employer of first choice," he said.

*Ilana Kowarski contributed to this article.*

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