

## **Lamont Campus Life and Work Environment Survey 2015**

### **Summary**

The 2015 Lamont Campus Life and Work Environment Survey is aimed at getting a sense of the Lamont community's overall satisfaction with their work environment, especially those aspects pertaining to campus climate and campus life. In addition to topics like work environment, working conditions, facilities and conveniences, as a follow up to the 2005 NSF-ADVANCE survey we also included questions on diversity and inclusion. The survey did not include questions pertaining to benefits such as health insurance, tuition and retirement since these are Columbia-wide and not controlled by Lamont. This survey was developed after incorporating feedback from the Center for Education Research & Evaluation (CERE) at the Columbia University Medical Campus. The survey was administered jointly by the Campus Life Committee and the Office of Academic Affairs & Diversity, and was distributed to the Lamont community after receiving permission from the Directors of the various units on campus (LDEO, IRI, CIESIN, DEES, AFSC).

Approximately 600 individuals were invited to participate in the survey. This number included people based on the Lamont Campus as well as several visiting and adjunct scientists<sup>1</sup> who are not based on the Lamont Campus. The results revealed that of the 365 survey respondents, almost 95% were based full-time at Lamont. Given that there are approximately 500 full-time members on this campus, this translates into a response rate of almost 70% for this survey.

All responses were recorded anonymously and email addresses were automatically de-linked from individual responses in order to protect privacy. The survey software used was Qualtrics. In order to protect anonymity, responses were first aggregated by question (rather than by respondent) and then the aggregated responses were filtered by specific

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<sup>1</sup> Given the varying nature and roles of visiting and adjunct positions, divisions were asked which of their adjuncts and visiting scientists should be included in the survey; accordingly survey invitations were sent.

attributes such as primary occupation, gender, primary unit, age, race/ethnicity, education level, and so on.

### **Overall demographic composition**

The overall demographic composition of the survey respondents were as follows: 51% female and 48% male (1% of respondents identified as other); 70% Caucasian/White, 9.5% Asian, 4.75% Hispanic/Latino, 0.9% African American/ Black, and 0.9% two or more races (13% of the respondents preferred not to disclose their race). In terms of age, approximately 39% of the respondents identified with the 31-50 age group, while 27% and 24% of respondents identified with the Above 50 and Below 30 age groups respectively (around 10% of respondents declined to disclose their age group).

“Research” was listed as the primary occupation of approximately 44% of the respondents. Other primary occupations listed were: student (14.52%); administration (13.42%); research support (13.42%); information technology (4.93%); teaching (1.64%); marine operations (1.1%); building & grounds (0.82%); and other (4.66%). The gender distribution for primary occupation was as follows:

Administration: 89% female, 9% male

Building & Grounds/ Facilities\*: 67% male, 33% female

Information technology: 88% male, 12% female

Marine Operations\*: 75% male, 25% female

Research: 59% male, 40% female

Research support: 56% female, 43% male

Student: 57% female, 43% male

Teaching\*\*: 83% male, 17% female

*\* denotes less than 5 respondents*

*\*\* denotes less than 10 respondents*

The responses for primary position at Lamont were somewhat different than for primary occupation, possibly because not all respondents are Officers. These categories were:

Officers of Administration (72% female, 28% male); Officers of Instruction (82% male, 18% female); Postdoctoral Research Scientist/Fellow (54% male, 46% female); Professional Officers of Research, i.e., LRP and RS (58% male, 42% female); Staff Officers of Research, i.e., Staff Associates (49% male, 47% female); Student (57% female, 43% male); and Support Staff (59% female, 41% male).

### **Work environment**

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (84%) reported that they were overall satisfied with their job (similar percentages for males and females), and 81% of respondents said they felt respected by their colleagues (86% male, 77% female). This number fell to about 68% when asked whether they believed that their unit had a co-operative and supportive work environment (74% male, 65% female). Also, more women than men reported feeling isolated and/or excluded from informal networks within their unit (21% female compared to 12% male). Roughly equal percentages of men and women reported that personal responsibilities slowed down their career advancement. Approximately 86% of males felt that their supervisor evaluated their work fairly compared to 80% for females; these were also the percentages of males vs. females who disagreed with the statement that others made negative or condescending comments about their competence. Around 77% of males felt that their work helped them achieve their career goals compared to 71% for females. There was no appreciable difference in responses when filtered by race.

Approximately 82% of respondents indicated that they had heavy workloads, i.e. multiple deadlines and the need to juggle projects – these percentages were similar for both male and female respondents. Around 35% of respondents said that they did a great deal of work not formally recognized by their unit – this percentage was highest among the support staff. Around 45% of respondents in administration said they had witnessed unprofessional behavior and/or interpersonal conflicts, compared to 36% for the scientific staff and 33% for all respondents taken together.

## **Workspace conditions**

With respect to workspace conditions the results were mixed. While 82% felt that they had enough workspace to suit their needs (office and lab), only around 68% felt that they had enough privacy when needed – when broken down by gender 79% of male respondents felt that they had enough privacy, compared to 64% of female respondents. For the other questions on workspace conditions both male and female respondents gave similar/comparable responses. However, these responses varied by unit, with CIESIN respondents most concerned about drinking water, and IRI respondents expressing dissatisfaction about the temperature control and lighting in their offices as well as privacy. These can likely be attributed to the physical limitations of the buildings in which these units are located (Geosciences and Monell respectively).

## **Diversity**

With respect to diversity, a majority of the respondents, both male and female, disagreed with the statement “there are few or no women at my rank in my unit” (69% of male respondents and 75% of female respondents). When filtered by primary position, these figures were 75% for respondents who stated that their primary position was in administration, compared to 64% for those who stated that their primary position was a scientific one. In other words, more scientists than administrators and more men than women indicated that there were few or no women at their rank in their unit. This can be explained by the fact that when looking at both primary position and gender, we find that 88% of the respondents from administration were female, compared to 38% female from the scientific staff. When asked about women in leadership positions, approximately 65% of respondents disagreed with the statement that there were few or no women in leadership positions in their unit. Again, this disagreement was stronger in administration (76% of respondents) compared to scientific staff (69%).

In contrast, a majority of respondents (60%) agreed with the statement “there are few or no people of color at my rank in my unit”. Both males and females gave comparable

responses, as did scientists, administrators, students and scientific staff. Both males and females also felt that their unit made an effort to promote an inclusive environment (64%) though that figure was lower for female respondents (62%) compared to male respondents (68%). A majority of respondents (77%) said that their unit had people from diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds, and that their unit had people from diverse nationalities/ national origin (85%).

An overwhelming majority (94%) of the respondents said that they had never heard disparaging comments based on race/ethnicity; however, this needs to be factored in with the fact that around 70% of the respondents identified as Caucasian/White. An overwhelming majority of the respondents also said that they had never heard disparaging comments about gender (82%), sexual orientation (96%), physical appearance (88%), disability (98%), age (81%), cultural differences (85%), family responsibilities (81%) or nationality/ national origin (88%).

Given their small number, filtering for minority responses wasn't possible for some questions because of the risk of identifying the individual(s). However, in terms of the bigger picture, many of the responses of minorities were similar to those of Whites, with approximately 85% indicating that they were overall satisfied with their job and 81% saying they felt respected by their colleagues. For questions specifically pertaining to diversity, both minorities and Whites gave similar responses to the questions about the number of women and minorities in their units, and in leadership positions. Around 58% of minority respondents felt that their unit made an effort to promote an inclusive environment, compared to 68% of White respondents (70% for White males). For questions on whether their unit had people from diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds, and diverse nationalities/ national origin, both minority and White respondents gave similar responses.

## **Challenges for work-life balance**

In response to the question about any challenges faced in achieving a satisfactory work-life balance 68% of respondents listed their workload as the biggest challenge. Around 28% of total respondents listed child-care as a challenge (55% female respondents and 44% male respondents). The commute was also another significant challenge (46% of all respondents). For the question on the ease of taking vacation time, 46% of respondents said it depended on the timing of projects, classes, deadlines, etc.

## **Open-ended questions**

In addition to multiple-choice questions, many of which allowed for text entries/comments, the survey also allowed for open-ended responses. These were grouped into two categories: positive aspects of working at Lamont; and negative aspects/concerns about working at Lamont.

### ***Positive aspects of working at Lamont (250 comments totaling 4,109 words)***

Respondents mentioned that overall Lamont is a very pleasant place to work. Common themes included:

#### ***Physical campus setting***

Respondents spoke about the beauty of the campus and its physical environment, saying it was also one of the reasons they enjoyed coming to work; that it felt like working in a nature park; that it was great to be in a forested environment; that the campus itself was very beautiful, especially in the fall; and that overall it had a very calm and peaceful feel to it. Respondents also mentioned that they regularly go for walks/ hikes in and around campus, and enjoy/appreciate the beautiful scenery. Comments also indicated that people especially appreciated being able to work on a campus like Lamont while living in New York City.

### *Dynamic and collaborative environment*

Respondents mentioned the dynamic and collaborative environment at Lamont, the intellectual stimulation when working with colleagues here, and the strong sense of community that the campus fosters. Comments also included flexible work hours, meeting interesting people, traveling around the world, camaraderie between colleagues, a mix of professional environment with a laidback feel, the freedom to create and work on new ideas, diversity of people and ideas, access to day care, and the overall satisfaction of being at Lamont.

### *Negative aspects of working at Lamont*

Comments were sorted into the following categories: *Campus Facilities; Work Climate; Lab/Office Spaces; Administration; Management/ Leadership; Workplace Harassment; Student Concerns; Diversity; and Campus Social Life.*

#### *Campus Facilities (169 comments, 4851 words)*

The shuttle bus and the physical state of the campus grounds formed the single largest complaint under “Campus Facilities” and in this entire survey. Overcrowding on the shuttle, standing during the commute, lack of extra service to compensate for additional riders, the poor conditions of the roads and infrastructure were common points of concern raised by respondents. Concerns were expressed that these have become the new normal and not one-off incidents. Respondents indicated that they were “embarrassed” by the condition of the campus in front of colleagues from other institutions. (Note: the survey was conducted before the roads and potholes were partially repaired in Dec 2015.) Other comments included poor street lighting – a potential hazard after dark, and lack of access to food after 3 p.m.

*Work Climate (138 comments, 4189 words)*

Under “Work Climate”, the next largest area of concern after campus facilities, the main issues raised were: funding / job insecurity leading to stress, angst and pressure; lack of a career path for Staff Associates and Officers of Administration; disparity in pay and benefits between different groups; and difficulty in obtaining transparent and consistent information concerning institutional policies. Also, there was a perceived lack of respect between i) supervisors vs. staff; ii) PIs vs. administrators; iii) advisors vs. students; with perceptions of being disrespected occurring for members of each of the above groups. Concerns were also voiced about inadequate coordination between LDEO and DEES with respect to decisions made by either body that impacted the other (e.g. hiring, financial). Several comments mentioned being in a state of constant stress because of uncertain funding and job insecurity.

*Lab and Office Spaces (57 comments, 1417 words)*

Under “Lab and Office Spaces” several concerns were voiced about space limitations, and the less than ideal conditions that people face in this context. Examples included: no proper office; cramped and windowless office; poor air-conditioning; poor lighting; no climate control therefore extreme temperatures; lack of storage space in shared offices; and no natural light. In addition to the physical discomfort of these situations, these also led to feelings of isolation and not being a part of the divisional social activities because of the remote and/or inconvenient location of the office, or not having an office at all. Comments also included concern about the lack of privacy – these being mostly from people with offices in the Monell building.

*Administration (51 comments, 1579 words)*

Under “Administration” concerns were expressed at the increasing level of bureaucracy (which represented an increased workload for administration and a time sink for scientists); travel reimbursement policies; and perceived aggressive behavior and divide

of sorts between scientists on the one hand and administration on the other, with each side perceiving the other as being aggressive. In addition, the ARC system was widely criticized, as was the CU-wide bureaucracy and the perception of poor communications regarding procedures and policies. Specific issues raised were the lack of support for international travel; difficulty of making arrangements for visitors; slow process of hiring summer employees; rehiring processes and gaps in employment; and the difficulty in getting clear information from HR about career advancement options at Lamont.

*Management/Leadership (30 comments, 1169 words)*

Under “Management/ Leadership”, comments included a perceived lack of leadership in terms of financial management and a strategic view for Lamont. Concerns were also raised about the lack of a properly functioning Development Office. Concerns were expressed at the expansion of the Directorate with high-salary hires, while there is little or no funding for basic services and employee support. Concerns were also raised about the decline of public / federal funding, and in this context the lack of transparency in discretionary research funds, special deals, and targeted LARP hires. Lack of communication from the leadership was another concern.

*Workplace Harassment (26 comments, 1665 words)*

Under “Workplace Harassment” several concerns were voiced about the fact that a professor accused of sexual harassment is still around on campus – sending a negative message to women and students. Concerns were also expressed that there was a lack of discussion about the incident, and the perception that it was suppressed, and people were not given the opportunity to air their frustrations or know more about what the institution is doing to prevent recurrences of such incidents. Some comments also mentioned subtle gender bias, and women being excluded from certain important discussions unless they are “senior and powerful” women.

*Student Concerns (21 comments, 1015 words)*

Under “Student Concerns” some of the concerns raised were: students’ office environment; students not sure whether they belong to DEES or Lamont; difficulties with advisors; feeling that they don’t have a safe space in their department to voice their concerns; and the lack of a social space such as a coffee shop where students can spend time. In addition, concerns were raised about feeling like students were kept in the dark and didn’t always know what was going on at Lamont and/or DEES. There were also some concerns that students didn’t have the best protection or recourse in bad situations with a professor or advisor.

*Diversity (14 comments, 557 words)*

Under “Diversity” there were concerns about the lack of racial/ethnic diversity among the scientific staff and higher-ranking positions within Lamont, and also about the lack of gender diversity at the leadership level at Lamont. Comments acknowledged that compared to past decades, there are significantly more women on campus now, but that this was not the same for racial minorities, especially under represented minorities. A comment mentioned the special status given to Christian holidays – these being observed as vacation days by the University, compared to people of other faiths who would need to take a day off for any religious observance.

*Campus Social Life (10 comments, 458 words)*

Under “Campus Social Life” concerns were voiced about not enough interaction between the different units/individuals at Lamont. Suggestions included: a semi-annual get together of multiple departments; Lamont-wide lunch events; Lamont-wide coffee hour\*; more sports facilities such as a gym or a swimming pool; and any other activities that promote a relaxed environment. A concern was raised that it can sometimes take months for people to acknowledge new faces at department/division functions, and that people should be encouraged to be friendly towards new faces. A concern was also raised that

the priority given to DEES faculty and Lamont Research Professors for faculty housing caused a two-tiered system, enlarging the gulf between those who live in the city and those who don't. Also, given the shuttle hours, it is not always possible to have social events at the end of the day as people need to leave by a certain time.

*\*A Lamont-wide coffee hour was instituted by the Campus Life Committee, every Monday at 3:00 p.m. in the cafeteria. The goal was to promote greater social interaction at Lamont. This was also widely advertised. However, given the poor attendance, the initiative was scrapped.*

## **Outliers**

There were three comments that did not reflect any of the ~1,000 comments received in this survey; however, we have included them for completeness. One comment said the Campus Life Committee had not met in nine months, did not accomplish very much, did not send out meeting minutes, and required a new leader. This is factually incorrect since the committee meets every month, and sends out minutes after every meeting, as can be confirmed by various units on campus. Also, in addition to this campus-wide survey – an undertaking that requires enormous amounts of time and effort – this committee has carried out a wide range of activities, e.g., fun-run; vending machine in the cafeteria; shuttle bus issues; campus sports; and Lamont coffee-hour. It is possible that the individual who made the comment belongs to a unit for which the CLC representative did not disseminate the meeting minutes. A second outlier comment questioned the need for an Assistant Director for Academic Affairs & Diversity because anyone “not supporting the scientific mission of Lamont slows down and may even prevent people from doing science”. A third outlier comment said that there was “over the top intimidation of males for perceived gender/ Title IX issues”. It is possible that the same individual made all three outlier comments, but we are unable to ascertain this given that survey responses were aggregated by question rather than by respondent, in order to protect anonymity. The Campus Life Committee does not endorse these views, but respects the right of the individual to express them.

## **Recommendations**

Among the complaints that respondents expressed, some of them – such as the uncertainty in the soft-money funding environment – are beyond the scope of the Lamont leadership. However, some other issues are within the control of the Lamont leadership. Based on the survey responses, the following recommendations are appropriate:

*Shuttle bus:* The shuttle bus was the single largest complaint among survey respondents, and among these complaints overcrowding was at the top of the list. There have been times when there were approximately 75 riders in the bus – this is both dangerous and illegal. Fridays are especially crowded due to the large number of people at Lamont that day. Accordingly we recommend having an 8:30 A.M. shuttle bus on Fridays year round, including the summer.

*Administration vs. scientists:* There seems to be a fraying relationship between the administration and the scientific staff, with each side stating that the other has been unprofessional and hostile towards the other. Both administration and scientists are an integral part of Lamont, and it is in everyone's best interest to have these two groups work well together. A suggestion to address this is to have meetings where each can explain their views and try to understand the other.

*Students as part of LDEO:* One commonly expressed complaint from students was that they were not perceived as a part of LDEO and were instead perceived as DEES, even though they viewed themselves as a part of LDEO and were in research groups headed by Lamont Research Professors. Some students also mentioned this in the context of wanting to use LDEO channels for certain issues, but having to use DEES channels instead. Since students officially fall under the jurisdiction of the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, a suggestion is to have a meeting between DEES students and the administration where students can voice their concerns and needs.

*Reporting harassment:* Some respondents mentioned that they did not know how to report harassment, or that even if they did, they feared retaliation. A suggestion would be to ask the CU Title IX Officer to come up to Lamont at regular intervals (perhaps twice a year) to talk about these issues as well as their legal ramifications.

## **Concluding Comments**

Overall, the survey results show that the members of the Lamont community are satisfied at Lamont. An overwhelming majority (84%) of respondents said that they were overall satisfied with their job, with only 6% of respondents saying that they were not satisfied with their job (the remaining 10% of respondents were neutral). A recurring theme across all cohorts, ranks and titles was that Lamont is a great place to work and offers a dynamic, collaborative and supportive work environment. There is far greater consensus among respondents on the positive aspects of working at Lamont (250 comments reflecting similar sentiments) compared to the negative aspects (ranging from 10 to 169 comments on a wide range of topics). There is still work to be done, and the immediate next steps would be for the Lamont leadership to take note of the recommendations offered in the previous section.

To our knowledge, Lamont is so far the only campus at Columbia to have completed a campus-wide survey addressing issues of campus life and work environment, in part made possible by the relatively small size (~600) and centralized leadership. That this survey included all groups on the Lamont Campus allowed us to gain insights into the thinking and perspectives of all our community members, and not just certain groups such as faculty and scientists. The Lamont leadership could consider sharing an edited version of the survey results with members of the Columbia administration at Morningside. Efforts such as this that offer people the opportunity to express their thoughts and perceptions about their workplace contribute to a greater sense of inclusion and belonging, which helps to improve the quality of the work environment for all.

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