PART TWO: STAFF RESOURCES

By Sonia Scherr | Phoenix

BEARING THE BURDEN
Although they often work "behind-the-scenes," the contributions of Swarthmore staff enable the college to function. This week's article is the second in a two-part series that provides an in-depth look at key aspects of the staff experience.

More than a year after a long range planning committee completed the first ever major study of staffing issues, many staff continue to have concerns regarding wages, training, and education, opportunities for advancement, and staff influence in college governance.

Out of a workforce of more than 500 staff, fifteen were interviewed for this article, of whom all but two also remained part-time employees. The staff interviewed worked in Environmental Services, McCabe Library, Physical Plant, and various administrative positions. Their top concerns were compensation, training, and education. Many staff also felt that their concerns were not always taken seriously enough by the college. These findings were consistent with the results of a 1998 Study and Planning Committee (SAP) survey, which reported that 37 percent of the staff workforce. Nevertheless, staff also emphasized the positive aspects of their work experience, such as job security and a pleasant work environment.

This week's article the second in a two-part series that examines the staff's concerns, the college's trainings and educational opportunities, the grievance policy, human resource policies, and staff influence in college governance. Last week's article provided a historical perspective on staffing issues and focused on staff wages.

Training and Education

Training and educational opportunities ranked only slightly behind wages as one of the top concerns among staff, though the college has recently made efforts to increase its support in these areas.

Several employees lamented the lack of training in many staff departments at the college. "People are looking for more in-house training," said one staff member, who reported that there is little ongoing training in his department.

The results of the SAC survey suggested that this dissatisfaction was widespread. Fifty-seven percent of respondents stated that they were "dissatisfied" or "strongly dissatisfied" with their training and professional development opportunities. The same percentages of respondents indicated that they would like to see an increase in the amount of training and professional development that could directly benefit them.

The 1998 Accreditation Self-Study prepared by the Long Range Planning Committee Sub-Group on Staffing Issues (SLCP) for the Middle States Evaluation Team pointed to a basic lack of training for all staff at the college, especially in the areas of supervisory skills and in areas directly related to their jobs. In fact, over half of the respondents to the SAC survey stated that their department's training was "inadequate or nonexistent.

In addition to training, a few employees were disgruntled with inadequate support for continuing education in areas both directly and indirectly related to their jobs. Just over half of the respondents to the SAC survey stated they were "dissatisfied" or "strongly dissatisfied" with the amount of support they received for continuing education.

The SAC survey also found that 37 percent of respondents indicated their departmental training was "inadequate or nonexistent." The same percentage indicated that they would like to see an increase in the amount of training and professional development that could directly benefit them.

The self-study confirmed the lack of training for supervisory staff. It noted that many campus managers have been promoted into their positions without any supervisory training.

During their interviews, several employees mentioned the ways in which the college has supported their educational endeavors. For example, Johnson, who works in Dining Services, was pleased that for the past two years she has been able to arrange her work schedule in order to take classes at the college. Another employee commented on the college's support for her education. She noted that the college provided her with financial assistance to attend a program at the University of Life, a program in which Swarthmore students tutor staff in literacy and computer skills.

The college will continue to take steps to augment staff training and educational opportunities in the near future, according to senior vice president for academic affairs and planning. Fox, that the college is working to create a new position in Human Resources that will be responsible for training and development. Moreover, the current $20 million capital campaign includes a $1.5 million fund earmarked for staff educational and training opportunities.

The Grievance Policy

The grievance policy is one area in which Swarthmore has made significant progress, according to most of the staff and faculty interviewed.

The policy is currently in the final stages of implementing a substantially revised grievance policy intended to be more accessible and easier to understand. The new policy includes four stages: the initial discussion between the employee and the supervisor, the oral interview, the written statement, and the final resolution. The new policy no longer places the onus on grievances to try to work out problems with their offenders.

"I think this is a reasonably positive step forward for the college," said O'Connell, who added that the true test of the policy will occur once it is implemented.

The revisions started in 1998, when former Director of Human Resources Barbara Carroll began collaborating with the staff. Carroll noted that the current grievance policy was written in an "open process," where Carroll presented drafts of the revised policy to the SAC, the Administrative Advisory Committee (AAC), and in early 1999. Carroll used the feedback from these committees to refine the final policy, which will be formally introduced in the fall semester.

"The revisions were the result of a comprehensive review of the college's current grievance policy," said Carroll. "The revised policy now includes a more clear, consistent, and user-friendly process for resolving conflicts."

Bradhaw, according to SAC officers, said she plans to promote awareness of the revised grievance policy and to distribute informational leaflets and meetings with staff.

Another related change is that, with the new policy, the college expanded the functions of the Office of Human Resources to include handling complaints of harassment and discrimination.

"We are implementing a new policy to address these issues," said Carroll. "The goal is to create a safe and welcoming environment for all staff members, no matter their gender, race, or other identity characteristics."

"I don't turn anyone away," said Bradshaw. "All staff concerns are relevant.

Human Resources: Looking for Leadership

T he lack of a HR Director has slowed the efforts to address many staff concerns. The position in HR has been vacant since March, when Barbara Carroll resigned after less than three years on the job. A search committee has interviewed several candidates for the position, and the college is now "within days" of hiring a new HR director, said Aslanian.
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Hound that turnover has plagued Human Resources in this decade, said the predecessor, who was hired in 1982, three years late.

"The personnel situation hasn't stabilized," said Westphal. "We need someone committed to the college, willing to approach the problems of college education, and committed to the college environment."

Kazlauskas, an administrative assistant in the education department, said the work is "very satisfying." She explained that the surveys are used to help make decisions on future courses and programs. Kazlauskas said she enjoys the work and is happy to be part of the Human Resources team.

Kazlauskas supports more staff representation on all committees, saying that "if you don't have staff on the committees, you're not going to get the right decisions.

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The Future of Staff Issues

An article about the staffing in the Human Resources office discusses the question of whether the college will be able to keep its current staffing levels. The article suggests that the college has a strong commitment to its staff, but questions remain about the future of the staffing levels.

One staff member said the college's staffing levels are "terrific," while another said they are "marginal." The article notes that the college has a history of turnover, which is a concern for the staff.

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