

COACHE White Paper: Collaboration and Interdisciplinary Work

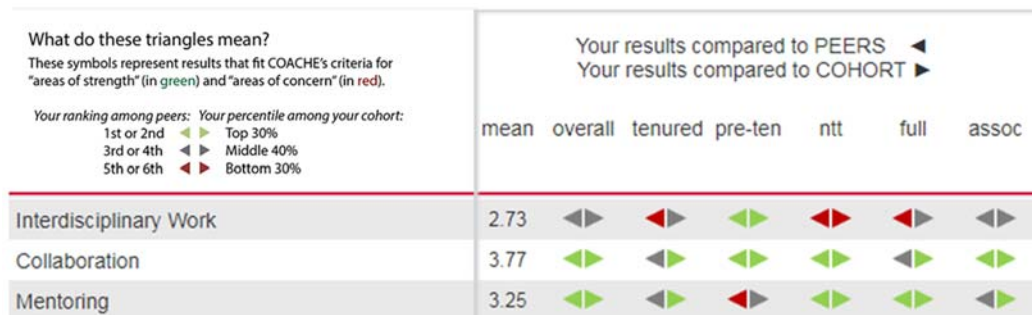
This is Part IV of a series of white papers on the COACHE survey. The Office of the Provost and the Faculty Advisory Group for the COACHE Survey want to share data findings on a number of key areas. White Paper Number 4 is about Faculty Perceptions on Collaboration and Interdisciplinary Work.

Summary of Perceptions on Collaboration and Interdisciplinary Work

Collaboration. Despite a popular perception of faculty as soloists, most faculty work requires collaboration whether with students, peers, administrators, or other colleagues inside and outside of the institution, in the classroom or the lab, and with the broader community through service or outreach programs. Although many faculty members value the work they do independently, they also enjoy collaborative projects within and across their disciplines. In addition, many early career faculty members report an expectation for collaboration, having come to enjoy and expect such intellectual commerce during graduate school.

Interdisciplinary Work. First, universities have seen widespread growth in research collaboration within and between institutions and with off-campus partners. Although not exclusively the province of the sciences, interdisciplinary research has become more predominant. Second, public and private funding for interdisciplinary research has increased. Third, there is a great deal of interest and intrinsic motivation for researchers to cross-fertilize; this type of work attracts many graduate students and early-career faculty. However, because the academy has not yet fully embraced interdisciplinary work, unchanged policies, structures and cultures are institutional disincentives, as they are still best-suited to narrower work within disciplines. This includes publication vehicles, multiple authors, peer review, and reward structures (for promotion and tenure; merit pay; incentives), to name a few.

Figure 1: Perception on Collaboration and Interdisciplinary Work

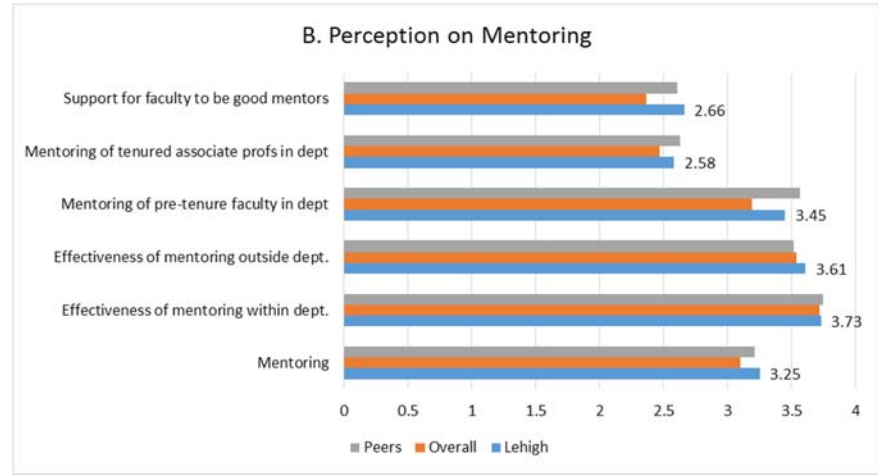
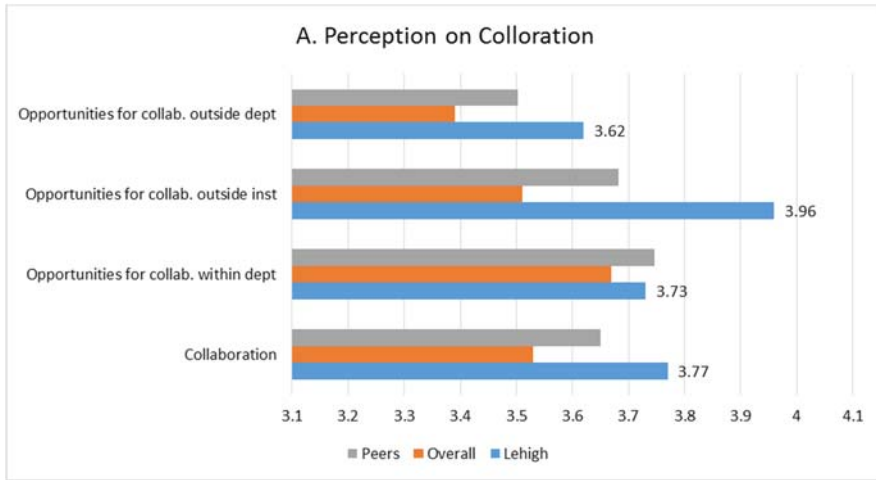


In Figure 1, responses to questions on collaboration, interdisciplinary work, and mentoring are summarized. Lehigh University faculty members rated the University above both the peer average and overall survey average in collaboration and faculty mentoring. Rating on Interdisciplinary work is a mixed bag with pre-tenure faculty viewed it more positively than tenured and non-tenure track faculty members. Collaboration seems to be a positive area of general agreement among faculty with different ranks and tenure status. The average rating of 3.77 in collaboration puts Lehigh on the high end of this measurement dimension.

Figure 2: Summary of Comparative Analysis - All Faculty



Figure 3 (a-c): Mean Scores of Detailed Items for Collaboration, Interdisciplinary Work, and Mentoring



In Figure 3, a through c, mean ratings for the question items that made up each of the collaboration, interdisciplinary work and mentoring sub-dimension are presented.

Lehigh faculty members’ average ratings are mostly higher than peer average in collaboration area. Lehigh faculty members rated “opportunities for collaboration with outside institutions” far higher (3.96) than the averages of peers and overall survey participants. Perceptions on interdisciplinary work are generally very low among all survey participating schools as well as our peers.

Despite the generally lower ratings, Lehigh has a brighter spot in “interdisciplinary work is rewarded in tenure” decisions. Lehigh’s average rating of 3.08 is far higher than both the peer and the overall survey averages. In the area of mentoring, Lehigh faculty’s perceptions generally are similar to those of the peers and other participating institutions. The ratings are very similar. “Support for faculty to be good mentors” and “mentoring of tenured associate professors” are two areas that are generally rated low among all participating schools.

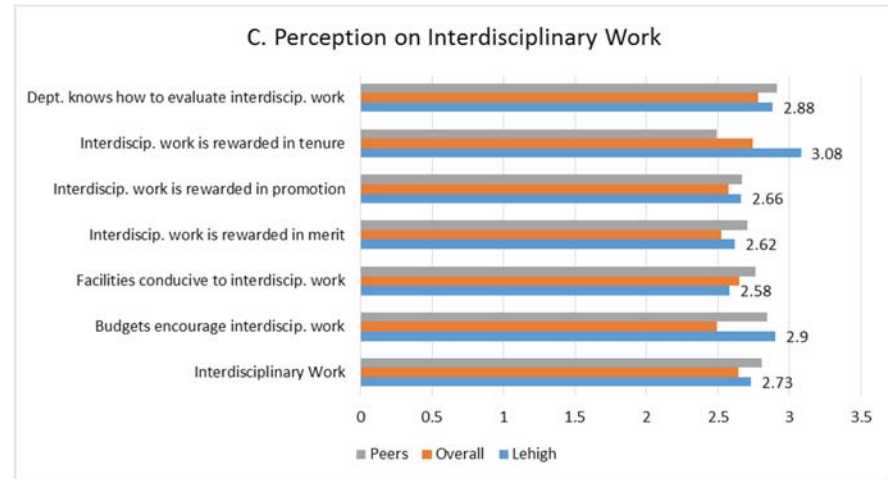
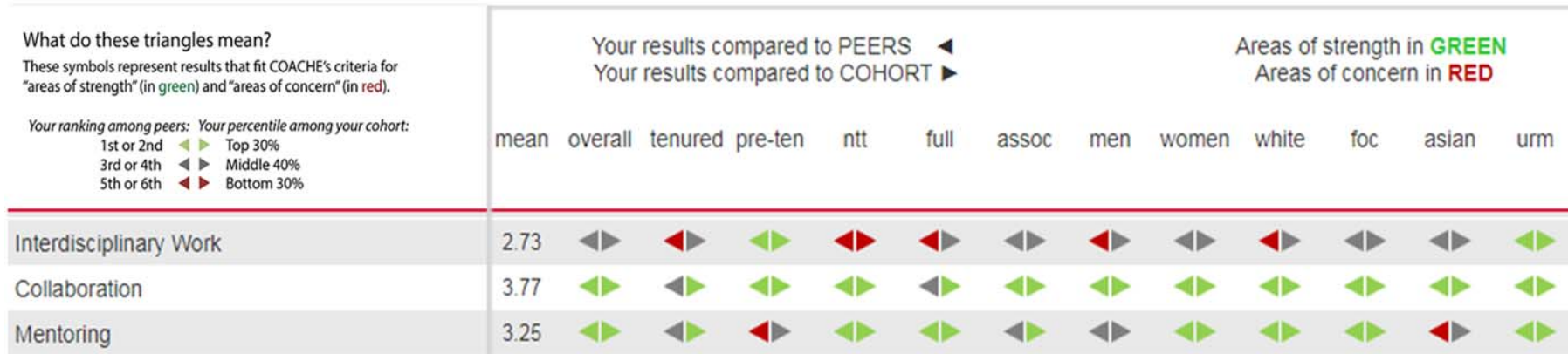


Figure 4: Summary of Comparative Analysis - Sub-Group Responses



In Figure 4, when the responses to collaboration, interdisciplinary work, and mentoring questions are drilled down to sub-group differences, we find:

- 1) The perception on **Collaboration** is almost across the board rated more positively than both peer and overall survey averages.
- 2) Interdisciplinary work received generally a lower rating among Lehigh faculty members when compared to our peers, especially among tenured, non-tenure track, male, and white faculty members.
- 3) Under-represented minority (URM) faculty members generally have a more positive perception on all three dimensions of the measurement – interdisciplinary work, collaboration, and mentoring. However, the sample size for URM is relatively small.
- 4) Among the sub-groups with less a favorable ratings on mentoring are pre-tenure and Asian faculty members. Both groups have rated mentoring below the average of our benchmark peers.