The University of North Carolina Greensboro:  
A Report on the Faculty Retention Project Fact-finding Groups  

This document provides information gleaned from fact-finding groups conducted at the University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG) on February 4 and 5, 2008. The groups were conducted to gather information from UNCG faculty about their perceptions of the workplace climate, as part of a proactive initiative by UNCG to assist in the retention of faculty. Rankin and Associates Consulting (R & A) conducted the fact-finding groups at the request of the Subcommittee on Minority Recruitment and Retention. A second initiative will be a survey distributed to faculty that have left the institution to ascertain the reasons for their departure.

Methods  
On February 4 and 5, 2008, 13 fact-finding groups were conducted at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. All participants were solicited by the Subcommittee on Minority Recruitment and Retention. The interview protocol\(^1\) used in the groups included four questions, which addressed participants’ satisfaction with their UNCG faculty jobs, their satisfaction with their career progression at UNCG, reasons they may have considered leaving UNCG, and ways to improve the retention of faculty at UNCG.

Sixty (60) faculty participated in the 13 fact-finding groups, which were divided by certain demographic characteristics\(^2\) so that participants might feel safe to speak about their own experiences. Of the 60 participants, 34 were women and 26 were men. Additionally, 31 were tenured faculty, while 29 were untenured or not in tenure track positions. At each group, participants were offered the contact information of R&A staff for the opportunity to discuss any issue not addressed during the groups. A few

\(^1\) See Appendix A for the complete Facilitator’s Guide for the Fact-finding Groups.  
\(^2\) See Appendix B for a listing of the groups and the number of participants in each group.
individuals who participated in the groups provided additional written comments about the climate for diversity via email to R & A.

**Findings**

This section provides the common themes that emerged from an analysis of notes taken during the fact-finding groups and from individuals’ emailed comments. Participants in each of the fact-finding groups provided information about their own personal experiences and observations. This report briefly summarizes the common experiences, observations, and suggestions discussed. Comments written in quotations are remarks from participants made during the fact-finding groups and sent to R&A via e-mail. Their comments may reflect individuals’ entire tenure at UNCG.

**Job Satisfaction at UNCG**

Overall, several faculty – particularly tenured faculty and White men – were satisfied with their faculty jobs at UNCG. Most participants noted, however, that their degree of satisfaction was largely dependent on their departmental colleagues and department chairs. Said one participant, “If you asked me if I was satisfied I was 10 years ago I would have said no, mainly due to the department head, but since you asked me today, I would say absolutely, mainly due to the department head.” A few participants described horrendous situations in which their departmental chairs overlooked them for prime service activities necessary to earn tenure and promotions, failed to include them in departmental decision-making and course development, and in one case, falsified documents in a faculty member’s personnel file.

Those participants who were “lucky enough to land in very collegial departments” were more satisfied than those participants whose departments were perceived as unsupportive. Often, faculty in the minority in their departments (faculty of color across departments and women faculty in traditionally male-dominated departments) were less satisfied with their jobs than were those participants in the majority (e.g., Nursing, Romance
Languages). In collegial departments, senior faculty understood the challenges faculty of color and women face at UNCG, valued the scholarship produced by faculty of color, and mentored junior faculty through the tenure process and beyond.

The fact-finding groups revealed several challenges impeding faculty job satisfaction, especially among faculty of color. Foremost, participants pointed to the lack of faculty of color at UNCG, in senior faculty positions, and in “powerful” administrative positions. Some participants said the root of this dearth of faculty was the alleged discriminatory hiring processes where minority candidates were often perceived as “not a good fit.” A couple of participants gave examples of previous searches where the search “was tailored to bring in certain folks – someone’s friend – but people will ask you if you know anyone [candidates of color]… but why should we bother to give them names [of potential candidates] when they already know who they’re going to hire?”

In addition, some faculty of color indicated they were not afforded the same level of respect as their White colleagues. For example, several faculty said they were routinely called by their first names while their White colleagues were addressed using the title “Dr.” and surname. Faculty of color also reported that often their scholarship was not valued in their departments. More than one person was told, “Your scholarship doesn’t get published in top notch journals” or “Your work doesn’t get funded.” To that end, one faculty member said, “Being outside the mainstream, we tend to see things in different ways and therefore seek refuge in different perspectives to validate our existence and those we work with; in particular, those who are marginalized. If I had been a minority who engages in mainstream work, perhaps my fate here would have been seen differently.”

Among most groups, isolation was a major contributor to job dissatisfaction. If faculty felt included in departmental affairs and the community at large, they were less likely to
suffer from isolation. Faculty felt isolated when they did not see others like themselves in their departments or at the University as a whole. For instance, African American participants said a big challenge for them was that “there aren't very many Blacks and they're spread out” across UNCG. One participant said, “We don't get to see this many [African American colleagues] in one room. Before this, I would have said we didn't even have this many Black faculty here….”

Additionally, some international faculty (often not native English speakers) felt discriminated against in students’ teaching evaluations and isolated from their peers based on both the “language and cultural divide.” One faculty member said that despite his attempts to “fit in” in his department, he has been left out of social events and departmental decision-making. He attributes his situation to a myriad of circumstances, including his native culture (which is more reserved than American culture), the unsupportive nature of his department, and his status as a non-native English speaker. Although he is fluent in English, he said conversations occur as if everyone else was “driving a brand new sports car” and he was “struggling to keep up in an old, broken down car,” and he “just can’t do it.”

Some faculty of color, international faculty, and women in traditionally male-dominated fields indicated that they felt pressure to take responsibility to “fit in” with the department, which often left them masking parts of themselves, their backgrounds, and their cultures. One faculty member – the only non-White in his department – said, “I know I’m the diversity guy, the guy they hired so they have diversity. But once I got here, they wanted me to act just like them and they don’t understand when I can’t.” A female participant said, “People don't know how to take me, or to approach me…they don't take diversity well. I felt very disadvantaged early on. I pushed myself to get to know folks socially to make life better for myself. I'm tenured now so I don't have to do that anymore!” Several people experiencing this challenge said they would like to see the
individual departments and UNCG taking more responsibility to appreciate and value their differences.

Furthermore, several African American participants felt overwhelmed with committee work and student advising, to the detriment of the tenure process. One person said, you “feel like you can't say no to things that are about us, especially to things that have to do with the Black community or diversity” (committees, etc.). They indicated the experience was a double-edged sword where they felt like they ought to be on the committees “because if you're not on them, you have no input into issues that get decided about your community. But that means you're on all the committees.” Faculty of color felt overwhelmed with service activities often because they are committed to working on issues of social change and justice, and they get asked to serve to increase diversity and give perspective. All of this service, however, has not been valued or credited at the time of promotion and tenure decisions.

Safety was a significant concern for some women faculty and faculty of color. They felt physically vulnerable because they more often than their more senior colleagues (often male or White) teach the night classes in buildings that were unlocked and unsecured. One of the participants offered, “Most men [in my department] have tenure and therefore don't have to teach at night.” These participants recounted instances when they were completely alone in buildings at 10 or 11pm. Others detailed instances when they had been harassed by students after night classes where the students would follow the faculty down the hallways, yelling and threatening the faculty. “Even when I called for an escort, he only escorted me to the garage door…not all the way to my car and I had to wait 45 minutes for him to even come.”

Women faculty were generally satisfied with their jobs at UNCG, especially in supportive departments, though some still spoke of underlying sexism at the departmental and university levels. “The overall climate in my department is fine, but there is still the
good ole boys network at work. I don’t think it is intentional, but many women still feel excluded because we don’t ‘talk the talk’ [e.g., sports]. I also know of two gay faculty in our department who feel excluded when the talk turns to ‘family’ and they don’t feel comfortable in sharing.” Also, “there is a still a subtle power dynamic at work. I think also that they don’t know it is about power and therefore their actions are unintentional. I finally found a good way to describe this phenomenon… ‘Not just that what I do as a woman is undervalued, but rather that what men do is overvalued.’ Therefore, we as women continue to do more and are less valued than men who do less, but what they do is valued more.”

Other women, mostly in male-dominated fields, were less satisfied with their jobs. They were mostly in lecturer/instructor or non-tenure track positions (though they desired tenure-track positions). They were excluded from departmental decision-making, key committee appointments, recruiting students, and course development. They said they were “second class citizens at the University,” given only one-year contracts (sometimes for 15 years or more), and paid a much lower salary than tenure track faculty with similar or fewer qualifications. A few recounted atrocious situations\(^3\) at UNCG, mostly at the will of their department chairs.

Regardless of demographic characteristics, most junior faculty that were less than satisfied with their jobs pointed to the lack of mentoring available to junior faculty. Some departments have “wonderful mentorships.” The degree to which the department facilitates mentoring, however, depends largely on the support of the chair. While some participants felt well-supported and properly guided through the P&T process by their mentors, most said that mentoring happened in name only or not at all. Junior faculty felt bewildered by the lack of clear guidelines aimed at achieving tenure, and many were

\(^3\) Situations are not included in this report so as not to identify individual participants.
concerned that since they were unaware of what was expected of them, they would not earn tenure.

Across demographic categories, faculty were extremely concerned with UNCG’s recent focus on becoming a more research-oriented university. Several new faculty said they felt betrayed within their first year at UNCG. They accepted positions at UNCG based on its reputation as a teaching-focused institution, and quickly realized after their arrival that the University wants to change its focus to research. The new faculty said they are now expected to bring in large research grants, without the infrastructure usually available at large, research-focused universities. Senior faculty were less concerned than junior faculty, and attributed much of the bureaucratic difficulties at the Office of Sponsored Research to “growing pains.” Since UNCG historically lacked the infrastructure for soliciting and managing large research grants, many faculty found it easier to collaborate with colleagues at other universities (e.g., Charlotte, Chapel Hill) and manage the funds through those institutions, which ultimately leaves UNCG with a smaller portion of the grant funds.

**Satisfaction with Career Progression at UNCG**

Senior faculty were generally very satisfied with the way their careers had progressed at UNCG. Faculty, including some faculty of color, who had been at the University for 20 years or more indicated they had ample opportunities to advance their careers in the way of earning full professorships, serving in administrative positions and on high profile committees, and heading special programs.

Some of the women participants said they have received tenure and been promoted at UNCG, but were less satisfied with their career progression. They spoke of the “old boys’ network” and the lack of women in some key administrative positions. Other women,
often lecturers/non-tenure track faculty, wanted and applied for tenure track positions only to be repeatedly overlooked.

Some international faculty were very satisfied with their career progression. Others, however, noted that all of the senior administration and the majority of department chairs were “domestic,” which dampened their hopes to move into the administrative ranks at UNCG.

Likewise, faculty of color were concerned that most of the UNCG faculty base and leadership were White, which is not an acceptable reflection of the student body. Further, junior faculty of color have not benefited from any informal mentoring and conversations about career progression that their White colleagues have been afforded. Many participants said they knew UNCG faculty that left the University before they went up for tenure, believing they were not going to attain tenure at UNCG.

Most assistant and associate professors were very concerned about the potential for their careers to progress at UNCG due to the “state of flux” that UNCG is currently experiencing around its new focus on research. They suggested that their departments expect them to procure large research grants and generate “enough” scholarship, while also expecting them to teach up to three and four courses per semester. Most faculty urged the institution to “pick a focus” and then alter the infrastructure to reflect the focus. For example, if faculty were expected to focus on research, then course loads should be reduced.

Participants were divided as to whether they had ever contemplated leaving their positions at UNCG. Many senior faculty liked their positions and were very comfortable at UNCG. Most said they would consider leaving for a higher salary or to pursue different opportunities in their fields. Other participants said they liked living in
Greensboro or that their spouses had good jobs in the area, and would be hard pressed to leave. Participants also indicated that the tuition reimbursement benefit kept them at UNCG.

Many of whom said they thought about leaving said, “If I have to bring in big research dollars, I may as well go to a big university that has the infrastructure and reputation to do it. Here, we’re starting at square one. It’s ridiculous for a ‘teaching school.’” Faculty – many of whom were underrepresented in their departments – in unsupportive departments were frustrated by the “corruption” in their departments and routinely looked for opportunities to leave UNCG. African American faculty said they felt isolated in the Greensboro community and that there was little opportunity to meet or socialize with other professional African American community members. Additionally, they said Greensboro is a difficult place for single people to socialize.

Some women participants considered leaving UNCG because they are part of dual-career academic couples, and their spouses have not found adequate employment. A few indicated that UNCG had “lied” to them in the hiring process, saying UNCG would be “creative and supportive” in helping to find their spouses substantial employment at UNCG. While the University did offer adjunct or lecturer positions, those positions were not rewarding enough (financially or otherwise) to keep the couple at UNCG. These women suggested that UNCG offer more substantial positions (visiting professorships or post-doctoral positions) in order to retain UNCG’s new faculty hires.
Suggestions for Improving the Climate

Participants had a variety of ideas regarding how to improve the retention of faculty at UNCG. They also voiced tremendous concerns regarding their participation in the focus groups. For example, “Is this information from the fact-finding groups really going to be used?” “Will the recommendations from this report be enacted any differently than the recommendations from the Race & Gender Committee of 15 years ago?” “Will the administration hear the concerns and do anything about it?” In fact, one participant recounted a story of her first few days here when she was sent to pick up her key. She walked into the wrong room and went into a leadership meeting with university administrators instead and was stunned to see that every person in the room was White. Some of the groups voiced a concern about whether this report was going to go to that same all White administration or to a more diverse audience, and whether anything would actually be done with the data.

By and large, all groups desired an institutionalized, formal mentoring process that would ensure every junior (and other) faculty receives support through the entire career trajectory, not just to earn tenure. “It's taken for granted that everyone has this knowledge and knows how to move forward.” “It feels like it's good enough to get us here but there's no feeling of attention to ensuring advancement.” Some participants indicated their departments already have acceptable and supportive mentoring programs in place. In those cases, some faculty indicated that they had one mentor in their department, while other departments offered three mentors (one each for service, teaching, and research). Others suggested that new faculty be assigned to mentors outside their departments, as well as in their departments, which would create collegiality across disciplines and especially help faculty housed in “unsupportive” departments.

Additionally, all groups wanted UNCG to “pick a mission and put its resources towards that mission.” Participants understood, whether they were happy about it or not, that
UNCG has decided to pursue a more research-oriented focus. If that is to be the case, faculty asked that their teaching loads decrease, the Office of Sponsored research establish clear and consistent guidelines for seeking external and internal funding, and the University provide more resources for attending professional research-oriented conferences. To decrease their teaching loads, faculty suggested enlarging class sizes where appropriate (e.g., Biology 101) so that faculty have to teach fewer sections of the same course. They also offered that UNCG was “wasting funds” hiring many lecturers to teach small classes when one larger class would educate the same number of students.

For African American faculty, in particular, UNCG must remedy a number of situations in order to retain them. First, UNCG must recognize that African American faculty are subtly and overtly discriminated against in the hiring, promotion, and tenure processes, and then find ways to improve these situations. Department heads ought to be given the message that the University wants to increase faculty diversity, and be trained/educated in how to examine issues around diversity.

Additionally, the University must acknowledge the “incredible lack of awareness on the behalf of many White faculty, staff, and students about issues of diversity” by encouraging them to attend programming that will increase this awareness. And, the University ought to find ways to “deal with the fact that minorities get the weight of extra service without getting the credit for it.” The reward system also must value minority faculty and majority faculty equally – their research and how they do their work should be given the same value, same resources, same support, etc.

Further, the University “needs a more visible presence of Black faculty and staff and Black organizations. There is the Black faculty and staff association but it's not very organized, there is a lack of leadership and/or enthusiasm at times, and a ‘class divide’ between faculty vs. non-professional staff…unless there's a big controversy.” Similarly,
women and junior faculty asked for a “Faculty Club” where new (and more senior) faculty could socialize, network, and establish informal mentoring sessions.

One discussion focused on the state “push” to be an accessible system, open for all, which the faculty felt had made retention of faculty more difficult. Increasing the number of students, some of whom are provisional, has increased the class size, which along with the increased expectation for research, has “devalued teaching.” Others discussed the need for more than one faculty in each discipline with similar teaching/research interests, so that there is at least one colleague with common interests in their respective departments.

UNCG needs to address faculty frustration with the grants process, the IRB process, and the assessment process noted earlier, which would impact retention (i.e., prospective faculty could go to another institution where the expectations were the same, but the infrastructure was more supportive and expedient). “The grant process and the IRB process is ridiculously slow! The IRB review is slowed by the “gatekeeper” in my department so it discourages me from wanting to do research. It is very frustrating and may indeed factor into retention.”

Lastly, several participants suggested that UNCG make the Subcommittee on Minority Recruitment and Retention a more formal group with an office, long standing mission, etc.
Summary

The February 2008 fact-finding groups were held with the intent of gathering initial information about faculty members’ perceptions of the climate and faculty attrition at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. Information garnered in these groups was given to the Subcommittee on Minority Recruitment and Retention in order to begin to address the challenges at UNCG and was used to modify the Faculty Retention questionnaire that will be distributed to faculty that in spring 2008.
Appendix A
UNCG Climate Assessment
Facilitators’ Guide for Focus Groups

Introduction:
Thank you for your willingness to meet with me today to share your feelings about the climate at UNCG for ___________________ (fill in group you are addressing). The focus groups are a proactive initiative by the University to assist in the retention of faculty at UNCG. A second initiative will be a survey distributed to faculty who have left the institution to ascertain the reasons for their departure.
This focus group will take about one hour and fifteen minutes. There are a total of 4 questions. I’ll ask one question at a time and then invite the group to give their opinions. I’ll take notes during the interview, and the information I gather will remain confidential. R & A will analyze the data in aggregate, and no names or other identifying information will be used in reports or other communications about the results of this study. In order for this focus group to be successful, it is vital that everyone here feels safe to express themselves freely and honestly. What one person says here, stays here. Please do not discuss your peers’ contributions to the group with anyone outside the group. Answering the questions will be considered your consent to participate. You may decline to answer certain questions and leave the focus group at anytime. At this time, do you have any questions about what I’ve said?

Questions:

Question 1: How satisfied are you with your job as a ___________________ (fill in the group you are addressing) faculty member at UNCG?

Secondary question: Why are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your job?

Question 2: How satisfied are you with the way your career has progressed as a faculty member?

Secondary question: Why are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way your career has progressed?

Question 3: Have you ever considered leaving UNCG? If so, why?

Question 4: What suggestions do you have for improving the retention of ___________________ (fill in the group you are addressing) faculty at UNCG?

If you wish to supply additional information, please e-mail those thoughts to: Stefani Bjorklund at stefani@rankin-consulting.com.

Thank you to each of you for your time and insights.
Appendix B  
University of North Carolina Greensboro  
Faculty Retention Assessment  
Initial Fact-Finding Groups  

Number of Participants by Group  

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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Hispanic men ( all ranks)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>African American women ( tenured)</td>
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*One of the participants of the Asian/Pacific Islander men ( untenured) group was a man who identified as Hispanic American that was not able to attend the Hispanic men group.

** One of the participants of the Hispanic men ( untenured) group was a man who identified as White that was not able to attend the White men group.

*** One of the women of the Asian/Pacific Islander group was a woman who identified as White, and another identified as South American. Both were unable to attend the demographic groups to which they were assigned.