U.S. Faculty Members Feel a Lack of Clout, International Survey Finds

By PETER SCHMIDT

Compared with their peers in many other nations, faculty members at four-year colleges in the United States stand out in their insularity from the international academic community and their sense of a lack of power over their institutions' leadership and budgets, according to the unpublished results of a study involving surveys of faculty members around the world.

The international study also found that the United States is seen as losing its advantage over many nations in terms of the perceived quality of its higher-education facilities, and that many faculty members in highly developed nations are less engaged in the affairs of their universities and see their institutions' management as more heavy-handed than was the case in the early 1990s.

The study that has generated such findings involves surveys of faculty members in 20 different nations, as well as Hong Kong, conducted in 2007 and 2008. It is a follow-up to a landmark 1992 survey of faculty members in 13 nations and Hong Kong overseen and financed by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

The earlier effort, the results of which were published in the 1994 report *The Academic Profession: An International Perspective*, marked the first wide-scale attempt to use survey data to compare the lives and perceptions of college faculty members around the world. It sounded alarms even then that the American professoriate was much less in touch with the international academic community than the professoriates of other nations, and also reached the conclusion—reaffirmed by the latest research effort—that faculty members
around the world see their colleges' administrations as autocratic but generally are happy with their jobs.

The results of the most recent study—called the Changing Academic Profession survey—are still being analyzed, with researchers in a few nations having yet to provide others involved in the international collaborative effort with their results. Two American scholars heavily involved in the effort—William K. Cummings, a professor of international education and international affairs at George Washington University, and Martin J. Finkelstein, a professor of higher education at Seton Hall University—released much of the data gathered so far to *The Chronicle* in advance of a discussion of their key findings today at an international conference on academic freedom, shared governance, and globalization being held in Washington by the American Association of University Professors.

Philip G. Altbach, professor of higher education and director of the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College who was a co-author of the 1994 Carnegie report, praised the latest survey on Thursday as solid research and "a milestone." He said such international research "is in my view even more important now because the world of academe is so much more globalized than it was even 20 years ago."

Participating in both the 1992 and latest studies were Australia, Brazil, Britain, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Netherlands, and the United States. The latest effort also included surveys of faculty members in Argentina, Canada, China, Finland, Malaysia, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, and South Africa. In each of the nations involved this time around, researchers based their analyses on survey data gathered from demographically representative samples of about 800 faculty members from four-year colleges and universities.

**Diminishing Sense of Power**

In the summary of study's findings that he plans to present today, Mr. Cummings says: "Academics in most countries think decision making is top down, that the administrative process is cumbersome, that communication between the administration and faculty is poor. The U.S. is no exception."

Moreover, he says, the faculty members of many nations, including the United States, report having less power within their institutions than they did in the early 1990s, with midlevel decision makers, rather than college presidents or outsiders, being the primary forces professors cite as usurping their influence.
Except for in Britain and Japan, faculty members in most nations do not believe they, collectively, have much influence in most decision-making areas. Faculty members in the United States feel exceptionally powerless over their institutions' affairs, being less likely than their peers in nearly every nation to report having a big say over the selection of key administrators, the budget priorities of their institutions, or their own teaching loads.

Especially in nations with well-developed higher-education systems, the management of colleges is perceived by faculty members "as asking for more while providing less," making greater demands that are not accompanied by improvements in facilities or other forms of additional support, Mr. Cummings's analysis says. Although those faculty members seem to be keeping their morale intact, in many nations they appear to be doing so by withdrawing from involvement in their institutions' governance and instead focusing on their own academic pursuits.

In discussing the study's results Thursday in an interview, Mr. Cummings said faculty members in the United States still report feeling a lot of personal attachment to their academic disciplines, but they display much less sense of connection with their academic departments or their institutions than they did in the 1992 survey.

"It is almost as if they are drawing into their own professional worlds and disengaging from substantial participation in the management and governance of their institutions," Mr. Cummings said. To stay happy, he said, faculty members "have redefined their jobs."

Mr. Finkelstein, who led the survey effort in the United States, said that here, "the dominant picture is of both the central administration and faculty yielding to deans." Although faculty members at research universities and prestigious liberal-arts institutions reported having substantially more power than those at comprehensive institutions in the early 1990s, the differences between institutions have been muted, he said.

'Behind the Curve' on Internationalization

Mr. Altbach of the Center for International Higher Education said the study's results also show that American faculty members remain relatively isolated from their peers elsewhere. In examining the latest data from the United States, he says, he was struck by "how behind the curve Americans are when it comes to their views of internationalization, their knowledge about what is going on academically around the rest of the world, their use of data from scholars from other countries."
"That," he says, "is a little bit understandable in the sense that this is a very big system and we produce a good chunk of the research that is being done globally."

Among other key findings, the latest international study shows that faculty members in Brazil, Britain, Japan, and the United States perceived less support for academic freedom from their administrations than they did in the 1992 survey. Those in Hong Kong, Korea, and Mexico perceived more such support.

In most countries, at least half of the faculty members surveyed said the quality of their research is threatened by pressure to be more productive.

Faculty productivity, as measured by the publication of research in refereed journals, appears to have declined slightly in the United States while rising sharply in Brazil, China, Hong Kong, and Korea, American faculty members are substantially more likely than those in other countries to report engaging in research that is socially oriented, and less likely than those in most other countries to report engaging in research that is basic or applied.