During fall semester 2013, Student Affairs graduate assistant (GA) Jessica Frawley developed and administered a survey of her fellow GAs working in the Student Affairs Division. She wanted gain greater awareness of stress, work-life balance and satisfaction with the GA positions. This assessment was administered in web format using Campus Labs in December 2013 to all GAs working in a student affairs department. There were 31 student respondents. 100% were enrolled in master’s degree programs, including business administration (42%), Counseling (48%, including CAS), and 3% each in education, literacy and school psychology. 52% were first year grads, 39% were second year grads, and 10% were in their third year or more. 45% of respondents were men, 55% were women, and 90% were traditional-age grads (21—25 years old.) 60% had graduated from an Alfred University bachelor’s degree program.

Summary of findings

- 47% of respondents say they work more hours than the program requires; 33% report working about what the program requires; 20% work less.

- 87% feel their supervisors clearly outlined what was expected of them.

- 70% believe GA expectations are realistic given their other responsibilities.

- 87% feels their work was/is appreciated.

- 87% are satisfied with the communication between themselves and their supervisor.

- Overall, 94% are satisfied with their GA position.

- 27% work for pay outside their GA job.

- 80% indicated that they have learned transferable skills that apply to their careers. Most commonly noted skills included leadership, administrative tasks, time management, teamwork, conflict resolution, counseling, supervision, planning, and many more.
What do GAs value in their supervisors?

Students gave a wide range of responses. The most frequently listed values (cited by at least 5 respondents) were “setting clear expectations,” “flexibility,” “friendly/personal/approachable,” “consistent feedback,” “honest,” and “good communication skills.” Responses also included words like “supportive,” “leadership,” “role model,” “respects me” and many more.

How much stress have you experienced in the following areas? (% of students who responded “a great deal of stress” or “considerable stress.”)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic coursework</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating an academic/life balance</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with GA supervisor</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with faculty advisor</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional wellbeing</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical health</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To deal with this stress, students were most likely to turn to, in order: family (47%), other students (40%), AU Wellness Center (16%), academic advisor (13%), other faculty (13%). 30% said they did not have need of help in dealing with stress or anxiety.

Selected quotes:

What transferable skills have you learned as part of your GA?

• How to speak to people, and work with people who frustrate me.
• Interacting with a supervisor in a professional manner.
• Has allowed me to become more confident in my skills and learn more of the administrative skills that we don’t touch as much (in classes).

What do you value in a supervisor?

• Describing tasks fully so I can understand expectations, and make sure I’m doing things correctly.
• Has a belief and sticks to it; doesn’t sway depending on who s/he is talking to or how s/he is feeling at the moment. Clear communication.
• Having passion for their position and being “down to earth.”
• Someone who takes time to get to know you personally, and who appreciates your work.

Summary and Action Steps:

This assessment highlighted the importance of clear expectations, consistent feedback, expressing appreciation for valuable work, and taking the time to get to know our GAs on a personal level. The list of transferable skills learned by GAs is impressive and should be shared with faculty.

There is not much difference in the way students in different academic programs perceive their GA jobs, although in general, women are more satisfied with their GA positions than men.

It is concerning that almost half of our GAs believe they work more hours than what’s required. Related to that, it’s not clear that GAs know what to expect, prior to orientation. We should talk with faculty and within our division about how that situation has developed, and what the implications are.

For full results, contact Kathy Woughter, VP for Student Affairs.