Washington State Legislative Service Project: Legislators 2013
Executive Summary – Spring 2014

Francis Benjamin and Nicholas Lovrich, Division of Governmental Studies and Services, WSU

The *Legislative Service Project* examines the views of key individuals involved in the Washington state legislative process to determine how changes to this process have affected legislative civility. Study participants include legislative and agency staff, registered lobbyists, and legislators who served during recent legislative sessions. The legislator portion of the *Legislative Service Project* focuses on legislators, both past and current, who served during the 1990 to 2013 legislative sessions of the Washington State Legislature. Survey questions covered the areas of: legislative public image and effectiveness, civility and working relationships, campaigns, leadership/management styles, and work/sleep performance effects.

Following the trends of previous surveys conducted for the *Legislative Service Project*, legislators participating in the most recent iteration of the series of surveys continue to find their work very worthwhile, and if given the opportunity to go back in time they would make the same choice to serve in the Washington State legislature. Legislators indicated in this round of the survey that previous elected local government and special purpose district experience, related formal education, business experience, and their engagement and investment in their own respective local communities best prepared them for their service in the state legislature.

Ranking of previous *Legislative Service Project* recommendations

How to improve legislative public image:
Greatest effectiveness: work for the good-of-the-state and not personal/partisan agendas
Easiest to implement: increase transparency of the process
Best overall: improve communication to citizens

How to improve legislative effectiveness:
Greatest effectiveness: party leaders encourage working cooperatively across the aisle
Easiest to implement: limiting how many committees on which a legislator can serve
Best overall: party leaders encourage working cooperatively across the aisle

How to improve legislative civility:
Greatest effectiveness: show respect for other people and their opinions
Easiest to implement: eat meals with other legislators
Best overall: show respect for other people and their opinions

How to improve legislative campaigns:
Greatest effectiveness: hold joint freshman orientations which involve both parties
Easiest to implement: hold joint freshman orientations which involve both parties
Best overall: hold joint freshman orientations which involve both parties

While legislators taking part in the survey tend to agree that partisan politics is a factor in the number of legislative special sessions occurring in recent years, they also feel that the legislator's part-time status, increased issue complexity, and poor time management also likely play some role in this matter. To reverse this trend, legislators tend to look to their leadership, to narrowing their work focus, and to lengthening legislative sessions. Legislators indicated that it is increasingly difficult to make time to meet with and listen to constituents and consider the views of legislative stakeholders who deserved to be represented in the legislative process. When comparing legislative interactions during session with those taking place outside of session, legislators have many more work-related and social interactions with other legislators during the legislative sessions than outside of session. Legislators, as expected, are much more likely to interact with colleagues from their own party than those from the other party.

Legislative survey participants, for the most part, are happy with the current level of technology applied to the legislative process, but did tend to feel that there is room for improved technology applications in the areas of enhanced video conferencing, broadening the diversity of citizen engagement, increasing multiple language communication options, and expanding the use of remote testimony. When asked about voting on proposed legislation, most legislators reported that they are most likely to vote based on the "best solution" even if the majority of their constituents likely would not agree.

When asked about what leadership office style promotes the most effective legislative work, legislators were almost equally split between the responses of "emphasize teamwork and working together in harmony" and "set the end vision and allow staff considerable freedom in how they get there." When asked about legislative management style, most legislators responded that the style that promoted the most effective legislative work entails focusing on *proactive listening* to staff and making staff successful in their legislative careers by the *assignment of progressive responsibility* for legislative work. When asked what additional resources would be most helpful to them in order to come to better decisions, legislators most frequently responded *more time*, *supplementary unbiased information* and *additional access to staff*.

The majority of legislators were in agreement with the results from past legislative surveys conducted as part of the **Legislative Service Project** which reported that "during session legislators get tired sooner, go to bed later, take longer to fall asleep, wake up more often at night, sleep fewer hours, get up earlier, and have a harder time getting up." Legislators also indicated that during the course of the legislative session there are clear signs of erosion in their personal and work relationships, quality of sleep, and personal and work satisfaction. The greatest decreases, during legislative session, occur for legislators in the area of their sleep quality.

When assessing their own productivity, legislators tend to measure productivity based on a combination of their personal evaluation of their own work, constituent satisfaction with their performance in office, fulfilling commitments made in their campaigns, and successful bill passage on sponsored legislation. They measure office productivity based on constituent satisfaction, work effort, and timeliness of work accomplishments.