

Texas A&M Division of Academic Affairs

Focus Group Input on Climate and Diversity

March 2014

Overview

On March 18-19, 2014 six (6) employees from Texas A&M Division of Academic Affairs (DAA) met at the Texas A&M Institute for Preclinical Studies (TIPS) to participate in a focus group regarding their input on the general climate and diversity within the DAA. The focus group was put together through a random sampling of all employees. The participants of the focus group were charged to “Help us improve our unit climate”. As part of this process participants were asked to:

- Delve deeper into three issues identified in the results
 - Worsening climate (historically underrepresented)
 - Minimize identity (historically underrepresented)
 - Stressful environment
- Provide recommendations to address these issues.”

The focus group meeting was facilitated by two individuals external to the Division, but familiar with TAMUS, climate surveys and diversity. An agenda of this two day meeting (afternoon session and morning session) is available in Appendix A: Focus Group Agenda.

To develop the recommendations presented in this report, the group was first presented with information and results on the 2012 Academic Affairs Climate Survey. This presentation was given cooperatively by Drs. Suzanne Droleskey and Leigh Turner the Co-Chairs of the Academic Affairs Climate and Diversity Committee (AACDC). Following this presentation, Drs. Droleskey and Turner turned the focus group sessions over to the facilitators and were dismissed so that the group could establish a level of rapport and trust to ensure that they could be open and direct as they moved forward with their charge. After establishing ground rules for discussions (Appendix A), the group was given the opportunity to then independently review the presentation notes and have an open discussion about the results. During this open discussion they talked about the results and shared anecdotal information related to the survey implementation and overall process and climate/diversity information. After this discussion the group was lead through a facilitated identification of issues using Nominal Group Technique (silent generation of ideas, round robin recording, clarification discussion, combination of issues, then individual ranking and weighting of top 5 issues). The silent generation of ideas, recording and clarification was completed during the first day (afternoon session). This was a predetermined stopping point to allow participants the evening to individually reflect and process the discussions.

On the second day (morning session) Drs. Droleskey and Turner (Co-Chairs of the AACDC) were invited back and the group with the help of the facilitators then had the opportunity to ask questions related to some of the issues identified the previous day. This was done to help the focus group participants understand factors or unit information related to the issues that might impact the final recommendations of the group. The Co-Chairs were again excused and the focus group moved forward with the Nominal Group Technique process where they combined and reworded issues. At the end of the morning session the group then individually voted (rank and weighted) their top five (5) issues. The combined results of this rank and weight voting was shared with the group. The group then agreed on how they wanted the information presented in this report.

For this report, the rank and weight results are presented in weight then rank order, followed by the listing of combined issues, and then finally the original list of generated issues.

Weight and Rank Vote Order of Issues

Top Five Items by Weight			
Weight Points	Rank Votes (#Votes/ Rank Points)	Item Number	Item Wording
80	3/9	28	Modify the wording of “at will” employment to providing an explanation of the process for termination (i.e. in new employment offer letters/hiring process.)
70	4/12	31	Increase morale and build trust among employees through creation of events and/or policies such as administrative leaves, team building retreats, social gatherings, and general recognition of good work.
70	3/10	35	Have more extensive, required training and workshops for supervisors on management issues and leadership skills.
57.5	3/9	29	Have meaningful line staff involvement in planning, discussions and outcomes in all levels within the Division of Academic Affairs.
55	3/5	13	More transparent performance evaluation, promotion, and merit raise process.
Other Items that Received Votes and Weights			
Weight Points	(# Votes/ Rank Points)	Item Number	Item Wording
50	3/8	33	Increase awareness and understanding of the current office protocols and anonymous TAMUS complaint/reporting systems including how the systems are evaluated and how appropriate notification of actions and resolutions are communicated.
50	1/5	12	Identify research-based best practices related to (education, business, government) institutional change.
47.5	3/8	30	Empower employees at the unit level to make decisions regarding job responsibilities.
40	2/8	17	Stress competitive pay rates for new hires – pay them what they are worth.
25	2/5	27	Construct an inner-office “survey” to determine what needs to be changed/reported at unit or department level and implement recommendations.
25	1/4	6	Look at ways to increase buy-in (help folks understand “why” so they can support and understand) when it comes to institutional change.
20	1/5	3	There should be health coverage from day 1 of employment, not wait 90 days (regarding employer contribution).
10	1/1	18	Take a step backward and refine survey instrument to better pinpoint areas of concern and to ensure validity of data collection.

Consolidated or Combined List of Issues

- ~~1. Do more to boost morale (i.e. administrative leave, work/fun retreat, staff appreciation, ice cream day).~~
- ~~2. Events or actions that build trust or familiarity or comfort for understanding colleagues~~
3. There should be health coverage from day 1 of employment, not wait 90 days (regarding employer contribution).
- ~~4. Include & accept input from staff in planning discussions, and outcomes.~~
- ~~5. Get rid of "at will" contract and come up with something equitable to tenure track.~~
6. Look at ways to increase buy-in (help folks understand "why" so they can support and understand) when it comes to institutional change.
- ~~7. Mandatory diversity training for all staff.~~
- ~~8. Develop system or policies to identify specific actions or concerns at unit level.~~
- ~~9. Have more staff involvement or implement a system where staff have a voice even up to the provost level.~~
- ~~10. To increase awareness of diversity, have events such as world day, gay/lesbian pride days, etc.~~
- ~~11. Define diversity before training or events.~~
12. Identify research-based best practices related to (education, business, government) institutional change.
13. More transparent performance evaluation, promotion, and merit raise process.
- ~~14. Have more "extensive" training and workshops for supervisory.~~
- ~~15. Have a truly anonymous reporting/complaint system.~~
- ~~16. Create or outline some consequence system for employee bullying.~~
17. Stress competitive pay rates for new hires – pay them what they are worth.
18. Take a step backward and refine survey instrument to better pinpoint areas of concern and to ensure validity of data collection.
- ~~19. Change from "at will" employment to process for termination.~~
- ~~20. Construct an inner-office survey to determine what needs to be changed or reported at unit or department level.~~
21. Allow more freedom of expressing (in dress, hair, etc.) where reasonable/appropriate.
22. Create a task force or an outside consultant for all this (the issues identified in survey).
- ~~23. Better channels for reporting and action on workplace bullying or other inappropriate behavior.~~
- ~~24. Create ways to implement more changes at the unit or department level.~~
25. Labor day is a holiday.
26. Traditions should not play a factor in the workplace.

Items combined into new statements:

27. Construct an inner-office "survey" to determine what needs to be changed/reported at unit or department level and implement recommendations.
28. Modify the wording of "at will" employment to providing an explanation of the process for termination (i.e. in new employment offer letters/hiring process.)
29. Have meaningful line staff involvement in planning, discussions and outcomes in all levels within the Division of Academic Affairs.
30. Empower employees at the unit level to make decisions regarding job responsibilities.
31. Increase morale and build trust among employees through creation of events and/or policies such as administrative leaves, team building retreats, social gatherings, and general recognition of good work.
32. Increase awareness and understanding of diversity, as defined by TAMUS, through ongoing interactive training/education and/or events to all employees with the Division of Academic Affairs.

33. Increase awareness and understanding of the current office protocols and anonymous TAMUS complaint/reporting systems including how the systems are evaluated and how appropriate notification of actions and resolutions are communicated.
34. Increase awareness and understanding of TAMU defined “hostile” work environment policies.
35. Have more extensive, required training and workshops for supervisors on management issues and leadership skills.

Original List of Issues

1. Do more to boost morale (i.e. administrative leave, work/fun retreat, staff appreciation, ice cream day).
2. Events or actions that build trust or familiarity or comfort for understanding colleagues
3. There should be health coverage from day 1 of employment, not wait 90 days.
4. Include & accept input from staff in planning discussions, and outcomes.
5. Get rid of "at will" contract and come up with something equitable to tenure track.
6. Look at ways to increase buy-in when it comes to institutional change.
7. Mandatory diversity training for all staff.
8. Develop system or policies to identify specific actions or concerns at unit level.
9. Have more staff involvement or implement a system where staff have a voice even up to the provost level.
10. To increase awareness of diversity , have events such as world day, gay/lesbian pride days, etc.
11. Define diversity before training or events.
12. Identify research-based best practices related to (education, business, government) institutional change.
13. More transparent performance evaluation, promotion, and merit raise process.
14. Have more "extensive" training and workshops for supervisory.
15. Have a truly anonymous reporting/complaint system.
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17. Stress competitive pay rates for new hires – pay them what they are worth.
18. Take a step backward and refine survey instrument to better pinpoint areas of concern and to ensure validity of data collection.
19. Change from "at will" employment to process for termination.
20. Construct an inner-office survey to determine what needs to be changed or reported at unit or department level.
21. Allow more freedom of expressing (in dress, hair, etc.) where reasonable/appropriate.
22. Create a task force or an outside consultant for all this (the issues identified in survey).
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25. Labor day is a holiday.
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Appendix A: Focus Group Agenda and Group Ground Rules

AGENDA

DAY 1—Afternoon Session

- ✚ Charge to the Employees of the Focus Group
- ✚ Presentation of Survey Results—specific to 5-6-7
- ✚ Dismiss of Leadership
- ✚ Icebreaker Activity
- ✚ Group Definition of Ground Rules

BREAK

- ✚ Group Discussion on Results
- ✚ Individual Identification of Ideas
- ✚ Round Robin Sharing of Individual Ideas
- ✚ Clarification of Ideas

DAY 2 – Morning Session

CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST GATHERING

- ✚ Q&A
- ✚ Consolidation of Ideas
- ✚ Individual Ranking and Weighting of Top 5 Ideas
- ✚ Presentation of Results of Ranking and Weighting of ideas
- ✚ Wrap Up and Adjourn

GROUND RULES

- Vegas Rules
- Do Not Interrupt—let people finish
- Be Constructive
- Respect Others' Opinions
- Agree to Disagree
- Keep Emotions in Check
- Don't Take Things Personally