

Texas A&M Division of Academic Affairs Focus Group Input on Climate and Diversity March 2014

Overview

On March 25-26, 2014 nine (9) 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 that was stratified based on gender.

. 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 antidotal 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. **NOTE:** *The group asked that a table for weight order, number of votes and vote rank points be provided in the report.* For this report, the rank and weight tables are presented, 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
130	6/20	52	Commit to a review of the performance evaluation process to ensure legitimacy of recognition for outstanding individuals. This can include 360 performance evaluations, performance evaluation audits, supervisory trainings, and trainings to empower employee's investment in and understanding of the performance evaluation process.
110	4/14	53	Commit to rewarding and recognizing outstanding individual based on annual performance evaluations through merit increases. In the absence of budget allocations for merits, rewards and recognitions can include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Appreciations that are personalized to the employees preferences 2. Grants to individuals to create new programs 3. Increased availability and encourage guilt-free use of vacation time/opportunities 4. Adjusted work space (i.e. window views, chairs, desks) 5. Staff, team or project highlights via website, newsletters, video, etc.
90	5/13	32	I am constantly told that I am an employee "at will". We need better HR policies to shorten the time to legitimately terminate low performing employees
85	5/13	56	More transparency through the sharing of relevant and appropriate information through various mediums for all levels of employees.
75	4/15	55	Create a way to know the people you work around in a manner that allows individuals to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives and personalities. This may include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Team building exercises 2. Utilizing TAMU resources 3. Recognition of units that demonstrate commitment 4. Professional but friendly atmosphere
75	6/8	57	Commit to the design and dissemination of a time relevant action plan related to the climate survey.
Other Items that Received Votes and Weights			
Weight Points	(# Votes/ Rank Points)	Item Number	Item Wording
65	3/13	54	Commit to reviewing the current system(s) for reporting and addressing diversity concerns or incidents, and evaluate the potential need for systems more specifically addressing acts of discrimination or non-inclusion.
40	2/7	51	Commit to encouraging ongoing personal and professional development through opportunities such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Leadership training b. Management training c. Supervisory training in management of varying diverse groups/personalities d. Job shadowing programs e. Paid sabbatical leave for special projects after 10 years of service f. Additional skill development training g. Continuing education toward degree attainment
40	2/4	6	Address lack of diversity within units in leadership positions.
40	1/5	9	Give internal employees the opportunity to move up the career ladder.

30	1/5	10	Discretion in implementation.
30	1/5	41	Bring back the probationary period for new hires.
25	1/2	31	Increase pay in lower level positions to encourage the best people to apply and to remain in those positions for a while.
20	1/4	24	Communication with direct supervision when salary increases and bonuses are being assessed and decided.
20	1/3	19	In areas where efficiency is clearly not an issue add staff to lighten the workload.
20	1/2	26	Provide opportunities to positively highlight diversity in a public fashion through various mediums
15	1/2	37	Instead of putting work on productive employees from non-productive employees; get rid of them (nonproductive employees).

Number of Votes and Rank Points Order of Issues

Top Five Items by Weight			
Rank Votes (#Votes/ Rank Points)	Weight Points	Item Number	Item Wording
6/20	130	52	Commit to a review of the performance evaluation process to ensure legitimacy of recognition for outstanding individuals. This can include 360 performance evaluations, performance evaluation audits, supervisory trainings, and trainings to empower employee's investment in and understanding of the performance evaluation process.
4/15	75	55	<p>Create a way to know the people you work around in a manner that allows individuals to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives and personalities. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Team building exercises 6. Utilizing TAMU resources 7. Recognition of units that demonstrate commitment 8. Professional but friendly atmosphere
4/14	110	53	<p>Commit to rewarding and recognizing outstanding individual based on annual performance evaluations through merit increases. In the absence of budget allocations for merits, rewards and recognitions can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Appreciations that are personalized to the employees preferences 7. Grants to individuals to create new programs 8. Increased availability and encourage guilt-free use of vacation time/opportunities 9. Adjusted work space (i.e. window views, chairs, desks) 10. Staff, team or project highlights via website, newsletters, video, etc.
5/13	90	32	I am constantly told that I am an employee "at will". We need better HR policies to shorten the time to legitimately terminate low performing employees
5/13	85	56	More transparency through the sharing of relevant and appropriate information through various mediums for all levels of employees.
6/8	75	57	Commit to the design and dissemination of a time relevant action plan related to the climate survey.
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40	2/7	51	<p>Commit to encouraging ongoing personal and professional development through opportunities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> h. Leadership training i. Management training j. Supervisory training in management of varying diverse groups/personalities k. Job shadowing programs l. Paid sabbatical leave for special projects after 10 years of service m. Additional skill development training n. Continuing education toward degree attainment
40	2/4	6	Address lack of diversity within units in leadership positions.
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20	1/3	19	In areas where efficiency is clearly not an issue add staff to lighten the workload.
20	1/2	26	Provide opportunities to positively highlight diversity in a public fashion through various mediums
15	1/2	37	Instead of putting work on productive employees from non-productive employees; get rid of them (nonproductive employees).

Consolidated or Combined List of Issues

- ~~1. Professional but friendly atmosphere; not rigid~~
- ~~2. More vacation time, opportunities and encouragement~~
- ~~3. Don't wait 3 years to share results of the survey~~
- ~~4. Find ways to educate people about the various perspectives~~
- ~~5. Annual mandatory professional development for all full time employees~~
6. Address lack of diversity within units in leadership positions
- ~~7. Offer grants to individuals to create new programs~~
- ~~8. Eliminate interference of others that share workspace~~
9. Give internal employees the opportunity to move up the career ladder
10. Discretion in implementation
- ~~11. Share all relevant information with staff~~
- ~~12. How do we accomplish what the university wants with expansion~~
- ~~13. Find ways to encourage respect for those perspectives~~
14. Utilize staff you have and cull the herd
- ~~15. Larger workspace due to growth of the unit~~
16. Create an open door policy
- ~~17. Find out who the perpetrators are of non-inclusive behavior~~
- ~~18. Implement a formalized job shadow program between managers and supervisors~~
19. In areas where efficiency is clearly not an issue add staff to lighten the workload
- ~~20. Need to move forward (action)~~
21. Engage your staff in the decision making process
22. Delegate responsibility
23. The constant feeling that your job is in jeopardy
24. Communication with direct supervision when salary increases and bonuses are being assessed and decided
- ~~25. Create a fun work environment with weekly team building activities~~
26. Provide opportunities to positively highlight diversity in a public fashion through various mediums
- ~~27. Offer paid sabbatical leave after 10 years of service for employees to work on a project of choice~~
28. I need to know what my job is and let me do it
- ~~29. More transparency~~
30. I know my job (and others) so leave me alone
31. Increase pay in lower level positions to encourage the best people to apply and to remain in those positions for awhile
32. I am constantly told that I am an employee "at will". We need better HR policies to shorten the time to legitimately terminate low performing employees.
33. Ensure employees can and want to supervise before hiring for a position or promotion
- ~~34. Money and opportunities talk: pay employees to attend graduate school or seek 1st degree~~
- ~~35. Bring back merit increase according to evaluations~~
- ~~36. Allow supervisors to utilize the full performance evaluation, not say they are not allowed to give "excellent"~~
37. Instead of putting work on productive employees from non-productive employees; get rid of them (nonproductive employees)
- ~~38. No more academic affairs strategic planning retreats~~
- ~~39. Create a system for safely addressing diversity concerns or incidents~~
40. Create a way to know the people that work around you on a more personal level
41. Bring back the probationary period for new hires

- ~~42. While there is no budget, do more employee appreciation~~
- 43. NO #43 – NUMBER SKIPPED
- ~~44. Division wide custodial /maintenance appreciation week~~
- ~~45. Encourage individuality~~
- 46. Operate more like a business; less like a social club
- ~~47. Faculty and staff weekly highlights via print, web, video, etc.,~~
- 48. More authority within reason in a supervisory role
- ~~49. Reward the outstanding~~
- 50. Play Pharrell's "Happy" song at the end of each week via Kyle Field

Items combined into new statements:

- 51. Commit to encouraging ongoing personal and professional development through opportunities such as:
 - o. Leadership training
 - p. Management training
 - q. Supervisory training in management of varying diverse groups/personalities
 - r. Job shadowing programs
 - s. Paid sabbatical leave for special projects after 10 years of service
 - t. Additional skill development training
 - u. Continuing education toward degree attainment
- 52. Commit to a review of the performance evaluation process to ensure legitimacy of recognition for outstanding individuals. This can include 360 performance evaluations, performance evaluation audits, supervisory trainings, and trainings to empower employee's investment in and understanding of the performance evaluation process.
- 53. Commit to rewarding and recognizing outstanding individual based on annual performance evaluations through merit increases. In the absence of budget allocations for merits, rewards and recognitions can include:
 - a. Appreciations that are personalized to the employees preferences
 - b. Grants to individuals to create new programs
 - c. Increased availability and encourage guilt-free use of vacation time/opportunities
 - d. Adjusted work space (i.e. window views, chairs, desks)
 - e. Staff, team or project highlights via website, newsletters, video , etc.,
- 54. Commit to reviewing the current system(s) for reporting and addressing diversity concerns or incidents, and evaluate the potential need for systems more specifically addressing acts of discrimination or non-inclusion.
- 55. Create a way to know the people you work around in a manner that allows individuals to understand and appreciate diverse perspectives and personalities. This may include:
 - a. Team building exercises
 - b. Utilizing TAMU resources
 - c. Recognition of units that demonstrate commitment
 - d. Professional but friendly atmosphere
- 56. More transparency through the sharing of relevant and appropriate information through various mediums for all levels of employees.
- 57. Commit to the design and dissemination of a time relevant action plan related to the climate survey.

Original List of Issues

1. Professional but friendly atmosphere; not rigid
2. More vacation
3. Don't wait 3 years to share results of the survey
4. Find ways to educate people about the various perspectives
5. Annual mandatory professional development for all full time employees
6. Address lack of diversity within units in leadership positions
7. Offer grants to individuals to create new programs
8. Eliminate interference of others that share workspace
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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

- Be respectful of others ideas
- Be honest
- Don't take it personal
- Listen
- Be patient
- Give details
- Be open
- Consider limited knowledge
- Be supportive and affirming
- Respect confidentiality