

Texas A&M Division of Academic Affairs

Focus Group Input on Climate and Diversity

March 2014

Overview

On March 26-27, 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 ethnicity.

. 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.

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
200	9/27	62	<p>Create and maintain a workplace environment that is positive, respectful, safe and secure. This responsibility begins with leadership but is ultimately all individuals' responsibility. Ideas/examples include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Everyone needs to chillax 2. Recognize that all Aggies come from different cultures and backgrounds 3. Treat everyone with the same respect and dignity 4. Provide workplace settings with better physical conditions (i.e., working lights and bathrooms, no AC, no security, mold, and smells) 5. Promote Aggie culture without disparaging others 6. We say/promote that "Aggies are family", lets practice this
165	7/25	59	We say "Aggies are family" so let's practice that.
160	7/21	60	<p>Ongoing work toward developing and fostering a year-round environment of positivity and genuine staff appreciation, as well as engaging staff in university-wide decision making, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a DAA staff council including on and off campus, for increased visibility and participation 2. Monthly staff focused events 3. Financial incentives and discounts aimed at certification, degrees and continuing education credits 4. Develop a system for recognition and promotion of those often overlooked 5. Celebration of staff through recognition and rewards (ex. Monetary)
115	7/24	61	<p>Invest in improving the workplace competency of staff (on and off campus), including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Formal leadership and mentoring training for all management staff b. Identification of potential growth areas of staff for continued development c. Professional development face-to-face trainings for employee empowerment, professionalism, respectful interactions, establishing appropriate work-life balance and boundaries, more meaningful diversity, communication in person and electronically d. Tip sheets, handouts, other resources targeted to recognize triggers/factors that impact stress and conflict e. Financial support for certifications and degrees
75	5/14	63	Explore the possibilities of a 360 evaluation.

<i>Other Items that Received Votes and Weights</i>			
Weight Points	(# Votes/ Rank Points)	Item Number	Item Wording
55	4/8	58	Don't always do what other universities do, be willing to take a stand and be different
35	2/3	57	Restructure the guidelines in the performance evaluation system to standardize the review process and provide ongoing annual education on conducting effective reviews for employees and supervisors.
25	1/5	50	If you are going to have forums like this do something with the staff inputs, and connect the feedback directly to the action implemented.
20	1/3	28	Sharing power is empowering, provide more challenging and creative work.
20	1/3	36	Executives (i.e., BOR, President, Provost, VPs) need to physical visit with all depts. Monthly, quarterly, ...
15	1/2	40	Create staff specific programs toward diversity, don't expect staff to tag- along for programs specific to students

Consolidated or Combined List of Ideas

1. ~~Provide quality leadership that staff wants to follow~~
2. Be open to ways to increase diversity among the supervisors
3. We need a specific leader that has time and provides a higher level of management oversight
4. ~~Everybody across the board chillax down down a couple~~
5. ~~Don't assume anything; if you have any doubts for and clarify~~
6. NO #6 – NUMBER SKIPPED
7. ~~Share upper level discussions with lower level people to keep things transparent~~
8. ~~Don't pass the stress on to others; take ownership~~
9. ~~Message being sent, need to be from the top down~~
10. ~~Post ideas and strategies to help people recognize stress factors/triggers~~
11. ~~Allow more employees at all levels to provide feedback and value those opinions~~
12. Remember that not all “aggies” have similar beliefs
13. ~~Receive regular direction from the big boss~~
14. ~~Have frequent face to face time division wide to get to know others~~
15. ~~Don't mix up your personal and professional life~~
16. ~~Coordinate work priorities over different levels~~
17. ~~Empower your employees with resources and delegate responsibilities~~
18. Allow staff to participate in events on campus occasionally during the work day
19. ~~Acknowledge everyone's presence~~
20. ~~Give ample time for change or adoption~~
21. ~~Remind staff that work environment is not the place to voice all ideas~~
22. ~~Show employee appreciation more than once a year~~
23. ~~The leadership should say it like it is~~
24. ~~Don't take things too seriously, other than your work~~
25. ~~Recognize staff contribution even if they don't speak out~~
26. Chill out, micromanagement is not for you
27. ~~Action speaks louder than words — nominate staff for awards~~
28. Sharing power is empowering, provide more challenging and creative work
29. ~~Provide more support for off campus staff~~
30. ~~Acknowledge and encourage different voices~~
31. ~~Never resort to management by tantrum, and never publicly berate a subordinate~~
32. ~~Treat everyone with some respect and dignity~~
33. ~~Provide workplace with better physical conditions~~
34. ~~Be respectful if you give a project don't turn around and give it to someone else~~
35. ~~Better food chain communication to get information to the appropriate party or employee~~
36. Executives (i.e., BOR, President, Provost, VPs) need to physical visit with all depts. Monthly, quarterly, ...
37. ~~Provide more recognition for good work~~
38. ~~Celebrate staff through recognition and awards~~
39. ~~Allow people to wear orange~~
40. Create staff specific programs toward diversity, don't expect staff to tag- along for programs specific to students
41. ~~Don't hurt other people's feelings — think before you speak~~
42. High staff turnover reflects a problem in leadership
43. If someone makes a mistake, correct that person not the entire staff
44. ~~Admit your own mistake~~

- 45. ~~Low morale as a result of unrealistic expectations and deadlines — saying “suck it up” is not going to make a strong department~~
- 46. ~~Follow through and practice what you preach~~
- 47. ~~Provide employees education opportunities (i.e.. credits/courses toward degree/certifications) like other colleges and universities~~
- 48. ~~Treat others the way you want to be treated~~
- 49. ~~Model behavior you expect of others~~
- 50. If you are going to have forums like this do something with the staff inputs, and connect the feedback directly to the action implemented
- 51. ~~Understand people have different work-life balance~~
- 52. ~~Ongoing diversity education~~
- 53. Don't always do what other universities do, be willing to take a stand and be different
- 54. We say “Aggies are family” so let's practice that
- 55. ~~Be respectful of coworkers~~
- 56. ~~Create a safe and secure environment~~

Items combined into new statements:

- 57. Restructure the guidelines in the performance evaluation system to standardize the review process and provide ongoing annual education on conducting effective reviews for employees and supervisors
- 58. Explore the possibilities of a 360 evaluation.
- 59. Ongoing work toward developing and fostering a year-round environment of positivity and genuine staff appreciation, as well as engaging staff in university-wide decision making, including:
 - a. Develop a DAA staff council including on and off campus, for increased visibility and participation
 - b. Monthly staff focused events
 - c. Financial incentives and discounts aimed at certification, degrees and continuing education credits
 - d. Develop a system for recognition and promotion of those often overlooked
 - e. Celebration of staff through recognition and rewards (ex. Monetary)
- 60. Invest in improving the workplace competency of staff (on and off campus), including:
 - a. Formal leadership and mentoring training for all management staff
 - b. Identification of potential growth areas of staff for continued development
 - c. Professional development face-to-face trainings for employee empowerment, professionalism, respectful interactions, establishing appropriate work-life balance and boundaries, more meaningful diversity, communication in person and electronically
 - d. Tip sheets, handouts, other resources targeted to recognize triggers/factors that impact stress and conflict
 - e. Financial support for certifications and degrees
- 61. Commit to an enhanced communication plan that is honest and open, including:
 - a. A place to go find answers such as “ask an Expert”
 - b. Information transparency through weekly updates to keep the lines open and constant from supervisors and administrators
 - c. Opportunities for division wide and/or cross unit interactions (not Christmas parties)
 - d. Coordination of work priorities at Provost level within and across units
 - e. Provide punctual information on policy and procedural changes to allow realistic time for implementation
- 62. Create and maintain a workplace environment that is positive, respectful, safe and secure. This responsibility begins with leadership but is ultimately all individuals' responsibility. Ideas/examples include:

- a. Everyone needs to chillax
 - b. Recognize that all Aggies come from different cultures and backgrounds
 - c. Treat everyone with the same respect and dignity
 - d. Provide workplace settings with better physical conditions (i.e., working lights and bathrooms, no AC, no security, mold, and smells)
 - e. Promote Aggie culture without disparaging others
 - f. We say/promote that “Aggies are family”, lets practice this
63. Foster a culture of professionalism including:
- a. The elimination of tantrums, belittling, bullying, drama, gossiping, and disrespectful behaviors
 - b. Encourage self-responsibility, accountability, modeling of positive behaviors, follow-through, respect of co-workers, understanding of differences including work-life balances

Original List of Ideas

1. Provide quality leadership that staff wants to follow
2. Be open to ways to increase diversity among the supervisors
3. We need a specific big boss
4. Everybody across the board chillax down down a couple
5. Don't assume anything; if you have any doubts for and clarify
6. NO #6 – NUMBER SKIPPED
7. Share upper level discussions with lower level people to keep things transparent
8. Don't pass the stress on to others; take ownership
9. Message being sent, need to be from the top down
10. Post ideas and strategies to help people with stress factors/triggers
11. Allow more employees at all levels to provide feedback and value those opinions
12. Remember that not all "aggies" have similar beliefs
13. Receive regular direction from the big boss
14. Have frequent face to face time division wide to get to know others
15. Don't mix up your personal and professional life
16. Coordinate work priorities over different levels
17. Empower your employees with resources and delegate responsibilities
18. Allow staff to participate in events on campus occasionally during the work day
19. Acknowledge everyone's presence
20. Give ample time for change or adoption
21. Remind staff that work environment is not the place to voice all ideas
22. Show appreciation more than once a year
23. The leadership should say it like it is
24. Don't take things too seriously, other than your work
25. Recognize staff contribution even if they don't speak out
26. Chill out, micromanagement is not for you
27. Action speaks louder than words – nominate staff for awards
28. Sharing power is empowering, provide more challenging and creative work
29. Provide more support for off campus staff
30. Acknowledge and encourage different voices
31. Never resort to management by tantrum, and never publicly berate a subordinate
32. Treat everyone with some respect and dignity
33. Provide workplace with better physical conditions
34. Be respectful if you give a project don't turn around and give it to someone else
35. Better food chain communication to get information to the appropriate party or employee
36. Executives need to physical visit with all depts. Monthly, quarterly, ...
37. Provide more recognition for good work
38. Celebrate staff
39. Allow people to wear orange
40. Create staff specific programs toward diversity, don't expect staff to tag- along for programs specific to students
41. Don't hurt other people's feelings --- think before you speak
42. High staff turnover reflects a problem in leadership
43. If someone makes a mistake, correct that person not the entire staff
44. Admit your won mistake

45. Morale – saying “suck it up” is not going to make a strong department
46. Follow through and practice what your preach
47. Provide employees education opportunities like other colleges and universities
48. Treat others the way you want to be treated
49. Model behavior you expect of others
50. If you are going to have forums like this do something with the staff inputs, and connect it to the input of the forum
51. Understand people have different work-life balance
52. Ongoing diversity education
53. Don't always do what other universities do, be willing to be the first
54. We say “aggies are family” so let's practice
55. Be respectful of coworkers
56. Create a safe and secure environment

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 sensitive as a speaker and a listener
- Don't take things personally
- Respect each other's truth
- Be honest
- Listen Actively
- Vegas rules – be respectful of confidentiality
- Be open
- Don't be afraid