Climate Survey

Recommendations Report
of the Classified Staff Council

to

Office of Equity and Inclusion

Christine Curley
Assistant Vice Chancellor
Extension Building, Room 501
432 N Lake St
Madison, WI 53706

Office of the Chancellor

Aaron Brower
Interim Chancellor
Extension Building, Room 527
432 N Lake St
Madison, WI 53706

April 2014

Classified Staff Council Climate Response Summary and Recommendations

In the spring of 2011, UW-Extension conducted a workplace climate assessment survey created by Rankin & Associates Consulting; a result of work by a UW System Inclusivity Initiative taskforce committee. The survey results were presented in the fall of 2011 to UW-Extension by Sue Rankin of Rankin & Associates. The UW-Extension Climate Response Workgroup convened in March 2012 to analyze the results and propose recommendations. At that time the Classified Staff Council did not have input into the recommendations as the Council and its by-laws were being developed. In July of 2013 the Classified Staff Council adopted the by-laws. In the fall of 2013, the Classified Staff Council was asked by the UW Colleges/ UW-Extension Chancellor, Ray Cross, to develop recommendations based on the workplace climate assessment survey. Chancellor Ray Cross has recently accepted the UW System President position.

The Classified Staff Council consists of nine members representing all divisions. Members include Inga Foley (BAMI-WPT), Julie Hunter (GEAS-ECC), Dan Kursevski (CEO-EL), Donna McLaughlin (DEED), Lisa Perkins (Coop-FL), Suzanne Samuelsen (GEAS), Katy Sticha (Coop-PD&E), Dan Wanish (GEAS-ECC), and James Wegener (BAMI).

The first goal of the Council was to understand the history and conclusions of the 2011 Climate Survey project and the subsequent recommendations. The report concluded that groups such as women, LGBTQ and classified employees reported less satisfaction with their jobs and higher rates of offensive, hostile, exclusionary, or intimidating conduct. The qualitative evaluation of the open-ended questions identified 3 strengths and 4 areas of concern. Staff admired the mission and goals of the institution, enjoyed working with their colleagues, and appreciated the employee benefits. Their concerns included classism and related inequalities, inappropriate salaries, lack of career progression and opportunity, and compromised leadership through lack of accountability and modeling of desired behaviors.

Given that the survey identified structural/policy-related problems as key contributors to negative climate, the Council also met with UW System President, Ray Cross; UW-Extension Interim Chancellor, Aaron Brower; and Director of Human Resources, David Prucha. President Cross and Interim Chancellor Brower both declared their commitment to improving the climate for all staff and asked for recommendations from the Classified Staff Council on how they could accomplish this arduous mission. David Prucha described how the structure of separate classified and unclassified personnel systems resulted in different work rules and opportunities, which reinforced the hierarchy and elitism experienced by some employees. He noted the revision of the personnel guidelines for the University of Wisconsin System, known as the University Personnel System, offers a unique opportunity to address these structural issues.

In developing recommendations, the Classified Staff Council conducted informal conversations with classified staff and held a brown bag luncheon with the invitation to openly ask questions, state concerns, and provide recommendations. In addition, the classified staff were encouraged to email or call council members with questions, concerns, and recommendations not addressed at the brown bag.

Recommendations

For purposes of the survey, climate was defined as "Current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning the access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential." Climate is created by both the people and structures of an organization and it evolves over time.

The Classified Staff Council also agrees with the following key points within the UW-Extension Climate Response Workgroup Summary and Recommendations report.

> The one key strategy to address climate problems is to redesign processes and structures to support inclusive behavior and relationships. Institutional level recommendations will likely facilitate change within the personal and interpersonal levels. Though changes in policy can occur almost instantaneously, new relationships, behaviors and thinking evolve over time.
>
> Efforts to alter climate must target these multiple levels and relationships within an organization, and develop both short and long-term interventions. For example, policy changes will have little impact if attitudes remain stagnant, and individuals' desire to be inclusive could be hindered if the institutional structure reinforces inequitable relationships. The recommendations are not intended to be exhaustive, and are only an initial response to address broad climate barriers. As the climate evolves so, too, should the institutional response; interventions should be continuously proposed, implemented, and evaluated.
>
> Another key component to positive climate is to build staff trust towards UW-Extension leadership. Many barriers are long-standing, and staff may question the organization's sincerity to change. Such distrust often leads to low levels of staff participation and low morale. This potential weakness can be minimized by establishing accountability and reporting measures. All UW-Extension units should develop timelines and milestones that include assignment of responsibilities for all colleagues in the unit, including those in leadership roles. Plans and assessments results should be communicated widely and model transparency. In addition, a 6 month update by the chancellor can demonstrate progress and reassure staff that concrete changes are being implemented due to the feedback they provided through the climate survey and input to the workgroup members. The chancellor should also publically announce whether or not the recommendations are accepted and the reasoning behind the decision.

There are specific climate areas which can be addressed such as supervisor training, supervisor evaluation, pay, sharing information equally with all classes of staff, continuing/professional education, tuition reimbursement, inclusion of Classified staff in institution-wide discussions and policy making, and inclusion on search and screen committees. It really comes down to everyone valuing the contributions of Classified (and all) staff, realizing the "culture" that has existed for so many years does not always necessarily reflect those positive values and sincerity in working to improve the culture/climate.

The Classified Staff Council recommendations fall under six categories. The recommendations have been loosely defined as on-going revisions will need to be made based on further analysis and additional studies. Subcommittees or ad-hoc work groups (referred to as groups) could be developed to conduct the on-going analysis and studies as well as suggestions for continued improvement. It is also recommended that these groups explore ideas for an efficient implementation process for the agreed upon changes that will achieve a healthy climate. The groups should be represented by all employee classifications in order to create true representation, consistency and transparency. Once the groups have additional recommendations they could present them to the three employee councils either in a joint council committee session or separate council committee meetings as well as to the Chancellor.

Category 1: Climate change
The Classified Staff Council appreciates both former Chancellor Ray Cross and current Interim Chancellor Aaron Brower for their sincere efforts to improve UW-Extension staff climate. However, it is hoped that these efforts will keep moving forward because classified staff continue to be concerned that many well -meaning supervisors and administrators don't recognize how they contribute to this negative climate. Certain practices and attitudes have become 2nd nature, (examples can be provided). We think it would really help if Aaron were to have an open discussion with all administrators to sincerely emphasize the importance of treating all classes of staff (Faculty, Academic and Classified) as equal. Maybe a reporting mechanism could be started to solicit examples of negative climate from any level of staff and then provide the means for an appropriate department to investigate/follow up. ('Appropriate' is important as one department where this duty may reasonably be assigned/reports to, appears to be one of the areas where this negative 3rd class culture seems to be most entrenched.)

Another recommendation is to add specific supervisory expectations to each supervisor's performance review. This will address all 4 goals in the *UW-Extension Climate Response Workgroup Summary and Recommendations* document. Supervisory skills could be addressed by requiring supervisors to complete a list of the educational opportunities, professional development opportunities, career path discussions and the results, as well as how each of their employees contributed to a project for that division/department. Supervisors may need some training on how to easily accomplish this as it may sound time consuming, but it doesn't have to be, especially if supervisors talk with their employees more than once per year about their performance. Once performance reviews are tied to pay adjustments, both supervisors and their employees will need to know how this can affect supervisors' overall pay adjustment.

Category 2: Continuing Education
There is a concern, which the Classified Staff Council plans to explore further, that funding for continuing education and travel is dispersed unequally between faculty, academic staff, and classified staff, with classified staff training being given lower priority. To the extent that this is true, it may contribute to climate issues. If our research supports this concern, we would suggest that some kind of policy be established, at least for tracking this issue, and hopefully to bring more equality of opportunity to all employment levels.

Category 3: Team Building
To address the concern that the current culture places classified staff too frequently at the bottom of the hierarchy in terms of professional respect, we believe there needs to be a culture of building teams where all contributions are recognized as important and valued in obtaining smooth operations. We believe employee orientations and supervisor training is paramount in achieving a team building culture. A certain amount of hierarchy is inevitable due to job responsibilities; however, equal respect can be achieved for all employee positions.

Category 4: Supervision
We support supervisor training that will train how to support, value, and encourage desired work performance while creating and maintaining a positive work environment.

Provide consistent supervisor training and support by making sure every supervisor is aware of the HR tools available to them to create consistency in communication and evaluation practices. Inconsistent supervisor practices have been discussed at length in our council meetings with the conclusion that many supervisors are not aware of the HR tools that are available to them or where to find the tools when

they have a question. It was also discovered that communication and evaluation practices vary widely, partially because supervisors are placed in their position without much, if any, supervisory training. It will be important to ensure that the supervisor training within UPS will be thorough and include communication and inclusiveness training.

Classified Staff Council suggests that incentives be created for Supervisors to encourage classified staff development and mentoring. Perhaps the Chancellor's Awards could add an Awards Category for Staff Development/Mentoring, or that the concept could be included in another category. In addition, employee evaluations could be a tool for encouraging supervisors to identify employee strengths and developing professional development goals.

Category 5: Search and Screen Committees

The Classified Staff Council feels that consistent classified inclusion on Search and Screen committees (and other strategic initiatives) will improve the collaborative relationships between classified staff, academic staff and faculty. It would be very helpful if there could be some kind of widespread communication from someone in Administration to remind all UW-Extension employees that it is a UW-Extension expectation that all search teams include classified staff, no matter what level the position for which the candidate is being sought. This is suggested because it has become apparent at our Classified Staff Council meetings that different divisions and units seem to be operating under different practices regarding the makeup of search and screen teams.

Category 6: Communication and Transparency

In the interest of greater clarity and transparency, it would be very helpful if compensation and other employee guidelines and policies were posted on the UW-Extension website in a readable format for UW-Extension employees, as opposed to the current practice of referring people to the OSER website. That would not only help classified staff, but be helpful from the supervisory standpoint as well, thus reducing unnecessary tension and misunderstanding.