

Glendale Community College Listening Sessions Executive Summary

Purpose

Thirteen listening sessions were conducted during 2003-2004 on the Glendale Community College (GCC) campus to collect impressions of campus climate. The process was initiated by then Interim President Dr. Phil Randolph in February 2003. Following the permanent appointment as President of the college, Dr. Randolph continued the process as an aid to his decision making and to initiate actions to improve the college climate.

Format

Each session focused on the membership of a formally recognized employee group (Faculty, MAT, M&O/CRAFTS/SAFETY, and PSA) or constituency group (Hispanic - AACHE, African-American - MCBAA, Asian American - APIA, and Native-American - UTEC). The number of participants at each session varied considerably, and some groups required two or more sessions to complete the process. Some participants hold membership in both an employee and a constituency group. Their active participation was welcomed in both. Each session lasted approximately ninety (90) minutes.

Participants were provided a handout listing six (6) topics previously identified as “Areas of Concern” by respondents to the Fall 2001 Climate Survey: diversity, morale, communication, fairness, leadership and decision-making/governance. President Randolph facilitated each discussion by inviting participants to voice their views about each area and by seeking answers to the following questions:

- How are we doing in this area? Describe examples that demonstrate this.
- What issues remain?
- What actions could lead to improvement?

Blank index cards were available on-site or through the leadership of each focus group for those preferring to provide anonymous input. Views from each session were summarized.

General Impressions of GCC Campus Climate

The general impressions of campus climate learned from the listening session process include the following:

Diversity - Faculty attitudes about the diversity of the workforce at GCC are more favorable than those expressed by staff, with the exception of Hispanic faculty. Beliefs about the meaning of equal opportunity, under-representation and related Maricopa District policy have created unfulfilled expectations for many staff members. Steps have been taken to insure minority representation on every screening committee, and new efforts are being made to extend recruitment to regions with significant minority population. Still, the general sentiment is that more should be done to address this topic until the employee demographic profile generally reflects that of the student population and the service area.

Morale - Faculty morale is highest of all groups, except as noted above. Attitudes about morale vary among staff and constituency groups. Concerns over diversity, the perceived fairness of assignment/promotional practices and fear about speaking out within a group appear to be the dynamics affecting groups reporting low morale. New leadership and a more civil atmosphere were often cited as contributors to higher levels of morale.

Communication - The general impression is that communications have improved. The President’s Newsletter, the Listening Sessions, the President’s personal communications style and cessation of the “email wars” were most often cited as improvements to communications. Expanding the distribution of information and improving cultural sensitivity within communications would help even more.

Fairness - Within staff and constituency groups, many expressed suspicion about hiring/assignment and promotional practices. Some opportunities appear predetermined, and it is perceived that the result is either the deliberate or de facto exclusion of minorities. The process of hiring adjunct faculty--a position that may lead to a provisional appointment--was a frequently cited example. The new practice of advertising internally for acting or interim staff opportunities for five (5) days before external advertisements, received mixed reviews.

Leadership - The appointment of the new president was given broad acceptance and support. Trust is gradually building. Some are still reluctant to bring the President their concerns because they fear fallout from supervisors and managers. Some positive change has been noticed. Interaction with Deans and other administrators has been described as "kinder and gentler." There is hope that others will adopt the President's leadership style.

Decision-making / Governance - Although there were questions regarding the allocation of resources, overall there was satisfaction with the influence individuals and groups have on decisions that matter. Some temporary employees, including those with long tenure, feel left out. It appears too that attempts made from 1996 - 2002 to create a more inclusive budget process have in fact added well intentioned but cumbersome input to what should be routine decisions¹. Meetings using a "town hall" format are planned for the future and will afford employees new opportunities to provide input and seek information about matters of governance.

Conclusion

Overall, the quality of the campus climate has improved at GCC since it was last measured by the Fall 2001 survey. Participants in the Listening Session process credit a change in leadership as the most profound factor contributing to that improvement. Diversity is the over-arching area of concern for many minority employees, and coupled with related perceptions of bias, prejudice or favoritism, is the most contentious issue on campus today. Most minority employees appear willing to give the President's initiatives aimed at improving diversity matters more time to succeed. Others would like to see alternative approaches taken and the timeline shortened.

Campus climate is not a static phenomenon. Perceptions about the quality of campus climate are likely to be affected by numerous variables and events. Events of the past few years have demonstrated though, that campus climate is a matter of great interest to all GCC employees and that they support methods to monitor its quality. The President's on-going open meetings, open-door policy, and management by walking around to assess campus climate were noted and clearly appreciated by listening session participants. In conclusion, it is recommended that the Glendale Community College Action Plan related to campus climate be amended to include conducting a formal study of campus climate every five years.

Respectfully submitted,

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¹ The 2003-2004 budget process has not yet been fully evaluated, but seems to have alleviated some of these concerns.