

## Listening Sessions Executive Summary

Climate Progress Report to the Higher Learning Commission – North Central Association

### **Purpose**

Ten listening sessions were conducted during the period September 9 to October 1, 2004 on the Glendale Community College (GCC) campus to obtain feedback on the draft Climate Progress Report and to discuss climate survey options presented at the August 16, 2004 All-Employee Convocation. The listening sessions also served as a continuation of listening sessions conducted Spring 2003 through Spring 2004. Following the completion of listening sessions, a Campus Conversation was scheduled for Wednesday, October 6, 2004 to communicate how and when the College would conduct a follow up climate survey.

### **Format**

Each session addressed the membership of a formally recognized employee group (Faculty, MAT/Safety, M&O/Crafts, and PSA) or constituency group (Hispanic - AACHE, African-American - MCBAA, Asian American - APIA, and Native-American – UTEC). Two additional groups were added to the process; the Faculty Senate and Department Chairs Council. Some participants hold membership in both an employee and a constituency group and attended more than one session. Their active participation was welcomed in both. Each session lasted approximately ninety (90) minutes.

The draft Climate Progress Report was distributed to every Governing Board approved employee of the College prior to the listening sessions. The report addressed the six (6) topics previously identified as “Areas of Concern” by respondents to the Fall 2001 Climate Survey: leadership, communication, diversity, fairness, decision-making/governance, and morale, and the actions taken to address these concerns. President Randolph facilitated the discussions, summarized changes in each area of concern that emanated from previous listening sessions and then invited participants to voice their views about each area, seeking additional feedback to the following questions:

- What issues remain?
- What actions could lead to further improvement?

Dr. Randolph also outlined the four (4) climate survey options presented at the All-Employee Convocation and solicited feedback and recommendations on the options.

Additionally, blank index cards were available on-site or through the leadership of each group for those preferring to provide anonymous input. Views from each session are summarized below.

## Climate Survey Options

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

Option 1 – Repeat Fall 2001 Survey – There was little support for this option from any group. Listening session attendees felt there was no compelling reason to run this survey again. Several opined that the campus was very different today, that the survey would not accurately gauge the present climate. Others stated that the Fall 2001 survey was aimed at situations that no longer exist and individuals that are now gone. The survey questions would certainly require major revision, and must be depersonalized.

Option 2 – Use a Recognized or Existing Survey – Many employees liked the idea of using a recognized survey. Dr. Randolph mentioned that there are literally hundreds of climate surveys on the web, though a large number of these target business, industry and government agencies. There are several surveys applicable to educational institutions. The HLC-NCA does not have a climate survey of its own to offer, though it may be of some help in recommending surveys (Note: *Several of the HLC-NCA surveys are only available if the institution is participating in the AQUIP process*). An obvious advantage to this option is the establishment of an immediate benchmark for future assessments. Several attendees mentioned that they would favor this option if the College was able to add questions, should the recognized survey not address all of the College's concerns. College Research Services is in the process of investigating/obtaining copies of some recognized surveys for review by the College. If the decision is to use a recognized survey, Dr. Randolph stated that a committee of employee and constituency group members would review and select the survey. Survey administration and management would be contracted to an external consultant or research agency to insure confidentiality and an unbiased analysis of results.

Option 3 – Develop a New In-house Climate Survey – While tailoring questions to the institution is an advantage, the process of developing questions, insuring validity and reliability, while still meeting the timeline established for report submission to HLC-NCA is problematic. Also, if benchmarking is a concern, this survey would have to be used repeatedly, and thus might suffer from similar concerns of the Fall 2001 survey. Several employees stated that coming to any consensus on questions is a monumental task, and takes months (Note: *The Fall 2001 survey development process lasted 8-9 months*).

Option 4 – Systematic Approach, Use a Recognized Survey, Conduct in 2005/6 and Repeat Every Five (5) Years – This option received considerable support from all groups. The use of a recognized survey (Option 2) versus a New In-house Survey (Option 3) was discussed, but the majority would prefer Option 2 (*see above*). Considerable discussion centered on when to conduct the survey. Option 4 originally envisioned submitting the draft Climate Progress Report to HLC-NCA in June 2004, and deferring a formal climate survey until 2006, after the installation of a new president. A sub option was later developed that included conducting a climate survey in Spring 2005, followed by a

second survey in 2006, one-year after the installation of a new president. Many opined that neither of these sub options would serve the College well, that the College should stay the course and conduct a climate survey as part of its progress report to HLC-NCA in June 2005. Conducting a survey one year after the arrival of a new president provided too little time to accurately assess change. Collectively, two surveys seemed like a waste of resources to some. Dr. Randolph then discussed a third sub option, conducting a survey in Spring 2005, including survey results as part of the College's response to HLC-NCA in June, and allowing a new president to conduct a future survey at a time appropriate to the College.

Summary - After much discussion by all groups, consensus seems to include the following characteristics:

- though the College could just report out on actions taken to address the concerns identified in the Fall 2001 survey, and delay a formal climate survey until some future date, the general feeling was to conduct a survey and include results in the June 2005 report to HLC-NCA.

- if possible, a recognized/existing survey should be used.

- attendees approved of the idea of the president appointing a committee to select the survey instrument.

- an external consultant should be contracted to manage/administer the survey and prepare all analyses.

- the systematic approach was desired, but the timing need not necessarily be every five (5) years.

- attendees approved of the idea of including a climate survey as part of the next Accreditation Self Study (2011-2012).

### **General Impressions of GCC Campus Climate**

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

Leadership – Dr. Randolph's service to the College was uniformly appreciated. Many cited his calming influence on the campus and the re-establishment of trust as key contributions. The appointment of a new Dean of Administrative Services, the reorganization of the President's Advisory Committee and establishment of a President's Administrative Team (includes Associate Deans) were given broad acceptance and support.

Communication - The general impression is that communications have improved. The President's Newsletter, Listening Sessions, Campus Conversations, and the President's personal communications style were cited as improvements to communications. Expanding the distribution of information and improving cultural sensitivity within communications has helped even more. One lingering problem is the Maricopa County Community College District (MCCCD) policy regarding the use of the College's computer resources to circulate personal opinions or positions. Dr. Randolph informed several groups that the District was addressing this issue and that changes in policy were being considered.

Diversity – At GCC, beliefs about the meaning of under-representation and related Maricopa District policy have created unfulfilled expectations for many staff members. Steps have been taken to ensure minority representation on every screening committee, and new efforts have been made to expand recruitment activities, employ a variety of media, and extend recruitment to regions with minority populations. Still, the general sentiment is that more should be done to address this topic to improve the demographic profile of the College. Several attendees asked about the available pool of qualified candidates. In some cases, an insufficient number of qualified candidates apply. This makes it very difficult to improve representation.

Fairness – Several employees expressed continued concern about hiring/assignment and promotional practices. To some, opportunities for hiring or advancement appear predetermined, to the exclusion of minorities. The new practice of advertising internally for acting or interim staff opportunities for five (5) days before external advertisements appears to be well received.

Decision-making / Governance - It appears that changes made in 2004 to create a simpler, fairer and more understandable budget process have succeeded. Dr. Randolph stated that his initial budget message establishes a focus for each year and reinforces the development of budget packages that support the College's administrative, instructional and student services needs. Informational convocations, inclusive retreats regarding strategic and master planning, and Campus Conversation using a "town hall" format have afforded employees new opportunities to provide input and seek information about matters of governance.

Morale - New leadership and a more "civil" atmosphere were cited as contributors to higher levels of morale. Still, issues of diversity and fairness negatively impact the morale for some employee/constituency group members.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the quality of the campus climate has improved at GCC since it was last measured by the fall 2001 survey. Participants are most complimentary about new leadership and communications improvements, as evidenced by feedback from 23 listening sessions conducted since January 2003. Diversity and fairness remain areas of

concern for many minority employees. The College remains committed to improving these areas of concern.

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 Glendale Community College continue to work on the six areas of concern, amend the College Climate Action Plan to include recent listening session findings/outcomes, conduct a climate survey in Spring 2005 (Option 4) - to be included as part of updated Progress Report for the HLC-NCA (due June 2005), and conduct additional campus climate surveys at regular intervals as part of the College's management philosophy.

Respectfully submitted,

Charles F. Jeffery, Linda Hawbaker and  
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