Report on 2016-17 Employee Campus Climate Focus Groups

Methods

As a result of the annual Campus Climate survey, 364 respondents (64 Faculty, 90 Classified Staff, and 210 Administrative Professionals) indicated their interest in participating in a focus group. This report summarizes the results of six focus groups conducted during the late Fall semester and early Spring semester of the 2016-17 academic year.

Efforts were made to keep participation confidential and employee classifications in separate groups. Two focus groups per each of the three employee classifications were scheduled. Administrative Professional (AP) and Classified Staff (CS) focus groups had a maximum participation cap of 10 people per group and Faculty, due to the structure of colleges and confidentiality needs, were capped at eight people per group.

Email invitations were sent to randomly selected persons within the entire pool of respondents for both Classified Staff and Administrative Professionals. For Faculty, invitations were sent randomly within each college to better meet confidentiality needs. Focus group participants were asked to RSVP to a specific lunchtime focus group and additional invitations to randomly selected respondents were made as individuals declined. To allow for attrition, 12 people were scheduled for all AP and CS focus groups and 10 people were scheduled for both Faculty focus group. Final employee participation included 12 Academic Professionals, 11 Classified Staff, and 7 Faculty. Employees who declined indicated workload (particularly Faculty), time constraints, or concerns that the location of the meeting was too removed from campus. Day-of attrition was challenging, with some participants emailing in the morning to indicate they could no longer attend and others chose not to attend without a message. Faculty proved particularly challenging to schedule and Fall focus groups were rescheduled for Spring hoping to better accommodate calendars.

Employees participated because they had specific needs they wished to have addressed, were new to campus and seeking more information and connection, or felt a responsibility to contribute and "give some feedback if somebody wants to listen". Focus groups were semi-structured, beginning with the question "What brought you here today?" Additional questions were used as needed to initiate or continue dialogue.

To maintain confidentiality, this report is a summary of comments across and within each employee classification compiled into general themes. Triangulation was used to promote trustworthiness of the findings. Data, sans any individual or institutional identifiers, were sent to an outside researcher who reviewed and provided feedback on initial themes. For this report, general themes are addressed first and issues specific to employee classification are included later.

Findings

High Workload and Low Morale: "There's only so much rolling up your sleeves you can do"

Employees are feeling the stresses of being asked to "grow, grow, grow" with regard to increasing enrollment and expectations without increases in faculty/staff, budgets or other resources. In fact, when people retire, you don't know if the position will be filled or if the responsibilities will just be redistributed among those left in the department without additional compensation. Weekend work is a standard expectation rather than an occasional need and there is no adjustment of expectations in areas that are consistently short-staffed.

While summers on campus used to feel like a time catch-up, regroup, or plan it does not feel like there is any time in the year anymore to pause and "be strategic". Everyone is overloaded and when "you add more to your plate, something is going to fall off," which is seen as a personal failure rather than the consequences of being overloaded. What feels like a series of constant deadlines and requests to do more without time to focus and choose areas of greatest impact make work feel less meaningful, purposeful, and satisfying.

Additionally, the contradiction between what the university promotes in terms of a healthy work/life balance and what the expectations are around workload are disappointing. While doing more as things are in transition is understandable, it seems the "other duties as assigned" clause in most people's contracts is being overused and working this way is not sustainable personally or for the university.

It's Difficult to Live in Fort Collins on a CSU Salary

Fort Collins is expensive and it is difficult to make a livable wage as a university employee. Working two jobs or having a two person income is too often a necessity. Employees feel priced out of town with no support in the campus community, where out-of-pocket healthcare costs are on the rise, raises are stagnant, and parking rates increase every year. It feels like the people making the decisions about many of these things do not really have to deal with the ramifications of the increases personally. Employees questioned their quality of life, security, and their ability to retire if they continued to be employed at CSU.

The addition of Emma Chavez as the Ombuds and the outreach to those living at or below the poverty line is an important and needed addition to the campus community. As the cost of living continues to rise, employees wondered what additional support might be necessary, even for the middle class. Possible ways to support employees and

make Fort Collins more affordable might include an on-campus parking rate that was based on salary or the possibility of employee housing.

Human Resources and the Hiring Process are Frustrating

Everything about the hiring process takes too long. Human Resources is understaffed and overworked and the resulting backlog has a significant impact on the university as a whole. The process of getting someone hired can take months, from getting the job descriptions into the system to getting a background check cleared. Meanwhile, departments are already overworked and people are burning out.

Is Diversity Really a Priority?: "On our campus there are pockets of people who talk about diversity and then there is everyone else"

Employees were both appreciative of efforts and questioned diversity and how it is prioritized at CSU. Diversity efforts were largely seen as compartmentalized and highly variable depending on your area, department, or supervisor/manager/dean/leader.

Yes, Students…But What About Us?
Employees see efforts to recruit and admit a diverse student body (though note as a land grant institution, CSU is no where near representative of the diversity of the state of Colorado), and wonder about efforts to recruit diverse faculty and staff. Several employees who identify as racial diverse say it is still not uncommon for them to be the only person of color on a campus-wide committee. The number of faculty of color awarded tenure is particularly concerning. Employee diversity leads to student diversity in both recruiting and retaining efforts and employees advocate more attention be paid to diversifying and supporting faculty and staff with marginalized identities.

Lofty Goals: "What does supporting and appreciating really look like?"
Employees are appreciative of the Principles of Community as a starting point for making diversity a priority, however; they question what the Principles look like translated into action and what role accountability plays in prioritizing diversity. Without accountability, the Principles are just "top level talk" which often feels very disconnected from what happens "down below". Top-down expectations about what is and isn't acceptable feel like the next step to operationalizing each of the Principles.

Diversity Training
Employees feel that philosophical approaches and "awareness trainings" are not always practical because they stop short of providing day-to-day, concrete

application or skill development. Beyond an understanding of identities and impacts, employees were particularly appreciative of trainings that let them practice language and approaches to situations they have or would encounter in their daily work responsibilities.

The accessibility and support for diversity training varies greatly across campus, and some employees have extensive training opportunities, while others have never had any diversity training at all. More so, employees note that while they may hear about opportunities, if their supervisor/manager/dean doesn't see diversity training as valid or valuable they may not be supported or allowed to participate. Leaders at all levels of the institution must make diversity training a priority.

Talk vs. Action

Employees are frustrated with the Ripple Effect and both the lack of effect on white male centric processes, networks, and attitude on the workplace and also the failure of the initiative to address the intersections of race and class. Additionally, employees are disappointed in what they view as incongruent messages about priorities from the administration, evidenced by things such as how quickly messages are sent out celebrating sports teams compared to how long it can take to see messages about world events that have an impact on marginalized communities on campus.

Who Are We Leaving Out?

State Classified employees emphasize their experience with a "credentialing class system" and the lack of respect and inclusion they often experience interacting with Administrative Professionals and Faculty. "They don't consider your education level if you're wearing an embroidered maintenance patch" and often don't realized State Classified employees have degrees, expertise, and advanced training.

Additionally, some employees noted that CSU lacks "cognitive diversity" and that students' "intellectual and political diversity" is actually greater, or more diverse than that of the faculty/staff.

Evaluations: "It's more about justifying the distribution of raises that real feedback on work"

Annual evaluations are about raises rather than being tools to improve job performance. And, when it seems everyone gets the same raise, the amount of time and energy used to do evaluations seems like a waste.

Employees question the inconsistency with which evaluations happened, for themselves as well as the opportunity to evaluate and provide feedback to supervisors. Some employees have been at the university for several years and have not been a part of any sort of evaluation process.

Employees want feedback and are interested in improving—themselves and their work areas. Additionally, employees wonder about how to best provide difficult feedback "up the chain", particularly in small offices where demographics can "give you away".

Facilities Matter: Building, Renovation and "Fundraising"

Poor facilities have an effect on the daily quality of work life in terms of how you and your peers gather and interact, as well as on how you and your department are perceived. Remodels that have been promised for years seem to drop to the "bottom of the list" as new projects are "added to the top of the list." Employees of all classifications felt workspace quality had an impact on job satisfaction and saw disparities in what gets remodeled and what gets built, however the issue of facilities was particularly salient for faculty.

Facilities, including air quality, lighting, building age, classroom/lab space design and technology, office accessibility and public areas have a profound impact on department culture and productivity, When facilities are poor, faculty more often than not choose to work elsewhere when not teaching. As a result, people "don't share meals times, don't run into each other, don't start conversations and don't bounce research ideas off each other." Opportunities for interdisciplinary scholarship, student accessibility, and senior/junior faculty mentoring are all eroded. Additionally, facility quality is a factor in faculty recruitment and who a program can draw.

For faculty, facilities are a significant indicator of the "haves and have nots" and point to institutional priorities such as STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, math) over other areas, particularly when it comes to facilities. "If you're not a money-making unit, you're ignored." Faculty questioned the gaps in the espoused values of a student-centered, community serving Land Grant institution and the enacted values around prestige and profit generation, evidenced by the state of facilities across campus.

Leadership: "Just because you've been here a long time, doesn't mean you're a good leader"

Whether highly satisfied or deeply disgruntled, employees say the quality of their "leader" (whether a dean, chair, director, or manager) is a significant factor in the quality of their work environment. More so, the quality of employees' leaders is largely attributed

to luck, as supervisors are often promoted based on specific technical skills to roles where they don't necessarily have the skills to know how to lead or manage others.

Employees wonder if there are campus-wide "standards" for supervision and if the university offers the necessary training to support leaders in meeting those standards. Employees see the need for supervisor training around skills such as conflict management, developmental supervising, and CSU policies and procedures, Similar to diversity training, supervisory training seems to vary wildly across campus and department to department. Some employees question the effectiveness of providing training after people get to supervisory roles, noting "you can't train people at the top," and wonder if different ongoing training for everyone might be a better option to prepare people to lead.

Some employees wonder if the university operates on an "outdated sense of hierarchy" and relies too heavily on positional leaders. The role self-organizing teams, a concept from business frameworks, is one possibility for alternative work structures that don't depend on a single person for success or satisfaction.

Additional Topics
- The addition of lactation rooms is appreciated. Distribution of lactation rooms could be better, as some employees have to travel significantly to get to the closest room and lose time work time.
- Childcare on campus is convenient, particularly for nursing, but has become the most expensive option in town.
- Growing number of adjuncts on campus is a concern as they have no rights/protections and there is a fear this could erode the climate for academic freedom. Some protections need to be in place. It doesn't have to be called "tenure".
- The disparity between State Classified and hourly employees is a concern. You cannot give a raise to a part time employee regardless of how skilled or productive they are.
- There seem to be more and more coordinator roles on campus and fewer middle management roles, meaning advancement at CSU is limited.
- While it is a significant benefit, State Classified employees really use the benefit of tuition reduction because of the timing of courses and conflict with work hours.
- Custodians seem to be the only people required to punch an actual time clock. Having time clocks in public spaces feels demeaning and degrading.
- You have to fail to show you need resources. If you cover everything and keep it all running, even at your own personal cost, you won't get the support you need.
- Employees at all classifications expressed concern about the possibility of an upcoming large group of retirees and the potential loss of experience and skill
- Areas of campus are "siloed" and territorial, with duplication of resources that could be used more strategically, e.g. a university "temp" department where

employees who are knowledgeable about the university and it's systems could be "floated" to the departments with the most need at specific times of the year.