

UC DAVIS

STAFF ASSEMBLY

Campus Update September 2014

UC Davis Staff Assembly Campus wide Communication Survey

There were many positive takeaways from the 244 responses Staff Assembly received for our campus communications survey, which looked at how UC Davis staff receive campus information and what helps or hurts their efforts to openly and honestly communicate their views upward. A large majority of respondents indicated an interest in receiving campus-related news “all the time.” Further, their preferred delivery mechanisms, which include emails from the Chancellor and *Dateline*, are in place and being used. Additionally, most respondents have taken the initiative to communicate concerns, ideas and suggestions with their supervisors, but it’s problematic that so many have either received no response or no follow-up after a supervisor promises to “look into it.” Additionally, the idea that a staff person would NOT communicate with their supervisor for fear of retaliation or because of experiences that indicate the effort is “useless,” is a shortcoming requiring attention.

Noteworthy points that emerged from the data

1. Staff are interested in suggesting ideas for improvement, and do so on a regular basis, but a majority of the ideas they suggest move no further than a supervisor promising to “look into it.”
2. Staff believe that “implementing changes as a result of communications efforts,” and “having a supportive supervisor or unit/department leaders that can escalate and support ideas,” are changes that would improve communications and motivate staff to communicate.
3. A majority of survey respondents receive information about major campus decisions and initiatives from *Dateline* (80.41%).
4. More than 50% of staff rate their department/unit’s communication on important matters as “fair” to “poor.”
5. Several comments emphasized the need for trust in both the ability to provide information (upward communication) without negative repercussions and the ability to trust that leadership is communicating honest and complete information.

Next Steps

Since the release of Staff Assembly’s preliminary survey data in late June, we have been in discussions with UC Davis administration and HR leadership about ways to solicit additional insights into the positive and negative feedback staff provided in the survey. We have decided that focus groups, conducted by an impartial third party with expertise in focus group facilitation, is the best course to ensure we receive the type of valuable information needed to understand how to best enhance campus communications. Once we have finalized the plan, and identified dates and locations for the various focus groups, we will reach out to staff interested in volunteering their time, thoughts and energy to this important campuswide initiative.

Office of the Ombuds Annual Report

The UC Davis Ombuds Office opened its doors June 3, 2013. From that date through June 30, 2014, the office has received 267 visitors (172 Davis campus, 92 Health System) seeking impartial and confidential conflict management services. Recently, the Ombuds Office released its first annual report detailing themes that emerged from experiences recounted by visitors.

The most frequent concerns of visitors to the Ombuds Office involved:

- Poor communication
- Disrespect (including bullying behaviors)
- Distrust with a person of higher institutional status

The report also states that “visitors’ fear of retaliation by persons in power is profound.” Unfortunately, this isn’t the first time we’ve been confronted with this type of information. The Campus Climate Survey identified “positionality,” or hierarchical relationships as a leading factor in staff claims about experiencing “exclusionary, intimidating, offensive and/or hostile conduct.”

Only half of the respondents to the 2012 CUCSA Staff Engagement Survey felt they could be “open and honest sharing views upward.” Further, staff reported unfavorably on communications that kept them informed about matters affecting them. Many of these same issues surfaced in Staff Assembly’s recent Campus Communications Survey where we received several comments emphasizing the need for trust in both the ability to provide information (upward communication) without negative repercussions and the ability to trust that leadership is communicating honest and complete information.

We’re seeing serious steps being taken to address these problems, as evidenced by the creation of the Ombuds Office; HR’s recruitment of a Diversity and Inclusion subject matter expert who will ensure diversity and inclusion permeates HR programs and policies; the Office of Campus Community Relations’ active outreach to campus groups about ways to improve climate; administrations dedication to supporting the work of Staff Assembly’s committees; and more.

The Ombuds report concludes with a series of recommendations, which include:

- Consider building in a 360° review process, group communication protocols and coaching support in areas with reported activity
- Address retaliation issues (institutional monitoring)
- Provide skills-building training in conflict management and difficult/crucial conversations skills for all community members, with mandatory training in such areas for program directors, administrators, supervisors, managers, and chairs.
- Provide confidential exit surveys to all departing employees

The results of our Campus Climate Survey, the Staff Assembly Campus-wide Communication Survey and the CUCSA Engagement Survey coupled with the Ombuds Annual report show a few troubling trends that must be corrected. Campus administration is taking the results of all these surveys and the information in the report very seriously and is working with Staff Assembly on next steps.

Breakfast with the Chancellor Program

Since our last update we had one more Breakfast program but this time with our Provost. The topics brought up by staff included the following:

1. Campus Safety (specifically safety on the core of campus and vehicular traffic during pass time)
2. More Inclusive Campus (how to live the “One UC Davis” campaign)
3. Hiring Consultants/Contract Employees vs Career Staff
4. Morale Building
5. Continuing Education for Staff

Several staff that participated took the time to provide their feedback which was unanimously positive. All those surveyed said they would highly recommend the program and will actively encourage others to participate.