2017 COACHE Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey Analysis: IMPROVING CLIMATE Custom Question

The work climate for faculty at UC Davis has a significant impact on our ability to recruit and retain excellent scholars, and to promote the realization of their full potential as researchers, teachers, and community members. In the interest of soliciting insights from faculty about how to improve the climate in their immediate work environment, the 2017 UC Davis COACHE Faculty Job Satisfaction Survey asked faculty respondents to *"List one change that you think could significantly improve the climate in your academic unit (e.g., your lab, clinic, department, college, or school)."* This report presents the information gathered from that open-ended question.

OVERVIEW:
A total of 602 faculty provided responses,[1] many of which were lengthy and detailed, to this survey item. Results presented here are based on the coding and analysis of those verbatim responses.[2] The vast majority of the responses, 574 or 95% of the total, **identified potential changes that they believe could improve the social climate in their academic unit.** In contrast, a small number of respondents (14 responses or 2.3% of the total) reported being happy with the current climate of their work unit. Six (1%) respondents reported that they had neither opinion nor suggestion for improving climate on campus, while 4 respondent (.6%) shared concerns pertaining to the university's efforts to improve the climate, and another 8 respondents (1.3%) offered comments not directly related to the survey question.

SUGGESTED CHANGES:
The suggestions articulated by faculty covered a wide range of topics and potential modes of improvement. The most commonly recommended changes were those pertaining to: **facility space and maintenance**, current **funding** models, university and department **leadership**, issues arising from **faculty collegiality and conflict management**, and **greater transparency** from university leadership. More detailed results related to these topics are provided below. In addition to those topics, faculty also recommended the following changes with some regularity: increased or improved staff support (4%), the hiring of more faculty (4%), increasing diversity (3%).

Facilities - space and maintenance:
Among the faculty who responded to this 2017 COACHE survey item with suggested changes, **improving campus facilities** was the most common recommendation. In full, 75 faculty respondents (13%) stated that campus climate could be improved by building **new facilities, expanding space** allocated to individual departments, or performing necessary **maintenance** on current spaces. (e.g., *"…It is really discouraging to work at a high-quality academic institution where the restrooms resemble a bus depot, classrooms are never cleaned, and the physical environment is inconsistent with the quality of the intellectual work that is expected to occur there;" "… janitorial services … pertains to one facet of 'climate' - it's just grungy most of the time."*)

While calls for more, better, newer/renovated/upgraded and better-maintained work facilities predominated among the faculty responses, faculty respondents also articulated needs for:

- ***Improved organization of work space*** (e.g., *"A shared faculty lab/studio would increase opportunities for colleagues to see and understand each other's work better;" "Provide the department with more space. Currently we can't even offer a visiting scientist a desk. That makes space a contentious issue, which doesn't help the department climate;" "Make the hub of our building an area where faculty and*

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[1] See Appendix Table 1 for response rates by rank, gender and race/ethnicity.

[2] Initial codes for this analysis were derived from the question posed in the COACH survey (i.e., overall feedback and recommendations). Following a grounded theory approach to data coding and management (e.g. Charmaz, 2006), open-coding techniques were also used in the initial round of coding in order to identify themes emerging from the data. Subsequent rounds of focused coding were then used to flesh out salient themes in greater detail.

students can meet, mingle and talk...;" "Less need to compete for space;" "it would really help if we were all in one building ... [being located in multiple facilities] significantly undermines both the collegiality of the department and the opportunities for potentially important collaborations.")

- ***space for students*** (e.g., *"Having better classroom facilities (that students in high ranking institutions from some of the emerging countries have come to expect) and smaller class sizes;" "Adequate teaching facilities;" "Space!!!!!! Many of my students have no desk to sit at. We need space."*)

- ***improvement in research facilities*** (e.g., *"Infrastructure support. I set up a lab with start-up funds over a decade ago, but that's long gone. My indirect funds go into an administrative black hole. My lab is hanging together by strings and band-aids these days. We must use direct costs to pay for nearly everything now, from safety supplies to hazardous waste cleanup. I even had to pay for my lab/office telephone with direct funds for a while!" "Invest in modern research facilities and buildings. Many research buildings on this campus are old and run-down and require significant infrastructure maintenance;" "Modernize facilities and make critical equipment placements to increase competitiveness in grantsmanship."*)

Funding – levels, models, decision-making:

Increases in funding, revised funding priorities, and/or changes to the current budgetary models were commonly cited by faculty as the most impactful way to improve the climate in their department or division. In total, seventy faculty (12%) identified one of these types of changes to funding as the one they would recommend to improve climate in their unit.

Funding levels

Forty-eight faculty (68% of respondents who named funding as their one recommended change) asserted that increasing funding levels would significantly improve their work climate. In addition to many comments that called for increases in the overall level of funding available to departments/divisions, many faculty respondents identified the following specific funding changes:

- ***increasing support for obtaining and administering grants*** (e.g., *"increase in support for grant administration;" "We need more support to run our labs and keep up with reporting. It is overwhelming task to maintain a large research group on soft money;" "More streamlined grant preparation, submission and distribution."*)

- ***increasing the level of institutional funds available for research*** (e.g., *"Increase in support when grant funds are not available;" "Greater funding for pilot projects in research, etc. would be a huge benefit to junior faculty getting their research programs going;" "Summer grants and more money for putting on workshops and conferences. more funding and fellowship time for graduate students;" "Add seed grants for collaborative projects among faculty from the college."*)

- ***increased support for hiring graduate students*** (e.g., *"More funding for research, especially to support faculty hiring of graduate research assistants;" "It is almost financially prohibitive to hire graduate RAs. Requiring faculty to pay tuition and fees for students they hire is ridiculous outside the hard sciences. It penalizes faculty-student mentoring and collaboration;" "More block grant support to help faculty hire more graduate students;" "More support for GSRs."*)

Budget model and decision-making

A prominent theme among the faculty respondents who identified funding changes as the one change that could significantly improve the climate in their academic unit, 43 (61%) specifically recommended that the university reconsider the current budgetary model. Many of these (22 respondents) identified the budget model as a negative influence on their work climate because:

- ***it rewards departments for the quantity of students in classes rather than the quality of education provided*** (e.g., *"change the funding model to decrease perverse incentives for large class size;" "Revise the current budget model -- it pits faculty against each other for students and creates a reactive climate of fear in which faculty are pressured to design intellectually debased courses to attract students rather than holding themselves and each other to high standards."*)

- *increasing competition between departments/divisions and faculty within departments/divisions* (e.g., *"A reliable and sustainable funding/budget model that makes strategic planning possible, and that encourages cross-unit collaboration, rather than discouraging it;" "Better economic model that would alleviate interdepartmental conflict;" "The college internal business model could be adjusted to create more harmony, rather than competition, between departments."*)

Another 21 respondents identified the overall monetary focus of the university administration as problematic. These respondents argued that a **for-profit business model** predominates that:

- *is ill-suited to education* (e.g., "Stop treating the university like a business model. Students are not customers and teaching should not be a popularity contest;" "Look at us as faculty members rather than cost centers;" "not all work can be quantified by a blind, flat matrix (viz. the SCH/major calculations for the budget model) … and certain areas, notably the humanities and arts, are fundamental to all undergraduate education and must be supported, even if they are not as 'sellable'."*)

- *leads whole areas of scholarship and scholarly contributions to be undervalued* (e.g., *"Value the scholarly contributions of faculties. Running a academic institution like business is not helping;" "The marginalization of departments and programs that don't bring in money or have high student numbers should not be a model for providing a liberal arts education;" "Stop treating the university like a business model. Students are not customers and teaching should not be a popularity contest."*)

Leadership:

Sixty faculty respondents (10.5%) identified changing the university or department leadership as one action that would improve the climate in their primary work unit.

Of these, the majority (44 respondents, 73% of those identifying leadership change as their top suggestion) stated that changes to **college and/or campus leadership** could significantly improve the climate in their academic unit. Proposed changes at the university and/or college level include:

- *bringing in new leadership* (e.g., *"Having a dean with a greater intellectual presence and prominence;" "Recruit new leadership;" "We need deans who have vision;" "turnover of senior leadership which is completely petrified;" "Better leadership."*)

- *reducing the number of administrators* (e.g., *"Get rid of the administrative excess in the 'leadership' (i.e. Assoc/Asst/Vice deans/chancellors/etc). This layer of bureaucracy affects everyone … it means that more money goes to administrators who do nothing to improve student learning or research."*)

- *greater emphasis on shared and faculty governance* (e.g., *"The leadership should engage more with faculty and not make decisions without taking their concerns into account;" "Terrible leadership blind to what is going on at the ground level. Leaders need to have the courage to open the box and really look inside, and then take action to make change;" "Stopping the top-down policies and the fake 'shared governance' that top administrators do not actually believe/practice;" "Better communication with administration! more transparency for decision making, more active listening to faculty."*)

- *diversifying the leadership* (e.g., *"Less control by the 'good old boys' in leadership positions such as chairing and determining the committees that develop academic plans, etc. More diversity in the constitution of committees determining the future direction of the department and college;" "For the next chancellor to be more open and inclusive in their decision making than the previous chancellor."*)

Sixteen respondents (27% of those identifying leadership change as their top suggestion) reported that changes to their **department leadership** would improve the social climate. Nearly all of these respondents specified that improvement could be achieved by replacing their department chair. (e.g., *"Replace the department chair;" "Hiring of a department chair from outside the department;" "Rotate the Department Chair or limit service time to 10 years;" "We need a much more effective department chair; one who communicates and builds community" "Have chair who actually leads rather than is a place*

holder/manager. Just no vision at all and is demoralizing. No attempt to bring faculty together and/or give department a sense of direction and future.")

Managing faculty conflict and improving collegiality:

Thirty-five faculty respondents (6%) identified improved management of disruptive faculty dynamics – caused by individual faculty, groups of faculty members, or more pervasive departmental interactions – as the most impactful approach to improve the climate in their work unit. These respondents identified a variety of approaches to **improve collegiality and reduce faculty conflict** but most of their suggestions focus on acknowledging and addressing faculty bullying or harassment that is occurring in their departments:

- *manage disruptive individuals* (e.g., *"Terminating destructive and toxic individuals who are eroding any possibility of meaningful collaborative and productive work;" "One change, which is apparently impossible on this campus, is for colleagues who are blatantly un-collegial to be held accountable for their behavior. Instead, at least in some specific cases, this type of behavior is ignored and the individual is rewarded because of some kind of marketability that they supposedly bring;" "I am waiting for one faculty member to retire."*)

- *manage senior faculty "cliques"* (e.g., *"Retirement of individuals who are no longer committed to progressive, innovative, and new visions for the department and university;" "Our department needs tools to deal with hostile behavior exhibited by a small number of senior faculty members, particularly as it unequally impacts early-career faculty, women and faculty of color. Hostility is always unfortunate but the lack of action to counter hostility is debilitating and demoralizing;" "There is a culture gap between many of the senior folks vs the people hired starting say 10 years ago. As a result, the more junior faculty haven't yet been able to really shape the department and the way it works. This will naturally change soon, but it's going to be tricky to try and establish a more supportive and transparent culture;" "A system to prevent manipulation of department affairs by a few most senior faculty."*)

- *manage more pervasive issues that undermine climate* (e.g., *"Having skilled, forward-thinking facilitators who can help confront the institutionalized biases and especially racism that damage morale and leads to various forms of attrition. Collegiality can only be sustained with a minimum of mutual respect;" "Decrease culture of backbiting, subtle humiliation, and subtle group/public shaming within the department;" "Everybody that works around here is smart when it comes to academic performance but professional, personal, cultural and psychological differences due to diverse nature of our community inhibit formation of a true team spirt. At the core of this is lack of trust. Better communication, giving opportunities for more formal and informal interactions so that people could know each other better will help build mutual trust, respect and understanding, some key pillars of an effective team."*)

Increased transparency:

Twenty-two faculty respondents (4%) specified that increased transparency is the best way to improve the climate in their work unit and/or on campus generally. Many of these respondents provided succinct but general recommendations such as *"more transparency for decision making," "more openness," "transparency and honesty,"* and *"better communication with administration."* The majority, however, specified three areas that would benefit from increased transparency and communication: policies and priorities, budget processes, and hiring and personnel actions:

- *transparency about policies and priorities* (e.g., *"Having guidelines and policies that are documented, readily accessible, transparent, consistently applied, and responsive to feedback … It's hard to create a climate that feels equitable, and in which people can feel equipped to manage their professional trajectories, when there's inequitable access to critical information and decision-makers;" "A more transparent process for longer term planning of the growth mode we are in;" "Clarity from higher administrative levels. Every year there's some significant change that we are responding to. It's*

impossible to plan for the future when the conditions are constantly changing;" "More opportunities for discussion about the direction of the University-regular engagement and discussion combined with the transparency needed to feel that to have such a discussion.")

- ***transparency about budget processes*** (e.g., *"There is currently no budget transparency;" "There is limited transparency in how some departments get more resources than others and these decisions do not seemed to be made according to their productivity clearer flow of money, especially on indirects;" "Resources and budgetary transparency across the university."*)
- ***transparency about hiring and personnel actions*** (e.g., *"The lack of transparency of searches done for administrators. Faculty searches are very transparent - we have to give a reason for every action we take. Yet for administrators, hiring is done mostly behind closed doors;" "clarity of standards and requirements for promotion/merit, and clarity of short and long term goals for the department;" "make criteria for barrier step at full more transparent. without letters, it is difficult to assess what counts;" "Transparency regarding the merits and promotion process and the compensation plan."*)

APPENDIX: Custom Question Response Rates by Rank, Gender and Race/Ethnicity

Appendix Table 1: Response rates for open-ended questions about faculty diversity

	Question Responses (Provided comments)	Question Response Rate	Question Response Rate Among Survey Respondents	Survey Response Rate
Assistant	111	19%	44%	42%
Associate	138	27%	58%	47%
Full	344	27%	57%	47%
Male	317	21%	51%	42%
Female	285	31%	58%	53%
White	454	28%	58%	49%
Asian	73	15%	42%	35%
URM	75	25%	50%	50%