

COMMENTARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This survey represents a continuation of an ongoing effort to measure the campus climate as perceived by faculty. The overall intent of carrying out these periodic surveys is to strengthen shared governance at the University of Houston by sampling faculty opinion, in order to provide what we believe will be beneficial feedback to the Faculty Senate, the faculty body as a whole, and to the administrative leaders on campus.

The survey elicited a 46% response rate, and a considerably higher rate (56%) if only tenured/tenure track faculty members are taken into account. Substantial (albeit widely variable) responses from all Colleges and somewhat comparable returns from all tenure track ranks were obtained. The level of participation gives the results weight and validity. Moreover, the magnitude of the response indicates that a large number of faculty, when given the opportunity, are strongly motivated to express their opinions.

The results of the survey bear out the sense that **the climate on campus with regard to faculty interactions with the central administration is very different from that which prevailed in 2002**. This change is in no small part due to the importance placed on the spirit and practice of shared governance by former Chancellor and President, Dr. Jay Gogue. The formation and activities of the Faculty Senate Commission on University Governance (FS-COUG) was an outgrowth of a recommendation made in the 2002 Faculty Climate Survey Report

An important outcome of these developments is that **respondents perceive that faculty are appreciably more engaged with members of the central administration in the decision-making process**, as recommended in the 2002 report. Reciprocally, **respondents perceive that central administration has become more sensitive to the need for faculty involvement in the formulation of campus-wide policy**. These factors provided much of the impetus for the establishment, as recommended by the 2005 FS-COUG report, of the University Coordinating Commission, whose purpose is to assure that all campus bodies that might be affected by changes in University policy have an opportunity to voice their viewpoints. This evolution in attitude toward shared governance is reflected in the survey findings in two major ways. First, responding faculty view the job being done by the President and Provost in a markedly more positive light. Second, the faculty perspective is that improving shared governance, although continuing to be important, is no longer the overriding concern that it was in 2002.

Among the 23 performance dimensions used in evaluating the central administration, over half were close to “normal,” that is judged neither strong nor weak. The most positive areas were fostering diversity at the University, developing appropriate intercollegiate athletic programs and execution of the positions of President and Provost with honesty and integrity. The most negative were allocating resources to colleges, obtaining private support and development, obtaining support from the state legislature, supporting the external fund raising efforts of colleges, providing support for grants and contracts and providing administrative and financial assistance. It should be pointed out that, in the period since the survey was conducted, the administration enjoyed good success in increasing the allocation of funds from the state legislature.

When asked to select in rank order the three most important among nine administrative initiatives, the highest ranked initiatives were to increase salary and benefits for existing faculty, to increase research support, to increase undergraduate quality, to increase faculty size and to strengthen links with the Texas Medical Center. Given that current faculty were the survey respondents, the emphasis placed on the first two initiatives mentioned is not surprising. It is noteworthy, however, that faculty also reflected a desire for the University to continue to improve, as would be the case if the last three initiatives could be implemented. Among initiatives, the lowest ranked was to increase the number of branch campuses.

The premise behind conducting the evaluations of college and department climates in the survey is that a faculty member's immediate working environment would be most meaningful to that individual. As compared to the evaluation ratings of performance dimensions for the central administration, mean scores for performance dimensions for all colleges taken together were more positive than those for central administration, and corresponding scores for departments were more positive still. Thus the overall scores, expressed as different from normal were -0.13 for central administration, +0.10 for colleges and +0.32 for departments. **Clearly, the closer a respondent is to events, the more favorable is the response.** This was true also for issues related to individuals when viewed through the prism of college vs. department environments.

Across all colleges, the most positive performance dimensions were providing computational and telecommunications facilities and execution of the Dean's position with honesty and integrity. The most positive issues were access to the Dean (+0.77) and the holding of regular faculty meetings in the college (+0.37). The most negative performance dimensions were salary allocation to faculty (-0.31), reward and retention of outstanding faculty (-0.25) and obtaining private support and development (-0.16). The most negative issue was sufficient opportunity for input into academic decisions (+0.21). Individual college scores varied widely and did not correlate with either the size or complexity of organization within a college. The survey seemed to reveal that colleges that recorded the most negative scores reflected this overall attitude for all administrative levels: central administration, college and departments. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the degree of satisfaction with the local environment colored views of the entire University administrative structure. The Task Force believes that extensive general Senate discussion of the survey results specific to individual colleges is unwarranted, and that the information for each college provided in the Appendices would best be reviewed at the college level.

The rankings of performance dimensions and issues in departments as a whole bore some resemblance to those in colleges. Aside from high scores for access to the Chair (+1.19), holding regular faculty meetings (+0.70) and execution of the Chair's position with honesty and integrity, respondents felt generally positive that they were kept well informed of issues that arise in the department (+0.56) and having sufficient input into academic decisions (+0.56). The most negative response was obtaining private support and development (-0.15). It is encouraging to find that responding faculty feel relatively involved in formulation of policy in departments, where they should be most engaged. Again, there were considerable disparities in the scores for departments within individual colleges but the survey was not designed to reveal information about specific individual departments.

In light of the survey outcomes, **the Faculty Climate Survey Report Task Force recommends to the Executive Committee and the Senate:**

- **That shared governance, as defined in the Preamble to the *Faculty Senate Constitution and Bylaws*, continue to be a high priority in the selection of a new Chancellor/President and other administrative leaders within the University of Houston.**
- **That the incoming Chancellor/President, once selected, should be furnished a copy of this report and should be briefed by Senate leadership on the major faculty concerns it reflects.**
- **That faculty and campus administrative leaders continue to strive jointly to improve the central administration performance dimensions measured in the survey.**
- **That each Senator be urged to review the entire report, especially those elements particular to the College (s)he represents, as well as the perceptions of departments within that College.**
- **That in those cases where issues are raised that are germane to specific colleges, Senator(s) elected by the faculty of the unit be charged to personally discuss those issues with the appropriate dean.**
- **That efforts be initiated immediately to plan for the next Faculty Climate Survey, which we suggest be conducted during the 2009-10 academic year.**

The Faculty Senate pledges to continue working cooperatively with the central administration. Effective shared governance will continue to depend on enhanced, open and productive interactions between administrators and faculty in making policy decisions at all levels of the University.