

Missouri University of Science and Technology Summary of Climate and Engagement Focus Groups

In April, Missouri S&T conducted a series of focus groups with faculty and staff to better understand their perceptions about their jobs, the support they receive at work, and their commitment to their work and the university. We received valuable feedback from these groups and have shared it with the Chancellor and Provost. Following is a summary of what we heard, background information to clarify some of the issues raised, and steps we are taking to respond.

Survey Background

The purpose of the focus groups was to gain a deeper understanding of the results from the market research survey we conducted with faculty and staff during January and February of last year. To ensure participants' confidentiality, we asked an independent human resources consulting company to conduct the focus groups. The company conducted five sessions, which included faculty, technical professionals, administrative professionals and office support staff. To identify invitees, we used a random sample across all departments and multiple levels.

Summary of Key Perceptions

Working at Missouri S&T

- **Faculty and staff feel very positive about their jobs and are strongly committed to their work and the students.** This is great news, and something we all can feel proud of.
- **Staff expressed concerns about the new compensation structure and performance evaluation process.** We wanted to clarify that the new staff salary ranges are actually broader than those in the past, and most staff are in the lower quartile with substantial room for salary growth over time. Also, practices such as requiring performance evaluations for all staff are actually common at many institutions and considered to be valuable when managing performance and expectations. Because these are major changes for our campus community, we all need time to adjust to them. In the meantime, we plan to focus on better communications to ensure our staff understand the reasons for these changes, how the new processes work, and how they tie to career growth.
- **Staff questioned the length of time required for job reclassifications.** It's important to understand that Human Resources has the responsibility to review reclassifications carefully. When requested for a legitimate reason, reclassifications typically take 30 to 45 days. However, if not justified, they may be questioned or deferred, which requires more time. Again, we plan to focus on better communications to explain delays when they occur.
- **Participants raised work life balance issues such as child care alternatives.** Although our research has indicated that offering a child development center would be financially unviable for the university, we are currently working on less costly alternatives. We are also developing a suite of work life policies to address time off for community and family involvement and wellness activities. We cannot share the details since these initiatives are not yet finalized, but will let you know more as soon as possible.
- **Participants expressed concerns about aging buildings.** Due to issues with the budget for maintenance at the system and state level, maintenance has been deferred for many of our buildings. We are aware of this issue and are working with Facilities to address it as best we can. If you suspect a health issue at your building, please contact the Department of Environmental Health & Safety.

Diversity Issues

- **The majority of participants felt that diversity issues are not as prevalent at S&T as at Columbia.** However, the groups included mostly Caucasian participants. A few participants expressed concerns about treatment of women and people of color, and some said that minority students have noted a lack of diversity on campus. To address this issue, we are examining our student, faculty and staff recruiting and retention support for under-represented groups and women.
- **Faculty and hiring managers expressed concerns about having to “lower our standards” in order to hire diverse candidates.** We are committed to hiring qualified faculty and staff; however, since selection is a subjective process, this feedback suggests a need for increased training to help those with recruiting and hiring responsibilities examine implicit, and often unconscious, biases against those who are different from them.

External Perception of Missouri S&T

- **Participants expressed a strong sense of separation between the university and the Rolla community.** Although the university has a great deal of community engagement, we feel that it has been geared more toward organizational relations than the issues and concerns of individual community members. We are currently examining what we might do to reach them at a more personal level, and will keep you informed about our next steps.

University Vision and Goals

- **Participants said they have not been given enough context about how the university’s vision and goals relate to their own jobs, and expressed concerns that the vision and goals are changing too frequently.** We believe that the key to addressing these issues lies with face-to-face, two-way conversations with leadership in small group settings, where connection and better understanding can take place. To that end, as one example, the Chancellor has started a series of casual brown bag lunches with faculty, and we are looking into similar meetings with other leadership, faculty and staff as well as other communication forums.

Perception of Leadership

- **Participants expressed concerns about the amount of turnover in high-level administrative positions, particularly on the academic side. They also commented that the Chancellor does not communicate enough with faculty and staff, which leads to a sense that their opinions are not valued.** We recognize that the degree of leadership change that we have experienced creates a sense of insecurity. Fortunately, the turnover is winding down and we are beginning to stabilize. We believe that increasing the opportunities for two-way conversations with leadership as described above will provide more context for why the changes have taken place and enhance opportunities to communicate with university leaders, formally and informally.

Willingness to Recommend the University

- **Participants feel proud to say they work for the university and are proud of the work they do.** Again, this is great news for all of us.
- **Most would recommend the university to undergraduates, particularly those who are studying engineering. Some would hesitate to recommend it to graduate students if they feel the specific program is not strong.** Attention is being paid to strengthen our graduate programs with additional investments in graduate students, research and academic programs.

- **Some of those who expressed concerns raised in this summary said they would hesitate to recommend the university to potential faculty and staff.** We believe that willingness to recommend the university will increase over time as these concerns are addressed.

Our Commitment to You

In discussing these results with the Chancellor and Provost, it was clear that they were already aware of many of these perceptions and are working to address them. We are committed to communicating about these issues and keeping you informed of our progress. If you have additional comments or questions, please let us know. Your thoughts are very important to us.

Melanie Mormile, Ph.D., Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs

Shenethia Manuel, J.D., Vice Chancellor for Human Resources, Equity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer