



Report on the Climate and Culture of the Lurie College of Education

San Jose State University

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Introduction

After discussions in May, 2016 Provost Andrew Feinstein engaged the AASCU Penson Center for Professional Development (APC) in June, 2016 to conduct an assessment of the culture and climate of the Lurie College of Education at San Jose State University. Dr. John D. Welty, Associate, of the APC was assigned the responsibility of conducting the assessment.

The Lurie College of Education enrolls 1,775 students across six departments. The departments are Child and Adolescent Development, Communicative Sciences and Disorders, Counselor Education, Educational Administration, Teacher Education and Special Education. In addition, the college offers an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership. The college employs 54 tenured and tenure-track faculty, 102 adjunct faculty and 19 staff. The Dean of the College is Dr. Elaine Chin, who was appointed in 2007.

Methodology

Provost Feinstein advised the employees of the College that Dr. Welty had been engaged to “gather feedback on the climate and culture of the Lurie College of Education.” This message was sent to faculty and staff on June 22, 2016 and a reminder was sent on July 12, 2016. Faculty and staff were advised that they could schedule an appointment with Dr. Welty on July 18-19 or on September 8-9. Subsequently, September 12 was added to the schedule to provide an opportunity for all who wished to meet with Dr. Welty to be accommodated. These dates were selected to assure that faculty who were not available or on contract during the summer months would be provided an opportunity to meet with Dr. Welty.

Table 1 summarizes the number of faculty and staff interviewed and also indicates the percentage of employees by employment classification who were interviewed. In addition, Dr. Welty met with the Dean and managers of the College.

Table 2 indicates the information provided to each person interviewed and the questions that were posed to individuals who were interviewed.

A modified content analysis was performed on the data gathered by Dr. Welty and will be reported under findings.

Findings

The data gathered from the interviews was analyzed by using content analysis and the major themes identified from the responses to each question are summarized below. While there were many specific suggestions and examples provided, this report will attempt to focus only on those themes and trends in which approximately **forty per cent** or more of a given group (e.g., faculty, staff, and adjuncts) identified the themes or trends that are cited.

Leadership

The responses to the question about how effective is the college and department leadership revealed very divided positions. About **one third** of the respondents indicated that college leadership was effective and was characterized as decisive, fair and helpful. A larger percentage of staff than faculty held this view. There was also a belief that the college budget is being managed effectively. Further, staff in the college believe they are respected and are pleased with the professional development opportunities that they are provided.

Another **one third** of the respondents indicated that there was a crisis of leadership that was characterized by hostility and a lack of trust. A larger percentage of faculty held this view than did staff and adjunct faculty. Further, a large number of faculty cited the instability of leadership at the departmental level as a major problem that has resulted in a concern about the direction of the college. Only one department has had stable leadership over the past few years, which has resulted in a strong sense of direction and purpose in that department.

Finally, a large number of respondents believe that there is a lack of vision and direction for the college. As a result of this lack of vision and direction, they indicated there is not a sense of common purpose existing within the college.

Effectiveness of the College

With regard to how effective the college was performing its work, there were three common themes that emerged. A number of people believe that there has been improvement in the college in terms of developing processes, the handling of budgets, and clarity with regard to how one seeks professional development funds. The second theme that emerged was that the college was not effective because of the low morale and lack of a sense of common direction. Finally, the third theme that emerged was that the college was disconnected from the school districts. While partnerships do exist, they are well below the number of partnerships and the strength of those partnerships that might be expected between a major university and surrounding school districts.

Missed Opportunities

Those interviewed were asked to respond to the following question: What would you like to be able to say about the college but you cannot because it is not true? Three major themes emerged from the responses to this question and are outlined below.

First, respondents wanted the college to be viewed as the “go to” college recognized for the outstanding teachers, counselors and administrators that were being prepared at San Jose State University. Second, respondents wanted the college to be recognized for its collaborative and collegial culture between faculty and administrators and between faculty and faculty. Third, respondents wanted the college to be recognized for its strong partnerships and relationships with school districts.

These responses reflect the strong desire of respondents to have a stronger presence and reputation in the region than is currently the case.

Climate

Respondents were asked to describe the climate within the college. Over one half of the respondents described the climate of the college as combative, tense and unhealthy. The climate was not solely discussed just in terms of the leadership of the college, but also included faculty-to-faculty relationships. In particular, significant concern was verbalized about the disruptive behavior of one faculty member. Further, it was indicated that one committee does not function well because of the disruptive behavior of this particular faculty member who seeks to intimidate others.

A second description of the college climate that emerged, although at a much lesser rate, was the lack of a common vision for the college.

Culture

Respondents were asked to describe the culture of the college. There was not significant agreement with regard to the culture of the college. Four areas that emerged as a description of the culture are outlined below.

Two culture descriptors emerged with almost equal occurrence: the college has a lack of team spirit and was characterized as fragmented, toxic and hostile and an equal response of the description of the culture was that it is collegial and collaborative. The last description of the culture that emerged frequently was that the college lacked a sense of forward motion and direction.

Professionalism

Finally, respondents were asked to identify what could be done to improve their own professional life. There were a large number of suggestions that were varied. The only area where there was some agreement was to reduce conflict among the faculty. Other less frequently offered suggestions included

stabilizing chair leadership, creating a vision and common sense of purpose, and providing support for tenure track faculty.

Conclusions

The vision for the college states in part “the Lurie College of Education is a professional community of students, faculty and staff engaged in supportive partnerships to serve a community of culturally diverse children” The plan further states that one of the basic values of the college is “ethical, collegial and humane interpersonal relationships as a basis for community.”

Based upon my interviews and review of other data provided, the college is not moving in a positive direction to achieve its vision and act on one of its basic values. There is a significant split among members of the college with regard to the effectiveness of college and of the departmental leadership. One department is an exception. In addition, the fairly recent appointment of a new administrator is viewed positively.

There is a lack of clear vision and a sense of direction for the college. The instability of leadership in several departments over the last few years also contributes to the view by those interviewed that there is a lack of direction. However, **there is a strong desire** to have the image and reputation of the college improved externally and to take steps to become the leader in providing outstanding education programs in the region.

In general, the management of the college has improved over the years and there is a belief that the budget is administered more effectively, that processes and procedures have been established to make more clear how the college operates and there is improved transparency.

Conversely however, the climate for faculty in the college is tense and not productive. The behavior of one faculty member has contributed to creating this environment as well as other actions that have been taken by college leadership to divide faculty. This lack of a collegial environment has resulted in some faculty withdrawing and no longer wishing to participate in leadership roles or just refusing to participate in some committees. Such a climate is not helpful to moving in a positive direction.

There is some evidence in at least two departments that the failure of the departments to address or resolve issues is negatively impacting enrollment and perhaps the quality of graduates. If these conditions are not addressed, there will be negative consequences for the departments and the college in the future.

Without question, there is a desire by a large number of faculty that the college develop a collegial and collaborative environment with a common direction in order to improve area schools and other human service agencies. To achieve these aspirations will require some significant changes and a commitment by faculty and staff to work together in a more positive environment. These changes and agreements to work together for the good of the college will not come easily, but creating a positive environment can be achieved if a commitment for change and redirection is made by all personnel in the college.

Recommendations

Some significant actions must occur if the direction of the college is to be reversed. Some of these recommendations involve personnel issues and they will be shared verbally with the Provost.

Other specific recommendations include the following:

1. As soon as possible, a national search should be initiated for a department chair in teacher education.
2. Consideration should be given to merging the departments of counselor education and educational administration. If such a merger occurs, a search should be conducted for a chair for this new combined department and priority given to developing strong partnerships with area school districts.
3. While there is evidence of support for tenure track faculty, it will be important to increase that support and provide clarity in expectations with regard to teaching, scholarly activity and service.
4. Once some of the above recommendations are implemented, the college could benefit from an intensive strategic planning exercise that engages as many people as possible in the college and also includes members of area school districts and human service agencies.

Table 1
Interview Participants

Employee Type	# Emp. Inter.	Tot. # Emp.	% Participants
Dept. Chairs (including former)	10	14	71.43%
Faculty (12-mo, AY, former, FERP)	29	43	67.44%
Lecturer (Full-time and 12-mo/AY)	2	9	22.22%
Lecturer (Part-time and former)	11	117	9.40%
MPP (including 1 outside of college)	4	4	100.00%
Staff (including former)	11	16	68.75%
Totals	67	203	33.00%

Note: There were 5 faculty who were scheduled for interviews who did not show up (2 FT and 3 PT).

Table 2
San Jose State University
Interview Questions

Explain my role – Review culture and climate of college and make recommendations for improvement

I am looking at themes or trends and not looking at specific incidents

I will not be attributing comments to individuals. I may want to use examples that you may have. If I use them I will ask your permission. The only exception is that if something is identified which may be a violation of an executive order which would require me to report it e.g discrimination or sexual harassment I will let you know should that occur

Questions:

1. How long have you been at SJSU? What courses do you teach? What is nature of your research
2. How effective is the leadership in the college?
3. How effective is the work of the college?
4. How would you like to be able to describe the college but can't because it's not true
5. Describe the climate for faculty in the college?
6. How would you describe the culture in the college?
7. What could be done to improve your professional life in the college?
8. Is there anything else that is important that I haven't asked about?