



UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

**FOLLOW-UP FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH
SHARED GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNICATIONS**

FOCUS GROUP REPORT

MARCH 2011

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METHODOLOGY

In 2009, the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) suggested that UNM assess the campus climate regarding shared governance and communication through a survey or other form of opinion measurement. The HLC report also suggested that follow-up research be conducted to assess progress. The initial benchmark research was completed in May of 2010.

This focus group research, commissioned by the University of New Mexico, is part of the follow-up assessment. It supplements a quantitative survey of faculty and staff that is being administered in March/April 2011. Both the benchmark and follow-up research were conducted by Research & Polling, Inc., (RPI) of Albuquerque.

The primary objective of the focus group discussions was to provide an in-depth assessment of the current status of communications and progress toward shared governance at UNM. As with the benchmark research, the Health Sciences Center (faculty, staff or administration) is not included in these research efforts. HSC is participating in a separate study.

Three focus groups were conducted in late February – early March. Approximately twelve employees were selected to participate in each of the focus groups.

Faculty Senate/Senior Faculty February 23, 2011 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

This focus group was comprised of half Faculty Senate members and half Senior Faculty. Faculty Senate participants were chosen because of their leadership position in the Senate or were recommended by the Faculty Senate leaders. The Senior Faculty participants were chosen using random selection among all Senior Faculty members on the main campus that completed the benchmark online survey (in March 2010) and self-reported (via a question in the survey) that they were at least somewhat active in shared governance activities at UNM. Consideration was taken to ensure that the focus group was comprised of a broad selection of faculty from different schools within UNM.

Department Chairs & Program Directors February 24, 2011 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

These focus group participants were selected at random by RPI from a complete list provided by UNM. The list included Department Chairs, Program Directors and some associate Deans.

Staff Council Members March 1, 2011 10:00 to 12:00 p.m.

Approximately half of the UNM Staff Leadership focus group participants were recommended by the Staff Council President and the remaining participants were recruited using random selection among members of the Staff Council who completed the benchmark online survey (in March 2010) and reported (via a question in the survey) that they have at least somewhat active participation levels in institutional and staff committee meetings. Consideration was taken to ensure that the focus group was comprised of a broad selection of staff members from different departments/schools.

The focus groups were moderated by Marie Mound of Insight Out. Brian Sanderoff, President, and Nancy Kastanek, Vice President, of Research & Polling, Inc. coordinated the focus group project and observed the focus group discussions.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

Faculty and staff leadership feel there has been a “thawing” of the cold and tense relations between themselves and Central Administration compared to one year ago. During the previous focus group sessions conducted in 2010, faculty and staff leadership anticipated the possibility of a “train wreck” occurring if relations among the groups did not begin to get back on track.

Improvements have been made in communication between faculty/staff leadership and Central Administration, however participants felt it was premature to form an opinion on actual shared governance until after the budgetary process is completed. The long absence of the current President due to illness, coupled with the intense budget challenges created by large revenue shortfalls, created intervening variables that make assessment of progress in shared governance difficult.

Some focus group participants perceived the faculty as having stepped in to fill the leadership vacuum created by the President’s absence. Focus group participants tended to credit the efforts of faculty and staff for their increased involvement; however, they credited Central Administration for having increased faculty and staff engagement in budgetary matters. Particular emphasis was placed on the personal management style of the Faculty Senate and Staff Council presidents, who were commended for having cultivated an atmosphere of reconciliation with the Central Administration. Some Department Chairs observed and acknowledged the increased cooperation between the Faculty Senate and Central Administration; however, they were not convinced that the rank-and-file faculty noticed this progress.

The creation of a number of committees revolving around budget formation has had the benefit of including more voices in the decision making process. However, focus group participants were not sure whether this increased voice was due to the crisis or actually portends positive changes for the future. Also, some of the newly formed committees (over the past year) were described as dominated by university administrators and short on faculty who spend time in the classroom. Participants on these committees were said to be handpicked by the administration, including faculty representation.

New Mexico’s revenue shortfall has made budget issues the overriding focus of university constituents. It is also said to have brought faculty, Department Chairs and Program Directors together in new ways, a change which focus group participants characterized as an unexpected benefit of dealing with the budget crisis. On the down side, participants noted the large amount of time and effort required to obtain financial information (employment statistics, budget and expenditure reports) and to then study, understand and analyze the data. Nevertheless, many feel compelled to do so because of their lack of trust in the Central Administration to prioritize UNM’s academic and research mission. Having Faculty Senate members involved in the presentation of financial information was said to have increased faculty’s sense of trust.

The source of many administrative decisions continues to be a mystery to participants. Even Deans, Chairs and Program Directors who must implement changes find themselves ill-informed of the source or rationale behind an “exercise” or change.

Transparency continues to be an obstacle to shared governance. Although many participants acknowledged that more information is being made available, participants in all three focus groups complained of reticence on the part of Central Administration to provide certain requested data (employment statistics, budget and expenditure data) or, when data is provided, a reluctance to explain how to analyze it.

Post Script:

Due to the deadline set by the Higher Learning Commission for submission of UNM's monitoring report by June 2011, the focus group sessions were conducted in late February and early March, 2011. A number of participants in each group expressed concern regarding the timing of the discussions. Some participants believed that it was not possible to express a full or complete opinion on shared governance matters between faculty/staff and the Central Administration until after the budgetary process was finalized.

On April 11, 2011, approximately two months after the focus groups, the UNM Board of Regents approved a budget for the upcoming fiscal year. According to a news article appearing in the *Albuquerque Journal* on April 12, 2011, student, staff and faculty representatives/leaders were quoted as applauding the budget and complimenting the process of all major parties (regents, administration, staff, faculty and students) coming together to develop the final budget.

SHARED GOVERNANCE

While some participants believe there has been progress toward a shared governance model of decision making, others feel the progress has been in the area of communication and not necessarily decision making. Participants felt that until the actual budget decisions are made this spring, it is more difficult to assess the effectiveness of any shared governance efforts. Characteristic of university constituents' point of view:

“Not sure this is shared governance but we have more influence.”

“Faculty has been more vocal in committees lately.”

“Appearances are improving, but underlying problems remain.”

Prior to opening the focus group discussion, participants were asked to comment on progress in the area of shared governance.

Positive Viewpoints (Faculty):

“Shared governance for faculty has increased this past year. Many faculty are now participating in administrative efforts to reconcile significant budget cuts.”

“I would describe it [improvement in shared governance] as pending. There has been much activity in terms of committees, task forces, etc., but, few decisions to base any judgment on whether those discussions have been productive.”

“I would say the climate is tense, but improving. Administration is starting to listen to faculty, but only if faculty insists on being heard. Of course, faculty has the responsibility to be active in shared governance, rather than only being reactive.”

“There have been some apparent improvements in shared governance over the past year. Faculty has become more engaged by the upper administration in terms of budget matters. There is a huge lack in strong leadership in the upper administration that is leading to a drop in faculty morale.”

“There is an increase in cooperation between administration and faculty. With our excellent Faculty Senate President, a lot is happening. I see very little of President Schmidly. Mostly I read what the latest scandal is in the Albuquerque Journal.”

Neutral Viewpoints (Faculty):

“Things have quieted down, but everything has been swept under the rug until it is time to get it out. Nothing has changed on either side. The collision will occur next time there is a major event.”

“Administration is talking to faculty, involving faculty leadership in wide ranging conversations. For trust to be restored, their conversations need to lead to actions based directly on the conversations.”

Negative Viewpoints (Faculty):

“Contentious at best. There are areas of collaboration but there are also areas of major disagreement mostly on resource allocation. Budget cuts have not helped and decisions are not easily made or discussed.”

“Difficult. I still don’t get a sense that faculty concerns are being taken seriously or addressed.”

“I’m disappointed that Central Administration and Regents don’t recognize the importance of the academic mission to the university and the state, and the centrality of faculty in carrying out the academic mission. Faculty are not viewed or treated as an important, essential asset.”

“I believe that a sense of mistrust persists. In a climate of cutbacks, it seems that the faculty voice is limited to certain areas while leaving other areas off limits. Administration has drawn faculty governance into the process, but these ‘off the table’ items make it more difficult to trust when it is clear that they might have an impact of overall quality of the student experience.”

“Still extremely tense and antagonistic. Faculty still feels that administration’s efforts to communicate are insincere and lack the ability to establish true communication. We feel we are told about matters, but our views are not encouraged to be shared. The faculty feels defeated and inconsequential.”

“Poor. I see little evidence that anything has changed in terms of how the university is run and how faculty has been brought into the process of steering the university. There are many professors, like myself, who have significant administrative experience outside of a university environment who are not being listened to.”

“The upper administration has had their activities more closely monitored and as such are ‘more careful’ in their actions. However, even with this I still see little change in attitude. It is still more of the same for UNM, no transparency and an attitude that ‘we as all knowing administration’ know what is best for the University. They do not!!!”

The initial written comments by Department Chairs and Program Directors on progress with shared governance were less optimistic than observed among participants in the faculty focus group.

Positive Viewpoints (Chairs and Directors):

“It appears to be improving at the level of the Faculty Senate and Central Administration. Faculty in my department continues to feel under-valued (no relation to the work they do), rarely see interaction with Senior Administration. Most continue to believe there are too many Senior Administrators.”

Neutral Viewpoints (Chairs and Directors):

“[The issues of shared governance are] problematic from both sides.”

“Shared governance should let us know what our choices are and then we could make informed decisions. We don’t even know what our choices are.”

Negative Viewpoints (Chairs and Directors):

“I think it has deteriorated, to a worse state than even one year ago.”

“My impression is that the faculty perceives shared governance to be a highly contentious issue, and that relations with Central Administration on this issue are not good.”

“I don’t think that things have changed substantially. The administration is doing end-run around shared governance by appointing hybrid ‘strategic advisory committees’ that have their hand-picked faculty. This is not shared governance. The Central Administration is less visible.”

“Considerable amount of mistrust and friction. General feeling that President makes important decisions with little or no input from faculty and the University community.”

“There is no communication between the Central Administration decision making process and the Faculty Senate structure. They’re like two distinct silos.”

“We have a communications problem more than a shared governance problem; a lot of the angst around shared governance is due to poor communication.”

SOURCE OF DECISION MAKING

Quite a few participants, regardless of the focus group population, said the source of many administrative decisions continues to be a mystery. This observation sometimes applied to what some participants regarded to be major decisions, e.g., creation of a Chancellor position at HSC, changes in Distance Education and Extended University programs, UNM’s Westside campus.

From the point of view of Department Chairs, much information is filtered through and disseminated by the Deans, but it is never clear where decisions are actually made.

“In general, everything comes through the Deans. It’s not clear whether changes in decisions come from the Deans or another source.”

The Deans were said to attend regular meetings with the Provost. While the majority of these meetings were said to be unfruitful, ten percent is regarded to be so important that Deans or their representatives are afraid to miss a meeting.

As we heard in the benchmark series of focus groups, Department Chairs and Program Directors said they receive continuous requests to complete reports or provide additional information, without a clear sense of the source or the intention. As one Department Chair said:

“In the past two years we have had so many exercises. All the rules are being shaken and changed. Go one way and then change. We are aware that we must communicate the changes to others and give a rationale for them, but we don’t always know the rationale.”

Restricting the university catalogue to an online source only was given as an example of a change about which faculty was not informed:

“When you are making a major change you have to communicate it and give the reasons and they need to be good reasons. People have to be prepared to change their routines to accommodate the changes.”

For some participants, the timing of this follow-up research (online survey and focus groups) is yet another example of a decision being made without knowledge of who made the decision and why. Participants felt it would have made more sense to conduct this phase of research after the university budget is finalized.

“There’s been some thawing in interactions between Central Administration (and perhaps Regents) and faculty leadership. Perhaps, more attention is being paid by Central Administration to the ‘academic mission’ after Paul Roth’s interventions. It’s difficult to tell whether budget creation during this difficult time will reflect importance of faculty contributions and academic mission. We won’t know until March or April.”

“There appears to be too many committees and task forces formed to produce budget recommendations. It is unclear how the final budget decisions will be made in April (Budget Summit scheduled for mid-March) – So it is not possible to determine whether there has been an improvement in the budget decision making process or whether trust can be restored.”

BUDGET PROCESS

New Mexico, like many other states, is facing a large revenue shortfall/budget deficit. Public educational institutions funded through the state general fund all face difficult decisions to reduce the coming year’s budget.

“Budget issues dominate most issues on campus right now, so it all comes to that; consequently, what constitutes ‘real’ change is difficult to determine.”

“Continued budget cuts and financial pressures are threatening to decimate the University.”

The dire circumstances surrounding budget formation has brought together constituents from across the university community that might not have otherwise met. Some focus group participants lauded this unforeseen turn of events because it had inadvertently resulted in improved communications.

“Chairs and directors have banded together and gotten to know each other because the system is broken. I have enjoyed this opportunity. I like communicating across departments and programs with other chairs and directors.”

“The budget crisis has brought us together in new ways.”

A few efforts were cited as having fostered greater communication on budget issues. At the impetus of the Faculty Senate, a series of budget presentations were given at the Arts and Sciences retreat. The involvement of members of the Faculty Senate in these presentations was said to increase a sense of trust in the information.

“It felt more real coming from the Faculty Senate.”

“It was hair-raising to go through the budget experience and learn the budget process. It was an improvement in that Faculty Senate pushed harder to be part of the conversation. Improvements are coming because the Faculty Senate is pushing harder.”

In an effort to study budget information, members of the Faculty Senate Budget Committee obtained data from the Controller’s Office and the Budget Office, only to find that the numbers did not reconcile – due to the difference between amounts budgeted and actual expenditures. Had this aspect of the two data sources been explained, considerable time could have been saved.

“We felt that Central Administration was not forthcoming, we had to ask for everything, even though we didn’t really know what we needed and they did not offer any guidance.”

Academic participants noted many times that considerable effort is required to study and understand the budgeting process. As a Department Chair stated:

“Faculty has worked at educating themselves on the budget process. If they had an administration they could trust, faculty would not have to invest so much time learning the details of the budget process.”

ACADEMIC MISSION

Faculty and Department Chairs do not feel they can trust the designated administrators to always prioritize the academic mission as they understand it from the perspective of educational professionals.

“There used to be a social contract with faculty, with a set of certain expectations of professional progress. That no longer exists.”

“Faculty is demoralized because they do not feel we have a shared vision with the Central Administration regarding academic mission. There’s no engagement. It’s all about jobs and not the research mission; leaders do not care about research.”

“The Provost needs to be more supportive of faculty on the workload issues. How can we teach all these classes and conduct research? They need to communicate better with the Regents to educate them.”

TRANSPARENCY

Participants (particularly in the Faculty Senate/Senior Faculty focus group) noted that Central Administration is now, for the first time, sharing the entire budget with faculty groups. Central Administration has shared it with the budget committees who can now review the budget as a whole, rather than just the I&G (State Instruction and General Appropriations) budget.

That being said, there is a perception there are still areas of the Central Administration that continue to stall or resist sharing information, or when they do provide it they do not extend a helping hand with interpretation of the statistical or financial data. While a number of participants reported having had access to the budget information (budget and expenditure spreadsheets), many participants still perceive resistance on the part of the Central Administration to share specific employee statistics, such as FTEs, etc.

“The office of the VP for Administration has become more responsive to the academic fiscal condition, but remains unwilling to modify the operation of the university to rectify these issues. Human Resources, the President’s Office and Enrollment Management *do not* seem to be responding to requests for transparency.”

“It would appear from Faculty Senate information that there is some progress in communication. However, whether transparency has improved, I’m unsure.”

From the staff perspective, employment statistics continue to be unavailable:

“Some offices seem more willing to include us in decision making. There seems to be an unwillingness to share stats on staff.”

LEADERSHIP

There is a strong feeling among faculty, staff, Department Chairs and Program Directors that “there is a lack of strong leadership at the top.” The long absence of President Schmidly left many faculty feeling that there was a leadership vacuum. Many months passed before Health Sciences Center Director, Dr. Roth, was appointed by the Board of Regents to serve as acting president. Some participants in the Department Chairs and Program Directors focus group wondered why the Provost had not been “empowered to be in charge in the President’s absence from the outset.”

“The churning of leadership at the Central Administration level is just another wasted year.”

One Department Chair described the President as having “been gone since May of 2010.” Others said it was not clear who was leading the university at the beginning of the fall semester.

“How can changes be made if no one is leading?”

Many academic participants noted the increased opportunity for faculty involvement during this interim period.

“Faculty input is being sought on high level panels in the governance structure. There was a significant void in leadership when President Schmidly got sick for an entire semester, but a significant number of faculty pitched in to fill this void.”

“The faculties have achieved more engagement in shared governance, but the administrative leadership is in apparent free-fall.”

There is a sense that Central Administration avoids making tough decisions. For example, participants in all three groups said the administration cuts low paid staff rather than higher paid positions. These participants did not feel cuts at the staff level produced significant savings. They acknowledged that cutting faculty and administrative positions present difficult decisions, but greater savings.

“The reason we have leaders is for making tough decisions.”

“They try to save money by cutting low paid staff, staff that make the least amount of money, rather than making tough decisions.”

“They can’t cut the budget unless they eliminate faculty positions.”

PRESIDENT

With the return of President Schmidly from sick-leave, both faculty and staff noted a return to a more distant tone from the Office of the President. Many participants said the President’s Monday morning messages resumed their previous superficial tone, in contrast with acting President Roth’s more content-driven and personable tone. These observations do not necessarily discount progress, but demonstrate a “wait and see” mode among university constituents.

“The chill in conversation returned immediately upon President Schmidly’s return to work.”

Some staff participants, however, felt President Schmidly was “softer and more personal” after returning to work. They noted positive gestures on his part: he stood up for staff when the Educational Retirement Board (ERB) initially recommended to reduce employee benefits and increase fees, and he encouraged staff leadership to work with UNM’s Government Relations Committee which provided support for the staff position. Participants also acknowledged that, upon the President’s return, it was necessary for him to spend significant time preparing for the legislative session in Santa Fe.

ACTING PRESIDENT ROTH

Participants agreed that the management style of acting president Paul Roth (beginning mid October 2010) resulted in a significant improvement in communication between faculty/staff and both the Central Administration and Board of Regents. Participants in all three focus groups also commended Roth's responsiveness on their behalf. He initiated the Containment Committee Task Force in November and included staff representation. By contrast, President Schmidly's budget task force (PSAT), which was initiated the prior summer, did not include staff representation.

"When Dr. Roth was acting president we saw how things can be improved. He was a great communicator. Too bad he isn't president of UNM."

"When Roth took over he did a phenomenal job of engaging."

"[Shared governance] is slightly improved. Thanks primarily to Paul Roth's performance as acting president."

"During Paul Roth's term as acting president, he made a sincere and concerted effort to communicate what administration was doing and why. That was most welcome and needed. Since he is no longer in that position, little has happened, communication is surface level only, faculty priorities seem to matter less than even before."

PROVOST

By and large, focus group participants did not perceive improvement in communication or responsiveness of the Provost Office since the benchmark research was conducted in 2010. The Provost is not perceived to be a "real advocate of the different academic departments," and was described as "suspicious of faculty workloads and budgets."

"The Provost Office is much more isolated than in the past, it is noticeably different from past Provosts."

The Provost Office was also criticized for a lack of transparency with respect to budget information. One Department Chair noted:

"We have a hard time getting data from the Provost's Office. A lot of data is hard to get. The Provost's Office has not been forthcoming. We find things out one way or another, but it's not through the Provost."

Many believe the Provost was never given the opportunity to fulfill the full powers and authority that are typically vested in the Provost position.

"In fairness to the Provost, she was selected in such a manner that she was not empowered to be a strong Provost."

A few participants noted that one of the Assistant Provosts does attend meetings on behalf of the Provost and tended to be accessible:

“This Associate Provost of Academic Affairs is the only one in the entire administration that I can call and gain access and get something done. He will respond.”

Participants felt the Provost could make better use of Associate Provosts.

“She is perceived as getting orders from somewhere else; she does not delegate to her Associate Provosts.”

PUBLIC RELATIONS/LOBBYING

Some Faculty Leaders/Senior Faculty feel that the Main Campus is not being promoted “up in Santa Fe” by the leadership and University representatives in ways that help the University. As one member noted:

“The Medical School promotes itself in Santa Fe and gets its message across about all the great things that are being done for healthcare in New Mexico. We need to promote Main Campus to the Legislature in the same way.”

Notably, one Staff leader mentioned how certain lobbyists keep them up to speed on the situation in Santa Fe. He noted that, although many feel that money is wasted on lobbying efforts, he feels that the lobbyists serve their purpose up in Santa Fe and are making accomplishments through the dinners and functions they sponsor. In his personal experience, he noted that “I can speak to more legislators in one function than all week at the Roundhouse”.

FOCUS GROUP SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS

Among the three populations queried in the focus group research, participants in the staff focus group were most optimistic about progress in communication and influence with the Central Administration. Participants in the faculty focus group acknowledged progress in communication, but emphasized the need to wait and see what actually happens with budget decision making. Participants in the Department Chairs and Programs Directors focus group were most skeptical about progress toward shared governance.

FACULTY SENATE AND SENIOR FACULTY

Much of the credit for advancing faculty participation in shared governance and the budgeting process is given to the Faculty Senate, rather than the Central Administration, though acting president Roth garners credit as well.

“Changes that have been happening are the result of Faculty Senate pushing to be in the conversations with Central Administration regarding the budget.”

Whereas current members of the Faculty Senate have observed an increased interest among faculty to participate on Senate committees, some participants in the Department Chairs and Program Directors focus group are of the impression that there are not enough faculty volunteers.

DEPARTMENT CHAIRS AND PROGRAM DIRECTORS

The Department Chairs expressed considerable doubt that much progress has been made toward shared governance with the faculty as a whole. Rather, participants tended to see progress in the relations between Central Administration and a small number of faculty leaders. The newly formed committees such as the PSAT were described as top down – composed largely of administrators with little representation from faculty. And the members of these committees were said to be hand-picked by the Central Administration rather than recommended by the Faculty Senate. The attitude of the administrators on these committees toward faculty was described as one of “disdain.”

Participants in the Department Chairs and Program Directors focus group expressed differing opinions regarding the Faculty Senate, though all agreed the current Faculty Senate President has provided strong leadership. Some felt most faculty does not have time to be involved.

“Faculty Senate seems to have transformed itself into a more pro-active body, but I’m not sure if it is resulting in any real changes.”

Some chairpersons and directors are even said to discourage participation.

“It takes time to be participate on a committee, most faculty are too busy to get involved.”

Some participants perceived Senate committees as lacking real force or power to affect Central Administration decision making. This lack of effectiveness creates apathy among the larger body of faculty members.

“Many faculty do not get involved in [Faculty Senate] committees because they believe it is a waste of time. They don’t see it as effective.”

“Most of the faculty in my department are literally too busy to have time to participate.”

A couple of Department Chairs felt the Faculty Senate was “not representative” of the larger body and that it lacks a “grassroots” orientation. This participant felt the Faculty Senate tends to be dominated by “political types that act within their sphere of power and influence,” and that “the same group of faculty tend to get re-elected”.

“Shared governance might be happening for the Faculty Senate but not for the rank and file faculty, I’m not sure they represent us.”

“I keep seeing the same people any time there’s a call to action.”

Though the overall tone of the Department Chairs and Program Directors focus group was less optimistic than the other two populations queried, they did acknowledge progress in the area of inclusive communication due to the leadership of the current Faculty Senate President. Nevertheless, they have their reservations.

“I hear from Faculty Senate that communications appear to be better, but transparency hasn’t changed.”

“There has been improvement in shared governance between Faculty Senate and Central Administration; I am not convinced that they [Faculty Senate] are consulting rank and file faculty.”

“In general, a greater visible communication and sharing of problems and economic constraints and economic reallocations. However, this doesn’t necessarily apply to real brainstorming, real listening and sharing of information.”

Department Chairs recognized that their primary communications and interactions with Central Administration are largely accomplished through the Deans, thus they were less likely to comment regarding their interactions with Central Administration.

“Moderately good [climate between Department Chairs and Central Administration]. However, the Department Chairs still represent a middle management level, for the most part (there are exceptions) that receives information and tasks to the extent that Deans and Central Administration are willing to be transparent and forthcoming.”

“In my experience there is no relationship between Central Administration and the Chairs.”

“I can’t comment about this as a generality [climate between Department Chairs and Central Administration]. As a Department Chair I sense that we are seen to be low on the pecking order, and not included in decision making.”

It should be noted that many of the Department Chairs/Program Directors reflected positively about their relationship with their Deans regarding communication between the two positions. They feel that their Deans keep them abreast of the key University matters and current events to the extent that the Deans have been briefed by Central Administration. Some participants noted, however, that Deans are sometimes left out of the strategic planning process and there is a perception among some that Central Administration wants to “keep the Deans as weak as possible”.

STAFF COUNCIL

Participants in the Staff Council and staff leadership focus group recognize progress in communication with Central Administration. Some attribute this to the leadership of their current president, who has established a rapport and a solid working relationship with the university president. They also credit President Schmidly for being more accessible and attentive to their concerns.

“[The staff president] is doing a great job fostering a relationship with Central Administration, partly because he is the same age as President Schmidly. They’re able to bond due to peer identification. ‘Cowboy to cowboy’.”

“Climate has improved - staff have a strong yet measured voice via our President Merle Kennedy. He has developed a good rapport with President Schmidly, Helen Gonzales and other administrators.”

A number of positive observations were made by staff participants:

“Staff concerns are being considered in University discussions. We have a stronger voice than before, but still not as strong as we need.”

“I feel staff has a stronger voice in the governance at UNM. Staff Council has had a seat at all the budget meetings and a say in budget matters affecting staff.”

“Central Administration seems to be working with Staff Council and Staff Council committees to try and address staff concerns.”

“We have bridged the gap in many ways with the Central Administration. Nothing is served with hostility. I have to give a lot of credit to the Administration. I’m very happy with the progress, they have listened to us.”

“Because of issues like the ERB proposals and Staff Council’s attention and communication, perception of Council has improved and/or increased among various levels of [Central Administration] staff. More constituents contact me now.”

“The climate has improved this year. Staff is being included in more university committees and taskforces and we are being listened to for our concerns. We need to continue this inclusion and access.”

Critical comments regarding progress in shared governance included:

“I think that there is still a certain amount of distrust by staff toward the Central Administration. There is a general feeling that Central Administration doesn’t take staff concerns into their decisions in favor of faculty.”

“The relationship between Staff and Administration has grown more polite and cordial, but there remains a deep seated mistrust on both sides. Staff is included in processes, but their input carries little weight.”

Attitudes are not so favorable when it comes to staff morale, which was said to be low, largely due to the reduction in workforce. Staff Council members feel that the Central Administration is not suffering as much as staff. They feel they are always the ones who feel the cuts most. Even academic employees complained that too many staff positions were being cut.

“Staff is constantly expected to do more with less.”

“Staff remains over-taxed, undervalued and fearful for their jobs. Central Administration still prefers to protect high salaries of friends rather than make needed cuts.”

“Staff layoffs over the past year have been dramatic. It seems we are targeted in budget cuts, and the department staffs that are left have seen a dramatic increase in workload with no increase in salary.”

“We still don’t get everything we want, but we are at the table.”

Some staff participants noted that:

“If the staff infrastructure continues to be cut, it will begin to affect the students.”

Staff participants also noted that preferential treatment of some departments or units “destroys morale.” The Health Sciences Center was cited as receiving favored treatment. They also said it was demoralizing when the university hired a Dean with a salary and benefits package of over a million dollars, while they are struggling to keep their units running.

Relationship with Human Resources – Staff Council has been told by the VP of Human Resources that she is their “official liaison” to the Central Administration. However, some participants described the position as difficult to work with.

“It’s easier for us to go the President or Provost than the VP of Human Resources.”

“HR is ‘handling us’, rather than working with us.”

“Human Resources Vice President still feels it is necessary to manage (control) Staff Council.”

Some participants said the VP of Human Resources does not see herself as “obligated to represent staff.” She was described as “suspicious of staff,” and as “concerned with the relationship between Staff Council and the Unions.”

“If HR is involved they are not going to advocate for staff.”

“HR has become our nemesis. It shouldn’t be. We would like HR to become our advocate.”

On the upside, the Staff Council’s Compensation Committee has experienced a “one hundred-eighty degree improvement” in their work with the representative from the Division of Human Resources.

“There are still issues with the Career Development Policy, but the HR rep shows up at our meetings.”

Relationship with the Enrollment Management Division – Some staff spoke of difficulties working with the Vice President of Enrollment Management. The management style was described as “dictatorial.” A primary example was her “override” of UNM’s flex-hour policy for employees using public transportation. The management style of Enrollment Management was said to “drive employees away.” However, staff appreciated their voice being heard when

Central Administration reassessed the decision to consolidate other units under the Enrollment Management Division.

Appendix A

Discussion Guides

UNM Follow-Up Focus Groups Discussion Guide - Faculty

Climate

In general, how would you describe the climate between faculty/staff and the Central Administration, as it relates to shared governance, over the past year? (*Have participants write responses prior to discussion.*)

What changes, if any, do you feel are happening? (*Have participants write responses prior to discussion.*)

Probe: relationship with Regents.

Voice

Have there been any changes as it relates to Faculty input or Faculty voice with the Central Administration? (Listening, respecting, considering, responding)

Budget Process

It is clearly an unusual period economically, locally and nationally, but putting that aside, how do you feel about current developments in the budgeting process at UNM? How do you feel these processes affect the ultimate decision making? Do you have suggestions?

Given the current budget constraints, do you feel academics is receiving the priority it deserves? (*Probe: Is academic mission guiding decision making?*)

President's Office
Provost
Executive VP for Administration

Other than budgetary matters, how do you see the Faculty's voice in decision making processes that impact academic programs?

Probe: relationship with Regents.

Transparency

Has information important to you become easier to access? What steps have improved this access? Do you feel the university community is aware of the information that is available or how to access it?

Central Administration

Has the absence of the UNM President over the fall impacted the process of shared governance? Is so, in what ways?

Faculty Senate

How is the relationship between Faculty Senate and Central Administration?

Have you detected any changes in tone or tenor in communication between Faculty Senate and Central Administration?

Performance Evaluation Process

Some changes were made to the performance evaluation of the university president. How do you feel about the usefulness of the evaluation?

Fewer changes were made to the performance evaluation of the Provost/VP. What is your opinion of the current evaluation criteria?

Remaining challenges

What are the biggest remaining challenges facing (Faculty/Staff/Department Heads) in the immediate future?

New Issues

Are there any new issues or items on the horizon that were not part of the baseline research we conducted last spring? Items that could have an impact on the overall success of shared governance efforts?

UNM Follow-Up Focus Groups Discussion Guide – Department Chairs

Climate

In general, how would you describe the climate between faculty/staff and the Central Administration over the past year? (*Have participants write responses prior to discussion.*)

In general, how would you describe the climate between Department Chairs and the Central Administration over the past year? (*Have participants write responses prior to discussion.*)

What changes, if any, do you feel are happening? (*Have participants write responses prior to discussion.*)

Probe: relationship with Regents.

Voice

Have there been any changes as it relates to Department Chair's voice with the Central Administration? (Listening, respecting, considering, responding)

Budget Process

It is clearly an unusual period economically, locally and nationally, but putting that aside, how do you feel about current developments in the budgeting process at UNM? How do you feel these processes affect the ultimate decision making? Do you have suggestions?

Given the current budget constraints, do you feel academics is receiving the priority it deserves? (*Probe: Is academic mission guiding decision making?*)

President's Office
Provost
Executive VP for Administration

Other than budgetary matters, how do you see the Department Chair's voice in decision making processes that impact academic programs?

Probe: relationship with Regents.

Generally, how is the relationship between Department Chairs and Deans as it relates to shared governance/voice? (Listening, respecting, considering, relaying views)

Probe: Deans considering and relaying Department Chair views to Central Administration

Probe: Deans communicating important information to Department Chairs

What changes, if any, do you feel are happening?

Transparency

Has information important to you become easier to access? What steps have improved this access? Do you feel the university community is aware of the information that is available or how to access it?

Central Administration

Has the absence of the UNM President over the fall impacted the process of shared governance? If so, in what ways?

Faculty Senate

How is the relationship between Faculty Senate and Central Administration?

Have you detected any changes in tone or tenor in communication between Faculty Senate and Central Administration?

Performance Evaluation Process

Currently, what is the process for the performance evaluation of the Provost/VP? What is your opinion of the current process and evaluation criteria?

Remaining challenges

What are the biggest remaining challenges facing Department Heads in the immediate future?

New Issues

Are there any new issues or items on the horizon that were not part of the baseline research we conducted last spring? Items that could have an impact on the overall success of shared governance efforts?

UNM Follow-Up Focus Groups Discussion Guide -- Staff

Climate

In general, how would you describe the climate between staff and the Central Administration over the past year? (*Have participants write responses prior to discussion.*)

What changes, if any, do you feel are happening? (*Have participants write responses prior to discussion.*)

Probe: Atmosphere of trust

Communication

Have there been any changes as it relates to communication between staff and the Central Administration?

Probe: Timely information

Probe: Carried out in good faith

Voice

Have there been any changes as it relates to staff input or staff voice with the Central Administration? (Listening, respecting, considering, responding)

Probe: Collaborative decision-making environment

Probe: Staff input is valued in developing institutional budget

Budget Process

It is clearly an unusual period economically, locally and nationally, but putting that aside, how do you feel about current developments in the budgeting process at UNM? How do you feel these processes affect the ultimate decision making? Do you have suggestions?

Given the current budget constraints, do you feel academics is receiving the priority it deserves? (*Probe: Is academic mission guiding decision making?*)

President's Office
Provost
Executive VP for Administration

Other than budgetary matters, how do you see the staff's voice in decision making processes that impact academic programs?

Transparency

Has information important to you become easier to access? What steps have improved this access? Do you feel the university community is aware of the information that is available or how to access it?

Central Administration

Has the absence of the UNM President over the fall impacted processes, climate, and communications at UNM? Is so, in what ways?

Staff Council

How is the relationship between Staff Council and Central Administration?

Have you detected any changes in tone or tenor in communication between Staff Council and Central Administration?

Remaining challenges

What are the biggest remaining challenges facing staff in the immediate future?

New Issues

Are there any new issues or items on the horizon that were not part of the baseline research we conducted last spring? Items that could have an impact on the overall success of shared governance efforts?