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PROCESS, OUTCOMES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE
CLAS STAFF VISIONING WORKSHOP
SEPTEMBER 16, 2022

The objective of the CLAS Staff Visioning Workshop was to provide a venue for staff to share their experience, contributions, and vision for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences culminating in actionable recommendations. Further, the CLAS Staff Council wanted to facilitate direct communication from CLAS staff to senior leadership.

The CLAS Staff Council began planning for this staff-led visioning event during the summer of 2021. The Council applied for, and was granted, funding for the event by the UI Staff Council through the Coca-Cola grant for Professional Development and Education. Event committee members Mark Fullenkamp, Alli Rockwell, Emma Kirk, and Sandy Mast met with strategy consultant and workshop facilitator Jennifer Horn-Frasier from Bluebird Sky Solutions in Iowa City in June 2022 to begin planning a staff workshop focused on shaping the future of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

The focus of the event planning and process was on desired outcomes: the future that staff would like to build within CLAS. The reason for this approach is that co-defining the desired future state and co-designing how to create that future will more effectively keep a group forward-focused while, in the process, address obstacles that stand in the way. It was important for the event planning committee to bring in a facilitator external to the university to enable robust discussion and encourage fresh perspectives.

The workshop developed input and recommendations representing the views of CLAS staff on the following topics put before us by Dean Sanders:

- Communication within the college
- Hybrid work arrangements
- Staff contributions to the strategic plan and DEI
- Performance reviews

The CLAS Staff Council sent invitations to CLAS staff from all the work groups across the college seeking volunteers to be a part of this event. A group of thirty-two volunteers that proportionally represented staff work groups were identified. Prior to the event, participants received information about the four topics that would be discussed and asked to rank order them based on their interests. They were then strategically placed in groups of eight based on the preferences of topic and work group they belonged to, to ensure a good representation of perspectives. Due to schedule conflicts and sickness, twenty-four staff volunteer participants and ten CLAS Staff Council members, who served as table guides (appendix A) attended the workshop. A few days before the visioning event took place, organizers provided each participant with supporting documentation to review and prepare their ideas and thoughts prior to the workshop about each of the topics.

The visioning event included one morning session and one afternoon session but all participants had group input to all four subjects. Two small groups discussed each topic, then shared priorities and recommended actions with the full group for further discussion. A table guide kept notes on desired future outcomes, available resources to obtain future outcomes, and recommendations for actions to be taken to reach the future outcomes and presented them to the entire group of staff. At that point, the staff from other tables were able to add their thoughts while the facilitator made notes for each subject discussed.

Participants in the visioning event identified some themes and areas of opportunity that CLAS could capitalize on to make positive progress in more than one focus area. For example, strengthening communication – transparency, participation, clarity, frequency – will positively impact staff engagement with leadership across every focus area. Other themes included recognizing the value of staff contributions to CLAS through a more robust and consequential performance review process, emphasizing staff stories and staff-led initiatives in collegiate communications, as well as demonstrating trust in hybrid and flexible work arrangements.

COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE COLLEGE

Framing Question: Imagine that communication throughout CLAS helped ensure that staff are well informed and that their voices and ideas are shared and heard. What would that look and feel like?

Desired Outcomes: With many recent staffing changes in the college, both on the Communications team and in the Dean's Office, we have noted improvements in communication practices and channels. We also are eager to provide input as the college assesses and reimagines our communication channels and plans additional changes. We recognize the challenge of providing as much information as possible while balancing issues of confidentiality and avoiding information overload. We suggest that the following, simple actions as ways to continue improving CLAS collegiate communications will support these objectives:

- CLAS staff are included and informed about what is happening in the College.
- Information flows equitably and predictably from the Dean's Office to staff.
- Staff know where to find info and get answers to their questions, minimizing disinformation and conjecture.
- CLAS staff understand options for using their voices, insight, and experience to communicate with CLAS leadership and spark positive change in the College.
- Communication systems that foster productivity and positive work culture are community building, inclusive, and promote belonging; are transparent and demonstrate trustworthiness; as well as recognize staff contributions and achievements

Recommended Actions:

- **Expand the DEO Mailing to include all CLAS staff.** Rename it something more inclusive and communicate the change and its intent (to build inclusivity and increase everyone's access to information) clearly. In doing so we believe that categorizing the articles/items within by "Title", "Audience" and "Call to Action" would clearly distinguish the "who, what and why" these items are important to staff members.
- **Create a consistent schedule for key communications pieces and make it visible.** For example, mandate that departmental ALT members and supervisors hold monthly meetings with their staff to share pertinent information.

- **Strive for equitable representation of staff in CLAS communications.** Include staff stories, accomplishments, and contributions in CLAS-wide communications such as strategic communications' Faculty and Staff Newsletter.
- **Ensure all staff are aware of the channels available for making their voices heard.** Staff should have the opportunity to meet directly with the Dean and senior leadership. Many avenues of interaction with CLAS Staff Council, which regularly meets with the Dean and can elevate staff feedback, are also available. Staff have the opportunity to attend CLAS Staff Council meetings and discussing concerns with the Council, serve on Council, and utilize the CLAS Staff Council anonymous feedback form at https://uiowa.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5nVjnZYg4HD7mvz.

HYBRID WORK ARRANGEMENTS FOR CLAS STAFF

Framing Question: Imagine that you and your CLAS colleagues were satisfied with the hybrid work options and physical workspace available to you. What would that look like and feel like?

Desired Outcomes: Staff at the visioning workshop engaged in a robust discussion of our desired outcomes for hybrid work. We envision full parity and equity between employees who are on campus full-time and those who are hybrid/remote. Much of this parity comes down to a cultural shift: veering away from treating hybrid work as an exception to the norm and accepting that our college, and the American work force more generally, would benefit from normalizing this aspect of employee choice.

Proactive and thoughtful efforts by CLAS leadership that assess staff needs during moments of change – like the Future of Work report – could go a long way toward reinforcing the trusting relationship staff maintain with leadership. Such assays of our needs, when paired with the intention to act in accordance with staff response, forge a helpful line of communication between leaders and staff.

We were concerned to find that, despite survey responses that indicated overwhelming satisfaction with hybrid work arrangements, the Future of Work report's language referred to hybrid work as, "not the new norm." To the contrary, staff at the Visioning event shared the objective of creating a college culture in which hybrid work is not simply an option, but is valued equally—both culturally and in resource distribution—to fully on-campus work.

Efficiency of space utilization will be optimized by ongoing evaluation of work arrangements, efficiency, and efficacy at the department or unit level.

Recommended Actions:

- **Encourage unit autonomy when deciding hybrid work arrangements.** Rather than choosing from a preselected array of models (e.g., 2-day remote or fully on-campus), units should be able to create hybrid work arrangements based on individual and collective staff needs, as well as unit and collegiate objectives.
- **Every employee should fill out a Work Arrangement Form annually.** All staff and units should identify how to measure the success of and regularly assess their work arrangements for efficacy and efficiency whether entirely on campus, entirely remote, or working with a hybrid model.
- **Foster the ability of staff to establish and maintain respected boundaries surrounding their work arrangements.** Doing so will lead to a stronger sense of equity.

- **Provide clear and consistent message from leadership about the expectations and policies surrounding work arrangements.**

STAFF CONTRIBUTIONS TO STRATEGIC PLANNING
AND COLLEGIATE DEI INITIATIVES

Framing Question: Imagine that the CLAS staff felt ownership of and benefited from the long-term goals of the CLAS and the University. What would that look and feel like?

Desired Outcomes: The strategic plan should be a vehicle that facilitates institutional change and enables a culture shift in our organization that encompasses integration of DEI into all facets of CLAS function. The extent to which the strategic plan will be a tool for each staff member to identify and act upon their individual contribution to the college's overall objectives will depend upon several factors:

- Staff understanding the role of the strategic plan and their opportunity for involvement in the planning process,
- The frequency with which the strategic plan is reviewed and discussed for its applicability and relevance to individual units and roles,
- The consistency with which the strategic plan is transparently considered in every level of decision making, and
- The relevancy of the strategic plan in staff member's day-to-day functions.

When staff have agency and ownership of the strategic planning process, the strategic plan should empower them to answer the questions of how and where they belong and how they contribute to the success of the CLAS. CLAS staff are well-positioned to foster collegiality, be forward-thinking, be inclusive, "lead where they are," and take ownership of CLAS initiatives. Staff can ignite engagement in their units and departments to enact the current strategic plan and future iterations. CLAS leadership can support and facilitate enhanced staff engagement by acting on the following recommendations.

Recommended Actions: Although there were several recommendations suggested, those listed below are the top three that, if implemented, will more fully utilize the college's existing resources and will affect an immediate shift in understanding of the roles staff play in contributing to and driving the progress of the strategic plan.

- **Renew communication around the current 2021-2026 strategic plan.** Consider providing a hard-copy, one-page summary or strategic plan quick reference sheet to each staff member (for an example, see the Dean of Students "Quick Guide for Responding to Distress," Appendix B). Revise and redistribute annually. Discuss how current, ongoing, and planned CLAS operations support the objectives in the strategic plan in regular updates to ALT and Dean's office staff meetings.
- **Expand staff participation in the next strategic planning cycle.** The number and constituency of staff on the strategic planning committee should represent the number and distribution of staff in CLAS. The CLAS Staff Council could be utilized directly, or its constitution used as a template. When staff deliver consistent recommendations that demonstrate a consensus, these considerations should be carefully considered for inclusion in the strategic plan and addressed directly. If staff input is not forthcoming on a strictly voluntary basis, it should be solicited. Drafts of the strategic plan should be released at regular intervals to increase transparency.

- **Enable staff ownership over strategic plan initiatives leveraging the annual performance evaluation.** Create an addendum to UI-level performance eval form (for an example, see the addendum to 2017 performance evaluation: "Professional and Scientific Employee Self-Evaluation," Appendix C) specifically related to each individual's role in supporting the strategic plan pillars (research and discovery; undergraduate and graduate student success; diversity, equity, and inclusion; outreach and community engagement). Assure that current DEI professional development opportunities (BUILD, BGC, Safe Zone, etc.) are more readily available to staff in the CLAS. Consider making participation in these developmental opportunities mandatory on an annual basis. Encourage staff participation in community-facing events (recruitment or service to youth, fairs, etc.) by permitting flex time or paid time for approved volunteer service.

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Framing Question: Imagine that the performance review system helped all staff perform to the best of their ability in their CLAS roles. What would that look and feel like?

Desired Outcomes: Staff want to participate in a performance review process that is proactive, meaningful, actionable, and closely tied to specific job roles. Performance reviews should inform a near- and long-term hiring plan within the college to assure staffing needs are met and succession considered. While acknowledging that CLAS HR has limited autonomy with the tool used to conduct performance evaluations, value will be added to the review process by being deliberate to bridge universal competencies and role-specific responsibilities and expectations. It is necessary that the rationale for performance review systems and policies are established and transparently communicated especially for the meaning and distribution of ratings and the connection between ratings, performance goals, promotion, and salary increases. The CLAS performance review system and process should align with the procedures described in the University Operations Manual (see Appendix D). Critically, that performance reviews will:

- Establish expectations for performance and identify potential career growth opportunities,
- Recognize the accomplishments and define the professional and educational needs of staff members, and
- Serve as one criterion for determining discretionary salary increases for staff members.

Recommended Actions:

- **Establish and communicate across all staff levels the rationale for performance review ratings.** Staff and supervisors should have a shared understanding of the meaning of ratings and their distribution. The rating of "meeting expectations" must be destigmatized; if it is to be the standard target rating, then it should be seen as a desirable rating, not a penalty. To facilitate alignment of performance reviews with responsibilities, staff and supervisors should regularly review role expectations and have clear criteria for measuring success.
- **Utilize existing HR resources to expand continuous communication and training around performance reviews.** The performance review objectives and process should be included in onboarding training, in preparation for annual reviews, and new related activities developed (e.g., workshops about the performance review process including how to give and receive critical feedback and how to coach staff to improvement). Performance reviews should be revisited multiple times throughout the year to assess

progress and adjust resources. Acknowledge and address that supervisors experience challenges with allocating time to conduct meaningful reviews.

- **Utilize the performance review form and process to proactively set goals, identify needed resources, and assess progress incrementally.** Redesign performance review system to include more frequent, proactive review meetings. Implement processes to help people analyze the reasons specific goals were not met and to develop strategies for addressing them. Prioritize, recognize, and reward continuous improvement.