

CALS Classified Staff Survey – Submitted by CALS Staff Council – May 15, 2012

Method and Survey Design

A survey, comprised of eight questions, was directed to all classified staff via hard copy distributed at the Faculty/Staff Meeting (April 10) and provided weekly (CALS Weekly Bulletin) over 3 weeks. A link was provided to an on-line survey tool.

The survey was made available to staff following their departments/units receipt of information about and the submission of the completed report for both CALS21 Phases I & II. Classified staff had two and a half weeks to complete and submit the survey – April 10-27, 2012 (18 days).

This survey was compiled as a starting point and provides a snapshot of current involvement and themes associated with the CALS strategic plan expressed by classified staff. The timeline to create the survey, gather information, access information and write a report has been extremely short, March 26 – May 15 (approx 7 weeks).

Questions were designed to reflect staff awareness of and participation in the CALS21 Strategic Plan planning process, Phase I & II, in their department/unit.

Question types were closed (the first three) – provide the name of the department/unit which is your primary employee and two “yes”, “no”, “I don’t know” responses. Five questions were open ended. The questions were designed to reflect:

- Staff awareness of and involvement in the CALS21 Strategic Plan and its process – specifically Phases I and II
- To identify recurring themes relating to CALS being more efficient, effective and innovative

Steps were incorporated to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of survey responses.

Developing the questionnaire was a collaborative effort among CALS staff council members.

Questions posed to CALS classified staff:

1. What unit/department is your primary employer? Note: This is an optional question. This information is needed only to determine if staff responses represent a good cross-section of CALS departments/units. Sixteen (16) were represented.
2. Are you aware of or familiar with the CALS21 strategic plan initiative?
3. Have staff been invited to participate in your unit's/department's preparation of responses to the CALS 21 strategic plan initiative questions?
4. If staff have been involved in the process, how have they been involved? If they have not been involved, respond, "Not involved".
5. What obstacles do you encounter when carrying out tasks associated with your job?
6. What changes would you suggest to improve your work place to make it more efficient?
7. How can resources at CALS be used more effectively and/or efficiently? Be specific, when possible provide examples.
8. Have you anything else you would like to add?

Purpose of the Survey

- Determine if there is a need to enhance classified staffs awareness of and/or participation in the CALS21 Strategic Plan process
- Identify obstacles encountered when carrying out tasks associated with their job
- Suggest how resources at CALS can be used more effectively, efficiently and/or innovatively

Conclusion

One of the goals of the strategic plan should be: establishing avenues for creation and sustainability of a healthy college work environment that will benefit all CALS staff, faculty and students.

The skills, knowledge and experience of classified staff are an integral part of and contribute directly to the success of the CALS strategic plan and the success of CALS and the University of Arizona. They account for one-third of the CALS work force and play a critical role in providing services and administering programs. Services they provide and tasks they undertake cover a broad range of responsibility – custodial, research, administrative, logistics, coordination, accounting, information technology, etc.

It is imperative that CALS administration and faculty recognize that classified staff has a significant investment in how CALS can best support its goals over the next 10 years. The survey provides strong evidence that classified staff have not been effectively involved in the process and that they need to be provided an assurance and confirmation of inclusion, “participation and presence at the table”, regarding all stages of the CALS21 strategic plan: development, assessment and implementation. Their expectation is simply; a well defined, active role in the shared governance of CALS.

There is an old saying that states, “good leaders get everyone rowing the boat, great leaders get them all rowing in the same direction.” Classified staff need to understand where CALS administration is taking them and why. Equipped with this knowledge, the opportunity for a much higher level of staff engagement exists and, subsequently, a much higher chance of success for CALS21.

We are aware that the information collected is from a very small sample collected over a very short period of time. The four themes identified provide a very general explanation of the data collected as they relate to classified staffs issues and suggestions.

For a survey to be most effective it should be based on a clear set of goals that are aligned with the direction established by the CALS leadership. This is something that should be considered when you initiate the CALS21 strategic plan. At that time, the survey content can measure information that will provide practical, powerful results and a roadmap for specific action plans. Fundamentally, we believe that a staff survey is only of value to the extent it is used by CALS leadership as a guide to implement strategy, improve performance and achieve desired objectives.

We anticipate that the information provided in this report will be viewed as a conversation starter.

Survey Data and Summaries

Number of CALS classified staff: 654 full-time, part-time, on call/stand-by

- 53 staff members submitted the survey (8.10%)

Questions 1 - 3

1. What unit/department is your primary employer?

18 departments, units and cooperative extension offices were represented by surveys submitted

- 39 (73/6%) identified their department/unit
- 14 (26.4%) chose not to identify their department/unit

2. Are you aware of or familiar with the CALS21 strategic plan initiative?

38 yes 71.7%

15 no 28.3%

Almost 30% of classified staff indicated they are not aware or familiar with the plan.

3. Have staff been invited to participate in your unit's/department's preparation of responses to the CALS 21 strategic plan initiative questions?

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|--------------|----|-------|
| Yes | 26 | 49.1% |
| No | 17 | 31.1% |
| I don't know | 10 | 18.9% |

50% were not or do not know if they or another classified staff member was included in the process.

Questions 4 -8, Issues and Suggested Solutions

Four main themes were identified when reviewing the participant responses.

- Workload/Workplace
- Communication
- Administration/Faculty Relations
- Financial/Funding

Summary of Four Themes Identified

Workload/Workplace:

How can we make our work environment more productive and use resources to their best advantage?

Staff across the board identified ways in which their workload has increased over the years while the number of employees has decreased. There is insufficient time to complete tasks or services appropriately. Also, there is a lack of coverage due to the reduced staff hiring (generally and especially when other staff are sick or on vacation) and concerns that this will only get worse with the next budget cut. Increased enrollment, decreased funding, a three-year hiring freeze, and the redistribution to departments and colleges of many services previously provided by the university have taken their toll on the quality of our work, the accuracy and speed of our work, and – overwhelmingly – on morale. The increased workload has stressed faculty/staff relations and also had an impact on the quality of services offered by departments to students. Many staff identified physical conditions in the workplace that have an additional impact on workload and on our long-term health. Aging facilities and equipment create more work and general concern for safety and physical wellbeing. Many CALS staff in the 21st century spent more hours sitting in front of a computer than ever before, yet our desks, workstations, and lighting are often still those purchased many decades ago for staff who have spent more of the day on their feet and less hours looking at an electronic screen and working on a keyboard. Personnel at remote sites have little to no access to the benefits available to main campus employees, which is also a damper on morale. At the end of this section is just a sampling of the many and varied solutions staff might offer in how workplace/workload issues are addressed.

Communication:

How can we ensure definitive, yet flexible lines of communication that facilitate proactive ideas, initiatives and expectations on the part of staff, faculty, and administrators?

A common issue stems from a disconnect between the various departments within the college, and between departments and college/university administration. With an array of changing policies and procedures, staff often find themselves unapprised of important new developments and unaware of such programs as new professional development curricula or new resources available to university personnel. As just one example, many personnel involved in such financial transactions as ordering lab supplies or authorizing transactions conducted by other personnel found themselves completely unaware of the rollout of UAccess Financials last October or of the training opportunities available. Business officers were communicated with directly, but the information didn't always spread out from there. Heavy workloads in units across the university mean that calls or emails frequently are not returned within a reasonable time and additional time is wasted following up on inquiries or requests over and over again. Experienced staff

who might serve as mentors for new staff don't have the time to share their experiences and knowledge. This is a particularly critical issue for small departments with few personnel and for our small county campuses.

There are further disconnects within departments – between faculty and staff. Staff that might make a significant contribution are often not brought to the table to participate when faculty are planning/budgeting for sponsored projects proposals or conducting program evaluation. Staff feel like “outsiders” in their own departments when they aren't communicated with or appreciated for their expertise and unique perspective as those actually administering the programs in many cases. As evidenced by the responses to survey questions about CALS21 communications, many department administrators either asked for no staff involvement in planning exercises or asked for involvement in only a superficial way once responses had already been formulated and a surface “buy in” on the part of staff seemed politically appropriate. The culture varies in departments across the college and unfortunately many staff had little opportunity to fully participate in strategic planning for the department's future.

Administration/Faculty Relations

How can administrators and faculty better articulate their needs to staff and, in return, benefit from the suggestions and ideas generated by the staff supporting their programs and associated services?

In today's environment, classified staff are needed to carry out a whole range of tasks that were assigned to others in the past. Research staff in labs, for instance, are now responsible for tasks like ordering supplies and making travel arrangements – tasks that used be taken care of by more fully staffed business offices. Faculty need to ensure, no matter what the situation, that their staff are receiving the training needed and have time allotted when assigned additional duties. A common issue referred to in the survey is that faculty sometimes don't articulate well how projects should be implemented or how they can be implemented given current university policies and Financial Services Office policies. Some of these policies can have a tremendous impact on the budget or schedule for grant-funded projects. By not communicating with staff in advance, they aren't taking advantage of the expertise and experience that staff have had dealing with these issues. When proposals that need to be routed through Sponsored Projects are left until the last minute, an already heavy workload becomes even greater as it takes more work to rush a proposal routing than it does to have planned ahead and routed a proposal well in advance of the deadline.

Modern technology can be a curse as well as a blessing. While it gives faculty the option of mobility; the opportunity of being off-site while attending to business while traveling, conducting research or outreach off-campus, communicating via email or Skype, and teleconferencing presents challenges. Technology that separates people often limits brainstorming that occurs when we are all working together in the same place. It takes much longer to get responses to questions emailed back and forth rather than working with personnel directly, face-to-face.

Fearing unemployment in today's poor job market, staff are hesitant to candidly express their concerns about specific faculty with administrators who might be able to make a difference. Constant change in leadership and policies at the college and university level – together with budget cuts and increased admissions – have left faculty and staff alike “physically and emotionally spent.”

Financial/Funding

Are we providing services, delivering programs, and undertaking support tasks in the most efficient and cost-effective way?

While faculty are feeling the pinch of trying to do more work with less support staff, staff are also feeling the pinch of services once provided by the university that have been distributed to colleges and departments across campus. For instance, accounting transactions once performed at the university level in the Financial Services Office have now been decentralized. International Faculty and Scholars once offered a number of support services to departments interested in hosting foreign scholars or students. Those services today have been almost completely decentralized, forcing faculty and staff across the university to “re-invent the

wheel” and adding immeasurably to the costs involved in administering such a project. These days, we are all seeking additional grant funding to supplement decreased support from the State of Arizona, but Sponsored Projects Services is either not interested in assisting faculty and staff with questions when preparing grant budgets or they are simply so short of personnel they are unable to do so. In any event, it makes the grant proposal process more difficult to navigate than it might have been if the university was able to better invest in this particular unit.

At the same time, UA staff have not been asked widely to participate in any kind of focus groups that might have evaluated the function of such systems as UAccess Financials and addressed some very basic user issues in updates to the program. There are multiple instances where duplication of effort is a waste of already scanty resources. Transactions that your business manager used to be able to edit and correct (if containing even the smallest mistake on the part of the person who generated them) now have to be disapproved and regenerated. Shouldn't the experiences of “frontline” users have been integral in launching a new system as major as UAccess Financials?

Several counties have no agent based there on a full-time basis. A single administrative staff member is sometimes the only person that the public is able to interface with when contacting their county extension office for the kind of information we are charged with providing the public. It takes much longer than it used to for that single administrative staff member to track down an agent or specialist based in a more populous location so they can respond to these types of questions about agriculture, gardening, pest management, environment, financial and family resources. This is one of the fundamental pieces of our mission as a land-grant university's college of agriculture.