Spring 2018 Faculty Listening Sessions
Final Report
Faculty Welfare and Development Committee
UNC Asheville

Introduction

During the fall semester of 2017, the Faculty Welfare and Development Committee (FWDC) initiated plans for a series of faculty listening sessions to take place early in the spring 2018 semester. Inspired by multiple lively discussions taking place on campus at the time, as well as increasing expressions of frustration from our colleagues, FWDC endeavored to provide a meaningful yet efficient space in which faculty could share their views and participate in the shared governance process.

The purpose of this report is to share with our faculty colleagues, as well as with university administrators and professional staff, the key themes that emerged from these listening sessions. The findings indicate robust agreement among faculty regarding both positive and problematic aspects of their work lives. Faculty expressed strong appreciation for the high quality of their colleagues and students, for their autonomy, and for our liberal arts culture and collaboration across disciplines. Top concerns included workload, climate, compensation and benefits, and transparency and communication from university leadership. Furthermore, data from the recent Employee Engagement Survey (faculty and staff) and COACHE survey (faculty only) largely support the themes that emerged from the listening sessions. Together, results from these three data sources should inform and strengthen the broader shared governance process on our campus during a crucial time of transition.

Methodological Approach

Eight listening sessions were initially scheduled to take place over the course of three weeks in February 2018. One session was added later by request. Two of the nine sessions were open to all faculty. The remaining sessions were each devoted to one of the following groups: women, faculty of color, chairs and program directors, tenure-track faculty, lecturers, tenured faculty, and long-serving faculty (those had been at the university for 20+ years). The original announcement, followed by multiple reminders, was sent to the "Faculty Official" email list, and read as follows:

> *The Faculty Welfare and Development Committee (FWDC) invites all faculty, including part-time faculty, to attend one or more of our listening sessions during the month of February. Our hope is to use your insights to inform FWDC's agenda for the remainder of the spring semester and for the next 1-2 years. Based on recent conversations with many of you, we expect that issues such as workload, criteria for evaluation, and campus climate will be popular topics. We sincerely hope you'll*

join us to share your experiences and ideas on these as well as other issues that are important to you. Your input is greatly appreciated.

Note that some sessions are open to all faculty, while others are designed to facilitate conversation among particular groups. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or any member of FWDC. We'll send out reminders as the dates approach.

All sessions were facilitated by 1-2 faculty, in most cases members of FWDC. In each session targeting a particular group, the facilitator(s) identified as a member of that group (e.g., a tenure-track faculty member facilitated the session for tenure-track faculty members; a woman facilitated the session for women faculty, etc.). FWDC members prepared a "guide for facilitators" in order to ensure general consistency of format and questions across focus groups. Participants were welcomed and invited to introduce themselves. Facilitators emphasized that confidentiality would be prioritized, and that audio of the conversations would not be recorded. They further explained that notes would be taken, but that comments would not be associated with names or other characteristics that could compromise participants' identities.

Discussions lasted approximately one hour each and were structured around the following prompts:

1. What do you appreciate most about working at UNCA?
2. Currently, what are your strongest concerns or sources of dissatisfaction?
3. What suggestions can you offer for addressing those concerns?

Facilitators took copious notes and shared them in a folder accessible only to faculty members of FWDC. The data were reviewed and discussed by the committee, and then analyzed primarily by a social science faculty member of FWDC in preparation for the report.

In total, 48 faculty plus the chairs and program directors participated in at least one session. An additional six faculty communicated with the FWDC chair by email or scheduled an individual meeting to discuss their ideas. We estimate that the number of unique participants fell between 75 and 85.

A few important notes about the presentation of findings:
1. In some cases, specific details have been omitted intentionally in order to prioritize participants' confidentiality.
2. The themes highlighted in this report represent issues that were raised in *multiple* sessions or were discussed at length by multiple faculty within a single session. The report should therefore not be understood as an exhaustive representation of faculty perspectives.
3. Readers should not assume that comments concerning faculty of particular identity groups or rank were necessarily shared by an individual identifying as a member of that group.

For example, in some cases, tenured faculty members shared concerns about the workload of lecturers and tenure-track faculty. Likewise, white faculty expressed concerns about the lack of effective recruitment and retention of faculty of color.

4. Because sessions were not audio-recorded, long quotes could not be captured or presented.

Key Findings

Consistent with the prompts offered during each of the listening sessions, the findings below are presented according to themes of appreciation/satisfaction, followed by sources of concern/ dissatisfaction.

Appreciations

1. Colleagues/Collegiality: There was widespread agreement that strong, warm relationships with colleagues, within and across departments and programs, constitutes one of the top benefits of working at UNC Asheville.

2. Autonomy and Innovation: Faculty reported high levels of satisfaction with the freedom they are afforded to teach and research in areas of their choice, as long as core department needs are met. Relatedly, multiple participants noted their appreciation for the support they experience when pursuing new ideas and projects.

3. Quality of Students: By and large, faculty shared that they enjoy and appreciate working with UNC Asheville students. Faculty described students as creative, curious, and hard-working.

4. Interdisciplinarity and Liberal Arts Culture: In nearly every session, participants mentioned the university's liberal arts mission as a key strength. Faculty seem to understand and be proud of "who we are." It should be noted, though, that for some, this feels like a double-edged sword due to perceived pressures to teach LAC courses regularly.

5. Other: While not easily categorized, two other sources of satisfaction arose in several conversations. First, early career faculty in particular, raved about the Center for Teaching and Learning and the faculty mentoring program. Additionally, participants reported strong appreciation for shared governance opportunities, despite some dissatisfaction with *how* the process is currently working (see point #2 under "Concerns"). Generally speaking, faculty feel that they have a voice.

Table 1. Sources of Satisfaction

Theme	Examples
Colleagues	- strong team mentality; people help each other out - great colleagues (mentioned repeatedly) - feeling of comradery - fruitful, creative collaborations - sense that colleagues want you to succeed - shared values (among the people who stay)

Autonomy & Innovation	- freedom to create interesting courses - encouraged to chart our own research agendas; create a balance that "fits" us - flexibility of teaching, including scheduling - opportunities to work with students outside our home departments - recognition of diverse types of scholarly and creative activity - opportunities to grow professionally
Students	- willingness of students to work - curious and adventurous students - classroom is rewarding on multiple levels
Liberal Arts	- culture and mission - ability and expectation to teach across disciplines - interdisciplinarity in teaching and research is strongly supported

Concerns

1. <u>Workload:</u> Workload was the one concern that was raised in *every* session. Many faculty mentioned workload as a primary and ongoing source of frustration, but the context varied considerably. The following three dimensions were evident in the comments:
   a. Overall Volume – Many faculty expressed frustration that faculty workload is unmanageable, unsustainable, and continues to grow. For example, one group discussed their perception that administrators and professional staff often identify problems, then create new tasks for faculty, making it their responsibility to "solve" the problem. On a related note, particularly in the face of a perceived increasing service burden, some faculty lamented the limited time available for the intellectual work necessary for high quality teaching, research, and creative work.
   b. Inequity - Equity issues were mentioned across ranks and groups, but were most pronounced among women, faculty of color, and untenured faculty (including lecturers). Many faculty remarked that these groups often take on a higher volume of work, particularly in the realm of service. Related to this is the feeling that different forms of service are valued differently, and that white men regularly dominate the more prestigious opportunities. These perceived patterns also have implications for performance evaluation.
   c. Increasing Expectations - Faculty across ranks expressed a concern that expectations for excellence across categories of teaching, scholarly and creative activity, and service have increased over time, contributing to burnout and demoralization. Some noted that this is more of a cultural shift than a structural one.

Although criteria for evaluation have not changed dramatically, there is a pervasive perception that the norms have and that the consequences are non-negligible.

2. Transparency and Consistency: Conversations about transparency and the need for clear communication came up in most of the sessions. Faculty across ranks and disciplines, but especially those with experience in leadership roles, shared various examples of decision-making that they perceived as inconsistent, unclear, or unfair. While some examples related to application of evaluation criteria, other concerns dealt with decisions about budgets and position allocations. Faculty want opportunities to provide feedback on matters that affect them, and they want to see policies and protocols applied consistently and fairly.

3. Climate: The climate for women, faculty of color, and in some cases untenured faculty continues to be problematic. While participants in several sessions acknowledged that colleagues engaging in harmful behaviors may not do so with intent or awareness, many women and faculty of color feel persistently unappreciated, undermined, dismissed, exploited for their "invisible" labor, and in some cases bullied. Some members of these groups shared that differences of power and authority prevent them from addressing such issues with their colleagues or with appropriate supervisors. Also notable were several comments about heightened tensions between faculty and administrators.

4. Salary/Benefits vs. Cost of Living:
    a. Structure of Merit Raises - Faculty across ranks and groups expressed frustration with what they see as a flawed or unfair structure for merit raises.
    b. Chair salaries - the current structure disproportionately benefits chairs who already have higher salaries, despite the fact that chairs perform essentially the same work.
    c. Compensation - For many, the salary and benefits do not feel adequate or aligned with the high cost of living in Asheville.
    d. Lack of support for caregivers - While multiple faculty voiced appreciation for the family leave policy, many also expressed significant frustration with the lack of childcare on campus, or at least support in finding quality childcare. Experiences among those with caregiving responsibilities, more generally, seem to vary by department and chair, which is problematic.

5. Diversity and Inclusion: Faculty in multiple positions within the university expressed strong concerns about poor recruitment and retention of faculty and students of color. Diversity "trainings" are also widely perceived to have been ineffective in addressing either institutional or personal discrimination in multiple dimensions.

6. Other: Several other issues were raised in at least two sessions, but did not fall neatly into the above categories.
    a. Administrative "bloat" - A number of faculty, particularly those who have been at the university longer, conveyed strong concerns about the growth of administrators and professional staff, relative to faculty, with little apparent benefit to students or decrease in faculty workload.
    b. Evaluation of teaching - While fervent belief in the value of teaching is nearly universal at UNC Asheville, there are multiple aspects of how we evaluate teaching that feel problematic to faculty. Some suggested that student feedback on

instruction (SFI) is given inappropriate weight and also exacerbates bias. Others suggested that disseminating SFI surveys for every instructor, every course, every semester, is unnecessary and may discourage innovation.

c. Leadership gap - Faculty across ranks, including but not limited to those serving in leadership roles, remarked that the university fails to cultivate new leadership adequately. Specifically, they pointed to a lack of support and training for new chairs and also highlighted inertia in particular areas (i.e., certain roles remain with the same individuals for long periods of time).

Table 2. Sources of Dissatisfaction

Theme	Examples
Workload	- pressure to say yes too often, to too much "I can't do everything" - so tightly scheduled and exhausted that there is no time for deep intellectual work or community-building - driving ourselves into the ground because of expectations of excellence in teaching, research, *and* service - feels like "we've changed what the standards are" - maintaining an active research program while carrying a heavy teaching load is challenging without adequate resources - when problems are identified, faculty workload increases as a way to "solve" the problem - growing emphasis on undergraduate research without clarity of how it "counts" - not enough people stepping up to share in the work - advising loads are unreasonably heavy for some; inequity is common - significant inequity in distribution of service, as well as recognition for it
Transparency and Consistency	- protocols for decision-making should be applied consistently, rather than varying across program areas or departments in ways that are unfair to particular groups - leaders must accept responsibility for making tough decisions, and explaining reasoning clearly - lack of clarity about the role of deans - budget process is unclear and seems unnecessarily complex - communication has not always been timely or transparent - perceptions without data and clear communication sometimes leads to deeper resentment

Climate	• abuses of power go on for years, and "nothing is ever done" • leaders at high levels don't stand firm against persistent, problematic behaviors • Mistreatment not always just faculty-faculty, but also sometimes administrator-faculty and faculty-staff. • it feels like the climate has shifted negatively • faculty speaking to students in derogatory ways about their colleagues
Compensation vs. Cost of Living	• benefits are poor, and have gotten worse • cost of living in Asheville has skyrocketed; salary is inadequate • difficult for partners to find jobs in the area • childcare is costly and hard to find • "I don't feel secure in Asheville"
Diversity and Inclusion	• need better mechanisms in place to recruit and retain diverse faculty. Support should be more robust. • lack of adequate representation in the administration, too • slow to welcome diverse epistemologies, particularly non-Eurocentric perspectives • campus is confused about what diversity means • offensive assumptions that women and people of color (faculty and students) are less competent