Morale Task Force Findings

In early fall 2018, the Faculty Senate conducted a university-wide poll asking, "What are the five most important issues that need to be addressed to provide Faculty Senate its 'voice' in supporting the faculty?" Approximately 35%, or 144 full-time faculty members, responded with a range of issues of concern. Among these, the issue of faculty morale was mentioned by several respondents.

Communication

An important predictor of employee morale is perceived organizational support, I believe that campus leaders should make a conscious effort to craft supportive messages. This does NOT mean protecting faculty from bad news. For example, if low enrollment means that we will be struggling financially, we need to be made aware of the problem and the extent of the problem. However, such news produces anxiety and faculty members will want to know if the administration has their back. Faculty can be asked to pitch in, but loyalty is a two-way street.

At the departmental level, I know new professors are often anxious about tenure. Departments that offer help to new professors if their teaching or research efforts are sub-par, as opposed to a sink-or-swim culture, reduce anxiety and improves departmental performance. I believe Chairs play an important role in creating either a learning culture or an every-man-for-himself culture. Does SEMO invest much in training new Chairs on these types of leadership skills?

One source of displeasure for senior faculty members is pay compression. When new professors must be paid at rates close to senior faculty in order to successfully recruit the new folks, it indicates that the pay structure has not kept up with the cost of living. I am not sure how to fix this when SEMO encounters multiple budget crises, but I think it would be helpful to be more transparent about how the pay system works. How are salaries determined? What salary survey data is used to help identify what the market rates are and how much we are under or over? More transparency will alleviate anger. In a vacuum, people are more likely to presume that bad motives underlie unpopular decisions. I am not sure who should educate the faculty and staff on these matters, perhaps the Dean at a college level or the VP of HR at a university level, but I have found that many faculty members are unaware of the mechanisms of the pay system.

These are just three examples of how we might try to reduce negative emotions, such as anxiety and resentment, which foment burnout and a loss or creativity and engagement.

Communication

Communication does not mean simply discussions between different units within the university, but also listening and problem solving. Many faculty members feel that once a discussion has taken place it is then forgotten. Improving communication then means following up with solutions or further discussion. It also means that the concerns of the faculty are heard and responded to. Visible, substantive evidence is therefore needed if we are truly dedicated to successful communication.

There are some initiatives already in place, such as the President's Shout Out Awards. This is an underdeveloped program that honors individuals throughout the University for their service. These awards demonstrate that faculty and staff are appreciated for their work.

Previous to the restructuring, colleges would give awards for service, teaching, and scholarship. This is another way to acknowledge that administration is aware and proud of what faculty are doing.

In terms of disseminating information from the top down, weekly memos from the Office of the Provost to the university as a whole would be useful in dispelling rumors and misinformation. Senators in Faculty Senate should be diligent in sharing information and soliciting feedback from their departments.

Mentorship

My research on a faculty mentorship program indicated that such a program is a valued component for career advancement and professional development. The typical mentorship design at other institutions involves new faculty and junior faculty (up to the associate level) being paired with a faculty mentor in their department/division. Colleges /Universities with a mentoring program report that it advances mentees' research, helps them to develop teaching skills, and especially is beneficial in enhancing career satisfaction, career management and collegial networking.

Goals of such a program typically include (1) providing all junior/new faculty with a career mentor; (2) identify a faculty mentoring curriculum; (3) reporting outcomes and progress to improve the program; and (4) building a collegial network of faculty mentor/mentee teams. Many programs appoint a department/division facilitator to match up the junior-senior faculty members. The mentor will then ideally "*act as a teacher, sponsor, guide, exemplar, counselor, moral supporter—but most importantly assist and facilitate the realization of a wholly balanced and successful academic career*."

Mentoring has been shown to:

* Promote career development and satisfaction

* Improve success of women and underrepresented minorities in academic careers

* Enhance faculty productivity (mentoring is linked to funding and publications)

* Predict promotion in academia

* Improve self-efficacy in teaching, research and professional development

* Increase the time that educators spend in scholarly activities

* Lead to less work-family conflict

There may also be significant benefits to the college/university in a mentoring program, including human resource development (improved retention, job performance and promotion of

diversity) and improvement in organizational culture and communication. Mentees and mentors typically meet at least 2-3 times per year.

I know when I entered the university in Fall 2014 from industry, I benefitted immensely from the informal mentorship of a colleague in the college of business. Despite having an academic career in another discipline (biochemistry), I was totally unfamiliar with the most appropriate business journals, conferences, tenure and promotion requirements, etc.—the help and guidance of a mentor was invaluable. In our current climate, I believe a faculty mentorship program would improve faculty morale and encourage a more collaborative and less stressful collegial environment for both junior and established faculty members.

Recognition

Teaching is more than a job, it is a service and one which many of us feel called to do. Deep commitment to student success is what keeps most of us in careers as faculty at a teaching institution. Few of us are here for the money, and few have ambitions to administration; we are teachers who love to teach, who are very invested in our students' success, who work more than full-time to plan amazing classes, engage students outside of class, celebrate with them when they succeed, and support them in many ways. We are not salespeople, automatons, or anonymous assembly line workers. But how often and in what ways are faculty recognized for these efforts, for our academic and even personal achievements, and as experts in our fields of study and of the academic programs we oversee?

Recognition, or affirming the value of one's work, directly correlates to efficiency and higher financial returns for the institution.[1] Increasing recognition of the variety of activities in which faculty engage and affirming our essential role in student recruitment, retention, and completion is an achievable goal for this institution.

Each and every faculty member is valuable and relevant to the mission of the university. If the university promotes its mission as "student-centered," then faculty (who work the most directly with students) are the essential link. This concept is so important that to lack affirmation of relevance is a top cause of faculty attrition. It is very clear that when managers-in our case, department chairs, committee chairs, and deans-ignore this core component of good leadership, employees lose sight of their effectiveness and do not see themselves as important, valued, appreciated, or relevant; they feel unappreciated, disposable, and replaceable.[2] They start looking for positions at other universities, and take a valuable resource with them when they leave-themselves. Recruiting, training, and retaining high-quality faculty hurts our bottom line and affects student retention, so the logical choice is to promote simple strategies to improve recognition.[3]

1. Leadership Training: effective leaders provide recognition in authentic ways. Studies on faculty retention in higher education affirm that employees who perceived their leaders as authentic and ethical performed better, had a sense of community, engaged in citizenship behaviors, and were more likely to be satisfied with their job.[4]

2. Focus on middle management; leadership training for administrators should be mandatory for all administrators, but is especially important for department chairs and those in similar

positions.[5] According to Sherri Hughes, director of leadership at the American Council on Education, "One law that we know about faculty life is that it's made or broken by a good chair … if we want to have a quality and diverse faculty, then we have to have good department chairs. So many times, when people run off [the job], it's because of what's happening in their unit."[6] Ensuring that department chairs have strong leadership training correlates to positive work environments, which in turned improves faculty retention.

3. These concepts are already built into our governance. As outlined in the Faculty Handbook, among other duties, the role of the chair is to:

- Encourage improvement of faculty performance by fostering effective teaching and stimulating research, scholarly performance, and creative activity
- Promote faculty professional development and enrichment

- Encourage faculty in their service to the University, the community, and professional organizations.
- Maintain faculty morale by preventing and resolving conflicts and by arranging for the effective and equitable distribution of faculty responsibilities.

4. Foster a climate conducive to recognition through the **positive psychology** framework. This framework promotes soft skills, including strategies for providing consistent and authentic recognition. Employees who feel respected and valued are much more likely to stay in their current position.

5. There are many low cost resources available to improve recognition at the departmental, college, and university levels. We have a strong resource in our own Education Leadership faculty, and strategies which have been used at other universities include book clubs, online training modules, leadership development workshops or retreats, and creating systems of checks and balances to ensure and equal, positive, productive work environment in which faculty feel valued. Some also include a reporting system for poor leadership; providing a mechanism where faculty can report poor or even abusive leadership without fear of retribution could be an important component of this initiative.

Recruitment

In regards to recruitment, I have found a lack of both administrative and financial support in regards to student recruitment and recruitment events. Many faculty are only given one day worth of funding to attend a recruitment event or will have to pay for part of their trip out of their own pocket. Many recruitment events are held during breaks or weekends, causing faculty to give up their own time to attend. I have also found that organizing the prospective student data can be overwhelming and time consuming. My suggestions are as follows:

- Provide adequate financial support for all recruitment trips and events (after speaking with Provost Randolph, there is money available through the provost's office)

- Provide administrative support for compiling prospective and accepted student data collected at recruitment events. This can be through the use of student workers. More support from the university admissions office would be helpful as well.
- Faculty acknowledgement from the administration for extra time and work put into recruitment events, particularly events held during breaks or weekends.

Resources

I believe the overall theme of "resources" was the number of tasks that faculty were having to take on, with little to no reprieve. Examples included the business department going to a 4-4 as opposed to the accreditation recommended 3-3 and the new emphasis on recruitment and retention in addition to the duties of teaching and advising. It appears from the meeting and in talking with other faculty members that the work load is continuing to increase, while every other aspect stays stagnant.

An example from the Criminal Justice, Social Work, and Sociology department is the removal of the graduate coordinator for the Criminal Justice graduate program. In looking at the numbers of the program, it does not appear to be a coincidence that the program numbers have dropped dramatically since the university cut the graduate coordinator position.

A growing concern in the Social Work department is the lack of scheduling software for the field coordinator when placing students in work sites, thus resulting in more and more time being spent on tasks that can easily be facilitated with proper resources.

As individual aspects, these items may seem trivial to most, however as you discuss with other faculty from other departments the trend continues to emerge that faculty are being asked to do more with less, repeatedly. The trend is having a negative impact on faculty morale leading to faculty leaving for universities and promises of less tasks and more resources, or the possible threat of "mass exodus."

It appears in all my conversations that "resources" continues to circle back to one main component: money. It is difficult to come up with creative initiatives involving the use of money in "normal" times, much less during a time with troubling budget concerns. Some initiatives cross over into other categories, such as communication. While faculty understand that every request cannot be met, the non-existence, or lack of communication as to why is creating a discourse. It is understandable that budgets must be reduced and that departments, colleges, and the university must take fiscal responsibility seriously. However, cutting positions and not funding program advancing enhancements with no serious communication as to why except for monetary issues is a concern.

The fact remains that resources cost money, and money is scarce at the current time. The initiatives that I believe could be beneficial, and more importantly, realistic, are simply opening up the lines of communication as to why resources are being cut, or not funded. In addition, it is for individuals in leadership positions to understand that although money is scarce, they must continue to look ahead at the overall impact their decisions have on

departments (with relation to resources). While cutting resources in current time may save money, the impact the lack of resources has in future times could be much more detrimental to the fiscal budget.