

End of Year Report for 55th Session of the Faculty Senate

Introduction

I would like to begin by thanking the Board of Regents and others present for the time and opportunity to outline the activities that Faculty Senate has completed. However, before I begin discussing our accomplishments, I would like to recognize all the university employees who came together to allow a successful completion of the past academic year during a time that none of us could have ever imagined.

Critical to the success of this year are the people who served on the Emergency Response Team. It is because of the ERT's willingness to listen, understand, and consider the scientific evidence of COVID-19 that the university was able to develop rules and regulations that significantly lessened the impact that so many others in our country experienced this year. Additionally, the decision by Cape Girardeau County officials to implement a mask mandate was key in the university's ability to create a safe bubble for our students, and employees. Recognition must be given to all of the students and employees who willingly followed and reminded others that those rules and regulations were necessary to protect ourselves and the people around us.

Accomplishments

- Bills approved by Senate
 - Student Evaluations
- Communication and Support Events
 - Special presentation to all faculty regarding –
 - Campus Sexual Assault and Title IX Rules and Regulations
 - Campus Diversity and Equity
 - CTL Take-Away Friday on April 30, 2021: Words of Wisdom from Faculty Senate
 - Description: In this session, Faculty Senate representatives outlined recent initiatives, provided updates regarding ongoing projects, discussed current issues, invited comments and reactions from faculty in attendance, and brought up anything else that's fun and exciting in the Senate.
 - Senators who presented were Indi Braden, Agriculture, Vera Campbell-Jones, Nursing, Erin Rae Fluegge, Management, Stephanie Hallam, Kent Library, Belinda McMurry, Engineering and Technology
- Participation in Broader Academic Processes
 - Senate executive staff participated in review of initial ERT rules and regulation.
 - Instrumental in the changing of recommended to mandatory mask-wearing when in campus buildings and assurances that employees would be supported in enforcing this rule.
 - Senate participated in an Extraordinary Program Review, which is defined in the faculty handbook:
 - Chapter 5B Course and Curricular Approval Process, Section 1 Review Committees, under the subheading - Academic Program Review Policy and Procedures.
 - Policy section-
 - In the first paragraph, the policy describes need of normal cyclic program reviews.
 - The second paragraph then discusses, "*When necessary due to major financial constraints or other major institutional or state-level factors, the President, after consulting with the Provost and the Faculty Senate, may*

initiate an Extraordinary Program Review with specific instructions and timelines.”

- Procedures section –
 - Discusses three methods of program selection and who can initiate those reviews (i.e., cyclic review, noncyclic review, and extraordinary review).
 - In the last part of this section, under Procedure for Regular (cyclical) Program Review.
 - Step 9. *“If a program will be eliminated as a result of the program review process, the Faculty Senate, the University community as a whole, and the faculty in the program are informed by the Provost about the decision by June 30th. Procedures related to program elimination can be found in Chapter 5C of the Faculty Handbook: Process for Academic Restructuring”*
- Based on preliminary information from the Extraordinary Program Review, there will be several programs eliminated, which means we will begin a major academic restructuring by June 30th.
 - Chapter 5, Section C, Policy Section, defines a major academic restructuring as one that *“involves program or department discontinuance, creation, reorganization, or merger of Departments, Colleges, and Schools. Major restructuring may involve the discontinuance of tenured, tenure-track, or RNTT positions.”*

Faculty Morale

The Pattern of Decline:

- The results of the “Great Colleges Survey” for 2012, 2014, and 2018 indicated a relatively low score in 2012, followed by an increase in 2014, and then a return to lower scores similar to 2012. The areas of concerns were - Compensation benefits, and work/life balance; Shared governance; Faculty, Administration, and Staff relations; Communication.
- In 2018, Chair David Powell presented findings from a faculty poll with comment cards. The suite of concerns fell under- Communication, Mentorship, Recognition, Recruitment, and Resources. Low faculty morale was a persistent theme throughout the comments.
- In 2020, Dr Brooke Clubbs conducted a study on faculty burnout at SEMO. Her findings indicated that there was not a relationship between salary and burnout score. Institutional and social support in the form of guidance and reassurance of worth were mitigating factors of burnout, with guidance being the most significant and reliable.
 - Deans and department chairs play a critical role in creating the culture of support in their college and departments, but relationships with colleagues appear to be most important in mitigating burnout.
 - Of note, pre- and post- analysis were completed to ascertain whether the COVID-19 pandemic played a role in faculty burnout. The results indicated that there was only a 0.03 difference.
- During Spring semester, I conducted a simple opinion poll to get a sense of current faculty morale based on two questions regarding value and trust at different academic structural levels (i.e., colleagues, chairs, deans, and provost) and upper administration (i.e., president and Board

of Regents). A total of 180 faculty responded to the survey (figure 1) and some participants provided comments (See Appendix).

▪ **Points to consider**

- It is apparent based on the information I have provided to consider what can be done regarding the continued decline in faculty morale and more generally the overall decline in employee morale. Having a reputation for advocating for others and my willingness to ask and listen to the concerns of other employees, it has been made apparent to me that many employees from top to bottom and across the divisions are unwilling to speak truthfully when giving advice and/or opinion to upper administration for fear of retaliation. This is further compounded by the continued decline in state funding and across-the-board budget cuts that all divisions have been experiencing.

Within the Academic Division, faculty workloads have increased, resources have declined, and academic buildings need repair. One of the budget strategies that has been employed is to reallocate money to other areas by not filling open faculty lines (figure 2). Many departments have repeatedly had to assign overloads or hire adjunct faculty in order to cover courses. This lack of sufficient faculty has exacerbated faculty dissatisfaction and has led to higher faculty turnover or earlier retirement.

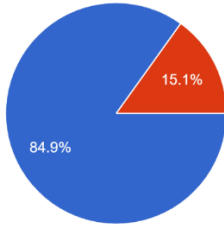
Attracting qualified faculty has been a struggle due, in part, to noncompetitive salaries and benefits. This, in turn, often results in having to offer higher salaries, which adds to salary compression for current faculty. Many new hires view their employment as a temporary job until they can find better employment due to workload expectations, health care benefits, and current financial instability. Based on discussions with employees in other divisions, this appears to be a consistent theme. It is alarming that we are losing some of our best and brightest as a result.

One of the most critical requirements, especially during financial instability, is competent leadership. Employees rely on their leaders to make well-informed decisions that are devoid of personal and/or political influences. To be successful, leaders must be open to listening to their qualified administrative staff, even when it may be contrary to their own opinions. No one person can fully comprehend the intricacies of an institution as large as this university. A leader must be open and transparent, show no favoritism, nor avoid responsibility.

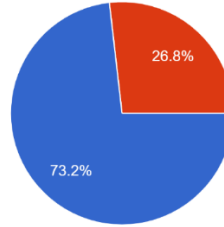
Returning to the survey I conducted earlier this month, there is an apparent perception by faculty that leadership personnel do not value them, nor do they trust the decisions of administrative leadership.

To be fair, it is my opinion the Provost and the Board of Regents are not to be fully blamed. Regarding the Provost, he is limited in his ability to make decisions without the President's approval. This is also true for those who are not protected in their position by tenure. Members of the Board of Regents are limited in what information they receive by the ability of the President to control what is placed on the agenda originating from the university. As a result, information provided is often filtered by a single perspective.

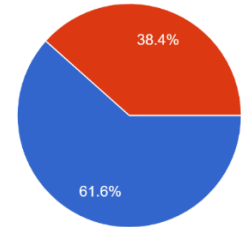
My colleagues value me.
179 responses



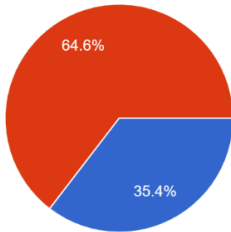
My chair values me.
179 responses



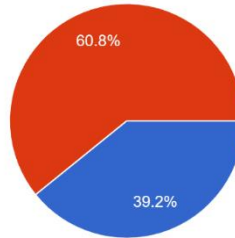
My dean values me.
177 responses



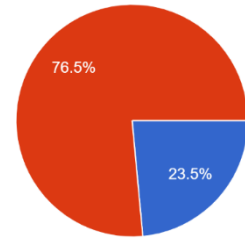
The provost values me.
175 responses



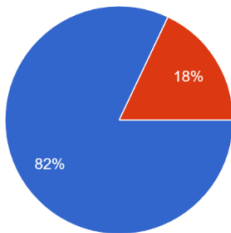
The president values me.
171 responses



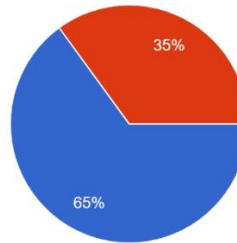
The Board of Regents values me.
170 responses



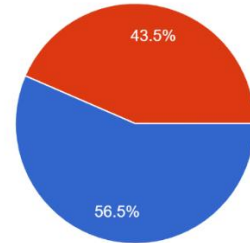
I trust my colleagues.
178 responses



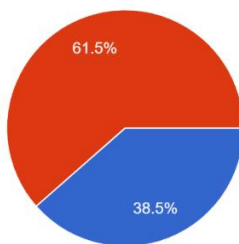
I trust my chair.
177 responses



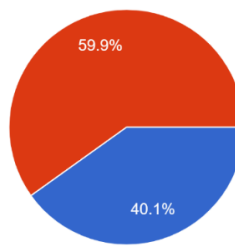
I trust my dean.
177 responses



I trust the provost.
174 responses



I trust the president.
172 responses



I trust the Board of Regents
169 responses

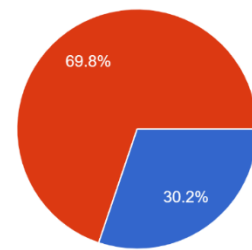


Figure 1. Faculty morale survey conducted Spring 2021. A total of 180 faculty responded to the survey. Each category is represented by a pie chart (blue = yes and red = no) with respondent numbers.



Figure 2. Available budgeted faculty lines compared to actual faculty lines filled from 2012 to 2021. Information provided by Southeast Finance Office.

It is my opinion that many of the decisions made by the President have caused a continued decline in faculty morale and overall morale of all employees at this university. Many employees have stated or confirmed that there is a general fear of retaliation, bullying, and potential loss of employment. I would like to provide the following examples to show a pattern of behavior:

HLC AQIP Pathway Strategy Forum: Advancing the Climate for Continuous Improvement (Spring 2017-Fall 2018) –

- The AQUIP project that was initially decided on was “Valuing Employees”. This was in response to the last Higher Learning Commission evaluation, which listed this as a topic of “opportunity to improve”. During the group discussions, Dr. Vargas began insisting that we change the AQUIP project to developing a new evaluation of professional staff. There was disagreement and as a result, Dr. Vargas disengaged in the discussions by focusing on his phone.
- The “Valuing Employees” project continued once we returned to campus. We began our work by initiating a campus survey in 2018 using the “Great Colleges Survey”. Money was only approved for surveying 600 employees, rather than including all university employees as in the previous 2012 and 2014 “Great Colleges Surveys”. Following completion of the survey, several employee focus groups were developed to gain feedback concerning how to improve on valuing employees. I am not aware of the final report nor the outcome of this report. Bethany Alden-Rivers, who was the lead on this project, left the university shortly after completion of the project.

Working with Faculty Senate

- Having served on the Faculty Senate executive staff under Dr. Dobbins, the senate executives met biweekly with the president throughout the semester. During these meetings the executives were able to directly discuss senate matters with Dr. Dobbins, which allowed open debate and often resulted in agreeable compromises. From 2011- 2014, these discussions resulted in approval of 53 faculty senate bills.

Under Dr. Vargas, these regularly scheduled meetings have been reduced to one or two meetings per semester. Senate executive staff now only meet with Dr. Godard biweekly. From 2015 to 2021, only 20 bills have been approved by the President.

- At the beginning of my 2020-2021 term as chair of faculty senate, Dr. Vargas requested that I meet with him privately at Wildwood House. This was a very irregular request, but after speaking with Dr. Godard, I accepted the invitation. During that meeting, Dr. Vargas spoke of wanting to improve his relationship with Faculty Senate, and he assured me that he was no longer going to micromanage Academic Affairs because “there was now a competent person in the Provost position”.

Past record of behavior

- Civil Action No. 13-331 Bartlett v. Kutztown University. Dr. Vargas was named as one of the defendants in this case. From Campus Legal Advisor (February 2016), “Because Stahler had pled that Vargas was the one who allegedly insisted Stahler work despite not being cleared following a heart attack, and also eventually fired him, the judge denied the motion that had been filed by Vargas.”. This case was agreeably settled out of court.

Suggestions to improve employee moral:

- Improving administrative relations with Southeast employees
 - Complete a 360-degree review of the president as outlined in the Faculty Handbook:

“The Review of the President:

The review of the President is an extension of the collegial process, which encourages participation in governance of the University by persons at every level, including faculty and staff, the administrators of each division, students, and the Board of Regents. Assessment of the President's performance is made possible through informal mechanisms and periodic reviews. Each of these is designed to provide input for assessing the performance of the President of the University and for suggesting areas that might be strengthened.

Periodic Review of the President:

The Board of Regents will initiate a review of the President at least every three years after the President of the University assumes office, unless otherwise specified by the President's contract. This review will be led by a consultant who is selected by the Board of Regents to facilitate a comprehensive, 360-degree (or similar style) assessment that incorporates feedback from (a) multiple levels of university governance and (b) external stakeholders selected by the Board of Regents. As a result of the 360- degree review, the Board of Regents will communicate the outcome to the campus community as deemed appropriate.”
 - Add a faculty advisory representative to the Board of Regents. The Faculty Senate should select and put forward a list of candidates for the Board of Regents' selection. This will allow an opportunity for the board to hear and consider another perspective regarding important university decisions.
 - It would be helpful if members of the board would be willing to meet and listen to the concerns of the various employee groups. Get to know those people who are the heart and soul of this university.
 - Provide greater autonomy within the university division leadership. Set reasonable and agreed upon goals but let them develop solutions that are appropriate to their area. They know that division better than anyone else.
- Strategic budget cuts
 - Suspend football for five years. Allow the current players to complete their education by honoring their scholarships. The cost savings can be used to build our reserves in order to pull us out of this cycle of across-the-board budget cuts.
 - Athletic Tutorial Services and their funding should be folded into the University Tutorial Services. This would allow a significant improvement in resources and further incorporation of athletes into the broader student community.
 - Elimination of regional campuses that consistently have low enrollment.

Appendix

2021 Faculty Morale Survey Participant Comments:

- These were too binary ... I trust some colleagues but not all. Some of my colleagues value me, but not all.
- The institution only cares about students. The faculty are the workhorses and have been treated as dispensable bodies during this pandemic.
- I am adjunct, so the Board of Regents probably doesn't know anything about me. At the beginning of last semester when staff and students were given masks for Covid safety adjuncts were completely left out. I was told it was because they didn't order enough for part-time workers. However, they always had extras on supply for the students to get one on the way into the building. I felt like I was ""expendable."" I do not receive any insurance, and am paid for only the hours I teach (which is very little), and cannot teach more than 9 hours as part time. I accept that, but I was quite offended that my life was not important enough to be treated like anyone else on staff. That, so far, has been my only complaint over the last 2 years I have worked for SEMO.
- Some recent actions by Provost Goddard call into question his reliability and the extent to which the Board of Regents pressures him and President Vargas into decisions that reflect the best interests of the faculty or the institution.
- Almost all of these answers should be "it depends", "sometimes" or "some of them" - I am very concerned that any results from this survey can only produce misleading interpretations. Trust with what? I do not believe that my own responses to this survey reflect my morale in any way.
- Not sure what some of those things mean for morale. I don't trust some people some of the time, but I'm going to try and not let it get my morale down. Life is too short.
- There is very little transparency from the top to the faculty and staff level. We have had several instances of being told that nothing was happening in an area and literally the next day find out that was not true, or that programs were being moved and asked to overhaul the degree program with no knowledge or consideration that it was occurring that it just had to be done. I also believe that administration only values faculty with PhD's and that some of us with other types of terminal degrees are considered less than and the same opportunities are not afforded to us.
- This place has the most despicable leadership I have ever seen. No one cares about faculty - but they sure like to say that they do. They care about the bottom line. Money is important, but making profits is coming at the expense of human capital. Making "the numbers" work for loads and such is asinine. Further, not everyone is treated equally in the process. If you are "in favor" with admins things are more likely to work in your favor that if you are not. Even worse is that when people try to advocate for themselves they are either retaliated against or made out to be "anti collegial" and their tenure is held over their heads. It's truly alarming. I have applied for multiple other positions and have on campus interviews very soon. There have been multiple

resignations in my department, and many others are interviewing. While I have many reasons to leave the roots of my family here (as a tenured faculty member) the leadership of this institution is in the business of making our jobs unsustainable.

- Many times decisions are reached without soliciting faculty's input (including senior faculty). Other times, their opinions or suggestions are ignored.
- There have been issues within HCAM this school year, specifically within the Conservatory, and I'm not sure who or what to believe. I take everything with a grain of salt, but there are some things that have been said that have been proven to be true.
- If there was a ""maybe"" selection, then I would put that for a lot of the trust - and some of the valuing - questions."
- My feelings for these questions are truly somewhere between a simple "yes" and "no" - more of a scale between those extremes.
- Some of my colleagues are great, but some of them would trample over my dead body to get on the good side of our chair. My chair is vindictive. The dean is useless. The provost is the worst. I hate this place. Can't wait to leave.
- For most of the answers for the chair, dean, provost, president, & board, the real answer is sometimes, or at least not always with all decisions.
- The Provost's actions during program prioritization have been uncollegial at best. After being told repeatedly that we would stick to a particular schedule of deadlines for all parties : dept, chair, college, etc, in the fall, Faculty Senate was allowed to miss its deadline significantly and then the Provost never returned his own decision forms to departments. Now significant program elimination decisions appear to have been made unofficially by the Provosts office and regular channels (dept , college council, academic council) are expected to vote on them. If the department or college does not approve it, it is still being sent forward. This sends the message that the decision has been made for us, so why are votes taking place at all? The Provost speaks a lot about transparency and I believe the process was reasonably transparent up until December. After December, the rules seemed to change without warning. I no longer trust the Provost when he speaks about transparency. While I would not call for a vote of no-confidence at this point, I do think an extraordinary review of the Provost is warranted.
- This was difficult to answer with only the yes/no responses. I would've answered differently if I had the the option of a "sometimes" or a rating scale of 1 - 5. In general, I feel valued and trust the administration, but have less trust for the upper levels, i.e. President and Board of Regents, because of less communication from them about why decisions are made.
- I trust most of my colleagues, but not all of them.
- I unable to respond to questions about the Board of Regents due to a lack of contact with and knowledge of them

- The administration acts with an air of aristocratic privilege as if they have the divine right to rule over the smelly peasants, I.e the Faculty. Faculty are treated as a troublesome cost burden to the institution, rather than the reason the institution exists in the first place. The work done by faculty is constantly devalued. I find the term workload in "workload formula" to be particularly insidious. It as if the only valid form of faculty work is that work tied directly to the direct accumulation of sufficient revenue and that other forms of faculty work, such as professional development and service, are to be performed on the side as uncompensated activities.
- This was the stupidest survey I've ever taken. I have no basis for any of these answers beyond faculty and departmental interactions. How can I trust someone that I don't know? How can I determine if my administration values me when 99% of my time is spent not interacting with administration? How does any of this have anything to do with my morale. If you are asking if I'm happy with my job, I am. I love my job. I wish I got paid a little more but, ultimately, I'm super happy at SEMO.
- The survey should have included more than yes and no. There are some situations that upper administration don't view as important.
- Sadly, I cannot respond for departmental faculty who have left for the reason I have checked above. I will likely be next to leave.
- My Dean IS my Chair. They value me only so much as they can use or exploit me. If I stop being of use to them, they will stop being supportive of me. There is no mentorship or prospect here, just an ever-growing list of responsibilities, equity issues, and personal grievances with tenure criteria stacked on top. We have been set up to fail, and it is not just because of the adjustments we are having to make because of COVID and budget cuts. My department was unappreciated and ignored before the pandemic. We are bleeding faculty members and asking for and getting no help. I hope my colleagues within my department value me, but most people outside the of this building do not understand or respect what I do, let alone value it. As for the Provost and the President? Do they value me and do I trust them? That is just laughable. They consider us an "essential service" and our building is in disrepair, with parts of it literally crumbling around us. Also, we are responsible for supporting every discipline on campus, but our budget keeps getting cut... How are we supposed to do that with no resources and dwindling faculty?
- I do not feel valued at this institution beyond the occasional 'thank you' that precedes a message asking me to do additional labor with no meaningful acknowledgement of the already unreasonably large workload and no offer of further compensation.
- You are asking yes and no questions on some things that are not yes and no answers. Do I trust the Provost? I don't know the Provost so how can I say I trust him. No disparagement meant - its just that I have no relationship base to use in answering this question.
- I do think their is an institutional issue which limits innovation and change - which is discouraging.

- The Provost and the Board of Regents care about money and that's it. Full stop.
- Using yes/no responses alone grossly simplifies results and lacks true insight into morale.
- I really don't have enough information to evaluate the President or Board. Not sure of the President's priorities. For the Board, I really don't have enough info to decide. They seem fine. Also, instead of a dichotomous Y/N, I do feel the support is strong. I really like my colleagues and I trust them.
- The university response to Covid has made it abundantly clear how little they care for my physical and mental well being.
- I doubt the Board of Regents knows who I am so I don't expect them to value me. As I know very little about them, I'm not sure I trust them either.
- As you go higher up the chain, it is harder to know how much I am valued. A "maybe" answer would have been my choice for the president and BOR.
- Some but not all of my colleagues value me.
- I do not have a chair. I am part of a auxiliary unit. I do not feel that the university outside of my Dean have the best interest of my auxiliary unit at heart. Most of the time professional staff are treated like afterthoughts at this university. Professional staff are not treated as respectfully as faculty. The university has many auxiliary units and many other professional endeavors beyond education that they do not recognize support the university and do not value. The university hierarchy does not coincide well with auxiliary unit functioning. In fact that hierarchy inhibits the ability for auxiliary units to function at their optimal capacity.
- It is particularly frustrating when you make simple scheduling requests to your chair and literally the opposite is done.
- Based upon the manner and timing for sharing information; I do not know nor trust what upper administration is thinking or planning. This is quickly reducing faculty morale, further enlarging the already sizable gap between these two entities.
- Too many conflicts of interest going up the chain of command.
- I am an instructional specialist in the IEP and am considered teaching staff. I don't technically have a chair or a dean, nor do I report to the provost. I substituted my director for the chair, my executive director for the dean, and the vice president in my reporting line for the provost. The president and the Board of Regents is the same for me.
- I broadly trust my colleagues, but some of them are untrustworthy rats.
- This is way too black and white for me! Its very difficult to answer these as yes or no questions.

- Some recent actions by Provost Goddard call into question his reliability and the extent to which the Board of Regents pressures him and President Vargas into decisions that don't reflect the best interests of the faculty or the institution.
- I answered these but wouldn't count them as that accurate. Yes and no options are not sufficient for these kinds of questions.
- Some of these might have been answered as "unsure"
- Most of the academics decisions come from the top which is frustrating. Faculty these days do not have any voice and the administrator seems to not care at all. I think faculty morale is all time low these days.
- I really don't have enough experience working with the provost, the president, or the Board to accurately respond.
- These questions are strange. To the point of paranoia. They lack subtlety.
- I would have suggested something like ""I understand X has a very difficult job, and overall I trust X"". Followed by a 5 point Likert scale of I totally agree to I totally disagree. Maybe an area to make a comment of why you trust someone or why you distrust them."
- Needed more options that just yes or no. "Somewhat" would have been really helpful. I don't want to put that I DO NOT trust anyone, but just not as much as I would like to be able to.
- Could not answer all the questions do to limited interaction with and knowledge of some parties.
- My immediate colleagues value me but in the Dept. there are faculty of many programs. My colleagues value me - I answered no because I am a in small program which was forcibly added with other Dept and a new Dept. was formed. The other Dept. didn't want us from the beginning as they perceive us as competitors (god knows why, may be we are better). The previous dept. housed (still does) some incompetent people. In the new dept. we have challenged the state of affairs to make things better, definitely these incompetents will not like . People from the old Dept. thought they can continue this nonsense and this new people will just keep quiet as this new group is minority. The Chair tries his/her best but to manage more than 2 programs with this kind of varied interest is very difficult. The Chair is also from the old Dept. I think the Chair is eying the Dean position so the person wants to keep the higher admins happy and try to avoid conflicts . May be little bit spinless too. Still the person is way better than the previous who was ousted. The Chair will get benefit of doubt as this person is under a lot of pressure from various quarters. The Dean (ex- interim provost) and the Provost is the most unqualified person I have seen.
- Trust or no trust doesn't address the stress and the feeling of abandonment when administration asks us to make changes without direction or support.
- None.

- Why not a semantic differential scale? Answered yes to everything because I trust them more than I do not
- The "good ole boys club" is alive and well within my department and the "system" continues to support this setup, regardless of clear inequities, valid complaints and/or valid (legal standing) documentation. Retaliation, or just merely sweeping issues under the rug, by other "good ole boys," seems to be the resolution to any and all issues within my department.
- The Provost, President, and the Regents don't know me at all. I do believe they respect the faculty.
- I'm curious how answering these questions will assist in facilitating positive morale. It seems this approach is not conducive or constructive. The feedback you will get won't assist with addressing the problem. I think morale not only impacts faculty but administration as well. Some of our current challenges have nothing to do with leadership, rather the state of our budget, the pandemic and our community/state/country and civil unrest. I would prefer having dialogue. We are adults and need to learn to have difficult conversation and strategize together positive solutions.
- I have just been filling in as an adjunct going on year 2 but I really am impressed how well everyone seems to value each other in the department that I work in
- I understand the necessity of balancing the books-but not at the expense of good, dedicated people. There is subterfuge and out-right mendacity at the top-not to mention, a lack of accountability (transparency). Those in positions of governance try valiantly to do things in an above-board fashion and are thwarted at every turn, by administration. This is not a people-centered, honorable place anymore. Perhaps I was naive to believe it ever was.
- I've been on campus for a couple decades, and, honestly, I hardly recognize my department or the university any longer. The existential sense of malaise - aimlessly drifting in the face of oncoming calamity - makes it a real grind to do the job I love (even when the covid crisis over the last year is factored out). I don't think administration at different levels is working at cross-purposes to me either through incompetence or apathy. I'm despairing a bit that this current atmosphere will define the remaining years of my career.