COVID-19 Differential Impacts Focus Groups Summary of Conversations

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A university task force was charged with conducting focus group meetings with campus leaders and supervisors to gain a better understanding of their concerns regarding their ability to promote equity and success for faculty and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nine focus groups composed of campus leaders and supervisors met from February 9 to February 18, 2021. Of the 59 focus group participants, there were 4 senior administrators, 8 deans, 11 academic chairs and directors, and 36 administrative and classified staff supervisors. In addition, leaders and supervisors unable to attend a focus group session had the opportunity to respond to questions via an online survey, which received 21 responses.

The focus groups were facilitated by academic and administrative faculty and classified staff who sei (e,Btsehe)-119 (d)tht11 lb2.ë,Btseh8163.15 Tdegadm aR (e)1 and agicar, whnh r ,11 (r)5 (d)10 -caR (e)1

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COMMON THEMES:

1. Campus leaders reported their employees felt anxious and stressed. Campus leaders reported that the health impacts of COVID-19, both physical and mental, as well as the need to shift to a

reported that an increased workload due to the move to remote work was a top contributor to their anxiety.

The words most frequently used by leaders to describe their empl « $\mu_{i \; i}$ " \neg_{i} " Ψ " φ φ " φ "

guidance on safety measures, guidance for continued remote work, and guidance for transitioning back to in-person instruction/office work.

Some employees reported unequal access to technology and the internet from home, including varying workspace availability, which impacted work productivity. For these reasons, some specific technical resources were requested, as well: off-campus secure-transfer protocols to enable more productive work from home; computers for classified staff whose personal devices were not capable of supporting work from home; a university-wide Zoom plan; and funding to update technology.

Limited student access to Wi-Fi and computing resources at home was another concern. The feeling was that students writing essays on their phones, for example, were not going to perform as well as those working with PCs or even laptops. This led to stress for both students and instructors.

5. <u>Consistent and transparent communication was essential</u>. There was a difference of opinion reflected in the feedback regarding communication. Many participants lauded the campus leadership for its communication over the past year, saying that it was better than that from other institutions. However, others felt that the information shared was not complete or not timely enough. Both those who were happy with current communication practices and unhappy with them seemed in agreement that, for weathering and coming out of the pandemic, the campus was looking to the leadership for good communication.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Some specific suggestions for improving campus climate included:

Better guidance to assist with acknowledging the change in employee work schedules
Better guidance to support employees with challenging work conditions
Improved short-term crisis management
More opportunities to share concerns with campus leadership
Increased communication of digital resources such as guidance on using Google Jam

Institutionalizing a remote/flexible work policy inclusive of those who originally were not eligible to participate (e.g., essential workers)

Free/discounted parking

Bringing back cost of living adjustments

Granting pre-tenure faculty taking a tenure extension a pay increase during the year that they were originally slated for tenure, or back paying for the missing years after tenure was received

More teaching lines

More support for student success and returning students to campus Continuing technology resources such as Zoom, Jabber, G-Suite, etc. Possible scanning and emailing of physical mail sent to offices Support for continuing work from home for classified staff

Ensuring comparable work from those working at home

Structured promotion opportunities for administrative faculty Additional resources and support for the offices of Online Education and Information Technology

Better guidance to support employees with mental health needs
More facilitators for difficult conversations surrounding mental health and inequities
More support for mental health emergencies for faculty, staff, and students
More opportunities for social interaction among faculty and staff