President and Provost's Council on Women (PPCW)
Task Force Report: Workplace Culture
March 2021

Task Force Members

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Grand Challenge

Foster a culture that not only prioritizes Ohio State's core values of integrity, transparency and trust, but also ensures that these values are consistently upheld and universally used to guide policy, process and practice.

Context

When integrity, transparency and trust guide our actions, our behavior matches our policy, and people visibly display these values. The university culture is transformed into an environment that values differences in opinion and leverages conflict to affect change.

Currently, these university values are not recognized and embraced across all levels and units and are inconsistently applied, with policy and practice often times disconnected. Affirming how we live out these values is the only way to create an inclusive environment. Feedback from exit interviews, data from faculty and staff engagement surveys and disappointing retention rates for women faculty and leaders reveal concerns about fairness and consistent practices. To create a culture that facilitates engagement and achievement, employees must be empowered to raise concerns, with full trust that managers/leaders will respond with integrity and transparency about how policies are being applied.

Rationale and data

When the culture at Ohio State prioritizes and upholds core values of integrity, transparency and trust, gender equity will be one of many positive results. The most recent culture surveys were conducted at Ohio State in 2014 for staff and 2017 for both faculty and the Wexner Medical Center. Human resources data show that we are falling short on hiring and retaining women in leadership as well as diverse faculty and staff. The diversity in our student body is not much better. Recent forums and focus groups convened by the Task Force on Racism and Racial Inequities confirm that the culture is not consistent across the organization. The following data would provide viable metrics of success:

- State of women and women of color
  - Retention rates - including the "why"
  - Promotion rates and compensation – comparable to male/white colleagues
- Updated data from faculty, staff and students about the culture at Ohio State

We need a commitment from Ohio State leadership to regularly and transparently address the experiences of people who are disenfranchised from the aspirational culture.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Create and Maintain a Diversity Dashboard.

Background: In 2014, a PPCW "Widening the Circle" task force report introduced the idea of designing and maintaining an interactive dashboard that would track the university's progress toward defined diversity and inclusion goals in faculty hiring.

Justification: With the heightened visibility of racial and social injustice in the United States that resulted in widespread social activism in 2020, Ohio State established the Task Force on Racism and Racial Inequities. Forthcoming recommendations from the task force include establishing a more comprehensive diversity dashboard that will enable – and compel – the university to transparently track its progress toward implementing task force recommendations and meeting related and relevant diversity and inclusion goals.

The creation and maintenance of a diversity dashboard will provide clear and transparent data by which leaders can be held accountable to the university's mission to diversify its faculty and staff.

PPCW strongly believes that accountability is a necessary component to many initiatives that the council has worked on, and also proposes that building accountability into annual manager/supervisor evaluations would lead to a higher level of adherence to policies and guidelines intended to create a better work environment for women and women of color at Ohio State.

Recommendation #2: Expand the Office of the Ombuds to include support for staff employees.

Background: USAC has previously identified the absence of an Office of the Ombuds for employees.

Justification: The Ohio State University established the position of faculty ombudsperson in 2010 and added the graduate and professional student ombudsperson in 2021. Currently, two ombudspersons provide a safe, neutral and impartial space to have these discussions, and their responsibilities include:
- Serving as an advisor to faculty to assist them in determining the viability of their complaints and issues
- Directing faculty to appropriate offices, committees and university rules and policies
- Serving when appropriate as an informal mediator of early-stage complaints, to mediate as an impartial party

To support an inclusive culture at Ohio State, all of our faculty, staff and students should have access to the Office of the Ombuds. Additional ombudsperson(s) should be hired, and the office should be expanded to include more robust reporting requirements, especially when patterns of misbehavior or unfair practices have been identified. There should be some accountability for follow-up with the person making the complaint, as well as the office/individual receiving the complaint. University Administration should strongly publicize and encourage faculty, staff and students to utilize the Office of the Ombuds as appropriate.

This action is achievable this calendar year with investment for additional staff in the Office of the Ombuds.

Recommendation #3: Incorporate expectations around diversity, equity, and inclusion into performance evaluation at all levels.

Background: New metrics for monitoring and evaluating efforts around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are being developed around the University, including a new Diversity Dashboard, as recommended by the Task Force on Racism and Racial Inequities and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion's Buckeye Portal for Inclusive Excellence. However, current performance evaluation procedures and metrics are largely focused on excellence in research productivity, student success, and community engagement, with little attention to efforts in service of DEI. Moreover, evaluation of leaders is not concretely tied to the outcomes of individuals within their units, particularly with regard to DEI.

Justification:

There is a need for greater transparency about who is engaging in DEI activities, how much time they are committing, and the ways in which it is valued by the University. This will encourage all members of the University community to act with integrity and facilitate trust in the University's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- The Office of Academic Affairs, University Senate, Office of Human Resources, and USAC should work with ODI to create standardized metrics for evaluating contributions to DEI.
- The Office of Human Resources should standardize exit interviews and generate data on retention.

Recommendation #4 Conduct a university-wide culture survey for Ohio State faculty and staff.

Background: Culture surveys have been inconsistently applied across the university. The medical campus completes an annual survey using different process then the rest of the university. USAC has also advocated for a culture survey. The PPCW Position Statement on Racial Equity (link) (Sept 2020) requested that the university commit to lasting change by creating a welcoming and inclusive culture.

Justification: In order to accurately assess the state of the culture at Ohio State, we need updated information directly from faculty, staff and students. This action is achievable this calendar year. Once completed, we will have a baseline understanding about Ohio State's culture, which will identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.

Additional considerations:
- Faculty and staff may be hesitant to complete the survey or provide honest responses (for fear of retaliation or potential consequences). The use of an external data firm to conduct the survey and share the results would ensure some level of anonymity.
- University leaders should ensure widespread promotion and public encouragement for faculty and staff to participate in the survey.
- The data must be able to be segmented to allow for appropriate comparisons (ex. Business unit or college, campus location, women of color/white women; women/men; faculty/staff).
- The final survey results must be widely shared in both an aggregate and disaggregated form, with appropriate measures to ensure confidentiality. Doing so is consistent with a culture of transparency, integrity and trust.
- Senior unit leaders should be asked to address any significant findings with a written action plan that is shared among the faculty and/or staff of the unit.
- Targeted training should be provided to address areas for improvement that are identified through the survey results.
    - Require training, with real consequences if not completed
    - Focus on systematic issues as well as individual behavior
    - Follow-up after initial training sessions to ensure accountability and implementation
    - Identify action-steps for departments and individuals
    - Use in-person training as much as possible