Focus Group Summary

Heather Roberts-Wrenn, with the help of Mary Carroll, conducted 14 Focus Groups to deep dive into the 4 topics identified as having the greatest opportunity for improvement (Communication, Fairness, Work-Life Balance, and Opportunities for Professional Development). Participants were randomly selected from all CALS employees who work at least .5 FTE or more. A total of 54 employees participated in the Focus Groups between August 2017-September 2017, and over 11 hours of discussion were transcribed. Below, you will find a summary of the feedback generated by the Focus Group discussions.

*PLEASE NOTE: These are notes made from transcripts from the focus group meetings. To ensure that participants are kept anonymous, exact quotes are intentionally not included, and instead, themes and summaries of ideas are used. The notes try to capture the essence of the discussion as it happened, the comments that were made, and they may jump from subject to subject, although they are organized in some general themes for readability.

Communication

- **Overall, people thought communication was good.** Multiple people commented on how communication has improved over their tenure in the college
    - No longer feel detached from other units
    - Communication is viewed as mostly okay, with some exceptions of individuals who do not communicate effectively with one another and/or temporary flare-ups
    - Dial-the-Dean, TMN, brought up as a positive
- Email
    - **People say they get emails that they don't believe are pertinent to them**
        - Poor branding: Also they feel that some emails don't look like they're coming from CALS, not a unified theme
    - Emails are too long – may not read that 5-page attached document, so just put it in the email and make it concise and to the point
        - **People like the format of an email/communication that has a table of contents** (e.g. CALS Weekly Bulletin)
    - Preference for emails to come during work hours (not on weekends or late at night)
    - Preferred methods for mass communication was email, and in-person if important
    - Recommendation for summarizing important communications in the Weekly Bulletin (e.g. email migration communication gets repeated in WB)
- Social media
    - Of people who mentioned social media, about 50% said they would be more likely to look at stories about what's going on in CALS through social media rather than an email; the other 50% said they avoid social media
- Off-Campus
    - JS was mentioned as a potential stopping point of communication because he's always on the go
    - There is a perception by off-campus folks that they are not included in all meetings and trainings (both CALS-internal and University-wide), and a desire to be more included via web (e.g. retirement trainings, professional development, etc.)
    - Skype was mentioned positively, especially for folks off campus
- Toss-up between preference for video vs. text
- One mentioned that being part of CES, they know what is going on in all of Cooperative Extension, but that it is not the case for CALS
- **Eliminate ambiguity, make communication crystal clear**

Bold and Underlined text used to emphasize points that were made by more than one person

    - Dean was mentioned as not being clear (e.g. State of the College going over the budget, language used, presentation design overcrowded – that is feedback from faculty) – causing less people to attend all hands
- Recommendation of having a central repository for important communications that you're not expecting feedback on immediately (similar to Dean's page with recent communications)
- The need for a better feedback loop/follow up came up in multiple groups
    - Following up with people who have been involved with updating/revising a process is lacking. It is not clear after the activity what is being done with the information, or even during the activity/meeting why their presence is important/needed
    - Additionally, communication before AND after major changes have occurred so people know when they're in place
- Although folks felt like they had good supervisors, they raised concerns that sometimes other folks might feel like they can't talk to their supervisor/be heard – leads to a desire to have someone else to discuss interpersonal issues with and be heard (Recommendation: make sure people know who their HR representative is, and that they can reach out to them for support through even interpersonal issues)
- Desire for greater appreciation and recognition (e.g. sincere thank-yous/small gestures) over plaques or awards for tenure
- **Preference for information to come through department heads/supervisor as filtered** so that folks know it's relevant and important to them
    - Decisions made at CALS-level: how will it affect the unit (e.g. budget)
- One mention of a desire to know how University policy is being dealt with at the college level
- Mention of lack of communication around where all faculty/staff from Building 90 went

Fairness

- **The overall perception of workload distribution was good and that policies for promotion and advancement were fair**
    - One person mentioned they like the revised hiring process for how documents should be perceived and how everyone should be treated exactly the same
- Diversity
    - Perception that disproportionate service expectation of certain faculty, particularly on female faculty: recommendation to standardize and formalize what service component equates to and appropriately acknowledging that service (e.g. if 10% service = 3 committees, but someone serves on 6, acknowledging that contribution as 20% appropriately, or acknowledging the workload on various committees as more time than others)
    - Perception that certain supervisors don't take the complaints or issues being brought up by women seriously, to the point that a female felt it necessary to take a male colleague with her to get a particular issue taken seriously
    - Recommendation for diversity and inclusivity training for supervisors (message from the college on what behaviors are acceptable vs. not)
    - Perception of EC being all white men indicates a lack of fairness
    - "Within my [unit] in the last couple of years the nonwhite, non-normative type of people did not get raises and all the other people did get incredibly high raises."

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    - Someone mentioned a colleague who made a comment that invalidated what a diverse candidate had said in their presentation (on the basis of their diversity), which was not contradicted at the time
    - Recommendation: actually measure and ask what folks are doing to further the mission of Diversity & Inclusion (e.g. APRs/Career Conversation, and make it a weighted item, not just an 'extra')
    - Unfair distribution of work on racial minorities or underrepresented folks to ask them to sit on search committees because we have a lack of diversity
    - An example was brought up about a particular individual making comments about transitioning students and gender identity
- Role of Leaders
    - **<u>Poor behavior is not effectively addressed – reports to supervisors amount to nothing</u>** (e.g. tardiness, inaccuracy, bad behavior)
        - Moving "problem people" around, allowing them to go to other jobs within the university just to get rid of them
        - Address poor performance with performance improvement plans (the specific recommendation was to put people on notice for 1 year, then if they haven't improved, let them go)
    - Publicize and clearly state requirements
        - Fairness of merit increase disparities was brought up, and people don't know what counts as merit
        - Recommendation to publish/advertise exactly what criteria are (e.g. for promotion, advancement, good APR/career conversations, P&T reviews) so people feel it is fair
        - Clarity on what the goals are, and what are priorities based on what you are evaluated on, would increase fairness
        - Clarity on what behaviors are acceptable vs. not (e.g. we want to have a professional atmosphere in CALS, equitable distribution of service, breakdown of what "being the most sought-after place to be part of" means); make the connection between the goals and the actual actions people are taking (e.g. I'm serving on ____ committee, and this is furthering the goals, I'm supporting the college in this important priority)
    - Recommendation for peer evaluations within committees or work groups to get a sense of whether people are behaving properly and carrying their weight
    - Desire for *contributions* (not just the fact that you served on one, but that you actually contributed) in committee work to be acknowledged on annual review as well
    - Job duties falling, which are actually outside the scope of their job duties, on individuals just because they are the only non-faculty members in their departments (e.g. advisors being tasked with event planning, setup, cleanup)
    - Plant Sciences: best practice of having the professor and TA sit down to go over expectations of what you will be doing each week (standardizing level of work between TAs to ensure fully utilizing, but not over utilizing the TAs)
    - Perception of folks who don't do anything getting merit increases
- Institutional/College Level
    - Making sure people are being evaluated using appropriate metrics (e.g. using a graph with research on one axis is not fair to POPs)

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    - One faculty member mentioned more investment in staff support (e.g. marketing, recruiting, ordering supplies, carrying out labs – better coordination with the college in those areas)
    - CALS focusing on specific sciences (e.g. not human development, retailing, etc.)
    - **<u>Lack of management experience/training, and interpersonal/observatory skills in some department heads to manage the department</u>**
    - Uneven work level distribution for folks in different departments that have the same job
    - Recommendation to look at turnover in departments
    - Perception of (only 1 example was thought of) personal vendettas impacting someone not getting P&T
- Extension
    - Lack of access to resources was perceived as not being fair
    - No handy drinking fountain for some Extension offices, and the water jugs not being an allowable expense (questionable if this is indeed happening)

Work-Life Balance

- Positive/Neutral
    - People enjoy the flexibility inherent in their job and working in a university setting
    - Some questioned whether the statements really were bad things at all (e.g. integrating home and work duties/hard to tell where work ends and life begins)
    - People delineated between jobs that require interaction with students/the public from jobs that shouldn't need to work outside their normal hours (e.g. accountant or administrative assistant)
    - Some of the higher workload is a baseline expectation for career advancement
- Role of leaders
    - Some people desired more support from leadership/supervisors to pursue a healthy work-life balance and feeling like that taking time for oneself/your family was welcomed
    - The college and leaders have a duty/role in respecting vacation time and Out of Office replies – folks shared instances where they got pushback for taking vacation
    - Having regular meetings where the leader talks about work-life balance resources once a year, and staff meetings in which the leader lets folks know the goings-on of coworkers (e.g. so-and-so is going to be leading trainings out of the office for the next couple days) was recommended
    - Talk of enforcing/supporting the lunch hour would enhance productivity
    - One person shared experiences of increasing their workload, but having to put in overtime in order to accomplish it, then when they wanted to set boundaries to get back to the normal level of output, it was shot down by the supervisor with the expectation of the higher output with no overtime or increase in compensation
- Institutional/College Level/Resources
    - Dean setting the tone that "if I can work 80-120 hours a week, so can you"
    - Multiple folks said that they weren't aware of a number of the UA's benefits (e.g. help with day care, time off from work for adopting, etc.); New Hire Orientation is by sign-up and not mandatory, plus even if you hear about it during orientation, may not remember when you need it – it's good to remind people (Recommendation: invite a representative from Life & Work Connections once a year to a staff meeting)

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    - Comments on instructors being asked to overhaul the way they teach, and not being given the resources to do it properly: recommendation for CALS to provide more resources to flip classrooms, go online, or incorporate integrative learning techniques
    - Reward of the UH for cost-cutting and other measures that is really borne out by the employees
    - Comment about the Dean wanting things done 2 days ago, and that that culture trickles down
    - Recommendation on doing a quick workshop (e.g. during the state of the college?) how to set boundaries and to emphasize importance of enjoying your life and downtime, that it will make you more productive at work
- Culture
    - **<u>Desire for creating a culture that respects and encourages people to take vacation</u>**
    - There's an expectation even on weekends or vacation to respond to emails or telephone calls promptly
    - The culture is that you do what is needed to get the job done – not that anyone is requiring you to put in extra hours, and not necessarily viewed as a bad thing
- Coworkers
    - Some felt if their coworkers didn't know or understand their roles that required them to work offsite or off hours that they might be perceived to not be putting in the same amount of time as them; desire for transparency with coworkers' roles
    - There are perceptions in some areas that other coworkers are not working as much, which leaves a bad taste in the individual's mouth
    - Competition between coworkers to not be the one who has hours cut from them (soft money)
- Personal Accountability
    - Some people felt like the onus for work-life balance was primarily on themselves, and didn't have trouble advocating for themselves/setting boundaries; others did describe having difficulty in setting boundaries
    - Recommendation to stop attending meetings that are not 100% relevant or necessary
- Recommendation for faculty to "buy themselves out of a course" in terms of grant dollars so someone else (faculty or postdoc who wants the experience) can teach the course
- Feeling that more and more is being taken on due to budget constraints, higher and higher expectations, and not enough people (or division of labor is lopsided)
- There's a perception that hours of compensation that are cut from folks funded on soft money are being used for professional development of others/leaders (e.g. travel to other countries, conferences, etc.) instead
- Large portion of one discussion on lack of work-life balance for graduate students (by non-grad students) and exploitation of that group of employees

Opportunities for Professional Development

- One faculty mentioned how much more useful the college level research team's communication is compared to the VP of Research at the university level in terms of training opportunities (and funding opportunities)
- Extension
    - **<u>Detached in the county offices from opportunities on campus</u>**
        - Get trainers and other seminars held out in counties

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    - Recommendation: create a go-to standard training on what Cooperative Extension is
- Role of Leaders
    - **<u>Majority of people said that they do not have regular professional development conversations with their supervisor</u>**
        - Should entail a quick assessment of what's taken place in the past, then bulk of conversation to focus on future and goal-setting
        - People generally desire to hear what they can work on to improve; they don't want sugar-coated reviews that are telling them they're just great
    - People desire enhanced responsibility and growth within their jobs
    - People also viewed increased autonomy as professional development (e.g. taking the program in this direction, making changes and shifts to improve the flow of work)
    - We should be investing in people for the long-term
    - Desire for supervisors to encourage perspective that this position should grow you into the next position
- Institutional/College Level
    - Would like to see advertisements of funds for folks to present at/attend an international conference
    - People desire more funds to do professional development, some folks talked about using it as a reward
    - Recommendation: Online tutorials of frequently asked questions (e.g. about the structure, college level processes, unit level processes)
    - Recommendation: broadcasting professional development opportunities/funds
    - Talk about the bus tour that was done during Dean Sander's time, or similar day trips to other locations
    - Data management training and support for statistical analysis were mentioned
    - Networking with people who have similar jobs and functions to you (e.g. is there shared training for graduate coordinators across the college?)
    - Training supervisors to ask the right questions when discussing professional development and career goals of their employees
    - Desire for professionalism training and industry-focused speakers for graduate students
    - Conflict management training was mentioned as a solution for when issues arise between coworkers
    - Someone who has gone through the Financial Administrators series to give a synopsis, especially for folks out in the counties who can't attend on a regular basis
    - Highlight top professional training opportunities already available at U of A, but that may not be well-known
    - Recommendation: Organize current training opportunities for different use groups (e.g. if you're a new employee, etc.)
- Culture
    - Shifting the culture so that professional development is a basic part of one's job, not just an extra
    - Feeling like time is not set aside for professional development; plates are too full
    - Perceived lack of promotion within, more often they see hires from the outside
- Distribution of funds
    - One faculty member spoke up in favor of staff and folks outside of Tucson getting more funding for professional development
    - People said those who show an interest in being developed/ask for it should be the ones to receive funding over people who don't have an interest in being developed

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    - Use professional development to increase diversity in units
- New employees
    - No orientation to the structure of CALS
    - Not having the training to work in the university's system (e.g. UAccess, day-to-day life in the position and what will happen throughout the year)
    - Knowing who to go to for what (context was the person was speaking about Extension)
- **<u>Structured mentorship requested</u>**
    - Not much mentorship perceived by faculty; "sink or swim": recommendation to make it a rewarded part of APR to mentor junior faculty
    - Recommendation for peer mentor system for new employees to help them navigate the new environment
    - Formally setting up mentoring structures for junior faculty, and professional training in how to be a good mentor for the more senior faculty
- Promotions and merit increase were mentioned
- **<u>Faculty don't generally feel like they have a lack of funding opportunities, they can self-determine if they need to go to a conference and if they have the budget for it, they go</u>**

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