To: Dean Shane Burgess

Re: Faculty Morale in CALS

The Dean's Research Advisory Committee has held a series of discussions regarding factors that affect faculty morale. This report represents our initial findings. We hope this will open the door to future discussions on this topic with the CALS Executive Committee and Unit Heads.

We felt it was important to begin this report with attention to factors that positively affect faculty morale. This is followed by four areas of emphasis that negatively affect faculty morale, with some potential action items listed for each area.

<u>Factors that positively affect faculty morale</u>:

- Mission: Faculty are energized and morale is good when we are working in our passion area (conducting research, interacting with students, teaching in our expertise). This suggests that faculty are aligned with the broader mission of CALS.
- Faculty hires: Recent hiring activity (especially interviews) has energized a number of faculty; however if these positions are not filled by top candidates then this excitement could dissipate quickly and be very negative in the long term.
- Intramural funding: the potential to garner seed funding from the ADR's office is met with enthusiasm and appreciation. This kind of investment really matters.

<u>Key factors that negatively affect morale</u>

1. **<u>Leadership, metrics, and priorities</u>**
   - Lack of leadership at the Department Head level (in some units) creates a difficult environment in which to thrive.
   - Faculty feel uncertainty regarding the meaningfulness of annual reviews – human capital is wasted in an arduous process of data entry that penalizes successful achievers, followed by multi-stage reviews; faculty perceive seemingly random scores at times; in some cases we feel a lack of clear metrics and a meaningless to the scores, with little positive feedback.
   - Uncertainty about 'actual vs. perceived' promotion and tenure metrics leaves junior and senior faculty feeling that it's hard to prioritize in a streamlined way.
   - Faculty feel some uncertainty about the connection between metrics used for annual review assessment versus the metrics used for promotion and tenure decisions
   - The manner in which annual reviews are delivered to faculty is a critical issue of morale (see action item below).

   <u>Action Items:</u>
   a. Unit leaders need to develop a rubric-based system for annual review scoring and seek approval of this system by their faculty. This ensures that the uniqueness of each Unit can be captured. This rubric would be used by both Unit Heads and Peer Review committees.
   b. We suggest that CALS initiate an open forum discussion of a unit-based normalization of annual review scores. This would alleviate a situation where one department awards a "3" for the equivalent effort for which another department awards a "4" or "5".
   c. Can we move toward a culture in which an administrator or leader kicks off the annual review meeting with, 'what do you need to succeed more effectively?' This could begin to transform conversations in a much more positive direction. In this case unit leaders would need to be mentored to ask, be enabled to act on responses, and be sure that all faculty are speaking to their needs.

2. **<u>Limited faculty recognition</u>**

   - Faculty do not have the sense that if (a) one is highly successful, (b) one will be rewarded (e.g., via salary increases, equipment upgrades). One of the only ways one can improve their situation

is to move or get a job offer. Could UA/CALS have in place metrics that say if you meet a certain criteria/threshold that you will get a raise and funding to upgrade your lab – "a second startup package" that is proportional to the funding you brought in, your productivity overall, or the quality of your work?

- Faculty often don't feel appreciated for the things they like to do (i.e. research in most cases), which makes faculty goals/priorities at odds – in perception or reality – with administrative or other priorities.
- We need to balance recognition for quality as well as quantity.
- No raises (cost of living, merit) make faculty feel negatively toward the institution and College they have chosen to serve.

Action items

a. Design and fund an incentive based program for top achieving faculty.
b. Implement a strategic plan for cost of living raises for all faculty.
c. Design a survey to gauge broader faculty input. For example, we could ask "Do you feel valued by CALS for your research/mentoring expertise? What should change to make you feel more valued?"

3. Non-Motivating Messages

- Leadership is more than maintenance or metrics. We are not just 'dots' on graphs, but some of the messaging from our College-level leadership has led to this perception. Dots on graphs don't usually lead 'good achievers across the board' to be recognized (good researcher, good teacher, good service, high aspirations – the important core). The "dots on a graph" metrics are useful for reporting up from the College to the UA administration, but have a less positive effect on faculty. Different metrics/criteria should be developed for the college 'downward' that better reflect individual departments' missions.
- The tone set by College-level leadership can trickle down or be amplified by unit leaders, or be felt directly by faculty; this sets the tone of the workplace and our shared mission. Both routes can lead to uncertainty or unhappiness or persecution feelings among the faculty.
- At times there are mixed messages from CALS leadership to Unit Heads and/or to faculty such that even productive faculty can feel that they are being told (implicitly or explicitly) they're not doing their jobs. Positive feedback can go a long way.
- Sometimes the message from the Dean seems to differ from that of the associate deans.
- Every CALS meeting seems to be about the budget. This kills the spirit of the faculty. What about who published in Science/Nature? Who got a grant? A conduit for reporting positive news would be great.
- Some awards in the College have a high threshold for nomination or application, discouraging busy faculty.

Action Items:

a. Re-name the "All Hands" meeting to "Excelling in our Mission" meetings. Start meeting with a celebration of science and/or mentoring. This could be new grants, high profile papers, awards, etc. Remaining agenda items should emphasize how they tie into completing our Mission.
b. Support and encourage awards with lower thresholds for application/nomination
c. Continue to link the messages shared by the Deans and Associate Deans for a streamlined and clear vision of ways forward.

4. Lack of quality resources

- We suffer from an ever-worsening inability to attract good grad students. This is integral to our teaching and research missions. We need good GRA/GTA support (competitive stipend level, multi-year contracts, etc.) to attract top students. Top graduate students increase faculty productivity which increases a faculty's ability to obtain future grants and increases the visibility and reputation of CALS as a whole. Top students in turn get better placements; better placements makes it easier to recruit strong grad students in the future.

- Mechanisms of funding for graduate students vary greatly (e.g., some get 1 year of support and then unknown after that; sometimes 1st year funding must come from PI, etc.). The productivity of 1st and 2nd year students is not very high and some faculty don't want to put students on grants until they are productive. Institutional support for early-stage graduate students could make an enormous difference.
- Uncertainty or variation in GTA funding, coupled with larger classes, means "writing emphasis" courses are increasingly so in name only. A big course with no TA means a course no longer taught and a missed opportunity for CALS.
- Numerous increases to student ERE rates reduce the number of students that can be supported per fixed grant support, and affect the decision-making of some faculty regarding providing GRA support at all.
- Lack of funding in support of strong departmental or cross-cutting seminar series leads to a feeling of stagnation and removes one straightforward avenue for departmental or college-level cohesiveness/interaction. Faculty stop attending bad seminar series, with lasting effects on faculty recruitment, unit morale, etc.
- University support of core facilities that are not competitive on the open market results in the loss of productivity and revenue.
- High rates of turnover in office staff cut faculty productivity.
- Staff support has been cut drastically over the past 10 years. This, in combination with changes to UA administrative systems has resulted in more and more "paperwork" being pushed to, and by, the individual faculty.

Action Items

a. Secure funding mechanisms that increase and stabilize graduate student funding.
b. Ensure that our departmental staff are appreciated, cared for, and supported, so that the best ones stay and help faculty 'do their jobs while administrative staff do theirs.'
c. Explore opportunities to strategically 'inoculate' CALS units with excitement via shared or unit-led seminar series.
d. User surveys conducted for periodic review of core facilities need to be made public on the ORD and core facility websites. ORD should actively investigate core facilities that have ratings below a specific threshold or have a significant reduction in the number of users.

We sincerely hope this articulates important drivers of morale and sparks a discussion to ensure that CALS is the best place to work.

DRAC members