

COMMUNICATIONS WORK GROUP—RECOMMENDATIONS APRIL 2007

Background

UCR is interested in how it can improve the workforce environment to better retain valuable faculty and staff. In 2005, Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Ellen Wartella asked that a survey be conducted of all faculty and staff, and students so that the current “climate” of the campus could be measured. The survey was designed to obtain information about how faculty and staff view issues such as their work, their work environment, and their job satisfaction.

In order to address the areas needing attention as a result of the survey, Chancellor Córdova has established a Staff Climate Survey Steering Committee to review these issues and make recommendations to her and the EVC/Provost for improving our work environment. This has been done by means of three workgroups, charged by the Steering Committee, in the areas of communication, recognition, and career opportunities. This is the report of the Communications Work Group.

Communications Work Group Membership

William Boldt (Chair), Greg Artman, Lisa Arth, Cheryl Gerry, Kim Devoy, Beverly McNeil, Jasmine Mejia, Linda Morris, and Adrienne Sims.

Communications Focus Group Membership

Sean Cason, Frederick Do, Cindy Flannery, Ross French, Nora Hackett, Josee Larochelle, Kris Lovekin, Connie McGrath, Eilleen Milam, Karen Punta, Bette Quinn, Robin Ripley, David Stevens, and Anna Tognazzini.

Charge to the Communications Work Group

Develop recommendations to address/enhance/improve communication at UCR.

Overview—What is Communication?

Communication is a learned skill. Speaking, listening, and our ability to understand verbal and nonverbal meanings are skills we develop in various ways. In review of promising practices of communication, we found that communication was connected with leadership. The better the communication—the better the leadership. Therefore, good communication is essential to good leadership.

In Shirley Taylor’s document *Communicating across Cultures*, she states the Four A’s of Successful Communication are Attention, Appreciation, Assimilation and Action. Since the survey has been completed, now is the time that administration can show appreciation by assimilating the information and taking action recommended by the committee to improve communication. In a few articles, keeping employees informed and involved were essential to keeping them engaged and motivated.

In other documents, upward and downward communication was essential and there needs to be a commitment of top management to ensure this occurs. Again, with senior management support of these recommendations, we have the groundwork to improve on what has been done in the past. Ineffective communication can result in depressed motivation and poor flow of information can lead to interpersonal conflicts. In addition, communication is important in multinational environments with great ethnic diversity, like what we have in our academic setting. Individuals from some cultures may respond to one type of communication better than another. Therefore, it seems imperative to have various communication options to disseminate information and to be sensitive to the diverse workplace.

Communication is a founding principle of the University. When people fail to communicate or communicate ineffectively, then the organization suffers not only in the areas of work effectiveness and efficiency, but also in terms of morale.

Recommendations—Overview

Communications cannot be separated from the other topics under review by the Work Groups (recognition and career opportunities). They are intrinsically entwined as was repeatedly made clear throughout the process. At its heart, communication is about recognizing employees at all levels and appreciating their contributions to the institution. It is about giving staff the opportunity to be creatively involved in decision-making and to contribute to the advancement of the unit and campus. It **must** start with commitment from senior management and provide tools for employees to communicate to all levels.

Priorities

Most of the recommendations made by the Communications Work Group rely on existing staff and structures but focus on refining and enhancing the mechanisms for improved communications. There are five (5) recommendations made by the committee and they are presented in no particular order. The Work Group feels that each recommendation stands on its own and addresses one or more issues raised by the climate survey. However, taken as a whole, the recommendations strive toward a solution that is greater than its parts.

Components of the Recommendation
RECOMMENDATION 1: COMMUNICATION POINT PERSON

Summary of the workplace issue

- Identify key areas of concern
 - How do we improve communication within our departments?
 - Ensure that staff receive important information.
 - Staff receive information in a timely fashion.
 - Encourage the upward and downward dissemination of information.
- Link to the appropriate survey item
 - Communication Point Person in each department/unit/area (28, 29 on survey).
 - Link on iViews and UCR Home Page for Climate Survey information (28, 29).
 - Hard copy of important information for employees who do not have access to a computer (28, 9).
 - User Groups for Point person in departments/areas to meet on an ongoing basis (27, 28, 29, 30).

Strategy

- Specifically define the goal of the recommendation—designate a staff communication point person in departments/units/areas
 - Improve communication with staff.
 - Timely dissemination of information to staff.
- Define the strategy behind the recommendation
 - Assurance that someone in each unit is responsible to get information to staff.
 - Accountability for information getting to proper people.
 - Link on iViews of Climate Survey allows staff to stay informed of actions that result from the survey and subsequent steps.
- If implemented, how will it address/enhance/improve the workplace issue?
 - Correct and timely information to staff.
 - Ownership and involvement between staff.
 - More informed staff.
- If implemented, how might it impact the ratings on the next climate survey?
 - Improve ratings on future surveys.

Structure

- Identify and define the role of the staff, campus departments, vendors, etc. needed to implement the strategy.
 - Need staff who will volunteer to take on responsibility of being a Communication Point Person for their department/unit/area.
 - Communication Point Person in each department/area will need to be willing to attend User meetings to keep informed.
 - Computing and Communication programming a link on iViews for the Climate Survey.
 - Someone associated with the Climate Survey information to keep the link on iViews up to date.

- Senior management needs to clearly endorse and value this position and its responsibility.

Process

- Detail how the strategy would be implemented – e.g. – action plan
 - Computing and Communications to put link on iViews.
 - Departments/units/areas identifying Communication Point Person.
 - Requires visible support from senior management upon implementation.
- Provide an estimated timeline for the implementation with major milestones identified.
 - Immediately –
 - Have Control Units work with administrators in their departments to Identify Communication Point Person in each department/unit/area.
 - Place link on iViews for Climate Survey results and information.
 - 3-6 Months –
 - Be sure that the Climate Survey information link stays on iViews and is kept up to date so staff knows what is happening with it.
 - User Group formed for all Communication Point People to gather and discuss the process to continually improve and monitor communication.
 - 12 Months and longer –
 - Launch of new staff communication portal (see Recommendation 3), which will further utilize iViews as a staff communications tool.
 - New Climate Survey to see impact of new communication process implemented
 - Evaluation process to be sure recommendations that get implemented continue and are improved as necessary.
- Identify and describe the major challenges of implementation.
 - Communication Point Person in each department/area will need to allocate the time in their daily duties to take on this responsibility.
 - “Buy In” from all - Senior administration down to staff that take on the role of Communication Point Person.

Resources required

- In an environment where employees are already feeling overwhelmed and departments understaffed, it may be difficult to identify someone with time to serve in this capacity. Commitment to and strong encouragement for this process from top management through the ranks is imperative in order for this to be successful.
- It is more a commitment of time and energy than it is money. It must be a priority for the campus to improve communications between and within departments.

Evaluation measure

- New Climate Surveys to compare.
- Control Units continually review and support recommendations.

Components of the Recommendation
RECOMMENDATION 2: MODERATED LISTS

Summary of the workplace issue

- Identify key areas of concern
 - Delay and/or lapse in dissemination of information.
 - Break in communication chain if one person does not pass the information along.

- Link to the appropriate survey item
 - UCR gives me information about the things I need to know (Item 28).
 - The information I need arrives on time (Item 29).
 - My supervisor keeps me informed about changes that affect my work (Item 21).

Strategy

- Effectively transmit information to all UCR populations in a timely fashion.
- Develop a standard for communicating information to the right people in a timely manner.
- Standardize dissemination of information.
- Utilize automatically created lists to distribute information based on access to system applications.
- Will improve transmission of information to all UCR populations.
- Possible impact: Improved ratings on survey items noted in 1.b. above.

Structure

- Must have “buy-in” from all central offices so information is disseminated in a consistent fashion.

Process

- Review and update topic/groups for Scotmail lists.
- Poll staff again about Scotmail lists—are they appropriate? Do they reflect the community that they serve?
- Add marker or symbol to the subject line of Scotmails to easily identify type of message; one example of something similar is the icon in address pane in Internet Explorer.
- Establish automatic notification system based on access to system applications.
- Timeline
 - Immediately –
Review current Scotmail lists to determine if topic/groups should be revised

 - 3-6 Months –
Poll staff again regarding Scotmail
Add marker or symbol to Scotmail to easily identify type of message
Establish automatic notification system based on access to system applications

 - 12 months and longer –
On-going review of effectiveness of Scotmail and appropriateness of categories

Resources required

- The only resource needed is time involved in establishing automated notification system, which would be minimal due to certain automated notification systems currently in place (i.e., EACS notifications)

Evaluation measure

- Measured by improved ratings on future climate surveys

Components of the Recommendation
RECOMMENDATION 3: COMMUNICATION PORTALS

Summary of the workplace issue

- Though portals are in-the-works (i.e., a student portal), there is not now a centralized location for staff to get information.
- iViews, as a communication instrument, is currently limited.
- There is need for at least an interim web-based communication solution, based on item 30 of the Wonderlic survey: “gap” in open, two-way communication between departments (score 2.83).

Strategy

- The new student communications portal is in process. Future plans include portals for faculty and staff. This would provide a central “meeting” place for staff to get information. The likely vehicle for this will be through iViews.
- While the infrastructure for the portal should be available in early 2008, the site will need to be populated with content. This would be an area that the Communications Work Group, or its successor, can be of assistance.
- Themes that will be important to the development and launch of the staff communications portal:
 - Content Development
 - Access to Information
 - Capacity Building (training)
 - Media Development
- The new portal would provide a relevant and centralized location for staff to find information, something that has been lacking on the campus where information is often fragmented and hard to find.

Structure

Specific elements should be considered in the development of the staff portal:

- FAQs
- Services (i.e., free and open-source software)
- Documentary Resources (i.e., meeting minutes)
- Communication and Information Training
- Help page
- Reference Desk
- Discussion Forum
- Network Communities
- Activity Sets/Subsets
- Links to Other Websites/Portals
- Resolving Disputes
- Archive
- Site Map/Directory

The first step is to design the staff portal, which would be done by C&C. Next, content would need to be developed for the portal. This will necessarily be a concerted effort of involved staff members. It is suggested that the Communications Work Group, or its successor, be involved in both the development and implementation of the staff portal.

Process

- The Work Group, or its successor, would work with C&C on the development of the portal components and infrastructure, helping to ensure that the deployed portal will be flexible and responsive to the dynamic needs of the campus community. The work group could work within the community to get initial feedback and provide a sounding board for ideas.
- Once the structure is in place, the work group would provide a strategic plan for populating and maintaining the portal.
- Timeline
 - According to Chuck Rowley, the staff portal infrastructure should be available at the beginning of the next calendar year (January 2008 or shortly thereafter). The work group would work with C&C during the development of the portal, and begin constructing a content plan for populating the site.
 - Content would follow, with full rollout anticipated in summer 2008.
- The primary challenge for this recommendation will be content development and maintenance of the staff portal so that it is a viable and vital resource for the campus community.

Resources required

The resources that should be factored are:

- The cost of development of the communication portals is programmed into the C&C budget.
- Staff time and materials for development of content will be required. It is unclear at this time if additional FTE and funds will be required or if existing can be utilized. Further evaluation of the costs would occur during the development stages of the staff portal, with further recommendations made before implementation occurs.

Evaluative measure

- Usage of the portal, including traffic analysis on the portal. Provide a feedback loop to collect project critiques as well as use data.
- Improved survey results relating to communication of timely and relevant information to staff.

Components of the Recommendation
RECOMMENDATION 4: MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISORY TRAINING

Summary of the workplace issue

After significant discussion about the workplace issues, the Work Group believes that that now is an excellent opportunity to expand training in communications for supervisors and managers.

It has regularly been observed that employees are often thrust into supervisory or management positions without training or experience in some important aspects, including communicating with their employees. This is true for the supervisor of one employee to a senior manager who provides leadership to a large unit.

UCR needs to go back to basics and have supervisors/management re-learn how to deal with employees. Communicating well with employees has to start at the top and go down through each level—it must be a priority for this campus. For example, it is critical that unit leaders have regular staff meetings with their entire unit to share the campus vision and what part their unit plays in reaching campus goals. Unit heads should also regularly attend departmental meetings for improved morale, as well as providing recognition to their employees and sharing campus information.

While the intent of this recommendation is to improve communications, it could address other items raised in the *Employee Opinion Survey* as well. These include:

1. Item 60: I understand UCR's seven strategic goals. (*Campus Community* category: average score = 2.76).
2. Item 36: I receive frequent performance feedback. (*Performance Feedback* category: average score = 3.00).
3. Item 46: I have confidence in UCR leadership. (*Senior Leadership* category: average score = 2.74)
4. Item 45: Employees truly respect UCR leadership. (*Senior Leadership* category: average score = 2.69)
5. Item 47: UCR leaders understand employees' concerns. (*Senior Leadership* category: average score = 2.41)

Strategy

The intent is to augment several existing and planned training programs to provide further exposure to communications tools and techniques between management and their employees.

This process provides an excellent opportunity for UCR to increase training and discussion relating to communication with employees. Hopefully, by providing communication training and increased focus on communication tools and techniques, supervisors and managers will feel more comfortable in communicating with their employees and, in turn, employees will feel that they are being considered in major decisions.

Structure

The majority of the emphasis for implementation of this recommendation would fall on Human Resources, although putting communications issues on a future agenda for the Executive Leadership Institute would include work from the EVC/P and other Vice Chancellors, as well as HR and Strategic Communications.

The Work Group discussed options and costs with Marilyn Voce, Acting Assistant Vice Chancellor for Human Resources for accuracy and buy-in. Sue Anderson, the Principal Analyst at HR who is responsible for training, was also consulted for opportunities and options.

Process

There are several existing structures that could be expanded to include an increased emphasis on management and supervisory communications.

- a. Performance Management Training (*Existing*). Performance management is the ongoing process of linking an individual's performance expectations to the mission and goals of the organization, unit, and department. This training is mandatory for all supervisors at UCR, and involves two multi-hour workshops. While there are excellent tools already included in this training, including exercises on linking performance expectations to the organization's mission, values and/or goals, it is suggested that the program be looked at again for further opportunities to enhance supervisory communication with employees. The certificate program in performance management is also available and enhanced communication tools and techniques should be explored as part of that program.
- b. Building Core Competencies Training Program (*Existing*). The Building Core Supervisory Competencies program is specifically designed for employees with one to two years of supervisory experience who want to develop a broad range of skills that can enhance their performance in carrying out supervisory duties. While communication tools and techniques are inherent in the program, it is suggested that the program be looked at again for further opportunities to enhance supervisory communication with employees.
- c. Emerging Leader Program (*In Development*). As a first step in developing future leaders, the implementation of a leadership assessment program was proposed. This program would allow individuals to participate in a 360 degree feedback program to identify strengths and development needs, and then receive career counseling to create a professional development plan. The long term objective of the leadership assessment program is to provide the organization with the necessary information on which to build a leadership development program. UCR is now ready to begin development of this program and is proposing an Emerging Leader Program that will provide leadership development opportunities in conjunction with the Leadership Assessment Program.
- d. LMS Description (*In Development*). A learning management system (LMS) is a software application or Web-based technology used to plan, implement, and assess a specific learning process. Typically, a learning management system provides an instructor with a way to create and deliver content, monitor student participation, and assess student performance. A learning management system may also provide

- students with the ability to use interactive features such as threaded discussions, video conferencing, and discussion forums. This system will be used to assess and track important competencies for staff, including communication.
- e. Customized Supervisory Development Programs (*Existing*). A customized training program could be developed for individual units or entire divisions to address specific communications-related issues.
 - f. Executive Leadership Institute (*Existing*). The purpose of the Executive Leadership Institute is to provide up-to-date information for UCR's senior administrators to assist them in effectively achieving their own goals as well as the University's goals. This is a problem-solving planning process that will focus on cross-cutting issues that ultimately will help us achieve the stated goals of the Chancellor and achieve excellence for the institution. It is suggested that one ELI session focus on communication for executive leadership, possibly including media training, marketing, donor cultivation, and employee communications.

Timeline

Immediately—

Review of existing programs for opportunities to improve communications training for supervisors and managers

Notify supervisors at all levels of the availability of training.

Establish an accountability procedure to monitor competencies.

3-12 months—

Deployment of additional training opportunities into existing programs

Date set for Executive Leadership Institute on communications

Major Challenges: These are existing programs, and supervisors/managers take advantage of these opportunities as they are inclined. However, it is important that it be made clear from the “top down” that these training sessions are not only mandatory but critical to developing a community of communications, respect and excellence at UCR. (Note: The UC system already has mandatory management training programs for issues relating to sexual harassment and ethics.)

Resources Required

Human Resources—Initial evaluation of existing programs can be done within current staffing. However, implementation of all but minimal expansion will require additional staffing. It is recommended that, based on the outcome of the initial evaluation, additional FTE be allocated to HR as required to implement and expand communications training for managers and supervisors at UCR. Specifically that Sue Anderson's appointment be increased from 0.8 FTE to 1.0, and that consideration be given to additional support staff for the training unit of HR.

Executive Leadership Institute—Could be implemented using existing staff within a reasonable timeframe.

Evaluative measure

- Performance review requires completion of mandatory training for supervisors and managers.
- Increased interest in voluntary training for supervisors and managers.
- Next climate survey results.

Components of the Recommendation
RECOMMENDATION 5: CHANCELLOR’S OPEN FORUMS

Summary of the Workplace Issue

One of the concerns expressed by *Communications Focus Group* members was a lack of face-to-face interaction with executive leadership. There was also concern that there was no environment where employees felt "safe" to voice concerns without fear of reprisal or retaliation.

As a potential solution to this issue, focus group members suggested that the Chancellor conduct regular open forums that would address the key issues for the campus as a whole, and more specifically those issues that significantly impact staff.

While the intent of this recommendation is to improve communications, it could address other items raised in the *Employee Opinion Survey* as well. These include:

- Item 60: I understand UCR’s seven strategic goals. (*Campus Community* category: average score = 2.76).
- Item 30: There is open, two-way communication between departments. (*Communications* category: average score = 2.83).
- Item 44: UCR leadership, which includes Chancellor, Vice Chancellors, Provosts, Deans, respects employees. (*Senior Leadership* category: average score = 2.71).
- Item 46: I have confidence in UCR leadership. (*Senior Leadership* category: average score = 2.74)
- Item 45: Employees truly respect UCR leadership. (*Senior Leadership* category: average score = 2.69)
- Item 47: UCR leaders understand employees' concerns. (*Senior Leadership* category: average score = 2.41)

Strategy

The intent of this recommendation is to provide an open, safe environment in which campus and staff issues can be raised and addressed. The benefit would ideally be two-fold:

1. Improved communication.
2. Increased confidence in Senior Leadership.

The survey results appear to indicate that there is a *disconnect* between Senior Leaders and staff. The intent of this recommendation is to eliminate this disconnect, and provide a forum in which executives and staff members can have a face-to-face meeting that addresses key issues that people perceive as being ignored.

- In an environment where there is a lack of communication, people will fill in the blanks with their own assumptions, and these assumptions are usually overwhelmingly negative.
- If this continues for an extended period of time, perception can indeed become reality for many people, and this may be the cause of the results above.
- Providing a forum in which these issues can be addressed "head-on" could eliminate this perception, and hopefully improve communication and increase people's confidence in, and support of, executive leadership.

Structure

While the structure would obviously be determined by executive leadership, it would likely include the following components:

- Attended by all executive leaders (to the extent possible).
- Held regularly.
- Occur during work hours - not during lunch.
- It would last 1.5 - 2.0 hours.
- Light refreshments would be served.
- An agenda/information packet would be provided.

Presentations/discussions regarding key issues affecting the campus as a whole, and staff in particular. These would be made by the Chancellor and other executive leaders, as appropriate (1.0 hour). These issues could include:

- The status of major campus initiatives, e.g. the medical school.
- Updates on budget, enrollment, etc.
- Updates on human resources issues (i.e., bargaining unit contracts, benefits, etc.).
- Construction updates.
- Safety concerns/emergency preparedness.
- Responses to questions raised at the last meeting that were not able to be answered at that time. If answers are not readily available, then the response would be deferred until the next meeting.
- Responses to questions submitted prior to the open forum.
- Q&A with those in attendance.
- A web page of open forum results should be maintained, and tabled questions should be answered there within one-two weeks.

In summary, the idea is that this structure would promote an open environment in which staff could air their concerns, and receive honest feedback in a timely manner.

Process

These forums could be implemented on a regular basis, with the first forum scheduled for spring 2007 (end of May).

- This should be scheduled in a room large enough to hold up to 200 people (the University Theatre may be an ideal location).
- The room should also have sufficient multimedia capabilities for PowerPoint presentations and videos, as necessary.

Challenges to be addressed include:

- Coordinating executive calendars.
- Developing an agenda, scheduling speakers, and ensuring that the Chancellor is appropriately briefed on the key issues that may arise during the meeting.
- Assigning staff to ensure an *Open Forum* web page is maintained and updated on a consistent, timely basis.
- Staff should be encouraged to attend and granted release time for these events.

Resources Required

- This recommendation could be implemented with very little additional cost; however, it would impact the time of executives and support staff, as well as the attendees, who would need to be granted release time to attend these meetings.

Evaluative Measure

- The ideal result would be improved survey results next time in the areas of *Senior Leadership* and *Communication*.
- The goal would be that the scores in these areas are on a par with those of the more positive areas of the campus climate survey.

FURTHER COMMENTS

It is recommended that the work of the Communications Work Group continue, in perpetuity, in some form, for evaluation and continuation of the process. Communication issues are not easily solved and will continue to shift as changes in technology and leadership occur. Internal assessment is an on-going process and should be a dynamic exercise that continues to look for opportunities to improve communications within and outside of UCR. Therefore, we recommend that a task force or similar group be convened with a charge of continuing to review communications at UCR. This group would provide a forum for staff to share communication-related items, and could provide recommendations for further refinement and enhancement of communications mechanisms at UCR in response. It is further suggested that the group re-evaluate the progress on the above-listed recommendations within six months of the submission of this report.

Out of a recent Executive Leadership Institute, it was suggested that a committee be formed to look at performance and accountability. This committee is in process and will provide additional information, resources and ideas to address performance and accountability. The task force (as recommended above) would be very interested to be kept informed of this committee's progress, and proposals for improvements in campus communications.

Another suggestion for the Steering Committee's consideration is that, after the reports from all three work groups are synthesized and recommendations for implementation made, that the campus have a "launch" for the next steps of the survey response process. This would provide the campus community with a highly visible opportunity to see the progress that the campus is making on these issues and the future plans in these areas.

SUMMARY

Communication is a vital yet often overlooked component of a dynamic university campus. In the short amount of time that the Work Group had, a number of themes and issues kept coming to the forefront of our discussions. Work on communications at UCR should continue and resolving communications issues **must** be a priority for the campus.

The Work Group members hope that all of the staff and faculty at UCR will embrace a culture that promotes communication among all levels and across all boundaries, encouraging the rich dialogue of a community that is committed to the excellence of the institution and to pride in our university.