

November 17, 2021

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. M. Katherine Banks
President, Texas A&M University

FROM: Cynthia Billington, Chairperson
Texas A&M University Staff Council

SUBJECT: University Staff Council Presents Staff Feedback and Response to MGT Report

Summary:

When the MGT report was released on Oct. 25, The University Staff Council (USC) immediately began receiving reactions from staff members across the university. The initial feedback ranged from enthusiastic support to anxious fears, the latter of these individuals asking if the USC, as the staff representative body, would provide a platform for staff to share their feedback without fear of retaliation. It's a long-held belief that staff, who make up over two thirds of the faculty and staff body at Texas A&M, are expendable and do not have the safety and power that faculty do when expressing their views.

On Nov. 5, the council held a virtual forum open to all staff. The information collected during that session supported what we'd all been hearing individually; there was distrust toward the feedback mechanism, fear of RIFs, and concerns that key individuals were not consulted by the firm when the recommendations were made. In our dealings with our constituents, we've aimed to assuage these concerns and encourage them all to provide feedback using the supplied platform for the MGT report. We discussed the need for a survey to collect quantitative data to better indicate to leadership which portions of the report were raising red flags, and by which bodies on our campus. The results of our survey may be explored here: tx.ag/uscMGT.

In conclusion, despite the mixed emotions and reactions to the MGT report from faculty, staff and students alike, the USC is resolute in being positive and trusting in the institution that any changes made are for the better of our organization. In order to truly represent the staff body, we respectfully request to be involved in any further conversations and working groups.

While not an excuse to be completely resistant to change, some past experiences lend to growing concerns surrounding reorganization. Staff have seen restructuring on campus result in staff RIFs, only to rehire them at a lower salary in the newly restructured unit. Others have shared experiences of large, unexpected RIFs that came without the option of rehire or reallocation

around the university. In short, the USC wants to ensure that the desire for efficiencies and cost savings are not at the expense of staff.

There is a wealth of institutional knowledge within your staff body. We would be remiss to ignore cautions or anecdotes as we work to improve and enhance our great campus.

For your convenience, we offer the following observations based on our conversations, survey and forum:

Provost Office

1. Recommendation #1: Reorganize the Office of the Provost to allow greater focus on student academic success.
 - a. Over 60% of respondents agreed, either strongly or somewhat, with this recommendation.
 - b. Concerns were raised about the proposed locations for programs taken from the Provost's Office. It is important that these units are moved to areas that will provide the greatest service to students, faculty and staff. Each unit's purpose should be clearly defined. Additionally, for those areas placed under the Office of the President, it may place a great deal of power, and burden, on an already-strained area.
 - c. The comment was made multiple times that traditionally, the Provost's Office primary goals should include curriculum, research, academic integrity, and trends in higher education. All areas that might lend toward student academic success, rather than the singular focus.
 - d. Optically, it might appear that the vice president and associate provost of diversity is being demoted. This could signal a troubling disinterest in and abandonment of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts during a particularly sensitive and charged climate on campus and nationally.
2. Recommendation #2: Centralize Undergraduate Academic Advising
 - a. This recommendation felt vague. Many agree there are benefits to centralization at the college level. The greatest concerns expressed were in response to university-wide centralization. Those supporting individually housed advising nodded to superior academic and pedagogical knowledge and the personal growth and development that comes from an ongoing advisor-advisee relationship as key benefits.
 - b. While centralized advising may offer some standards of care, it comes at the cost of personalization of academic progress for the student, which ultimately affects their focus toward their career goals and interests. Academic advisors are more than experts of degree evaluations - they provide guidance, resources, and feedback based on the individual interactions with students, especially within respective departments.

- c. For those students wanting to change majors, there is currently a set structure, via Transition Academic Programs, in place to objectively assist students with the goal of seamlessly changing majors from one to the next. Physically or organizationally centralizing advising may reduce the number of offices a student needs to visit, but at a reduction of advisor value. Reducing an advisor's abilities, as this report suggests, reduces the value of an academic advisor significantly to the point where homogenized advising for students will occur.
 - d. Data shows over 50% of respondents indicating disagreement. The 33.3% who indicated Strongly Disagree are made up of mostly academic units.
3. Recommendation #3: Elevate the Higher Education Center at McAllen
- a. While this recommendation received nearly 50% of respondents in agreement, many comments were received that touched on other branch campuses like Galveston. Changes outlined in this section will affect these campuses, and it would be useful to know specifically how. It was reported that Galveston does not have a clinic on campus, therefore a lot of students go without aid as the mental health waiting list for local psychiatric care is 6 months or more. The request was for more resources, including advising, tutoring, academic mentors and student affairs.

Faculty Affairs

1. Recommendation #1: Create a new Vice President of Faculty Affairs Position
- a. Many staff members cited a desire to see a less top-heavy leadership structure, but staff were divided on whether this position with a direct report to the President was a good idea.
 - b. Staff members cited understaffing in this arena as a concern and some expressed a preference for this position to remain tied to a Dean of Faculty.
 - c. Quantitatively, almost 40% of staff stated that they neither agree nor disagree with this recommendation.

Academic and Strategic Collaborations

1. Recommendation #1: Continue to incorporate other campus units that fit the mission of Academic and Strategic Collaborations.
- a. Feedback in this section centered around the fate of existing college-embedded programs. While feedback somewhat agreed or strongly agreed, collectively 56.2% in support, comments stressed a focus on the mission to educate students and a better understanding of how this effort would support remote campuses. It should be noted that 30.8% neither agree nor disagree, which could indicate confusion or a need for more details and clarity.
2. Recommendation #2: Create an office focused on improving recruitment and retention of undergraduate students. 63.7% somewhat agree or strongly agree with this recommendation.

- a. Feedback from staff included praise for university-supported efforts toward recruitment, especially of diverse students.
 - b. Questions arose about how this might be different from the efforts undertaken by the current Office of Student Success.
 - c. Feedback was offered that centralized recruiting might prove difficult given the wide variety of student profiles recruited by programs across the university as well as the concern of a centralized office making admissions decisions.
3. Recommendation #3: Sunset community-focused programs that do not adequately serve the needs of the community and establish new programs to best support the shared mission of TAMU and the state of Texas. 60.9% somewhat agree or strongly agree.
- a. Most of the staff feedback concerning these programs focused on how these would be determined, what metrics were used to quantify this conclusion.
 - b. There was interest in how new programs would be selected and interest in preserving staff positions in community relation roles.
 - c. There was also interest in community program development for branch campuses, such as McAllen, and the benefit those programs could bring to local communities.
4. Recommendation #4: Invest in cultural centers, including a performing arts center, a museum and hospitality center, and campus gardens. While 67.7% of staff surveyed agreed, commentary supported the need to boost existing cultural programs before investing in new centers.
- a. Staff suggested that there was a planned expansion of the Music Activities building that could fulfill the Performing Arts Center described.
 - b. Staff were supportive of community partnerships, especially those providing economic development. However, they were skeptical that a focus on performing arts centers and cultural programming was consistent with the tone of cost-savings and efficiencies suggested in the remainder of the report.
 - c. Staff expressed concerns with funding of such ventures, the long-term, substantial sustainability of these types of programs without proper financial modeling and viability studies.

Academic Realignment

Staff were generally concerned about the fate of currently existing colleges and schools outside of those discussed in the four pillars (Architecture, Education, Mays Business School, etc.). Would they be housed under one of the four pillars, or would they continue to stand alone? There was also concern about how potential realignments might impact branch campuses who offer a wide array of programming.

1. Recommendation #1: Combine the College of Liberal Arts, the College of Science, and the College of Geosciences to create a new College of Arts and Sciences. 50.4% either strongly disagree or somewhat disagree with the statement. 33.5% strongly disagree and 16.9% somewhat disagree.

- a. The primary concerns voiced by staff regarding this potential restructuring were around the process used to determine which staff would fill the aggregated positions as the report speaks to administrative efficiencies gained by consolidation. A key point for staff is involvement in the process, a clear method of selection, and understanding of an approximated timeline.
 - b. Other feedback centered around the logistics of such a consolidation with questions about where this “super college” might be housed, if curricular changes would need to be approved by SACS-COC or the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, etc.
 - c. Concerns were voiced for the merger of these programs having a negative impact on the appeal for future students. Super colleges or mega colleges tend to de-individualize students and concerns have been expressed about phasing out Geosciences if this merger occurs. In addition, many departments with math-based sciences may affect acceptance of students based on the required curriculum.
 - d. Staff mentioned focus should remain on what we do well before considering growth and because other institutions are doing this should not be the reasoning behind Texas A&M adopting a consolidated college.
2. Recommendation #2: Establish a School of Visual and Performing Arts with new departments in music, performing arts, and fine arts, and relocate the Department of Visualization to anchor this new school. Staff support for this recommendation collaboratively was 57.5% agree and strongly agree. It should be noted that 24.1 of staff strongly disagreed or somewhat disagreed.
 - a. Feedback from staff included a question about why Music Activities would be excluded from such a school.
 - b. Other feedback indicated that the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board previously prohibited a conservatory model of instruction, which resulted in the current Performance Studies programmatic focus and a subsequent loss of most of the music and theater faculty and staff in that department.
 3. Recommendation #3: Establish a Department of Journalism. Nearly 60% of staff support establishing while 21.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed.
 - a. Staff commented that this program previously existed in the department of Communication but was intentionally phased out and currently exists within the College of Agriculture.
 - b. Regarding re-establishing a Department of Journalism, a look at sustainability and demand for this program should be explored more thoroughly.
 4. Recommendation #4: Elevate and expand the Bush School of Government and Public Service to be a highly visible and accessible part of the university portfolio through significant investment and a merger with the Department of Political Science. Staff support for elevation and expansion of Bush School was recorded at 61.6% agree and strongly agree. It should be noted that 22% neither agreed or disagreed with the finding.
 - a. Staff commented that the Bush School does not house any undergraduate programming (only graduate and certificate coursework) and seems incompatible

with an academic department with a strong core teaching and research mission like Political Science.

5. Recommendation #5: Create the new Institute of Biological Life Sciences which will contain the Department of Biology and the Biomedical Sciences Program. 24.3% of staff strongly or somewhat disagree with recommendation 5. 31.5% did somewhat agree but at least 26% neither agree nor disagree.
 - a. Staff provided feedback that upper division coursework in these programs differ significantly, and thought should be given to the impact that combining these programs might have on students.
 - b. Staff also expressed concern about the consolidation of potentially duplicated staff positions.
 - c. A question was raised about whether the Institute of Biological Sciences & Technology would remain a stand-alone center.
6. Recommendation #6: Merge the University Libraries into the newly created College of Arts and Sciences and create a new Department of Library Sciences. Staff opposed this recommendation with 32.6% strongly disagreeing and 14.1% somewhat disagreeing rounding out the overall disagreement to 46.7%.
 - a. Many staff members provided feedback regarding this recommendation including concern that moving the library under one college would signal allegiance/responsibility solely to that college; whereas, currently, the libraries service all disciplines across the university, including libraries that are located on branch campuses.
 - b. A suggestion was offered that perhaps the Libraries would better fit as a direct report to the Provost, with other student services, like the DSA or Enrollment.
 - c. Staff also suggested that the university closely review accreditation requirements of libraries like LCME (Liaison Committee on Medical Education).
7. Recommendation #7: Implement recommendations from the Texas A&M Health Administrative Organization Structure and Budget Assessment. Nearly half of staff surveyed, 49.6% neither agree nor disagree with this recommendation.
8. Recommendation # 8: Improve the research organization at TAMU-Health. The majority of staff (over 68%) agreed or strongly agreed with this recommendation.
9. Recommendation# 9
 - a. Reassign the University Studies degree program exclusively to the college of Arts and Sciences. Nearly 30% of staff disagreed or strongly disagreed with this finding. Many staff members cited the goal of this degree was to gain a variety of experience from across the university and feared that centralizing the degree in one college might lessen scope of impact.
 - b. Refocus the College of Veterinary Medicine on the core mission of graduate education and invest in the construction of a new Small Animal Hospital. Staff seem to support this recommendation by 64% however comments seem to support the construction of the new Small Animal Hospital. Staff expressed concern with

- combining these two thoughts as a single collaborative effort. Expansion of the small animal hospital is needed to remain accredited and BIMS are two separate programs and problems. Students benefit greatly from the vet community, and this is what attracts many prospective students.
- c. Refocus the College of Architecture on the core mission of Architecture and Landscape Architecture/Urban Planning.
 - i. The metrics suggest that 58.3% of responding staff members agree or strongly agree with this recommendation
 - ii. Staff raise the concern that construction science is very much a part of Architecture and Landscape and would not be beneficial to move this away from the program. The importance of Construction Science should be considered.
 - d. Consolidate the Department of Health and Kinesiology in the School of Public Health, including clinical research associated with the Department of Health and Kinesiology. Move the Technology Management Degree Program to the Department of Engineering Technology. Staff supported this recommendation by 53.5% collectively with agreeing and strongly agreeing. Some staff members commented that varying coursework or degree programs might also better fit in the College of Education or other areas of the University.

Student Affairs

1. Recommendation #1: Reorganize Student Affairs and expand student “High Impact Practice” (HIP) services.
 - a. Staff suggested that moving high impact programs into Student Affairs would result in the loss of current academic ties, which is what makes them high impact practices in the eyes of this institution.
 - i. This sentiment is echoed in the survey comments. HIPs have a strong academic component that ought to stay with academic affairs.
 - b. Staff are generally supportive of moving the Money Education Center under Student Affairs.
 - c. Many staff voiced concerns that Veterans Services should not be moved to Student Affairs.
 - i. Survey comments are concerned this recommendation was not adequately researched. VSO is a compliance/financial aid office, substantially different from other offices/functions in DSA. This seems like a misalignment.
2. Recommendation #2: Align student organization management practices to ensure transparency and accountability.
 - a. Seasoned staff members offered historical knowledge of why the current structure of advising exists by suggesting that TAMU’s advising structure/model can be attributed to higher ed case law (some of which TAMU was a plaintiff) and

cautioned that changing the advising practice/model could lead to avoidable litigation.

3. Recommendation #3: Integrate Student Health Services and Counseling and Psychological Services into Texas A&M Health and establish a dedicated unit to focus on providing holistic student health.
 - a. Staff's primary concern with this recommendation, according to survey comments, is connected to what is in the best interest of students. Concerns stem from a misalignment in purpose of TAMU Health and the service units of SHS and CAPS. If the new TAMU Health can bolster services for students, there would be great support for this move.
 - b. Staff did not express a strong preference but cautioned that evidence of improved efficiencies should exist before implementing change.

Facilities

1. Recommendation #1: Restructure of Facilities and Operations/Safety and Security to include all facilities services under a new centralized management structure in Facilities Management.
 - a. Staff comments centered around needing clarification with this recommendation.
 - i. Data from the survey showed general support of this recommendation with nearly 50% in favor.
 - b. There was support for continued use of building proctors and on-site facilities support who would be familiar with repetitive building issues and understand how to quickly resolve them.
 - c. Several voiced concerns related to further outsourcing of staff positions and cited the negative service outcomes and personnel loss from prior outsourcing.
2. Recommendation #2: Create a new division of Facilities Planning and Construction (FPC) that allows for an expanded, strategic planning and construction unit.
 - a. Few comments were provided on this recommendation; however, nearly 55% agreed on the survey and nearly 30% noted a neutral response.
3. Recommendation #3: Create a Division of Faculty Information Systems to maintain information in support of TAMU operations.
 - a. As with recommendation #2, few comments were shared. The survey resulted in a similar response with over 50% in favor and nearly 30% neutral.

Finance & Business Administration

1. Recommendation #1: Centralize financial/business services under the Chief Financial Officer. For the overall 50% that agree with centralizing the Finance and Business Process, 27% neither agree nor disagree.

- a. Staff found some positive gains in this area including consistency in processing, the opportunity for cross-training, a potential for pay equity, and optimism that these changes could produce a career ladder for staff in the business realm.
- b. Staff pointed out that many of those in business titles wear multiple hats including HR functions, management of scholarships, and administrative support, and that this would make it difficult to dissect business staff from the units they support.

Human Resources & Organizational Effectiveness

1. Recommendation #1: Reorganize Human Resources and Organizational Effectiveness and implement a one-stop human resources service center.
 - a. Nearly 57% supported centralizing this unit to those with trained professionals in HR.
 - b. Staff resoundingly voiced their concern about understaffing and poor service experience from central HROE. While some applaud the idea of shifting the primary HR responsibilities to a central unit with trained and experienced HR professionals, many are concerned with complete centralization.
 - c. Staff with historical knowledge shared that a centralized HR model had previously been implemented and did not meet the needs of the University. This resulted in the current liaison model that is in place today.
2. Recommendation #2: Provide cross-training for employees.
 - a. Over 50% of respondents strongly agreed with this recommendation.
 - b. Staff commented that the purpose of cross-training should be to maximize employee flexibility and utility, to provide coverage during absences, and to provide advancement opportunities for staff. They cautioned that cross-training should not be used to further stretch over-taxed staff members or avoid replacing staff positions.
3. Recommendation #3: Eliminate the Human Resources Liaison Network
 - a. Staff pointed out that the review firm may have misunderstood HR liaisons as HROE staff members, rather than staff members of their units/colleges/departments.
 - b. Most staff supported the continuance of the relay of communication to the unit through a liaison or similar program with 44% of respondents somewhat or strongly disagreeing with disbanding the HR liaison program.
4. Recommendation #4: Invest in succession planning and talent management
 - a. Staff strongly supported this recommendation and felt it was long overdue with over 77% somewhat or strongly agreeing.
 - b. Continued professional development and retention strategies for those identified as top performers is needed.

5. Recommendation #5: Invest in a voluntary phased separation (VSP) program for eligible tenured faculty members
 - a. Most staff supported the recommendation to implement a VSP; however, many staff commented that the program should also be extended to staff members who were retirement eligible.
 - b. More than 51% somewhat or strongly agreed with this recommendation, while only 11% somewhat or strongly disagreed.

Information Technology

1. Recommendation #1: Consolidate Information Technology across campus.
 - a. Staff support centralized systems software and infrastructure, so far as it defines consistent process and workflow.
 - b. Staff are less supportive of losing access to IT support staff in their building accountable to their leadership.
 - i. This concern is twofold. First when IT doesn't work it creates work stoppages and removing this service could lead to extended down-time.
 - ii. Second, many IT units support specialized software and hardware that requires technical training and knowledge that poses delays for issues when it becomes necessary to get central IT up to speed to resolve issues with this software.
 - iii. This is echoed by those serving TAMU outside of the Bryan/College Station area.
 - c. Survey comments are mixed regarding consolidation. One indicating it has been done before on campus before changing to the current model. The primary concern is losing service, while the most common positive comment is having a simpler IT infrastructure on campus.
 - i. One unique perspective was the likely staff attrition will leave wide gaps in institutional knowledge of the existing systems.
 - ii. An additional comment pointed out the role of IT supporting classrooms and requested that this support structure remain a stand-alone IT service so classroom issues do not impact the learning experience.
2. Recommendation #2: Establish a university-wide Help Desk and ticketing system.
 - a. Many units have successful ticketing systems. Staff vocalized the need to review systems on campus that work well and replicate those systems broadly.
 - i. This sentiment is echoed in survey comments. Many are happy with their existing ticketing system, while others point out the need for intentionality for implementing this change.
3. Recommendation #3: Prioritize cybersecurity to ensure campus services are not compromised.

- a. According to survey data and comments, staff are supportive of this effort and point out the many improvements made by the Division of IT in the last few years.
 - b. There is an undercurrent concern that centralization might inhibit cybersecurity efforts given the varying security requirements for FERPA, HIPPA, IRB security needs across campus.
4. Recommendation #4: Utilize project managers.
- a. Staff have mixed feelings about this recommendation in the survey data. Comments indicate support for managing projects more efficiently, while others point out the role of professional project managers is not best suited for the style of projects undertaken on campus.

Marketing & Communication

1. Recommendation #1: Centralize marketing and communications across the university.
 - a. Staff members expressed a hopeful support of this idea given the proper staffing and support. Overall support for this recommendation was nearly 50%, however individual comments emphasized the importance of allowing for individual personalities and marketing strategies for the many divisions, departments and colleges in the university.
 - b. Staff members also vocalized a concern that over centralization could result in poor service and lack of unit support, including branch campuses.
 - c. It was noted that, if done correctly, it could enhance the practice of making and implementing tactical goals in recruiting, marketing, and promotion. Ultimately, an aligned strategy and goals would be helpful, but to remove individuals from their embedded organizations could be detrimental.
 - d. Lastly, equity was brought up. In short, be clear what duties MarComm will handle and what will fall upon administrative assistants or student workers within colleges. Budget-rich colleges might hire “local” or third-party staff for their marketing needs. This practice cannot be supported.
 - e. It was brought up multiple times that internal marketing and communications is an area for improvement within the university. With an organization of this size, leaving staff communications to HROE, faculty communications to the Provost Office, and student-body communications to Student Affairs, you can have internal messaging become convoluted and leave individuals searching for a central point.
2. Recommendation #2: Clarify university marketing and branding guidelines, training processes, and a mechanism for enforcement of those guidelines.
 - a. Over 75% of respondents agreed with this recommendation.
3. Recommendation #3: Streamline digital presence and contracts.
 - a. Over 65% of respondents agreed with this recommendation.
 - b. Some expressed the desire for transparency and clarity as to what this would encompass. For example, would this include websites and, if so, how would an undertaking like that look?