

FGCU STAFF CLIMATE SURVEY

Report on

Focus Group Meetings



April 2003



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Office of Planning and Evaluation

Introduction

Purpose, Context and Methodology

Context and Purpose

In October of 2002 the Office of Planning and Evaluation (OPE) completed the staff climate survey and presented it to the Vice-Presidents of Administration and Academic Affairs. The Vice-President of Administration then convened a meeting with the OPE and the Staff Advisory Council (SAC)¹. At this meeting (held in December of 2002), the Vice-President asked that OPE follow up the *staff* climate survey with a series of focus groups, as was done in the case of the *faculty* climate survey.

The aim of the focus group meetings was primarily to reinforce and amplify the results of the climate survey. First, it was intended that participants' feedback would confirm and/or clarify what was meant by data from the survey. Second, the meetings were to facilitate greater understanding of existing problems on the part of policymakers, as the quotes, anecdotes and richer qualitative information presented in the report of the focus group discussions would provide them with dimensions that were not available in the data from the climate survey.

Focus Group Dates & Participant Numbers

All meetings were held in **March** 2003

<i>Date</i>	<i>No. of Participants</i>
Wednesday the 5 th , 3:00 p.m.	12
Thursday the 6 th , 11:00 a.m.	11
Monday the 10 th , 3:00 p.m.	13
Tuesday the 11 th , 11:00 a.m.	10
Total	46

¹ The Staff Advisory Council is a representative body of the university staff. It had been instrumental in the conception and execution of the Climate Survey.

This report presents the results of four focus group meetings held in March 2003. These meetings were conducted with representatives of staff from all units within FGCU. A total of 234 (71%) of all full-time staff had responded to the earlier climate survey, and 46 of these participated in the four focus groups. Not only was this a high number but also an analysis of the profile of the participants showed that efforts to ensure that they were representative of the total FGCU population were very successful.

Overview

Results show that the early excitement that attracted staff to FGCU at all levels, is still present. Staff members' keen interest in their jobs is evident, as is their willingness to extend the effort and, within reason, the time applied to their tasks. They are proud of being a part of the university, and of FGCU's role in the region, and statements by focus group participants generally underline the findings of the climate survey of October 2002 in this regard: over 80% indicating satisfaction with their environment and their co-workers, and planning to stay at FGCU.

But the focus group discussions also reveal a widespread dissatisfaction with the conditions under which staff have to function, and the effect of those conditions on their individual and collective morale. Specifically, they feel over-extended in their daily tasks and under-resourced in the performance of them. Most participants feel that their departments are understaffed for the tasks required, and falling steadily behind as the university grows and staff complements fail to keep pace. Many feel they are recipients of inequitable treatment across-the-board, and undervalued in terms of compensation.

Methodology

Although many individual views were expressed, the primary purpose here is to report on the 'consensus expressed or constructed by the group'. Opinions emanating from one person are identified accordingly; they are preceded by phrases such as "one person said", and for the most part given as direct speech. In many cases, however, verbal and non-verbal corroboration allowed us to conclude that the expressed opinion was a group position rather than an individual viewpoint. These individually expressed views remain important, because, together with the other reported individual viewpoints, they yield

diverse yet complementary perspectives on a particular issue. This provides a fuller picture of staff opinion.

As a first step towards gathering these opinions, a representative of OPE met with the Staff Advisory Council to outline plans for the focus groups, to solicit their advice on approaches to participant selection, and to enlist their help in ensuring a high rate of response. It was agreed that the draft questions that OPE would develop for discussion would be based upon the issues identified from the climate survey report as those needing confirmation or follow-up².

At the meeting at the end of January 2003, it was decided that there would be four (4) focus groups. The population from which responses were sought would be all FGCU University Support Personnel Services (USPS) and Administrative and Professional (A&P) staff. In one group, supervisory and non-supervisory staff would be kept separate, so there would be a safe context for those who considered supervisors to be an 'inhibiting presence'.

The meetings, one for each focus group, were held in the first two weeks in March 2003. To ensure the highest level of participation, the help of all fourteen members of the Staff Advisory Council was enlisted. They each agreed to recruit, and send to each of the four meetings, one representative from the area of the University to which they were assigned³.

² This is consistent with the best use of the focus groups as a qualitative study that enlarges the findings from the more objective and less anecdotal survey.

³ This assignment was done by the 'ID' numbers shown in the accompanying table. (Two SAC members were assigned to area #7, which had at least twice the staff of most of the other areas.)

Five issues were identified (from the quantitative results of the survey) for discussion in the focus group meetings:

- Adequate staffing
- The support of supervisors and others higher up
- Opportunities for growth and promotion
- Equitable treatment of themselves and co-workers
- Salary

The planners, in seeking to provide university policymakers with a more complete understanding of staff concerns, anticipated reactions from the focus group meetings that would enable the leadership to better appreciate what staff meant by particular responses in the climate survey. Discussion and comments from the focus group meetings would hopefully offer insights as to why staff felt the way they did.

This report of concerns and comments from these four meetings attempts to provide such broader and deeper understandings.

Stratified sampling areas - FGCU

[One representative from each of the 13 numbered (#) areas was invited to each of the four meetings held]

<i>Area</i>	<i>ID #</i>
<i>Colleges</i>	
CAS and CPS	1
COB (including Small Business Development Center) and CHP	2
COE (incl. Family Resource Center) and Grad. Studies and Continual Learning	3
<i>Rest of Acad. Affairs</i>	
Acad. Affairs (including Planning & Evaluation, ORSP and Service Learning) & Pres. Office,	4
Enrollment Mgmt.	5
Student Services	6
ITBS	7
Library	8
Athletics	9
<i>Advancement</i>	
<i>Administrative Services</i>	
Human Resources and Admin. Computing	10
Campus Police and Safety, Purchasing and Auxiliary Mgmt.	11
Plant Operations and Maintenance	12
Controller's Office, Facilities Planning, Admin Services and Budget Office	13

The five subsequent chapters discuss staff's answers to five questions; these responses are discussed against the background of data from the climate survey administered in October 2002. Chapter one considers the issues of inadequate staffing (question one). Chapter two considers poor remuneration and lack of opportunities for promotion (question two). Chapter three discusses the issue of inequitable treatment (question three). Chapter four attempts to identify those things at FGCU which staff find attractive and welcoming (question four) and Chapter five looks at factors that increase levels of stress (question five). It also presents participants' suggestions for how best to adjust those circumstances and conditions that promote tension.

A final note: throughout the text, boxes and sidebars are used to present selected results from the staff climate survey done last October. These extracted findings provide an important context in which to interpret the focus group results provided here.

As it was designed to do, this focus group process has provided information to explain, enrich, and amplify trends *already evident* in the data from the climate survey. It is noteworthy that there are very few inconsistencies between the findings of the climate survey and what our focus group participants reported.

Chapter One

Understaffing

Working at FGCU

- 86% of respondents (197) agree that they are “proud to work at FGCU”.

Source: FGCU Staff Climate Survey – October 2002

Focus group responses provided a rich harvest of qualitative data from which to develop a picture of the existing ‘climate’ amongst staff at FGCU. Caution should be taken in developing conclusions based solely on the results of the focus groups. It is necessary for the results to be viewed within the context of findings from the more objective and extensive climate survey that preceded the focus groups. Findings of the latter are more vivid, easier to relate to and understand, and provide clear snapshots of the ‘climate.’ But while we welcome the fact that they so amplify the earlier results, we must also be cautious lest we allow them to distort. Understanding everything against the backdrop of survey findings such as the one presented in the box above, will enable accurate interpretation.

Thus, for example, while there are several things that staff are unhappy about, and these are covered extensively here, this is a group of employees that derive a great deal of pride and satisfaction from working at FGCU, and often push themselves to the limit trying to serve their constituents who, most often, are students.

Question One: In the recently completed climate survey, a majority of staff on this campus indicated that their area is not staffed sufficiently. Do you agree with this perception, and to what extent are you impacted by the situation and its effects? What needs to be addressed most urgently, and how?

The Climate Survey in October had indicated that staff in most units were close to unanimous (and in some cases, unanimous) in their agreement that workloads were unmanageable because of understaffing. Focus group participants confirmed this

situation with narratives on the expanding tasks required of them, static and sometimes depleted staff complements, shrinking 'down' time and rising expectations from supervisors.

Added to this some respondents claim that for those fortunate few departments that are allowed to hire full-time employees, the hiring process takes too long, and there are difficulties with the reliability, competence and commitment of student workers who sometimes fill the gaps. The problem is highlighted by the relentless, necessary growth of FGCU itself, in fulfillment of its mandate of service. "There seems to be new tasks added to the existing workload on a frequent basis," said one person. "Staff members are already overwhelmed and nothing is being done to increase the number of staff."

This chapter probes the question of whether the units in FGCU are sufficiently staffed.

Examples of understaffing.

Understaffing appears to be most acute, in its effects, in undergraduate admissions, a department described by one participant as being "at the heart of what we all do." (Interestingly, participants from other departments with acute needs of their own ceded 'pride of place' to admissions.) Staff members from admissions report an 80% increase in the number of applications now as against when the university opened. Despite being required to work on one Saturday each month, and being encouraged to work additional hours in order to keep up with the workload, the staff of that department were very behind. A member of the department said that no new staff had been hired in two years. "We're supposed to do a 'two week' turnaround on applications, now it's gone to 'six to eight weeks' . . . (and) even if we hire more staff there doesn't exist any space to put them. We don't even have computers for them."

One participant from a department that works with students on academic probation, pointed out that they " [had] lost a position and we have many more students to serve. Yet we are in the critical area of student retention, and we are a money saver for the university."

Although they were not always as extreme, there were similar stories with respect to other departments. One participant's department had begun by servicing just four areas; "Now we have 15," without any increase in staff. A participant from one office, for example, said that office "started out with two

people and we are still two. We've added more and more [tasks], but no staff.” Similar stories were told by participants from the broadcasting and campus security departments.

Representatives from more than one department, claimed that “the manpower level is below what it was at our opening. The requests for service however are up...” In some cases ‘75%’ was the figure used. Participants from a department reported that, “after two more phases of [construction] and after adding three to four more buildings, we’ve only gotten two additional staff members. There are simply not enough persons to cover the maintenance [needs] and operations” of these buildings.

Persons commented on the issue of work overload. “Even though we are asked to take a lunch hour, that is not always realistic.” “... we aren’t prevented from taking lunch; in fact we’re encouraged to take our breaks and to go and take lunch, but there just isn’t time.”

Workload

- Out of the 231 who responded to this question, 180 (78%) reported that (their workload) had gotten generally or much heavier (over the past year). When asked whether or not their level of stress had changed over the past year, 152 (65%) stated that it had gotten generally or much higher

Source: FGCU Staff Climate Survey – October 2002

Problems with the hiring process.

Exacerbating the effects of staff shortages was frustration about the hiring process. One participant described it as “a struggle.” “The hiring process is much too long,” said one participant. The matter “goes to a committee, someone [is brought] in and they try them out for a while, and then it goes back to committee. It can take a couple of months, two or three months really.” This presents difficulties for every department, but more so for some. “We have a 24 hour ... schedule and we need to replace someone quickly just to be able to keep on doing our job. Just the paperwork to get the job posted takes a long time.”

Hiring processes at universities were generally agreed to be lengthy, but, even by that standard, according to one participant who’d worked at other universities, “this hiring process here at FGCU is very, very long.” Frustration at what some felt was a cumbersome hiring process was fairly widespread, applying as it did

to all levels of staff. But, “it seems to take [even] longer for hiring OPS, and USPS staff, than for faculty”, one participant said.

The potential of technology

Alongside the complaints regarding understaffing, many participants also felt their departments were under-resourced in terms of technology, though this was not as prevalent a complaint as those about staffing levels. More pointed was criticism about the use of that technology, especially when coming from the professionals in that area. There was generally a feeling that more efficient use could be made of the technology and the software – but here also there were limitations due to levels of staffing. “Many times when we are asked to take on more tasks we should consider how much of those tasks can be automated so as to streamline the process.” The underlying suggestion was for closer integration of technology resources, client needs, and staffing.

In an ironic comment on the issue, someone asked “whether the help desk is getting help so that they are able to help us quickly enough. I figure they are swamped because whereas I used to be able to get help quickly I can't get help on technology matters quickly enough now.”

Some participants felt that reallocation of staffing resources in favor of administrative computing, enabling them to meet these requests for automation, “would ultimately decrease the workload for other offices.” Technology staff like programmers could write software routines that would help with lookups and data entry and this would help staff who were doing a lot of this by hand. “People are in a lab sifting through 500 records,” or performing other tasks more efficiently handled by information technology.

Other solutions

One idea was to use volunteer forces in the community. The proponent gave the example of a volunteer whose help “ended up being very beneficial to him as well as to FGCU because it made him a better candidate for the position he eventually got at another library.”

Another suggestion was for internships for students who were already within the FGCU community. “We could create positions to match the programs that the colleges have so that this work experience would form an integral part of their education and training.” It was pointed out that the College of Business does have internship

programs in their departments, with the suggestion that this could be expanded to other colleges and across the university.

“Cross training of capable staff in order to help out other departments”, as “one way to utilize more the staff we have in a time when it might be difficult to get any more staff” was also proposed.

Some participants, however, saw the issue of staffing and resource allocation in more fundamental terms. “The university is too reactive,” said one person. “It needs instead to be more forward-looking”, and this was seen as a barrier to necessary planning.

Other participants addressed the process of planning itself, and what they perceived as a lack of communication. “It would be nice if those of us who are affected by the decisions to devolve those tasks,” said one person, “are involved in the decision before it happens.” Another participant said: “The pulse is often taken about changes already done. But the question should have been asked earlier. How *will* you feel if we do this?” There seems to be a cry for a more active pre-consultation process, regardless of what is done about the understaffing situation.

Staffing

- The greatest differences between what was important and the level of satisfaction was found in the areas of *adequate staffing* in their offices to do their work and *opportunities for promotion*...

Source: FGCU Staff Climate Survey – October 2002

Chapter 2

Compensation and opportunity in the workplace

Not unexpectedly, the matter of compensation elicited some of the strongest expressions of dissatisfaction across focus groups. Almost without exception, participants in the sessions read the question, and expressed agreement with the findings of the survey.

Question Two: More than half of the respondents to that survey felt that they did not earn a comfortable living, and nearly two-thirds felt they did not have opportunities for promotion. Would it be accurate to say that these views are shared by most of your immediate colleagues? What contributes to their feeling that they lack opportunities?

Only three representatives, did not agree with the two underlying premises contained in the question. They were aware of what salaries in their profession were like on the outside and felt that their own university salaries compared. But even in cases like that, where individuals did not necessarily feel themselves disadvantaged, they were very aware of and sympathized with the disaffection of their co-workers.

The discussion coalesced around three aspects of the question: compensation *per se* and comparatively; lack of opportunity for or obstacles to advancement in the job currently being performed; and low expectations for change.

Low satisfaction with Compensation and Opportunities

- Staff reported least satisfaction with *opportunities for promotion*, sufficiency of staffing in their office / department, having support from the vice-president/ provost, having support from the president, and *earning a comfortable living*.

Source: FGCU Staff Climate Survey – October 2002

Compensation

Salary inadequacy, and inequity within the campus and within divisions, is a main source of discontent. Staff claim that... “every year we are paying more and

more for the benefits that we get.” This would be less so if they felt as if everybody was “all in there together”. But they don't feel this is the case. They feel that some people have it better. For instance, staff generally feel that new hires have come in at salaries that are higher than those of many of the longest-serving members.

This was true between departments also: “In our area the two divisions that do the least work are paid the most, and one division that does the most work gets paid the least.” Whether or not this analysis is based on accurate data as to payment disparities, it does point to a need for a market equity study to be done. More than one participant felt this way. “We need to pay people what their jobs are worth,” said one person. Another person said that “a salary review on every level is a good idea to keep morale up.” Another expressed the issue more graphically: “Southwest Florida is notorious for paying low salaries because we get sunshine down here. Well, we can't eat sunshine.”

The issue of overtime drew perhaps the most pointed comments, which often link with the matter of staffing levels and workload treated in Chapter one. Here (again) some staff members see themselves as being caught in a Catch 22 situation. “Compensation only comes in the form of ‘comp’ time, but because there is a constant flow of work there is not time to take ‘comp’ time off.” “When we work late putting in S.A.T. scores and things like that, because of the USPS rules we can't get compensated except hour for hour. All we can get is compensatory time. But what good is that, because the work is so much that we never have the time to use it.”

To this situation has been added the perception of unfairness: “Several of my colleagues are squeezing in many extra hours because they just simply can't get overtime and they've been told they can't get ‘comp’ time either. But yet there is an inconsistency with the application of that rule⁴. Others have been told differently.”

⁴ Confusion could have resulted from the fact that different rules apply to USPS and A&P employees.

Opportunity in job

Many focus group participants were also quite blunt in their assessment of the possibilities for advancement in their current job. “Some jobs are just dead end jobs,” said one person. “Most times, unless a supervisor leaves, there is no opportunity for advancement.” Another said: “When you come here, you know you're pretty much going to sit in that seat, and that's it.”

One explanation offered was that: “The system as it exists does not lend itself to promotion. There really aren't career ladders here. There really isn't anywhere to go in most cases. Plus if you look at the organizational charts in the university they are very top-heavy with administrators.”

There were two particular bones of contention within the alienation from the administrative culture: what was seen as the discrimination against experience in favor of academic qualifications; and the practice of hiring from outside a department, and/or the university, for posts within that department.

“Overall I think the value of having a degree is over-emphasized,” said one person, “or the need for specialists in the field. How much of a specialist do you need? I've been doing this thing for 15 years.” “Experience is just not valued enough,” said another, whose view was supported. Many staff members say that, even in situations where there is no complaint about the quality of work being done, they are told that improved compensation is not possible because they do not hold a degree. Not surprisingly, this causes disaffection.

Adding, for them, insult to injury was the perception, in the words of one participant, that “the opportunity for advancement or promotion is not always equal to the work being accomplished. For example, I was hired as a clerk, then moved up to Program Assistant, and yet from the beginning I was told to *create* this office. I've performed managerial functions from day one and have not received compensation or recognition for any of it.”

The perception exists that the best possibility for promotion, or for making more money, lies in applying for higher level positions outside one's own department. There too, however, there is a perception among some that unfairness exists.

“Even if we were to be promoted, that does not guarantee that we will receive equitable compensation for this promotion.”

As a basic necessity, it was felt that a merit program needed to be put in place and, as one participant said, “the merit program should be university wide and not applied to just a select few.”

One particular story may or may not be atypical: “Well, there was something (a merit system) last year, but our supervisor does not believe in giving *outstanding* as a rating in ... evaluations. So none of us got any of that [bonus]. But [others, including that supervisor] got it because [they] got *outstanding* in [their] evaluation.”

Expectations for change

Perhaps the set of comments that are most redolent of the “climate” among this category of worker at FGCU, relate to perceptions of possibilities for change in their own circumstance and the professional environment around them.

Here again one is dealing with perceptions that may or may not be grounded in fact-based analysis. For instance: “There are no mechanisms in place to overcome or break through the annual 2.5% raise.” Other respondents feel that: “There really does not exist a lot of great expectations for pay. Because people know about the state salary policy and they don't really hold out much hope for more compensation.”

Others say: “It has been difficult to hear about raises to other higher levels of support staff and to know that these raises have not been equitably distributed to us. When we hear that certain [employees] have gotten [large] raises that creates a certain feeling of dissatisfaction among us, the other levels of support staff.” Perhaps these raises have been within the state guidelines, but if so that has not been clearly communicated to other staff.

This feeling of alienation is captured in a comment which discusses the change in culture between “then” and “now” in the university community. “We are much more divided than when we were at USF. Then we were just one big family. Now we're each in our separate areas, and we're all doing our own thing, and

I've got to charge everyone for anything I do for them. And no what matter what I do, it seems I'm never making enough in charges for my bosses to be satisfied.”

Views aired in this chapter would appear to be predominantly negative about how focus group participants perceive their place in the FGCU “cosmos”. People who elsewhere appear to be satisfied with and interested in the challenges of the work that they do, have strong reservations about the value placed on that work and on them as workers.

And perhaps a start has already been made in addressing this at the supervisory level. “In the conflict management task force that's now been formed,” one participant pointed out, “there is an initiative to encourage the hiring of people on the basis of their ability to treat those they supervise in a civil fashion.”

Key areas

- The next two areas of greatest difference [between what was important and the level of satisfaction] were in earning a *comfortable living* and being treated *equitably* at FGCU.

Source: FGCU Staff Climate Survey – October 2002

Chapter Three

Equitable treatment for staff at FGCU

The findings of this study reveal contradictions, a fundamental one being: that people who enjoy their work, and take pride and see value in it, are beset by feelings – and examples – of being themselves undervalued and inequitably treated. Living this contradiction has, it would seem, created high levels of stress, and affected the morale of many staff members as well as their relations with co-workers at supervisory and higher levels. Furthermore, and perhaps most significant of all, many staff perceive the inequity in the way they are treated as being systemic.

The issue of equitable treatment for staff at FGCU was addressed by asking focus group participants to respond to the following question:

Question 3: Nearly all staff believe that it is important to be treated equitably by FGCU, but less than 60% of them feel that they are. (The gap is even wider with regard to factors mentioned previously.) Can you speculate as to why this would be the case, and can you identify things that would have strongly influenced this view?

“Inequity is a feeling...”

More than one staff member pointed out that “Inequity is a feeling.” In other words, never mind the presence or absence of specific, identifiable reasons for staff to think that they were not fairly treated, many staff *believe* this to be the case. “Whether or not [it] is so, people feel [it is] so.” One thing they felt was that “USPS staff are looked upon as valueless and easily replaceable” and someone else claimed, “this feeling exists on all levels.”

One or two people attempted to account for these widespread negative sentiments by suggesting that “the hierarchical structure creates a fear based environment” Someone else thought that, “the climate that exists (the feeling [of being] underpaid, under appreciated, [and of] work related stress) factors into how people treat or mistreat each other and it passes along from staff member to staff member, no matter their position.”

There was also a general comment that “Things are pretty much on edge. This tenseness is systemic and affects the climate.”

Whatever the reasons, such observations, particularly when taken in conjunction with comments about isolation and poor communication - suggest some lingering dissatisfaction among staff.

The staff climate survey completed earlier reported one person as writing that morale was depleted and the enthusiasm so prevalent at the beginning had gone. Staff comments at these focus group meetings were in line with this observation. This is a ‘climate’ consideration in the broadest sense, something having to do with the *zeitgeist* obtaining in the institution – something needing to be addressed by overarching strategies, if it is to be overcome.

Reasons for staff feeling that they are inequitably treated

Poor communication; isolation

Many persons suggested that lack of communication might be one reason why people feel that they are inequitably treated. It was felt that communication could promote a sense of community, of shared objectives. “The communication should be better with the staff,” one participant observed. “It should be very clear that we're all working toward the same goal, and what those goals are.” Another participant said, “There needs to be better communication throughout the university as a whole so that there can be a sense of unity.”

Isolation was seen as a difficulty – one to which inadequate communication contributed. “It may have to do with isolation. Many departments are very isolated and therefore they tend to feel that people [have] it better than they do. They feel ignored. I mean nobody remembers us – we're way out there in the boondocks. I think we are the stepchild.” Others insisted that isolation was independent of proximity: “We must be [kindred] then because we're right here on campus and we feel *we're* the stepchild.”

Poor communication not only contributed to misapprehensions; some persons pointed out that it meant that people were unaware of many of the programs and advantages that were available: “People simply don't know things. Human

Resources has an employee assistance system – a very good one – and they publicize it. And yet people are unaware of its availability.”

Communication was seen as having other practical applications. One staff member said, “There needs to be clearer and consistent communication of any implementation of new technology and/or processes, and the areas that it impacts.” Another declared, “Look at this for example: there are important things happening with [the] Banner [system] ...they started almost a year ago and we're just getting communication about it this week.”

Poor remuneration, work overload and stress

Issues of remuneration, work overload and the related stress because of inadequate staffing were raised as factors accounting for the feeling of inequitable treatment. On the matter of compensation, there was one particular source of contention.

“The real bombshell was this raise that they gave the president.” Someone else agreed, declaring, “We would have been better off if we didn't know anything about that.” Another person interposed, “If they could see that he was underpaid how come they couldn't see that we were underpaid?” Some people seemed to accept that inequitable remuneration was inevitable, given budgetary restrictions, but at least one person made the point that when the president receives a large increase in pay, and staff receives increases of only 2.5% in 2002 and probably 0% in 2003, “This grates. I mean I'm not saying he isn't worth it but [to] people that was a bad message.”

On the matter of staff overload, people were equally forthright. One staff member said, “Some [colleges] really have much less faculty to support and yet they have more support staff. I know that there are some colleges that generate far greater FTE and yet don't have the secretaries... for the faculty. Some of them [secretaries] serve for up to forty faculty. Is that equitable?” Another focus group participant reflected similar views: “The academic colleges have more faculty than staff and therefore there is a heavier demand placed on those staff members. Instead of hiring that next faculty member maybe we should hire the needed support staff for those faculty we currently have.”

Focus group participants shared particular insights and concerns regarding the various deleterious effects of stress on staff at all levels. Someone suggested that supervisors' "inequitable treatment" of employees "could be [caused] by the stress they're under. That stress could cause the harsh and unfair treatment they dish out, because when people are under the gun like that they crack." The situation, another felt, "also allows individuals to feel at liberty to step over certain bounds professionally and to treat people any way they want because there is so much stress around."

Still, more than one member of staff spoke of giving up their lunch hours to address student needs or to keep up with other work tasks. These examples of dedication to the job appear consonant with findings from the Climate Survey that staff members enjoy their jobs and appreciate the positive aspects of their work environment. According to these data, staff members feel a strong sense of personal accomplishment – indeed so strong that it outstrips their rating of the importance of this value. They feel free to set their priorities, feel proud to be part of FGCU and are happy to be in a circumstance where they work in accord with their ethics. They appreciate that they work in a comfortable physical work environment, and in a place where they can feel safe.

***Top 3
Areas of Satisfaction***

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Percentage (Number) or Staff agreeing</i>
I feel physically safe in my work environment.	96% (214)
My co-workers respect me	95% (216)
I feel a sense of personal accomplishment from my work	90% (211)

Source: FGCU Staff Climate Survey – October 2002

Need for training programs

Some staff members thought that a lack of training programs might contribute to feelings of inequity on the part of staff. It was suggested that the university as a whole needed to improve in the area of training, beginning with the implementation of a proper orientation program. They felt a new employee orientation that goes beyond learning regulations was necessary. It was also felt that there was a lack of standards and that, once these were in place, management personnel should insist on training to meet these standards.

One person observed, “Training needs to be supported from the top down, or people simply won't go. Right now it's not mandatory. It's more policy than reality. And it's not frequent enough. It's so infrequent that you have to seek it out.”

Inconsistent application of policy by management⁵

One individual suggested that management level personnel were not “on the same page” with their counterparts in other departments with respect to various aspects of policy application/enforcement. Consequently, different members of staff were receiving different applications/enforcements of policy that was common to all university staff members. Put differently, “The problem is the lack of the consistent application of rules. That leads to the *perception* of inequitable treatment. One person says that our supervisors or our dean says we can do [a particular thing]. But then another person says, ‘Oh, wait a minute; ours says that we can’t.’” This matter was not advanced as a communication issue, but that dimension doubtless applies.

Inequities in treatment by faculty, administrators and supervisory staff

It was clear that members of staff were particularly sensitive to one aspect of inequity: their treatment by faculty, administration and supervisors.

Individuals expressed the view that faculty looked down on support staff and that the administration (“all the big guys”) believe that “We can always replace these people – we can always go out and get others to do that job.”

⁵ Respondents used the word ‘Management’ in most cases to refer to those members of the administration above their supervisors. Staff seemed in most cases to be quite happy with their *immediate supervisors* [see box].

Such views concur with some findings of the Climate Survey. Survey data show that members of staff feel that they have respect from their co-workers, and that they respect and are respected by their *immediate supervisors*, most of whom support them. However, some persons feel that they lack the support of persons further above them and lack respect from faculty with whom they do not work in partnership.

**High Satisfaction with
Immediate Supervisor**

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Percentage (Number) or Staff agreeing</i>
I respect my immediate supervisor	88% (198)
My immediate supervisor respects me	87% (198)
I know the expectations my immediate supervisor has for me	84% (196)
I have the support of my immediate supervisor	84% (197)

Source: FGCU Staff Climate Survey – October 2002

Chapter Four

FGCU's attractiveness

Participants identified various characteristics that drew staff members to FGCU. Some of these had nothing to do with the University, per se. One participant mentioned people wanting “to get out of the snow”. “Sometimes it's just a lack of employment elsewhere,” someone else said. “This is a down market.” Another person described employment at the university as “sustainable – this is an employer that's going to be here for while.” A fourth participant found the University attractive as part of “a clean industry... there's a positive association with educational institutions.” There were also participants who wished to escape corporate culture, and were therefore glad to be away from “acquisitions and mergers”, and punitive hours.

But there were also features of the university itself to which staff members were drawn. This chapter presents participants' responses to question four below as it attempts to identify features of the University's climate that originally attracted staff.

Question 4: Many aspects of the FGCU climate asked about in the survey (such as support from supervisors, the physical environment, and work hours and schedule) were viewed favorably by respondents. What draws staff to FGCU, and what do you think they find particularly attractive and welcoming at this time? Has this changed (for better or worse) because of events over the last six or seven months?

Responses indicate that staff still regard working at FGCU as an exciting experience that is personally beneficial at several levels. They are proud to be part of a still new, still innovative and still challenging environment. It can be reasonably argued that their passionately expressed dissatisfaction on certain issues has its roots in the expectations stimulated by their very identification with the publicly stated goals and objectives of the university. On the ground, the natural growth of the university, a process in which they take great pride, seems to vitiate many of the valued features of the FGCU experience –

innovation, collegiality, creative problem solving – in favor of formalization of procedure and more structured, sometimes exclusionary relationships, now becoming more and more necessary.

What draws staff to FGCU

One focus group member described FGCU as “a big employer and getting bigger.” The University was, according to two other people, a place where there were “lots of opportunities” in one case, and, in the other, an institution presenting “a lot of options” in an environment where there are not many big industries. One participant felt that among persons “relocating to this area, FGCU really stands out in an economy that's...dominated by retail and service industries.”

One respondent was delighted with the hours they had to work at FGCU – over forty hours per week, but better than “the corporate world [where] they drive you eighty hours a week”. “I appreciate the fact that the university stops at five,” this participant said. “I have a family and I can have some family life. Even though I generally work more than forty hours things are much better.”

Participants were perhaps most enthusiastic about the benefits FGCU offered – “the benefits here are good, health insurance and all the others” – none more so than the advantage of being able to attend the University and so continue their education. “One huge benefit is the availability of education,” one person remarked. Another said, “We also come here for our own educational opportunities. Working here helps us to go on with our study.” Someone else commented, “This University offers a wonderful setting for someone who wants a nice place to work and hasn’t even completed their education to the bachelor's degree. For people like that... the options aren't always that great.”

Several participants mentioned the attractiveness of the campus, the newness of the physical plant, and its ample resources. “This University offers a wonderful setting,” was one comment. The campus was described as “new”, “clean” and “wild and attractive”. Excitement attached to the continuing development of the infrastructure: “It is exciting; there is a lot of building going on. In the five years there have been – what – about twenty more buildings?” These opinions are consonant with staff climate survey findings, according to which more than 80%

of respondents agreed that they had a comfortable work environment, and 72% felt that they had a pleasant atmosphere in which to work.

There was also status attached to a job at the University. “We are the talk of Lee County,” one person observed. “Working at the university does open doors for you,” another said. “I mean, now, reporters answer my calls. And there's a lot of prestige associated with working for the university here. My mom was thrilled when she heard that I've got a job at the University. She couldn't believe it.”

What staff find attractive and welcoming?

Although only one participant mentioned being attracted by “the opportunity to set up something new, to be involved during the formative phase” of the University’s development, many others spoke of the University as encouraging innovation: “One important thing is the freedom to innovate... We’re not going to a department where everything is always set and we have to be fitting into a routine that is inflexible.”

Perhaps related to this notion of newness was the excitement at being part of FGCU’s continuing growth. Some participants advanced this as a trait they continue to find attractive “You can see the growth going on all around you,” one person remarked. Another said, “The energy derived from the growth going on is very exciting.” There was only one demurral in this regard and it was somewhat ‘tongue-in-cheek’: “Well I speak from the point of view of [my department], and while you see growth and energy we see more problems.”

More than one person reported job satisfaction and the positive experience of being part of a professional, dedicated staff. “People here care about the job they're doing,” was one opinion. “They are real professionals. They enjoy working with people.” Indeed, according to someone else, “Even those that are disgruntled with their job get a lot of energy from the sense that they're making a contribution as they're working with students.” Someone else said, “It's satisfying to see the benefits that your work can give to others.” Climate survey data indicate that a very high level of satisfaction among respondents attached to this factor, 90% of respondents to the survey reporting that they felt a sense of personal accomplishment in their jobs.

Again, more than one participant remarked on the sense of community – a factor no doubt related to the gratifying experience of working with a dedicated staff. One person said, “People do try to get along here and to cooperate. There is a feeling of community.” Another, “Because [it’s] small...we can get to know the students, and I like that. And we get to do really nice things in our department, like having potluck suppers...” (Climate survey data indicate that 84% of staff members agree that they had adequate opportunities to get to know their co-workers.)

There were participants who remarked on positive experiences with management. One said, “I think also what's good about FGCU, or at least my area, is that supervisors provide a team environment.” Someone else noted, “My supervisor is a faculty member and he really gets along well with us.” Yet another person stated that they “found that the faculty here have been wonderful” and felt “very supported by the faculty I work for”. Findings with respect to difficulties in staff-faculty relations, or staff relations with management do not translate to smaller contexts where there are generally good relationships between supervisors and staff members.

One or two participants remarked on the University’s extensive resources and the newness of the plant. “It’s a job in which a lot of support is available to you because it’s such a large organization,” one participant said. “I mean we have new computers and new equipment and nice bright new shiny places to learn and work,” said another. (Most respondents to the climate survey agreed that they had adequate technology resources to do their work.) One participant particularly appreciated the Family Resource Center, which was seen as fostering the generation and use of new ideas: “I have a child at the Family Resource Center and it’s an amazing place.”

Work environment

- More than 80% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with their work hours, they have a comfortable physical work environment, they can set their own priorities, and they are kept informed of events sponsored by their office.

Source: FGCU Staff Climate Survey – October 2002

Changes over the last six months

With regard to changes, good and bad, that had taken place over the previous six months, one member of staff expressed satisfaction with the expanding facilities: “Every building we add is another good reason to come onto campus, and to come to work.” Also on the positive side, another participant thought that the changes in governance (FGCU now having its own board of trustees) meant “we can do things much quicker “ Someone else found “One positive in the midst of all this anxiety,” that being, “the fact that through an initiative sponsored by the staff counsel, the administration has given [us] more information on devolution... It has helped quell some anxieties.” There was also much enthusiasm about improvements in sports and the contribution they had made to the University: “The sports programs are better. That has been bringing people on campus...[They] have been a real bonus to the campus.”

The most serious issues, however, related to stress occasioned by lack of resources, and uncertainty about the budget and the consequences arising from that. “There has been a real increase in anxiety,” one person remarked. “We're constantly being asked to do more with the same amount of resources.” Someone else declared, “One big thing that's happened recently is the uncertainty regarding the budgets. A lot of us are left hanging in limbo. There are some grants coming from the state that have been reduced to zero in the governor's budget. If that stays, then positions will be lost. There's a lot of uncertainty therefore.” Someone else concurred: “There is a higher level of stress. The question is, given the budget situation, will we have jobs?”

What is attractive vs. what creates stress

The two positive factors that attracted people, and still appear to do so are ‘staff having a high level of satisfaction from what they do’ and ‘enjoying a sense of community.’ (Comments would seem to suggest that this sense of community exists at the level of their colleagues.)

However, an examination of the picture provided for the six-month period preceding the survey reveals evidence of the same concerns which come to light in the feedback from focus group participants concerning the factors causing stress. Many of these factors have benefits, but also negative stress producing side effects. The contention that the Board of Trustees made it easier to get things

done, for example, was countered by the fact that some felt it occasioned a loss of status and power for staff. In addition, all those matters upon which staff focus in their account of stress-creating factors (presented in the next chapter) are identified as surfacing in this period: work overload, understaffing, poor compensation, job insecurity and poor communication.

Chapter 5

Job stress

This chapter presents participants' responses to question five below and examines those factors that participants now identify as causing or contributing to stress. It also presents participants' suggestions for ways in which the administration might reduce or eliminate those characteristics that raise levels of stress, and in this way improve the climate in the University.

Question 5: Two out of every three staff members report increasing levels of stress. Why do you think this is so? Is it related to difficulties they experience working with faculty, with supervisors, or with staff in other offices? If the administration wishes to positively affect this situation and the climate at FGCU, where should they begin?

Why staff members report increasing levels of stress

“The number one reason for increasing levels of stress is that we are not staffed enough.” This remark by a participant adequately summarizes the feedback from focus group members. Allied with this was the conviction that, as someone else said, “there is not enough compensation.” These issues – often perceived almost as one – were raised many times. “For most people the problem is simply workload,” one person contended. Another said, “I've been to the university for many years now. I've taken more and more work on... but yet I have got no help or compensation.” It went on: “Understaffing gets everybody irritable in the first place. And that creates the underlying conditions for stress,” explained one person; another elaborated, “When people are under that sort of pressure, patience gets lost and there are arguments. People become short with each other and really more tense as deadlines approach.”

Stress derived too from the fact that staff members were concerned to do a good job: “Sometimes we put the pressure on ourselves, as with the desire to address all requests, we spread ourselves out so thin. The stress comes from the fact that there is no help when we need it, and we don't have control, and we can't meet needs.” Aware that all units were stretched, staff members were hesitant to

<i>Stress at Work</i>	
<i>Percentage of staff responding that the level of stress had...</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
...gotten generally higher or much higher	65%
...remained about the same	32%
...gotten generally lower	3%
Total	100%

Source: FGCU Staff Climate Survey – October 2002

make requests of other units. As someone said, “I also feel [reluctant] asking for things from other people in other offices, and that puts pressure on me.” “It's not like the old days when you could just go and ask for something and expect it to come right back to you,” another participant pointed out, “people have other things to do. More formal procedures, needed as the university became larger, also created problems.” Someone else observed, “I [could] simply call up someone [and] ask them to do something. [Now there are] ... processes that we have to go through and orders that we have to send, the forms that we have to fill out, and we have to wait.”

It was felt that poor compensation (and other kinds of neglect shortly to be discussed) led staff to feel undervalued. And again, poor compensation was often spoken of in the same breath as understaffing: “There has been no additional staff and there is not enough compensation,” one person observed. Another said, “We see a lot of special attention being given to management but the worker bees [are] not getting anything. They don't even get a thank-you.” “A lot of time staff simply don't feel valued. There are no incentives and there is no merit pay attached to our evaluations, so why do them?” Being under-appreciated was overtly identified as a cause of stress: “Stress comes because we don't feel valued or valuable. We're not getting recognized for the work we do.”

Faced with attempting to account for stress, one person responded: “The reasons for stress could be all the things that you mentioned in the question” (i.e., difficulties staff experience working with faculty, with supervisors, or with staff in other offices). Feedback suggested a variety of problems with leadership at almost every level, all of them perceived as contributing to stress. They began at the top of the University, with the Board of Trustees, whose advent, and the subsequent legally mandated changes, was seen by some as a blow to staff representation. “With this new Board of Trustees thing, we lost our union, therefore we have no leverage. Right now the union has no contract with [the Board of Trustees].”

Conflict between employees at higher administrative levels also created stress: “I think a lot of [being stressed] is affected by the perception of what's going on at the top – people's view of the relationship between the leadership of the different departments. If you know that there exists a strained relationship at the top between the departments, then it stresses relationships between you and an individual in the other departments.” Someone else remarked, “The leadership needs to come together and present a united front.”

Leadership Collaboration

- Fewer than 35% rate as excellent or above average the ability of supervisors and staff or faculty and staff across offices/ departments to work together to solve common problems... In addition, 126 (55%) of the respondents reported that there was a particular division or college that their department (repeatedly) had difficulty working with.

Source: FGCU Staff Climate Survey – October 2002

Team building across departments was also proposed to “prevent confrontation and conflict over procedures.” “We...need to establish standard protocols and policies” and, they said, ensure consistency in their application. Consistency in applying rules would mean, for example, that faculty would not override staff decisions affecting student status, thus making staff “look bad”. But it would even lessen stress if staff knew simply whom to turn to “if we need help with a particular problem or with a particular student? These things need to be clear for everyone in every department. We need to know where to go if we're having a problem with our immediate supervisors.” One person also noted, “It is also ironic that as an educational institution we don't do very much leadership training. Many people, especially those promoted because they did good work at

a lower level, need leadership training because they now have to lead people.” Someone else reminded that, “It is also important to allow employees time off to do this training. In some areas, if you are missing for those reasons, it could be frowned upon.”

Solutions. Where should the administration begin?

One response was, “We should throw more money at it.” The remark, offhand as it may seem, also reveals the existence of a Catch-22 situation in which staff feel there is no point to raising this issue because they have been told so often that there is no money. No one else made the ‘money’ suggestion, except to propose streamlining the budget. When one participant proposed that the budget be reworked to eliminate waste, another countered: “You have to be careful about saying that... if you recommend that, they will start outsourcing.” The subsequent exchange made it plain that some people are insecure about their jobs.

Staffing

Participants were clear that administrators needed to begin by addressing the matter of staffing in order to relieve work overload. As one person said, “I think a decision has to be taken that new money coming in, whenever it comes in...will have to be spent not only on increasing programs – an appropriate portion of it has to go towards increasing support staff, and faculty.” There were suggestions as to how to address understaffing in the current situation of budgetary constraints. One person thought that students and volunteers might help: “If we’re not getting more staff then maybe students can help. We also need to look at [the] setting up of [a] volunteer services department...Hospitals run on these volunteers.” Someone else suggested that staff members be moved into different slots. “A change...would help. [In that way] it’s also possible to see, and to get feedback on whether we really need people in one area as opposed to another.”

Leadership

There were many suggestions, relating to a variety of issues, all concerned with how to improve leadership at every level. “There has to be an orientation for new employees,” one person said. “People need this to start out on the right page –

even if they simply know which department to go to for help. And this orientation has to be mandatory. We could tie [it] to their pay. At the hospital we signed up for benefits at the orientation session. If you didn't go to orientation, then you didn't get benefits." Another person observed: "When you are new you can't even begin to figure out which building to go to. We need to know what are the rules of engagement to be followed." A third person pointed out that things had previously been better in this regard: "Some prospective parents, or the parents of prospective students, have a better sense of our campus than our new employees because they go on these tours. We used to take the time to walk people around in the early days; have them meet everybody and see everything."

There were direction, resource and planning issues: "Those who give us tasks to do often neglect to allow for adequate planning time. They expect miracles to be done without the time, proper direction or adequate resources." Another participant declared, "They often have no sense of what that task involves. When we are given tasks, there needs to be some concurrence between expectations and resources." Also on the matter of direction: "[Administrators] need ...to let staff members know which priority of all the priorities... they need to put first in their jobs." And someone else commented: "People need to [get] clear direction on what the University's goals are, so that they can align themselves with that – that would be a huge help."

There were other proposals that reflected a concern with giving appropriate value to staff input and status: "I think the staff needs to be involved more in the decisions that are made," and "I think [leadership] should discuss more with the people in [the] situation. They know a lot that could help." Equity was also a concern: "There has to be a sense of fairness and equity. [We] need to know how that bonus was given out. It seems that the people that did it didn't use a system that was objective or fair." And there was the vexed issue of being undervalued: "Staff at the support level don't feel the compassion from the director level. They feel directors really don't care." Someone else said, "I think we ought to try to bring a human element to leadership. When we reached to that 3000 benchmark, all we got was a congratulatory e-mail. Nothing personal. It was terrible – and then there was the news of further budget cuts!"

Communication

Many of these matters were seen as problems of communication, and again participants faulted leadership for poor communication. Some felt that administration had little respect for staff: “When you hear, secondhand, information about where the job is going to go, or who is going to be in charge, that causes anxiety. You would like to be the first to know.” “I think the best feeling ... comes when we get a sense that people care about informing us. Sending us an e-mail is nice, but let us know you hear our voice, that you are aware of all our concerns.” Another observed, “Something is done that will impact us and we never know about it until it trickles down to us much later.” A third gave an example, “We didn't get any idea that we were moving until people started visiting our office and looking around at what they would do with our space. It was when our Dean came and took us over to our new space himself, and walked us through and looked at where we would all be, that we felt better.”

“Sometimes technology changes broadside us,” a staff member said. “It would be nice if we were able to be made aware of these early on or at least know where to go to find out about all the things that are happening. An example of this is what happens ... when we're sitting in front of our computer screen and working with [a] student and suddenly we find that the technology interface is different.”

Focus group members also felt strongly that administration needed to listen. Among the insistent comments were these: “The critical thing is for the administration to listen.” “Yes they're busy doing things, doing their jobs but they have no idea what we do, or they don't even understand.” There was also a practical suggestion that was echoed by more than one participant staff member: “Management does need to walk around to listen to what people have to say. With growth that is very important. They just need to walk around in a very informal way.” A similar suggestion was, “They should walk around and visit different parts of the University and talk to people there. Then and there [they could] see where things can be rearranged.”

There were differing views on how to improve communication, promote a sense of community and boost morale. One person felt “A key would be to create unifying events for university departments to have their staff go to together. This

exchange between people from different areas would be very beneficial, as it would build important relationships.” But there were other views on this matter: “On the other hand I think what they have now amounts to little more than command performances, and that really increases the gap between administration and staff.” Also, “They need to boost morale but you don't do that with events, you do that by caring.”

Future direction

The problem of identifying and addressing aspects of culture and climate within the university becomes more difficult as FGCU gets larger. [It] becomes a many-headed hydra, because the culture or climate tends to fragment into pockets, as the university gets larger. And so what appears as the problem in one office or area might be quite different, or certainly would not be a problem, in another. Universal prescription therefore is not the solution, and in fact could be quite harmful in certain instances.

Yet it is important to address the needs of the institution as a whole. One focus group participant expressed the view that “We really don't have an institutional culture here at FGCU, in the same way that business corporations have an institutional culture.” They saw this not only as a problem but as a starting point for the way forward. “It is important to establish things, like, for example how we're supposed to interact with each other. The culture is often, by default, whatever happens in that particular office you find yourself in. There is no unifying policy on how to interact with or react to others.” Establishing this is an overarching challenge that FGCU leadership must face at the same time as they confront the many unique issues raised in this report.