Work Climate Survey   Morehead State University April-May 2021

The MSU Work Climate Survey was initiated through a joint ad hoc committee of Faculty Senate and Staff Congress, November 2019. The committee gathered higher education validated surveys and replicated the questions for MSU. After discussion among the ad hoc committee was concluded, the survey was sent to two focus groups for question refinement and/or elimination and skip logic determination. Focus groups were led by tenured faculty whose expertise was in developing surveys. General calls for participation were made to staff and faculty and both focus groups included volunteers from staff and faculty. After the focus groups concluded, an IRB proposal was sent forward and approved. Please see appendices for the proposal approval (Appendix 1), invitation for participation (Appendix 2), skip logic pathways (Appendix 3), and questions asked within the survey (Appendix 4).

The idea here is to identify positives and negatives as strengths and weaknesses, respectively. This report is divided into several parts: an opening section that included all 143 respondents, a second section whereby respondents answered questions based on their HR classification status as faculty, administration and staff and a third open ended questions section. Faculty constitute 78 percent (N=103) of the sample of self-selected respondents and include tenured, tenure track, instructors and Visiting Assistant Professors (VAP). Administrators and staff consisted of 12 respondents in each category making up the additional 18 percent of the sample. There were 5 respondents or 4 percent who were unsure of their classification.

SECTION I

On the positive side, most respondents indicated that they understood their role in the mission of MSU, that they had adequate training to do their job and that they had productive interactions with their co-workers, supervisors and colleagues in other areas. About two-thirds said that they could disagree with their supervisor without fearing intimidation and/or reprisals. Finally, respondents expressed satisfaction with sick leave, vacation accrual, health insurance, holiday and university closures, life insurance, retirement options and tuition waivers compared to other employers.

Respondents were split in their satisfaction with vision insurance and the dental insurance policy. They were also split over whether they had adequate resources to do their jobs and over the adequate communication of policy, benefit and employment-related information. They were also split over whether the workload was evenly distributed across all personnel in their unit.

However, at least 70 percent or more of the respondents were dissatisfied (disagree or strongly disagree) that vacancies were being filled in a timely manner. Only 10 percent of all respondents agreed that vacancies in their unit were being filled in a timely manner. Moreover, 69 percent were dissatisfied regarding having adequate personnel in their work area to accomplish tasks. Most respondents (74 percent) said they worked during their paid time off. And while slightly over half of all the respondents (53 percent) indicated that professional development opportunities were available to them, about half of them (46 percent) also indicated their disagreement to some extent that they had opportunities for advancement at MSU, with another 26 percent neither agreeing nor disagreeing. One third of respondents also indicated that they were dissatisfied with MSU compared to other employers regarding professional membership opportunities, another third neither agreed nor disagreed.

According to these survey results, the greatest source of dissatisfaction regarded compensation. Approximately three quarters of the respondents disagreed with the statement that they were adequately paid for their work. Only 13 percent of all the respondents agreed with that statement. Moreover, only 5 percent of the respondents agreed that "adequate annual raises are built into the budgeting process," while an overwhelming 90 percent disagreed with that statement (73 percent of which strongly disagreed). Finally, more respondents than not (40 percent versus 30 percent) disagreed to some extent that MSU is heading in an upward direction. The remaining 30 percent neither agreed or disagreed.

Neutral Responses

For some items, a neutral response indicating "neither agree nor disagree" was the modal response. This occurred for the following statements:

"MSU is heading in an upward direction." (30 percent)

"I have opportunities for advancement at MSU." (very slight at 26 percent)

"Comparing MSU to other employers, I am satisfied with professional membership opportunities." (34 percent)

A neutral response could reflect a respondent's lack of knowledge and/or a state of confusion or that the topic is currently irrelevant to that respondent or the experience with it is now forgotten and no longer important to them.

SECTION II

Staff, Faculty and Chairs/Associate Deans

In this section, respondents were split between faculty, staff and administrators. Staff were asked questions about following policies, the practice of fair employee treatment, adequate communication, cooperation development and complaint resolution. They were also asked about their direct supervisor being accountable and holding others accountable, fair workload assignments, creating an open, honest, cooperative and productive work environment, involvement in the decision-making process, communicating objectives and planning and working toward consensus. All in all, most all of the staff respondents indicated that they agreed with positive statements about their workplace and their direct supervisors.

Faculty

Faculty Response about Chairs and Associate Deans

Faculty were asked about contact with and for an evaluation of their Chairs/Associate Deans, their Deans and the Provost. Just over half the faculty responding reported that they had contact with their Chair or Associate Dean during the past year either weekly (25 times or more) or frequently (13 – 24 times) while another 31 percent had contact monthly (4 to 12 times).

On the positive side, regarding their Chair or Associate Dean, most faculty respondents indicated their agreement that their Chair or Associate Dean is candid (71 percent), communicates with faculty/staff in a timely manner (71 percent), listens to employees in their reporting department(s) (76 percent) and listens attentively and with empathy to concerns expressed by others (69 percent). They also, agreed to some extent that their Chair or Associate Dean ensures that their faculty/staff have the resources, information, authority and support needed to achieve job duties (70 percent), although 24 percent of faculty respondents did disagree with that statement.

About two thirds of faculty respondents, indicated that their Chair or Associate Dean did a good job of planning (62 percent) with 25 percent disagreeing to some extent. Faculty respondents demonstrated similar levels of agreement regarding Chairs/Associate Deans creating an environment so that others would have appropriate access to useful information (61 percent) and fostering an environment of open honest and respectful discussion of all issues (61 percent). At least 20 percent of respondents disagreed with both of these statement to some extent.

Slightly fewer faculty respondents agreed with statements about their Chair/Associate Dean working with other areas to maximize resources (57 percent) with 17 percent disagreeing to some extent and their Chair/Associate Dean involving appropriate persons in a decision-making process (58 percent) with 25 percent of faculty respondents disagreeing to some extent.

About half of all faculty respondents indicated that their Chair/Associate Dean copes with conflicting requirements of multiple constituencies (55 percent) with almost a quarter (26 percent) disagreeing and 53 percent agreed that their Chair/Associate Dean creates a climate in which faculty/staff are encouraged to learn, with 20 percent disagreeing.

Similarly, 55 percent also indicated that their Chair/Associate Dean had a clear vision for the unit, 53 percent indicated that their Chair or Associate Dean is accountable and ensures accountability in others for achieving results and closer to half (51 percent) of faculty respondents agreed that their Chair/Associate Dean advocates for faculty/staff needs in their area (51 percent). However, almost one-third of the faculty respondents (30 percent) disagreed to some extent with both of these statements. Moreover, only 43 percent agreed that their Chair/Associate Dean has long range vision, thinks and plans beyond year-to-year operations. (43 percent) with one-third (34 percent) disagreeing to some extent.

It is noteworthy that more faculty respond favorably to more generalized statements about Chairs/ Associate Deans listening and communicating with their faculty. However, when similar statements are presented to respondents with more specificity, there is more disagreement and, therefore, more disapproval in their evaluation of their Chairs or Associate

Deans. This sequence of statements and the corresponding percentages of agreement and disagreement demonstrates what the chairs do well, but also areas of with room for improvement. This pattern also suggests that there is a significant number of faculty who may have become marginalized by their immediate leadership.

<u>Faculty Response about Deans and Provost</u>
Faculty were also asked to agree or disagree with statements about their Deans and the Provost. On the positive side, faculty respondents reported that their Dean communicates with faculty and staff in a timely manner (63 percent), is candid (58 percent) and listens to employees (56 percent). About half reported that their Dean listens attentively and with empathy to concerns expressed by others and fosters an environment of open, honest and respectful discussion of all issues.

However, over half of the faculty respondents reported that they rarely had contact with their Dean (0 – 3 times), while one third said they had monthly contact (4 – 12 times). It is not surprising then that many faculty respondents had little knowledge about what the Dean actually does based on the frequency of "neither agree nor disagree" responses in this section of the survey. In 12 out of 16 total statements about their Deans, faculty respondents indicated neither agreement nor disagreement most often than any other response making this the modal response in the following statements:

Is accountable and ensures accountability in others for achieving results (43 percent).

Works with other areas to maximize resources (42 percent).

Involves appropriate persons in a decision-making process (37 percent).

Reflects an ability to cope with conflicting requirements of multiple constituencies (37 percent).

Does a good job of planning (36 percent).

Creates a climate in which faculty and staff are encouraged to learn (36 percent).

Creates an environment that ensures others have appropriate access to information which may be useful (35 percent).

Listens attentively and with empathy to concerns expressed by others (35 percent).

Effectively advocates for the needs of their faculty and staff (33 percent).

Has a long range vision, thinks and plans beyond year to year operations (33 percent).

Fosters an environment of open, honest and respectful discussion of all issues (31 percent).

Articulates a clear vision for the college or school (28 percent).

Regarding the last statement about the Dean articulating a clear vision for their college, faculty respondents were otherwise split over agreeing or disagreeing with this statement about their Dean. This could possibly reflect a divided awareness among those faculty in their schools and/or colleges.

Regarding the Provost, faculty respondents indicated generally agreement favorably toward similar statements as with the Deans. On the positive side faculty respondents agreed that the Provosts listens and communicates in a timely manner, while disagreeing in appreciable numbers (more than one-third) regarding the effective hiring of faculty and staff. Moreover, in every one of the 31 statements about the Provost, the majority of faculty respondents chose the "neither agree nor disagree" response. In 26 of those responses, the neutral response category was more frequent than either of the agree or disagree categories combined making that response the most often chosen response. By comparison, the neutral response was even more pronounced when faculty responded to statements about the Provost than when they did so about their Deans.

Chairs and Associate Deans

Chairs and Associate Deans were asked about their Deans and the VP for Academic Affairs with whom most all reported having weekly to monthly contact. These topics were about their supervisors' (Deans and Provost/EVPAA) ability to listen and communicate with employees, fair treatment of employees, even distribution of workload, planning and decision-making, effective hiring, evaluation of faculty and staff, conflict resolution, relationships across campus and

resource maximization, the environment they create and the image they convey to local communities. Similar to the staff respondents, with one or two occasional exceptions most all Chairs and Associate Deans agreed positively with these statements about their Deans and the Provost.

Section III

Toward the end of the survey all respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement to five more general statements about the university and their work. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed to some extent that their work at MSU is important (96 percent) and that they liked the people with whom they worked (83 percent). However, about two-thirds (67 percent) agreed that they looked forward coming to work and slightly less than half of all respondents (48 percent) said they felt their work at MSU was valued. Another 44 percent of respondents disagreed with that statement. Finally, respondents were almost evenly split when agreeing (41 percent) or disagreeing (39 percent) about whether they would recommend MSU as an employer to their family or friends.

Section IV

This is the open-ended question section of the survey during which respondents were asked five questions and then asked to provide one-word responses to two more questions. The first question was **"What do you appreciate the most about working for MSU?"** (N=82) The most frequently occurring response was the faculty's commitment to teaching and student learning followed by faculty and staff's commitment to shared governance, academic freedom and the flexibility inherent in a faculty position along with supportive staff and supervisors. These sentiments were expressed directly in the following responses:

"I appreciate the commitment of my colleagues, who are professionals dedicated to educating MSU students no matter what challenges we face (economic, pandemic, etc.). I appreciate the opportunity to work with faculty, staff, and administration on shared governance (this year's Faculty Senate and Staff Congress have been especially effective in working together and meeting regularly)."

And from others:

"My direct supervisor and my unit. MSU administration beyond my supervisor level makes it difficult to work here."

"My colleagues, students and department chair are a pleasure to work with. They counterbalance the aspects of the job that I loathe."

"I appreciate that in my particular circumstance I have the freedom to set my own goals and priorities and shape my workday to conform with them rather than having a daily grind largely dictated by others. I recognize that not everyone (even at MSU) enjoys this level of freedom."
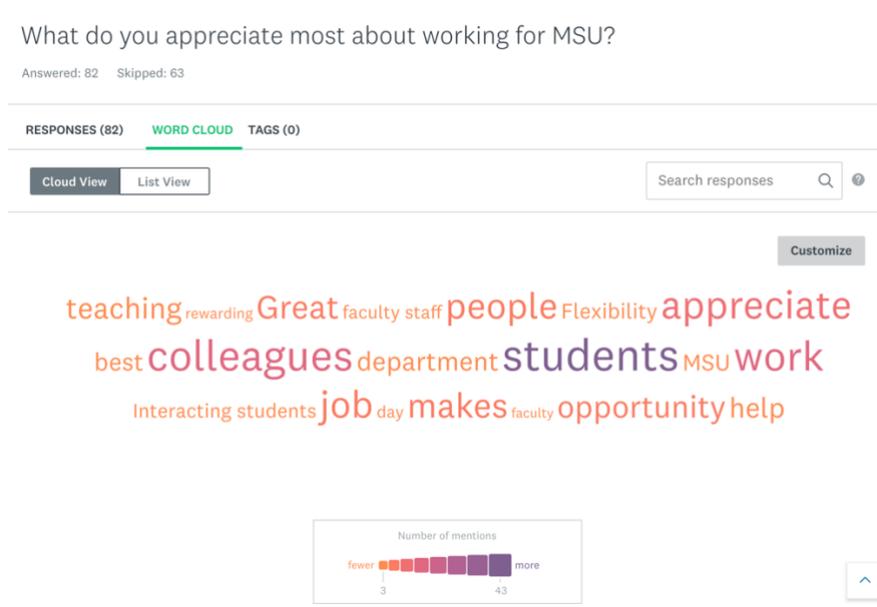
Graphic 1: Wordle depicting the most often cited words to "What do you appreciate most about working for MSU?"

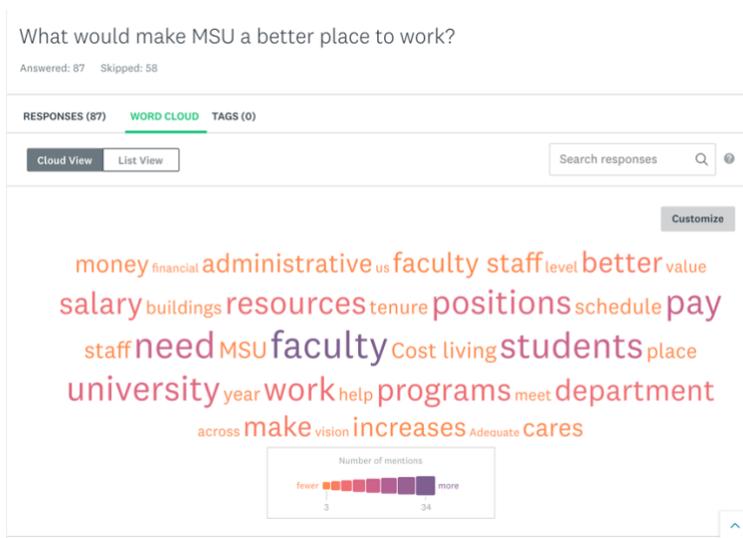The second question was: ***"What would make MSU a better place to work?"*** (N=87) The most frequently occurring responses were to increase salaries for faculty and staff, hire more support staff and tenure-track faculty and improve shared governance by increasing administrative transparency and faculty/staff input into decisions-making that would affect their working lives. It was noted by several respondents that communication between the administration and faculty/staff is poor and that some employees enjoy special treatment at the expense of others. This speaks to policy being applied and applied evenly across campus to all who work at MSU for greater and more even-handed accountability. Another frequent comment was about the lack of any vision or long-range planning at MSU. These sentiments were captured in the following direct responses:

"Adequate financial compensation. A culture of trust and respect in which shared governance is a priority. Tenure-track faculty positions need to be filled in a timely manner. I rated my supervisors as not having vision not because I don't believe they can create a vision for our department and college, but because they are unable to work towards a vision when we are struggling to get through the day-to-day operations. Our department is in desperate need of a full-time ADS, and other departments are in the same boat. We are not able to focus on vision and moving forward when we are constantly cleaning up problems and struggling through daily operations."

And another:

"The easy things would make MSU a better place. 1) Valuing junior faculty by abiding by workload expectation, the PAC code of conduct, and supporting research opportunities 2) allowing for basic building upkeep to keep us safe and provide a place for education. 3) Providing basic advertisement and coordinating marketing teams for recruitment. As a follow-up the department orientation/faculty mentorship programs have been defunct for so long and the faculty turn-over rate is so high, basic understanding of PAC, department bi-laws, job expectations, and daily running policies is none existent."

Graphic 2: Wordle depicting the most often cited words to "What would make MSU a better place to work"

The third question asked: **"Briefly describe over the last three years revisions to MSU policies and procedures have impacted you."** (N=66) Two common responses emerged among responses to this question. The first was that policies currently in place were not being followed to the detriment of faculty and staff and that their selective use had resulted in the departure of contributing and vital faculty and staff. These failures of proper policy implementation have created more work and put greater pressure on those employees willing to go the extra distance to see that goals are met. The second issue identified by those responding to this question involved two newer administrative initiatives, namely fractionalization of staff and the hiring of Visiting Associate Professors. Several respondents complained that adding to staff members' workload due to fractionalization had been destructive for their unit. The other complaint was a promise made to VAPs about being offered tenure-track jobs had been broken. The following direct comments support these statements:

"I have gone from having hope for the future of the university to near nihilism. What's the point of "updating" or "revising" policies if no one follows them and if every "plan" we have for every new problem/issue is "check with your supervisor"?"

And another:

"The lack of adherence to existing policy is perhaps more impactful than anything. Fractional loads did profound damage to my unit. A little bit of honesty from the top about that fact would be appreciated."

And another:

"The increase in the use of instructors, the increase in faculty members teaching outside their area of expertise, and the appalling diminution of research have made me feel like I am teaching at a high school."

And another:

"In visiting positions, the policies are not adequately communicated and defined for me. When I asked for clarification about one of the PAC documents, the associate dean of my area literally said "no one gives a shit about those." I am assigned a teaching overload every year (one semester as much as 20 cr hours!) and am not able to ask for a reduction because I am in a visiting position."

Several more respondents depicted the problem as:

"The president seems to think that a widget can fit in any peg. There is no respect for expertise or competence. Sycophants are running the show."

And another:

"MSU leadership does not seem to have an interest in filling positions, and then all of the duties of the unfilled positions fall to one person. There is ZERO accountability for any person I have come into contact with, either in a management or faculty position. The department is literally a "inmates running the asylum" situation."

And finally, one respondent supplied a possible solution:

"Faculty are powerful if they use the power. It appears to me that we continue to give up power at the suggestion of the administration. I have voted against several policy changes that do just that. Apparently, others were not as thoughtful in their consideration of the meanings of such changes. Most of these changes have not impacted me yet, but I anticipate they will."

The fourth question asked respondents to **"describe a time when you felt valued at MSU."** (N=74). Most respondents reported that they felt valued when they received positive feedback from supervisors after doing extra work, when they received awards or some other form of recognition for their service or when students expressed their appreciation in student evaluations or some other manner. Other respondents reported that they felt valued some time ago, such as when they last received a salary raise or they were hired. The following quotes support these statements:

"That time occurred several years ago when I received a large salary raise. Other times have been when students told me that I made big difference in their professional lives by helping them reach their career goals."

And:

"When I got large raises in the 90s and early 2000s. When scholarship was rewarded and supported. When we were allowed to hold students to high standards."

And another:

"I felt valued when I was hired. There seemed to be appreciation for my education and practical experience as well as what that would bring to the classroom."

Conversely, the fifth open-ended question asked respondents to ***"describe at time that you did not feel valued at MSU."*** (N=72). While some respondents answered this question when responding to the previous question, many direct responses

to this question included not feeling valued during the furlough, upon receipt of every paycheck, when being given more responsibility for the same compensation, working in an unhealthy and unrepaired building, when not being asked for input into decisions about resources and planning that affecting them. Several respondents said they did not feel valued "every day." Several others said that as members of Faculty Senate they felt ignored and devalued by the administration. For example, as one respondent put it:

"Every time I am asked to serve on a committee, told my work is valued/important, and then the institution goes through a fiction of consensus or collaboration all to arrive at the decision a high-ranking administrator wanted. I have been on searches where the committee is a smoke screen for an administrator's personal preference; I have been in benefits meetings where the HR director stalls and delays simple information; I have been told I need to "know my place" when I have asked relevant questions; and I have seen the work of both constituency bodies on campus ignored and actively undermined by the highest levels of administration."

The sixth open-ended question asked respondents to *"list three to five words that represent your perspective of MSU."* The responses presented as both positive and negative sentiments regarding MSU. As no list was presented for selection, all words cited for both questions were entered to create a visual sentiment. The three to five words list emphasizes the sentiment that faculty and staff perceive that they are overworked, experience austerity, and that employees are underpaid.

Graphic 3: Wordle depicting the most often cited words to "List three to five words that represent your perspective of MSU"

Question 7, *"list one word that is your top descriptor of MSU,"* elicited numerous responses not cited in question 6. Again, all words listed in response were entered to create a visual. The top response, *opportunity,* along with other words such as *family, potential, and tired,* create a visual with positive overtones while cautioning that rest and reward should be offered to optimal conditions. Other one-word descriptions, cited in many different kinds of ways such as *austerity-obsessed, uncommunicative, tiring, no leadership, and lacking progressivism*, indicate that while faculty and staff hold dear their affiliation with MSU, it has become in some respects a pedantic exercise in frustration.

Graphic 4: Wordle depicting the most often cited words to "List one word that is your top descriptor of MSU"

SUMMARY and RECOMMENDATIONS

Positive aspects of MSU climate were noted throughout this survey. Most respondents indicated that they understood their role in the mission of MSU, that they had adequate training to do their job and that they had productive interactions with their co-workers, supervisors and colleagues in other areas. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed to some extent that their work at MSU is important (96 percent) and that they liked the people with whom they worked (83 percent). In response to Chair or Associate Dean questions, most faculty respondents indicated agreement that their Chair or Associate Dean is candid (71 percent), communicates with faculty/staff in a timely manner (71 percent), listens to employees in their reporting department(s) (76 percent), listens attentively and with empathy to concerns expressed by others (69 percent), and ensures that their faculty/staff have the resources, information, authority and support needed to achieve job duties (70 percent).

Negative aspects of MSU climate were noted in several specific areas throughout this survey. It should be noted that faculty disagreed with more specific questions regarding Chair/Associate Dean communication. This pattern also suggests that there is a significant number of faculty who may have become marginalized by their immediate leadership. At least 70 percent or more of the respondents were dissatisfied (disagree or strongly disagree) that vacancies were being filled in a timely manner. Only 10 percent of all respondents agreed that vacancies in their unit were being filled in a timely manner. Moreover, 69 percent were dissatisfied regarding having adequate personnel in their work area to accomplish tasks. Most respondents (74 percent) said they worked during their paid time off, and about half of them (46 percent) indicated their disagreement that they had opportunities for advancement at MSU. Slightly less than half of all respondents (48 percent) said they felt their work at MSU was valued. Another 44 percent of respondents disagreed with that statement.

According to aggregate survey results, the greatest source of dissatisfaction was compensation, followed closely by lack of adequate faculty, and lack of shared governance. Approximately three quarters of the respondents disagreed with the statement that they were adequately paid for their work. Only 5 percent of the respondents agreed that "adequate annual raises are built into the budgeting process," while an overwhelming 90 percent disagreed with that statement (73 percent of which strongly disagreed). The open-ended response questions clearly cited lack of hiring tenure-track faculty as a

source of dissatisfaction. Some responses appeared to indicate that programs had significantly suffered due to lack of tenure-track hiring and retention. A distinct lack of shared governance was cited in several open-ended responses. Faculty expressed disenfranchisement by the administrative structure which includes Chairs/ Associate Deans, Deans, Provost, and President.

While there are positives at MSU, the negatives may more clearly and immediately affect our academic programs. An academic program thrives in an environment of research and scholarship. Programs must have adequate faculty (tenure-track and/or tenured faculty) to address programmatic integrity as well as participate in an informed academic culture driven by scholarship and research practices (including internships, undergraduate research, and graduate programming). A university must financially support their faculty in order to attract, and retain, quality tenure-track candidates. Faculty clearly love their students, but at the end of the day, bills must be paid. Offering competitive salaries, at all ranks, would encourage quality applicants and could begin to address lack of adequate tenure-track faculty.

As previously noted, a neutral response often indicates a lack of knowledge about the content of a survey item. Recall that most self-identified faculty reported that they had relatively little or no contact with their Deans and that on three-quarters or slightly more of the items evaluating how Deans and the Provost did their jobs, faculty's modal response was neutral. Taken together these findings demonstrate an existing void between faculty and upper level academic administrators due to a lack of understanding about what administrators do and a lack of communication between the two parties. Clearly, these results support the recommendation to enhance communication between faculty the Deans and the Provost in order to establish shared governance in the process. One helpful initial step could be to determine job descriptions for all academic administrators, namely Department Chairs and Associate Dean; Deans and the Provost.

The lack of shared governance at MSU is a persistent issue. Many have noted it anecdotally and this survey supports the finding that MSU lacks commitment to shared governance. To paraphrase the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), faculty representatives, duly elected and selected through Faculty Senate, should fully participate in curriculum and academic affairs, university operations including selection of administrator search committees and policy formation, and long-term planning including budgets, compensation (salaries, etc.), and hiring/retention of tenure-track faculty. Open-ended responses indicate that faculty value their students and colleagues but that lack of shared governance leading to a "*rudderless*" and "*shambolic*" institution has left faculty disparagingly exhausted. Faculty are ready and willing to work with administrators to create lasting shared governance. A shared governance which would embrace the ideals of higher education would encourage not only quality applicants, but also retain outstanding faculty.

While this survey is an excellent beginning because it has identified areas of weakness and concern in the work climate at Morehead State University, follow up surveys that focus on specific areas for initiating and developing lines of communication between faculty, staff and administrators that establishes and maintains shared governance is imperative. These developments could launch the development and implementation of supervisor evaluations and fair and adequate compensation that become routine. These steps are much more certain toward contributing to the future growth of the university than the path the institution is currently pursuing.