

## **UTRGV Faculty Senate White Paper: The Role of Shared Governance and Servant Leadership in the Emergence of a New University Culture at UTRGV July 10, 2016**

### **Introduction:**

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) opened its doors on August 31, 2015 as a new venture, building on the communities of University of Texas Pan American (UTPA) and University of Texas Brownsville (UTB). It has been an exciting year with increased collaboration between the faculty members of the two campuses and high expectations from students, staff, faculty and community. As the 2015-2016 academic year concludes, it is time to review the year and provide constructive feedback on processes, decisions, and functions to identify improvements that would make the upcoming and subsequent years of the UTRGV transition more efficient and successful.

The faculty acknowledge that the consolidation of UTB and UTPA, as well as the founding of a medical school, were complex. While new endeavors rarely go as planned, there were a number of major issues that interfered with the ability of faculty and staff to perform their responsibilities efficiently, and in some cases properly, in order to fulfill the university's mission in education, scholarship and service. The first semester was fraught with significant glitches such as payroll errors, flawed advising processes, and commencement exercises that were lacking in both pomp and circumstance. The second semester was smoother on the surface; however, major issues continued to permeate the campuses which need to be addressed if UTRGV is to flourish and succeed and become the educational institution that is to "transform" the Rio Grande Valley and "inspire the world."

Overall, concerns by the faculty and staff can be grouped into the following categories (See sections 2 and 3 of this document):

- Leadership and Shared Governance Issues
  - Communication with Faculty, Staff, & Students of the UTRGV Community
  - Leadership Behaviors and Messages
  - Transparency and Trust Issues
  - Campus Culture and Environment
- Administrative Processes that Impede Efficiency and Productivity of Faculty and Staff

In an effort to partner with the UTRGV administration and in the spirit of joining together to ensure the success of the University as a whole, the Faculty Senate presents this White Paper with the expectation that we will all work together as full partners in the creation of a truly new University, one embodying a culture of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977/2002), transparency, true mutual respect, and vibrant shared governance (UTSFAC White Paper Executive Summary, April 8, 2016; hereafter, UTSFAC, 2016).

### Data Collection

The Faculty Senate initiated its data collection after Founding President of UTRGV, Dr. Guy Bailey issued a call for various constituencies, including the Faculty Senate, to identify “Issues/Concerns and Recommendations Regarding Processes that Impact Teaching, Research/Scholarship and/or Service.” That charge was first discussed by the Senate at its December 4, 2015 meeting. This White Paper is the response to this charge and other concerns that were identified during the year.

Data gathering for this section of the White Paper consisted of Senators consulting with their departments and soliciting input and feedback from faculty and staff. Face to face meetings, interviews, and telephone interviews were also conducted with staff, faculty and some administrators over the course of the spring semester to gather their perceptions of the issues that needed to be addressed. Finally, additional data from students (undergraduate and graduate) were also collected. These qualitative data were then compiled, to identify the major areas of concern. This White Paper does not include all the concerns that were submitted, but it does strive to present the overarching areas of concern that were identified.

To this end, this White Paper is divided into three sections.

Section 1 presents the underlying values that the Faculty Senate strongly urges UTRGV to adopt. These values are based on the concepts of shared governance (UTSFAC, 2016) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977/2002) We also present guidelines for ethical communication in organizations (Rubin & Yoder, 1985), as well as Peters and Waterman’s (1982) eight characteristics (adapted, where appropriate, to reflect that we are an educational institution) of excellent organizations as behaviors and characteristics we value and believe, when adopted, will lead UTRGV to function at its best.

Section 2 presents the Shared Governance and Leadership Issues that need to be addressed to promote a safe, healthy and productive environment for our campus community to flourish.

Section 3 presents specific feedback about processes that need to be overhauled to facilitate an increase in efficiency and productivity at all campus sites and at all levels.

### **Section 1: Values and Guidelines Recommended for Adoption**

The Faculty Senate at UTRGV is the "voice of the faculty" and an organization dedicated to the principles of **shared governance** (UTS FAC, 2016) and **servant leadership** (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). The Faculty Senate is the elected legislative and deliberative faculty body whose primary purpose is to represent the faculty to the University administration, UT-System administration, the Board of Regents of The University of Texas System, and such other parties

as may be appropriate or necessary. The Faculty Senate reviews and formulates policy and enacts legislation on all matters pertaining to the professional concerns, duties, standards, ethics, responsibilities, privileges, and perquisites of the faculty.

Given the great responsibility to serve as the voice of the faculty, the UTRGV Faculty Senate is committed to following the guidelines for ethical communication (Rubin & Yoder, 1985, pp.1415):

1. *"The habit of search:* Ethical communication willingly explores the complexity of any issue or problem. This exploration requires generating valid information and evaluating new and often controversial findings.
2. *The habit of justice:* Ethical communication presents information as openly and fairly as possible and with concern for message distortion. Not only is information accurate, but information is also parsed for maximum understanding. When we receive and evaluate information, the habit of justice requires that we examine our own evaluation criteria and potential biases that contribute to distortion in meaning.
3. *The habit of public versus private motivations:* Ethical communication is based on sharing sources of information, special opinions, motivations, or biases that may influence our position. Hidden agendas are discouraged for both message senders and receivers.
4. *The habit of respect for dissent:* Ethical communication not only allows but also encourages opposing viewpoints and arguments. The habit of respect for dissent in an open environment supports generation of the best idea say, through thoughtful examination, disagreement, and new idea presentation."

In addition to our commitment to the above guidelines/values for ethical communication, we also promote implementation of the eight cultural themes/values enacted by excellent organizations (Peters & Waterman, 1982). (Please note that themes/values #2 and #6 have been adapted to reflect that we are an educational institution.)

1. *"A bias for action - analyze problems; make decisions; take action;"*
2. *Open communication with all stakeholders (faculty, staff, and students) to provide the best ideas, policies, and processes to serve these constituencies. (adapted from the theme Close to the Customer)*
3. *"Autonomy and entrepreneurship - develop leaders throughout the organization; encourage risk-taking, innovation, and creativity;*
4. *Productivity through people - value employees at all levels; fight against we/they or management versus subordinate attitudes;*
5. *Hands-on, value-driven - adopt values that serve as basis for excellence;"*
6. *Grow areas/programs that are strong; do not over extend or diversify beyond their capacity to provide excellence (adapted from the theme "stick to the knitting");*
7. *"Simple form, lean staff - create and maintained simple infrastructure with minimal top corporate staff;*

8. *Simultaneous loose-tight properties* - Centralize core values; empower de-centralized decision-making; encourage autonomy and entrepreneurship.”

### **Desired Outcomes**

We believe servant leadership, shared governance, the adoption and practice of ethical communication guidelines, and the implementation of behaviors that enact the cultural themes/values will lead to the outcomes desired by the entire UTRGV community:

1. An improved transition experience for students, staff and faculty;
2. The identification and elimination of barriers (structural, procedural and cultural) that impede efficiency, effectiveness and high productivity;
3. Improved communication within the UTRGV community of staff, students, and faculty; and
4. An improved campus culture with a healthy environment for all who work and study at UTRGV.

## **Section 2: Leadership and Shared Governance Issues**

Leadership and Shared Governance were identified as a major area of concern by most respondents. Under this area, we subsumed several related categories of leadership behaviors:

- A. Communication to Faculty, Staff and Students of the UTRGV Community
- B. Leadership Behaviors and Messages
- C. Transparency and Trust Issues
- D. Campus Culture and Environment

Each of these areas of concerns is discussed below; some examples are given, and recommended remedies or changes, **when available**, are provided and explained.

### **A. Communication to Faculty, Staff and Students of the UTRGV Community**

There is wide agreement that UTRGV's communication to the external public is excellent. For example, via the media, we all share in the successes of the University as significant progress continues to be made in developing the School of Medicine. We celebrate the generosity of donors, we applaud the achievements of our colleagues in all areas of accomplishment (teaching, scholarship, community engagement/service), and we commend the UTRGV leadership and the Public Relations Department for their commitment to and their successes in communicating with the stakeholders in our community, as well as in the state and nation.

As was mentioned in a meeting of legacy institution Faculty Senate Executive Committee (FSEC) members with the President and the Provost in September 2015, communication to the internal UTRGV community (staff, faculty and students) is not ideal.

- 1) We need **regular communication from the President** that is supportive and encouraging of the accomplishments of the faculty while directly acknowledging the problems and providing information about what is being done to resolve them.
  - a) In addition, there is a need for the Faculty Senate to have regular meetings with the President so that the Senators can better understand the issues and be actively involved in determining and implementing solutions.
  - b) There is also a need for the FSEC to meet with the Provost monthly before each Faculty Senate meeting.
  - c) The Faculty Senate President or his/her representative should be appointed (as a non-voting *ex officio member* or as a *full member*) of the President's Executive Team. The President's University Council appears to be a programmatic, information sharing body where presenters share information about the accomplishments of their respective units. A seat at the President's Executive Team meetings may be a more appropriate to bring in the faculty's perspective on matters that affect them.

One respondent stated: *"The simplest thing to fix would be for the Provost and the President to dramatically improve their communication to the faculty via email. There have been almost no emails with substantive news from Dr. Bailey, which is poor practice generally, but goes double in a time of major transition."* A regular communique may serve to bridge the chasm that exists between the campus community and the President's Office and other administrative units. At this time, we are aware that one administrator has sent updates throughout the spring about her areas of responsibility, and another administrator sends unofficial summaries of meetings attended. These are both helpful.

c) Direct and timely communication is needed. The faculty in particular would appreciate receiving information about developing situations as a courtesy and as it is necessary to foster efficient fulfillment of their responsibilities. A meeting or an email stating that an important announcement or change is forthcoming is preferable to being informed after the event by the University Marketing Department or by learning about an event in the news. We understand that there is sometimes a need to preserve confidentiality or not “to leak” information to the press; however, there should be a way to keep faculty “in the loop” without breaching confidentiality or making faculty feel peripheral to the functioning of the University.

Moreover, the faculty should be fully and **immediately** informed, after a surprise public announcement is made, about the impact of the event and plans to deal with the repercussions of the event. An example is the recent announcement that the Dean of the School of Medicine is being replaced. Even a week after the announcement, there was no formal communication with the faculty except for a brief message from the Provost that was devoid of any details of specific plans to address the many adverse impacts of the event on the School of Medicine and the University as a whole, and guidance to the faculty on how to deal with the many pressing problems they face as a consequence of the event.

- 2) We need a directory of departments/units and their faculty and staff contact information. It is critically important to have this information by AY 2016-2017, and preferably before.
- 3) We need functioning web sites. We understand IT is not fully staffed, and that is a problem that needs to be resolved. Many IT staff have left for better paying positions. However, we cannot recruit students without a strong website presence. Even the community has shared its frustration about the lack of information currently available.

*“The fact that we are halfway through the Spring semester, and there are almost no departments with working websites makes the entire university look incompetent, starting with the upper administration.” [The Provost and/or President]...need to issue a clear timeline on when departmental websites will be completed.”*

- 4) We need leadership to **acknowledge** “glitches” in a timely fashion instead of ignoring the glitches for weeks and even months. As one faculty member noted, acknowledging that there are problems to be fixed can go a long way toward repairing credibility of the Administration. In this context, it was refreshing to hear Dr. Bailey acknowledge at the meeting with the Faculty Senate on April 26, 2016, that he is aware of many problems, and intends to prioritize and address them in a timely

manner. Moreover, as stated in the Introduction, the Faculty Senate prepared this White Paper in response to Dr. Bailey's request, which was much appreciated by the Faculty Senate. We would like this spirit of acknowledgement to become pervasive, to be openly demonstrated as timely through frequent communication, and to be followed up with timely communication as specific problems are addressed and resolved.

- 5) We need to clarify the role of faculty in the advising process.
  - a) One Dean reportedly told faculty that they are not allowed to advise students. They can only mentor. Such hair-splitting is detrimental to the building of a culture of "*Si, se puede!*" Instead, these instructions foster trepidation when students feel they have to be "sneaky" about visiting with their professors and former advisors.
  
  - b) The Advising Center has yet to call a meeting with former departmental advisors, and the Center has yet to work jointly with the academic units to ensure that students are well advised throughout their academic careers.
  
- 6) The Graduate Student Alliance also identified communication as a major concern. They described problems with work assignments, getting paid, becoming homeless, incurring debt, etc., when they were not told about payroll problems, tuition problems, etc. Some staff also are concerned about insufficient communication.

**Recommendations:**

1. Schedule the President to meet with the Faculty Senate at least once each semester, and more often if he wants to communicate more frequently about specific issues.
  
2. Schedule monthly meetings with the Provost prior to each Faculty Senate meeting.
  
3. Appoint the Faculty Senate President to attend meetings of the President's Executive Team (see page 5).
  
4. Establish a regular and frequent email communication from the President to the other administrative units and the faculty. A suggestion is to have a staff member assigned to help in the task of regular communication, as well as communication in circumstances pertaining to unexpected events.

5. Prepare a clear plan of action prior to public announcements that must be kept confidential in advance, provide that plan of action to faculty (or, if appropriate a subset of faculty), and schedule a meeting with faculty or a subset to enable constructive discussion of the problems created by the event and potential solutions.
6. Prepare a directory of departments/units and their faculty and staff and contact information by August 31, 2016.
7. Develop and communicate a plan and a timeline for completing departmental websites.
8. Acknowledge problems in a timely fashion, communicate plans and timelines for resolving them, and inform the faculty when problems have been solved.
9. Clarify on a University-wide basis the role of faculty in the advising process.
10. Develop and implement a plan for timely communication with students. If a staff member is assigned to this task, he or she would have to maintain close contact with the various administrative units that affect student affairs, and would need to be readily accessible to students for input and questions. This individual would be expected to meet with the Student Government Association at a mutually agreed frequency. A similar plan should be implemented in regard to staff and the Staff Senate.

## **B. Leadership Behaviors and Messages**

Most of the feedback received from faculty and staff and even students indicates that the respondents perceive that **Servant Leadership and Shared Governance** are not being enacted on campus; instead, **Autocratic Leadership** behaviors and messages are being conveyed at multiple levels of the institution (chairs, etc.). Since academic institutions should be the bedrock of our democracy, the perception of an autocratic system instead of shared governance undermines the most fundamental value of the institution.

Overall, the comments from faculty reflect concerns about not being comfortable to openly express ideas at the department level and other levels due to fear of retaliation and fear of being labelled a “troublemaker.” Even mid-management individuals expressed sentiments such as “*I just keep my head down and do my work.*” Disagreeing or debating with Chairs, Deans, etc. is seen as *verboten* even when it is done with the best of intentions. Below are some examples from the data that were gathered.



1) There is “insufficient communication from central administration to faculty. **Decisions are made and policies and procedures are developed and implemented without consultation with the faculty.**” This comment most likely alluded to the development of the HOP/ADM policies that were reviewed by a joint UTPA/UTB committee; however, Administration made substantive changes that were not vetted with this committee prior to being posted on the University website. What was most troubling is that there was no communication about the changes and no documentation (track changes documents) that can be located to verify changes. The Faculty Senate, therefore, continues to review the posted policies and compare them with those versions submitted by the HOP Review Committee to ascertain those that have had **substantive changes** from what was submitted by the representatives of the HOP Review Committee.

- a) **Hiring procedures are highly suspect** with various search committees reporting that they were surprised when searches were abruptly cancelled. An instance of a Chair inserting himself/herself into the search committee process was also reported.
- b) Workload being changed to **5/5** for one-year lecturers when that practice was vehemently opposed for years by a legacy institution for its detrimental impact on both the students and faculty.
- c) Workload for Music Department faculty remains an **unresolved issue** that can be resolved in a positive manner if sufficient resources are committed for **adjunct** faculty appointments. Some faculty in the Music department teach 18-21 units per semester.
- d) The issue of being “**mandated**” to conduct classes at BOTH campuses in ITV (Interactive Television) cases is another situation that leads faculty to question administrative decisions, and to be concerned about the lack of shared governance, and the lack of appropriate vetting of ideas before they are implemented.
- e) There is a concern that SCHs (Semester Credit Hours) are being generated by **overloading online programs** with students and touting the use of coaches. Feedback from students and faculty indicates that they seriously question the value of the coaches, and the quality of their assistance. One MPA program student stated: The faculty are excellent. The coaches are not helpful. (Note: *Some of the above issues could also have been placed under the transparency and trust section of this paper.*)

2) There does not seem to be a systematic understanding of the **role of chairs in facilitating unification and shared governance**. There is a tendency for some chairs to use top down autocratic management techniques, to not support the implementation of shared governance, and to avoid conflict by not calling faculty meetings and not responding to emails.

3) The Chairs are relying on the Deans (most of them new) for leadership and some of them are not interacting effectively with the faculty. There is a need for the Chairs and Deans to engage the faculty in problem-solving dialogues. Faculty currently feel marginalized. One Dean has been rumored to imply: "If you don't like it here, leave." In another example, a Dean told faculty and students that their program is not "first rate." These types of messages do not communicate support, positive leadership or even an attempt to work productively on addressing faculty concerns and on making all aspects of the University first rate.

4) There is a widespread perception by the faculty that this behavior by the Chairs and Deans reflects the leadership at the top, the Provost and the President of the University. Another respondent stated that the campus suffers from a "leadership vacuum at the top of the administration. Absentee President—no effective advocate for the faculty." By "absentee," this respondent was probably referring to the absence of communication from the President.

5) Numerous faculty have commented that meetings are often scheduled when faculty have classes or children to pick up from school. Despite being a **family friendly campus** (ADVANCE grant), meetings seem to be scheduled primarily for the convenience of the administration. There appears to be very little regard for the fact that no travel funding is available for most departments. Some faculty believe that their chair punishes some faculty by scheduling their classes at another campus without regard to the faculty member's needs for research time, lack of resources for mileage reimbursement, etc. These actions communicate that the "family friendly" policies are just "lip service" and not actually practiced, and that there is insufficient respect for the faculty.

6) Several respondents noted that Chairs/Program-and School Directors (hereafter chairs) have varying levels of leadership skills. Several departments report having had only ONE meeting per semester this past academic year. Unification cannot occur by repeatedly stating that we are ONE university DISTRIBUTED on several campuses. (One respondent just recently informed us that his/her department has had NO meetings this year.)

7) Deans/Chairs say that instead of advising, faculty should devote their time to research; however, some Chairs/Directors schedule meetings on short notice that significant travel time or additional child care costs.

8) An example of **staff perceptions** follows: One non-academic department head scheduled a meeting in Harlingen until noon, did not build in time for lunch, and expected his staff to be back at the office at Edinburg by 1:00 even though the travel time was almost an hour. This behavior communicates a lack of planning and **lack of regard for staff**. When asked, the department head reiterated that they must be at their posts by 1:00. Some staff had to eat their lunches while driving back to the office. Others just skipped lunch in order to arrive on time. These types of actions and the disrespectful attitudes that they reflect contribute to low morale and difficulties in retaining staff.

## Recommendations:

1. Provide **leadership training and shared governance training to chairs and deans**. This training will enhance their proficiency in unifying departments, handling conflict, and enacting servant-leadership and shared governance, especially in the critical areas of hiring, tenure and promotion and annual evaluation processes. Administrators should become familiar with the concept of “team of teams.” and the benefits of having individuals who approach problems from different perspectives. It seems too many administrators are afraid of conflict. They do not see the benefits of constructive conflict as a means to create synergy and produce the best ideas for this new University. They, therefore, sometimes forcefully, squelch conflict that then goes unresolved. **The formation of a Council of Chairs may be a vehicle for training and support for the Chairs who have one of the most difficult jobs on campus.**

### Desired Leadership Behaviors

- Open communication
- Transparency regarding budgetary decisions
- Active listening and feedback; commitment to exchanges in which collaboration and compromise occurs to meet needs and goals of all involved
- Sensitivity to needs of student, staff and faculty especially Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs for safety and belongingness (Maslow, 1943)
- Sensitivity to culture
- Problem solving orientation
- Commitment to formulating unification strategies at all levels
- Commitment to procedures that ensure the integrity of process and true proactive faculty consultation (especially in searches, hiring, appointment of chairs and deans, etc.)
- Commitment to building trust
- Commitment to setting reasonable timelines with departmental/college policy formulation
- Commitment to prioritizing needs based on sustaining and remediating current programs that have fallen behind based on 2008 cuts (program development should be strategic)
- Commitment (not just lip service) to honoring the contributions of the legacy institutions while building for the future
- Willingness to examine the assumptions under which we operate, acknowledge flawed premises and tweak them so that the goals are achievable. Buzz words aside, how can we enact a new university in a proactive way?

- Commitment to promoting consensus in departmental decision-making

2. Establish and implement a **“unification strategy”** for departments and for the Colleges/Schools/Units. There needs to be a coordinated, strategically planned effort in every department/unit that has faculty/staff on more than one campus. Recent feedback indicates that at least one department and one unit appear to be making positive efforts to unify the faculty/staff. Central administration needs to ensure that such efforts are initiated in all departments and units.

3. Establish a system of **University Ombudspersons** for faculty, staff and students. The Faculty Senate specifically supports creating two University Ombudsperson positions for the Brownsville and Edinburg campuses; the Brownsville position could also support the Harlingen campus. Many issues may be resolved by utilizing the services of either retired faculty members with high credibility who are employed to serve as ombudspersons or the services of a current faculty member who receives a stipend and release time to perform this role. There are several models that exist within the UT System and elsewhere. The Faculty Senate supports the University of Texas model of an Ombudsperson for faculty, staff and students. A proposal for faculty Ombudsmen has been developed by the Faculty Senate.

### **C. Transparency and Trust Issues**

The transparency and trust issues are integrally connected to the other three areas described in Section 2.

#### **Transparency Issues:**

- 1) Transparency about how money is being spent is at the forefront of the transparency issues. The following quote reflects a majority of the concerns voiced about financial transparency: *“Where is all the money? There are not enough support staff, not enough student workers and faculty are paying for supplies for their classrooms. When does that stop?”*
- 2) Another obviously frustrated respondent stated: [The Administration is] “making excuses about withholding pay equity studies” referring to the Huron Report and not the gender equity portion of that report. Several respondents believe that the use of “strategic ambiguity” when talking about the report and focusing on the gender equity issues is disingenuous.

Another respondent stated:

- 3) *"[The] President's commitment to 'developing a merit policy that rewards our exceptional faculty and staff' along with his pledge to 'set aside dollars for creating a more competitive salary structure' rings hollow. We already have a merit policy that rewards faculty, but it hasn't been funded in years!"*

Overall, the concern about **compensation** is one that is shared by faculty and staff. One of the overall perceptions is that many faculty and staff are performing much more work (up to 4575%) than before (including long hours that are uncompensated by overtime pay for students who are limited to being paid for a maximum of 19 hours per week) and employees who only "clock" the allowed 40 hours a week when in reality, they do not take lunch breaks, they rarely take their 15 minute breaks; they are fearful of being away from their desks because they have no work study or other clerical assistants to "cover" for them. This culture has been in effect for years at the UTPA legacy institution. It continues in many departments where resources are limited and graduate students are just happy to have some type of employment.

Faculty believe that the new administration is exacerbating the current salary inversion/compression and not taking the **contributions of current faculty and staff** into account. Their feelings were summed up by the term: "indentured servitude." There appears to be widespread cynicism that the Administration will provide a minimal raise to faculty and staff while continuing its practice of hiring administrators at very high salaries to the detriment of the salaries of existing UTRGV employees.

**Trust Issues:** There were various other situations brought up that have to do with overall administration, the curriculum, and hiring and other processes. The faculty comments below illustrate these concerns:

- 4) *"The transition to a new university created (was used to create) a sense of crisis that allowed the university administration to do a lot of things that ordinarily would not be acceptable. Every problem has been excused due to a time crunch (such as having to do a year's work in a month's time). This is understandable but has gone too far. There comes a point where we have to do things the right way."*
- 5) *"Changing of the curriculum, advising, creating paths to degree, and many academic aspects did not have adequate faculty involvement. Changes in advising have been especially terrible and continue to affect students very much...."*
- 6) In addition, others question what the **Administrative Cost Ratio** (information reported to the state) is and the hiring processes for administrators: "The administration has created a bloated and expensive bureaucracy. Not only does this siphon resources from the actual mission of the university, the need of these bureaucrats to rationalize their positions provides a strong incentive for them to **insert themselves in the teaching and learning**

**activities of the faculty and students in non-productive ways.” This concern also applies to administration and management of research activities.**

- 7) *“There is a critical need for true transparency and real faculty autonomy. It seems administration does not trust the faculty and, partly as a result, the faculty do not trust the administration.”*
- 8) *“Faculty Governance- again, administration calls for faculty input on questions seems disingenuous. The calls are often made at the last minute, resulting in limited participation and when faculty do participate, the perception is their views are generally ignored.”*  
One faculty member remarked that he assumed that we lived in a democracy, but that faculty votes are ignored when choosing department leaders.
- 9) *Curricular issues: “[The] Provost’s office has effectively stripped control over the curriculum from the faculty. “[The] Curriculum belongs to the faculty.”*
- 10) *Academic Affairs: “It is unclear what the Provost’s office really wants. They want strategic plans aligned with UTRGV’s guiding principles, a revamped curriculum which they then refuse to implement, new proposals for graduate programs, strategic hiring plans, strategic growth plans, website content. When all this is done, it seems to disappear into an administrative vacuum.”*
- 11) The exceptions to this rule are programs/initiatives that are chosen projects of specific administrative incumbents. For example, the “Disaster Studies” program went from inception to implementation in less than two years. Contrast this with the proposed PhD in Psychology which has been percolating for more than 15 years.
- 12) We were told repeatedly by the Administration that OYAs (one year appointments) would be replaced by 3 year lines, but as far as I can tell the, the required 3 year lines have not been granted.
- 13) We were told that all Lecturers would be on a 4-4 rather than a 5-5 teaching load, but the “policy” now seems less than clear with some OYAs on a 4-4 and some on a 5-5. For the sake of quality, we need to adhere to the 4-4 teaching load.
- 14) The process for hiring OYAs is too late in the year and not in line with other UT institutions. We cannot trust verbal indications that there will be a position for the following academic year.
- 15) Multiple searches were initiated over the last two years, only to receive poor timing, inadequate funds to advertise, rejections of searches that have been conducted for unclear reasons, etc. This has led to several good candidates not being able to be hired after the process began. This squanders faculty time, resources, and does not enhance the

University's reputation. Several faculty and lecturers have expressed concern that they received vague promises that jobs would open that they could apply for; however, these "promises" never materialized or job searches were cancelled, and these individuals were forced to seek employment outside the Rio Grande Valley.

#### **Recommendations:**

- a. Provide **leadership training and shared governance training to administrators.** *"They need to lead by Inspiration and not by Intimidation." "Open, honest, humble communication goes a long way in establishing trust." "Transparency in decision-making helps ameliorate the rumors/stories that circulate when decisions are not explained."*
- b. Address the specific examples provided above in open discussion with the Faculty Senate Executive Committee. Resolutions of the issues can be presented to the full Faculty Senate and to the faculty by the Executive Committee, by representatives of the Administration, and by email and other mechanisms, as is judged appropriate for each issue.

#### **D. Campus Culture and Environment**

Our data indicate that the "culture of fear" is pervasive. Most respondents indicated that the source of the fear stems from various levels of the Administration, including the President's and the Provost's levels. However, there were also respondents who indicated that Chairs and Deans are complicit in suppressing open discussions that deal with potentially "contentious" issues, and therefore, they contribute to the fear experienced by faculty members. The Culture and Environment issues are strongly related to Transparency and Trust as well as to Leadership and Lack of Shared Governance.

Many respondents expressed a substantial **fear of retaliation** if the concerns they raised were attributed back to them. There is fear that their emails are being monitored. There is greater fear among the staff who do not have the protection of tenure afforded to tenured faculty, and among tenure track faculty who do not yet have tenure.

**Lecturers** are well aware of their tenuous positions and report keeping silent for fear of jeopardizing their positions. In some departments, Lecturers mentioned voting with their administrator for fear that not doing so would jeopardize their future employment. Concurrently, some tenured faculty who believe in affording Lecturers the same privileges as tenure track and tenured faculty (voting) expressed fear that as the number of Lecturers increase, they may exercise an **undue influence** on curriculum, hiring, etc. or the "Chair's pet projects." Those issues need to be discussed openly and addressed in an equitable manner so as not to disenfranchise members of the faculty while still making sure that the integrity of our academic programs is not compromised.

Below are some observations and comments collected from a variety of employees at many levels of the organization:

1) **From Tenure Track Faculty:** Tenure track faculty do not believe they are getting the clarity they need about tenure and promotion, annual evaluation and other critical policies. There was a lot of pressure during the Fall 2015 semester to get these policies done quickly. Then there seemed to be a lull as chairs and faculty realized that these processes could not be rushed. Currently, some faculty are reporting that they have been told by their administration that these policies must be worked on during the summer, even when many individuals are not officially “working” or being compensated. There is fear that policies will be passed and put into effect without widespread faculty input or influence. Currently, the main question is: If a department has not yet voted on changes proposed by the Dean of the College, as per policy and previous practice, should votes taken in Fall 2016 not take effect until Fall 2018 to allow for the requisite 2-year waiting period? **We recommend that this question be answered by the Administration in the affirmative.**

***We recommend that tenure track faculty appointed prior to September 1, 2016 be evaluated under the policies in place prior to the consolidation. Changing “horses in midstream” is not seen as conducive to retaining faculty who were caught in the torrent of change, especially over the last two years.***

2) **Hiring:** There is fear the “patron” system has returned to the University where patronage determines who gets plum (and even not so plum) positions without regard for qualifications and EEOC/AA laws. There is widespread belief that individuals are hired who will be “sycophants” and “yes men/women” as opposed to individuals who are critical thinkers/independent thinkers. As the University, we should be the models of democracy, not models of oligarchical leadership.

3) **Faculty Role.** There is fear that the **faculty role** as described in Regents Rule 40101(Faculty Role in Educational Policy Formation, “...the faculties of the institutions regularly offering instruction shall have a major role in the governance of their respective institutions.”) and Regents Rule 20201:4.9 (which states that the institution’s President has the responsibility to ensure that RR 40101 is honored) have been violated and will continue to be ignored.

This was an especially strong perception by some faculty on the curriculum committee for the Core. Confidence in having a process with integrity may have been eroded based on actions of the Deputy Provost who allegedly overturned the recommendations of a curriculum review committee and denied core courses that the committee had approved. (**Update:** The THECB has rejected courses that were to be re-submitted by July 8<sup>th</sup>.)



4) **Power of Assistant Deans.** Decisions with regard to **searches** to fill **faculty positions** appear to be made by Assistant Deans, who may lack sufficient knowledge of faculty roles and responsibilities. This concern includes the allocation of funds to the budgets for faculty searches, which are often inadequate. This creates problems for Chairs and the faculty search committees. Both faculty and staff have stated that Assistant Deans have **“too much power;” “create obstacles to smooth processes;” “are overburdened with responsibilities regarding faculty searches;” and that the Assistant Dean positions are “overly centralized” with responsibilities that belong to the department faculty and their Chairs.**

Several “admins” (administrative assistants) report feeling that they have to keep quiet because they may be labelled a “squeaky wheel” who is a troublemaker. These “admins” all seemed to indicate that they “just want to be able to do their jobs” but that even when they ask questions they have to tiptoe carefully in an effort not to anger the Dean’s staff (i.e., Assistant Deans).

5) **Accessibility of Budget/Financial Information.** In many instances, it is impossible to obtain this information. This is a comment from Administrative Assistants, Chairs, faculty and many others. Chairs, faculty and support staff cannot effectively manage institutional and grant budgets without having access to expenditures, obligations, and funds remaining in each budget category.

6) **Fear of Financial Improprieties.** There is fear that the financial resources have been largely committed to administrative hires and that is why raises are anticipated to be **minimal**. This is especially disheartening for individuals who have been routinely doing the work of multiple staff (e.g., custodians, support staff, and even some mid-level management personnel). One individual stated: *“Those who could raid the till did so while the getting was good.”*

7) **Need for Healing.** *“Reorganizing and renaming of departments did not have adequate faculty input. Faculty felt disenfranchised by many of these changes. A climate of fear and anxiety among faculty has made people concerned about retaliation as well. (A related issue is that I perceive that some faculty have responded to changes by doing less service and engaging less on campus. We need to bring healing back to our [university] community so that people feel part of a team and a shared vision and will be able to do their part. I understand faculty being critical, but they also need to participate and help. If faculty do not have the will, authority, or resources to do more, then administration fills the gap and does things without faculty involvement. “*

8) **Faculty Disengagement.** Many faculty members are sufficiently disillusioned and disheartened that they are difficult to mobilize for many training efforts. *“Faculty MUST be shown and led to FEEL like they are an important, integral part of the institution. Talk is cheap.”*

9.) **Lecturers.** Pay is inverted by newly hired lecturers. They have limits on summer courses. They are *“caught in an economic vise.”*

10) **Fear of Job Loss.** The fear that people just “disappear” and there is no “due process” when they no longer have their jobs. We understand that personnel issues are delicate and subject to privacy laws. However, many staff and some faculty, especially lecturers and tenure track faculty, are especially fearful of speaking out about issues (even minor ones) for fear of losing their livelihood.

11) **Legacy Institution Process Issues:** There is lingering resentment and suspicion about the Phase I, II, etc. processes as well as lingering feelings about the RIF (Reduction in Force) and the loss of jobs at the legacy institutions.

12) **From custodians.** They fear losing their jobs while trying to accomplish the work of over 60 custodians with about 37 current custodians. They are also unhappy that the night shift has been changed from 6 p.m. -2 a.m. to 6 p.m. – 3 a.m. A supervisor, who has since left the university, allegedly told them that they had been out of compliance with the old schedule and therefore, they had been “stealing” time from the University.

They were not happy with that characterization since they believe they work hard and try to do their work professionally and efficiently. They fear being fired if they are injured or disabled in any way. They comment that cleaning procedures and cleaning products sometimes produce physical stress, headaches, and nausea and heart palpitations. They do not feel these can be reported without risk of losing their jobs.

13) One student government senator stated in regard to advising: We have tried to talk to the Administration, but we have given up. They do not listen to us. The same senator expressed that she/he missed the old advising system and the ability to be advised by faculty members at the department level. However, she/he understood that faculty were busy and therefore did not have time for student advising. **That, of course, is not the reason for the change in the system; re-evaluation of the role of faculty in advising is warranted, as discussed previously.**

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1) Provide leadership training for Administrators and Staff and Faculty Senate Leaders
- 2) Administer a Climate Survey at regular intervals beginning in AY 2016-2017
- 3) Establish regular and frequent communication from the Administration to the faculty and staff.
- 4) Strongly encourage Chairs to hold regular and frequent departmental meetings during which culture and environment issues are included in the agendas. **Make the existence and effectiveness of such meetings an explicit criterion by which the performance of Chairs is evaluated.**

### **Section 3: Administrative Processes that Impede Efficiency and Productivity of Faculty and Staff**

Section 3 presents specific feedback from faculty, staff and students about processes that need to be modified/changed to facilitate increased efficiency and productivity on all campuses and at all levels.

One Senator described the processes for working with grant funding this way: “Many comments [are] related to the difficulty faculty have in navigating what appear to them to be Byzantine processes with limited to no connection to research goals.”

1) **Proliferation of bureaucratic processes.** *“Many simple administrative functions are overly complex and involve a large number of administrative overseers. Many of the central administration oversight activities should be moved to the level of the college or department, where the knowledge exists to enable wise and appropriate decisions to be made. Currently, faculty and administrative staff at the department level spend considerable time educating the central administration staff on some matters about which they [central staff] have little knowledge or understanding, but have oversight authority.”*

2) **Grants and Contracts and Sponsored Programs.** The current separation of and lack of communication between the offices of Grants and Contracts and Sponsored Programs makes the processes of applying for and managing awarded grants unnecessarily burdensome for PIs and Prospective PIs. Among the specific concerns raised were:

a) The current mandate to require investigators to submit all sections of grant applications, including the science, biographical sketches, and other non-budgetary items to Sponsored Programs well in advance of the grant deadline for a host of approvals (by people who don't understand the science). [Note: It has recently been reported that Sponsored Programs has backed off from that requirement in response to this concern.]

b) Poor communication between Grants and Contracts and the Office of Sponsored Programs. While there are valid arguments for having separate units for those functions, the inefficiencies created are substantial. The university could function far more efficiently if both units were coordinated under the direction of Dr. Maldonado (both of these units serve the researchers, so she is the appropriate overseer).

c) Grant accounts do not provide sufficient information for investigator oversight, e.g., because of the roll-up, it is not possible to determine if a category is getting close to the 25% NIH maximum on re-budgeting between categories without permission; similarly for the 25% carry forward provision.

d) More training is needed in Grants and Contracts, e.g., the staff need to understand NIH modular budgets, and re-budgeting authority allowed by NIH and other granting agencies; this is one of many areas where the administrative clerks are trying to trump the faculty with their approval power when they do not understand what is allowable and what is not allowable on each type of grant.

e) Funded grants, and funds committed subsequently in each “out-year”, are not set up in a timely manner.

f) Principal Investigators need to be notified in advance when progress reports are due and when grant funding ends.

g) Animal *per diem* charges are escalating rapidly (20% per year) and are already higher than at many competing universities. UTRGV cannot become an emerging research university unless animal *per diem* charges are competitive, enabling the retention and recruitment of researchers who require the use of animals. *Per diem* charges are heavily subsidized at many universities specifically so the best animal researchers can be attracted and so that they will have a competitive advantage in procuring grant funding by comparison with peer institutions. Increasing per diem charges at 20% per year is financially devastating to existing grants. Moreover, increases of any costs in grants submitted in the future are generally restricted to 3%.

h) Financial reporting and accounting processes are insufficiently developed and supported to allow for easy reconciliation and financial analysis of accounts.

i) There is insufficient written guidance about how each of the various sources of institutional funds may be used.

j) Shifting money between budget categories on funded grants, within limits established by the granting agency, should be a simple matter managed by the Principal Investigator, but at UTRGV it requires approval at several levels by individuals who had nothing to do with creating the original budget and know nothing about the changing circumstances that require re-budgeting. This process is unnecessarily time consuming and serves no legitimate purpose.

3. **Purchasing.** Purchasing processes are overly complicated and cumbersome and have been for many years. The relief from this promised by the adoption of “iShop” has not materialized.

a) The purchasing process is user unfriendly, time consuming, and inefficient.

b) Purchase requisitions are not transformed into purchase orders in a timely manner; requisitions are sometimes rejected when the issue could have been resolved by a phone call – rejection requires the entire process to be initiated again

- c) “Forms appear to have been created by people who never tried to use them; our unit has had to re-do some forms for in-house use.”
- d) Forms change frequently, with no update to let people know they have changed.
- e) Approval routing is inefficient and illogical.
- f) Inappropriate communications are conducted through “comments” in iShop; some issues require verbal communication.
- g) The processes are tedious processes, e.g., it is not possible to easily save a Purchase Requisition in progress and move it to another Purchase Requisition. (It is necessary to move a Purchase Requisition to a new cart in order to save it.). Change order and vendor set-up request processes are also cumbersome.
- h) The foreign travel request process is unnecessarily inefficient and tedious; it can take many days to get approvals and to track where a request is in the process, sometimes leading to more expensive flights because of the delays (as well as substantial lost time taken away from productive activities).
- i) Personal information shows up in iShop, along with travel plans. Anybody with access to iShop can view this personal information. This is not only an intrusion of privacy, but it potentially puts people at risk (e.g., everybody can see when an employee is out of town on an extended trip; if the viewer knew that the person lives alone, he/she would know that that the house or apartment would be unoccupied during that period of time).

4. **Human Resources.** As noted by many of the participants in the survey, the perception is that many practices and policies of Human Resources (HR) are highly inefficient, and contribute greatly to unnecessary regulatory burden, which is growing as HR implements new practices.

- a) Lack of standardization of processes, e.g., changing effort for staff is handled through a completely different system than changing effort for faculty; forms are not user-friendly and are not automated to pull information from the central system.
- b) Job titles, descriptions, and salary levels are not readily available; it is very time-consuming to track them down every time a staff member needs to be hired.
- 3) The approval process for hiring new staff member has recently become extremely cumbersome (the proliferation of bureaucracy, as mentioned earlier), even when the source of salary support is an investigator’s grant; the current job audit system prior to posting a new position is time consuming and inefficient.
- 4) A change in the distribution of effort of a staff member paid from an investigator’s grant requires a minimum of seven approvals in a queue, and often more than ten. It takes days for the approval process to be completed. Moreover, many of the approvers have to be notified on each occasion to go to Oracle in order to approve. If all of the

approvals are not obtained within 5 days, and sometimes they are not, Oracle times out and the entire process needs to be started over again.

#### **D. IT Issues.**

- 1) Desktop and laptop support service is slow. It can take days to get an appointment for someone to help with a simple problem that takes a few minutes to resolve. Those days of waiting can significantly impede productivity.
- 2) Computers are not delivered in a timely manner because of delays at IT. The delays impede productivity.
- 3) Desktop computers are not replaced with sufficient frequency to maintain efficient capabilities. Funds should be allocated to enable replacement of desktop computers on a regular schedule.
- 4) Universally denying faculty and computer-competent administrators at the department level “administrator access” to their computers makes it difficult to update or install needed software; long delays can occur in waiting for availability of IT staff to do the installations.
- 5) The email system used by UTRGV is inefficient and not user friendly by comparison with some other systems that are used at other institutions. For example, “server support for the standard email protocols POP and IMAP have been turned off; Clutter prevented important emails from reaching faculty in a timely manner; the SPAM filter does not seem to allow explicit whitelisting of legitimate email addresses” (even from the UT System).

*Section 3 Quote: “In many, if not all, of the instances noted above the problems appear to stem from the reification of processes at the expense of goals. In times of rapid change, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that processes exist to solve problems and achieve results. However, in all too many cases and in all too many bureaucratic processes, the creation [of these processes] become ends in themselves. UTRGV finds itself in such a position. The impression of many, faculty and staff, including staff within the administration, is that our processes exist to serve the narrow interests of the Administrative elite and not the long term interests of the University [as a whole; including], its staff, students, and faculty.”*

#### **Recommendations:**

- a. Review the bloated structure of Academic Affairs and how it creates bottlenecks of inaction or delayed action
- b. Dismantle the Assistant Dean system and empower academic officers such as Deans and Department chairs to handle budgets in consultation with accountants
- c. Establish a Shared Governance Committee to provide Oversight with FSEC

- d. Decentralize IT as much as practical to meet faculty need (For example, the School of Medicine has specialized IT needs that could be met more efficiently at the level of the School than by central IT.
- e. Conduct an audit on Administrative Cost Ratio
- f. Conduct an inventory of administrative titles in Academic Affairs since there is a perception of the “proliferation” of administration
- g. Provide Leadership Training to administrators, faculty, and appropriate staff in:
  - Shared Governance
  - Servant Leadership
  - Ethics
  - Group Meeting Facilitation
  - Conflict Management
  - Team Building Active
  - Listening
- h. Establish a formal faculty/staff committee that prioritizes process problems that are identified above and others as they arise, and makes recommendations in a continuing dialog with representatives of the administration in regard to specific changes to processes and forms. This committee should be a subcommittee of the Faculty Senate and the Staff Senate, although it might have some outside members who have particular expertise but are not Senators.

**Concluding Remarks:**

There is some overlap and redundancy in the observations and recommendations of the foregoing sections of this document as a consequence of inter-relationships among the sections; this overlap highlights some themes that cut across the topics of communication, leadership behaviors and messages, transparency and trust issues, and campus culture and environment.

Although the issues, concerns and perceived problems seem daunting, the summer of 2016 is the perfect time to begin developing a comprehensive plan to reset/change/modify practices before the start of the new academic year. After a concrete written plan is developed, progress toward implementing it and toward resolving the problems presented in this document should be reviewed periodically with the Faculty Senate.

The Faculty Senate stands ready to make 2016-2017 a year where we work in partnership to fulfill the promise of UTRGV. Please do include us as partners. We are all in this together and want to create an environment in which all of us will thrive and achieve our maximal potential--administrators, faculty, staff, and especially students. We believe implementation of our

recommendations can truly bring about a University of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in which we can all take pride!

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the UTRGV 2015-2016 Faculty Senate and the incoming 2016-2017 Faculty Senate. (Note: Data were compiled by the 2015-2016 Faculty Senate and voted on by the 2016-2017 Faculty Senate.)

Bobbette Morgan, President  
UTRGV Faculty Senate

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