

Communications as a mechanism of shared governance

*-excerpted from the Provost's Faculty Communications Committee AY 2016-2017
Update/Recommendations NARRATIVE REPORT • August 2017*

Introduction

The Provost's Faculty Communication Committee was charged in May 2016 to examine and make recommendations on "communication practices and processes that can facilitate two-way communication between faculty and administration, consider principles of communication that can inform decision-making about communication with faculty around campus issues and identify communication tools and mechanisms designed to support communication with and between faculty on campus."

The recommendations of the committee point to a needed shift in organizational culture that rests on three important changes in how communication is managed and enacted between administration and faculty.

- First, there must be clear recognition that faculty are essential stakeholders in organizational communication and decision-making; communication practices used on the campus should embody this principle.
- Second, the campus must develop structures that support effective faculty participation and engagement in organizational communication and decision-making. Some useful structures and practices are described in this report.
- Third, essential to making this work is a streamlined framework for campus-level and local-level communication that ensures access to information and designated processes for faculty participation.

The committee believes that these recommendations will lead to a more transparent and collaborative communication environment in support of effective shared governance and increased stakeholder engagement by faculty.

Background

The Provost's Faculty Communication Committee was formed in late 2014 to examine communication between administration and faculty. In July 2015, the committee issued a report that identified areas in which communication between faculty and administration could be improved. The committee's work in its first year focused on the importance of addressing faculty as key stakeholders and recognition that modes of communication are important in signaling to faculty their role in the organization. In response to that report, the Provost requested that the committee continue its work, focusing on better explicating the communication processes and climate desired on campus.

In AY 2015–16, the committee engaged in case study analyses of communication around prior key events on campus to identify how changes in communication sequence and structure could improve communication. Additionally, a chairs and directors meeting was devoted to

discussion of the communication challenges chairs and directors experience as well as discussion of their view of the quality of communication between faculty and administration. The work of the committee was summarized and shared with the Provost. This second year of work highlighted the importance of helping faculty and other administrators, such as chairs, understand their role as communicators, the need for prioritization of initiatives and goals in communication from administration and the importance of explaining organizations decision-making processes in communication with faculty.

The committee's work in AY 2016–17 included consideration of communication processes essential to participatory engagement, the importance of access to information in participation and the importance of feedback to campus communication processes.

Committee Focus Areas/Recommendations

Building upon the prior two years, the committee has identified the following four areas of emphasis for continued communications focus and improvement in its recommendations to the Provost and senior leadership team:

1. shared governance,
2. leadership engagement,
3. information access/updates and
4. feedback loop/assessment.

These areas of emphasis, in support of the strategic campus agenda, could help advance a shift in campus culture toward more collaboration among senior leadership and university-wide faculty (and other stakeholders) in the planning, communication and progress of the university's strategic objectives. Communications are certainly one area for improvement, but the underlying absence of a clearly understood model for how our senior leadership team is developing and implementing our campus strategic plan is at the heart of the committee's recommendations.

Five Recommendations

1. Shared governance

Shared governance is viewed here as a set of processes by which faculty participate in organizational deliberation and decision-making. Shared governance is a larger issue than specific structures for faculty involvement (such as the Boulder Faculty Assembly). Thus, the recommendation of the committee is that administration be deliberate in creating structures that support faculty participation.

The committee recommends the reframing of leadership communications with faculty (both at the campus and major unit level) into three prioritized categories based on the type of faculty participation desired. Committee members have suggested the following possible topics for sorting into the three shared governance categories:



1. Input (issues where input is needed): feedback on system policies, resources (financial, space, personnel) on campus, policy/impacts from campus, parking and other campus services, pesticides, energy and water use, etc.
2. Discussion (issues where discussion is important): anything involving the intersection of faculty and students, significant issues involving space use, significant issues involving technology, strategic planning (i.e., who is making these decisions and how can be it influenced by faculty input?).
3. Participation/collaboration (issues requiring direct, formal involvement of faculty in any decision-making): curriculum, admissions, tenure.

Per the above, the committee recommends that leadership articulate clear procedures and timelines each semester for faculty participation in campus decisions and change-management practices. For example, a window of time at the beginning of each semester when major priorities and change initiatives are communicated, followed by a period for feedback, discussion and commentary from individual faculty as well as faculty governance groups at all levels of the organization (e.g., BFA, A&S Council, ARPAC, etc.)

The committee further recommends strengthening the accessibility of assigned committees/taskforces to faculty by maintaining a prioritized roster of webpages for each, inclusive of the committee charge, chairs and membership lists, as well as timelines for committee work, faculty input mechanisms and administrative decision processes.

2. Leadership engagement

In order to support the shared governance processes recommended above, the committee recommends that senior leadership work toward the establishment of a prioritized annual and semester-based university agenda—inclusive of the participation/input generated via the faculty governance model—that is clearly articulated, updated and iterated, both at the campus level and at corresponding unit levels (e.g., colleges, schools, VC units, etc.).

The committee understands that dozens of initiatives and efforts are occurring across the campus at any given time, requiring varying levels of engagement and faculty input. That said, not everything can be a priority. The committee recommends major priorities be scheduled and limited to a small handful of items each semester that tie directly to the campus strategic imperatives, involve participation and collaboration across major units and can be meaningfully pursued and advanced with faculty (and other campus stakeholders) utilizing the shared governance model recommended above.

While more routine initiatives and decisions are also important, the committee recommends potentially aggregating communications surrounding those more sustained efforts (i.e., technology upgrades, administrative process changes, budget processes, parking impacts, etc.) into a regular, recognizable series of communications. This would enable leadership to focus the majority of its major communications with faculty on a more meaningful level of engagement on a small, focused number of major efforts to advance our campus mission, vision and strategic imperatives.

In addition, the committee recommends that leadership solidify and proactively share a process workflow for emergency and crisis communications that sets better expectations with faculty (and other stakeholders) regarding how the university will respond in emergencies and other crisis-oriented situations.

Finally, the committee recommends ongoing communications training, tools and support for campus leadership in order to facilitate the effective execution of the above engagement model.

These recommendations will help set clearer expectations and provide regular reinforcement of how we are advancing campus strategic priorities. They will also help to clarify the roles of deans, department chairs and others in the communication of strategic priorities and emergencies and assist in the growth of perceived organizational trust in the administration (perhaps helping to reduce the perceived distance between faculty and “Regent Hall”).

3. Information access/assessment

In addition to concerns about excessive email communications from administrative units and leadership that are difficult to contextualize and act on, faculty committee members and colleagues have expressed a strong sense of frustration with the inability to find information when they need it. With this in mind, the committee recommends ongoing enhancements to the architecture of the faculty page at colorado.edu/faculty to make it easier to find archives of leadership communications, in addition to major initiatives, committee rosters, governance groups, employee resources, upcoming events and deadlines, and faculty directory listings and listservs.

The committee also recommends the streamlining of duplicate sources of information (faculty resource listings, for example) and the enhancement of the Google search functionality on Colorado.edu to facilitate better faculty access to specific resource needs.

Finally, the committee recommends the creation of a single form at colorado.edu/faculty where faculty can make comments and ask questions that can be referred to the relevant resources to resolve needs and issues as they arise.

A faculty page on www.colorado.edu has been piloted this fall and has been well received. Ensuring that faculty and administrators understand how to utilize this resource is a key next step. These enhancements to the overall transparency and accessibility of faculty information and updates will assist in providing a simple reference point that the campus can promote to faculty (rather than the current array of individual communiqués and engagement efforts) and will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of faculty feedback and recommendations regarding leadership engagement and shared governance efforts, as described above.

4. Feedback loop/assessment

The current model for faculty communication and feedback is inconsistent and overly dependent on the individual dynamics of each initiative/committee/organization. The result is uneven and unpredictable, resulting in inconsistent communications—and often negative outcomes—that can be improved by adopting a more systematic approach that is consistently applied in faculty (and other stakeholder) communications.

The committee recommends the consideration of the following:

1. Establish regular, substantive in-person leadership-faculty engagement opportunities, driven by the strategic agenda and built upon the Provost's open forums begun last year.
2. Encourage the increased incorporation of faculty responses, op-eds, perspectives as a part of the campus strategic communications model to assist in further legitimizing major campus communications channels and demonstrating transparency and accountability.
3. Create a regular cycle of ongoing feedback opportunities to encourage ongoing constructive critique of communications performance in the interest of continual improvement.
4. Increase the use of feedback in the form of communications metrics (i.e., open rates, website visits, feedback form submissions, etc.) and analysis to facilitate ongoing assessment of the effectiveness of faculty communications.
5. Create an independent strategic faculty communication role to facilitate the feedback loop between the Provost's Office and faculty leadership/governance groups (one idea: roster this position as part of the Boulder Faculty Assembly?).

5. Resource assessment

The committee recognizes that these recommendations cannot be made without an acknowledgement of the potential resource commitments necessary to achieve the desired end state. In connection with the next steps outlined at the end of this document, we recommend a resource and process analysis. One potential way this could be achieved is through the engagement of the Business Analysis and Solutions Architecture team, either informally through the committee or through a more formal analysis.

Conclusion

Strategic clarity results in communications clarity. As it currently stands, it is not clear who sets the campus strategic agenda, what initiatives fit into the agenda, how colleges, schools and major units are aligned within the agenda and therefore how priorities are communicated, input is utilized and progress is measured.

If the conduct of our strategic imperatives were advanced more efficiently by being incorporated in the priorities and initiatives of major campus units, communication would be easier to optimize and it would be easier for faculty (and other campus stakeholders) to participate. As it stands, faculty infer and presume many details and administrative motivations

relative to communications about individual initiatives, committees, taskforces and decisions rather than trusting the administrative communications and decisions that do occur.

Next Steps

The committee understands the volume and significance of the strategic initiatives taking place across our university today and recognizes the challenge of pulling together a campus-wide culture long embedded in siloes of independent effort.

In order to begin the prioritization and adoption of the above recommendations, the committee recommends that senior leadership (including Deans) review all existing campus-wide initiatives that can be sorted into the strategic imperatives. Based on that work, the committee supports the identification of one effort under each strategic imperative that we—as a university community—can collaborate to advance, followed by the below implementation action items:

1. Build the cycle of faculty communication around the priorities identified by senior leadership (with additional, easy-to-find information and updates on other initiatives, aligned by the three strategic imperatives).
2. Build a change initiative communications “playbook” that details a consistent, replicable workflow and corresponding communications deliverables for leadership decisions and major initiatives that require faculty input.
3. Advance on all tactical recommendations detailed in this report
 - a. shared governance
 - b. leadership engagement
 - c. information access/updates and
 - d. feedback loop/assessment
4. Provide regular updates regarding the faculty communications model, as well as additional ongoing faculty input into the model.

At the heart of this report and its recommendations (as in previous years) is the consistent desire amongst faculty to more clearly understand and influence how we can most effectively contribute to our institution’s mission and play a positive role in advancing the university strategic vision and imperatives. Committee members are at the ready to provide additional detail and information pertinent to any questions surrounding our recommendations and support necessary to facilitate implementation of next steps.

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