

Responses From University of Oklahoma
Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication
Faculty and Staff One-on-One Interviews

In April of 2024, 47 staff or faculty members participated in individual, confidential interviews for an organizational climate assessment. All faculty and staff were invited to participate in the interviews. Moira J. Kelly of KELLY CONSULTING LLC interviewed the 47 staff and faculty members who chose to participate. All participants were asked the same series of questions in single, private, confidential interviews. The questions that were asked are shown in *Italics* and are in **bold**.

This is a summary of the comments expressed by interviewees in those interviews. The summary is a retelling of what they had to say about the questions that were asked. Respondents could give answers of any length and so there may be situations where a single respondent had several points of view in any one question. The write—up is designed to capture the major issues or concerns as expressed by those who participated. Great care has been taken to insure the confidentiality of the participants. Where appropriate, views expressed by a numerical minority of interviewees may also be reflected. If only one person made one observation in answer to a question, it is not included here to preclude any possibility of individual identification as to who made the comment.

PURPOSE

What do you think is the overall mission of the Gaylord College of Journalism (GCJ)? Has it significantly changed since you've been here?

Several people thought that excellence was a key part of the GCJ mission. More than half believed that the mission of the GCJ is to prepare students for careers in the field and that the college shows this by its commitment to the undergrads, commenting on the good programs that have been built over the years. Several commented that the college is building storytellers for the future. The graduate programs were cited by several others as a significant change since the college opened. A few thought overall changes at GCJ had been positive, while several others thought they were not positive. A few commented that there was a (journalism) “industry” focus at the college, yet others believed the programs had a broader vision for the future. A few thought all the changes had been for the better, and a similar number thought the changes had not been helpful.

What kinds of actions do your leaders take to show you the goals of the organization?

Nearly half of respondents did not know what the goals of the organization were or did not think the goals were clear. A few thought the goals were inconsistent or needed focus. Meetings were seen by about 25% as the method they find out about goals. Several respondents believed there should be a strategic plan shared to all. Several thought the actions they take were supported by college leadership. Others believed personal agendas, lack of leadership, short term goals, and conflict avoidance were responsible for goals not being set.

In your opinion, what gets in the way of goals being met?

Nearly 20% of respondents thought a lack of resources, money, time and/or people to be able to work on goals that might be set was the reason those goals were not met. Others believed that poor communication, personal agendas, short term focus, and a lack of leadership were reasons for not meeting goals.

Do you have a clear picture of what your individual role in the organization is and what is expected of you?

More than 55% of the respondents believed they had a clear picture of what was expected from them. About 20% thought their roles were clear sometimes, but not all the time. Another 20% did not have a clear picture of their roles at all. There were several comments about wanting clarity, and to be able to do their jobs well.

EMPOWERMENT

Do you have all the necessary training, mentoring and resources you need to do your job well? If not, what do you need that you are not currently getting?

About a third of respondents agreed that they did have what they need to do their jobs well. About 20% of the respondents said sometimes they did not have what they need to do their jobs well. When asked to elaborate on what was missing, those respondents cited needing mentors, support, and resources. A few respondents stated they did not believe their knowledge or experience was valued.

What happens when you make suggestions to change or improve things?

About half the interviewees said that their suggestions were ignored, disregarded or resisted. A few people stated that they either didn't make suggestions, or that the success of the idea depended on who the suggester was or what was being suggested. Some said they had received comments but that there was no follow through, while a similar number thought that an idea's success depended on who the proposer was and what was being suggested. Several heard from those to whom the suggestion had been given, but that there was never any follow-through. A few had been supported in new ideas or suggestions for change.

Is it clear as to what you are empowered to act on and what needs to be reviewed or approved by others?

Approximately 20% thought that they were empowered to act on issues, and an identical number believed they should not act on ideas without approval. Several thought it depended on the topic, or that it was just not clear where lines were drawn for authority to propose ideas and who needed to be involved at what levels. There were a few comments about how the University at large had become more "top-down" than "bottom-up". Respondents wanted more clarity about what things were acceptable to have suggestions made for change or what things were not to be changed at all.

PROCESSES

What internal processes or procedures in the organization are difficult or problematic for you in your job?

The largest number of responses to this question was "not sure"; "none", "don't know" or "doesn't apply to me". Some areas that were specifically raised were scheduling, money issues, difficult colleagues, lack of clarity, issues of faculty versus staff, curriculum, support from the Deans, other parts of the University and how they interacted with the GCJ, and the tenure process.

What internal processes or procedures are most helpful to you in your job?

About 10% of the respondents pointed to supportive, passionate colleagues as something they find helpful. On the other hand, about 20% of respondents could not identify any process or procedure that were helpful to them in their jobs. This was the largest single response to this question. A few pointed to getting the support from Deans and the how the tenure process works as areas which they found helpful. A few people added that things like experiential learning, the University's HR team, the reputation of OU, the financial strength of OU, shared services, and the advising group were parts of the University that work well.

What works really well here?

By far, the single largest answer was that the focus on students and student employees was an area at the GCJ that works very well. Other areas that were noted included a passionate faculty, the college's reputation, the group as a whole, the opportunities for experiential learning, and some of the areas. There were a few comments that either the respondent could not name a specific area or did not know of areas that work well.

RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNICATION

How do people treat each other in this organization?

About a third of respondents thought that most people treated each other well. Another third of respondents thought that their colleagues were treated poorly, unprofessionally, and that the treatment varied wildly depending on who the parties were. A few respondents thought that the GCJ had cliques that influenced treatment of others. A few commented that overall, women were not treated respectfully.

How do you find out about changes that are happening in the organization?

About a third of respondents rely on meetings to find out what is happening at GCJ or OU. A similar number rely on "the grapevine" or emails to learn about events or news relevant to the GCJ. A few respondents stated there was a lack of transparency at the College, and that communication overall could be improved. Some thought communication effectiveness depended on how the information was delivered, or by whom. Several expressed concerns that no one takes ownership about notifying others of relevant changes. A few stated that they did not get information about changes that will affect them until the change has already been made, and by then it is too late to have input into the communication or the decision.

Describe the teamwork with the people with whom you work most closely. Describe the teamwork with people in other operating areas.

More than a third of respondents believe that the teamwork at the GCJ is usually good. When focusing on the respondent's work group alone, the number of positive responses increased even to more than half of the entire group. Some stated that teamwork success was mixed because of difficult co-workers, pettiness in the work groups, or not seeing a clear path forward. About 20% of respondents thought that teamwork across groups was less effective, and that it happened because of difficult or petty co-workers.

POWER AND CONFLICT

Power in organizations does not always come with a title or position. Influential people or groups can exist both inside and outside of an organization. (Examples are leaders, unions, governmental agencies, media) In your opinion, who has the true power in this organization? How is it used?

About a quarter of the respondents thought some faculty members held the most power in the organization. Other groups that were named in smaller numbers were those who thought power was held by those with tenure, the provost, deans, and the Board of Visitors.

When there is a disagreement between employees here, what is it usually about? How do people resolve it? What would you like to see be different about employee disputes?

Respondents commented that driving issues in group conflict were topics like programming, staff and faculty interactions, recognition, how things are done, and what the priorities of the group should be. Other topics that were raised included power (and the use of power), frustration with things that supposedly have been resolved but in fact are not; varying views of what should be expected of students, policy differences; and a sense of disrespect that exists in the department. Several people commented on frustration with issues not being resolved, and policy differences that could be driven by personal agendas.

MORALE

Thinking back to when you first got here—how did you feel about the organization then? How do you feel about it now? What happened to change your view between when you started here and now?

Most respondents stated that when they had started, they were excited and hopeful. They saw value in what they were doing. Now, nearly half were demoralized or pessimistic. There were concerns about hierarchies and complexities in the organization, more issues with internal culture and power, and increasing complexities. At the same time, several expressed optimism about the mission of the programs and that new positive initiatives could occur in the future. Some thought the college was losing a sense of mission.

What do you like best about your job?

Nearly two-thirds of the respondents stated that working with students and seeing them graduating and succeeding was the best part of the job. Independence was cited by several as a key component of their job satisfaction. About a quarter of the respondents thought that they made a difference to students, and they valued that. Others stated that they valued the research they were able to do and that there was freedom to control a lot of the work schedule. A few respondents raised concern about salary compression, and others were concerned about not being valued by the university. Several were concerned about what they saw as an uncertain future.

What do you like least?

Several respondents said grading papers was the least favorite part of their jobs. About a quarter of respondents were concerned with behavior from others that they saw as being unfair, disrespectful, dismissive, or gossipy. They believed that these behaviors caused resentments and frustration because those above them rarely took action to stop the behavior of others that was seen as hurtful by the respondents.

Complete this sentence for me. “It makes me really mad when...”

Most of the responses to this question were quite personal to the individual answering the question. Several responded that individuals became upset when they believed others were being treated disrespectfully or were not being valued. A few thought recognition happened sometimes, or that it came from students, or only from a few people.

RECOGNITION, APPRECIATION AND VALUES

Do your individual contributions to the organization get recognized? How?

About one-third of the respondents stated that their individual contributions were not recognized. Another third stated that their individual contributions were recognized. Some of the recognition came from students, which respondents appreciated. Some respondents had not received any recognition for what they saw as meaningful contributions.

Does your work performance get regularly assessed or rated? How?

More than 70% of the respondents said their work performance was regularly assessed or rated, using a set process. About 20% said their work performance was not regularly evaluated or assessed. A few commented that the level of work was not being considered in the reviews. A similar number stated that the work performance evaluation process was not helpful to them.

In every organization, there are usually clear and stated directives about what to do and how to do it. At the same time, almost all organizations have an unwritten, unspoken set of norms for behavior and expectations of work performance. It is sometimes referred to as “that’s just how we do things here.”

(a) Focusing on the unwritten unspoken norms, in your opinion, who or what gets rewarded here?

There were many answers to this question, with very few repeated comments or phrases. About 10% did not know specifically what would be rewarded. A few thought bullies or other disruptives generally got what they wanted. About 10% thought that faculty was rewarded more than any other group. The most common theme was that it was not clear to the group at all what was expected, what would be rewarded, or what the university wanted as its focus area(s).

(b)What is discouraged, frowned upon, or will get you in trouble?

About one-fifth of the respondents thought that speaking out would be detrimental to an employee's career, while a similar number could not state with certainty what would happen to the employee who spoke out. A few commented that telling the truth would not be encouraged. Examples of what would be discouraged included making others look bad, challenging others in the University, being unethical, behaving badly, gossiping, not doing research, not having a professional appearance, or having different points of view.

Consider the current status of things at GCJ. Assuming you could make anything you want happen, what would be the one thing you would add? The one thing you would keep but change somehow? The one thing you would stop?

Add: The largest response (approximately 20%) was to add staff and academic advisors. Others wanted more accountability, money for student experiences, improved relationships and team building behaviors. Several suggested it might be a good idea to have a periodic state financial audit to verify the work being done.

Change: About 20% of respondents wanted to improve faculty and staff relationships. Several expressed a desire for a change in leadership. Others wanted to find ways to incentivize performance, involve graduate programs, have more funding, and to improve the overall mood of the College. Some thought the College could hire an additional Administrative Assistant.

Stop: Respondents wanted to end what they saw as harassing or discriminatory behaviors, reduce hostility and conflict, end pettiness (selfishness); and gossip. About 10% of all comments were on these topics. A few were concerned about a lack of professionalism. Others cited issues with pay and differences in treatment between staff and faculty. Some suggested looking at other ways or ideas for funding endowed chairs.

REFLECTIONS

What are you most proud of in your job?

More than half of the respondents were most proud of working with students, seeing their successes, and giving opportunities to students. Almost half commented on the pride they have in what they created, being professionals in the field, and keeping the College going.