



SUMMARIES FROM SUMMER STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS

Building a healthy community: Strengthening our workforce and investing in staff and faculty innovation, retention, development and capacity-building

Questions for today's discussion

1. While some challenges for the Augustana College community might be outside of our control, what are some things we might change to keep faculty and staff satisfaction and engagement (morale) as high as possible and improve connections among employees?
2. What education, resources, opportunities or tools do employees need to better solve the current issues they face and new issues that will arise? What are effective ways Augustana can invest and build capacity in our employees so they can successfully navigate the opportunities and challenges of the future, continue their professional development and move the college forward?
3. Regarding employee retention, what are some of the main reasons that Augustana employees stay? How can we cultivate increased engagement and satisfaction so people are energized to come to work at Augustana?
4. Communication, particularly regarding administrative decisions, seems to be an area where improvement would be beneficial. What are some ways that we can balance "too much e-mail" or "too many meetings" with providing information to those who are interested and/or need to know?

Summer Strategic Planning Discussion Topic: *Building morale, well-being and a healthy effective community*

Discussions for the summer planning sessions were structured around themes identified from a survey conducted in May and a more specific follow-up survey during the summer. The follow-up survey also asked for input on possible approaches for addressing issues. The goal of the conversation focused on the way forward: How do we address the issues affecting people's satisfaction, effectiveness and morale? For any possible solution, are there tradeoffs that need to be considered?

The themes were "Initiative-itis," "Compensation, Recognition and Professional Development," "Effort Duplication," "Communication from administration and across the campus," "How do we best support our faculty across careers?," "(Re-)developing community," "(Non-faculty) staff concerns" and "It ain't as bad as some present it to be." Each theme included its own questions (included with each summary).

Summary of Summer Strategic Planning Discussion: Building a healthy effective community

The survey on community morale produced vivid, definite results. We were struck by the professional, constructive and honest responses that were provided. The responders understood that we operate in a certain economic context and within a conversation about the value and nature of a liberal arts education in particular, and higher education in general in America. We had strong responses from faculty, certainly, but also strong responses from staff and administrators. There also was lots of frustration. There were



emotional concerns about firings and layoffs of staff and upper administrators with other hiring happening at the same time; an emphasis on marketing language rather than the core liberal arts mission; and contradictory messages that foster confusion and distrust. There was a definite call to action and a desire that this must be a plank in the strategic plan. We also realize that morale is an issue that goes far beyond a new strategic plan, and we plan to continue to work on this from this day forward. We know that to thrive as a college in the next decade and successfully overcome the many challenges that schools like us face; we must build a healthy effective community. We need to keep our focus on what is best for our students, and best for sustaining our college and our community. The following themes were identified, along with possible approaches for addressing these issues.

Themes

Theme 1: Initiative-itis

- “New initiatives” and expectations (e.g., advising, Symposium Day, etc.)—all take time. How can we maintain balance? How do we reign in the overwhelming extent of initiatives without stifling (appropriate) innovation?
- As one might expect, everyone has his or her own idea about what should be cut versus what should be preserved at all costs.

Discussion and Recommendations

Two main issues emerged in the discussion—(1) initiatives need to be reined in and controlled better and (2) improvements in campus communication and governance could significantly help this. There was not a sense that the campus should stop innovating or cease taking on new initiatives; the focus was more on how we go about choosing and implementing. Some themes/examples:

- Initiatives change quickly and changes are made without assessment; quick turnover in initiatives. Idea generation...how to prioritize? Many good ideas but can't do everything; no way to kill initiatives. Do we know when an initiative will be successful? Possible ways to focus: Measure ideas by learning outcomes or the strategic plan—some litmus test. Shelf-life—have assessment built into initiatives. Different departments and offices have initiatives...what about the integration of these?
- Call for stronger governance: what would Gen Ed Committee and Education Policy Committee need to “protect us from ourselves”; committees need to work effectively—committee training; committee sizes are too big...5-7 (splitting into groups). As with committees, need someone in administration to say “no,” including asking cabinet members to say “no” to each other. If faculty knew where to channel ideas, they could be handled, promoted or nixed more easily (associate deans, division chairs—as at other schools).
- Communication: same people carry the water for initiatives—not enough buy-in campus-wide; change fear/change fatigue faculty feel like things are sprung on them; top-down vs. bottom-up initiatives. Share initiatives in earlier stages of process. See other discussion groups for more on this and recommendations.

Theme 2: Compensation, Recognition and Professional Development

We are tuition dependent, and our revenues are not growing fast enough to keep pace with our costs.

- In the face of stagnant or slow-growing revenues, how do we manage raises that are above the cost of inflation, repair buildings and sidewalks and pay for benefits? What are we willing to sacrifice?
- Where are opportunities for advancement within the organization, particularly for staff?
- How can we adjust for structural inequities (e.g., different numbers of students, outside normal work-hour needs)?



Discussion and Recommendations

- Are there creative ways to compensate people without (or with less) money? Help with housing, provide select parking spots, help with new childcare, offer a better relocation cost provision; re-implement the option to have Fridays off for staff provided there is office coverage; consider flex-time. Regarding different workloads because of high-demand areas and such—reflect workload in staff pay.
- Trust and autonomy go hand-in-hand. We are in an era of assessment. How can we make it positive and not constantly feel like we're under the microscope? Train faculty leaders and staff managers to a) assess more efficiently and b) focus on mentoring and development. Hire fewer part-time people and replace them with fewer, more vested full-time employees.
- Faculty concerns. There are some difficult structural realities. Some departments have a lot of students and advisees, yet 60 students in a lecture-style course with multiple-choice exams sometimes can be less work than 20 students in a writing-intensive seminar. We need to recognize that some people are better teachers, advisors, researchers, etc. than others. Can we reassign workload? Course releases are a mystery; the process needs to be clearer. Other recommendations: Work closely with Advancement to raise funds for exciting development opportunities; re-adjust merit pay to make it meaningful; provide more faculty awards, e.g., endowed chairs for assistants or associates. Investigate whether short sabbaticals for non-faculty can work or spread partial sabbatical leaves over two terms. And finally, have another look at semesters, particularly if there are cost savings.

Theme 3: Effort Duplication

- Are there examples of work that is done on campus that is superfluous? What are the sources of effort duplication? Can effort duplication in these areas be eliminated?
- How should we balance departmental and campus initiatives? Are there initiatives that can be combined?
- There have been increases in recordkeeping and assessments for a variety of reasons. Such assessments cannot be eliminated, but what are ways to lessen the impact on individuals' work?

Discussion and Recommendations

Sources of duplication include inefficient systems, lack of communication, policies and procedures that have outlived their appropriateness and others. There is some duplication of the discussion that occurred in Theme 1:

- Overlapping initiatives. New initiatives are adopted, but old ones are not phased out; too many award ceremonies; some (junior) faculty feel pressured to do ALL things. Create an effective "clearinghouse" that can be used to help make all people aware of initiatives, which could reduce overlapping and repeated initiatives. Revise the Faculty Newsletter to communicate and inform readers about activities that are in danger of duplication on campus.
- Governance—Consider changing (or trying) a streamlined governance system. Rethink Senate size and structure: if membership is representative, use it for that purpose. Implement some of the Discussion and Recommendations from the Committee on Committees; expect committees to establish (and share) objectives for each year in order to focus time and effort and illuminate potential overlaps; divisions adopt a consent agenda and serve as notification sites; longer faculty meetings might save time.
- Current systems contribute to effort duplication. Have a single source for the catalog to avoid the need to modify in several locations; allow the piloting of new courses without onerous approval system for one to two years; centralize room reservations; make course add/drop signing process electronic. Assessment approaches: Reduce emphasis on general assessment and focus on high priority/impact. Instead of reinventing everything, research how other institutions solve similar problems.



- Communication/integration. Curricular efforts overlap many Student Life efforts (e.g., programming from OSA or Greg Aguilar's groups). Need better communication to integrate and leverage these experiences. Establish rubrics for reflective writing in Senior Inquiry and other campus-wide activities and objectives. Use librarians as generalists who see the isolated departments doing similar things—from departmental assessment to general student learning objectives.

Theme 4: Communication from administration and across the campus

In times of change and turmoil, mistrust is common.

- How can the administration help communicate concerns about budgets or enrollments in a way without sounding "alarmist" or "everything is just fine"?
- How can we create a climate of trust and understanding? How do we break this cycle of us versus them, administration versus faculty or administration versus staff?
- How should administration get input/consultation on logistics and administrative issues that affect day-to-day life (e.g., removal of office printers)? What's effective? How much input/consultation is appropriate and expected, especially given concerns about faculty and staff workload and time?
- How can we provide meaningful acknowledgement of achievements and efforts?
- How can we improve communication across campus?

Discussion and Recommendations

- Communication appears to be either "too alarmist" or "in denial," often contradictory. There is a desire to have a complete picture of where we stand financially as an institution and what that actually means for our future.
- Participants articulated a strong interest in understanding more about the decision-making process of the administration related to finances (e.g., how is it decided that some positions are filled, programs funded). There is a sense of a top-down structure.
- There is frustration around "losing money to work here" (i.e., salaries being stagnant and benefits costing more).
- There is a lack of perceived safety for members of the community to share their thoughts due to fear of retribution.
- The opinion was shared that administrative decisions need to be more transparent. "Decisions are often spun in dishonest ways." Messages from administration often conflict. "In the same week, the sky is falling, then we're OK."
- The question was asked, "Where are we as a community? And where does the administration want us to be?"

Possible Solutions

- Notable quotation—"Barriers are broken down when people get involved in the life of the college." Opportunities must be created to allow community members to interact.
- Some participants suggested that there are venues for sharing ideas, but there is not much space for faculty and staff to provide ongoing feedback to administration.
- Agreement came in needing more collaboration/interaction across campus to learn more from different perspectives (much like what has happened through these meetings).
- An idea was shared to offer 30-minute monthly meetings for different offices on campus to explain what they do, how they do it and answer questions. Could Friday Conversations be a possible venue for this? "Informal gatherings are incredibly important." The River Bandits game in August last year was noted as an effective example of such an event. There was a unanimous desire for more such events.



- Members present expressed the opinion that members of the community work in “physical silos,” largely isolated from each other; there is little opportunity to interact with administration, faculty and staff. One suggestion—manufacture opportunities and conditions for people to get together; let community members drive conversations about the future of the college.
- Allow community members to share personal stories of their lives at Augustana via CampusNet.
- It was suggested that participation in Symposium Days be open to staff as well as faculty; we should shut down the campus on these dates.

Theme 5: (Re-)developing community

- How can the college have a more positive impact on work-life alignment and balance? Consider potential costs/benefits.
- What might be effective “morale boosters” that you would like to see?

Discussion and Recommendations

- There’s a need to connect new colleagues to community. Assign them a mentor and provide resource guides about relators, daycare, groceries, etc. Create a new faculty handbook and extend it to staff. Morale boosters could include a six-course load; social initiatives—both family-focused and single-focused; and flex-time availability.
- Have more events/opportunities to meet people such as the River Bandits game last summer. Re-start softball teams and noon ball; casual opportunities for staff, faculty and administrators to interact; no-theme Friday Conversations twice a year. We are mourning the loss of the Wilson Center; we don’t know what to expect in the CSL Dining Room. Plan a happy hour in the CSL, with an introduction to the new offices.
- Beyond campus employees, consider the broader connected community. Organize family-focused events such as a picnic on the Quad or a book club to initiate discussion.

Theme 6: Staff concerns

- The role of support staff has changed across the nation. How can we manage that?
- What are ways to promote more control over work and decisions? What are the costs of making these changes?
- How can we invest in staff—not in numbers and base salary, but in other ways?

Discussion and Recommendations

- There was broad acknowledgement of the benefits that staff have access to (events, Figge Museum, workout facility, discounts on phone services). These could be stressed more.
- Other periodic reminders/benefits could provide much for the staff and therefore the community. Give staff members a coupon for a free meal in the CSL or a free drink of their choice at the Brew. Provide reduced lunch prices for staff at the CSL.
- There is much expertise among staff. Engage them in campus-wide decision-making so their voices can be heard.
- Job security is a big fear—communication will help. HR could provide more programming for staff and supervisors, such as “managing sessions.”
- A greater sense that we’re all in this together is needed. For example, change how we refer to staff and administrators as non-faculty members of the Augustana community.



Theme 7: It ain't as bad as some present it to be

There is the sense that communication and involvement in campus-wide issues has improved/increased.

- How might the college promote a better perception about getting out of the “Augie bubble”?
- How might we avoid falling into a morale complaint fest?
- What are examples of ways to keep communication regarding national trends vis-à-vis Augustana in context and help the community understand the actual state of affairs?

Discussion and Recommendations

- Work on how meetings are managed/input is obtained. Employees like being consulted, but they don't appreciate meetings that are hijacked by one or two loud voices. Employees are frustrated when input-seeking meetings are set for times that are during their workday. The language we use to communicate is important when discussing challenges that must be overcome. There is a consensus that employees want to be part of a successful college. We must communicate better to foster a positive work environment.
- Perspective giving/taking. Employees have a broad understanding that the “pie” is finite; however, concerns were raised that there is another “pie” for the administration and that resources could be moved to more pressing needs. There is a sense that some employees exist in a bubble and do not have an appreciation of the work of other areas. We must understand what areas other than our own do to advance the mission of the college. Some have voiced complaints about Time Clock Plus as being unreasonable, although noting that this is standard practice in many organizations. In response to the harsh economic climate, some jobs could be done by students. However, they should not be given jobs that should be done by a professional.

A final concern is the seeming doubletalk of employers who claim to seek the very skills that a liberal arts degree conveys, but who still tend to hire those whose majors fit into the narrow confines of the job description rather than those whose education demonstrates the skills which are said to be valued.