

**REPORT FROM THE WORKING GROUP
ON
ADMINISTRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS AND CULTURE**

The working group on communications and culture met almost weekly through the summer and beginning of the fall term. In addition to our own deliberations, the group met with President Wright, senior officers, fiscal officers, and some department heads including the directors of computing and public affairs. In addition, the committee held five public meetings that attracted more than 150 people and received a large number of emails with suggestions on how we might meet our charge.

The committee reviewed the results of the staff survey offered to all employees in the spring of 2006. The survey had a 56 percent response rate and while 89 percent of those responding stated that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their jobs at Dartmouth and 93 percent responded that they would recommend Dartmouth as a good place to work, the survey also found some frustrations with the operations of the administration. In particular, the survey found that many employees would like to see more opportunities for advancement, greater transparency around decision-making, and more willingness to embrace change.

The committee heard similar concerns at the open meetings that it held. The following statement was typical of the many comments and emails that we received:

It's my sense that people at all levels are looking for congruence between things they hear about and things they actually experience. They are also looking for consistency from one area of campus to another as well as between levels within any organization. It's also my sense that supervisors, managers, and administrators are looking around them for clues about how to conduct their affairs. But what any two persons see (or bring with them, or research on their own) may be quite different, and these differences may present something of a "mosaic of management" at Dartmouth. Sometimes difference has advantage; often it can be confusing or counterproductive.

Recurrent themes from these meetings included:

- The need to identify mission and institutional values
- A desire for more information about priorities and decisions
- Greater and more frequent communication
- The need to foster a culture of respect and civility
- More opportunities for professional development, growth, and advancement
- The need to embrace change more readily

Because of the increasing demands and pace of work, the ways in which we communicate with each other, and the increased specialization of our responsibilities across campus, there is a general sense that the campus has become increasingly divided into “silos” with individual offices, departments, and divisions feeling less connected to the mission, values, and priorities of the College. The meetings reinforced the message we received from the president: that while many things were working well, the administration

needed to find ways to encourage greater cooperation and integration across the institution toward our shared responsibility of supporting the academic mission of Dartmouth.

When pushed to describe the ideal administrative culture, committee members described a community of learners that:

- Fosters a spirit of innovation, open debate, and institutional responsibility;
- Communicates clearly priorities, decisions, and organizational structure;
- Is accessible; and that
- Values all members of the community.

While this might be the ideal, the committee members also recognized that different areas of the College could meet this ideal in different ways. Thus, the committee does not advocate a rigid adherence to one approach. Individual managers and vice presidents need the flexibility to establish the appropriate culture for their areas. But this flexibility does not eliminate the need to work within an institutional culture that encourages collaboration, open communication, and transparency of decision-making.

The need for a shared sense of institutional responsibility by employees and managers, more effective communication, and enhanced professional development opportunities for staff at all levels are consistent themes through all our recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The committee has divided the recommendation section of the report into the following subsections:

- Mission and Priorities
- Communications
- Institutional Responsibility and Accountability
- Decision-Making and Organization

MISSION AND PRIORITIES

Many employees are either unaware of Dartmouth's mission or are unclear how it relates to their work. We heard from many employees a desire for a shorter, crisper mission statement and a more clearly defined set of core values. Well-articulated statements of mission and core values can help foster the kind of culture that enables an institution to fulfill its goals. For many administrators, such statements are also critical in underlining the important support function that employees play at an academic institution. Quite simply, employees are more likely to work effectively if they understand the mission of the institution, the core values that support that mission, and the ways in which their work fits into that mission.

Many departments on campus have their own mission statements, and managers in some of these areas work to encourage their employees to understand how their department fits into the overall mission of the College. Other departments and areas pay little overt attention to the mission or to helping their employees understand the value of their work to the institution. This is especially prevalent the further a department or area is from the direct work of supporting the students and faculty.

In addition, many employees did not know what the annual priorities or even longer-term strategic goals of the institution are. Obvious priorities like the current construction of new buildings are readily apparent, but other critical priorities like financial aid, providing more accessible services to students, and supporting cross-institutional cooperation are little known or understood. Many employees do not understand the organization of the institution, the decision-making process, or the strategic planning process.

Recommendations:

- **Mission:** The President and Trustees should develop a shorter, crisper mission statement that can be more readily embraced by the whole community.
- **Core Values:** The President should, in addition to a set of institutional core values, also articulate a set of values for the administration that includes a commitment to better communication; that allows room for individual and divisional differences; and that respects individual employees.
- **Communication:** The President and Provost should remind the community regularly of institutional priorities and strategic goals, and each administrative division or department should review its own mission and core values to ensure that they relate to and are in concert with the institutional statements.
- **Priorities:** The senior leadership should provide greater clarity and communication around annual institutional priorities within a predictable annual process for dissemination, which includes a description of the process whereby priorities are determined. There should be a clear link between the annual priority setting and budget processes.

Although these recommendations are aimed more at the senior leadership of the institution, they would enable managers, and indeed employees across the institution, to do their own work more effectively. Once accomplished, managers would have the responsibility to communicate the mission and priorities within their own areas and to ensure that employees understand how they are related to their own work.

COMMUNICATIONS

The importance of communication pervades all aspects of this report and is a key part of the foundation on which most of its recommendations rest. From the College's mission statement, to new standards of accountability, to professional development, and to the principles of decision-making, effective communication is a central element in the College's effort to "better support faculty and students."

In his book, *The Power of Corporate Communication*, Tuck School of Business Professor Paul Argenti notes that, "Enlightened managers know that the more relevant and timely the information they provide to employees, the more likely the employees are to be

highly motivated to do a better job, to advance in their positions, and to further the goals of the organization itself.”

Internal communication to staff and administrators needs to be a higher priority for the College. Two-way communication between the leadership of the institution and employees will be central to improving administrative communications and breaking down administrative silos. Staff want and need easily accessible and more information as they seek to understand and implement priorities, decisions, and policies. We need to encourage a culture where information is shared appropriately.

Recommendations:

- **Create Overt Acts of Communication:**
 - Establish more frequent means for personal, “high touch” interaction with the President and senior officers as well as with colleagues across divisions and departments.
 - Use a “communications tree” starting with the President and moving through the senior officers, to divisional and departmental managers, and to staff through which communications can be relayed in person through the entire organization, and back up to leadership, with management accountable for the flow of communication.
 - Establish an annual "State of the College" address by the President, targeted to administrators and staff.
 - Schedule regular open meetings with the President or other senior officers, where employees can hear directly from the President and have an opportunity to ask questions. Begin casual drop-ins by senior officers to offices and departments and other informal meetings with senior managers.
 - Establish informal discussion groups or lunch opportunities where colleagues can meet and discuss issues of common interest.
 - Create opportunities for leadership to listen.
- **Adopt better, more frequent communication of institutional goals, priorities, and decisions:**
 - Describe the mission and core values of the College in Presidential speeches, letters, and other communications.
 - Find opportunities to explain how decisions and the decision-making process relate to institutional goals and priorities.
 - Encourage time to discuss and reinforce how the College’s mission relates to the work we do.
- **Create new or enhance existing technological mechanisms for frequent, employee-based communications:**
 - Distribute the new employee handbook and a policy manual as soon as possible and create an electronic database of all College administrative policies.
 - Create a Web-based archive of President’s Administrative Forum (PAF) announcements.
 - Reorganize the PAF to work as both a feedback mechanism and as a more effective communications vehicle for managers.

- Establish “daily briefing” section of the Dartmouth home page devoted to employees only (in the “Resources for Faculty and Staff” section) that features administrative information, announcements, and news – internal and external – of interest or import to employees.
- Post brief monthly updates from divisions or departments, in the daily briefing section, outlining current issues and projects in those divisions or departments.
- Develop an “ask any question” information site, similar to the University of Cincinnati’s tool at <http://www.feedback.uc.edu/> for soliciting employee feedback and for trafficking, analyzing and responding to that feedback.
- Analyze, on an ongoing basis, the effectiveness of all internal communications vehicles like *Vox*, as well as some of our external vehicles that are also read internally (*Dartmouth Life*, “Speaking of Dartmouth,” Web sites, community letters, email), making adjustments as necessary.
- **Require communications planning as a part of annual divisional and departmental strategic planning:**
 - Provide basic principles of communications planning.
 - Incorporate the development of communications skills into mandatory management training.
 - Develop templates for creating the communications plan: who is involved, who is impacted, and how to communicate decisions having an impact on other departments.
 - Make communication through divisions and departments a key accountability of management positions.
 - Establish mentoring relationships for new managers.

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Each division, department, unit, and individual employee within the administration needs to take responsibility for meeting the institutional goal of better serving the faculty and students. This requires employees to take an institutional approach to their work and to understand the impact of their actions in the broadest terms, and it requires managers to communicate priorities and to provide feedback to their employees. As an institution, the College must encourage more systematic performance evaluation from departments and individuals and must hold managers responsible for their decisions. Institutional leadership also needs to recognize that a culture that encourages innovation and risk taking will also result in some mistakes.

A culture that recognizes institutional responsibility at the divisional, department, unit, and individual level, encourages attention to priorities and goals as well as clear and regular communication about them. A culture that values accountability does the following:

- Requires performance reviews and planning at the divisional, departmental, and individual level to achieve results consistent with the College’s mission;
- Invests resources and focuses efforts to improve quality, achieve shared goals and objectives, enhance efficiency and effectiveness, and build trust and confidence;

- Provides training and professional development opportunities to ensure that every employee has the tools to succeed;
- Assesses performance against goals and plans.

The committee heard from many employees (through public meetings, emails, and the staff survey), that they would like to see greater accountability at every level, more transparency around goal setting, regular performance reviews, and a compensation program more clearly based on merit. Implementing changes around these principles should be framed in a manner that promotes and recognizes accomplishments rather than invoking fear and apprehension. The framework for any assessment program should stem from widely held institutional values such as commitment to excellence, integrity, innovation, and community.

Recommendations:

- **Responsibility for Performance:** Officers and managers should clearly establish their expectations around performance in meeting institutional goals, and how they expect to measure achievement. Managers and staff across the institution should challenge themselves, their colleagues, and their leaders to focus on institutional impact and responsibility, including the consistent and regular use of assessment tools to ensure that they are soliciting feedback and providing appropriate feedback to employees and that they are meeting institutional goals.
- **Training on Accountability:** Human resources and divisions need to provide their managers with the appropriate training needed to undertake the necessary planning and assessments. With an overall understanding of what it means to be accountable in the workplace, a focus on goals and objectives for meeting them will be more effective.
- **Performance Planning and Reviews:** Dartmouth must strive for one hundred percent participation in the process of goal setting and performance evaluation for individuals and divisions and departments. An important aspect of performance reviews is the ongoing discussion between supervisors and employees in establishing clear position expectations, tools and training to succeed, and opportunities for growth. There should be an ongoing conversation and assessment during the year as well as an annual written evaluation.
- **Compensation Program:** There should be a clearly articulated institution-wide merit-based compensation program for all non-faculty employees. This means there should be a consistent designation of a base raise for satisfactory performance and any additional raise to be determined by merit. Also, as the overall cost of benefits (health insurance, social security contributions, etc.) for employees continues to increase, an annual statement to each employee of Dartmouth's contribution would be useful.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND DECISION-MAKING

Dartmouth's increasing complexity over the past couple of decades has had a noticeable impact on the administrative and organizational structures of the institution. The McKinsey Report and our own series of open forums highlighted a series of issues regarding organizational structure and decision-making. Specifically, many employees do not understand who makes decisions, what the decision-making structure is, or how decisions are communicated. Nor is it always clear how programmatic planning at the divisional, departmental, and individual office level ties into the priorities identified by the President and Trustees.

Some employees expressed frustration and confusion about the committee structure. Others suggested that senior management did not always recognize the talents, expertise, and ideas of employees. Finally, we noted that the Dartmouth culture is more often than not an "oral" culture because policies and procedures are not always written down or collected together in a single repository or publication.

The College's current organizational structure consists of a series of standing committees, working groups, and ad-hoc committees. To make progress on two of the priorities articulated by President Wright, specifically enhancing communication across the institution, and encouraging innovation within a culture of interdependence, transparency, responsibility, and accountability, we have outlined a series of recommendations to enhance the current administrative committee structure so as to work towards the President's priorities.

Recommendations:

- **Transparency:** Implement greater transparency with respect to the organizational chart, the composition of committees, and the reporting relationships between committees and individual offices and departments.
- **Communication:** Facilitate and improve communication among committees, administrative offices, and the senior planning group. The College should explore ways to strengthen the use of groups such as the President's Administrative Forum, as vehicles to bring diverse groups of managers together with senior leadership. In particular, the organizational structure should be one of the key ways in which the College's mission, priorities, and values are discussed and disseminated to all staff.
- **Realignment:** We should look to realign current administrative committees along key areas and functions such as personnel, facilities and technology, financial planning and development, and programs.
- **Purpose:** Better articulate the charge for each committee so that each has a clearer understanding of its purpose (decision-making body, implementing group, informing or advisory group).
- **Representation:** Adjust memberships of committees to ensure representation from key areas, particularly with respect to the given

charge of each committee. Look for skills, talents, and expertise across all levels of the institution.

- **Accountability:** Increase the accountability of committee chairs to ensure that appropriate inputs for decision-making have been solicited and that all decisions are communicated clearly and efficiently to those areas most impacted by the decisions and more generally throughout the organization.

DECISION-MAKING

While the McKinsey Report highlighted Dartmouth's positive and collegial culture, the report also pointed to some of the challenges we face in decision-making. Specifically, they observed a lack of open debate surrounding issues, a lack of clarity around who makes the decisions, and a lack of transparency surrounding the decision making process. In addition, the consensus-driven approach to decision making employed at Dartmouth often provides senior leadership with a single position reached by compromise rather than providing several well-reasoned options to consider. Ultimately the consensus-driven approach leads to delays, changes in decisions as a result of additional analysis, and can cause runarounds.

The principles of good decision-making can generally be applied to all decisions made at Dartmouth, whether made by individuals or groups. These principles are intended to be flexible and should be used in a manner that is commensurate with the complexity and scope of the specific circumstance. For example, if a decision will have far-reaching, cross-divisional implications, it is our recommendation that those charged with making the decision strive for greater inclusivity and broader communication than would be necessary if the decision affects only an individual department or program. It is our hope that Dartmouth will not create unnecessary layers of bureaucracy through which all decisions need to pass, but instead encourage managers, supervisors, and other decision-makers to be mindful of these principles.

Recommendations:

- **Clarity of purpose:** Decision-makers, both individuals and committees, should understand the question they are being asked to address. Individuals and committees should understand whether they are actually the decision maker or advisory to a decision-maker.
- **Inclusivity:** Decisions should be made with particular consideration of who should have input into and/or otherwise be involved in the decision-making process. Individuals or groups who perhaps should be represented at the table include: senior members of the division or department that is undertaking the initiative; individuals with particular expertise in the subject; key customers of the initiative; and implementers of the decision. It is often preferable to include at the table someone who is not directly impacted by the decision but who is an independent thinker with broad understanding of the environment or who is a trusted advisor to the decision maker. Inclusivity can take the form of actual representation on an advisory or decision-making committee or can be achieved via the solicitation of input through a

variety of means, including paper or web-based surveys or questionnaires, forums, or open meetings.

- **A range of ideas and solutions:** Decision-makers should solicit a range of alternatives and encourage healthy and respectful debate and discussion about alternatives. Advisors to a decision-making group or committee should provide a reasonable number of alternative courses of action, including the pros and cons of each. The need for complete consensus is not necessarily the goal of those committees or groups asked to provide input to a decision-maker.
- **Decisions should reflect and/or relate to values of the institution:** Decision makers should specifically be able to point to the relationship and impact a decision has on the mission and priorities of Dartmouth and should apply the core values as a guide in the decision making process.
- **Communicating decisions:** Decision-makers should be clear to advisors or advisory committees about the criteria that will be applied to arrive at a decision. Members of a decision-making committee should be clear among each other about the ground rules for communications during a decision making process. Decision-makers should communicate the criteria, process and result of a decision-making process using a communication plan and methods that will reach the appropriate audience on a timely basis.
- **Clarity of minutes and records:** Decision-makers should document the decision making process and retain this information in a manner that can be accessed appropriately. Included in these records should be information about alternatives that were considered and how the committee arrived at the ultimate decision.
- **Trust in the process:** Those who are part of the decision-making process and those who are impacted by the decision should have respect for the process and those who contributed to it. Clear and concise records of the decision-making process will be particularly helpful to those who presented alternative solutions. If new information becomes available after a decision is made, then decision-makers should evaluate the new information and consider whether it affects the decision.
- **Accountability:** Decision-makers should be clear about what they and their advisors are accountable for during the decision making process. Implementers of a decision likewise should understand what they are accountable for. Decision-makers who apply the principles of good decision-making should not be afraid to make mistakes, but should also learn from prior experiences how best to apply these principles.

Conclusion

Some of the recommendations outlined above will be easy to accomplish, others will take more time and work. Still others will require the investment of additional resources. We hope that managers and directors will discuss the report with their employees and we hope that it will enhance Dartmouth's capacity to become an even more innovative and inclusive place to work.

We would like to end with two final recommendations.

- The first is to disseminate this report to all employees. As part of our work, the committee established a website that includes a suggestion box for ideas on how the administration could improve still further. Many of the recommendations outlined above depend upon better communication by all employees and a broader sense of institutional responsibility. We hope that a discussion of our recommendation will help encourage such a culture.
- Secondly, the administration should consider either continuing this committee for some period of time or establishing another committee to assess the implementation of the recommendations from the McKinsey working groups.

Finally, the members of the committee wanted to express their appreciation to the many people who met with the committee or sent in suggestions and who shared their experiences of working at Dartmouth. We learned a lot from these conversations, and we enjoyed debating and discussing ways in which we could encourage greater innovation, effective communication and operations. And we look forward to realizing the goals established by President Wright for the administration.

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