

The Penn State University Staff
Advisory Council (USAC) Presents

Staff Listening Session Report Out





Overview

- February 1 & 2, 2023
- Designed to listen to staff concerns
- Comments were solicited in advance
- Participation
 - February 1 = 283 participants
 - February 2 = 190 participants
 - Representation from most campuses

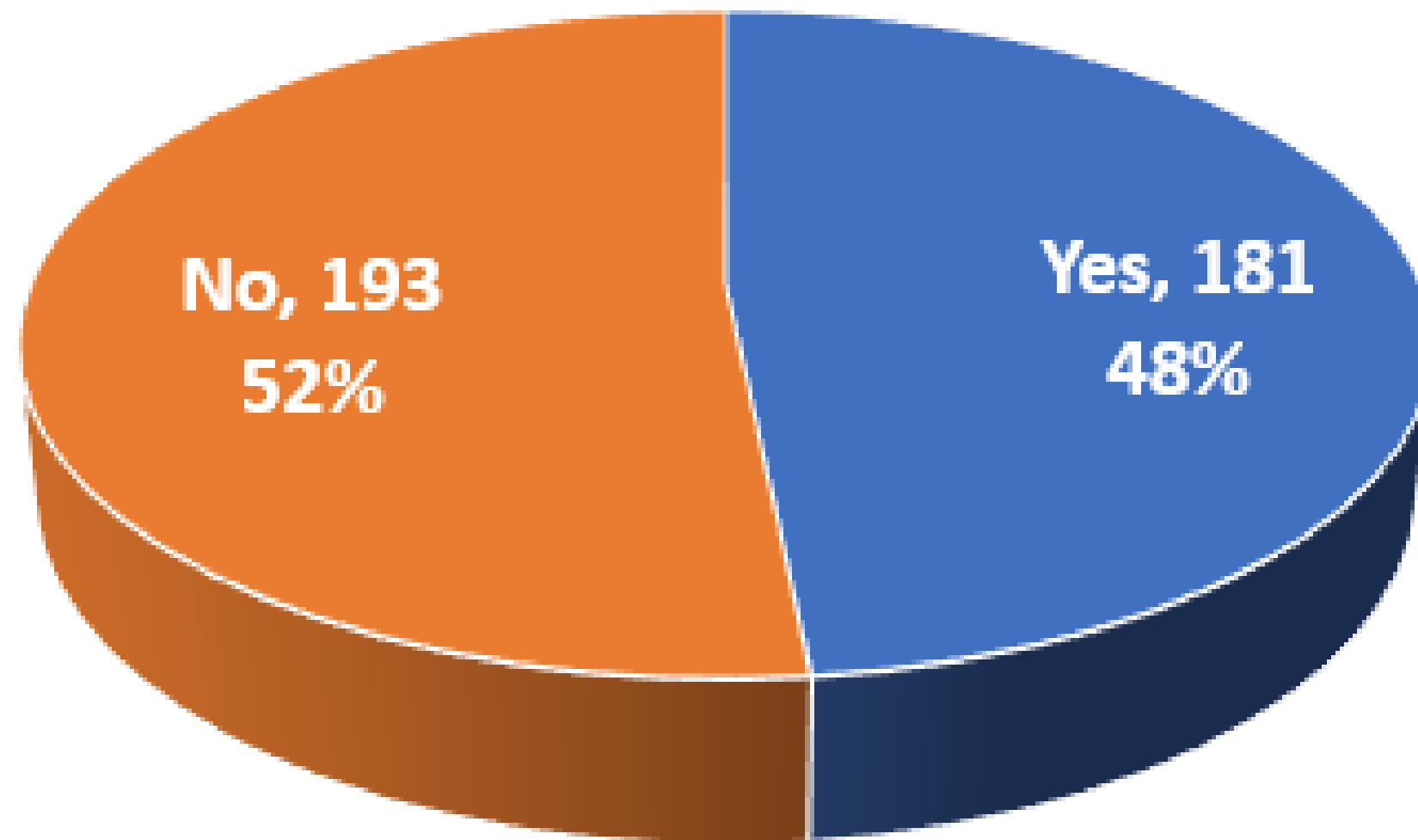
2023 Discussion Prompts

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Has your unit taken steps to address/improve employee morale?

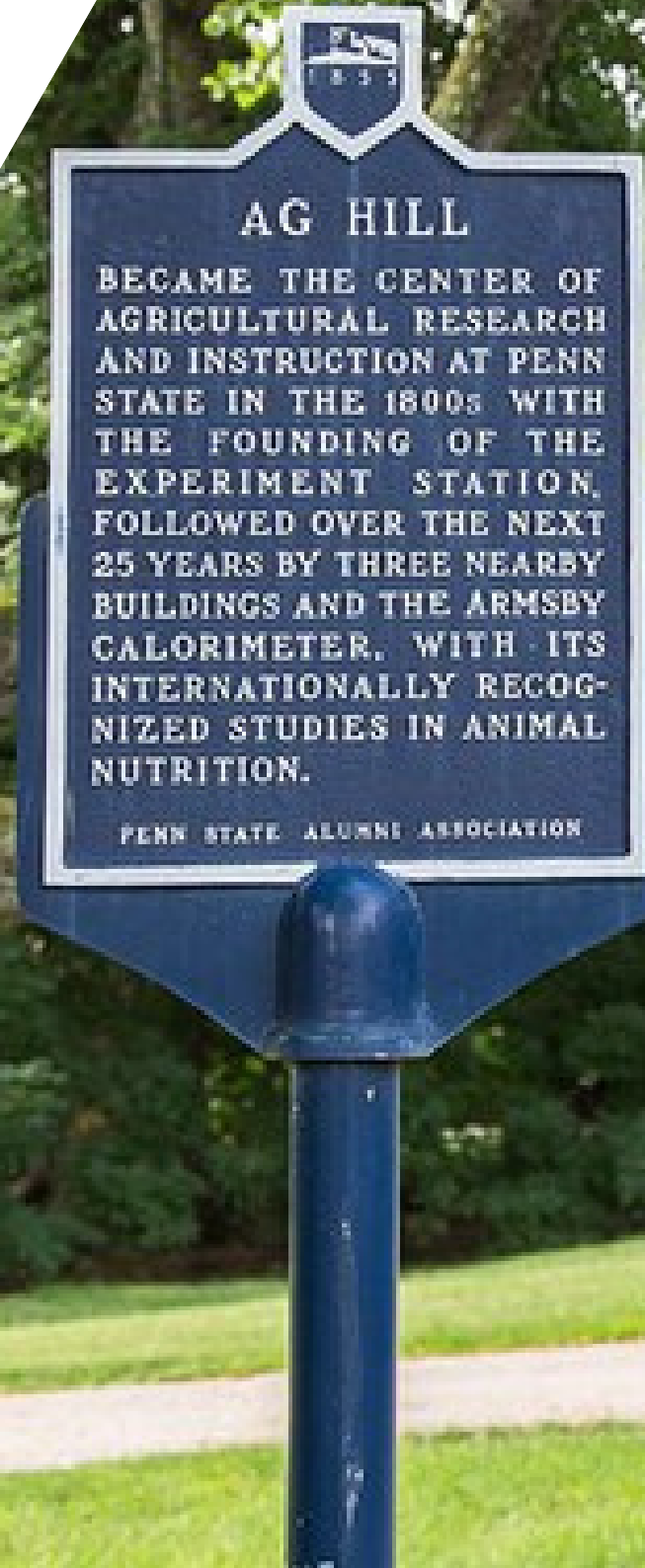
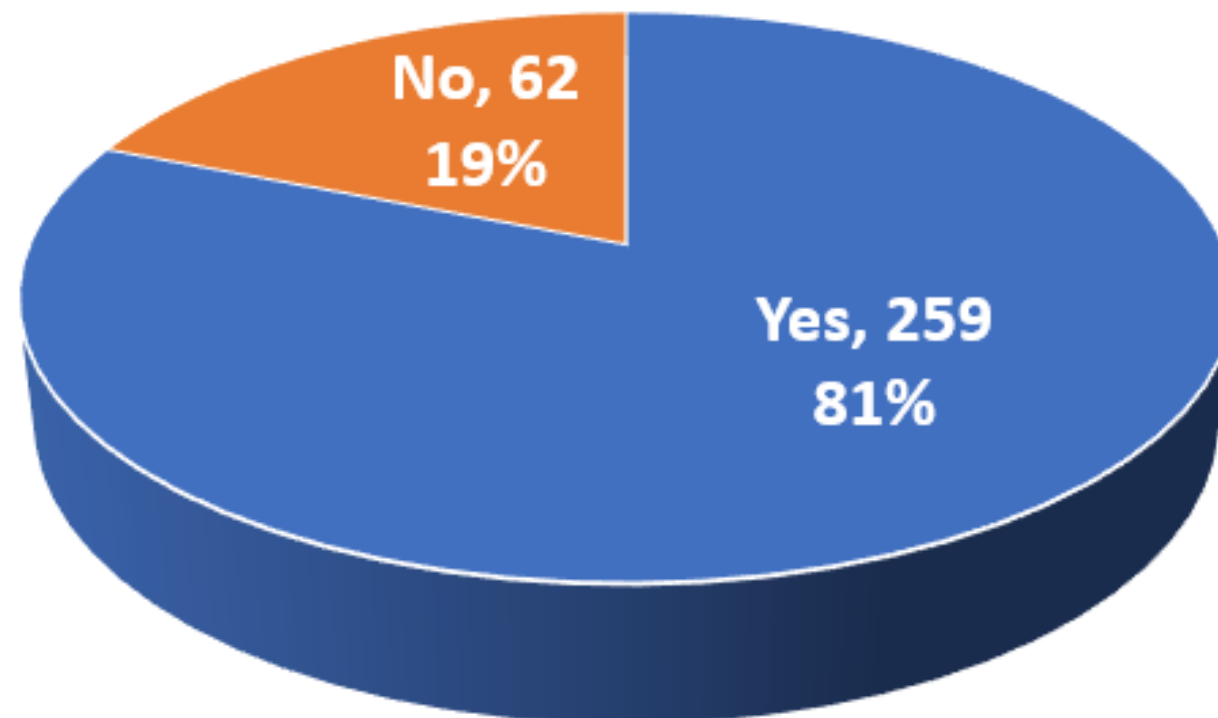


Have you experienced or witnessed rankism in the Penn State workplace?

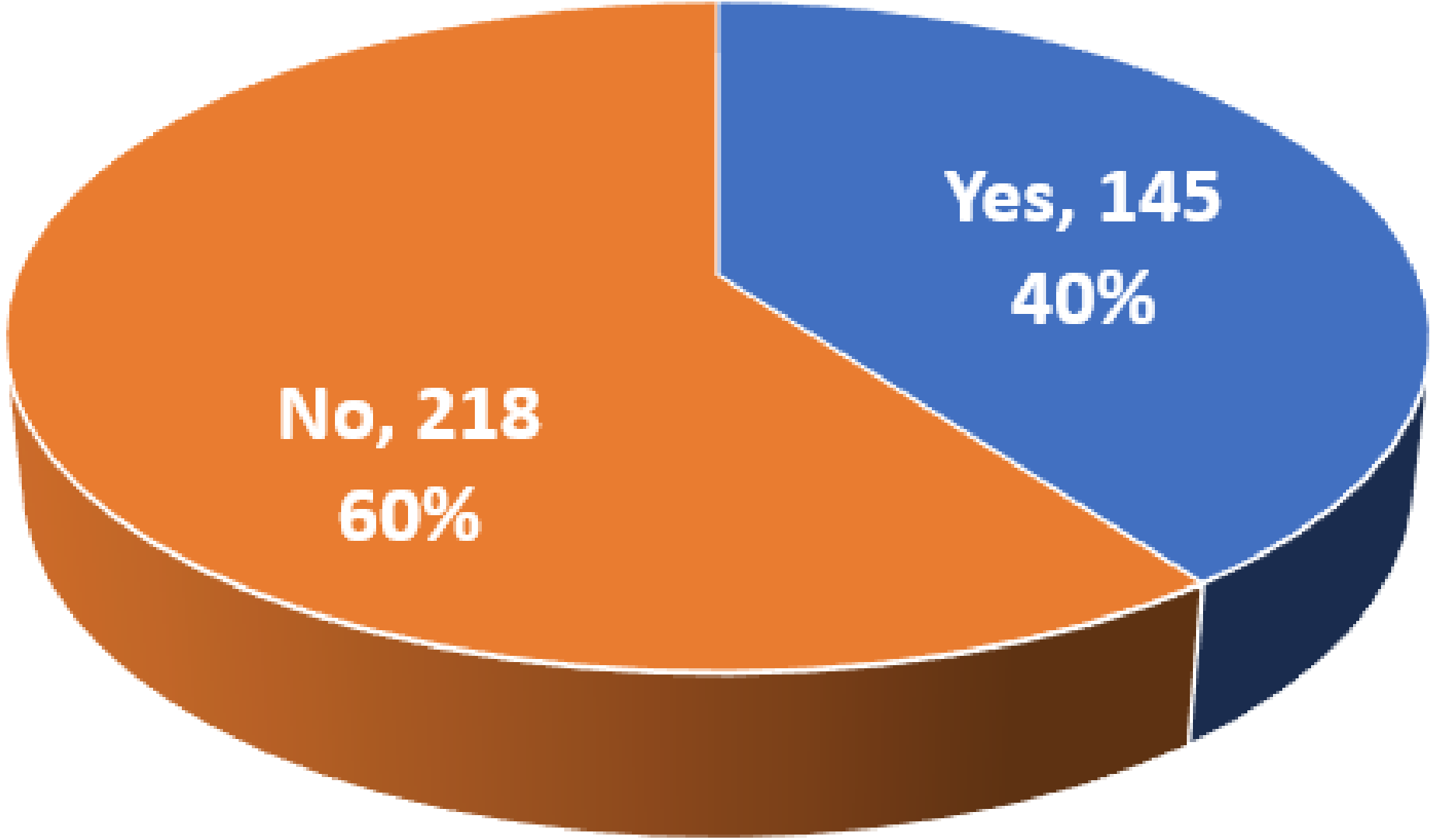
Within almost every organization there is a hierarchy among the employees based on position, title, role, and function. In some sense, hierarchical distinctions create a class system in the workplace. Unlike other issues of diversity, class in the workplace is largely unacknowledged, causing some employees to feel like "somebodies" and others to feel like "nobodies." While rank is a necessary tool in the management of organizations, rank-based mistreatment can result in lower levels of job satisfaction and performance, and lower levels of loyalty and commitment to the organization. Everyone deserves to work in a climate of dignity and respect."

Patreese D. Ingram, 2006

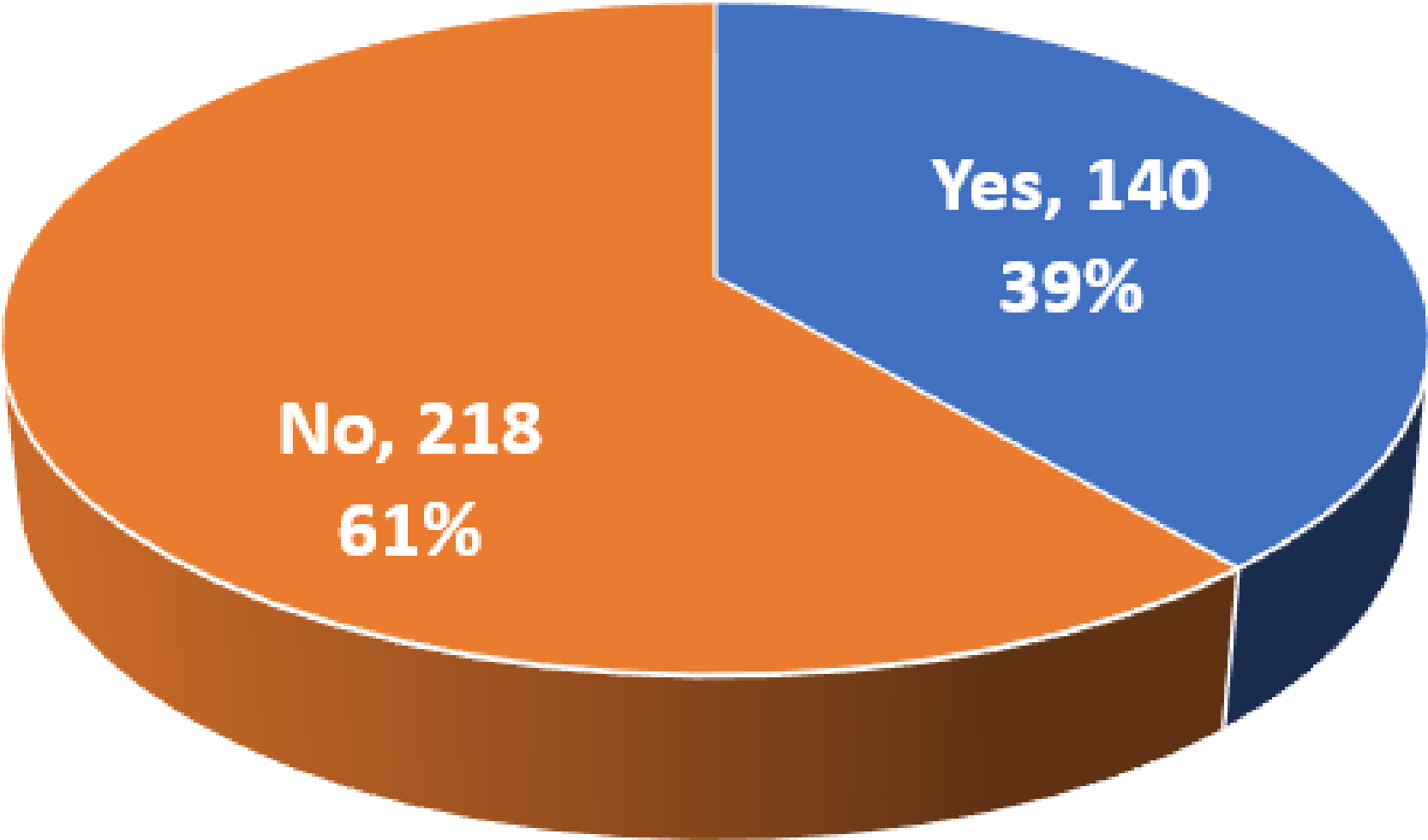
The Ups and Downs of the Workplace, Journal of Extension, 44(3)



Do you feel supported by University/unit leadership?



Do you feel valued, appreciated, and recognized in your work at Penn State?



2023 Listening Session Feedback

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Common Themes

- Human Resources
- Supervision and Leadership
- Faculty and Staff



Human Resources

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Human Resources

- **Compensation Inequity**
 - Within units, across units, and by level of employee
 - Limited promotions, increases, tangible rewards, or career path options
 - Salaries below market value
 - Raise offset by increases to parking and tuition
- **Compensation Modernization Project**
 - Frustration with length of project
 - Confusion about/dissatisfaction with impact on compensation
 - Concern over role changes and accuracy of new classifications
- **Benefits**
 - Not as competitive as they have been historically
 - Frustration with transparency and navigation of benefits
 - Negative impacts due to Highmark transition

Human Resources (cont.)

- Hiring
 - Inefficient process for hiring internal candidates (as opposed to internal promotions)
 - Inequity across units when backfilling vacant/hiring new positions
 - WorkLion system frustrations (outdated positions)
- Evaluation/Performance Review
 - Inconsistent expectations across units
 - When untied to compensation, does not encourage performance
 - Increased duties do not equate to re-evaluated JRWs
 - Ongoing changes to review system

Human Resources (cont.)

- Disproportionate Workload
 - Unfilled vacancies lead to increased workload without increased compensation or classification, even when duties become permanent
 - Workload fatigue causes severe impacts on morale, productivity, and overall wellbeing
- Advocacy
 - Collapse of Director of Academic Affairs position impacts campuses
 - Workplace impropriety goes unaddressed
 - Lack of availability and advocacy from HR reps
 - "Take it or leave it" mentality toward staff

Supervision and Leadership

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Supervision and Leadership

- Supervisory Training
 - Limited oversight, accountability, and training for unit leaders
 - Limited skill in guiding direction, empowering others, and recognizing staff
 - Lack of hands-on onboarding from unit leadership
 - Concern over work ethic
- Flexibility & Autonomy
 - Leadership styles do not support flexibility and autonomy
 - Staff want to provide input and support the accomplishment of unit goals
 - Staff want autonomy to grow within positions

Supervision and Leadership

- Flexible Work Policy
 - HR policy encourages flexibility; unit leaders remain inflexible
 - Remote work opportunities are inconsistent across units
 - Inflexibility leads to departures
- Support
 - Staff are viewed as dispensable rather than assets
 - Leadership messaging inconsistent with staff experience
 - Lack of supervisory agency in supporting staff

Faculty and Staff

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Faculty & Staff

- Inequity
 - Faculty have clearly defined pathways to promotion, higher compensation rates, increased benefits (i.e. parental leave), additional professional development opportunities, and tenure protections
 - Faculty promotions, hires, and retirees are publicly acknowledged
 - Staff with terminal degrees don't receive same treatment as faculty
- Representation
 - Faculty Senate, no equivalent for staff
 - Faculty sit on higher level committees where staff are underrepresented
- Rankism
 - Faculty undervalue the role of staff
 - Faculty lack awareness of staff job responsibilities
 - Staff receive unreasonable requests but lack the agency to decline those requests

Praise

- MLK and Juneteenth as recognized holidays
- Flexible work arrangements
- Many positive comments about people's direct supervisors and their colleagues
- Recognition programs
- LionCash and participation in on-campus meal plans
- Updated campus closure policy
- Tuition discount

Suggestions

- Cheaper or free parking passes and gym memberships
- Free classes
- Include staff in strategic planning conversations
- Team building opportunities within and across units
- Voluntary salary freeze for highly paid employees (i.e., those earning \$150,000+)
- 360 reviews that include feedback of supervisors
- Mentorship, networking, and advancement opportunities
- Ability to volunteer without using vacation time
- Review of structure when vacancies occur; allow current positions to be upgraded when vacant positions won't be filled
- More options related to recognition efforts
 - Access to events
 - Furniture, paint, office improvements
 - Public shout-outs
 - Time off vs. additional pay
 - PSU apparel
 - Gift cards
 - Employee work anniversaries

The 2022 Listening Sessions focused on Community & Belonging. Prompts related to questions asked in the Community Survey.

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Common Themes in 2022 and 2023

- Remote work policy
- Compensation questions and concerns
- Cost of living & workload concerns
- Campus closure policy
- Rankism and staff/faculty comparisons



Next Steps

- Focus groups
- Annual Listening Sessions
- Continue outreach to college/unit/campus SACs
- Strengthen relationship with Faculty Senate
- Provide insight as needed to administration

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