

March 2007 Campus Climate Survey:

Summary of Narrative Responses

(Questions 53–57)

Based on Responses from 382 Respondents

August 29, 2007

53. What do you consider to be the most significant strengths of YSU?

Respondents identified several strengths: the University's employees and students, accessibility, diversity, focus on teaching and learning, community engagement and support, student-centeredness, quality and breadth of academic programs, and campus facilities and grounds.

University Employees

More than 200 responses indicated that one of the University's strengths is its employees or specific categories of employees. The faculty was mentioned 175 times. Faculty were most frequently described as dedicated or committed, caring about students, and accessible to students. Over 100 respondents mentioned staff. Staff were also characterized most frequently as dedicated or committed. Other descriptors used were competent, qualified, long-term, loyal, friendly, and hard-working. Several people mentioned that employees have friendly, cooperative relationships. Nine respondents mentioned administration, department chairs, or specific administrators as strengths.

Comments:

- "The University's primary strength is the dedication, creativity, and initiative of its staff, faculty, and department chairs."
- "The University's employees and their dedication/loyalty to the institution...."

Accessibility

Many respondents mentioned that the University is affordable and provides good value for the cost. YSU's convenient location to a large population and its open-admissions policy provide access to higher education for many people who otherwise would not be served. Comments:

- "...our students receive great value for their educational dollar. Quality curriculum, exceptional faculty, staff commitment, low cost in relation to other universities."
- "unprepared and economically disadvantaged people in the region have a chance at a college education which would not be possible if YSU were not here."

Student-Centeredness

The centrality of students was another theme, illustrated by approximately 60 comments.

Comments:

- "individual faculty and individual staff going out of their way to do extra for individual students..."
- "It is very apparent that we all—administrators, faculty and staff—care about our students."

Students

Many respondents (40) consider YSU's students one of its strengths. They described students as hard-working and appreciative.

Comments:

- “its students: generation 1, college kids who work hard to make their lives better.”
- “the student body, which generally appreciate the opportunities they have at YSU to learn and grow.”

Quality and Breadth of Academic Programs

About three dozen comments listed the quality and/or variety of academic programs as significant strengths of YSU. Comments:

- “strong programs with fine reputations”
- “variety of degrees and programs offered”

Focus on Teaching/Learning

Many responses indicated that YSU is focused on teaching and learning. Specific strengths that were cited were small class size, small student to faculty ratio, attention to undergraduate education, and faculty-student interaction. Individuals mentioned learning opportunities such as internships, study abroad, and research with faculty. Comments:

- “...faculty who go the extra mile to engage, recruit and involve students in teaching/learning processes to promote student success”
- “focus on undergraduate teaching”

Diversity

Some participants identified diversity as one of the institution’s strengths. They cited the diversity of the student body and efforts to encourage and increase diversity. Comments:

- “diversity of students including race, needs, abilities, backgrounds, and hopes”
- “renewed effort to promote diversity of students, staff, and faculty”

Community Engagement

About four dozen respondents indicated engagement with the community as an institutional strength. Several also mentioned that the community is supportive of YSU.

Comments:

- “My colleagues constantly address the specific needs of the local community when designing courses. There is tremendous community outreach.”

Campus/Facilities

A number of people mentioned the beauty of the campus grounds. Campus safety, layout, size, expansion, improvements, and facilities were also cited as strengths. Comments:

- “a safe and beautiful campus”
- “physical environment of the university (trees, shrubs, etc.)”

54. What do you consider to be the most substantial challenges that YSU has faced during the past few years?

The respondents named several challenges. The most frequently mentioned concerns could be categorized into seven themes: work climate, finances, diversity, enrollment, technology, under-prepared students, and facilities.

Work Climate

More than 200 responses indicated that friction between administration and employees was a significant challenge for the University. In addition, “low morale” was mentioned 30 times. Several factors were perceived as contributing to this situation.

Administration. Over 100 respondents criticized “administration” or specific administrators. These criticisms contained several themes. One theme, identified in more than 30 responses, was that employees do not feel respected or valued by the administration. Over two dozen respondents described administrators as unqualified, inept, incompetent, ineffective, or similar terms. A dozen or more respondents complained of lack of leadership or vision. Another theme, expressed by 10 individuals, was disconnectedness: that the Board of Trustees and/or upper administration was out of touch with or disconnected from employees.

Unions. On the other hand, several individuals (18) criticized unions and/or union leadership. Some of the collective bargaining groups and/or their leadership were described as “unrealistic,” “unreasonable,” and “hostile.” Some respondents perceived unions as preventing accountability and progress. A few commented that union leadership misled members or provided poor guidance.

Communication. Poor communication was a concern identified by 27 respondents. About half of the comments were general, e.g., “lack of communication.” Several criticized administration for failing to communicate or sending mixed messages, particularly regarding promotion and tenure.

Workload. Perceptions of increased workload may contribute to the morale problem. Two dozen people identified work-load issues. Some comments were general, e.g., there are not enough human resources for the work expectations. Others were more specific: e.g., the practice of delaying replacement or not replacing people in vacated positions, increasing the workload for other employees. The knowledge deficit when long-term employees retire affects co-workers. Another concern is the increase in part-time faculty compared to the full-time faculty. Some respondents indicated that teaching loads are too high to fulfill scholarship and service demands.

Compensation. Ten individuals provided comments related to compensation. Most were complaints that certain categories of employees were paid too much or too little.

Financial Challenges

More than 130 individuals identified financial issues as a challenge. Over fifty specifically mentioned the decline in state support; however, a few individuals perceived poor financial management on the part of the University. Others cited the need to raise tuition because of poor state funding. Most of the comments were about the general lack of resources (e.g., “inadequate budgets,” “lack of resources”). Some respondents identified the lack of funding for specific

purposes, such as building maintenance, purchase of up-to-date laboratory equipment, filling positions, salaries, diversity initiatives, and maintaining academic program quality.

Diversity

Diversity issues were mentioned by more than two dozen people. A few perceived a lack of commitment to diversity; others simply cited the need to become more diverse. The lack of African Americans in faculty, staff, and administration was a specific concern, as well as the need to do a better job in graduating African American males.

Enrollment

Several individuals mentioned enrollment and/or recruitment concerns. These concerns included the shrinking pool of students in the region, competition from near-by institutions and on-line providers, and poor image. Four respondents identified enrollment decline as an issue. [Coordinators' note: Except for fall 2005, overall YSU enrollment has been increasing for several years.]

Technology

Nineteen respondents mentioned technology as a challenge. Several comments were general (e.g., "keeping up with technology"), but others were about the need for more instructional technology, laboratory equipment, and support for faculty use of technology.

The implementation of Banner was also cited by 19 individuals. The transition to Banner appears to be a significant source of stress. Some respondents felt that employees who are to use the system were not sufficiently consulted in the decision to purchase. Others were critical of Banner's capabilities compared to its cost. Some complained that the individuals on the core implementation teams have too heavy a workload, including implementing Banner and keeping up with their regular duties, especially when key individuals are retiring.

Under-prepared Students

Several respondents (17) identified serving under-prepared students or the need to recruit better qualified students as a challenge. The specific concerns were admitting under-prepared students, cost of remediation, inadequate remediation, and need for support services.

Physical Facilities

Ten individuals commented about the physical plant: nine were concerned about deteriorating facilities, and one expressed the need to prioritize components of the master plan.

55: Name up to three constructive suggestions for addressing the University's challenges.

Respondents' answers to this question reflected seven central themes:

- Change, replace, and/or improve leadership.
- Improve communication and listening skills.
- Enhance relationships by demonstrating respect and appreciation for each person.
- Increase the transparency of financial decisions.
- Upgrade YSU's reputation and enhance efforts at community outreach.
- Increase the "internationalization" and diversity of the campus.
- Improve the buildings and facilities on campus.

Change and Improve Leadership

Over 150 respondents indicated that there is a need to reduce or eliminate "top-down" decision-making. Most respondents recommended that seeking input from a much wider group of people (not just relying on upper administrators' ideas) before making decisions would greatly improve current practices. At least 59 individuals recommended that there be changes (resignations, dismissals, reductions) in upper-level administrative positions and/or the Board of Trustees. Many people also stated that there is a need to engage in collaborative problem-solving because, too often, key decisions are made without sufficient input from people who will be influenced by such changes. Individuals indicated that the lack of campus input to decision-making in areas such as "hiring" and "spending" is a long-standing source of conflict, anger, and frustration. People suggested that the President and members of the upper administration need to be visible, meet more regularly with faculty and staff, visit classrooms, demonstrate support, and "connect" in genuine ways with faculty, students, and staff.

Comments:

- "... bottom up rather than top down decision making...."
- "Changes in leadership, either new leaders or a change in administrative techniques, more student-focused and not just business focused."
- "More input from faculty/staff before major decisions. Supervisors actually visit departments they supervise."
- "Stop spending so much on consultants and lawyers. Make top administrators do what they are paid for."
- "Upper level administrators, i.e. all VP's and presidents should have personal interaction with real students and staff in order to see what ACTUALLY occurs on this campus...."
- "Stop wasting so much money on grievance/arbitration process and start working to resolve issues, put a plan in place to deal with early retirement and vacancies...."

Several individuals also stated that union members need to improve or change leadership qualities as well. Comments:

- "Less focus on union concerns."
- "Limited terms for union leadership."
- "That the unions as well as administration try to creatively and cooperatively work to resolve issues. Understand that we are all working for the same ultimate goal."

While describing recommendations, many respondents also indicated that there is a need for leaders to develop better vision, planning, and prioritization of goals. Respondents strongly voiced the need to clearly define important policies on matters such as tenure and promotion. Quite a few people indicated that there are always too many projects occurring at once. YSU “cannot be all things to all people.” Several individuals advocated that YSU focus on one or two central projects and then plan accordingly. Individuals indicated that people and resources are stretched much beyond what is reasonable. As a result, the quality of work and campus morale decline.

Comments:

- “... set maybe 3 achievable goals...”
- “Too many changes all at one time; limit to completing one. Focus on upgrading programs.”

Improve Communications Skills and Enhance Relationships by Demonstrating Respect and Appreciation for Each Person

More than 130 respondents stressed the importance of enhancing relationships and improving communication. People stated the value of listening first rather than judging or reacting defensively. Respondents recommended that there be more forums for “real” and “positive” and constructive dialogue. People’s answers also stressed that leaders show more real appreciation for the hard-working staff and faculty at all levels.

Comments:

- “Willingness to compromise. Tolerance to other opinions. Create more forums for positive dialogue.”
- “Schedule regular appointments within the (campus) departments to make sure everyone is on the same page. Staff meetings should include someone from the President’s area to update personnel on upcoming changes, concerns, and allow for question and answer sessions. This allows the hierarchy to have up and down information (communication flow) passage.”
- “Ask questions and listen to the answers of people who actually perform the work.”
- “Listen to people in the trenches more and implement their suggestions.”
- “Hearing what faculty and students’ vision for the future is.”

Increase the Transparency of Financial Decisions

At least 50 people indicated that there is a need to increase the transparency of financial decisions at YSU, a need to better allocate resources, a need to limit unnecessary spending, and a need to design viable solutions to enhance the campus’s financial status.

Specifically, respondents’ answers emphasized the need to do the following:

- Show much more transparency about financial decisions. Be open about spending, and seek wide input about key financial decisions before they are made.

- Enhance recruitment and retention to strengthen YSU’s financial situation.
- Limit administrators’ salaries.

Comments:

- “Stop hiring consultants....”
- “Freeze tuition for the next year or two....”
- “Carefully allocate resources.”
- “Thoroughly research the possible ramifications of major financial decisions before implementing (ERIP).”
- “Invest money into people not buildings.”
- “Continue and increase the intensity of lobbying at the state level....”

Upgrade YSU’s Reputation and Enhance Efforts at Community Outreach

More than 50 respondents indicated the need to improve YSU’s reputation. Although the answers were diverse, the recommendations included the following:

- Increase “outreach beyond the tri-county area,” and increase contact with the area high schools.
- Improve advising, and address students’ needs.
- Raise standards instead of focusing on remedial education, and improve academic reputation. Increase undergraduate research.
- Make teaching/education the major priority, and do not expect “elite level” research.
- Increase/upgrade research.
- Increase the visibility of YSU at the Canfield Fair.
- Increase community involvement.

Comments:

- “Focus on students’ needs....”
- “Commit to a proper university mission (to me, teaching; stop expecting elite level research at a school that is better treated as a teaching school leading students to professional careers).”
- “How about programs that result in higher level research...more grad programs in the sciences, doctorates in sciences, and professional programs like occupational therapy. Research directives with local engineering firms, etc.”
- “Improve YSU’s academic reputation and research.”
- “Continually monitoring academics. Provide programs meeting real world challenges.”

Increase the Internationalization and Diversity of the Campus

At least 22 respondents recommended ways to enhance diversity at YSU. The answers included ideas such as the following:

- Continue and enhance innovative approaches to increase diversity.
- Provide awareness training for faculty and staff.

- Hire and recruit minorities for leadership roles among students, faculty, staff, and the Board of Trustees.
- “Internationalize” the campus; offer “incentives” to U.S. and international students to attend YSU.
- Recruit students at area high schools.

Comments:

- “Grad recruitment in [Europe ?].” [*Coordinators’ note*: Handwriting was difficult to read.]
- “Better recruit minority students in Youngstown. There should be a larger YSU presence in Youngstown public schools.”
- “Continue creative efforts to improve diversity recruitment.”
- “Drop diversity for equality—‘diversity’[:] the way it’s implemented here is a politically correct form of racism/sexism—discrimination.”
- “In the area of diversity, the administration needs to make some bold moves in the hiring of minorities and move beyond the talking phase.”

Improve the Buildings and Facilities on Campus

Approximately fifteen individuals recommended that buildings and facilities on campus need to be improved. Their answers focused on enhancing the campus environment for all members of the campus.

Comments:

- “Clean up all the entrance ways to the university and surrounding areas.”
- “Plant some flowers! Clean up the elevators in the parking decks (they are often a person’s first impression of our campus and they are at best dreary and depressing and at worst, filthy and disgusting.”
- “[Concentrate on] upgrading classroom buildings with respect to drapes, flooring and repairs to walls.”

56. Please share any steps that you have taken to help increase diversity and/or raise awareness of diversity issues at YSU.

The following six themes emerged in respondents' answers about supporting diversity at YSU. The central themes include the following:

- Teaching, mentoring, and developing programs
- Hiring, recruiting, and encouraging community outreach efforts
- Developing and fostering positive daily interactions with people
- Reframing the definition of diversity to emphasize equality
- Disengagement with diversity issues
- Perceived “reverse discrimination” and “over-emphasis” on diversity

[*Coordinators' note:* Several respondents did not want to share what they have done to help increase diversity or raise awareness of diversity issues, because they believed that they would be identified if they provided specific information about their contributions.]

Teaching, Mentoring, and Developing Programs

More than 100 respondents indicated that they had taught about diversity, provided mentorship, or developed and supported programs related to diversity. Many respondents described their involvement in campus conversations and training to enhance awareness about diversity, physical disabilities, study abroad, and other professional development programs. Respondents indicated that their participation in campus and departmental events included diversity luncheons/desserts, SAFE training/YSU Unity programs, and various activities of the Center for Student Progress. Respondents also noted that they incorporated diversity into their classes and encouraged students to encounter “new” experiences through readings, site visits, and guest speakers. They also enlisted the help of students to mentor one another. Several respondents stated that they had made monetary contributions through grants or donations to diversity-related programs.

Hiring, Recruiting, and Encouraging Community Outreach Efforts

Over 70 respondents indicated that they actively participated in hiring, recruiting, and fostering community outreach efforts to enhance the presence and involvement of minority groups in all campus activities. Several respondents indicated their belief in “equal pay for equal work” at all ranks. In addition, some respondents recommended improving hiring practices at YSU to eliminate discrimination and racism against minorities and others (including but not limited to women). People described efforts to strengthen regional, national, and international contacts for recruiting and retaining under-represented groups.

Developing and Fostering Positive Daily Interactions

Over 20 respondents replied that their steps for improving diversity emphasized showing consideration in *day-to-day* interactions. Respondents' answers included their intent to convey “the golden rule” and to foster dignity as well as respect in their interactions. Several respondents

expressed the belief that a focus on thoughtful and meaningful interactions is very important and ultimately more effective than implementing special programs on diversity.

Comments:

- “Nothing particular, just a fair and inclusive atmosphere.”
- “Make [a] concerted effort to be fair to all students, faculty, and staff; treat all people with respect and dignity.”
- “Encourage openness and tolerance of others not just ethnic differences.”

Disengagement from Diversity Issues

Approximately 20 respondents provided reasons that they did not participate in raising awareness about diversity. The reasons varied. A few respondents simply wrote “not applicable” in their narrative responses or stated that they could not think of any sustained activities they had participated in to enhance diversity. Others replied that their participation does not matter, or they asked the question “why bother?” Several respondents indicated that they were disengaged now because recommendations for “diversity hires” were ignored by the administration. One respondent replied that diversity is not a staff responsibility and that a trained person should be hired to help with such an initiative and urged that it is important to stop delegating the responsibility to others. Some respondents indicated that candidates of diverse background would not apply here because they have so many other options available to them at other institutions. A few respondents explicitly stated that people and/or colleagues at YSU are “racist” or “discriminatory.”

Reframing and Clarifying the Definition of Diversity

About 10 respondents recommended re-framing and/or clarifying the definition of diversity. For example, several respondents recommended that a focus on equality as well as on tolerance is far more beneficial than a focus on diversity. Several respondents emphasized the importance of being “color-blind,” appreciating similarities, and respecting differences among diverse groups. A number of respondents stressed the importance of examining merit and content instead of emphasizing diversity per se. One respondent indicated that much can be gained through constructive teamwork by all members of the campus even if it is unrealistic to expect complete acceptance and tolerance by everyone.

Perceived “Reverse Discrimination” and “Over-emphasis” on Diversity

Approximately 10 respondents stated that “over-emphasis” on diversity was harmful and counterproductive. Several respondents indicated that diversity training is pushed too hard and “blown out of proportion.” Other respondents point out that the over-emphasis has created reverse discrimination. Some responses specified that diversity is not the crucial issue. Instead, “discrimination” should be the chief concern.

Comments:

- “Tired of diversity being crammed down our throats. Hiring committees told that if any minority applies and meets the bare minimum of the requirements—they must be hired—even when an excellent candidate with ‘wish list’ skills has also applied....”
- “YSU is blatant in reverse discrimination.”
- “Many times promotional programs cause as many problems as they were created to cure.”
- “... diversity is the wrong goal.... Equality is more important.”
- “I wish we didn’t have diversity issues at YSU. Wouldn’t it be great if we just had diversity?”

57. If you would like to make additional comments about the campus climate at YSU, please do so below.

Many of the responses to this item echoed concerns expressed in response to Question 54. Other responses were specific suggestions of actions to take.

Concerns

- *Morale.* There were more than 75 negative comments about campus climate or morale. Some of the adjectives used were “low,” “horrible,” “hostile,” “substandard,” “chilly,” “deteriorating,” “negative,” “awful,” “contentious,” “divisive,” “mistrustful,” and “unpleasant.” [On the other hand, there were also 16 very *positive* comments, such as “I truly love being here on campus,” and “YSU is a great place to work.”]
- *Administration/Employee Relations.* Approximately 50 comments noted poor relationships between administration and other employees. Some respondents predicted another strike.
- *Communication.* Poor communication or the need to improve communication was the theme of 10 comments.
- *Workload.* Workload issues fell into two categories: teaching load, and having too few employees to manage the necessary work. Implementing Banner while critical employees were leaving and not being replaced was a concern.
- *Diversity/Equity.* The related themes of diversity and equity were the subject of about one dozen comments. Concerns were expressed about inequities in hiring and promotion of minorities, racism, hiring of friends, support for diversity, the graduation rate of minorities, lack of attention to minorities other than African Americans, unequal treatment of employees, and the treatment of employees with disabilities.

Suggestions

In addition to the concerns noted above, a variety of specific suggestions were offered. Respondents suggested that the University should take the following actions:

Improve the following:

- procedures in Human Resources
- treatment of recommendations from committees
- communication
- transition in employees (provide overlap between one person leaving the position and the new person taking over)
- consistency between communication and action

Decrease the following:

- out-sourcing the cleaning of campus facilities
- hiring consultants
- hiring friends
- micro-management

- legal fees
- bureaucracy and paperwork
- payments to people who are not working
- marketing that YSU is “easy” to get into
- racism
- autocratic decisions

Increase the following:

- recognition of employees (e.g., awards)
- marketing
- promoting people from within
- accountability
- financial support for diversity
- training
- culture of scholarship and research
- minority graduation rates
- publicity for Women’s History Month
- compromise
- consultation with employees
- work with high school guidance counselors
- activities at YSU tent at the Canfield Fair
- attention to remediation needs of students
- visibility of President
- respectful treatment of employees
- parking areas
- transparency of administrative decisions
- collaborative management

Implement the following:

- a budget committee that is representative of the campus
- a code of conduct
- framed copies of the mission statement around campus; share mission with new employees
- town hall meetings
- anger management training for bargaining team members
- market analysis for every position
- written responses to employees who apply for internal positions
- “kindness day” or week to show appreciation to others
- removal/resignation/turnover of specific individuals or groups
- “flatten” the organization (fewer levels of management)