

# Executive Summary

## Metropolitan State University of Denver

### ACE Fellows Live Case Study

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#### Introduction

In August 2016 Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU-D) President Stephen Jordan invited the American Council on Education Fellows of 2016-2017 to address current concerns at his institution. This report outlines the work of four case study teams including: 1) Shared Governance, 2) Program Development, Approval and Launch, 3) Communication across Campus, and 4) Institutional Climate and Integration.

Each of the teams was provided with a definition of the existing problem, a set of key questions to be answered, a list of deliverables, and supporting documentation. The Institutional Climate and Integration team was uniquely responsible for understanding and articulating the essential features of the climate and culture at MSU-D that would need to be reflected in the recommendations of the three other ACE Fellow teams. Identified MSU-D champions offered support to each of the case study teams, providing campus context and access to resources as needed.

#### Recommendations

Recommendations are presented in detail in the report that address specific priorities of each of the subtopics. From an institutional perspective, actions can be taken through implementing change in structure, role and process that stand to benefit all three topic areas and support institutional progress.

1. **Structural changes:** The rapid level of growth and change that this university has experienced in recent years makes regular attention to re-evaluation of processes and structures quite appropriate. The report proposes examination of key structures to assure that Governance, Communication and Program Development/Approval agendas can evolve with forums that will best support the work in each of those areas. Campus leadership should make sure that all currently structured groups and committees are relevant for the MSU-D of today, are not over-complicating daily work and are adding value to the modern day work of the university. The report offers recommendations for changing existing structures including increasing the representation of committees in faculty senate and the expansion of representation on Curriculum Committee to include each college, department and unit. The report also identifies new groups that should be created or reconstituted such as in key changes to the President's Cabinet and a proposed reconstitution of the Communication Advisory Council.
2. **Role changes:** As the size of the university grows, the challenge for MSU-D lies in how to redefine roles for faculty, students, administrators and staff in a larger and more complex environment. A mere call for "more" engagement will not be realistic. Instead, the report identifies ways that University leaders can be more strategic about roles that they play among the campus community and in the work of the institution. Examples of

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changes recommended are to change the role of the Board of Trustees in program approval, reorient the faculty senate role in the reappointment, promotion and tenure (RPT) process and identifying a role for academic departments in making non-substantive changes in curriculum proposals. The report also articulates the need for changes in some roles for individuals, including the addition of a presence for the President and Provost in faculty senate meetings and the development of a new leadership role at the institution to lead a new, integrated communications effort.

- 3. Process changes:** The report identifies processes that need redesign in order to improve in all three topic areas. Process changes in institutional communication, for example, can have a strong potential impact on the areas of program development/launch and shared governance. The redesign of the RPT process and the active assessment of Curriculum are also two major processes highlighted in the report with strong potential to advance the university.

In addition to specific recommendations enclosed in the report, strategic attention is also warranted to aspects of campus culture that will help the campus community be the most receptive to the next chapter of growth in MSU-D's history.

The incredible rate of growth experienced by MSU-D in the past few years, in addition to the upcoming retirement of President Jordan, poses concern that employees and students at MSU-D may be at risk for "change fatigue." Attention to and awareness of the management of change should be an area of leadership expertise for campus leaders and should be an element of a re-energized internal communication plan. This also includes a necessary focus on transparency and a process for giving and accepting feedback that shows progress and results. In addition, given the rate of change involved at the institution we believe that a focus on developing an institutional climate of trust should be at the forefront of the leadership agenda at MSU-D. Attention to Shared Governance, Program Development and Launch and Institutional Communication all stand to improve the climate of trust at the institution, but the change process should be managed to prioritize conditions that will promote trust in the institutional climate.

A priority on promoting trust will require an active and engaged leadership approach from institutional leaders at all places on the organizational chart. It will be important to actively reassess structure, role and process in order to define both the work of senior leaders and the identity of senior leaders in institutional culture. No matter how new leadership may choose to approach specific steps of change in structures, roles or processes, a climate of trust will assure that the campus will be most ready to embrace the priorities of new presidential leadership. The entire ACE Fellows cohort expresses appreciation for the chance to learn more about this dynamic institution and hopes the information contained in this report will be of assistance to the incoming leadership of MSU-D.

### Introduction

In August 2016 President Stephen Jordan invited the ACE Fellows of 2016-2017 to address current concerns at the Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU-D). His campus has undergone a recent period of rapid growth that has resulted in an opportunity to reflect on and examine how to improve the effectiveness of MSU-D's shared governance function.

A five-step process was used by the Shared Governance work group assigned to this task. First, an analysis was conducted on the current shared governance practices using appropriate documents and comments, including those provided in MSU-D's most recent campus climate survey results. Second, the work group then reviewed and discussed a number of shared governance publications in order to learn more about best practice. A list of such publications can be found in Appendix A. Third, each ACE fellow in the work group participated in a substantive evaluation of home/host institutional best practices that address the specific concerns indicated in the Shared Governance Task force report. Major themes are summarized and presented in Appendix B. Fourth, group participants reviewed and discussed an analysis of peer/compatible university cabinet structures to determine the most effective and essential size and membership (see Appendix D). Details on this integral aspect of the report will be provided in the recommendations section. Finally, the group participated in a conference call on 11/29/2016 with MSU-D two representatives for Shared Governance. The call included the ACE group and one faculty member and one administration member from MSU-D. During the call clarifications regarding the final report and particular MSU-D needs were discussed.

### Recommendations

**Recommendation 1: Develop a campus culture where communication and collaboration serve as the foundation for decision making.**

The results of the climate survey pointed to a perceived need to improve campus communications. There is a perception that decision-making involves too many committees, and that the charges of the committees are not clearly stated or promulgated. MSU-D's Shared Governance Task Force also has expressed concerns about the timeliness and channels used to communicate proposed administrative policy changes. Our own work group investigation of information sharing found that not all committee meeting minutes were available, and agendas and the charge of most committees were either difficult or impossible to find. This we believe has led to a climate of suspicion and mistrust between faculty, staff and administration. Further, there is also the perception that decisions are developed and implemented without proper notice to key stakeholders.

Underlying the general unease of how decision-making takes place, there appears to be confusion about what shared governance actually is at MSU-D. Is every decision a joint decision with equal weight given to every constituency type? Or does shared governance require a distributed approach to decision-making which is partly informed by expertise and partly informed by explicitly enumerated discreet functions such as financial, educational, legal, etc.? Or does shared governance fall somewhere in between. Confusion about the true nature

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of shared governance may be one reason for the sense that relations between faculty and administrative is less collaborative and more adversarial.

The standard interpretation of shared governance is governance by distributed decision making, based on expertise and function. We recommend that the faculty senate contribute expertise that is representative of the faculty, chiefly in the area of curriculum development and educational policy. We recommend that the faculty senate play a role as a faculty representative sounding board on other areas such as financial and legal matters. For this to work properly we recommend that the President and the Vice President of Academic Affairs and their respective teams be allowed to attend faculty senate meetings to present updates and provide opportunities for exchanging ideas from both administration members and faculty representatives (see also Recommendation 5). We also recommend that the faculty share its work on areas within its purview with the administration and allow the faculty to benefit from the administration's insight. This would assist all at the university to gain knowledge that could prevent unforeseen ramifications, especially in the legal realm.

#### **Recommendation 2: Implement mechanisms to improve interest in as well as diversify of senate membership.**

We recommend that through the faculty and staff senates there be a broader representation of committee compositions. The senate bodies should reach out beyond themselves to solicit and evaluate nominations for university level committee appointments. Each committee's composition, charge, agenda and minutes should be made available to all university constituents. It should also be noted that, in the spirit of collaboration, mechanisms should be put in place to review and seek feedback on important administrative and other policies proposals impacting the respective senate bodies.

We further recommend strict term limits for all senators and a campaign to recruit 'new blood' and fresh perspectives to the senate bodies. The deans and chairs should play a role in encouraging their colleges to participate in faculty senate elections. Supervisors should encourage staff participate in appropriate elections, feedback should be sought and encouraged from all university community members.

#### **Recommendation 3: Redesign of the MSU Denver Reappointment, Tenure, and Promotion (RPT) process.**

Another way in which universities create adversarial rather than collaborative relationships is having the assessment and recommendation of tenure and promotion of faculty fall under the faculty senate's purview. Such a practice is highly unusual. This is normally left to the academic affairs division, the Vice President of Academic Affairs, college deans, department and university-level committees populated with highly-qualified faculty.

Effective RPT processes are essential to any university. These processes need to be coherent and as clear of conflicting interests as possible, as faculty and the institution reach their agreements. Guidelines published by the AAUP describe best practices for RPT procedures and provide lists of the characteristics common to strong RPT programs (see Appendix C). If we

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hold these important measures as a standard, then MSU-D is certainly in need of a redesign so that the university may come into alignment with AAUP best practices and with the practices conducted at other comprehensive state universities similar to MSU-D. The RPT process is non-standard by having the faculty senate play such a significant role -- as indicated by the AAUP.

We recommend that faculty senate's role in reappointment, promotion and tenure be limited to appeals based on procedural errors, thereby allowing the colleges to be the chief reviewers and recommenders of tenure and promotion. Finally, we recommend that the primary focus of faculty senate be on curricular and educational matters. Providing faculty-centered expertise in this domain is the most critical part of a university's existence and helps to elevate the educational component of its mission.

#### **Recommendation 4: Separate the main administrative decision-making bodies into two groups—President's Cabinet and Senior Leadership Advisory Council.**

We propose that the main administrative decision-making bodies be split into two groups. We base our recommendations on research conducted for nine public institutions in the Western region similar in size and scope to Metropolitan State University of Denver. Appendix D lists these comparison institutions.

These two groups are a smaller President's Cabinet and a larger Senior Leadership Group. Appendix E lists the participation by specific senior leaders in each group. Their tasks are as follows:

- *President's Cabinet:* Meeting weekly, these individuals are tasked with keeping abreast of and disseminating the current information and issues appearing on campus, the local and state economies, and higher education. This is the prime decision-making body on campus, though it also works with the senior leadership group with respect to decisions that impact the MSU-D community.
- *Senior Leadership Advisory Group:* This group consists of all individuals in the President's Cabinet along with representatives for faculty, staff and students. Meeting monthly, this group advises and consults, serves as a sounding board in which information is passed to all campus representatives in a timely manner. This group is designed to be inclusive, and to give the President's Cabinet the opportunity to have discourse and solicit feedback concerning past, present and future university decisions from all MSU-D stakeholders on a regular basis.

#### **Recommendation 5: Participation by MSU's President and Provost in senate meetings.**

A significant challenge at MSU-D has been the real and perceived distrust between faculty and administration. While shared governance might involve advocacy on behalf of faculty interest, universities are more effective when the faculty senate serves as a means of representing faculty expertise and perspective on university level decision making, in the spirit of shared governance. A more adversarial approach results from senate practices that exclude rather than include the voice of the president and chief academic officer/provost at senate meetings. The President and Provost should be regular agenda items on senate meetings.

### **Future Considerations**

Shared governance plays an important role in transitions that significantly impact the university community. We propose that MSU-D educate the university community regarding key principles of shared governance so individuals are clear on meanings and roles and understand the realities of the processes. Once understood, more cooperation and trust can be built. We propose that the MSU-D develop a set of rules for the composition of search committees for high level leadership appointments such as president and vice presidencies, and deans. Doing so will ensure that future searches are structured in a manner that will provide input from key stakeholders, promoting transparency and cultivating trust and respect for institutional structures. Finally, MSU-D is doing many things right and with some focus on shared governance the university has the possibility of becoming a national leader.

### **Reference Documents**

#### **Appendix A : List of publications reviewed**

*The AAUP Policy 10<sup>th</sup> ed: Faculty participation in the selection, evaluation and retention of Administrators*

*AAUP 1966 Statement on Governance on College and Universities in 2. The Academic Institution: Joint Efforts, section c. Internal Operations*

AGB Statement on Board Responsibility for Institutional Governance; Evaluation of Shared Governance-“questions drawn from a short monograph by Keetijie Ramo entitled Assessing the Faculty’s Role in Shared Governance: Implications of AUUP Standards” (1998)

University Leadership Council’s “Strategies for cultivating a productive University shared governance model” Custom research brief (2008).

AGB Publication-*Shared Governance in Times of Change: A Practical Guide for Universities and Colleges*. Steven C. Bahls (2014)

“Evaluation of Shared Governance” Research report by ACE Fellow Climate Survey Liaisons (2016)

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**Appendix B: Summarization of ACE Fellow Home/Host Institution Best Practices**

These best practices were developed from an examination of the ACE Fellow Shared Governance Group’s home and host institutions. Their selection coincides with the concerns extracted from pages 11-16 of the MSU Shared Governance Task Force report.

MSU CONCERN	OTHER UNIVERSITY PRACTICES
<b><i>Trust &amp; Accountability</i></b>	
1) lack of trust in who is representing faculty and staff	<p>Committees have websites with committee members, charges, meeting dates, and minutes including votes. Process for voting members onto committees is publicly available.</p> <p>Academic Senate committees notes, agendas and all materials are posted, some earlier so that folks can prepare.</p> <p>Bylaws and constitution are in place all CMU meetings are public. Representation on committee structures includes faculty, PT faculty, staff and students.</p>
<b><i>Communication</i></b>	
1) changes in policy poorly communicated	<p>Depends on scale of policy – small changes effecting only a few units are distributed through committees which posted minutes.</p> <p>Larger campus wide changes introduced through larger campus wide processes such as town halls, web site postings, and emails soliciting feedback from constituents prior to implementation.</p> <p>A Shared Governance Task Force including representatives from Faculty Senate, Academic Staff Council, University Staff Council and the Student Association can also be charged to ensure everyone is aware of all issues that might come up that impact each group individually and collectively.</p> <p>The university community is informed of major changes in policy through weekly bulletins, news reports and special announcement messages. Division heads are responsible for follow up memos &amp; communications to their departments.</p>

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<p>2) communication more like PR because handled by Marketing and Communications</p>	<p>Provost sends out a weekly newsletter that includes addressing relevant governance issues. The Provost then has weekly open office hours to discuss any concerns about its content.</p> <p>Representatives from President’s Cabinet regularly speak at faculty, staff, and student senate meetings.</p> <p>President posts weekly to a blog setup specifically to facilitate open communications with campus community</p>
<p><b><i>Policies &amp; Decision Making</i></b></p>	
<p>1) need for making educational mission central</p>	<p>University works hard to align academic mission to its strategic plan. Senate is the main decision making group for educational policy.</p> <p>A leadership conference involving board members, administration, and campus leaders (including senators) is held at the beginning of the academic year to review what has been accomplished and set direction for the future. The goal is to ensure that all have the opportunity for input and can get on the same page.</p>
<p>2) Too many decision making layers</p>	<p>Several decision making layers, but types of decisions change depending on level e.g. curriculum issues start at dept. level which makes primary pedagogical decisions. At college level, same curriculum undergoes budgetary review. At Senate level – same curriculum is evaluated for fit into university wide curriculum. At Academic Affairs level, same curriculum evaluated for alignment with system-wide policies before being sent to president for signature if necessary.</p>
<p>3) Perception that decisions are too centralized</p>	<p>Worked to create a clear understanding of decision making. Instituted a Shared Governance &amp; Communication Committee.</p> <p>At the end of the day, final decisions are somewhat made in a centralized manner. However, channels are provided for input along the way.</p>
<p>4) Transparency in the decision making process</p>	<p>Faculty Senate and Administration will often issue a joint statement for the outcomes of controversial issues.</p> <p>Minutes of executive committee meetings are published.</p>

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	<p>President and Provost are members of academic senate and take part in discussions.</p> <p>President’s cabinet does make some closed-door decisions but most decisions receive public discussion.</p> <p>Curriculum changes must be approved by all faculty.</p>
<b><i>Voice</i></b>	
1) Fear of repercussions	<p>Many safeguards have been put into place including avenues for grievances. Unions have protective posture. Offices for Title IX, OCREI etc. are in place. HR investigates wrongful complaints. Committees oversee promotion and tenure.</p> <p>Faculty has a strong voice, even more so than any other of the shared governance groups on campus.</p> <p>Senate is the usual outlet for complaints against administration, and the provost or president often invite themselves (president is the chair of Senate) to address issues.</p>
<b><i>Committee structures</i></b>	
1) Murkiness about committee charges	<p>Committee charges, and composition, are defined in the University Constitution and are very clear. Division/units and the Senate website has this info as well.</p> <p>An informal audit of university groups, their functioning and composition, is conducted every 3-5 years.</p> <p>Staff has a voice on some committees that are non-curricular and may hold a few seats on the academic senate.</p>
2) Advocacy vs governance	<p>Committee structures provide clear charges. Unions advocate for non-administrative faculty. Governance often means meeting the charges which include advocacy.</p> <p>Faculty senate and staff council provide recommendations.</p> <p>Senate does serve as an advocate not only for the faculty but for other governance groups since they have the strongest voice. They also are guided by AAUP and UW System guidelines</p>

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3) Power concentrated in a few individuals	Term limit for membership on committees and as senators.
<b>Board of Trustees</b>	
1) Limited interaction	<p>Open BOT meetings and senate meetings. Processes in place for concern to be heard.</p> <p>A Board/Senate/Staff Senate reception is held annually.</p> <p>Senate occasionally invites the Board chair to a meeting.</p> <p>The Senate conducts an annual review of the president which it submits to the Board’s executive committee.</p> <p>There is a mechanism whereby an employee can petition to be heard by the Board.</p>
2) Representation	A smaller President’s Cabinet consists of 8 members and a larger Senior leadership group consisting of 16 members. The composition of each group is listed in the Appendix.
3) Communication	<p>Within a day or two of a board meeting, the President puts out a recap of what took place which includes whom spoke at the meeting and what decisions were made.</p> <p>The Board President might also draft an email to all on critical decisions like the President’s Evaluation and raise, budget cuts, etc.</p> <p>Trustees Board Meetings are open to the public and held between 4-6 times per year.</p> <p>BOT website is posted and current with agenda, minutes and reports</p>

## **Appendix C: AAUP Suggested Guidelines for Promotion and Tenure**

According to AAUP Guidelines issues of bias, collegiality, homogeneity, fairness and faculty qualifications with regard to research, pedagogy and service must be considered when rendering decisions about promotion and tenure. Individuals making decisions regarding the qualities of advancing in rank within a specific discipline must have specific knowledge of the individuals being considering. Therefore, the following is recommended:

1. Provide an annual review by peers (within the department or unit), by the department chair and by the college dean or dean designee until tenure is earned.
2. For considerations regarding advancement in rank the following is recommended:
  - a. Review by qualified peers at the closest level to the faculty member (usually in the department) and recommendation of support.
  - b. Departmental Committee review and recommendation of support
  - c. Chair review and recommendation of support
  - d. College Committee review and recommendation of support
  - e. Dean review and recommendation of support
  - f. University Promotion & Tenure Committee and recommendation of support
  - g. VP for Academic Affairs/Provost review and recommendation of support
  - h. Presidential review and recommendation of support
3. Other AAUP suggestions submitted for your consideration include:
  - a. Voting review committee members must hold the rank that is similar to or above the rank for which the faculty member is applying. No assistant professors should serve of vote on rank.
  - b. Voting review committee members must hold tenure. No faculty member without tenure should serve or vote on rank or tenure.
  - c. Establish a university Reappointment & Tenure committee. Because of issues listed above the Faculty Senate should not function as a committee of the whole. Colleges should have voted and selected representatives who hold rank of associate and full professor.
  - d. Consider peer review for advancement to the rank of professor, this level of scholarship, pedagogy and service should be benchmarked against peers in the discipline.

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**Appendix D: Comparison Institutions**

We chose eight public institutions in the Western United States of the same approximate size as Metropolitan State University in terms of the undergraduate student body:

- University of Colorado Denver
- University of Colorado Colorado Springs
- Colorado State University
- University of Nevada Las Vegas
- San Diego State University
- Cal Poly Pomona
- San Jose State
- Texas Tech

While each of these schools has its own unique mission and focus, we looked for commonalities in participation across president cabinets by specific position. We then included the positions that appeared relatively frequently, in at least 50% of the comparison institutions' president cabinet, in our initial discussions. A spreadsheet with this particular school-specific information is available at this link <http://tinyurl.com/jz2a5ju>. From this list, we then considered Metropolitan State University's current cabinet and governance structure, and the importance of some of the included positions, to arrive at our recommendations.

**Appendix E: Participation by Position within Groups**

Administrator Group Participation

Position	President's Cabinet	Senior Leadership Group
President	✓x	✓x
Provost	✓x	✓x
Associate to President on Diversity	✓x	✓x
VP, Advancement	✓x	✓x
VP, Finance	✓x	✓x
Chief of Staff	✓x	✓x
General Counsel	✓x	✓x

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Dean of Students	✓x	✓x
President, Council of Administrators		✓x
Director of Athletics		✓x
CIO, AVP Academic Computing		✓x
President, Faculty Senate		✓x
President, Student Government		✓x
ED of Equal Opportunity		✓x
AVP for Extended Campus/Engagement		✓x
President, Classified Staff Council		✓x
TOTAL	8	16

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[1] *1966 Statement on Governance on College and Universities in 2. The Academic Institution: Joint Efforts, section c. Internal Operations*

# Program Development, Approval, and Launch

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#### Introduction

The Program Development, Approval and Launch team focused on recommending a process and criteria for the University to use in the development, approval and launch of new academic programs. With the University's desire to continue to meet the needs of students and employers in the region, it requires a process for program development that is both thorough and timely. Through this inquiry process, this team outlined the data that should be gathered during the program proposal and development stage needed to provide evidence of institutional mission alignment and strategic priority. Additionally, this team developed recommendations for a review and approval process that will allow the University to be both responsive and responsible in these academic program decisions.

Through individual interviews with process stakeholders, the Team determined the following:

1. Recent changes to the program and course review/approval process are widely seen as positive. Several stakeholders specifically noted the benefit of the simultaneous review as a significant improvement to the old system.
2. Converting to an electronic system through the use of Curriculog has reduced the workload of making requests while at the same time increasing institutional transparency.
3. During the 2015-16 review cycle, 339 curriculum change proposals were submitted for review (177 substantive, 162 non-substantive).
4. Only 4 proposals were rejected (all substantive) and 15 others were either withdrawn or rolled into other proposals.
5. There was some indication of frustration with how Curriculog was rolled out and several stakeholders communicated a desire for more training.

#### Recommendations

Through consultation with the team at MSUD, our attention was drawn to important concerns regarding the process of program development and curriculum proposal and revision. Key issues included examining bottlenecks within the process; the number, structure, and representative makeup of key committees; lack of clarity in the roles of various committees; communication between committees; the role of the faculty senate within the process; and the relationship between the Curriculum Committee and the Curriculum Manual Committee. Opportunities include streamlining the process to capitalize on faculty strengths and emerging workforce need; developing criteria through which to prioritize proposals; optimizing the new "Curriculog" platform to ensure proposals contain the information most pertinent to timely decision making; and infusing authentic assessment into the proposal process.

# Program Development, Approval, and Launch

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The Team makes the following recommendations to the administration with respect to further improving the development, review and launch of programs and courses.

1. Do not make any more significant changes to the newly adopted process for reviewing and approving programs and courses. The process is too new for more change.
2. Schedule a formal assessment of the new process in the next 2-3 years in which all stakeholders are represented. The Curriculog software can also be assessed at this time in order to provide vendor with suggested improvements.
3. Reaffirm the formal charge of each entity in the process.
4. Develop institutional standards for what it means for a program to be “financially viable”. Established standards will ensure that financial viability will be determined at an earlier point in the review process.
5. Further define standards for what are considered substantive and non-substantive changes to existing programs and courses.
6. Empower departments to make non-substantive changes that only impact their department. Changes can be expedited through the use of a “Change by Memo” process rather than requiring excessive amounts of information.
7. Limit BoT approval to new programs only. New courses should be approved at a lower level depending on their impact on other units, departments or colleges.
8. Ensure that each college, department or unit has representation on the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee to ensure appropriate advocacy to the review of their requests. One option to be considered might be ex-officio administrative representatives on the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee from each college (i.e. Associate Deans whose primary charge is curriculum). This would provide context for proposals.
9. Allow omnibus/special topic courses to be taught for no more than 2 years without being subject to the curriculum review process. Approval for these courses can be accomplished by memo at the department level.
10. All new courses and course changes should be approved by the middle of the semester prior to their launch. For example, a course to be offered in Spring '17 should be approved by Oct 15, 2016 and a course to be offered in Fall '17 should be approved by Mar 15, 2017.
11. Purple Book should be published annually rather than existing as a live document.
12. Ensure that regular training sessions are provided for the use of Curriculog.
13. All new programs should be approved at least one year prior to their launch.
14. Ensure that each review entity understand what would be a cause for denying a program or course.

# Communications Across Campus

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#### Introduction

This report recommends ways Metropolitan State University (MSU) Denver can improve two-way communications with faculty and staff and enhance its employee recognition programs. To do so we: 1) synthesized the findings of several past studies and surveys conducted either for, or by the institution; 2) conducted our own review of the communications materials available to us; and 3) placed our findings in a theoretical framework focused on people, messages, meaning, practices, and purposes of communication (Shockley-Zalabak, et al. (1995). Among the report's key recommendations are to: 1) focus greater attention on department chairs as individuals pivotally situated to relay policy changes and gather feedback; 2) make a number of visual and organizational changes to university websites to improve the clarity of messaging and reduce redundancy; and 3) leverage the faculty and staff awards process not only to bolster morale but also to improve communication. Many improvements have already been incorporated into the recently launched Early Bird email listserv. MSU Denver has a chance to build on this momentum through the search for President Jordan's successor. The recommendations below can help the institution leverage this opportunity as the entire campus community comes to focus on, and desire information about, the leadership transition.

A robust and effective communication plan can help to build social capital, which Kennan and Hazleton (2006) describe as "the ability that organizations have of creating, maintaining and using relationships to achieve desirable organizational goals" (p. 322). Thus, the ability of MSU-D to manage its communication plan affects and reflects the ability of the institution to manage its strategic plan.

Shockley-Zalabak, et al. (1995) describes communication as a process comprised of people, messages, meaning, practices, and purpose: Who is communicating? What is being communicated and what does it mean? Where and how is it being communicated? For what reason or to what end? Our recommendations, below, are organized around this Who-What-Where-How-Why structure.

Woven throughout our recommendations is an appreciation for the inherent complexity of communication. As Berger (2008) notes, organizational communication occurs at different levels (from one-on-one to group to organization-wide levels), via different networks (formal and informal, horizontal as well as vertical), and on different channels (websites, social media, memoranda, face-to-face, etc.). Some of these aspects are easier to manage than others -- organization-wide, top-down, formal communications can be controlled by campus leadership in ways that individual, informal, face-to-face communications cannot. The former set the stage for the latter and hence illuminates the strategic importance of a well-designed comprehensive communication plan in helping to frame campus conversations.

The upcoming presidential search provides an opportunity to invigorate the campus-wide communication plan by taking advantage of the natural interest of various stakeholders and community members in the search process and outcomes to debut new channels and mechanisms and to build new habits of connecting with campus.

### Recommendations

The organization of our recommendations is based on our review of interpersonal communications theory, a synthesis of the deliverables requested by MSU-D in light of this theory, and our review of best practices of other higher education settings. Our overarching framework thus starts from theory, recognizing that communications is made up of a process involving *People, Messages, Meaning, Practices, and Purpose*. Within this framework, we synthesized the requested deliverables into four categories: Increasing Attention, Effectiveness and Responsibilities for Communications (AER); Improving Use of Communications Technology (UCT); Enhance In-person Value of Communication (IPV); and Improving Recognition of Employee Excellence (REE). Below, each recommendation is nested within this framework and designated by its appropriate acronym. We end with an annotated resources list with links to best practices of note.

#### **Recommendation 1: Focusing on the People**

1. Develop protocols whereby senior administrators, regularly and thoughtfully, communicate with the campus.
2. Create a new communications position (see Practices, below.)
3. Further utilize and empower department chairs as communication conduits and communication sources. (AER)
  - a. Create a space for department chairs to share news, events, and items of interest with the campus.
  - b. Leverage chairs to enhance reciprocal communication about vision, mission, policies, etc.
  - c. Institute or reinstitute department chair training, including a module on effective communication practices within the university setting.
  - d. Formalize opportunities for department chairs to relay substantive comments up and down, e.g. via an internal blog or discussion board.

#### **Recommendation 2: Focusing on the Message**

1. Explore how each communication conduit and content conveys MSU-D's mission and vision for itself, its community, and diverse constituents and stakeholders. (AER)
  - a. As much as possible, align communication to focus on this central message.
2. Develop consistent, clear message typologies applying recognizable, iconic branding.
  - a. Early Bird is a good example of this approach.
3. Consider regular message/newsletter, such as "From the Provost's Desk"; "From the Dean's Desk"- containing well-organized set of timely and critical information, with clear headings, short summaries, and links to more complete information.

#### **Recommendation 3: Focusing on Meaning, Purpose, and Value**

1. By providing refined content and powerful messages, the meaning of information that the institution wants to be conveyed, can become clearer. A key element of effective

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communication lies in the power of the message regardless of channels of dissemination. (AER)

2. Dedicate webpages to central statement of principles, updates on process etc. for all major campus initiatives (e.g. HSI, Strategic Planning, Accreditation, Diversity and Inclusion, Presidential Search, etc.) This can ensure that the most meaningful messages to the campus are clear and separate from all other types of messaging.
  - a. e.g. Resources/Links for Office of Diversity and Inclusion appear buried. This does not seem to represent the values and mission of MSU-D, nor the message that the institution desires to convey.

#### **Recommendation 4: Focusing on the Practices and Processes**

1. Explore primary faculty landing locations on MSU-D website and increase effectiveness of this location. (AER & UCT)
  - a. Create better and more consistently organized central locations for dissemination of information. (AER)
    - i. Faculty and Staff HUB has a lot of information, official dates, deadlines, but no scroll for breaking news, timely announcement, etc.
    - ii. News stories featured in Newsroom differ from those on Homepage news. Consider centralizing message in one predictable fashion and having all feeds (MSU-D News email, homepage, social media, etc.) send eyeballs to same location for same information.
    - iii. Direct users to location to view after the search concludes. (AER)
  - b. Introduce users to the quality and quantity of information they can expect. (AER)
    - i. Calendar function is very well designed, with text/email function to add to personal feed, but events mostly aimed at students.
    - ii. Consider adding “news you can use” sidebar to Newsroom page linking to separate page aggregating policy changes or consider visually separating these two threads while keeping both on the Newsroom homepage.
  - c. Early Bird is well situated vehicle for pushing faculty to important locations.
    - i. Good use of Early Bird to post President Staff Agendas. (AER)
2. Be judicious in making changes and guard against “change fatigue.”
  - i. Assess probability of success and ability to maintain.
  - ii. Institute easy wins first to gain goodwill.
  - iii. Take and apply feedback to show communication is two-way street.
3. Ensure that all materials on webpage are consistently up to date and maintained. (AER)
  - a. e.g. Prior climate surveys are on line, current is not; Senate documents are several years behind, however, Faculty Handbook appears up-to-date.
4. Provide channels and mechanisms for feedback and ideas to enhance two-way communications. (AER)
  - a. Consider using Current Issues page to collect feedback on policy changes currently under discussion.

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- b. Consider adding a suggestion box for feedback/questions about policy changes (and designate an administrator to monitor and act upon it).
  - c. Recommend against a blog-style comments feature on newsroom feeds, even if comments are moderated – and especially if they are not.
  - d. Evaluate the use of all social media platforms. (UCT)
    - a. LinkedIn - MSU-D has 70,350 followers; make use of this platform for sharing with alumni and community.
    - b. Facebook - who is the audience to whom MSU-D is posting daily?
    - c. Listservs - Clarify and publicize gatekeeping policies at the campus, school/division, and department/unit levels.
    - d. Mobile App - Consider a more comprehensive MSU-D Communication App to support multiple ways of communication; ensures messages from administration get to campus, community, and off campus constituents; serve as a conduit between and among constituencies.
      - i. This allows “push” mechanisms that are more acceptable to younger generations.
      - ii. The newly launched MSU-D Early Bird is an excellent consolidation of several prior communication channels, but it relies on traditional web and emails delivery, which are no longer the most used communication media among college students and younger faculty.
5. Continue and create opportunities for ongoing contact with administrators. (IPV)
- a. Continue “Coffee with President” and “Lunches with Provost.”
  - b. Convene periodic meetings of department chairs (and, either separately or together, director-level managers and above), led by the new President, to report key university initiatives, policy changes, and strategic updates.
  - c. Food and drink facilitates attendance, engagement, and good will.
6. Consider organizational changes to improve internal and external communications. (AER)
- a. Break off strategic communications oversight from President’s Chief of Staff position and create a new oversight position reporting to the COS
  - b. Reconstitute the Communication Advisory Council to be convened by this position, and comprised of senior campus communicators.
  - c. Charge communications team with implementing feedback from the GBSM, Corona, Faculty Senate, and ACE reports.
7. Changes to the Faculty and Staff Awards Program. (REE)
- a. Facilitate timely solicitation of nominations, rigorous review, and announcement of awards.
  - b. Have all faculty and staff awards coordinated in an organized, consistent fashion by a single non-partisan point person or office.
  - c. Review and revise award criteria and process for nomination so they are clear, meaningful, and engage community in all aspects of process.

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- d. Continue to have all nominations reviewed by appropriate governance bodies (e.g. Teaching; Faculty Senate.)
- e. Help division/unit leadership to encourage and reward submissions and awardees.
- f. Elevate the visibility and financial benefit of the award (e.g. medals or pins that can be worn at public events; awards to base salary or non-taxable bonuses; professional development or travel funds, etc.)

## Reference Documents

Berger, B. (Nov. 17, 2008). Employee / Organizational communications. Downloaded from: <http://www.instituteforpr.org/employee-organizational-communications/> .

Kennan, W. R., & Hazleton, V. (2006). Internal public relations, social capital, and the role of effective organizational communication. In C. H. Botan & V. Hazleton (Eds.), *Public Relations Theory II* (pp. 311-340). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Shockley-Zalabak, P.S., (1995). *Fundamentals of Organizational Communication: Knowledge, Sensitivity, Skills, Values* (7th Edition.) Longman Publishers.

### **Resources for Further Refining a Communication Plan**

1. Recommendations for improving internal communication at UM [University of Montana] May 2014: Retrieved from: <http://www.umt.edu/communicate/docs/Report.pdf>
  - a. Provided six broad recommendations followed by specific details and examples; focused on relational solutions:
    - Promote leadership development because leaders are the most engaged.
    - Promote communities of practice (even across similar job units, eg. accounting)
    - Improve employee onboarding (which improves an employee's "connection" to their employer)
    - Promote practice of permission-based communication (employees more likely to pay attention to messages they want to receive) as a potential solution for all non-essential communication.
    - Build a central communication resources website
    - Optimize communication tools (look at what is clunky or not user friendly from the perspective of the community)
  
2. Internal Communications: Final Report and Recommendations, University of Wisconsin. Retrieved from <http://www.apr.wisc.edu/documents/Projects/Int-Comm-Final.pdf>
  - a. Driven by the assumption: *"When employees feel that they are valued, trusted and engaged, and when they have clear and transparent lines of communication with their management and leadership, they are likely to be more productive, happier and vested in the organization's success."*
  - b. Recommendations:
    - Campus leadership should establish and communicate the base level of commitment to robust internal communication
    - Create an employee intranet with an authentication portal and customization capability to tailor communications to each employee's preferences
    - Use messaging tools that aggregate news items whenever possible
    - Improve access to email distribution lists for campus-wide announcements

- Create a new Internal Communications Coordinator role within University Communications
  - Develop resources and training materials that inform campus communicators how to best publish news items of campus interest to the appropriate communication channels
  - Identify best practices regarding the utilization of available technologies such as phone message texting and social media
3. Georgia Regents Internal Communications Guide: *Retrieved from* <http://www.augusta.edu/dcm/documents/internal-communications-guide-8-5-15.pdf>  
A thorough investigation and plan for communications. Pages 8-9 provide a chart of targeted communication topics, intended recipients and most appropriate means of communication and is a good example of targeting the right audiences with the right information using the right communication medium.
4. Sixteen Internal Communication Best Practices for 2016: *Retrieved from* <https://enplug.com/blog/16-internal-communications-best-practices-for-2016>  
Examples of best practice recommendations:
- Have a plan, goal, and strategy prior to designing a communication plan
  - Communication Tools are a means to a goal, not the goal itself.
  - Create venues for feedback and metrics to track use and feedback
  - Avoid communication overload - keep information relevant to the particular audiences