



**Middle Georgia State University**

**Academic Affairs**

**Provost Fellow**

**2018-2019**

*Building Faculty Community at MGA*

## **Introduction**

Middle Georgia State University (MGA) has experienced several changes over a short period time. The most significant of these changes has been the consolidation of Middle Georgia College and Macon State College. Post consolidation, MGA emerged with 5 campuses and some immediate pressing priorities such as maintaining SACS accreditation under University status, growing graduate programs, and increasing resident occupancy. Under the direction of administration, much of the work of this transition relied on dedicated faculty and staff.

MGA employs 283 full-time faculty with 47% female and 48% male. Most of the faculty, 64% are at the rank of Assistant/Associate professor and 57% are tenured. Faculty are essential to the core of the mission of MGA and it is critical that faculty are supported to develop their professional careers and have opportunities to engage with students, colleagues, and the community at large.

It does not go unnoticed that MGA has also experienced changes within the University administration. I have participated in several of the campus interviews and a common question that is raised for administrators is “How will you develop faculty community among the 5 campuses here at MGA?” It is with that question in mind and my experience of mentoring new faculty to an educator role that stoked my curiosity to explore how building faculty community was coming to realization at MGA. This white paper will describe the process, the results, and suggested recommendations.

To explore this notion of building faculty community, I searched the literature and I also reviewed the publication of the Chronicle of Higher Ed, *Great Colleges to Work For in 2018*. There was a common

theme that I discovered for building an environment of faculty community. The themes include but were not limited to value and respect—having a voice and being heard, motivation and strong connection, strong shared governance, faculty development, clear policies and guidelines for promotion and tenure, and engagement with students, colleagues, and the larger community.

See figure 1. Word Doodle from the recognition categories for the Top Colleges to Work for 2018.



The process that I chose to explore these concepts at MGA were focus groups held on each campus this spring. I talked to faculty at each campus except for Warner Robins where no one participated in the focus group. I talked to about 70 faculty and some administrators from different schools and disciplines and who teach on multiple campuses. I also had representation from Library staff. I asked seven questions (see Appendix A). I took notes during the focus groups and from those notes I explored the concepts of Motivators, Value and Respect, Engagement, Connections, Frustrations, and Dreams. I reviewed the notes first for clarity and then again for commonality. In the final review, I extracted common terms that represent the following concepts:

*Motivators for the work of Faculty*

The work of faculty has evolved in scope of responsibility in meeting students where they are and assisting them to achieve their goals. Faculty serve a number of roles for students such as teachers, coaches, mentors, advisors, and cheerleaders. Although faculty commented on financial motivators to earn a living, faculty cited students as the primary motivator for the work of faculty. Faculty enjoy facilitating student learning, growth, development, and success.

“I love my job.”

“Seeing the success of students.”

“It’s beyond teaching –it’s the mentorship.”

“Helping students achieve their goals.”

“Teaching is a platform to share gifts.”

#### *Value and Respect in the Workplace*

Faculty felt valued and respected through having a voice on Senate, Executive Committee, and voiced good relationships with Department Chairs. Faculty cited opportunities for faculty development, Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), service on committees, and opportunities to talk with University administration. Faculty discussed recognition of work through public/written expression, service recognition, Promotion & Tenure (P&T), and faculty awards. Faculty cited communication and visibility of University administration with the President and Provost.

“We are encouraged to grow.”

“Professional atmosphere”

“Faculty and staff have a voice and are encouraged to speak out.”

#### *Engagement with students and colleagues and Connection to the MGA community*

Faculty are engaged with students primarily through service with student organizations, camps, campus visits, academic showcase, student competitions, and experiential learning. There is involvement with research. However, the engagement and research opportunities vary by campus location and discipline. Engagement with colleagues primarily occurs within their discipline. The most common cited opportunity for collaboration outside of the discipline was through Faculty Senate. Faculty identified convocation and graduation as other opportunities to engage with colleagues within the larger community. Engagement with the larger community also varied by discipline and campus location. The most common cited social events were intramural volleyball on the Cochran campus and Christmas parties. There seemed to be a sentiment of wanting more opportunities for social and family engagement with the larger community.

“I engage with students through QEP.”

“I engage with colleagues through teaching circles.”

“I engage with students with student clubs and internships.”

“I read *Inside MGA* to stay connected to the larger MGA community.”

### *Frustrations related to work*

Frustrations related to work center around resources, equity, support, and policies. There is an underlying sentiment that smaller programs and campuses receive less in resources and focus in the larger scheme of priorities. Salary equity and perception were common issues among faculty. Although a salary study was completed years ago, adjustments were made to minimum range and there has been no additional follow up. There is a need for additional review to be able to offer competitive salaries. There are also challenges for faculty in trying to obtain tenure with current policies in place. The faculty experience from on-boarding within the first three years varies based on the discipline and assigned campus.

#### Faculty Experience

“Heavy teaching loads for faculty with master's prepared faculty in tenure track positions.”

“Spread too thin.”

“Teaching overloads.”

“Managing scholarship expectations.”

“Transitioning from career to faculty role.”

“Difficult to attract qualified people to a rural area for entry level faculty position with current salary range.”

“Data demands with a short turnaround window of time.”

“Student support needs are greater with writing and math.”

#### Faculty Development and Awards

“Teaching award typically goes to someone from the Macon campus.”

“Lecturers are not eligible to apply for faculty development funds.”

“Timelines for submission for faculty development funds.”

#### Mission versus Enrollment Growth

“Seems to be very Macon centered.”

“Disconnect from what's evaluated and what's communicated.”

“Upgrades to technology needed.”

“Streamlining services financial aid, admissions/transfer of credit”

“Students not having textbooks due to not having financial aid reimbursement.”

### *Dreams for the future*

Dreams for the future included expansion of services, technology, and expansion of physical space.

“Shuttle service for student activities.”

“Science building in Dublin.”

“Building more traditions among faculty.”

“Additional faculty and staff.”

“Technology upgrades and need for similar technology resources among campuses.”

These findings are limited to the participants within the focus group and cannot be generalized to all faculty at MGA. However, the findings are supported by several issues addressed with Faculty Senate and Academic Affairs this year. This exploration did not occur in a vacuum as there are several initiatives that have been implemented or will be implemented in the future such as MGA’s Strategic Plan with a tenet of Building a Shared Culture, the Provost’s White Paper on Academic Identity and Strategy, the CETL Taskforce’s Vision Paper, the USG Chancellor Learning Fellows, the MGA’s Wellbeing committee initiative, and the reorganization of the School structures. These initiatives influence the environment for building faculty community at MGA. As we move to a school based organizational structure, it is important that intentional and coordinated processes remain intact to 1) facilitate the experience and development of faculty throughout their career; and 2) share resources within a growing diverse multi-campus focus serving rural, urban, commuter, and on-line student needs.

It is based on my findings and considering the strategic plan for *Building a Shared Culture* by attracting, developing, recognizing talent, and retaining faculty, I would like to endorse and recommend the following:

- 1) Endorsement of the recommendations of the CETL Taskforce Vision paper with the consideration to expand support for the development of scholarship using the Boyer’s Model of Scholarship.
  - a. Recommendation one: Establish Office of Application, Integration, and Discovery (OAID) with support for Undergraduate Research and Community Engagement.

- b. Recommendation two: Establish “Thinking Communities” to allow for engagement without expectation of a product. According to Eddy & Garza (2012), Thinking Communities are designed for reflection and center around process. It serves as an opportunity to deconstruct paradigms within Higher Ed. Mentorship may be a topic to explore within a Thinking community. Space should be designated/dedicated for this purpose.
- c. Endorsement of the MGA Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Initiative for the University in concert with the USG initiative.

\*Items a-c may be able to occur under the umbrella of CETL in partnership with Library Services with limited resources.

- 2. Endorsement for developing clear guidelines for promotion and tenure within the schools that is endorsed by the University’s Promotion and Tenure Committee.
- 3. Recommendation three: Review policies and guidelines for faculty workload, development funds, and teaching awards. Consider adding additional eligibility for faculty development funds and additional areas for teaching awards.
- 4. Recommendation four: Training of faculty search committees. Building faculty community ensures that faculty hires and onboarding are intentional with sharing our mission, purpose, and academic strategy. Faculty search committees should be trained and include a core list of questions related to MGA’s values and academic strategy to assess fit for the institution. This should be reinforced when faculty are on-boarded and welcomed to the community. On-boarding materials should include this information along with an MGA lapel pin. Although new faculty are introduced at Convocation, it might be helpful to have new faculty introduced with a photo or either highlighted in *Inside MGA* or on a page on the website of Academic Affairs.
- 5. Recommendation five: Communicate plans for additional phase of Salary study.

*Acknowledgement: Thanks to those who came to talk with me. I appreciate your insight and knowledge. I look forward to continuing the work on building faculty community with you all.*

## Appendix A

### Focus Group Questions

- 1) What motivates you to get up each day and do what you do at MGA?
- 2) Describe the ways in which you feel respected and valued within this campus community.
- 3) Describe the ways in which you engage with peers within and outside of your discipline.
- 4) Describe the ways in which you engage with students in research, experiential learning, and service.
- 5) Share examples of ways that you feel connected to the larger campus community.
- 6) What are you most frustrated about right now?
- 7) What would you change if money was not an issue?

## References

Eddy, P., & Garza Mitchell, R. (2012). Faculty as Learners: Developing Thinking Communities. *Innovative Higher*

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