

## Proposed Employee Council Survey Results

In spring 2010, the Employee Council Working Group (ECWG), with the assistance of Ethan Kolek in the Office of Institutional Research, conducted a survey of non-faculty employees who would be represented by a proposed Employee Council. The purpose of the survey was to understand employees' current attitudes toward the proposed Council. The brief survey invited employees to share their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions about how an Employee Council might effectively meet staff needs. This document reports the results of the survey.

### **Survey Population**

The survey population consisted of all exempt-staff and non-exempt staff (N=559), currently represented by the Advisory Committee for Personnel Policies (ACPP), and a group of non-faculty Trustee Appointed (TA) employees who would be represented by the proposed Council (N=129). This group excludes members of the senior administration and members of the Manager's Council. Prior to the survey, a brochure describing the proposed Employee Council was sent to all employees who would be receiving the survey.

### **Data Collection**

On June 10<sup>th</sup> an email message was sent to potential respondents asking them to participate in the online survey about the Council. Employees who typically receive communications via campus mail (non-Trustee Appointed Employees in Dining Services, Physical Plant, and Rental Housing) received a paper survey via campus mail with a return envelope.

The paper survey resulted in very few responses (5 surveys out of 164, response rate = 3%). After consulting with some members from these departments, the ECWG opted not to send additional survey reminders to this group.

Two email reminders were sent to non-respondents of the web survey. The web survey achieved a final response rate of 49% (n=192). Trustee Appointed employees and Non-Trustee Appointed employees had very similar response rates (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Web Survey Response Rates**

	Population (N)	Response Rate	Number of Surveys (n)**
Web Survey Overall	395	49%	192
TA Employees	129	45%	58
Non-TA Employees (web survey)	266	48%	128

\*\* Six respondents did not identify if they were a TA or Non-TA employee

Because of the low response rate among the paper survey group, these responses have been excluded from quantitative analyses. Given the formative intent of the open-ended items, the responses to these questions are reported in this document. It is important to emphasize that the general attitudes of

physical plant, dining services and rental housing employees who received the paper survey are not represented in these results. The ECWG will need to rely on other sources of information to understand the attitudes of these employees.

**Summary of Results**

- Overall, 73% of respondents reported having a favorable attitude toward the creation of the proposed employee council (see Table 2).

**Table 2: “Which of the Following Best Describes Your Attitude toward the Creation of the Proposed Employee Council?”**

	%*	n (Frequency)
Strongly Favorable	46%	86
Somewhat Favorable	27%	50
Neither favorable nor unfavorable	22%	41
Somewhat unfavorable	3%	5
Strongly unfavorable	3%	5

\*Does not add to 100% due to rounding

- Trustee-Appointed and Non-Trustee-Appointed Employees had similar attitudes toward the Employee Council. 72% of Non TA respondents and 74% of TA respondents reported having a favorable attitude toward the formation of the Council (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Comparison of Non-TA and TA Attitudes toward Proposed Employee Council**

	Non-TA Employee (n=127)	TA Employee (n=58)
Strongly Favorable	47%	43%
Somewhat Favorable	25%	31%
Neither favorable nor unfavorable	21%	24%
Somewhat unfavorable	4%	0%
Strongly unfavorable	3%	2%

- More than one-half of respondents reported knowing “some” about the proposed Employee Council. About one-fifth reported knowing “very much,” and over one-fourth reported knowing “very little” (see Table 4).

**Table 4: “Which of the following best describes how much you know about the proposed Employee Council?”**

	%	n
Very much	18%	33
Some	55%	103
Very little	28%	53

- How much respondents knew about the proposed employee Council appeared to be related to their attitude about the Council’s formation (see Table 5). Respondents who reported knowing “very little” about the proposed Council were less likely to report being “favorable” and more to report being “neither favorable nor unfavorable” than other employees.

**Table 5: Employees’ Favorability toward Proposed Council by Knowledge of Proposed Council**

	Very Much (n=33)	Some (n=102)	Very Little (n=49)
Favorable (strongly or somewhat)	88%	78%	55%
Neither favorable nor unfavorable	6%	17%	43%
Unfavorable (strongly or somewhat)	6%	5%	2%

- In general, employees’ attitudes toward the proposed Employee Council did not differ depending on their length of service. Employees who have worked for the College for 11-20 years were less likely to report having a favorable attitude toward the proposed Council than were other employees (see Table 6).

**Table 6: Favorability toward Proposed Employee Council by Years of Service**

	0-5 Years (n=68)	6-10 Years (n=42)	11-20 Years (n=36)	More than 20 Years (n=40)
Favorable (strongly or somewhat)	78%	74%	56%	78%
Neither favorable nor unfavorable	19%	19%	33%	20%
Unfavorable (strongly or somewhat)	3%	7%	11%	3%

- The vast majority of respondents reported that email was their preferred method of communication about the proposed Employee Council (see Table 7). Given that these respondents all replied to a web survey sent via email, it may be that employees who prefer email communications are over-represented among respondents.

**Table 7: Preferred Methods of Communication**

	%	n
Email	95%	182
Open Meeting	29%	55
Campus Mail	20%	38
Web Postings	15%	29
Departmental Meetings	12%	23

## Open Ended Responses - Ideas and Concerns about Proposed Employee Council

Respondents were provided opportunities to respond to several open-ended questions. The first open-ended item generated the most responses -- "Please use the space below to tell us what you think about the proposed Employee Council. We want to hear what you like about this idea, what concerns you have, and if you have other ideas about employee governance at Amherst." The main themes from the open-ended responses are summarized below. After each item are direct quotations from employees' responses that illustrate each theme.

### The Proposed Employee Council is a Good Idea

Of the 124 employees who responded to this item, 96 wrote that the proposed Employee Council is a good idea. A number of employees discussed the benefit of such a council for the College as a whole, noting that such a body could foster improved communication and better decision-making.

*"I am very much in favor of an enhanced role for non-faculty staff in the life of the College. I am also in favor of a representative body that would include members of both the TA and non-TA employees."*

*"Creating advising groups that are more inclusive of the College community can only strengthen the College."*

*"Great idea - more communication and participation, and accountability, is better."*

### TA Employee Participation

Another prominent theme among these responses was the importance of inclusion and representation for all employees. Several employees mentioned that they hoped the council would help improve the divide between TA and non-TA staff. The majority of respondents who discussed Trustee Employees being part of the Council thought that such inclusion was important.

*"Great idea to have an all inclusive committee for employees."*

*"I think it is a good idea that Trustee-Appointed staff be represented on a committee. It is strange that they have not been before. I like the proposal to have 3 TA and 10 non-TA to represent the number of staff in those groups. It would make me uncomfortable if there were more TA staff, I think this proposal is fair."*

As the quote above illustrates, some respondents expressed concern about the inclusion of TA Employees creating an environment that would lessen the voice of non-TA employees.

*"Just want to be certain that the "little man" on deck isn't over-looked and has just as much of a voice. Also, the freedom for representatives of lower grade level jobs to speak without feeling uncomfortable-- especially because management, supervisors and superiors will be part of the employee council. There needs to be an openness and mutual respect established where every voice is heard."*

A few Trustee Appointed Employees expressed surprise about the proposed formation of an Employee Council. The strongest opposition to Trustee Appointed Employee inclusion in the Council came from a small number of self-identified Trustee-Appointed Employees.

*"I'm a little confused about where the idea that Trustee Appointed staff weren't represented in governance. As a whole, it seems that TA staff tend to have better access to senior administration than do classified staff. It seems that representation on College committees, like the CPR, has been conflated with the need for a general council that includes TA staff. I view these as separable issues. I'm also not sure how one would elect representatives of TA staff when the list of the members of that group has been treated as a secret. My concern for the creation of an all employee (except faculty) council is that the empowerment of classified staff by the ACPP will be reduced. I think the ACPP has served classified staff well over the years and I fear that the creation of this new body will not achieve that same end."*

More common were responses from Trustee Appointed Employees that mentioned a lack of formal representation currently, and the importance of being included in an Employee Council.

*"It's a welcome idea. As a TA employee, I've sensed a lack of an officially recognized voice in college governance, as I am neither staff (who have been represented in the ACPP) nor faculty. Having said that, Amherst is generally an open place where there are many avenues to express concerns and present grievances, so I've never felt disenfranchised, underappreciated or disregarded. Still, the Employee Council is a \*formal\* way to bring together staff from a variety of stripes and ranks, and could be a positive symbol of community."*

#### Concerns about Council Effectiveness

Another group of responses concerned the effectiveness of the proposed council. Eleven respondents wrote about their suspicions that the proposed Council would have little impact at the College.

*"I certainly appreciate the idea of having increased employee representation at the College, but I have to wonder if it will be more than a Potemkin Village -- all for show. What power will it really have? I have my doubts."*

*"I like knowing that staff will have direct input. I'm afraid that it may be one more place where staff put in time but their efforts have little results."*

#### Employee Council's Relationship with Human Resources

Several respondents wrote about the importance of the Employee Council functioning independently from Human Resources.

*"I think it is a very good idea. I think the three areas it seeks to address communication, representation and governance are crucial to Amherst College growing as a truly diverse and inclusive institution. My main concern is that the council will only report to HR as the ACPP did and I think it needs to have many more forms of direct communication with senior administration and the trustees."*

## Council Formation, Number of Representatives, and Transition from ACPP

Several respondents asked questions or expressed concern about how representatives to the Employee Council would be elected, the balance between TA and non-TA representatives and who should be represented in the Employee Council.

*“My only concern for the proposed plan is the number of TA representatives on the Council. I would be interested in knowing just how many TA employees are members of senior administration or the Managers Council. I believe they should not be ‘weighted’ equally with the ‘regular’ TA employees and that may change their representation on the Council.”*

*“I would be interested in learning why there are quotas assigned to the ‘types’ of representatives of the proposed Employee Council. What disadvantage is there to a 13-member council elected at large from all non-faculty employees without regard to the employment status of the representatives?  
Are the interests between TA and non-TA employees more divergent than the interests between any 2 individuals?”*

*“Are the interests between TA and non-TA employees more divergent than the interests between any 2 individuals? “*

*“ Under ideal conditions and in the foreseeable future, I hope that everyone on campus will look beyond superficial barriers of ‘status’ (TA, non-TA, faculty, administration, student, etc.) and find unity and identity in our common purpose.”*

*“One concern I have is the transition from the current ACPP to the new council. I think it will be important that this transition is done smoothly and I believe it may be useful to have the ACPP and the new Council overlap for 6-12 months to insure continuity and allowing new Council members to learn about what the ACPP has been working on for the past two years.”*

*“Administrative department heads, whether in the managers' council or not, should not be eligible for election to the trustee-appointed positions in the employee council.”*

## Summary

The majority of Trustee Appointed and non-Trustee Appointed Employees reported supporting the proposed Employee Council. Unfortunately, because of low survey return, the attitudes of many employees in Dining Services, Rental Housing, and Physical Plant are not represented in these results. Many respondents shared their thoughts through open-ended comments, many of which articulated the importance of having an inclusive council for both Trustee Appointed and non-Trustee Appointed Employees. Open-ended responses can provide the ECWG with rich information about employee concerns and hopes for the Council. It seems clear from employees' comments, that further conversations and details about the proposed Council would be welcomed by the campus community.