

SUSSEX COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND CLIMATE STUDY

A REPORT TO THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Board of Trustees of Sussex County Community College (SCCC) has contracted with Porzio Compliance Services to conduct a comprehensive and multi-faceted examination of the organizational health of the college.

An organizational culture and climate assessment is an integral part of a continuous improvement process for any organization. Organizational culture is the set of values, behaviors, practices, and attitudes that employees in the college share and influences how they interact, make decisions, and approach their work. The culture quite simply is what makes Sussex County Community College -- Sussex County Community College. The study will identify priorities and bring understanding to how to create a more positive work environment and work experience for both leaders and employees. A positive culture that values collaboration and empowers employees can improve job performance, productivity, and job satisfaction.

The project involved two main data collection tools. First, Porzio Compliance Services, using the PACE Campus Climate Survey (developed and administered by the Belk Center at North Carolina State University), conducted a workplace climate survey of faculty, staff and administration in order to gauge employee sentiment. Second, an in-depth interview was conducted of fifteen randomly selected employees (5 administrators, 5 staff and 5 faculty). The interviews provided a deeper understanding of the issues raised by the survey data.

2. PACE CLIMATE SURVEY

A. OVERVIEW

The researchers selected the PACE Climate Survey as the instrument that would be best able to provide the organizational data that the board is seeking. The PACE survey uses an established instrument (with over 30 years of survey administration) that has been relied on by many higher education institutions. Most importantly, the PACE Survey allows comparisons of campus climate to that of peer institutions by size, region, degree type, etc. (over 170 community colleges have used the instrument). The PACE Climate Survey is best used as a vehicle for the institution to understand how employees “experience and perceive their work at the college” and then to foster communication institution-wide regarding how to better understand and respond to the issues being raised.

Data collected from the PACE Climate Survey is divided into four climate factors:

- Institutional Structure climate factor “focuses on the mission, leadership, spirit of cooperation, structural organization, decision-making, and communication within the institution.”
- Supervisory Relationships “provide insight into the relationship between employees and their supervisors, as well as employees’ abilities to be creative and express ideas related to their work.”

- Teamwork climate factor “explores the spirit of cooperation that exists within teams.”
- Student Focus climate factor “considers the centrality of students to the actions of the institution as well as the extent to which students are prepared for post-institution endeavors.”

(Source: PACE Climate Survey Standard Report)

The PACE Team creates and administers the PACE Survey online. The PACE Team then processes and analyzes the data and writes the climate reports including comparison data. The PACE Climate Survey is based on a five-point Likert-type scale questions ranging from a low of “1” to a high of “5”. Two Qualitative (open-ended questions) were also included that asked about the most favorable and least favorable attributes. Two open ended questions were also posed regarding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion issues at the College.

There were 150 employees from SCCC who participated in the survey, evenly split between part-time and full-time status. The Standard PACE 46 Question Report consists of frequency distributions and mean comparisons for questions related to each of the four PACE climate factors (Institutional Structure, Student Focus, Supervisory Relationships, and Teamwork) with three comparison groups (high transfer institutions, institutions in geographic proximity, and colleges of similar size)

B. SURVEY RESULTS

As can be seen below, the mean score for the average of the four climate factors (Overall) is over 3.5 meaning that more employees viewed the climate favorably than unfavorably. The Student Focus, Supervisory Relationships and Teamwork Factors were all 3.75 or higher. The lowest mean score was in the area of Institutional Structure with a mean score of 3.03.

Overall	150	3.543
Institutional Structure	149	3.033
Student Focus	150	3.746
Supervisory Relationships	150	3.806
Teamwork	150	3.848

In order to surface significant insights from the data, we examined each question where 65% or more of the respondents Agree or Strongly Agree with the question being posed. Those questions are set forth below and organized by climate area.

Student Focus

Having a Student Focus is critical to the success of any community college. In this area, 65% or more of employees surveyed Agreed or Strongly Agreed in regards to the following questions that the institution is indeed focused on the needs of students and that the employees believe their work supports that mission:

- 7. Student needs are central to what we do: 67%
- 8. I feel my job is relevant to this institution's mission: 87%
- 28. Staff (non-instructional, non-administrator) meet the needs of students: 69%
- 31. Students receive an excellent education at this institution: 67%
- 37. This institution prepares students for further learning: 66%
- 40. Students are assisted with their personal development: 66%

Supervisory Relationships

Having positive supervisory relationships is key to a workplace climate that motivates employees to succeed. A significant majority of employees Agreed or Strongly Agreed that strong, productive supervisory relationships exist on campus as revealed in the following question responses:

- 2. My supervisor/chair expresses confidence in my work: 86%
- 9. My supervisor/chair is open to the ideas, opinions, and beliefs of everyone: 81%
- 12. Work expectations are communicated to me: 66%
- 21. I receive appropriate feedback for my work: 67%
- 26. My supervisor/chair actively seeks my ideas: 70%
- 27. My supervisor/chair seriously considers my ideas: 71%
- 34. My supervisor/chair helps me to improve my work: 70%
- 39. I am given the opportunity to be creative in my work: 80%
- 45. I have the opportunity to express my ideas to my supervisor/chair in appropriate forums: 77%

Teamwork

The relationship between and among employees is also a critical metric for organizational success. The survey reveals that the vast majority of employees are working in productive and supportive teams as revealed in the following question responses:

- 3. There is a spirit of cooperation within my work team: 74%
- 14. My primary work team uses problem solving techniques: 76%
- 24. There is an opportunity for all ideas to be exchanged within my work team: 69%
- 33. My work team provides an environment for free and open expression of ideas, opinions, and beliefs: 71%
- 36. My work team coordinates its efforts with appropriate individuals and teams: 65%
- 43. A spirit of cooperation exists in my department: 75%

Institutional Structure

As indicated above, the institutional structure climate area assesses a number of indicators closely linked to how the college as an institution is organized and operates including how decisions are made, communication occurs and leadership is demonstrated. There were no questions in this climate area where we saw 65% or more of employees who Agreed or Strongly Agreed with the statement.

Conversely, the Institutional Structure area was the only area where we saw the 35% or less of employees who Agreed or Strongly Agreed with the statement as can be seen in the questions below:

- 10. Information is shared within this institution: 32%
- 15. I am able to appropriately influence the direction of this institution: 33%
- 16. Open and ethical communication is practiced at this institution: 35%
- 32. This institution is appropriately organized: 26%
- 38. I have the opportunity for advancement within this institution: 30%
- 44. Administrative processes are clearly defined: 34%

These questions surface areas that will require further institutional inquiry and focus. These areas include information flow, communication, and decision-making processes. Also troubling was that 44% of employees did not feel that they had the opportunity for advancement at the College.

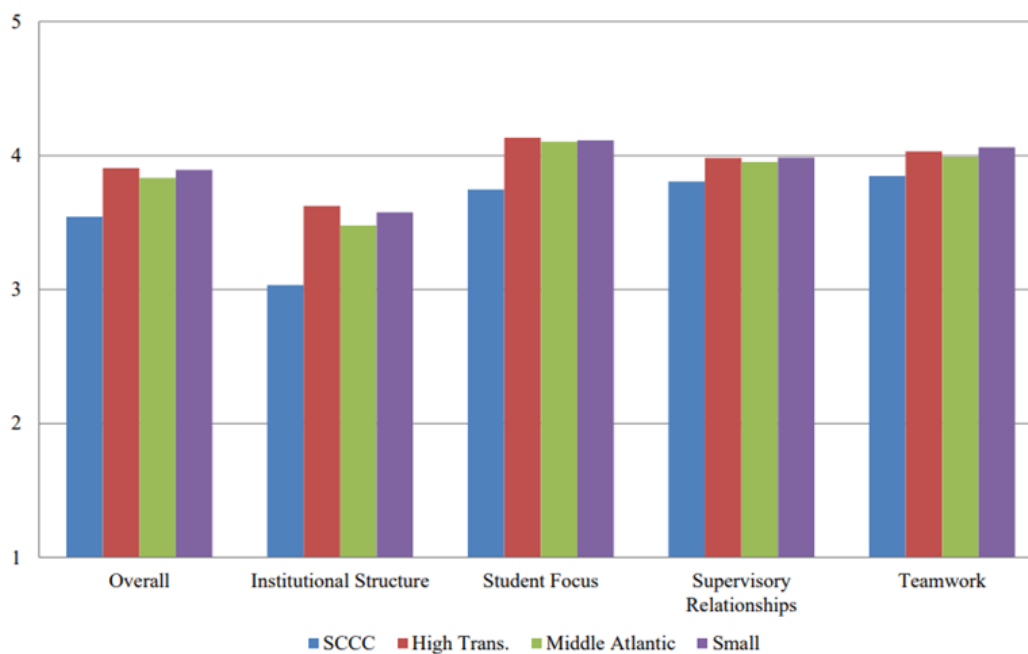
C. COMPARATIVE RESULTS

As we discussed above, one of the great benefits of the PACE survey is the ability to compare the results for Sussex County Community College with other community colleges, institutions of similar size, and institutions in the same geographic area. In examining the comparative data, we should be mindful that this specific data collection initiative by SCCC was not part of a routine replanned effort but was initiated in order to address issues that were being

surfaced at the college at that particular moment. Given the small size of the college, employees may have brought to the data collection certain motivations that may have some impact on the results.

Figure 1 below presents the SCCC means compared to High Transfer institutions, Middle Atlantic located institutions, and Small institutions. Although SCCC mean responses trail the comparison groups across the four climate areas, the mean comparison is most favorable regarding the Teamwork and Supervisory Relationships areas and least favorable regarding the Institutional Structure area.

Figure 1. Means by Comparison Group and Climate Factor



(Source: PACE Climate Survey Standard Report)

We have indicated below the standard report areas where the SCCC responses are significantly and meaningfully different from the High Transfer peer group data. These differences on their own will not prove the existence of a problem but do justify some additional inquiry by the college and corrective action if necessary. The PACE Standard Report comparative data raises concerns in the following areas:

- a. Alignment with Mission: Q1
- b. Administrators meet needs of students: Q 23, 35, 37, 42
- c. Communication Q 10, 41
- d. Structure: Q 32
- e. Decision making: Q 29
- f. Supervisory Relationships: Q 13

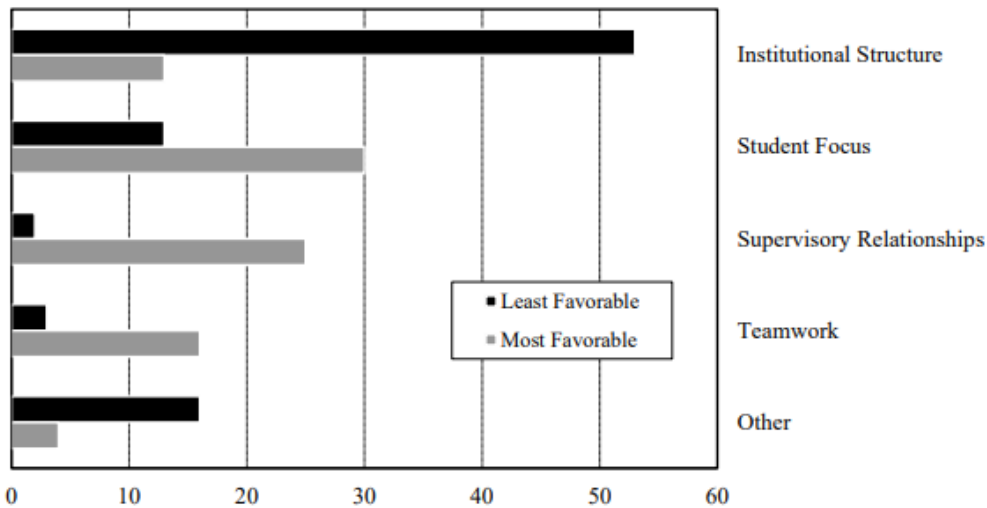
The relevant questions with the SCCC Mean Score and Mean Comparison scores are set forth below. All of these questions when compared with the “high transfer” peer group have effect sizes over - .600.

Institutional Structure	<i>SCCC compared with:</i>										
	SCCC		High Trans.			Middle Atlantic			Small		
	N	Mean	Mean	Sig.	Effect size	Mean	Sig.	Effect size	Mean	Sig.	Effect size
1 The actions of this institution reflect its mission	141	3.312	3.963	***	-.663	3.848	***	-.531	3.935	***	-.647
23 Administrators meet the needs of students	131	3.229	4.044	***	-.885	4.005	***	-.788	4.032	***	-.904
35 This institution prepares students for a career	138	3.580	4.172	***	-.702	4.142	***	-.659	4.230	***	-.827
42 Students seem satisfied with their educational experience at this institution	138	3.500	4.018	***	-.648	3.975	***	-.587	3.983	***	-.633
10 Information is shared within this institution	144	2.708	3.462	***	-.604	3.248	***	-.420	3.344	***	-.510
41 I receive adequate information regarding important activities at this institution	143	3.126	3.809	***	-.633	3.670	***	-.480	3.712	***	-.538
29 Institution-wide policies guide my work	137	3.241	3.876	***	-.649	3.797	***	-.552	3.858	***	-.654
32 This institution is appropriately organized	137	2.606	3.432	***	-.692	3.132	***	-.415	3.397	***	-.678
13 Unacceptable behaviors are identified and communicated to me	123	3.211	3.824	***	-.621	3.715	***	-.493	3.824	***	-.652

D. QUALITATIVE REPORTS

The survey also included a Qualitative Report that set forth responses to open-ended questions that required respondents to write in comments. Responses to the two qualitative questions that asked about what respondents found most favorable and least favorable about the institution were coded broadly back to one of the four climate factors or an “Other” category for those comments that did not fit into a climate factor. As can be seen in Figure 1, the greatest number of favorable comments fell within the Student Focus and Supervisory Relationships climate factor and the greatest number of unfavorable comments fell within the Institutional Structure climate factor. We will discuss below the climate factors where there were more than 25 responses, either favorable or unfavorable.

Figure 1. Sussex County Community College Comment Response Rates



(Source: PACE Standard Survey Qualitative Response Report)

There were 30 favorable comments in the Student Focus category. Below we have developed general categories from the responses presented in rank order by the number of responses (limited to only the top issues).

1. College is student centered
2. College serves students well
3. Employees care about student
4. Administration supports students and staff
5. College has good physical resources

There were 25 favorable responses in the area of Supervisory Relationships. Below we have developed general categories from the responses presented in rank order (limited to only the top issues).

1. My supervisor respects academic freedom and provides flexibility to faculty in teaching.
2. My supervisor is an excellent leader, works effectively with me, and is understanding and supportive.
3. My supervisor is open and honest, collaborative, and good communicator.

There were 53 unfavorable comments regarding the Institutional Structure area. Below we have developed general categories from the responses presented in rank order by the number of responses (limited to only the top issues).

1. Criticism of Leadership of the College (i.e. unethical/ no trust or confidence in/poor decision-making/disorganized).
2. Poor communication/transparency/meaningful opportunities to provide input into decision-making.

3. Employees not properly compensated/favoritism in compensation/faculty not valued.
4. No system of accountability for employees.
5. Fear of retaliation for voicing opinions/lack of safe space to voice opinions/hostile work environment.

PACE also included a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Qualitative Analysis. PACE indicates that the purpose of the DEI report is to “facilitate conversations around this topic at community colleges...” by asking employees to respond to two qualitative questions that focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (See PACE DEI Qualitative Report).

Questions 1: When thinking about your institution’s work to promote diversity, equity and inclusion, what do you think should be institutional leadership’s top priority in this next year? (n=72). We organized the responses into general categories, the top issues are listed below in rank order pursuant to the number of responses:

1. More training and education for staff; create more opportunities for input/forums.
2. Promote DEI organization wide, grow a DEI supportive culture at the College.
3. These initiatives are not necessary, College is already diverse, College should focus on finding employees who fulfill the job duties.
4. Administration does not understand DEI issues and needs to be more transparent in reporting progress.
5. The College should continue doing what it is doing now since it has been successful.

What are the barriers to improving issues of diversity, equity and inclusion at your institution? (n=68). We organized the responses into general categories, the top issues are listed below in rank order by the number of responses:

1. Need more staff devoted to DEI initiatives, need better support services, need placement testing, need more funding, need higher salaries, need more programs, need all employees to take training.
2. Do not see any barriers at the College or College should continue current efforts.
3. Not having an institutional culture that is supportive of DEI, institution does not prioritize DEI, resistance to change.
4. Executive Leadership Team is main barrier (lack of awareness/support).
5. Lack of Representation/Diversity on Hiring Committees.
6. Main barrier is location, Sussex County is not diverse.

3. SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW RESPONSES

In addition to the survey instrument, we conducted 15 semi-structured interviews of college employees. The college provided us with an Excel spreadsheet of all college staff, including part-time employees and adjunct faculty. Using a random number generator, we selected five employees with faculty titles, five employees with support staff titles, and five employees with administrative titles. We emailed each of the selected employees with an invitation to an in-person or virtual interview. If the employee did not respond within three days, we randomly selected another employee in that same title category to receive an invitation. We assigned each participant a unique identifying number and used that number for all recording purposes. Only the researchers had a list linking names of participants with their number.

The invitation described in detail the steps that would be taken to protect confidentiality of the responses and the identity of the participant. The response rate was strong across all of the job titles, except for part-time and adjunct faculty which to some extent was to be anticipated (it was not clear how often these employees were checking their college email address).

We developed an interview instrument with 20 questions which we believed could be covered in a 45-minute interview. The interview was structured as a dialogue in that we probed with additional questions in order to elicit more information or context from the participant and the participant was able to add information outside of the prepared questions.

The in-person interviews were conducted at an off-campus site in order to protect confidentiality. The site the researchers selected was the Holiday Inn conference room, which was approximately 1 mile from campus. This room had the advantage of having a second entrance/exit to ensure that subjects would not see each other in the lobby or waiting for the interview to begin. We also gave additional time between interviews to allow a confidential exit for those being interviewed. These protocols, we believe, did lead to both greater candor on the part of the participant and a comfort level among the participants that the researchers understood concerns with confidentiality.

The researchers did not record the interviews but noted the responses in writing. We transcribed the notes and organized the responses by subject and by topic.

The interview data was helpful in understanding and verifying a number of insights from the survey data. As a general matter the interviews revealed that the employees interviewed were deeply divided over the state of the college, with roughly half being supportive of the direction of the college and leadership and half being critical of the direction of the college and leadership. These divisions were reflected in many of the questions.

The interviews provided insights into a number of research questions. A summary of the results is presented below and organized in order to answer each research question.

1. How do employees perceive the work environment at the college? Do employees feel safe at the college? Most employees do not believe that there's a hostile work environment at the college and that they are treated with respect by colleagues and the administration. However, only half of the employees felt safe in the college environment with many referencing the lack of a visible and responsive security team.
2. What motivates employees? The employees indicated that their major motivation at work was in rank order: 1. serving students; 2. being a part of the college community; and 3. mentoring staff.
3. How do employees perceive their workload and stress levels? Most of the employees responding to this question indicated that they believed they were able to live a healthy work life balance with many referencing the four day work week. Most of the employees indicated that they were often stressed at work with the most common reason given being staffing shortages.
4. Do employees believe efforts to foster diversity, equity and inclusion have been successful? Most of the respondents indicated that, although the college community is committed to diversity, equity and inclusion, it is struggling with how to accomplish this. Many referenced the lack of preparation and support for students from different backgrounds as the reason for this.
5. Is communication effective across the college? Of the 14 employees responding to this question, six found communication to be deficient and four found communication to be effective. The remaining four indicated that, although there were problems, good faith efforts were being made by college leadership to improve communication. Those who believed communication was ineffective referenced that major campus decisions were being made without seeking staff input. Others referenced the lack of community and the ability to communicate across department silos as a contributing factor to the poor communication.
6. What is the employees relationship with their immediate supervisor? Most of employees interviewed thought that management at the college delegates tasks efficiently and that there's a positive dynamic between middle management and employees.
7. How do employees perceive college leadership? Although slightly more than half of the employees responding to this question believed that the leadership team did act ethically and maintained high standards for their conduct, there was a distinct group of respondents who believed that the leadership team lacked integrity identifying favoritism, lack of transparency, and lack of trust as the main issues.
8. What should the college be doing to ensure the best educational experience for all students? Respondents to this question provided the following ideas (top four in rank order): 1. improve communication and collaboration; 2. Address leadership issues; 3. expand programs and add faculty; 4. improve student support services.

4. DISCUSSION

We note at the outset that one of the purposes of the study was to understand allegations being made regarding a hostile work environment at the college. The study indicated that most employees do not believe that there is a hostile work environment and instead believe that they are treated with respect by colleagues and the administration.

With that said, the study did surface a number of issues regarding the structural organization, decision-making processes, leadership and communication issues of the college. The data suggests that the college should examine these issues more closely to determine if better processes and more regular and effective communications to employees is necessary to ensure that employees are informed and involved in shared governance. The study data also suggests that the leadership team examine the desirability of a greater awareness on their part regarding the impact of their leadership style on college climate and culture.

5. CONCLUSION

We believe that the study has served its purpose in providing the Board of Trustees and administration with the data necessary to develop and pursue strategies to improve the climate and culture at the college. These efforts undoubtedly will lead to a stronger college that is better able to support students and the community. The information gathered in this study is not intended to definitively answer every question, but to drive conversations on campus among all constituencies with the goal of improving communication, relationships, shared governance, processes, policies and transparency.

Institutional leadership, following extensive review of the survey data, has developed a comprehensive evolving action plan for moving forward. The plan not only seeks to understand the issues underlying the data better but to ensure that the entire campus community is involved in developing and implementing the steps necessary to improve. Our only additional recommendation would be for the college to administer the PACE survey again in the Spring of 2025 in order to provide some initial feedback on the success of these efforts.

We close by thanking the Board of Trustees for providing us with this opportunity to support the College in its improvement efforts. We also would like to thank the Administration and the entire College community in their willingness to engage in this study with great candor and thoughtfulness.

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