



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 degree 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 fulltime 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, colleges, 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 2015. 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

“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 ~~work~~ with student organizations, camps, campus visits, academic showcase, student competitions, and experiential learning. There is involvement with



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

“Students not having textbooks due to not having financial 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 Being 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 expansion and development of faculty throughout their career; and 2) share resources within a growing diverse multi campus focus serving rural, urban, commuter, and other student needs.

It is based on my findings and considering the strategic plan for Building a Shared Culture by attracting,

- 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 in Higher Ed. Mentorsh, w Co289 (t)-pu(ng)10po(. C12.5[(Men)12.5t2 4-4.6

## 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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