

NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR LEADERSHIP & INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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Grand Rapids Community College Grand Rapids, Michigan

PACE Qualitative Report

Personal Assessment of the College Environment

Lead Researchers Conducted

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NATIONAL INITIATIVE FOR LEADERSHIP & INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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Qualitative Analysis

Respondents were given an opportunity to write comments about areas of the institution they found most favorable and least favorable. Of the 305 Grand Rapids Community College employees who completed the PACE survey, 139 respondents (45.6%) provided written comments. In analyzing the written data there is a degree of researcher interpretation in categorizing the individual comments. However, reliability is ensured by coding all responses back to the questions on the PACE survey.

Figure 1 provides a summary of the open-ended responses. This summary is based on Herzberg's (1982) two-factor model of motivation. NILIE has modified the model to represent the PACE factors by classifying the comments into the most appropriate PACE climate factors. This approach illustrates how each factor contributes to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the respondents. Please note that when asked for opinions, it is common for respondents to write a greater number of negative comments than positive comments.

The greatest numbers of comments across all factors fell within the Institutional Structure climate factor. Please refer to Tables 1 and 2 for sample comments categorized by climate factor and the actual number of responses provided by GRCC employees. This sample of open-ended comments reflects employee responses as coded back to the questions of the PACE survey. Please note that comments are quoted exactly as written except in instances where the integrity of the report is compromised. Any additional edits for clarity are indicated by [].

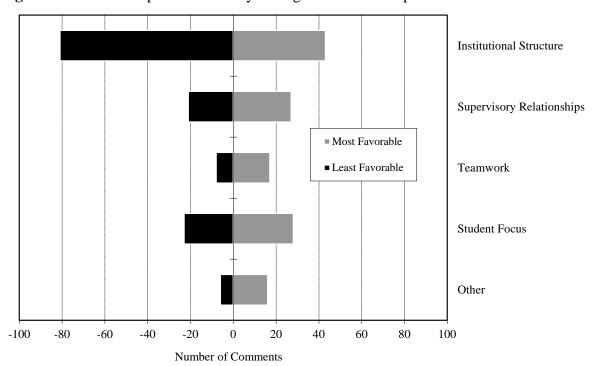


Figure 1. Grand Rapids Community College Comment Response Rates

Note: Adapted from Herzberg, F. (1982). *The managerial choice: To be efficient and to be human* (2nd ed.). Salt Lake City, UT: Olympus Publishing Company

Table 1. Most Favorable Responses—Sample Comments and Actual Number of Responses at Grand Rapids Community College

Factor Themes

Institutional Structure (n=43)

I believe we have a great commitment to equity and inclusion, but don't always know how to do the on the ground work that delivers that result. We are trying hard though, and including various voices, and our efforts are apparent.

The institution has a mission that is reflected from the top down -- allowing everyone and anyone to gain education.

GRCC is [conscientious] of our diversity and embracing the qualities that each person brings to our institution. We value equity, and are working to implement processes to help ensure it.

I like the ideals that this institution is built on. I like what we stand for and that we strive to be diverse and equitable.

Most favorable is the attempt to be inclusive with all kinds of individuals.

The overall mission of equity and inclusion here on campus is what I find most favorable. Specifically, the Diversity Lecture series and the CLS 100 Diversity lectures are 2 tangible examples of how GRCC has devoted itself to upholding these values on an institutional level. This categorizes GRCC as a progressive institution that cares about the individual needs and identities of both its students and its employees.

I think the college has come a long way over the years to include everyone's voice in the decision making both in the larger committees and departmentally.

We have supportive, highly ethical leadership at this college. Our administrative leadership makes student success the heart of our work. Leadership genuinely cares for faculty and staff members.

There have been great strides in the last year in communication -- from above, and within the institution. I believe we finally are putting students and how to best serve students first. It is a much friendlier place to work in the last year.

Administration seems to care about college and employees. Trying to make [the] work environment the best it can be for everyone. Although they need to stop being afraid to take a stand and do what is right when there are issues. Sometimes it seems they are more worried about public opinion than running the college like a business especially with disciplinary measures and firing.

GRCC is a very welcoming place to work. Most employees I've encountered are friendly and helpful.

I love the can-do attitude that we approach our work with at GRCC. As a new hire, GRCC has been a welcoming environment -- I am fired up about the work I get to do and the population of our students.

I love working for the college; it's a great asset for the community!

There have recently been multiple venues in which the administration has showcased that it values all of the staff present who contribute to the daily operations of the college.

I love love love the new collaborative spirit. I like the communication from the President's Office in terms of what's happening on campus with the "Pink Ink" coming out weekly. I loved the homecoming events. Any opportunity for us to get out of our offices and talk with other people who work here is awesome. We are here 40+ hours a week and making these connections help us help the students! Need to know who to call about testing or needing a key made or who is in charge of lifeguard training? If we get out and about and MEET and CONNECT with the people who do those jobs we will be able to do our own jobs better.

Strong connection to community/employers; Encouragement of innovation; Support for collaboration with other colleges; positive interactions with other departments; caring for students

I am thankful to be a part of a collegial, engaged department. Every faculty member is valued, supported, and motivated to meet the challenges of our students.

Supervisory Relationships (n=27)

I receive great support from my supervisor and my work role provides variety and allows creativity while at the same time stretching my abilities and providing support for professional growth.

I feel respected, valued, and given rewarding work

Love my department head! S/he is knowledgeable, involved, up-to-date, supportive & encourages creativity.

My immediate supervisor is very encouraging and uses the strength of their team to create groups to work together on projects. They are very forward thinking. They offer many opportunities for professional development outside of the standard offerings of the College. This has led me to many growth opportunities that I would not have had as an APSS [Alliance of Professional Support Staff] using only the offerings of the College.

I am able to use my creativity and expertise to respond to student needs and real-world trends. This is empowering to me and makes my teaching more effective and useful for students. My department celebrates innovation and creativity. I work in a great department which supports and celebrates making lasting connections with students. I know we really care about our students and their academic and personal success. This is at the heart of what we do.

My supervisor is excellent. They involve me appropriately in the work done within our department and forwards questions/concerns that I should handle to me instead of taking care of them. They support me in my professional development, work and does a fantastic job promoting work/life balance. I am fortunate to work at GRCC.

The freedom to implement new ideas in my classes without needing specific permission.

GRCC offers lots of enrichment opportunities to both students and faculty and encourages faculty to participate.

Many opportunities for professional development & serving on cross-college teams.

This is a great environment for professional development and discussion. I work with many people who are focused on students and the outcomes that GRCC can give to those students.

We have ample opportunity for professional development at GRCC. It is nice to have a location to ask questions and get information on new teaching techniques.

Teamwork (n=17)

I feel my work area really supports one another. We understand that work can ebb and flow so we do our best to help out if needed.

I have some flexibility in my work schedule which is something I greatly appreciate. Everyone in my office is understanding and accommodating of each others' needs. We try to support each other as much as we can. I think we do our work efficiently and well.

My team has improved immensely, and changes in diversity have been very positive. This has been my most positive PACE Survey.

The ability to discuss outcomes and situations with other team members has been a huge plus for me.

I think the department I [work] in does a tremendous job of providing appropriate data and information to the rest of the college. Employees in the department [are] given the freedom to do their jobs in a creative and innovative way.

The faculty, support staff and the work we do in our department is very favorable. I do also feel empowered by the institution, administrators and peers to pursue challenging projects.

I work in a department that is very encouraging, uplifting and positive. It's rather large yet we all get along tremendously. I feel that is in part to the type of community that the leadership of GRCC has fostered. I love my job and the institution that I work for.

Table 1	Continued
Table 1.	Continued

Factor Themes

Student Focus (n=28)

I appreciate that the department does not "dumb down" the material too much for students. Another community college that I taught at would make the exams as easy as possible, but my department at GRCC does not do that.

I enjoy my co-workers and that, for the most part, we all understand that we have a common goal; ensuring student success. How we define student success or what we think is required to get there varies, but we all want to help our students. It comes up more than a few times in meetings that we must remember the reason for which [we] are doing our work.

Institution is focused on students and outcomes and that is GREAT as this is our core work.

It's a privilege to work with our college students and my faculty colleagues. They are the number one reason I love the work that I do every day. I have no doubt that the faculty and staff are dedicated to supporting and educating our students - my colleagues are passionate and do their best to help serve the diverse needs of our students and the greater community. We have new leadership we believe in and good changes are happening. I have a lot of hope for the future of our college. I feel supported as a person who has a life outside the college as well.

Our commitment to students and their success. I find that to be one of the most favorable things about GRCC.

Students are well-supported here, and are given many opportunities to succeed.

I think we as a college do an excellent [job] with students from scouting them out in high school to the end of their college career. And the Counseling department does an excellent job with students and their issues but they are greatly understaffed.

The Career Services Center works very hard to ensure that the students have a successful transition from GRCC if students [are] planning on attending a four year college or in the 2+1 program or going into the work world. GRCC [is] there to help you make the right choice.

GRCC is supportive of students who need extra help. An example of this is the Fast Track Program for students who place into remedial classes.

GRCC is incredibly student centered. Professional development that has been offered in the current academic year has been focused on innovation and service to students which I believe will improve our ability to serve students, staff, and the community.

I think the college does a very good job of providing an excellent education at an affordable tuition rate. It truly is a great part of our community. Most faculty and staff are very dedicated to help[ing] students achieve their goals.

Table 1. Continued

Factor Themes

Other (n=16)

<u>Autonomy</u>

I appreciate the level of autonomy I have in designing and implementing curricula. And the support and encouragement I receive from my department head is what allows me to feel confident trying new things in the classroom.

I enjoy the freedom and diversity my job allows me to have. Every day there is a new challenge and I enjoy working to create a new vision and a new outlook for my area.

Benefits

The salary and benefits are outstanding. The best I have ever seen. Full-time faculty, especially those who have been here a long time, and staff are well taken care of here.

New President

The President is an inspiring leader. The Provost is a great problem solver and methodical in her work. She identifies and addresses priorities appropriately.

With the new President I think our values are changing slightly for the better. We are starting to concentrate on students as people and not just as revenue generators. There are a lot of people who I interact with that are really trying to support students to ensure they are successful.

The college now has executive leadership that cares about both students and employees, and appears to have the ability to motivate the community we live in to partner with us to meet training needs of our students. It remains to be seen if this climate will continue to develop into meaningful engagement with the community and its educational and employment partners.

Table 2. Least Favorable Responses —Sample Comments and Actual Number of Responses at Grand Rapids Community College

Factor Themes

Institutional Structure (n=81)

The President places trust in a few top leaders who do not have the trust of many co-workers. This creates a chilling effect on the information that the President receives.

From my perspective, we tend to allow decision-making that does not take into account the individuals doing the work. I feel that we would have better procedures and would utilize resources more efficiently if the right people were consulted.

Leadership makes most decisions without much input from the WHOLE. Top down decisions are not always the most effective as those on the front lines or middle management are left to execute the process should have SOME input. SLT [Strategic Leadership Team] [does not give any] input as this is work is not day-to-day decision making. We are all professional adults that are working toward the same mission; the level one is getting paid shouldn't determine what level of decision making you are included in. Knowledge is key to success. Showing faith in your employees goes a long way.

Encountering faculty and staff members who use insensitive language and disregard the needs of their students is what I find least favorable. On a campus-wide level, there needs to be an "inclusive language and sensitivity" training to foster respect in an environment where students' learning experience isn't negatively impacted by intentional/unintentional bias, discrimination, and overall disregard.

Very few minorities and people of color represented in actual leadership roles (i.e. Deans, Directors, Instructors, Department Heads, Professors, HR, etc.).

It's important to believe that the mission of your department is valued and supported. I am concerned about responding for fear of retribution which says a lot. We do need a model for academic decision making and training for those who facilitate change. Too many committees and projects that duplicate and/or obstruct the work. We gather a lot of data, but we don't do enough assessment. Too much multi-tasking, too much reactive versus proactive kinds of responses. We need to focus on what is right for our students and the community versus going after the next "trophy."

Communication is lacking in the Academic & Student Affairs Division - especially when it comes to offering praise and congratulations to those going out of their way to work on important teams and/or to assist students. It would be nice to hear from Academic Administration on a frequent basis as to how things are going.

Lack of leadership and people skills.

I would like to learn more about student experiences and success rates at our institution.

Overall communication is lacking at GRCC. Items are discussed at college and leadership meetings but we don't have great infrastructure for individuals to go back to check on information and initiatives or for individuals that do not make meetings to remain informed.

We are a change-oriented institution, which is great and necessary. However, we do not pause between initiatives to allow adequate time to appropriately communicate with one another and to "close the loop." We communicate a lot of information within our institution, but I question if our means of communication are effective.

There is still a lack of understanding about what different program[s] are and what different departments do. I wish people were encouraged to explore more and to spend some time learning more about the college. It would help our students.

While I don't think this is generally how things work as far as putting student learning and success 1st and seeking faculty input before making changes, recently when faculty teaching developmental education courses disagreed with administration they unilaterally decided to lower cut scores for those classes which was really frustrating. It was a short-sighted decision that will likely ultimately harm student[s] and set them up for failure.

Many questions don't pertain to my status at the college as I have very little contact with students. Also there is a lot of emphasis on responsiveness but I find that colleagues are sometimes the least responsive. Phones don't get answered. Also, there is very little inclusion of union groups in decision making.

As with many institutions, there is a disconnect between decisions that the administration makes and what decisions would instead benefit our students.

Administration seems to feel they can do anything they want, disregard faculty completely or only give lip service. They wait and do things when no faculty are around, they have a highly toxic atmosphere going now, and don't seem to care at all.

I always feel like I can't catch up with my work, no matter how many hours I work per day/week. This creates some professional dissatisfaction for me, even though I am happy to be a GRCC employee.

I also want to see more cross-functional cooperation and enthusiasm. I have the opportunity to work on several projects that require cross-functional support and input, but often find that because they may not immediately benefit from it the enthusiasm isn't there.

Faculty are just ONE important aspect of what makes this institution great. It feels like the faculty leadership often think they are the ONLY aspect. We all have a responsibility for different pieces of student success -- it's not all in the classroom. Whether it's helping a student with his or her tuition bill or making sure they have heat in their classroom or keeping them safe on campus we all have a role to play and it shouldn't be considered "less than" because we are not faculty.

It sounds cliché, but there is a clear divide between administration and faculty, one that lately seems to end with faculty who feel undermined and belittled. There is a need for more open dialogue between faculty and administration and the type of collaboration that will support instead of short-change students.

Sometimes we tie our hands dealing with overly complicated systems and are hesitant to support individuals that would like to work collaboratively to wipe the slate clean and begin again in the interest of students and institutional efficiency.

Equal opportunity means equal opportunity, not giving favoritism to any one group. This college is not good at treating everyone the same, as it gives favoritism to certain groups of people.

One area [that is] least favorable is when the campus is closed due to bad weather. If students take public transportation and have early morning classes most likely they are on the bus stop by 5:30a.m. and arrive at school by 7:00 a.m. then you find out the campus is closed or classes are delayed when you arrive on campus.

It seems as though leadership is stretched too thin in regard to job duties and assignments, which leaves little time for strategic planning and properly assessing programming.

Middle management (associate deans; directors); the habit of filling administrative positions based on personal affiliations instead of based on a person's ability to do the job.

I appreciate posting going internal first, but any "higher" position seems to be appointed without interviews happening. Being able to move up here seems difficult if not impossible. We cannot have an [organization] chart because people get moved around and titles change all the time. So much time would be spent updating one if we had one (although I think we really need one!)

There is also no pathway for upward mobility and promotions. Very frustrating. You get asked to do more work but they never discuss a pay increase for the work you do that is over and beyond your current job.

Very few opportunities to advance. Job descriptions are so [expletive] specific, it seems that it is used against those who want advancement ("oh you've been doing that for years, how do you expect to do this?") Along that line, we have opportunities to take leadership seminars, yet they don't seem to help with advancement. Who are we going to lead in our current positions?

This is probably a contract issue, but there is no performance motivation at the institutional level. Per our performance evaluation, you can do a stellar job or a mediocre job and you will still receive the same pay raise/step movement. Although many are self-motivated and try to do their best work at all times, it can be frustrating to see others who do the bare minimum and receive the same "raise" as those who go above and beyond. It would be nice if there was an institutional incentive (monetary or otherwise) outside of our contract for those folks.

Even though I'm on cross-college committees I sometimes feel like this place is too large to really know what is going on. It seems kind of random how committee membership is chosen and it's sometimes hard to become part of certain groups.

The evaluation process for Faculty at this institution is not effective. Other than a couple of my coworkers there is not an administrator at this college that knows if I am an effective teacher or not.

There are many different initiatives across campus that seem to either be working in isolation or sometimes in direct conflict with each other due to lack of global big picture thinking and/or communicating. Many great initiatives and creative solutions can be great, but when they are not aligned systematically they do not always provide excellent student support.

Supervisory Relationships (n=21)

I also think [there] should be ongoing trainings for those new to leadership positions to help them get better at finding their leadership style and managing the demanding workload.

For least favorable/very dissatisfied -- Professional Development. It hits one area and that is the proper training for Google and the decision to have only one or the other and not both as it becomes very confusing when documents are saved on Google or the S drive. I know it has a lot to do with communication within a department, but it's still very difficult having two systems and two saving locations. To only have one one-hour class for Google and it's basically overview, does not allow support staff to be informed enough to help others. Support staff is the first line that someone will ask questions.

No opportunity for growth either professionally or financially. It appears as if more staff are leaving for better opportunities.

Supervisor who micromanages and does too much on [their] own.

There is no direction or training to incoming Adjunct or new Professors on how to do their job. The administration does not lend guidance [as to] what the outcomes of their new job should be. In my experience the administration just throws them in the fire. The Professors around them have to lead them based on what they have learned in the past. There is no leadership given to new Faculty by the administration.

It is frustrating to feel that your ideas and your work [are] not taken seriously. This is the way I feel most of the time. I feel that my ideas and my suggestions are boxed in because they aren't being presented to the right audience. In the end, I am not confident that if I go to my supervisor with a proposal or idea, it will be passed on with the same conviction to the decision makers who can make real changes at the college.

I find that training classes here are not very well represented, they are rushed through and mostly there is very little or no hands-on. The instructor makes jokes about it as if it is okay, because "you're all here to get the hours you need" etc. This has been the case for Groupwise, budget, and Google docs. The computers in front of us did not allow us to actually get on and do something. Unbelievable for a college.

Analyzing course outcomes is a glaring weakness. The institution (administration) is afraid to guide teachers who need or refuse help in being better teachers. The fear of the teachers union is debilitating to making things better. Treatment of adjunct faculty is bad. Teachers union protects the longest tenured and highest paid. Not very helpful to adjunct faculty or faculty like me who have been here for what is considered a short time.

Teamwork (n=8)

I wish my department had regular meetings. This would help newcomers (like me) pick up on more department-wide information than is possible in random daily interactions with the other faculty members.

Sometimes I feel like we promote the idea of growing and promoting within and hearing all of the voices. However, sometimes I feel like this is not fully the reality in practice. Small things happen that don't align with those ideas.

The staff in my office work very well together and we are efficient, but it seems as if the larger department we belong to does not respect our work or understand it. There have been multiple occasions in my time here where we have been unable to make decisions for our office, and someone else outside of our office has made them instead.

Student Focus (n=23)

Communicating clearly with students seems to be problematic, particularly in the area of financial aid. Communication must be done in simple and everyday language, not in jargon which students don't understand.

The least favorable is the complaining over small things. I do not believe students come first, but second to faculty.

[Let's] get some real professionals that can think about students and their education, not just crunch enrollment numbers. They are the major drag on this school's enrollment, on the diversity of course offerings, and on the enthusiasm of us in mathematics, English, and other departments.

I love that the college strives to be student-centered, but as an [alumnus] and as staff, I do not believe we truly are. There is so much room for improvement in our processes, but staff seem to get caught up in what is best for themselves, not for the students.

Relevance, I don't think our community understand[s] our relevance.

At times, the challenges of our students can become burdensome to faculty. We care deeply, and rearrange our methods continually to work toward student success. But in recent years, the emphasis on data has neglected to take in (to seriously consider and understand) our students and their needs beyond data points. There are advances in humanity that take place when a student engages in the classroom that cannot be measured by simple outcome statements, and at times, I have felt that our administration is not willing to listen to our concerns. An example: entrance level skill scores have been lowered because data shows students can enter and pass, when faculty have clearly voiced opposition to lowering scores. Faculty understand how low scores can reflect a host of functional and behavioral skills that limit a student's ability to achieve beyond the ["yes/no"] data point. Last: College Faculty are dealing, more and more, with mental illness and disability in the classroom, and as K-12 education knows, classroom numbers and staffing have to be adjusted to deal with noted problems. I am an educator, not a therapist, and faculty are sometimes burdened with needs beyond education.

I think there are ways that we could better support our at-risk students (LGBTQ, racial minorities, students experiencing homelessness, disability support, etc.). We need to really invest in staff, programming, and resources that help these students to succeed.

In an effort to "roll up our sleeves" with an "all hands-on deck" approach to our work, we fail to involve students in the decisions that affect them most on all levels. I also notice that we don't expect our students to have an interest in being involved in the process -- we believe they're too busy, that they aren't interested, or that they simply won't follow through. We're selling our students short and failing to give them space to get engaged with this community. There is justice in getting students to participate in the process instead of doing things for our students. As a GRCC family, we must believe they are interested, that they can make a difference and that their opinions are valuable. We must also communicate this with our students -- we need to help them feel welcome to share opinions, give feedback, pitch in, etc. There is educational value in this experience!

Table 2. Continued

Factor Themes

I hear many students that seem to be left out of "helping initiatives," probably because it is difficult for educated instructors and educated staff members to relate to a lot of the challenges that students face. Wouldn't it be nice if we had temporary housing or food supplies for students in a pinch, students who just need a week or two away from crap that keeps them from being successful? We have food pantries, which is a start, but can we get grants or supporting businesses to be even more helpful? It's harder than ever today to keep on an even keel, keep on top of all of the "adult" things that were taken care of 10, 20 years ago.

Other (n=6)

Accessibility

I feel that the College still has a long way to go in terms of providing access for those with disabilities. Students have many options that legally are applied, but some staff and faculty with disabilities feel that they are marginalized. Physically, (number of buildings and hills and several locations) ours is a challenging campus. Inside buildings, unless they have been heavily renovated, finding working handicapped bathrooms without having to go to another building or floor is a problem. Also, our sound systems do not appear to be set up to work with hearing aids.

Accountability

I do not agree with the lack of accountability. It seems people can violate the rules in place and not be held accountable. It appears to be that HR and Admin are afraid to discipline out of fear of reputation or grievances. I have observed people do what they want and nothing is done when admin or HR has knowledge of violations. Some people abuse the system here with tardiness, missing office hours, and insubordination to mention a few.

Unfortunately, the culture and overall attitude of some faculty can be rather challenging. It can be very difficult working with some faculty members in various departments because there is no accountability in their professionalism toward others. While I have personally not experienced any of this, I think it creates a divide within the college. Faculty are the foundation of any college, but they are not always right in terms of academic policies and procedures.