



Final Report

REVIEW OF THE WORK ENVIRONMENT IN FACILITIES & SERVICES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Eric A. Smith, Assistant Vice President

UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESOURCES | EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Executive Summary

This report summarizes the process and findings of an investigation into the work environment at Facilities & Services at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Specifically, a number of employees asserted the existence of a hostile or discriminatory work environment. While those specific allegations were investigated, this unit-wide review was conducted to determine whether those concerns represented a larger issue.

It is important to note that this review was not intended to verify, duplicate or supersede investigations by the university's Office of Diversity, Equity and Access.

University Human Resources staff contacted all F&S employees with a request for an in-person interview. A total of 504 employees – representing each division of the F&S organization and a response rate of 46.6 percent – took part in interviews between Jan. 6, 2016 and Sept. 29, 2016.

Workplace issues expressed by some of the employees who were interviewed were found to apply to broader groups of employees, regardless of their status in one or more of the protected categories, and were deemed nondiscriminatory. The interview process identified systemic issues within the F&S management structure pertaining to the consistency of applying HR policies; as a result, many employees perceived that decisions such as hiring, promotions and discipline were improperly based on other factors such as familial relationships, arbitrary criteria that changes with each occurrence and simple favoritism.

The review did find that two employees experienced illegal discriminatory or harassing activity. In those instances, the assistant vice president for EEO and HR worked with F&S staff to immediately address those situations through appropriate channels.

In summary, this report did not find evidence of systemic discriminatory employment practices and work environments at F&S. And, in fact, many employees indicated that F&S is a good place to work and they enjoy working there. However, the report does identify practices that involved inconsistent interpretation and application of policies, which resulted in the perception of discrimination by some employees regardless of their status.

To address those concerns, the report includes a series of recommendations that will enhance the quality and consistency of management practices within F&S.

Investigative Approach

We chose to conduct a census of all Facilities & Services employees via in-person interviews. This approach was selected because it provided the most direct method of gathering information from employees and also would allow interviewers the opportunity to immediately ask follow-up questions while the employees were still present. Also, aside from the employees who were identified via the formal complaint process, there was no information that would indicate that the alleged discrimination and harassment was contained to a particular department or division within F&S. Thus, the investigation was designed to obtain information directly from employees. Interviews were conducted by division, and broken down further by department. This methodology allowed the interviewers to more easily identify recurring themes within individual division and/or department. It would further allow us to quickly identify whether some issues were associated with a particular supervisor or a group of supervisors and employees. Each employee received an invitation to participate in an individual interview and was notified that s/he would receive release time to do so. Employees were informed via letter and reminded during the interviews that the information they shared would be confidential – which meant we would not share who provided the information. The only caveat to the confidentiality provision was that it would not apply if the employee indicated someone was in danger or was engaging in criminal activity. Additionally, if the employee indicated illegal discrimination or harassment was occurring, we scheduled a meeting with the employee and the Assistant Vice President so the situation could be addressed appropriately. Once the employee understood, we proceeded with the interview. On average, interviews lasted approximately one hour, although in rare cases an interview had to be continued if the interviewer ran out of time. Each employee was asked the same set of questions that allowed them to expand upon their answers. However, additional questions were asked to get clarification or to obtain additional information if the employee stated there were concerns regarding the topic being discussed (i.e. the hiring process). The interviewers' notes were captured in a secure electronic database.

General Findings

It is important to note that the intent of the investigation was to determine whether employees were subjected to a hostile work environment and whether employment decisions were made based on reasons other than merit or some other legitimate criteria. Given the impetus for the investigation was the earlier allegations of discrimination, harassment, and a hostile work environment, it was anticipated that some employees would allege discrimination was a primary reason for employment decisions. The

purpose of the investigation was not to duplicate or verify the investigative efforts of the UIUC Office of Diversity, Equity, and Access. In instances where an employee alleged unlawful discrimination or harassment, their allegations were discussed in greater detail with the interview team and then, with their permission, communicated to the F&S Interim Executive Director and/or the appropriate F&S division director. The same approach was taken when an employee identified other workplace issues that required immediate attention. Careful attention was taken to distinguish an allegation of illegal discrimination (as defined by state and federal laws) from an allegation that an employee described as discriminatory but was not based on a protected category and that could be otherwise categorized as unfair, inappropriate, or inconsistent practices or application of policies.

Employees were asked about the fairness of the hiring, promotion, and discipline processes as well as whether they had experienced or witnessed discrimination or harassment while working for Facilities and Services. The questions were intended to allow employees the flexibility to describe instances in the workplace they believed were unfair and whether or not their belief was based on a protected category. If an employee responded that a process was unfair or that they had witnessed and/or experienced discrimination, s/he was asked follow-up questions to determine why s/he held that belief. In a majority of the cases, the examples given did not describe illegal discrimination, but outlined instances of poor behaviors by supervisors and instances of managers inconsistently applying policies and procedures which led to confusion and mistrust. Examples include the hiring process to select the newly created Custodial Supervisor positions in Building Services, the selection process for assigning craft and trades personnel to zones, and the process for upgrading employees to temporary supervisor positions.

Overall Themes

Several overall themes emerged early on and continued throughout the interview process. Employees across the organization expressed concerns in several areas:

1. Perceived discrimination and harassment – inconsistent interpretation and application of policies, which means many believe employment decisions are not based on merit or some neutral criteria. In the absence of clear policies, guidelines, and processes, some employees have concluded that such decisions are based on personal relationships with the selected candidate and/or a bias toward a preferred candidate based on protected category. Even though more minority employees have expressed this perception than other groups, it became

apparent that non-minority employees believe they are being adversely impacted by some of the employment decisions in F&S (i.e. the civil service intern program and lack of discipline for subpar work).

2. Differential treatment - responses to issues often depend on who is the immediate supervisor. One supervisor will respond to the same issue differently than another. There is no consistency in interpretation of policy or the application thereof.
3. Lack of Communication and Transparency - communication is a big problem throughout the department. Like any large organization, F&S has experienced problems communicating information to front-line employees. This is made more difficult by the fact that a large portion of the workforce do not access their email, which is a quick and direct form of communication. The result is that policies are not clearly communicated, understood, or consistently applied. Additionally, employees have reported that issues moved up the chain of command are either not addressed or the responses received from upper management are inconsistent, and information that impacts them directly is rarely shared. The lack of communication and transparency within F&S has contributed to the perception that information is purposely being withheld or altered to suit an individual's personal agenda. This has resulted in unresolved issues and distrust between management and front line employees.
4. Lack of accountability - both front line and supervisory staff believe that employees (at all levels) are not being held accountable for their performance, behavior, or attendance. From front line employees' perspective, managers fail to hold poor performers accountable and instead shift the work to employees who are good performers. Additionally, front line employees believe when managers address issues, they are inconsistent in their response to similar situations. Managers, on the other hand, believe their hands are tied when it comes to addressing employees issues. Those decisions are primarily left to the upper-middle managers (i.e. Asst. Superintendent, Superintendent, and Associate Director) who reportedly are not consistent in how they respond.
5. Employees at all levels of the unit indicated that HR policies and procedures are not consistent. In some instances, front line employees indicated they did not know what the HR unit does or stated the staff was not helpful when they needed assistance. Managers also indicated that it is

difficult to receive assistance from the HR department and have expressed that many of the functions that should be performed by the department have been pushed to the managers to perform (i.e. monitoring the search process, contacting potential candidates, making job offers, determining the appropriate level of discipline). Therefore, when managers are faced with situations that require HR expertise, they don't know where to turn. Managers in particular indicated these concerns are the reasons they sought advice outside of F&S.

6. Searches, Promotions, and Recognition – searches have been a large source of contention within the organization as evidenced by employees' confusion about the process, management's claims that it changes frequently, and ERHR's allegations that the process is circumvented by managers. The main source of confusion is the internal processes for conducting searches for civil service and academic professional positions. It is an issue F&S recognized prior to the investigation and therefore drafted search guidelines that are now being tested with the opening of several searches within the organization.

In regards to promotions, some civil service interviewees indicated they are aware of the mechanism for obtaining other positions in F&S or promotions through the civil service testing process. They stated they believed the testing process is fair, although the tests themselves can be outdated and often times do not reflect current practices. However, interviewees did not have a clear understanding about how managers determined who they would hire for promotions. Some interviewees indicated that individuals are already pre-selected for promotional opportunities because they have been given the opportunity to temporarily upgrade while a position was vacant. The temporary upgrade process itself is a source of contention and confusion because there wasn't clear selection criteria for upgrades. The perception is that the criteria changes based on who the appointing manager wants to upgrade. In some situations, the same individual has been temporarily upgraded for extended periods of time. Thus, when the unit decides to fill the position on a permanent basis, the employee who was continuously upgraded is believed to have an unfair advantage over other candidates. F&S recently updated the temporary upgrade guidelines to make them more uniform and consistent. A primary goal of the guidelines is to allow employees within a department an equal opportunity to upgrade using seniority as a selection mechanism.

Within the academic professional ranks, employees reported frustration over the lack of internal promotional opportunities and perceived the selection of outside candidates for higher level positions as unfair and demoralizing. Some stated they have worked for the unit for several years and received good performance evaluations, but it is not recognized when promotional opportunities become available.

7. Distribution of work and organizational alignment - new organizational structures within Building Services and the Crafts led to perceived inefficiencies and strife among employees. For instance, there was a divide between craft/trade employees who work in the zones and those who worked out of the F&S shops. Employees viewed the zones as premium assignments, while the shops were not. In the absence of criteria for determining who was assigned zone positions, employees assume it was based on favoritism and cronyism. In one instance, when an employee was reassigned from the zones to the shop, it was viewed as discriminatory due in part to the lack of a sound reason and clear criteria.

Additionally, there was confusion between the authority of the *foremen* of the shops and the *zone managers* regarding organizational hierarchy, coaching and discipline especially since zone managers were selected from each trade but supervised employees from different shops. Prior to the conclusion of the investigation, the zones were eliminated for budgetary reasons. Currently, all employees receive their job assignments from the shop. This has effectively eliminated the concerns associated with the zone structure.

The Self Directed Management/Team Cleaning organizational structure within Building Services, which was originally intended to provide greater customer service, has had the unintended consequence of creating confusion about the proper chain of command due to the reassignment of the superintendent of that area, the installation of the assistant superintendent as the operational manager of the department, and the installation of a new supervisor level classification – Custodial Supervisor. The increased number of employees being supervised by Custodial Supervisors has decreased their ability to ensure employees are active and that the work is being done. Although employees have greater flexibility to determine what work is done based on their interactions with their customers, that flexibility has led to reports that some BSW's are not performing their jobs well or are actually hanging out in the custodian's closet during their shift or leaving work altogether. No mechanism is in place that holds

employees accountable for their work performance or attendance. Thus, employees are confused about the Superintendent's role, while others are taking advantage of the lack of structure brought on by the implementation of the self-directed management and team cleaning. The Interim Director of Operations, Maintenance, and Alterations has begun to address these issues along with the Superintendent, whose role within Building Services is being re-established to ensure consistency and accountability.

8. The disciplinary process. Employees expressed frustration because some employees are allowed to perform at subpar levels without any consequence. This was a particular concern in Building Services and the shops that make up the crafts and trades.
9. Managers' poor behavior is not addressed. Employees stated there is a double standard when it comes to how managers' poor behaviors are addressed. In their view, managers are not held to high expectations in terms of how they interact with their subordinates and often times their poor behavior goes unchecked or is reinforced because they are supported by upper management. In this regard, employees noted that often times when someone is promoted into a supervisor/manager position they are not required to go through training on how to be an effective supervisor.
10. There are inconsistent expectations between groups within the same division (i.e. within the crafts and trades, the work expectations differ from one shop to the other).
11. Inconsistent application of policies or procedures between groups. The interpretation and application also differs from one situation to the next.

Recommendations

The following actions are recommended to begin addressing identified issues within F&S:

1. **Operationalize the F&S Mission, Vision, Values, and Guiding Principles.** F&S Executive Management Team must articulate the organization's goal(s), values, and vision and then set clear expectations that are consistently reinforced. In early summer, F&S held two retreats with members of the Executive Management Team and the Expanded Management Team to re-evaluate and relaunch their Mission, Vision, Values, and Guiding Principles. Those retreats

resulted in a revised statement that was distributed and briefly discussed with employees during three All Staff meetings in the Summer and Fall of 2016. However, in order to set expectations by which all employees will be held accountable, the EMT must operationalize the VMVG statement for each division and individual unit. This process is critical to the success of any other actions the department will take to address work climate issues. Employees have overwhelmingly stated that accountability is the primary source of workplace issues within the department. Thus, establishing expectations that are based on the department's VMVG statement, and that are reinforced daily, is the beginning of building the accountability throughout F&S.

2. **Establish a robust training program that is comprised of New Employee Orientation, Supervisor Training, and Leadership Training.** Several deficiencies were identified by employees in the area of training. First, employees stated there was little or no training regarding the F&S organization and its processes, or the University and its processes. The need for such training was also identified by the Interim Executive Director in the course of her interactions with employees soon after assuming the position. As a result, she has tasked the Associate Director for Employee Relations and Human Resources to develop a comprehensive New Employee Orientation program that provides important information about the F&S organization and the University. Among the topics that should be included are diversity & inclusion, as well as the F&S Mission, Vision, Values, and Guiding Principles, with an emphasis on accountability. Department supervisors need to be tasked with the responsibility of operationalizing the concepts introduced during the orientation.

Supervisor training is also badly needed as front-line employees and those in supervisory positions noted that employees who are promoted do not receive formal training on "what it means to be a supervisor". Poor behavior by supervisors was attributed in part to the lack of training for this group of employees. Ideally, training should include modules on how to address poor performance and behavior, which are tied to holding individuals accountable. However, the training should include various topics such as non-discrimination laws and policies, leaves of absence, and the resources supervisors have at their disposal to assist with HR related issues. Further training may include soft skills such as communication. The Associate Director for Employee Relations and Human Resources has also been assigned the task of developing a comprehensive supervisor training program.

For those individuals who are considered to be in leadership positions at F&S (the Executive Management Team and Expanded Management Team), there is a need for training that focuses on strategic planning, goal setting and metrics, implementation of the VMVG, and employee engagement. These are in addition to the fundamental topics such as diversity and inclusion. This is by no means an exhaustive list. It should be noted that the Interim Executive Director has convened a Leadership Training Committee to develop training for existing and potential leaders within F&S. The Associate Director for Employee Relations and Human Resources is a member of the committee.

The Associate Director of Employee Relations and Human Resources has been tasked with compiling the above trainings into a comprehensive training program for F&S which includes other university required compliance training.

3. **Diversity & Inclusion Training and Programming.** Diversity and inclusion is certainly a topic that should be incorporated as a part of all other training and discussions. However, a comprehensive diversity and inclusion program is necessary given employees' belief that workplace issues also stem from a lack of diversity within F&S, insensitivity to cultural differences, and the lack of understanding of nondiscrimination laws and policies. The unit has already launched a search for a Director of Diversity and Inclusion. That person will have responsibilities for diversity and inclusion programming and helping all employees understand F&S and the University's commitment to non-discrimination, equal opportunity, and inclusiveness. It should be noted that one individual cannot carry the burden of ensuring a diverse and inclusive work environment. It is a shared responsibility that everyone should be accountable for achieving.

4. **Develop and/or Clarify Policies and Procedures.** Policies and procedures related to employment transactions are a source of confusion for some employees. In particular, employees expressed that they did not know what the unit's policy is regarding promotions, the ability to move from one department to another within F&S, and what criteria was being used to evaluate their potential for obtaining other positions. An example frequently given by civil service employees was the upgrade policy and practice which was viewed as inconsistent within and across departments. The upgrade policy is viewed as a vehicle to gain experience in higher

level positions within the same promotional line that could position individuals for promotional opportunities when they become available. However, it is also seen as a vehicle that is used by managers to show favoritism, thereby better positioning one employee over another for future promotional opportunities. Similarly, employees need clarification on the internal promotion and compensation policies. An in-depth review of current HR policies and procedures for both civil service and academic professionals is warranted to determine if existing policies need to be updated or new policies created.

5. **Establish an appropriate role for ERHR within Facilities & Services.** Many of the issues identified during the investigation are HR related. However, there is currently a polarizing dynamic in place whereby employees and management accuse the ERHR staff of being unresponsive to requests for assistance, inconsistent in the responses they do provide, and lacking general HR expertise. Alternatively, the ERHR staff described a culture where managers and directors bypass them to shop around for answers, and ignore established processes to effectuate a pre-determined outcome. However, having a fully functioning HR department is critical to resolving many of the issues identified during the investigation. The Interim Executive Director should clarify ERHR's role within F&S, define and communicate its level of authority regarding HR issues, and set expectations for the ERHR staff regarding the level of service it provides to the unit.

6. **Develop and Implement a Training Program for ERHR Staff.** To best serve the needs of the department, it is important that the ERHR staff know campus policies and procedures, F&S policies and procedures, as well as have fundamental knowledge of HR laws and best practices. That knowledge can only be gained through continuous learning and application of policies and laws. Training for ERHR staff could include:
 - a. State and federal employment laws (FLSA, ADAAA, Worker's Compensation, FMLA, Title VII, EEO/AA, etc.)
 - b. Conducting workplace investigations
 - c. Ensuring consistent discipline
 - d. Obtain professional certifications (PHR, SPHR, SHRM-CP, SHRM-SCP)
 - e. Customer Service
 - f. Project Management

- 7. Implement a 360-degree feedback program for the Executive Management Team and the Expanded Management Team for the purpose of professional development.** A 360-degree feedback is a multi-rater assessment tool used to solicit information from a variety of workplace sources on an employee. This will include feedback from an employee's subordinates, peers (colleagues), and supervisor(s), as well as a self-evaluation by the employee. When relevant, feedback from external sources who interact with the employee, such as customers and suppliers or other interested stakeholders should be included in the feedback. This assessment should be independent of the performance appraisal process but may be tied into career and professional development discussions that take place during the performance appraisal. The 360-degree feedback process should be facilitated by a professional external to the F&S organization. This may be within the University or through an external vendor.

- 8. Implement a formal coaching program for ongoing development of the Executive Management Team and selected individuals of the Expanded Management Team.** The coaching program should be linked to the data that that comes from the professional development discussions and the 360-degree feedback program. The coaches should be people recognized for their leadership, trust and integrity, innovation, agility, and ability to deliver results. A coach should not be chosen just because he or she is in an executive position. They should also have a skill set relative to the individuals they coach. These individuals may come from anywhere within the University or through professional organizations.