



Mount Royal University
Support Staff and Exempt Transition Taskforce Report

July 2010



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Overview of Support Staff and Exempt Transition Taskforce

Mission:

Mount Royal's transition to university status has caused significant change for support and exempt employees¹. It is important to identify both the potential impacts as well as ways to mitigate these impacts and respond to common themes. The Support Staff and Exempt Transition Taskforce was given the objective of identifying areas for consideration and providing recommendations to address the considerations.

Background:

Key elements in becoming a university include the development and delivery of baccalaureate degrees, enhancement of library and lab services, functional and structural changes of faculties, implementation of a new governance model and launch of a new institutional logo.

While these elements have had significant impact on faculty, it is essential to also acknowledge and understand the impact on support and exempt employees. Therefore, it was important for the taskforce to work with support and exempt employees to identify and clarify possible impacts, explore options and approaches to mitigate such impacts, and provide recommendations based on this exploration. This approach is consistent with and supports the institutional priorities of managing growth and change, and positioning Mount Royal as an employer of choice for all employees within the post-secondary community.

¹ For the purposes of this report, the term "support staff and exempt employees" will now be referred to as "support and exempt employees."

Support Staff and Exempt Transition Taskforce Membership:

Name	Title and Department	Representative for
Heather Haddow	Associate Vice-President, Human Resources	Co-Chair of Committee
Maureen Bedard	President, MRSSA	Co-Chair of Committee
Suzanne Evans	Writing and Learning Strategist, Student Learning Services	MRSSA Executive
Lucille Gnanasihamany	Director, Marketing, Marketing and Communications – Office of University Advancement	Management
Vanessa Hennigan	HR Consultant, Human Resources	Human Resources
Alice MacKichan	Manager, Admissions & Recruitment, Enrolment Services	Management
Francesca Mancini	Wellness Services Administrator, Health Services & Optimal Therapies	Support Staff
Connie Papas	Senior Finance and Planning Analyst, Finance Planning and Risk Management	Exempt
Digby Smith	Instructional Assistant, Math, Physics & Engineering	Support Staff

Activities of the taskforce:

- Consult with key stakeholders
- Communicate key findings to stakeholders to demonstrate transparency
- Explore and identify trends and relevant issues that impact support and exempt employees
- Develop a list of potential impacts on support and exempt employees and circulate to taskforce members
- Identify and review any current approaches to ease transition for employees, including educating on change(s) and researching other post secondary institutions
- Suggest effective strategies and techniques for addressing and mitigating the impacts
- Make recommendations on best practices, engaging and supporting support and exempt employees during and after transition

- Ensure recommendations align with overall institutional priorities and strategies as well as faculty transition strategies
- Report findings and recommendations to the President's Direct Report Group

What the taskforce hopes to achieve/goals:

The Support Staff and Exempt Transition Taskforce will provide this report to the President's Direct Report Group (PDRG) to 1) create awareness of Mount Royal's key strengths and challenges from the support and exempt employees' perspective and 2) provide recommendations to address the key issues that have been identified.

Process

In brief:

The Support Staff and Exempt Transition Taskforce, together with the support and assistance of Standing Stones Consulting, embarked on the following key activities:

- a) determining the objectives and processes for the taskforce,
- b) coordinating the necessary details and facilitation of the workshops and survey,
- c) providing a summary report of the feedback obtained from the workshops and survey from Standing Stones,
- d) conducting research initiatives and
- e) developing recommendations.

In detail:

A. Determining objectives and processes for the Taskforce:

The taskforce first met in November 2009 to start the process of determining the objectives and tasks of the Support Staff and Exempt Transition Taskforce. The objective of the taskforce, as indicated in the section, *Overview of Support Staff and Exempt Transition Taskforce*, was to identify impacts of the institutional transformation resulting specifically from Mount Royal achieving university status, and explore ways to mitigate such impacts.

The taskforce agreed to engage an external facilitator, Standing Stones Consulting, to assist with the process of consulting and receiving feedback from support and exempt employees. The reasons for this were twofold: the limitations of the committee's own resources to accomplish the mandate; and the belief that support and exempt employees would be more candid with an external facilitator.

Meetings took place from November 2009 until May 2010 with the Standing Stones Consulting facilitators to meet the following objectives:

- To determine the consultation process with support and exempt employees
- To develop questions and methodology
- To review the feedback gathered and to identify trends and relevant issues
- To develop a list of recommendations with strategies and best practices to assist support and exempt employees throughout the transition

B. Workshops and Survey:

1) Workshops:

On Feb. 23 and 24, 2010, Standing Stones Consulting facilitated a series of four workshops. Invitations were distributed to a random selection of support and exempt employees to ensure representation from all of the divisions across the University (with an appropriate ratio of support and exempt employees). Each workshop was 2.5 hours long and included a series of activities including charting, wireless voting and discussion. A total of 49 participants were involved.

2) Survey:

An electronic survey was developed and invitations were sent by e-mail on March 29, 2010, to all support and exempt employees to complete it. Participants had until April 9, 2010, to complete the survey.

Survey breakdown:

Invitations sent:	734
Responded: (Partial/complete)	352 (201 / 151)
No responses:	382
Opted Out: (chose to be removed from mailing list)	4
Bounced:	4
Undelivered e-mails: (inactive e-mails)	approx. 15

3) Workshop and Survey Content:

The content developed for the workshops and survey addressed the main themes of:

1. purpose
2. commitment
3. capability
4. evaluation and learning

Themes and general content of questions:

Themes of questions:	Purpose:	Commitment:	Capability:	Evaluation and learning:
General content of questions:	University direction	Roles and responsibilities	Personal skills	Personal learning
	Unit goals	Workload	Available information	Listening to feedback
	Understanding the unit's plan	Work stress	Sharing news	Making changes
	Experience considered in decision making	Compensation	Team work	
	Service standards	Recognition	Unit to unit communication	
		Job security		

The questions in the workshops and survey were rated using a seven level Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The following is the list of questions asked of the support and exempt employees:

Purpose:

1. I understand the University's direction and vision for the future.
2. Goals and objectives for my unit are clearly defined and communicated.
3. My unit has a clear plan for reaching its goals and objectives.
4. I can explain my unit's plan for accomplishing our goals and objectives.
5. My experience and suggestions are considered when my unit creates work plans.
6. My unit has clear standards for the quality of service we deliver.

Commitment:

7. I understand my roles and responsibilities in achieving my unit's goals and objectives.
8. My workload day to day is typically manageable.
9. I feel that I am treated fairly and respectfully at work.
10. I do not find the work environment in my unit stressful.
11. I am adequately compensated for the work I do.

12. I am adequately recognized for the work I do.
13. Job security is not a concern for me.
14. I have confidence in the leadership of the University.
15. I feel that my work is valued by the University.

Capability:

16. I have the necessary knowledge and skills to get my work done well.
17. The information I need to do my job is available when and how I need it.
18. My supervisor/manager listens openly when I share both good and bad news about work issues.
19. When challenging issues come up, members in my unit work together to address them.
20. Communication and cooperation with groups outside my unit are open and supportive.

Evaluation and learning:

21. I am encouraged to identify my learning needs and address them.
22. My unit listens to feedback from our clients and stakeholders.
23. When evidence indicates, we change the way we do things to provide improved service.

Based on the above themes, the participants in the workshops and survey were asked the following additional questions:

- What are the top three challenges of the transition facing support and exempt employees today?
- If the key challenges of the transition are addressed, what are the top three opportunities?

Please refer to *Appendix A – Summary Report* for the list of the complete questions and summary of feedback from the workshops and the survey.

C. Standing Stones Consulting Summary Report:

Standing Stones Consulting developed a summary report dated April 29, 2010 highlighting the main themes presented in the feedback and comments from the workshops and survey data.

The Summary Report indicates the transition has been experienced in different ways, positive and negative, amongst the support and exempt employees. In order to become an employer of choice,

Mount Royal will need to address the key challenges, while also leveraging the key strengths of the institution, as indicated in the following excerpt from the Summary Report:

“Overall, support and exempt employees feel that Mount Royal is successfully transitioning from a College to a University. This is no small task in a competitive post secondary environment — running a post secondary institution is a challenge at any time.

Support and exempt employees share in the new vision of being the best undergraduate University ... What’s more; the success of the transition to date is due, in no small part, to the effort and innovation contributed by support and exempt employees.

However the graph shows that support and exempt employees have experienced the transition in widely varying ways. Some staff say they have seen little effect on their day to day work or are invigorated at this exciting time. Other support and exempt employees are experiencing large challenges like greatly increased workloads — in particular on the “frontline” (that) interfaces with students and faculty.

Many support and exempt employees feel that, if some of these key challenges are not addressed, it will stop Mount Royal (from) fully achieving its vision ... on the flip side, if the University and support and exempt employees work together to address some of the identified issues, they feel Mount Royal can fully achieve the vision and also become post secondary’s employer of choice.”

For the complete Summary Report from Standing Stones Consulting, please refer to *Appendix A – Summary Report*.

D. Taskforce research initiatives:

The taskforce researched and contacted Canadian and American post secondary institutions to gain an understanding 1) of their best practices, 2) of how they have dealt with strengths and challenges as an organization and 3) the initiatives implemented to bring about positive change. For further information, please refer to section, *Taskforce Observations and Research*.

E. Recommendations:

Based on the feedback and comments from the workshop discussions, the web survey and the post secondary research, the taskforce developed recommendations to address the key opportunities and challenges that emerged. For the complete list of recommendations, please refer to the section, *Recommendations*.

Taskforce observations and research

This section summarizes the *Standing Stones Consulting Summary Report* detailing the key strengths and opportunities and challenges based on survey and workshop feedback from support and exempt employees. For the complete Summary Report and data results, please refer to *Appendix A — Summary Report*.

A. What we heard: Key Strengths and Opportunities

In brief:

- 1) confidence in President's leadership,
- 2) dedicated, strong commitment to student success,
- 3) on the whole, fair treatment and respect and
- 4) confidence in personal skills.

In detail:

1) Confidence in President's leadership

Support and exempt employees expressed strong confidence in Dave Marshall's leadership. They appreciate the efforts he has made in communicating the vision and changes involved in the transition. Based on trust built upon these past efforts, they feel he has a key role to play in any activities resulting from the Transition Taskforce's work.

2) Dedicated, strong commitment to student success

Support and exempt employees share the vision of the institution and appreciate the opportunity that 'becoming the best undergraduate University' provides for students. The support and exempt employees are focused on student service and recognize they have a key role in the institution. They have worked hard to make the vision a reality, however, at the same time there is some worry that the current reality may not match the vision. Without addressing some key issues, Mount Royal may not effectively fulfill the vision for students.

3) On the whole, fair treatment and respect

Support and exempt employees feel they have a good working relationship with management and can share both good and bad news with managers. Most felt they are treated fairly and respectfully at work. Support and exempt employees recognize faculty's key role at the institution; at times, however, faculty

make requests that do not recognize the shifting priorities and increased workloads. Some employees felt it would be helpful for faculty members to express more empathy and make more realistic and timely requests.

4) Confidence in personal skills

Support and exempt employees were confident in their own skills and their contributions. They were also confident in their abilities to keep learning and appreciated the many courses available to them. Given enough time, most felt confident in their ability to continue adapting during the transition and beyond.

B. What we heard: Key challenges

In brief:

Support and exempt employees' feedback indicated the following key challenges:

- 1) increased workload and stress,
- 2) strained communication,
- 3) lack of voice and recognition,
- 4) shifting work processes and
- 5) strong skepticism of change from transition taskforce.

In detail:

1) Increased workload and stress

Becoming a University with the accompanying growth in enrolment has brought increased workloads for some support and exempt employees and little change for others. Workload has increased substantially in the interfaces between services and students and in some areas, with services for faculty (e.g. when providing research services). Other support and exempt employees are not as affected and expressed surprise at hearing of these challenges.

Some of the increased workload during the transition is from 'one-off' activities, e.g. updating forms and communications with the new logo and content. While frustrating, employees realize this will eventually sort itself out. Some workload increases, however, are more permanent resulting from past growth and potential future growth. Changes in policies and procedures have also increased workload in some cases.

There is a perception that this has contributed to an increase in stress in some areas, to the point where there may be an increase in sick leave usage, mental health issues and less enjoyment at work. This, however, has not been substantiated by any factual details. Concern was expressed by some that talented, professional staff may seek opportunities elsewhere. Some are also worried about job security and the current economic climate. Some suggestions from support and exempt employees for addressing the issue of increased workload includes redistributing work more equitably amongst staff, getting experienced extra help (especially at peak times), encouraging more regular visits to the fitness facilities and looking at business processes to make them more efficient and effective. Still others feel that growth should be slowed or halted until some of these issues are addressed or achieving the vision of becoming the best undergraduate university in Canada will be at risk.

Other suggestions include: improved coordination and spreading out the deadlines for key projects was also suggested as helpful (e.g. information systems for the web and calendar). When possible, scheduling major system implementations outside busy times associated with student activities (e.g. student admissions, registration, exams).

2) Strained communication

In general, support and exempt employees state that communication across the organization has become strained for everyone. There are more e-mails and meetings, but less effective communication. At times, key information is received from newspapers before staff or impacted areas have heard about it. With so many e-mails, it is difficult to know which apply locally when sifting through the in box. While wanting to be kept in the loop, many feel more focused and targeted communication would be helpful.

Requests and communication between areas for information or help are also a concern. Many feel that replies are taking longer and leave the 'requester' hanging – which sometimes impacts the service provided to students and others. This also contributes to the general strain as these exchanges lead to "hurt feelings" and increased 'testiness." Practical suggestions by employees for responding to this includes more empathy (we are all experiencing more work), more focused communication, and smoothing communication barriers by introducing individuals to other areas and scheduling face-to-face meetings or going for coffee.

3) Lack of voice and recognition

Some support and exempt employees expressed frustration that they were not treated as an equal partner in the transition. While recognizing the key role faculty play at Mount Royal, many felt that faculty had a disproportionate voice in planning and guiding the transition. One comment was, “Why ask us now after the transition?”

Although employees go the extra mile to make the transition a success, many also felt this effort has not always been formally or informally recognized. Many felt that some recognition, especially from faculty, would improve the climate on campus. Most felt that this recognition did not have to be monetary.

Some support and exempt employees voiced that they are a removed “fourth” party on campus in terms of importance. They feel that support and exempt employees are behind faculty, students, and management — in terms of recognition, committee memberships, visibility to the Board, professional development funding, salaries and benefits. Support and exempt employees recognize these role designations are necessary (e.g. when negotiations are happening). However, many felt that positioning their roles as a collaborative team supporting the success of students, would be more helpful in day-to-day work.

4) Shifting work processes

Due to past growth and sustained enrolment levels, some processes for serving students and faculty have come under strain, e.g. those providing information and guidance to students or when orienting new faculty members to services available at the University. With new requirements and volume of work, some policies and procedures have been changed and this has increased the work of others. In some cases, many are so busy juggling short-term priorities that finding the time to review and revise processes and look at the “big picture” was a challenge. Many feel this focus on the short term will become a growing problem if it means that the long-term viability, processes, or systems do not require the attention they deserve

Several suggestions were made to ensure revised policies, procedures, workflows and information systems were more efficient and effective when implemented. Many suggested that those revising these items consider potential impacts on other groups or stakeholders in more detail before putting

them into practice. Providing opportunities for input by stakeholders early in any change process was felt to be helpful. For key workflows, some felt having access to business analysts or specialized skill sets would be useful. Hope was expressed that a better first inquiry information source might be created that would provide guidance to the right people and the right department to shorten inquiry times and reduce frustration of support and exempt employees not knowing who to talk to about key issues. This source could also potentially help keep people updated on information and changes in departments.

5) Strong skepticism of change from Transition Taskforce

Support and exempt employees voiced strong skepticism that anything would change as a result of the Transition Taskforce. While many appreciated the opportunity to voice strengths and challenges the Taskforce has provided, many feel they have seen these consultation processes before (e.g. such as the “Assessing Mount Royal’s Employment Climate” survey done by the Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning) with little result. They saw the process as ‘window dressing’ or that it would result in ‘just another report gathering dust’.

At the same time, employees were hopeful the process would result in some concrete changes. They expressed a practical attitude recognizing not all issues can be addressed and that the University is in a tough economic climate. However, leveraging existing strengths and addressing key challenges of the transition would go a long way in helping the University reach its’ academic vision and become the employer of choice.

C. What others are doing: Key Research findings

Taskforce Research:

The Taskforce researched and contacted Canadian and American post secondary institutions to gain an understanding of their best practices, of how they have dealt with strengths and challenges as an organization and the initiatives implemented to bring about positive change.

- 1) Research findings were gathered from Canadian post secondary institutions including, St Francis Xavier, University of Calgary, Grant MacEwan University, University of Northern British Columbia, Nipissing University and University of Alberta.

The taskforce members contacted each post secondary institution and asked the following questions:

1. How has your institution addressed the feedback of support and exempt employees (and the impact of transition, if applicable)?
2. What challenges or opportunities have been identified?
3. In what ways were these themes addressed (programs, initiatives)?
4. In your opinion, has this been effective or not?
5. If you could do it all over again, what would you do differently?
6. How have you engaged support and exempt employees at the local level, within departments or faculties?
7. Are there any ways you would recommend engaging exempt employees that are different from those you use with support staff?
8. Have you used any specific activities or methods to encourage collaboration between support and exempt employees and faculty?

The feedback received from the post secondary institutions has been summarized with the highlights of challenges, strengths and initiatives from each discussion:

a. St Francis Xavier:

- Initiatives:
 - Initiated management only forums: cost effective, helped “gel” the group, a useful format for training (to offer managerial skills) and a communication conduit to roll out initiatives
 - Faculty/staff communications: implemented a ‘Respect’ campaign for support staff to become more respectful of faculty as being “deliverers of our product” and to increase the respect of faculty toward support staff

b. University of Calgary (AUPE local 52):

- Key challenges during transition: budget and faculty amalgamation
 - Key strengths: openness in communication from leadership, change in leadership with new president
 - Initiatives: communication from AUPE to membership (e.g. newsletters, e-mail updates)

c. Grant MacEwan University:

- Key challenges during transition: prepared for transition ahead of time, changes are largely focused on faculty and have not formalized the process as Mount Royal has
- Strengths: encouraging open communication between the managers and employees
- Initiatives: formed a new committee” Academic Governance Committee” where support and exempt employees can have a voice in the academic area

d. University of Northern British Columbia:

- Issues: recruitment of employees and budget freeze
- Strengths: engagement of employees and new president
- Initiatives: engage employees by sending surveys annually and holding focus groups

e. Nipissing University:

- Transition happened quite some time ago — no further insights or feedback could be provided based on working through the transition

f. University of Alberta:

- Issues: Any issues concerning the support staff are dealt with by the union and/or on an individual situational basis, mostly at the faculty level
- Initiatives: There are no initiatives to address issues of support staff in the future and no deliberate engagement of support or exempt staff, the institution has a hands off approach to issues and engagement

- 2) Research was conducted on top post secondary institutions outside of Canada to provide the taskforce with ideas of how other institutions have created healthy work environments where people are #1.

The research was compiled from the post secondary institutions of University of Michigan, University of Kansas and University of California. The information received has been summarized with the highlights of initiatives from each institution:

a. University of Michigan:

“Voices of the Staff” program: <http://www.voices.umich.edu/index.html>

- Provides a mechanism for employee input, encourages a sense of community among all employees and provides insight into improving the University system by facilitating staff participation through regular dialogue between the VOICES team and executive officers

“Staff Career Development Services”: <http://www.hr.umich.edu/career/index.html>

- A self directed career development website for employees to provide direct services for staff, such as career counselling, career fairs, job search skills, self-assessment tools and other resources that will help the University grow, attract and retain the best workforce talent

b. University of Kansas:

“Support Staff Senate”: <http://www.uss.ku.edu/>

- Represents the interests of support staff employees by providing an open forum to discuss their interests at an individual or institutional level

c. University of California:

“Irvine, Chancellors Advisory Committee on the Status of Staff”: <http://www.hr.uci.edu/cacss/>

- A committee that advocates for staff, promotes career development, mitigates problems and creates a positive work environment

Recommendations

Based on the feedback and comments from support and exempt employees, recommendations were developed by the Transition Taskforce. Recommendations have been divided into three categories: 1) overall recommendations, 2) five main themes that emerged from the feedback and 3) Standing Stones Consulting recommendations.

A. Overall recommendations to assist with the implementation phase of any recommendations approved by the President's Direct Report Group (PDRG):

1. Charter an implementation committee to actively oversee and take effective steps to implement the recommendations approved by senior management.
 - Implementation team would consist of representation from all groups including support staff, exempt employees, management and faculty
 - The mandate of the committee and expectations of members should be defined in advance of forming the team, e.g. seeking members with a pro-active approach; a willingness and eagerness to collaborate and lead projects; and the ability to dedicate time to the committee
2. Compile a document which can address the 'one off' questions from the feedback which will promote more knowledge and understanding amongst the employees.
 - Form a two person team (1 representative from MRSSA and 1 representative from HR) to work through the 'one off' questions, (e.g. compensation is a negotiated item through the Collective Agreement, hiring stats for support/exempt staff, etc), compile a "Question and Answer" handout for support and exempt staff and post on the HR and MRSSA websites
3. Investigate the logistics of providing an opportunity for support and exempt employees and managers to form triads (or larger groups) for peer support opportunities to discuss best practices and generate ideas.
4. Develop and implement a training program and handbook for managers (academic and non-academic areas) which would focus on the following issues:

- Setting and communicating realistic expectations for the work unit (both within the unit and across the institution)
 - Creating a safe environment for staff to voice concerns
 - Gathering feedback from staff on effective work processes
 - Developing a workload management plan
-

B. Main themes of recommendations:

The recommendations have been divided into five main themes that emerged from the feedback.

1. Workload and work processes

Although the workload issues are not pervasive across the institution, they seem to be in pockets and in those areas they are very real. The survey results indicate they are in the areas which serve students most directly, particularly on the front line. It is critical to determine which areas are affected and to what extent and then focus energy and resources towards these areas.

Recommendations:

- 1) Obtain additional feedback from each area to pinpoint the “hot spots” which are experiencing the greatest increase in workload. Use the results to distinguish between chronic versus short-term stress and use as a basis for intervention strategies.
- 2) Develop and promote processes to support more involvement of staff in the decision making within each department and provide opportunities for feedback on new or revised policies at the policy development stage.
- 3) Look for opportunities to provide ongoing training to staff (e.g. expansion of the HR orientation for new employees into a training session for current employees, open up department level training to other areas as appropriate, e.g. Enrolment Services has an New Employee Training session which provides an overview of all ES areas).
- 4) Explore options for additional workshops for staff to provide higher level work management skills.

2. Stress

Feelings of stress were expressed and it was often commented that stress was associated with the workload. In order to alleviate the levels of stress, mechanisms need to be put in place to manage stress for employees either individually or collectively. Addressing stress will contribute to the Institutional priority of employer of choice.

Recommendations:

1) Review and promotion of current resources:

- Review of current offerings for support and exempt employees for stress related workshops and initiatives (e.g. time management workshops, health and wellness information with the objective of promoting resources in community and determination of impact on stress reduction for employees)
- Continue to promote current services on campus (e.g. Employee Family Assistance Program, Human Resources' sessions on topics such as achieving balance and health and wellness surveys, etc.)

2) Research other initiatives that will encourage health and wellness among employees to help reduce and manage stress and promote happy, healthy employees.

3) Encourage managers and supervisors to have ongoing conversations with their employees about workload and stress.

- Supervisors and managers to gauge their employees and investigate creative methods to reduce stress (e.g. One employee may feel flex time would be most helpful for stress management, versus others indicating information on stress management techniques would be of more benefit)

3. Communication and information

Survey and workshop feedback suggests a need for more timely, regular and consistent communication practices and information-sharing within departments between management and their staff; between different departments; and regarding major institutional plans and developments. This seemed to fall into four categories: within departments, inter-departmental, faculty-staff communication and institutional.

Recommendations:

- 1) To improve communication and information-sharing within departments:
 - Set up confidential feedback channels for staff to provide their thoughts on institutional and department-specific issues, e.g. a suggestion and/or comment box with opportunity for “question of the week” to be responded to via e-mail, e.g. <http://www.kindlingapp.com/learn-more/>
 - Provide ongoing training to managers on how to create an environment of open dialogue between themselves and their staff and involve staff in decision-making
- 2) To improve inter-departmental communications and information-sharing:
 - Hold meetings between areas that work closely together, facilitated by their respective managers
 - Establish department-hosted “get to know us” sessions
- 3) To improve faculty-staff communications:
 - Forward the results of the taskforce workshops and survey to Deans and Chairs to promote a greater understanding by faculty about the challenges support and exempt employees face
 - Provide Chairs, who in turn supervise administrative staff, with managerial training when they assume their role
 - Provide training to Deans and Chairs regarding the roles various departments play in getting students into their programs and provide opportunities for them to meet with the staff who do the work
 - The MRSSA and the MRFA could collaborate, such as forming a committee to enact strategies for improving communication and perceptions about each group and to establish relations to enable all employees to focus on working to provide a quality education for students
 - MRSSA could explore ways to clarify its mandate and role to all support staff. The clarification could result in resources which would be a valuable reference for faculty who work closely with staff
 - Release minutes from the General Faculties Council in a timely manner to ensure information is available for support and exempt employees
- 4) To improve institutional communications:
 - Provide the taskforce survey results to the University Leadership Group
 - Distribute copies of media releases to all staff
 - Distribute key institutional messages to all staff

- Strongly encourage staff to take advantage of established channels for learning more about the institution and the people who make up the MRU community, including Town Halls, President's chats, learning sessions hosted by specific departments (e.g. Finance, Planning and Risk Services) and events such as MRSSA PD Days, Employee Awards and Employee Appreciation Day
- Hold annual orientation sessions for existing staff (e.g. re-orientation to MRU)
- Establish standardized MRU e-mail protocols including but not limited to etiquette, reasonable expectations on response times, and when not to use e-mail
- Set up an interactive website for all support and exempt employees including a chat function and discussion forums (please refer to University of Michigan's voices website for best practice at <http://www.voices.umich.edu/index.html>)
- Ensure support and exempt employees representation on appropriate committees or working groups

4. Recognition

Survey and workshop feedback suggests staff feel a lack of recognition or value and one solution would be to focus on employee recognition. In addition to the Employee Awards Ceremony and Employee Appreciation Day events, a more systematic approach to employee recognition may need to be considered.

Recommendations:

- 1) Research systems or mechanisms for systematic employee recognition and consider the development of recognition system outside of the Employee Awards Program:
 - within departments or within divisions
 - develop criteria and rewards through focus group discussion
- 2) Incorporate an 'employee of the month' article that can be published in *Face Time*
 - The article could be written by Communication staff following a 'nomination' by an employee or supervisor that recognizes the efforts and/or actions of a colleague
- 3) Educate supervisors and managers about the importance of systematic employee recognition
 - Research best practices
 - Explore recommendations from focus group on new recognition system
 - Discuss current barriers (if any) to employee recognition
 - Share best practices from other institutions

- Share best practices from within the institution
- 4) Integrate ‘recognition’ or ‘value’ discussions within the current performance appraisal process
 - Encourage managers to conduct conversations with their employees, i.e. “What is recognition to you?” and “How would you like to have it measured and/or be rewarded?”
 - Discuss current MRU and department practices in employee recognition and appreciation

5. Development

Employee development is tied to recognizing the value of support and exempt employees’ skills and engaging the high level of confidence in their current capabilities while recruiting and retaining the necessary talent to be a top undergraduate university.

Recommendations:

- 1) Research self directed career development models in post secondary institutions
 - Create a self directed website for internal employees including categories of assessment, job readiness and career exploration so they become aware of other positions available at MRU that fit their capabilities and goals (e.g. University of Michigan’s website, <http://www.hr.umich.edu/career/index.html>)
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C. Moving Forward — Recommendations from Standing Stones Consulting

The following recommendations have been compiled by Standing Stones Consulting as further detailed in the *Appendix A — Summary Report*.

- 1) Create the conditions for success:
 - Leadership: Senior leadership will play a key role in moving ahead with any recommendations coming from the Transition Taskforce
 - Resources: Some dedicated resources (e.g. people, time, effort, money) must be committed and possibly have at least some of their duties dedicated to the task, to make sure that key recommendations made by the taskforce happen.
 - Clear roles: To move forward, the taskforce must identify and address all the stakeholders (e.g. support staff, exempt employees, management, faculty, MRSSA, etc) who will need to be involved in responding to the report

- 2) Personal and local engagement: All the relevant stakeholders must be involved as part of the solution as “success cannot be left as the sole responsibility of the University (e.g. leaders, managers or human resources)” and as positive change will require support and exempt employees to see themselves as part of the greater solution in collaboration with the University community.

- 3) A method for ongoing input from employees — Consideration should be given to creating a method to identify and address issues across the organization in an ongoing way to continue to receive input and feedback from support and exempt employees.

4) Possible technology resources to assist with recommendations:

Workflow modeling tool:

<http://www.visual-paradigm.com/product/bpva/provides/bpmodeling.jsp>

Suggestion box for employees:

<http://www.kindlingapp.com/learn-more/>

Appendices

Appendix A

Summary Report from Standing Stones Consulting

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