

Academic Staff Executive Committee

Client Research Brief

Project: Develop an Academic Staff brand in order to create an Academic Staff identity and raise the profile of Academic Staff on campus.

Background:

UW-Madison has three groups of permanent employees: the faculty, the academic staff, and the classified staff. The academic staff is the largest of the three, comprising some 7,500 professional employees in the areas of research, instruction, administration, student services, clinical practice, outreach services, library services, information processing, communications, and facilities management. They represent one of the three arms of shared governance on campus (along with the faculty and students); they serve as representatives in the Academic Staff Assembly and as members of many campus, college/school and department-level committees. Their working conditions are defined in their own set of personnel policies and procedures.

Perceived problem:

The campus community is largely unaware of the roles and contributions of academic staff. This lack of awareness has several facets and implications.

First, many academic staff employees are not aware of what it means to be “academic staff”; in fact, many do not even know that they belong to the academic staff. Because they are unaware of their governance rights, individual employees miss out on opportunities to contribute to campus and to further their own professional development by serving on governance bodies. At the same time, academic staff governance could be enriched if all members of the group understood that they can participate. Because academic staff are unaware of the particular policies and procedures that define and protect their rights in their workplace, they do not know, for example, how they can attain job security or appeal the termination of their appointment.

Second, because academic staff employees fulfill such diverse roles on campus, they lack a sense of group identity. They are by far the largest group on campus but also the one with the weakest identity. The recognition given to academic staff by central campus administration often does not reflect the importance of academic staff on campus nor the strength of their numbers.

Third, the lack of a strong academic staff identity can lead to climate issues. We have heard from academic staff members that they feel isolated and marginalized in their employing units. A hierarchical relationship between faculty and academic staff reflects a lack of recognition and respect for the contributions of academic staff.

The Academic Staff Executive Committee is seeking a student group to develop an Academic Staff brand that will create a sense of a group identity among academic staff employees and raise the profile of academic staff among faculty and students.

Primary Audience:

UW-Madison academic staff employees.

Timeline:

The Academic Staff Executive Committee hopes to work with a student group on this project during Spring semester 2011.

Updates to Academic Staff Branding Proposal, March and April 2011

1.) Meetings with Students and Their Feedback, February and March, 2011

- In February, 2011, Greg Iaccarino, co-chair of Communications Committee (CC), reached out to students in the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and the Advertising Club, which are both Registered Student Organizations (RSOs) on campus. PRSSA and Advertising Club have student members whose course of study involves topics of branding.
- Two students met with Greg and offered feedback and suggestions, based on the current information about academic staff that is found on the academic staff website and existing hardcopy literature about the academic staff. (The hardcopy literature was on the academic staff table at the Academic Staff Institute on February 25, 2011.) The students reviewed and critiqued these materials, and offered suggestions for next steps. A summary is below.

1.) The information on the academic staff website (<http://acstaff.wisc.edu>) is “text heavy.” What are currently paragraphs about academic staff can be made into bulleted, succinct items, that grab the reader’s attention. *Note from Greg: A new CMS system is currently being developed, which, when implemented, may make the process more efficient for updating certain portions of the academic staff website.*

2.) The students and Greg agreed, after reviewing the existing information and text about academic staff, that MUCH of the text IS GOOD. The text just needs to be modified or tweaked in a way to capture the key points about academic staff, to enhance the brand and identity of academic staff. There can be more visual elements in the text as well, something that can be more easily scanned over. More importantly, as tied to the current budget process in the State of Wisconsin and initiatives at UW-Madison (New Badger Partnership, Public Authority, etc.), it is important that key audiences and constituencies are presented with branding documents that help them easily know about the key characteristics of academic staff.

3.) A brochure that can be easily distributed that has focused points about academic staff, pictures and/or quotes/profiles of academic staff was considered as an idea. This would be an enhancement to the online information.

4.) These students (plus more in their networks) continue to be available as resources for us to have more student input, as we move forward.

2.) Recommendations and Next Steps

- Before doing #3 (brochure) (and other aspects mentioned earlier), the students suggested that a brief survey (using Qualtrics) be sent to a random sample of academic staff (or the entire academic staff) which asks the academic staff for their thoughts and ideas about their current level of awareness now (of each other), familiarity with their roles, sense of community/unity, and other related topics (as mentioned on the first page of this document). Using that information will help with next steps, according to the students' thoughts. The survey would consist of both open-ended and close-ended questions. It would help give an initial sense of what grassroots academic staff might be thinking, in regards to these topics.
- Greg shared an update on the branding proposal, as well as the idea about a survey with the Communications Committee on March 11, 2011. A working group of the committee (Alice Pulvermacher and Sonya Sedivy) expressed interest in becoming more involved with the proposal.
- The working group was not sure about the timing and effectiveness of distributing a survey. Would the survey generate results that would aid with the intent of the branding proposal focus? Would the current state of issues on the table now affect the survey results?
- Also, the working group is interested in the definition of terms. Is "Branding" an appropriate term here? Or, is it more of a question about "Identity" of academic staff?
- In light of the current items surrounding the state budget, New Badger Partnership, and Charter Authority proposal, we are interested in hearing more about ASEC's thoughts, and/or from Academic Personnel or the Director of Human Resources. What impact are these items/issues having, in regards to "identity" and "branding" of academic staff?
- What are some strategies and methods to focus on now, as we move forward with this project/proposal, and also factoring in the New Badger Partnership, Charter Authority, state budget, etc. Are we SATISFIED with the current identity and presentation (branding) of academic staff, or are there ways to improve it?

Greg's thoughts: I actually think that some/all of the academic staff literature that was at the Academic Staff Table at the AS Institute was good. So, it could be a matter of discussing more about this literature, and building upon it. I don't necessarily think we have to "start from scratch," since there is some good text already out there about academic staff.

Also (from Greg), perhaps the Center for Brand and Project Management (within the Wisconsin School of Business) could be consulted as an additional resource:

<http://www.bus.wisc.edu/centerforproductmanagement/contactus/directors.aspx>

Students can still be consulted as resources

