



Amherst College Employee Council Platform

(Last updated January 2018)

COUNCIL COMMUNICATION & PARTICIPATION

The Employee Council strives to communicate effectively and transparently with our staff colleagues, as well as administration, faculty and students. We seek to build a stronger, more inclusive campus, and to encourage participation in our community. We believe it is our responsibility to keep our colleagues well-informed and involved in our advocacy for staff issues on campus. We welcome and rely on [staff feedback, concerns, ideas and initiatives](#) and will continue open communication in our public presence through Facebook, regular coffee hours at Frost Cafe and community-building events.

AMHERST COMMUNITY

The Employee Council routinely hears concerns from constituents about morale among staff on campus. We get the sense that there is widespread frustration and fear in regard to a number of issues. We are aware that our perspective is limited by internal and external barriers that make it difficult for us to get relevant data. As such, we hope that the results of the recently concluded staff climate survey (see below) will help us toward greater understanding and more responsible and effective advocacy. The Council welcomes, and is eager to participate in, initiatives to address all of the following areas of concern:

- **Class divisions among staff, and between staff and faculty:** The Council believes that some morale issues stem from differences in resource allocation across divisions and rank—i.e., that some staff are less likely than others to have their needs and concerns met with the attention or resources they require.
- **Advocacy for staff:** Employees feel they do not have a place to go to voice concerns about potentially systemic issues. They also worry about a lack of confidentiality and the possibility that, if they do speak up about their concerns, they may be labeled and retaliated against.
- **Understaffing and workloads:** We suggest that the College examine areas that are reported to be understaffed. We advocate that the College prioritize the allocation of full-time equivalent positions and other resources so that departments and individuals have appropriate workloads to operate effectively.



- **Retention and turnover:** There have been a large number of cases in recent years where employees have left, or been dismissed from, the College abruptly for reasons that are never made clear to their colleagues.
- **Accountability for management,** including division-specific concerns about staff management styles.

The Council appreciates the work of the Office of Diversity & Inclusion and will advocate prioritizing diversity and inclusion training for all faculty and staff, as well as making the trainings ongoing and accessible to all (i.e., holding diversity and inclusion trainings/classes in every department, versus a big college-wide invitation to the whole community for one training class). Assisting the administration involves working with our constituents to build a community where every staff member can acknowledge (to quote the title of a recent campus art project) “Amherst I Belong.”

CLIMATE SURVEY

We are excited that this initiative has come into action, with the vast majority of employees participating, and are grateful to those who have made it possible. Upon completion of the data analysis, we will continue to work with the administration to ensure that this process will guide meaningful progress in our community. It’s likely that many of our other platform initiatives will be further informed by the survey results. We look forward to collaborating across campus to support a positive outcome for our community.

JOB CLASSIFICATION & COMPENSATION PROGRAM (JCCP)

The Employee Council is grateful that the JCCP has been completed and presented to staff. We appreciate the efforts to reform the categorization of jobs in ways that are more consistent across the College and provide employees more opportunities to advance in their careers here.

We would like more information on how Human Resources will implement this process in a way that makes it accessible to all staff. We advocate for a process that will allow staff members to trigger a review of their positions, levels and related salary bands. Additionally, we hope that the Employee Council and fellow staff members will receive ongoing updates on how the JCCP will be implemented and improved.

CASUAL EMPLOYEES

As of January 2018, there are 1,108 staff employees working for the College. Of those, 385 (34.7%) are counted “casual” employees. Many of these are long-term employees in positions that are considered regular staff of a department or office. These employees do not receive regular benefits and are typically paid below the pay rate of non-casual employees with comparable job responsibilities.



In 2016–2107, the Employee Council submitted to Human Resources and the Benefits Committee a [proposal of recommendations for casual employees](#) based on feedback from Amherst’s casual employees and a survey of our peer schools. Following these recommendations, we endorse the immediate implementation of basic benefits for casual employees, including gym and library privileges, parking stickers, card-swipe for Valentine meals, and [employee discounts](#). We advocate that all employees whose positions no longer adhere to the definition of “casual” have the opportunity for part- or full-time employment by the College with benefits. We advise that the College conduct a review of all casuals to identify these individuals and ensure that “casual employment” is restricted to the definition in the [staff handbook](#):

An employee is considered to have casual employment if (1) the individual has been hired for a specific period of time, or (2) the individual occupies a temporary/casual position. Casual positions are defined as those which at the time they are established are not expected to be part of the regular staff of the department. ... Typically, casual employees hold their positions as substitutes for employees on extended leave, to assist in completion of a special project or when there are delays in filling vacancies. Casual employees are usually employed for less than 20 hours per week. ...

The Council believes every staff member should feel valued and supported for their contributions to the College’s mission.

BENEFITS

The College offers a very generous and highly competitive benefits package that is generally well-regarded by staff. In 2016–2017, Human Resources and the Benefits Committee conducted a survey which rated Amherst’s benefits and compared to peer schools. The review identified many areas where the College’s benefits rank very strongly, as well as some opportunities for improvement.

The Council endorses improvements to the College’s benefits offerings based on the survey’s findings and the input of our constituents. Specifically, we endorse the following:

- improvements to grant-in-aid
- tuition reimbursement for professional development
- a shorter waiting period for retirement contribution eligibility
- improved administration for leave time
- a commitment to high-quality low- and no-deductible health plans

We believe Amherst can strengthen its benefits package for staff to better reflect the College’s reputation for excellence in all aspects of campus, employee and academic life.



PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT PROCESS (PMP)

The Employee Council calls for clear and transparent communication about all aspects of the PMP to all staff and supervisors. The Council seeks clarification of the online workflow of the PMP. We encourage further articulation of the interplay between the PMP and the JCCP, particularly in terms of the PMP's effectiveness as a tool for supporting employees' professional development and upward movement. Specifically, we advocate the following:

- All supervisors (including faculty who are supervisors) should receive proper training regarding the PMP's requirements and its possibilities for supporting employee growth. The Council supports making such training mandatory.
- All employees should be informed that they are allowed, but not required, to complete a self-evaluation, and the role of the self-evaluation in the PMP process should be made clear.
- Every employee should have access to their evaluation prior to or concurrent with it being reviewed by Human Resources, such that the employee can advocate for themselves in a more efficient and proactive manner.
- An opportunity should be created within the PMP for staff to provide confidential feedback on and evaluations of supervisors. The process should promote greater accountability for management.