

**Executive Summary of the University of Southern Maine
Employee Climate Survey**

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Acknowledgements:

First, we wish to thank President Pattenau and the senior staff at USM for recognizing the importance of conducting a study to assess the employee climate. Their commitment to asking the questions and sharing the results is to be commended.

Next, we would like to acknowledge the members of the survey committee in developing and conducting this project:

Michelle Drucker (Committee Chair), Kathleen Bouchard, Julie Cameron, Susan Campbell, Margaret Cleveland, Mary Hawkins, Al Leighton, Dahlia Lynn, Rose Mahoney, Mark Menezes, Mike Mullett, Nicki Piaget, Dana Rickman, Suzanne Roy, Judy Ryan, Alison Salerno, Nolan Thompson, and Marion Tizon

Through numerous meetings, phone calls, and emails, over the course of several months, the team remained focused and on-task. In any survey of this kind, individuals always have questions they are particularly interested in asking, or not asking. Nonetheless, the team was able to reach consensus on virtually every topic area and question. It was truly a team effort.

Finally, thanks go out to the over 900 USM employees who participated in the survey. It is rare that employees have the opportunity to provide their opinions and perceptions about the kinds of workplace issues addressed in this survey; that so many of USM's staff chose to do so suggests both a high level of concern for, and commitment to, the institution.

Introduction

As part of the Transforming USM (TUSM) initiative, President Pattenauade called for an effort to examine the perceptions of employees regarding the overall climate at USM. In the fall of 2005, a committee comprised of USM employees from various departments, disciplines, employee classifications, and geographic locations was established with the goal of developing a survey that could be administered to all employees. The team met numerous times over the course of six months.

The survey was intended to gain insight into the perceptions of USM's 1800+ employees. By design, this was *not* intended to be a job satisfaction survey, rather an overall broad stroke to gauge the general work environment. One of the main goals of TUSM and this survey is to identify action steps that can be taken by USM administration to effect change at the campus level; it was strongly felt that job issues such as pay and benefits (key components of employee satisfaction) were system-wide concerns that could not be changed by USM's managers and administrators.

Methodology

The Survey Research Center of the Muskie School of Public Service was selected to administer the survey. Early in the survey development stage, the committee agreed that a web-based questionnaire would be the most practical and effective mode for survey administration, with paper versions available at all campus locations. It was also agreed that all full and part time regular employees, as well as part time faculty, would be asked to participate. Human Resources and Survey Research Center (SRC) staff provided several examples of climate surveys, and the team began to refine a list of the most important topic areas for examination. After a series of revisions and pre-tests, a final instrument was developed that allowed measuring the degree of agreement with, and the level of importance of, a series of statements addressing several key factors in each of the six identified topic areas. Those main topic areas were:

- Sense of Community
- Workplace Values and Work Environment
- Support from Supervisors/Managers/Department Heads
- Professional Development/Resources
- USM Mission
- University-wide Communication

Survey Design

Within each of the six topic areas, several statements were given that related to that area. Altogether, there were thirty-nine statements. In the first half of the survey, employees were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. In the second half, they were asked to record the level of importance they gave to each.

The statements had four forced-choice response options, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” for the agreement section, and from “very important” to “not at all important” for the importance section. By intent, there was no “neutral” or “neither” option provided, in an effort to force employees to choose which end of the scale was closest to their opinion. There was a “not applicable/choose not to answer” option.

For reporting purposes, responses were collapsed into two categories, either “agree” or “disagree” for the agreement section, and “important” or “slightly or not at all important” for the importance section (results for all four response options are shown in Appendix B).

Finally, employees answered a series of questions to provide a demographic profile of survey respondents, as well as an open-ended question, “What didn’t we ask that you would like us to know?”.

Survey Implementation

The climate survey was implemented in April, 2006. Employees were first notified of the coming survey by email from President Pattenaude via the USM A-list, a list including work email addresses of all 1800+ employees. Printed postcard announcements and a second email message from the president were then sent to all employees announcing the survey and linking to the electronic survey. Employees were also informed of locations where they could complete the survey on paper if they preferred.

Approximately 10 days after the survey began, an email announcement was sent to all employees, reminding them to please complete the survey. In order to increase the response from employees, all who chose to do so were entered into a drawing for a \$200 gift certificate.

Ultimately, 940 employees completed the survey, for a response rate of 52.2 percent.

Respondent Profile

Survey respondents quite closely represented the overall distribution across USM in most demographic categories. The percentage of women among the survey respondents (65%) was slightly higher than among the staff as a whole (60%). The biggest difference was within job classification; professional staff responded at a higher rate than others, resulting in professionals representing 46% of survey respondents vs. only 38% of the overall employee population. There was very little difference between survey participants and the full population by race, work location or length of service.

Key Findings – Agreement

- Overall agreement with the survey statements was reasonably high:
 - 24 of the 39 statements had agreement levels of 70% or higher
- At the lower end of agreement scores :
 - 15 items had agreement levels of 65% or lower
- Community-wide items and campus-level statements tended to rate higher than job-specific items. The highest scores were:
 - 92% “I understand why it is important for USM to value diversity”
 - 90% “I know how to find information about events happening at the University”
 - 86% “I typically prefer electronic communication”
 - 86% “I think my work at USM contributes to the overall mission of the organization”
 - 86% “I understand what is expected of me at my job”
- The lowest scores were:
 - 46% “I think staff levels are adequate in my area”
 - 42% “I believe the University values employee retention”
 - 41% “I believe USM’s physical facilities are adequate to support work and learning”
 - 38% “Morale is generally high among the employees I know”
 - 24% “I typically prefer paper communication”

- Staff rated the “Sense of Community” topic area quite favorably. This section had four items that were among those receiving the *highest* agreement scores and only two statements that were among those receiving the *lowest* scores (see Appendix B for the specific items and responses for this and all other topic areas).
- In contrast, the “Professional Development/Resources” topic area was not rated very highly. None of the items in this section received the *highest* agreement scores while three of them were among the items with the *lowest* agreement scores.
- **Gender differences:** Generally, males and females had quite similar agreement levels, but there were some exceptions. Those with the greatest variation were:
 - “I have the resources necessary to do my work”, where 69% of women agreed while 57% of men agreed
 - “I visit the USM website on a regular basis...”, which found 85% of women in agreement and 74% of men
 - “I think staff levels are adequate in my area” gained agreement from 50% of women and 40% of men
- **Job classification:** Wide variation exists between employees in different job classifications. In general, classified staff tended to have the lowest scores while professional staff were often the highest:
 - “I would recommend USM as a place of employment” had 87% agreement from professional staff but only 71% from classified staff
 - “I believe there is a spirit of cooperation among those with whom I work” found 79% of professional staff in agreement compared to 67% of classified employees

For some statements, the differences are most often between faculty and classified staff:

- “I am given a performance assessment on a regular basis” gained agreement from 85% of full time faculty versus only 48% of classified employees
- “My job makes good use of my skills and abilities” had 89% of part time faculty agreeing, 88% of full time faculty, and only 64% of classified staff

- **Length of service:** This variable also found wide disparity between respondents. One-third of the statements (13 items) found steady declines in agreement with longer service; for each of these items, the longer the employment, the lower the agreement
- **Geographic location:**
 - Lewiston-Auburn College had the *highest* agreement score on 19 of the 39 items
 - Augusta had the *lowest* agreement score on 16 items

Key Findings – Importance

The vast majority of staff rated most statements as being important, often at 90+ percent.

- Among the highest importance ratings were:
 - 99% “Being treated fairly”
 - 99% “Feeling respected by the people with whom I work”
 - 99% “Having a job that makes good use of my skills and abilities”
 - 98% “Feeling a sense of cooperation among those with whom I work”
 - 98% “High employee morale”
- Items with lower importance ratings included:
 - 79% “Receiving a performance assessment on a regular basis”
 - 76% “Knowing where I fit in TUSM”
 - 75% “Being able to recommend USM as a place of employment”
 - 58% “Taking part in campus activities/events at USM...”
 - 38% “Receiving paper communication”
- Average importance scores varied between the 6 topic areas:
 - 96% “Professional Development/Resources”
 - 95% “Workplace Values and Work Environment”
 - 94% “Support from Leadership”
 - 87% “USM Mission”
 - 85% “Sense of Community”
 - 77% “University-wide Communication”

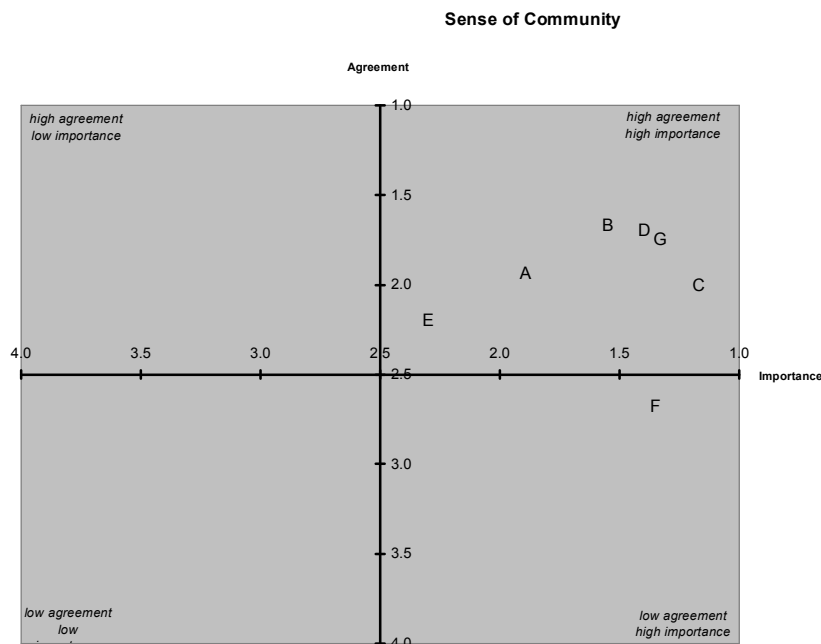
Key Findings – Importance/Agreement Comparisons

- Several items had both high *importance* scores and high *agreement* scores; these might be considered strengths or successes. Included among these items are:
 - “I am proud to be a member of the University community”
 - “I believe the University values student retention”
 - “I feel safe at USM”
 - “I understand what is expected of me at my job”

- Other statements had high importance scores but *low* agreement scores; these might be considered weaknesses or areas that need improvement. These items include:
 - “I believe the University values employee retention”
 - “I believe USM’s physical facilities are adequate...”
 - “Morale is generally high among employees I know”
 - “I think staff levels are adequate in my area”

The following six charts plot the agreement and importance scores for each item within each of the six key topic areas:

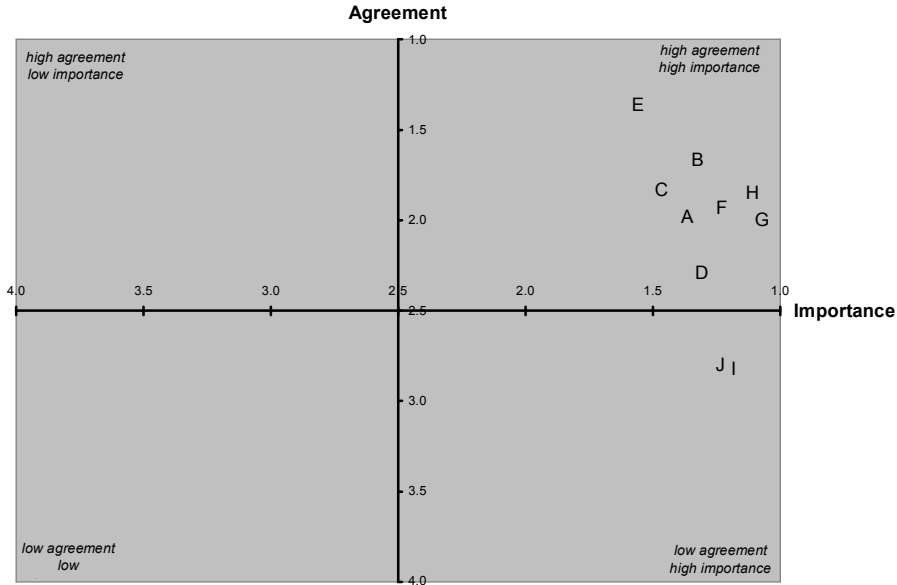
Chart A



- A - I would recommend USM as a place of employment.
- B - I would recommend USM to prospective students.
- C - I believe there is a spirit of cooperation among those with whom I work.
- D - I am proud to be a member of the university community.
- E - I take part in campus activities/events at USM that are outside of my work duties.
- F - I believe the university values employee retention.
- G - I believe the university values student retention.

Chart B

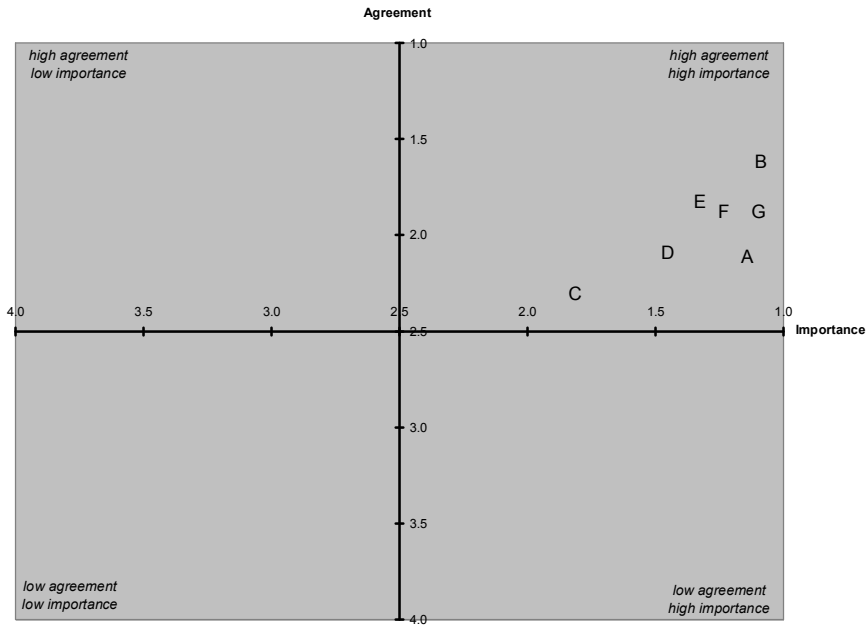
Workplace Values and Work Environment



- A - I believe that USM is committed to my health and safety at work.
- B - I feel safe at USM.
- C - I understand where to go and how to remedy the situation if I feel unsafe physically or emotionally.
- D - I am recognized for contributions I make at work.
- E - I understand why it is important for USM to value diversity.
- F - I am free to express my views at work.
- G - I am treated fairly.
- H - I feel respected by the people with whom I work.
- I - Morale is generally high among the employees I know.
- J - I believe USMs physical facilities are adequate to support work and learning.

Chart C

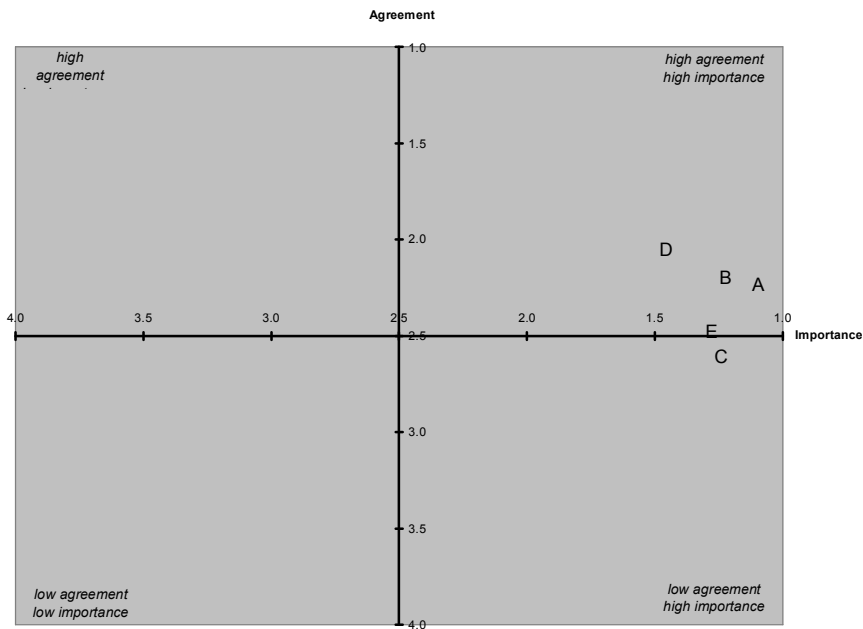
Support from Leadership



- A - I have input into decisions that affect my job.
- B - I understand what is expected of me at my job.
- C - I am given a performance assessment on a regular basis.
- D - I understand how my job performance is assessed.
- E - My supervisor/manager/chair communicates with me on a regular basis.
- F - I am supported and encouraged by my supervisor/manager/chair.
- G - My job makes good use of my skills and abilities.

Chart D

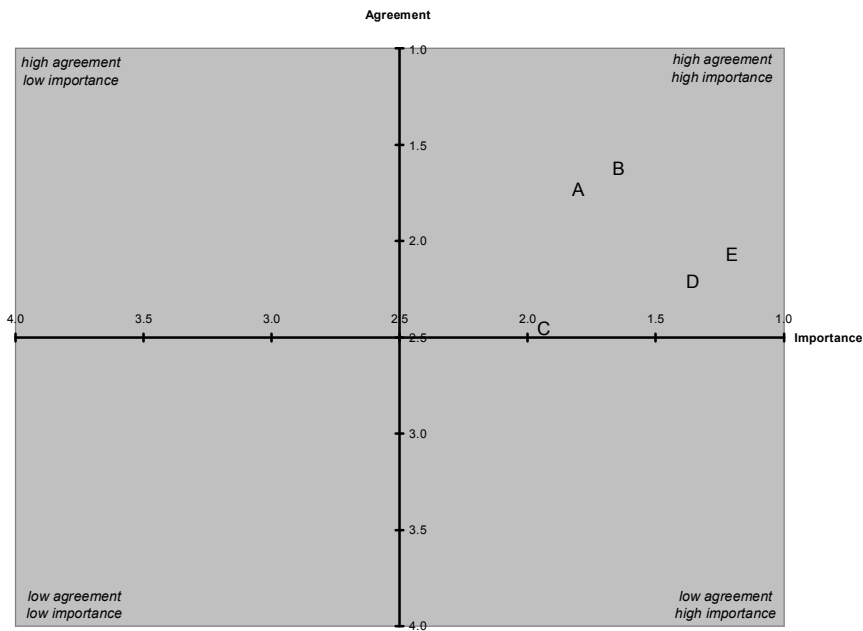
Professional Development & Resources



- A - I have the resources necessary to do my work.
- B - I believe my workload is manageable.
- C - I think staff levels are adequate in my area.
- D - I am able to take advantage of training and/or professional development opportunities.
- E - I am able to grow professionally and have the opportunity for advancement.

Chart E

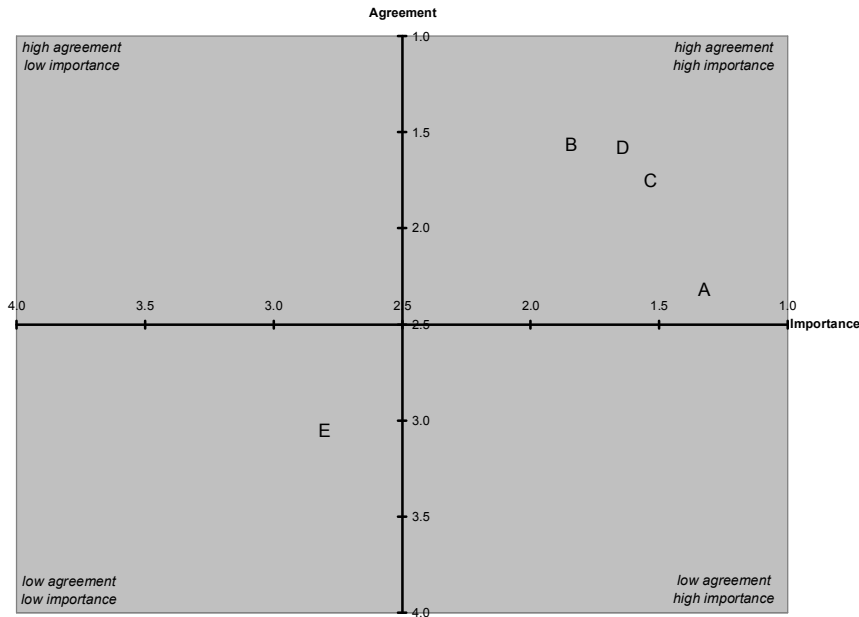
USM Mission



- A - I understand USMs mission.
- B - I think my work at USM contributes to the overall mission of the organization.
- C - I know where I fit into "Transforming USM", the Institutions five-year plan.
- D - I believe USMs leadership has a clear vision for the universitys future.
- E - I believe USM is headed in a positive direction.

Chart F

University-Wide Communication



- A - I am well informed about changes in policies and procedures that affect my employment (changes in Human Resources policies, health/safety issues, legal precedents, etc.).
B - I know how to find information about events happening at the university.
C - I visit the USM website on a regular basis to find information.
D - I typically prefer electronic communication.
E - I typically prefer paper communication.

Conclusion

This Executive Summary presents key findings regarding numerous issues of great interest to USM's staff, faculty and administration (additional details can be found in the full report). In particular, the survey seems to have identified several areas of strength or success, as well as areas for improvement.

Areas of strength/success, as indicated by a high level of agreement, include:

- Employees have a high understanding of why diversity is important, at 92%.
- Employees know how to find information about events taking place at USM, as shown by the 90% agreement for this statement.
- Many employees, 86%, reported that their work contributes to the mission of USM; 86% say they understand what is expected of them on their job; and 85% agree that they would recommend USM to prospective students.

Areas of weakness/opportunities for improvement, as indicated by lower levels of agreement, include:

- Only half of all staff agrees that they know where they fit in to Transforming USM.
- 46% agree that staff levels are adequate in their area.
- There was little support for the statement “I believe the University values employee retention”, with only 42% in agreement.
- 41% of employees agree that USM’s physical facilities are adequate to support work and learning.
- The perception of employee morale is not high; only 38% agreed that “morale is generally high among employees I know”.

Within demographic groups, some trends were found that may help lead USM’s action steps to improve aspects of employee climate:

- Classified staff often reported the lowest levels of agreement.
- For a number of statements, long-term employees had lower levels of agreement than newer staff.
- Employees in Augusta often reported lower agreement scores than other campuses.

Further data from the survey might also suggest directions to pursue. For instance:

- Lewiston-Auburn College staff frequently had higher scores than other campuses; it may be useful to examine aspects of their functioning to find approaches that could be attempted at other locations.
- Professional growth and advancement are very important to staff, but barely half agree that they have the opportunity to do so

The survey results could perhaps be incorporated into the University’s plans. Sharing the results will likely generate ideas and discussion from all staff as well as from the President’s senior staff. It is our hope that the sharing and processing of this information, leading to action, will contribute to an improved climate for USM’s valued employees.