Graduate School Equity & Diversity Progress Report for 2011-12

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YOUR CENTER : Biotron

The following identifies 3 areas for evaluating/improving equity and diversity in the Graduate School Centers and Institutes. Please assess equity, diversity and climate in your center by answering each set of questions.

**Climate Assessment:**
Climate refers to the general quality of the overall work environment. Is it characterized by a sense of community? Is there a perception that all are treated equitably and fairly, that the work environment is flexible and employees are encouraged to be creative in using available resources to achieve the best possible outcomes in performing their duties? Are activities designed to help create and maintain good climate supported by center/institute leaders?

Have you been working toward any goals in this area? Yes

If yes, what are they?

Our main goals have been to (1) foster a sense of mutual respect and cooperation among members of the Biotron staff, between Biotron staff and the Biotron administration (Director and Associate Director) and between Biotron staff and the researchers who use the facility. (2) encourage effective communication among staff members, Biotron administration and researchers and (3) achieve understanding and cooperation among staff members with regard to workplace responsibilities including expectations for job performance, work rules and work hours.

The Biotron Associate Director and the Director have spent considerable time over the past year working to address these issues, which we feel are significantly affecting overall morale at the Biotron and execution of the overall Biotron mission, which is to support research programs on the campus.

Check the response that best describes how your center is doing in this area and provide additional information as indicated.

_____ Doing Well
_____ Adequate
XX Needs Action

There has been a persistent complaint among a few (but not all) staff members in recent years that Biotron administration is not being receptive to their concerns and not demonstrating flexibility with regard to their working conditions (such as flexibility in work hours). This perception has been particularly strong among certain staff members during the 2010-2011 year. There have also been some instances of poor relationships between certain staff members,
and in some cases inappropriate behavior directed by some staff towards other employees (such as overt lack of cooperation and poor tone of communication).

- Please share one or two examples of activities that helped achieve a good climate in your center/institute.

*We hold staff meetings twice per month during which time information is provided by Biotron administration about building activities, upcoming events and projects, and opportunities for staff for professional development. Staff are encouraged during these meetings to voice any concerns they may have about workplace climate or other issues; staff are also invited to meet privately with the Director and/or Associate Director to voice issues and concerns.*

- Please indicate if there is anything you can do over the next year to build on your success in creating adequate climate in your center/institute?

We are considering returning to weekly staff meetings (rather than every other week, which was instituted two years ago) to enhance communication and cohesion among the staff.

- Please specify at least one action you will take over the next year to improve climate in your center/institute.

*We will continue to encourage staff members to use campus resources such as workshops offered by the Office of Human Resources to learn about ways they can contribute to a positive work environment in the Biotron. We are considering requesting the HR office to assist us by providing a staff member who can facilitate a group discussion or workshop about our climate and morale issues as well as to foster cooperatively and effective communication among staff and between staff and Administration.*

**Equity/Fair Treatment:**

This set of questions asks you to assess equitable and fair practices in your center. As you address the following questions, please consider standard practices in your center/institute with respect to: communications with employees; providing opportunities for training & professional development; advancement and promotions; and providing access to resources.

Have you been working toward any goals in this area? Yes

If yes, what are they? *Our goals are to insure that each staff member has a clear understanding of their position responsibilities and what is expected of them in the workplace. We strive to promote effective communication, encourage staff to use campus resources to enhance their training & professional development, and to promote staff members when appropriate to recognize and reward high quality work.*

Check the response that best describes how your center is doing in this area and provide additional information as indicated.
- Please share one or two examples of activities that helped achieve equity and fair treatment in your center/institute.

The Associate Director meets annually with each staff member (1-2 hours) to discuss performance and allow staff to communicate any concerns they might have about their work responsibilities including climate issues.

Administration encourages staff to discuss concerns they have about their perceptions of equity and fairness, and to work with Administration to resolve issues that seem to be in conflict.

We have been reviewing the existing work rules and various building policies that have been in place to enhance their effectiveness with regard to Biotron’s mission. During each review we consider the impact on the staff that are affected by those rules and policies and try to achieve a good balance of flexibility when possible, equity among staff and the effect on overall workplace climate.

- Please indicate if there is anything you can do over the next year to build on your success in creating equitable and fair practices in your center/institute.

Biotron Administration plans to work on several issues to address and resolve perceptions by some staff that relate to bias, inequity and inflexibility in the workplace environment. We will review and carefully consider existing policies, procedures and historical patterns related to these issues and in cases where adjustments can be made to promote workplace inequities, these will be instituted. When perceptions do not appear to be consistent with the actions of Biotron administration, then we will work with staff to communicate why a particular policy is in place, what the basis is for the policy and how their work related to that policy is important to the Biotron’s mission. When necessary, we will request assistance from appropriate members of the Office of Human Resources staff.

- Please specify at least one action you will take over the next year to improve equity and fair treatment in your center/institute.

We will continue to encourage staff to attend workshops on workplace climate and communication offered by the Office of Human Resources. We are considering requesting the HR office to assist us by providing a staff member who can facilitate a group discussion or workshop about our climate and morale issues as well as to foster cooperation and effective communication among staff and between staff and Administration.
Recruitment and Hiring
These sets of questions are focused on recruitment and hiring practices in your center/institute. As you consider these questions please consider the extent to which they promote equity, diversity and good climate.

Have you been working toward any goals in this area?

If yes, what are they?

Check the response that best describes how your center is doing in this area and provide additional information as indicated.

___ Doing Well
XX Adequate
___ Needs Action

- Please share one or two examples of activities that helped develop good recruitment and hiring practices in your center/institute.

Position responsibilities have been reviewed

- Please indicate if there is anything you can do over the next year to build on your success in developing good recruitment and hiring practices in your center/institute.

[Please see below]

- Please specify at least one action you will take over the next year to improve recruitment and hiring practices in your center/institute.

The Associate Director conducts an exit interview with each staff member who leaves the Biotron due to retirement, new job opportunities or other reasons. This has proven to be a very valuable exercise that provides Biotron administration with frank (and confidential) assessment of climate and equity/diversity issues in the center. It also allows us to consider new options for replacement of those staff members including possible restructuring of position responsibilities and changes in position classification. This practice will continue in the coming year.

Obstacles to Achieving Equity and Diversity and a Positive Climate
Are there any obstacles that keep you from making progress in the above areas?
Is there anything else you think the Graduate School Equity and Diversity Committee should be aware of that impact climate, equity and diversity in your center/institute? At the UW overall?

A current issue that needs attention and has the potential to stymie efforts to achieve a sense of equity among staff and positive workplace climate is the schedule of work hours, which is directly related to staff coverage in the various units needed to carry out the Biotron mission, which is to support research among campus users. Over the last 5-10 years, an increasing number of staff have requested flexibility in their work hours that puts their schedules not in complete alignment with the normal hours of operation at the Biotron (7:45 AM to 4:30 PM). In
an effort to provide individual flexibility, the administration has granted many of the requests; however it has become apparent that adequate coverage of the various Biotron units has been compromised. To correct that problem, the Director and Associate Director have proposed a new set of work hours that still proved some flexibility for individual staff but will address the gap in coverage. For some staff, the change is either zero or minimal and there are no concerns, but for others, there is significant resistant to altering their current work hours. Thus, Administration has struggled with the sometimes competing needs to have adequate building coverage to support the research mission, provide flexibility for staff to aid in a positive work climate, and to be fair and equitable to all staff. It has become apparent that to provide adequate coverage, not all staff would be able to receive the work rule flexibility they requested, and this was confirmed when Biotron Administration met with a member of the Office of Quality Improvement to discuss work flow with regard to staff hours. It was concluded that in order to show fairness to all, the work hours originally proposed by Administration to correct the gaps in coverage will be instituted. We plan to communicate with staff members individually to explain the work hours that each will be asked to follow beginning November 1 (for some staff that use car pool resources, the change may be phased in until room on different car pool vans is available).