

# Public Conversations Project May 2014 Listening Tour Report

## Some findings from our interviews:

The following findings are distilled from the interviews we conducted with administration, staff, faculty and a limited number of students. These findings are only partial and need to be augmented with additional interviews to fill out the experience of students and faculty, who for reasons of schedule and perhaps protest were not available at the time of our visit.

## Morale

Morale is big issue right now among staff and administrators. The LASPA search and subsequent protests as well as the larger underlying issues outlined below have sapped a sense of well-being and commitment.

- People ambivalent about the listening tours. Feel that they haven't been given access to the context, thinking behind the tours. And are skeptical that anything will come of them.
- Morale among staff is very low. Feel "burnt out." Overworked, underappreciated, disempowered. Unhappy despite beautiful environment and excellent benefits.
- High turnover among younger staff. Our own transitions within this community and then interactions with faculty and students. Internal sets of issues, which we grapple with 1-1/individually and not institutionally.
- "Some of us have been carrying this burden for a long time and it is hard to be the ones always being asked to carry it."
- Faculty – interested – but not shore how to engage.
  - o Whatever the program is, you'll get us, but we are already doing this. Need to get "the other people."

## Structure

There was much discussion about how the issues that people are experiencing are structural issues and cannot be solved with interventions and events.

- people feel silo-ed "We're silo-ed; nothing is shared, we (staff) not empowered to find communities, silo-ed; technology is not our friend"
- A lot of devaluing of staff
- Some departments and groups feel sidestepped –
  - o Students go around
  - o administration sidesteps.

- Staff frustration with the students' aggressive, adversarial approach. Students have found that this approach produces results. This approach contributes to the disempowerment of Student Affairs.
- Real issue is structure. Students are naming some of the structural things but not doing a very good job of addressing them.
- There is an experience that there is a top down structure where the president really does have all the agency – this becomes disempowering to many people who feel they could contribute.
  - The strategic plan on diversity and inclusivity is not a plan and has no accountability. So when the Laspa search failed it felt like the larger inclusivity process failed.
- PACDI – There is a perception that PACDI does a lot of good things but because of structural problems, the positive effects are limited.
  - PACDI is focused on student voice and student experience; primarily reports to the President so does not connect to the rest of the community. Does not connect to the Staff Council.
  - PACDI – a source of knowledge but no mechanism for it to go anywhere except straight to the President.
  - PACDI does a lot of talking about fires.
  - People have felt – abolish PACDI and do some real institutional work.
  - Is this a good time to take a first step towards reimagining PACDI?
  - PACDI conversations involve deep engagement; others on campus don't have access to this kind of deep engagement.
    - Echo chamber – venting chamber
    - What we produce goes nowhere – no return on investment.
    - Good conversation but it doesn't make its way into the community
    - No transparency of process – so it feels like it is not worth my time.

## Reactivity

There is a strong sense that the community has been stuck for a long time in a position of being reactive to issues of diversity and inclusion rather than thinking more broadly and proactively about it.

- “We are a community and institution that pays a lot of attention to micro-problems. Reactive, puts band-aids. Not looking for and paying attention to deeper issues.”
- The problem is that it circumvents all kinds of interesting dialogue that could be happening. It is all about reactivity – cause arises, circumvent appropriate staff – attention gets given – the larger problems don't get solved.

- "We are always putting out fires"

## COMMUNICATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

There is a sense that people do not feel appropriately communicated with and also a sense that people are not acknowledging progress made:

- "Part of the issue is communication – we know that. We need to do a better job letting people know when things are happening"
- Campaign "we want more" didn't bring people along before we put it out there.
- "Regarding Laspa; part of the crisis came from lack of clarity as to what we were looking for."
- "The whole community needs to see more of the big picture" Need better communication about what is being done/discussed/decided.
- "We need to deal with the perception that "nothing has happened" A lot has happened. We need to acknowledge what HAS happened and look to build on that."

Part of the problem is that there is an impression of a democratic process:

- "You want feedback but you don't listen to it –you have created an expectation of democracy that is not accurate."

## Racial dynamics:

Many people described the racial dynamics as being a mixture of black members of the community feeling slighted and marginalized and white members feeling silenced and afraid to engage.

- Some people spoke of "institutional white privilege".
- "White silence/Black slight"
  - Several African-American members of the community feel slighted.
  - White people are being silenced on this campus – they are afraid to speak for fear of being labeled and accused.
- "Being a staff of color is difficult at times."
- There is no "Safety to speak – to make mistakes, to speak truthfully – How do we create more safety for connection and engagement?"
  - "One of the problems around here is political correctness. We need to create supportive spaces, flip the dialogue to allow people to speak their truth. All our politeness and trying to be "inclusive and respectful" is not helpful.

Fear and lack of safety on campus (NOT physical). Worry that the year of dialogue will focus on surface micro-issues.

## Transparency – follow-through – return on investment

There is a concern for a lot of people about past efforts and the lack of either transparency or follow-through on recommendations. This results in a feeling of disenfranchisement and a reluctance to go back into another process for fear there will not be a “return on investment”

- “My worry/experience – there is nothing but ‘lip service’”
- “They ask for feedback and do nothing with it; if you can’t do it, tell me why”
- They did all of the mission statement of diversity work but “nothing ever happened to it”
- They did all this work about bias in the classroom and gave it to the dean, “but nothing ever happened to it.”
- Lots of wheel-spinning. It becomes a venting chamber.

## Places of real strength

There are some real places of strength in the community that have made a difference and could provide some foundation for the process. There is also a sense that the increase in concern is a product of Scripps’ own success – the larger the enrollment the more people are aware of the imbalance and deficiencies. Some assets:

- Use capstone Day – it really is a great way to interact about the issues.
- 5 college diversity group
- Informal meetings like the ones with Mary Hacher-Skeers
- Core One Syllabus
- Scripps Summer Academy

## Good outcomes:

We asked people what they would like to see come out of a process like this.

- Some skill sets that professors could use – making an inclusive classroom.
- Creating a safe space to move beyond political correctness – creating a space where people can make a mistake without hurting others or themselves.
- Facilitating dialogues that leads to skills building
- 5 college classroom climate work
- Do not repeat DD training.
- Start with dialogue – but a meta conversation about why this is so difficult to talk about.
- Plan for how this continues for how this continues after the program.
- Structures and policies to help us be more successful and feel more supported.

- Clear sense of shared mission.