

# **Analysis of Themes from MJC Climate Survey Focus Group Interviews Fall 2010**

## Background

In Spring 2010 the Accreditation/Institutional Effectiveness (AIE) Committee and the Research and Planning Office conducted the MJC Climate Survey. In early Fall 2010 the Director of the Research and Planning Office presented the analysis of the responses to the AIE Committee. The recommendation from the “Modesto Junior College Climate Survey Analysis Spring 2010” was to conduct focus groups interviews in Fall 2010 in order to understand the reasoning behind less favorable responses to some of the college climate statements. The AIE Committee decided to hold two forums during the first two weeks of October, one on each campus, to have dialogs concerning the overall responses to the survey. The AIE Committee also decided to conduct focus group interviews during the last two weeks in October. The idea was to ask participants to share their understanding of the possible reasons for the less favorable responses to certain survey statements and provide suggestions for improvement.

## Methodology

The AIE Focus Group Interview Taskforce identified five “reflection clusters” of functionally related survey statements with less favorable response percentages and created a list of faculty, staff, and administrators who represented the demographics identified from the survey and invited them to be participants in one of four focus group interview sessions. Each focus group was moderated by a member of the Taskforce and was asked to respond to the same five clusters of survey statements, and experienced note takers took notes of the dialogs from each session. The Director of Research and Planning compiled the responses from each focus group session and identified themes that surfaced from the responses. The AIE Focus Group Interview Taskforce assisted the director in analyzing the Themes and Notes from the four sessions.

## Analysis

- The most prevalent theme of all of the themes identified in responses to the five clusters of survey statements is the perceived Lack of Communication. The clusters of survey statements influenced the areas of communication as follows: planning/program review/input, leadership, feedback, student services offered, and technology plan/process.
- A related theme to the above is perceived Lack of Plans/Process regarding custodial/maintenance staffing, coordination of responsibilities, and supervision.
- Another prevalent theme is the perceived Lack of Inclusion and Equitable Treatment of certain groups and individuals in processes including planning and program review.
- One other prevalent theme is the perceived Disconnect in Committee Functions/Processes, Committee Structure, and Shared Governance.
- Another theme is the perceived Lack of Value and Adequacy in instructional programs and support services, committee work, program review, and budgeting decisions.

## Conclusion/Recommendation

The following Themes and Notes from Focus Group Interviews, relative to the above general themes, should be discussed by the college community to determine actions to be taken to improve the lines of communication and inclusion throughout the college and the value in planning/committee processes (including program review and budget) and instructional areas.

## Themes and Notes from Focus Group Interviews – Fall 2010

**Focus Group Interview Questions:** After review of response data to the following statements from the “MJC Climate Survey 2010,” why did the survey respondents indicate less favorable responses to these statements, and what can be done for improvement?

### Reflection Cluster #1

(Statement 2.7 The college’s overall planning process effectively incorporates input from the appropriate people or groups in the college and district. Statement 2.9 Institutional planning and program review are based on research and data. Statement 3.5 MJC evaluates courses/programs in an ongoing systematic review of their relevance, appropriateness, and future need.)

#### *Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Inclusion*

##### Why less favorable responses?

- Classified staff members are not represented in certain decisions (maybe represented, but not driving force).
- Classified staff members are not brought into division Program Review.
- Classified staff members do not feel informed/involved/consulted in the decision making and planning processes.
- Classified staff members get good information from faculty, not from classified representatives on committees = seem to be represented by same people/not branching out to include new classified as representatives on committees.
- Classified staff members do not have as many opportunities to gather information (pretty strict about completing work assignments).
- Classified staff members do not see evidence of running Program Review, but trust it is being done.
- Full-time faculty focus group participant indicated being puzzled as to why over 25 percent of Full-time faculty members do not know that programs are reviewed.

##### *Suggestions for improvement:*

- *Person updating course outlines should be involved in review.*
- *Classified staff members need more exposure to program review and processes.*
- *Need more input.*
- *More participation (involvement) by more classified (more and different staff members).*
- *Representation from all constituent groups should be balanced.*
- *Constituent groups need to find common ground/solidarity.*

#### *Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Communication Regarding Planning/Program Review*

##### Why less favorable responses?

- Some employees may not see link between planning and initiatives and input they give.
- People who are part of committees are more aware; people who are not part of committees are busy with their work (in a “vacuum” with time and work).

- One reason the N/A responses are high is that many employees are not part of processes themselves or the meetings or receive/read emails concerning processes/program review or these processes/program review are not part of their work. Some do not know enough about processes/program review to gauge/measure effectiveness, relevance, appropriateness, and future need. For example, a program was moved without input from staff.
- People read emails, but if there is not enough time to read emails about processes, they “sign off” on the information that is not directly related to their jobs.
- Everyone (faculty, staff, and administrators) is being asked to do more with less resources, and because of budget constraints, we are not able to replace those who have retired or otherwise separated from the college/district.

***Suggestions for improvement:***

- *Planning is more abstract – need to help classified see connections with budget like program improvement – need to see how research and data are used in planning and Program Review (not just “trusting”).*
- *Doesn’t seem to be upward dialogue (do we need to look at organizational changes?)*
- *More communication to college community concerning these processes, program review is needed.*
- *Need forums and other venues for sharing processes, data, criteria for how and why decisions are made and how those decisions feed into the “big picture” of the college/district.*
- *Forums should include an interactive Question/Answer time and for sharing information.*
- *Managers need to encourage attendance/participation in forums and staff need to collaborate in order to facilitate attendance/participation.*
- *More consideration needs to be given to really understand the implications/affects of decisions.*

***Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Value Regarding Instructional Programs***

**Why less favorable responses?**

- Some employees see certain groups may do the same, repetitive work (ask – how are staffing needs filled?). For example, current IAC faculty prioritization process – 95 faculty positions proposed/maybe 2 funded = many departments won’t see their work “pay off.”
- General Education faculty are asking if a discipline is relevant to other institutions (universities) – courses are lower division and don’t give students much for major.

***Suggestions for improvements***

- *Program Review is being done systematically but not “across the board” – should ask if programs are still relevant – Curriculum Committee should ask programs, “Show me the evidence.”*
- *Example of “Best Practices”: Faculty in Career Technical Education are doing “due diligence” (meeting 4+ times a year with Advisory Groups to ask for evidence (course evaluation/program evaluation)).*
- *Perhaps curriculum at MJC needs to be articulated as to use – faculty needs to understand relevance of lower division.*

## Reflection Cluster #2

(Statement 2.7 The college's overall planning process effectively incorporates input from the appropriate people or groups in the college and district. Statement 5.6 Participation in the campus committee structure is worthwhile (i.e., effort that goes in is matched by an equally valuable output. Statement 4.1 MJC treats employees equitably.)

### *Focus Group Response Theme: Disconnect in Committee Functions/Processes*

#### Why less favorable responses?

- Statements 2.7 and 5.6 seen as planning process in committee structure.
- The question is, “Do people know if planning process is working?”
- College has culture of setting up groups (spending hours and hours and result is “no”) – classified and faculty have spent many hours but no results/they “were not heard.”
- Large group of classified not engaged – classified still have work to do in addition to committee work (if no purpose or outcome to committee meeting, wasted time).
- Suspicion/discontent of amount of work done on committees and unclear decision making afterward.
- Some who have been here awhile feel there is no follow through with committee work/plans; input is not valued.
- Administration/leadership seems to be critical of recommendations coming out of committees.
- Plans and work that have already been done seem to be re-directed or begun again with another group (i.e., starting over).
- Faculty and staff feel like they commit to serving on committees/work groups/task forces—taking the time away from their job to do all this work/research—and then the committee recommendations are challenged, not carried forward and/or implemented.
- Faculty and staff feel like plans and work that has already been done
- Focus group participant observed: The more time people work here, the less they agree with this statement.
- The longer here, the more cynical (jaded) – others hear those who feel that way and are reinforced with those feelings.
- Those who are here longer have a huge influence on those who are newer.
- Faculty participant with 16+ years experience: never thought of it as a job – things have changed in the last 10 years – no attachment to the college and happiness in job now. It's the decision making process.

#### *Suggestions for improvement*

- *Stop pointless meetings. Multiple duplication of efforts...meeting 4 to 5 times to discuss decisions that have already been made. Need to have agendas that have specific purpose with action points.*
- *Need to identify cohort colleges--look at models, strategic planning and evaluation processes that work, and determine/refine best practices.*
- *Need more knowledge of how decision making works to improve these perceptions.*
- *Need to recognize what committee work is used.*
- *People need to realize that not each idea will be used/followed.*
- *The less amount of time on project, more is accomplished.*
- *Need to figure out each committee's charge and stick with it.*

- *We need to encourage greater participation in the processes.*
- *Too many meetings are “talk” – need to get work done.*

***Focus Group Response Theme: Disconnect in Committee Structure***

**Why less favorable responses?**

- Classified have more trouble making decisions/get things done/do not feel “allowed” to make decisions.
- Classified and faculty – same people on committees – some individuals have many meetings (can’t get college work done).
- Same people are on committees – they observe nothing changing/decisions not made or it ends up “no.”
- Observation of data: longer at MJC, less agree committee worthwhile –
  - Some classified feel “shut down” when they are in committees (originally feel enthusiastic).

***Suggestions for improvement***

- *Committee structure is working, but agenda items are too many – college needs to narrow agenda items and prioritize and focus on fewer items – operational projects (like capitalization or Founders Hall or getting SLOs complete = simplify.*

***Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Communication Regarding Leadership***

**Why less favorable responses?**

- Administrators are not doing a good job of communicating the importance of institutional planning and program review.
- Expressed angst over the President and one Vice President: It’s all about who you are. You have a situation where a chair is doing a good job, but someone else isn’t. Who is responsible? It isn’t clear who you are reacting to.
- Hear people say that “they” are always in meetings. Don’t see the deans, when we do see them, they are going mad house. Always in a hurry, have no time. Used to not have so many committees.
- Use to have a dean to talk with. Now getting an appointment is different. Dean’s used to turn to faculty for information. Lost sense of collegiality.
- It is the board of trustees who seem non responsive and non accountable. If we don’t have board support to make changes, then nothing will change. There is leadership within we could be working collegially. People don’t respect the college’s culture. People are disenfranchised and disconnected.
- Problems exist in the divisions. For example, our division has a distance ed. program. There was an arbitrary decision made to terminate the DE program because it was perceived as being inefficient as compared to the classroom. The defense for the decisions was that we are using tax paying dollars.

***Suggestions for improvement***

- *Need a better way to spread (communicate/educate) what committee work is done.*
- *It may be a matter of perception = need communication/information avenues (list of who’s on which committees, what the lines of communication are, sources of information).*
- *Need better communication throughout college community to feel heard/valued.*

- *Others look for the “busy people” who get things done and ask them what’s happening.*
- *Option to create an Ombudsman. Someone who is disconnected from the powers...create an external structure to provide support. Many people are afraid to approach their leadership even in the unions...fear of reprisals.*
- *Change some personnel. Not that we don’t have the personnel to do that.*

***Focus Group Response Theme: Equitable Treatment***

**Why less favorable responses?**

- Classified – responses could come from classification study and process – they may see them not produce “equitable” treatment.
- Many would walk away (from the college) if things were more economically suitable.
- Only place joy, positive feelings happen is in the classroom. At first, it was always enjoyable to be on campus. It is no longer a joy to be here. New faculty members are happy at first, but they become jaded as time goes on.
- Survey [response numbers] represents what has happened in the last decade.
- Yes, we can see that half the administration feels they have been treated inequitably. We are in a tremendous hurt (noted across all groups). Shows this college is dysfunctional. And, that it is on-going right now.
- Part-time and Full-time Faculty – different perspectives in different divisions/programs.

***Suggestions for improvement***

*(None)*

***Focus Group Response Theme: Perceptions of Shared Governance***

**Why less favorable responses?**

- Shared governance has eroded/slipped away in last 4-5 years.
- The decision was made without faculty involvement...the course was cancelled without feedback, and the entire program was cancelled. Thereafter, it was brought back to the faculty. Decisions are made without faculty involvement. The argument was refuted by the individual who made it. This decision is microcosm of what goes on here. It shows that we do not have shared governance. Decisions are made and then an attempt to build support is done after the fact.
- Shared governance isn’t understood or practiced the way it should be at this college.

***Suggestions for improvement***

- *Need to review definition of “shared governance” to clarify how committees function – disseminated and discussed with college community.*

### **Reflection Cluster #3 (Statements 3.3 and 3.6)**

**(Statement 3.3 MJC makes a conscious effort to make changes to improve student learning. Statement 3.6 Program review at MJC leads to improvement of programs and services.)**

#### ***Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Communication Regarding Feedback***

##### **Why less favorable responses?**

- If people are not seeing Program Review results, then they disagree that there's improvement.
- Program Review is done by department, but it is not communicated.
- Changes are made; not sure what results are.
- Many employees do not read emails that involve this issue.
- Student learning **is** improving because we are looking at data gathered through program review and needs assessment (among other data sets).
- I agree with outcomes, but outcomes we can trust...but it hasn't worked in so long.
- Continued leadership transitions can have a negative effect.

##### ***Suggestions for improvement***

- *All people at the college need to realize that all departments are involved in student learning.*
- *Need clearer communication of what successes there are and who is doing what.*
- *Any time that there are opportunities for people to provide feedback (even this focus group), it is cathartic for those involved.*
- *Need thoughtful input regarding dedication of space and resources that would translate to improvements in programs, services, and student learning.*

#### ***Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Inclusion in Process***

##### **Why less favorable responses?**

- The apparent "high numbers" [Strongly Agree/Agree] from Classified (considering what could have been lower numbers to these statements) are based on "trust" because there is a question about whether Program Review "works." (For example, who "reads" Program Reviews?)
- Classified are not consulted/Program Review has been instruction oriented.
- Some departments include classified staff members in Program Review – reviewing/improving some departments.
- Morale issue – if things are "good," trust is there; if not, it may lead to negative spiral.

##### ***Suggestions for improvement***

- *Classified staff members need to be included in "conversations."*

#### ***Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Value Regarding Program Review Process***

##### **Why less favorable responses?**

- Program review is time consuming and is not used by some (put on a shelf).
- A dean uses program review in division/departments.
  - Faculty may feel it is time intensive (waste of time) = we did all this work, but nothing happened.

- Others feel it may work – realize it might not pay off, but it might.

- State budget impacting these responses – no results for work/time expended on program review.
- One participant asked, “How long has program review been around MJC?” There were differing answers by other participants, depending on number of years working at MJC and the divisions using program review.
- Four decades to increase student learning. We’ve tried every conceivable option. We talk about it, throw money at it. The problem is that we are saddled by a cultural change...Self serving, entitlement (related to current youth culture and attitudes)...makes it impossible. It just can’t be done.
- Going in two directions. We are like a sail boat that has lost its sail. There are a lot of different activities trying to promote so many things. We are spread too thin.
- Program review is necessary only from the standpoint of accreditation, and so are SLOs. Practically, PR and SLOs don’t have any impact from a classroom point of view. We go through the hoops go through it for PR...
- Recommendations (hiring) and then a town hall meeting – it seems a waste of time because a charismatic speaker can turn it all upside down in the town hall meeting. It comes down to who is making more money. Priorities are based more on accounting than on need.

#### ***Suggestions for improvement***

- *There must be results tied to PR. Outcomes tied to it even if it is delayed due to no money.*
- *We continually jump on the latest band wagon, but we stop doing what works. Library, tutoring, bridge, smaller classes. These are expensive. We need to put our money where our mouth is and do what we know works.*
- *All the work and planning is undermined so why go through the process if I can just wait and be more vocal and make it all change.*

## Reflection Cluster #4 (Statements 3.3, 3.10, and 3.8)

(Statement 3.3 MJC makes a conscious effort to make changes to improve student learning. Statement 3.10 Tutorial services are sufficient to support MJC faculty, students, and instructional programs, regardless of location. Statement 3.8 Library resources are sufficient to support MJC faculty, students, and instructional programs, regardless of location.)

### *Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Communication Regarding Services Offered*

#### Why less favorable responses?

- Not enough communication of services provided (tutorial, library) = students/staff do not know the difference between tutoring and writing center or math center.
- Lots of people who checked the library question aren't familiar with the library.
- What does "tutorial services" mean?
  - Responses of students could depend on where student is (location influences "type" of "tutorial services" known).
  - Faculty responses vary – English Department uses Writing Center exclusively; other departments use Tutorial Center in library basement.
  - From nursing perspective, there are no tutors.
  - Anatomy has own.
- Career Technical Education programs do not have enough students with "upper skills" to help students with "lower skills."
- Focus group participant from library: People don't know about the library, but we go into classes and do lots of things.

#### *Suggestions for improvement*

- *Need better communication about types of services offered.*
- *Need training for "upper skills" CTE students to help "lower skills" CTE students.*
- *Need to have professional development to train "tutoring center" like writing center/math center staff are trained – need for CTE faculty to incorporate process to introduce CTE subjects in tutoring, writing centers/math centers [for contextual learning].*
- *Do a Spring Institute Day (on the library).*

### *Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Adequacy Concerning Services Offered*

#### Why less favorable responses?

- Library resources, particularly on the West Campus, are not sufficient to support faculty, students, and instructional programs.
- Participant's understanding is that the library services on West are less adequate.
- The only knowledge one focus group participant had concerning library was from students – West Campus Library is less stocked with material and has shorter hours.
- No sense if the resources aren't adequate.
- Library does not have enough money.
- Many faculty do not encourage their students to go to tutoring because they do not agree that what occurs there is "tutoring" – they see the tutors actually editing/correcting

students' papers – divisions are looking to fund their own centers, with staff trained in tutoring skills (Writing Center/Math Center).

- Inadequate number of tutors.

***Suggestions for improvement***

- *Need to explore the consolidation of services.*
- *Open library 12 hours on East.*

***Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Communication Regarding Planning/Input***

**Why less favorable responses?**

- Discussion of how poor the planning was/is on putting West together and new buildings overall.
- There were no books in the library (on West) for the first 2 years participant was here. No planning. Just like our soon-to-be Patterson site...no planning.
- Putting all the tutoring together under one roof (implied as a bad idea): Frustrating that it is done without faculty input. Decisions are made in an arbitrary fashion without making any effort to look at what we are doing. Goes back to the lack of input. Going off in a direction...an administrative practice.
- Since the decisions are made top down.

***Suggestions for improvement***

- *Need to be proactive with strategic planning.*

## Reflection Cluster #5 (Statements 4.14 and 4.13)

(Statement 4.14 MJC systematically plans, acquires, maintains, and upgrades/replaces technology infrastructure to meet instructional needs. Statement 4.13 The interiors of the classrooms, offices, and restrooms are adequately maintained.)

### *Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Coordination of Custodial Responsibilities and Facilities Maintenance*

#### Why less favorable responses?

- Newer buildings “look” cleaner than older buildings – both cleaned well, but custodial staff are not told to remove “old stuff” (like furniture)/piled up in corners of classrooms/just work around stuff (not in their job descriptions).
- Obsolete stuff (like TVs) not removed in classrooms.
- Facilities Department (custodians/groundskeepers/trades in particular) has been operating short-staffed for a number of years—back to Prop 13 days.
- Faculty participant: from faculty perspective, does not know what process is of how classrooms are cleaned; some parts of classrooms are cleaned and others are not.
- Understanding is that custodial and maintenance are short handed for job assignments.
- No service from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., except emergency.

#### *Suggestions for improvement*

- *Need to have more maintenance/custodial staff to remove old stuff – need to have group to evaluate what needs to be removed/upgraded.*
- *Need to communicate responsibility of work (for example, cleaning parts of classrooms (lecterns, tables, etc.) – why work orders to do certain work?*
- *Some custodians do not do their work adequately. Need to be better supervised and released if not doing their job.*

### *Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Communication Regarding Technology Plan and Process*

#### Why less favorable responses?

- Lack of resources (financial and human) – classroom labs
- Assumption is there is a plan for technology, but unclear how it works.
- Some areas of technology are okay; others may not be.
- Budget constraints – faculty and staff work with what they have, understanding no budget – planning for technology upgrades when budget gets better (understand that it’s expensive).
- The offices and classrooms-whiteboards versus the blackboards. Faculty member feels that it has all been very wasteful and that the college should have never changed out the blackboards. Whiteboards, smart boards...we are always chasing this ideal of being technologically ahead. It’s like the field of dreams. We throw it into the rooms where faculty members have no use and no need for it. The blackboards were very adequate. Throwing money where it isn’t needed. It is the cookie cutter approach. Again, shared governance is a figment of the imagination of the college.
- They just brought in 5 companies to look at the projectors. No one came. Feel like they’re trying.

- There are so many meetings. Your voice is never heard. When people aren't heard, then they stop coming...stop wasting their time.
- Some faculty and administrators get things done. But, most things are done at the local level, and it's not celebrated. It's lost. Not sure who you can talk to and hear our new administrator is even less so. Few people care and are passionate about this institution.
- Some venues are division based and some are technology department based.

#### ***Suggestions for improvement***

- *Should set standards in classrooms and evaluate how and what kinds of technology are needed.*
- *Career Technical Education has process to develop project for improving student learning (with technology equipment) – direct faculty write up proposals.*
- *We need to look at the needs and consider what the staff wants. What does faculty need/want/use....why buy it?*
- *Efforts are too often college wide. Rather than going to faculty meetings. Time simply isn't there. Start at the bottom. This is your area. Collect data at the local level and then bring it up.*
- *Need one technology plan and budget/one source to repair/upgrade – need to identify external resources/funding.*

#### ***Focus Group Response Theme: Lack of Custodial Staffing Plan for Buildings***

#### **Why less favorable responses?**

- There is growing concern that, not only are the current facilities not being maintained, but as new facilities come online (Allied Health/Student Services/Science Community Center, etc.) there will most certainly **not** be enough staff to adequately maintain them.
- Speaking as a full time faculty member...the restrooms...students have general disregard. It is impossible to keep them clean.
- Faculty member was privileged to have a person who kept the blackboards in classroom and everything very clean. Cut budgets, made it difficult for maintenance to keep up with all the changes...additions to workload (by adding buildings and not increasing staff)...spread the staff too thin. The A/C in Founders hall threw dust. Staff members are overworked. When maintenance is done well it is fantastic. Founders Hall was so old and the treatment of the building has deteriorated.
- People were pulled off jobs in the middle of the night. Purchases and repairs. We used to be able to repair say a light fixture for 100 now in the new buildings it cost 300. Many purchases are done without thought of ongoing maintenance. Many of the newer buildings cannot be cleaned properly, and they are already falling apart.
- Rat infestation in a building. Had lizard infestation 3 months ago. We purchase buildings that are beautiful now, but we aren't purchasing for long term durability, and there is no consideration for staffing. Again, we are opening another new site without thought to maintenance over time.

#### ***Suggestions for improvement***

- *Need to closely monitor space utilization.*
- *New buildings coming on line need custodial/maintenance staff.*

### Other Responses: Ambiguous Survey Statements

- In Statement 3.5 – “relevance,” “appropriateness,” and “future needs” are three different aspects; the statement could be taken different ways by focusing on different aspect or could be confusing to respondent (large N/A response).
- Statement 4.1 – is not clear – what is meant by “equitably”? (College wide? Workload? Respect? Salaries? Treatment?) This is a broad statement, with differing interpretations and levels (faculty, staff, administration) (for example, equal representation, “voice” – no)
- Statement 3.6 – These are value statements – it depends on how we perceive learning.

### General Comments

- Can future surveys have comment boxes next to each question so that respondents can write in their reasons for selecting a particular answer?
- Can information be distributed to potential survey group(s) prior to the actual survey (appropriate things to consider when responding to the survey questions)?
- *Need to look at other colleges (cohorts?) to see what **does** work.*
- *Need to have more college-wide social activities.*
- *Need to survey constituent groups more frequently.*