

University of California
2019 UC Staff Engagement Survey

Analysis of Written Comments: Merced

Respondents answered one or more comment questions:

1. Please select the most important reason you are considering leaving the UC system. (102 comments)
2. What one or two suggestions do you have that would most improve your campus / location as a place to work? (216 comments)

OVERALL SUMMARY: Respondents describe an unsettled work environment related to significant changes in leadership. “Start by educating Leadership (AVC, VC, Chancellor) that the employees are unhappy and make them actually address it,” suggests one respondent. “This is only one of many engagement surveys, and I am sure the outcomes of this one won’t be any better than the years before. But Leadership will not make any meaningful changes to address the negative feedback. Middle managers are not empowered or supported, leaving the lowest level employees to run the show, while middle and upper management jockey over authority lines.”

Respondents believe the university has “lost our focus as to who we serve,” according to one respondent; others call for leaders and managers to be “held to the same level of expectations and accountability as their employees.”

They call for more effective communications, especially regarding change initiatives. “There is a lot of change within the division that I work in, and I do not feel that it is being communicated properly,” says one respondent. “This has caused rumors and a lot of confusion.”

Another respondent suggests stronger collaboration among campuses implementing similar systems: “With many campuses seemingly moving in the same direction for improved systems (Financial, Travel and Procurement) and processes (work order systems, workflow and approvals), it appears the collaboration and communication between campuses is lacking. This could be a missed opportunity for cost savings in terms of leveraging size and scope with shared suppliers.”

Respondents urge leadership to emphasize retention by “fair compensation to start, increase compensation as job responsibilities grow, and never tell people: ‘you should just be happy you have a job.’” Another respondent agrees: “I know that we are at the mercy of our budgets, but it would be nice to try and retain our talent.”

Responses to Comment Question #1

Respondents were offered a list of 11 topics to choose from, including 'Other'. The three most frequent topics, with number and percent of comments are:

- Career advancement opportunities (n=23; 23% of 102 comments)
- Working environment (n=18; 18%)
- Confidence in senior leadership (n=15; 15%)

Career advancement opportunities. Respondents see no path for career growth at UC Merced. They believe management relies on external hires and favoritism to fill open positions.

- “No opportunities for professional growth. Salary stagnation. Unequal treatment. Disrespect. Fear of speaking my mind. Retaliation. Hostile work environment. Serious conflicts of interest. No trust. Low staff morale etc. Too many issues to list.”
- “While many staff in leadership roles continue to be reclassified in salary and title, there is no room for advancement or pipeline for those front facing staff to move up. Additionally, jobs with a master's degree preferred/requirement match an entry level salary.”
- “Hiring managers in my area do not consider internal candidates unless that person is their friend.”
- “The only way to get a promotion or job raise at UC Merced is by being offered a job elsewhere. Promotions or raises are not given to staff otherwise even if they work hard, are loyal to the UC, and have always had excellent performance reviews.”
- “I feel that within my department there are no opportunities to advance in my career and also the pay does not reflect my degree and experience.”

Working environment. Respondents describe a toxic work environment in which performance and merit matter less than personal relationships with managers.

- “People here are rewarded and promoted for poor work and lack of teamwork. I am ignored by my colleagues, when other departments don't like your position on issues, they use unsubstantiated personal attacks at the vice chancellor level to get their way. Department does not work as a team, but has set up fiefdoms. I never know what I can do at work anymore to not upset my teammates because they are so territorial.”
- “Our culture does not teach or promote true leadership among managers. A manager doing more work individually seems to be valued more than their team's overall performance.”

- “Incompetence of / or inexperience in management. SKAs of Leaders within the department are minimal or none. Leaders in Department should be seasoned leaders (20+ years) not 2-5 years’ experience, or none at all. Often hear same issue in other departments.”
- “Of the thousands of things I did right to support stakeholders (internal and external), my manager only identified 3 mistakes I made this year for my performance evaluation. You tell me how this is motivation? Because of my age, my manager does not offer me development opportunities like she does the younger members of my team (even though I am known to be the best at what I do). Age discrimination is alive and well at UC Merced.”
- “The new ‘regime’ favors younger generation and people who do not raise issues, especially when it comes to waste and incompetency managing 2020 Project.”

Confidence in senior leadership. Respondents do not believe current leadership will act to restore a culture of values at UC Merced. Some hold out hope for new leadership.

- “Our campus needs an overhaul at the senior leadership level. Cronyism, unethical behavior, misuse of public funds, and sexual harassment of staff by members of senior leadership being ignored or covered up. The list continues. And it begins at the top. With the Chancellor’s announcement to step down, today is an opportunity for a new, positive culture instead of one of toxicity and reprisal.”
- “Senior Leadership is not bringing the right people to the table when it comes to discussing the future changes and how they apply to those of us actually doing the work. I do not believe that Senior Leadership is interested in the ideas of others that may stand in the way of progressing their agenda, but want ‘yes’ people who then become those who get promoted and increased merit regardless of those of us killing ourselves day/night to get the actual workload accomplished.”
- “Everything is top secret, even when it directs my staff. Getting a reclass appears next to impossible.”
- “For years I have watched systemic, harmful issues go unaddressed at our campus. Some are not held accountable for their scope of work, nor their behavior. I find it disheartening to a great degree to work and watch others work so hard to keep things operating while the actions of some in positions of authority create unnecessary obstacles and/or dismantle hard-won progress due to inexperience and a lack of care to build understanding. The unwillingness of our senior leadership to address this mismanagement, unfair promotion and hiring practices, as well as other serious, unethical acts is distressing. Separately, but just as important,

there is little to no transparency and clearly no intent to fix the very broken state of communication on our campus.”


- “The Higher Education landscape is changing, but our leadership is slow to adjust to these realities. Additionally, too much sway is given to what people say versus leading with intent. I think the UC mission is fantastic, but I have serious concerns that our leadership won't make the critical decisions necessary for its next stage of growth.”
- “The old adage ‘it's my way or the highway’ has been witnessed on more than one occasion by senior leadership. Not promoting from within and bringing outside hires on at a higher salary. Merit pay to those of us who eek along with a below mid-point pay and no cost-of-living increase and take .25% so we don't even get 3 percent is a disgrace to our leadership. My 2.75 percent on my substandard salary to their 3 percent over-inflated salary is not comparable. But I guess it's not supposed to be and again ‘my way or the highway’.”

Responses to Comment Question #2

Respondents were offered a list of 14 topics to choose from, including ‘Other’. The three most frequent topics, with number and percent of comments are:

- Leadership (n=30; 14% of 216 comments)
- Communication (n=26; 12%)
- Career development (n=24; 11%)

Leadership. “Strong and honest leadership drives the train” – respondents urge campus leadership to lead by example, demonstrating the values of mutual respect and involving employees in decisions that affect their work.

- “Leadership needs accountability, always working remotely does not build a team environment. One must be present to know their department.”
- “There is clearly an issue with leadership at UC Merced. Our VC  refuses to make decisions, everyone feels demoralized and overworked, situations are addressed reactively rather than proactively, departments refuse to collaborate for fear of losing ‘power’, communication across campus is poor, etc., etc.”
- “A clear campus strategic plan would help the staff see which direction we are going and how well we are prepared with the resources we have.”
- “Give staff on lower rungs access to give input about campus changes so that we can feel comfortable with those changes, even if we don't get what we want. The opportunity to give input before changes take place at least lets us know that we're heard.”

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records. It highlights the need for consistency and thoroughness in data collection. The second part of the document provides a detailed overview of the methodology used in the study. This includes a description of the sample size, the selection process, and the specific procedures followed for data analysis. The third part of the document presents the results of the study, which show a clear trend in the data. The final part of the document discusses the implications of these findings and offers suggestions for future research.

The data collected during the study shows a significant increase in the number of participants over time. This suggests that the intervention being studied is effective in attracting more people. The results also indicate that the majority of participants are from the age group of 18-25. This is an important finding as it suggests that the intervention is most effective for younger people. The study also found that the majority of participants are from the urban areas. This is another important finding as it suggests that the intervention is most effective in urban areas.

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- “Leadership should follow through on commitments, and not create an environment of guilt and shame, if an employee inquires about the status of such commitments.”
- “All of us, including senior leaders and all levels of management, are too busy to really manage and develop our teams. There is too much scrambling and not enough thought being put into our work.”

Communication. With changes in leadership, communication regarding goals and plans for the university are essential. Respondents call on leaders to keep them informed, and to increase interactions between leadership, faculty and staff.

- “Communication should be respectful, especially in department heads. Expectations should be clear and we should ALL be held to the same standards.”
- “Inviting and honoring open communication to start building trust and accountability on our campus across all levels is highly important. A complete culture change is needed. None of the other highlighted areas of potential change are possible without improved communication.”
- “Clear roles and responsibilities, contingency planning on how we are to handle issues when people aren't onsite, notification of what teammates are present, working from home, or not available. If there are issues, discuss them in a safe space right away, not once per year at a performance review.”
- “Managers or supervisors do not always share information or provide updates to staff. Therefore, more communication from campus leadership regarding changes or new initiatives would be appreciated.”
- “Senior leadership makes many decisions that are not realistic for their subordinates. More people should be included in the decision-making process and communication needs to improve.”
- “Communication has been an issue at this campus since I started back in 2005. Most recent example is Staff, Students and Faculty have been invited to all Beam signing for every building on this campus. Staff is just hearing about two events and there was no invitation. This is a morale deflater. We are no longer invited to an event that all employees are excited about our growth.”

Career development. Respondents suggest more robust career planning and support for training and development for employees, including support for employees to participate in degree programs.

- “Career development is always talked about but there is actually very little to no room for growth within the management path. This issue is typically

blamed on a budget shortfall but we consistently allocate funds to higher wages for new hires thus limiting advancement of veteran staff.”

- “For those that have committed more than 5 years to the campus, there should be a set roadmap for advancement (such as done nationally to reward seniority).”
- “I am highly interested in continuing education. At my last university, allowances were made for those interested in seeking advanced degrees so that they could attend classes at no cost. It seems like I would have to pay full tuition, if I wanted to take classes at the UC.”
- “A long running practice of promoting people into higher or new positions without proper handling resulting in those with inadequate knowledge and ability leading to workplace inefficiencies and lowered morale.”
- “Please bring the Management Skills Assessment Program back to UC Merced. It’s a system-wide program and we are the only campus that no longer has this important management program.”
- “Recognize staff that have contributed to the success of the university and demote those that have destroyed its reputation. Do away with career classes that have no bearing on anyone’s career. This is simply fluff and a waste of time.”
- “A formalized 1, 5, and 10 year plan would be ideal. It seems the only time this is discussed is during the appraisal period, but could there be quarterly checks? Or mid-point checks?”