At the University of Oregon, there are a total of 1,200 Officers of Administration who comprise the university’s professional staff. They work in a broad range of positions across the entire campus, with responsibilities ranging from student health center doctor to piano tuner to department or program manager.

To learn more about areas of concern and interest to OAs, the Officers of Administration Council conducted a Listening Tour in November and December, 2013 to ask OAs for input on four questions. Through an online survey and in-person meetings, 154 people responded. (See Appendix A for the demographics of the respondents.)

The feedback was neither all good nor all bad, as would be expected from a diverse set of employees. In general, OAs share a sense of hope about the administrative changes under way and the possibility of creating more consistent processes. They also express concern about heavy workloads and thin staffing, frustration about inconsistent communications, and worries about being the only unrepresented group on campus.

Many of the themes that repeat throughout this report had already been identified as issues during the Officers of Administration Council annual retreat in August, 2013. The Council aims to address several key themes, as noted in the Medium Term Goals of the Goals and Missions from 2013-14. (See Appendix B). This Listening Tour report will contribute significantly to the Council’s goals and mission for the upcoming fiscal year.

The OAC shares this information with the OA community and central Administration as a step in improving communication on campus and furthering the case for a much-needed employment structure for OAs.
Common Themes from the Listening Tour

- **The need for efficacy:** Improving coordination and communication between university decision-makers and implementers will yield better productivity for both groups.

- **Communications challenges:**
  - Especially during periods of intense change, OAs would like more communication from administration in multiple formats, such as email, meetings, and short articles posted on websites.
  - The Deans and Directors (dean-dirs) email list does not work effectively to disseminate information. Messages sent to that list are inconsistently forwarded, leading to uneven distribution of information and a perception of “grape-vine” communication.
  - OAs seek more consistent communications about university leadership decisions and the processes behind how those decisions were made.
  - Websites for central administrative groups are generally poorly organized and disconnected from one another, which creates inefficiency and unclear messaging.

- **Voice:** OAs are concerned about maintaining a voice in the university’s decision-making. How are OAs represented?

- **OA employment:** OAs are looking for help with employment and supervisor challenges, and for answers to policy and process questions. Currently, there is no person or process specific to OA grievances, for example.

- **Staff isolation restricts potential:** OAs are committed to their department’s work, which can make it difficult for them to see how their work ties in to the greater university. This, in turn, limits how effectively those employees make strategic decisions and serve as effective leaders serving their area of the institution.

Suggestions for the University

- Engage the University’s communications staff to improve the delivery of information to employees.
- Improve supervisor support and training from Human Resources.
- Expand access to professional development and leadership opportunities for OAs.
- Create clear policies and procedures for OAs, including grievance policies.
- Improve engagement in governance through a committee matching system. Employees can nominate themselves for various types of committees, such as searches or policy committees, and those seeking committee members can post opportunities or browse self-nominated.
- Encourage service through language included in position descriptions. This serves two purposes:
  - Employees will understand that service is expected, not just as part of one specific job, but also as a duty of all employees.
  - Emphasize to hiring managers that service to the institution is important.
Question #1: Do you feel there are professional growth opportunities in your position? Including opportunities to advance. Why or why not?

The two diagrams show that while most OAs feel there are adequate professional development opportunities, a much smaller percentage feel there are sufficient advancement opportunities.

The three common themes from question 1 are:

1. OAs feel there is a lack of advancement opportunities within their units
2. There are sufficient professional development opportunities, but at times they are difficult to access due to time restraints and administrative restrictions
3. OAs are looking for well-defined career tracks and processes, as well as defined access to professional development opportunities

The most common challenge in participating in professional development was a perceived lack of available time. Survey respondents said, "I am too busy and already put in OT", "[...] many time constraints", and "Workload, and making the time, makes it hard to train/grow." Several responses speak to disparity of opportunities between the administrative OAs and the front-line employees, noting that they feel there are more opportunities for professional development as you scale the hierarchy.

The survey indicates that OAs experience a lack of advancement opportunities within their units, and a lack of clearly defined "career ladders" within the University as a whole. The experience of the people responding to this question is that career advancement requires applying for a new position, most often in a different unit or organization. The University does not have a policy or procedure defined for advancement within a particular unit or current position. One response pointed out that the same responsibilities and job description has widely varying pay grades and titles between different organizational units.
Defining a job description and title based on the skills needed and the job performed would help make a progressive career ladder more explicit across the University’s OA landscape.

**Question #2: What do you feel are the two or three most important issues or activities the OA Council should focus on over the next three years?**

The top three responses to this question are:

- Compensation and advancement (19 comments)
- Concerns about being only unrepresented group (17 comments)
- Professional development (14 comments)

**Compensation and advancement**

OAs commonly expressed a desire to improve work situations and the need to enable the UO to compete with private sector employers to hire and retain high quality employees. OAs also are concerned about the potential inequities in salary among OAs working in similar positions across campus.

**Concerns about being only unrepresented group**

The top theme expresses concern about OAs potential disadvantage in terms of employment due to being an unrepresented group. Related comments focused on concerns about having less of a voice in university governance.

> “I hope that OAs are not the group who is left out of things. SEIU and United Academics have bargaining power, OAs have no one to speak for them (not that unions are the only way to be spoken for). Having no one replace Mary Beth Allen as the OA rep in Human Resources is just one indicator that consideration of OAs' contribution to the UO success is often over looked or under appreciated.”

— Listening Tour response

**Professional development**

The most common response was to encourage more professional development opportunities for OAs. Others advocated for more leadership training, more clarity in policies about the importance of professional development and service expectations, and the recommendation that the university make available funding for travel and other indirect professional development expenses.
Question #3: Do you feel there are sufficient opportunities for you to participate in shared governance service to the UO? (Senate, senate committees, search committees, etc.)

There were three specific areas repeated throughout the responses:

- Justifying participation and/or finding the time due to workload (7 comments)
- How it relates to career path, position description, advancement, and merit (6 comments)
- Communication—don’t know about opportunities (12 comments)

Although 50 percent responded in the affirmative ("there are sufficient opportunities"), all three of the above sentiments are easily found in the written responses. This indicates while people feel opportunities are out there, participation is often not supported by their supervisor, unit, or job structure, nor is it valued as an element of career advancement.

"I believe the opportunities exist and hope to become more involved as my schedule permits.”  
— Listening Tour response

The listening tour results show that OAs often feel they work for their department, rather than the university as a whole. This disconnects OAs from the broad mission of the university.

Communication about how to engage in governance opportunities is also lacking or is not clear.

A selection of comments from respondents:

- “... some OA’s serve broadly. Other OA’s don’t get asked to/have opportunity to serve as often or at high or visible levels”
- “... limited or just token representation”
- “... limited to those who are ‘known’ – not necessarily the best choice”
- “... limited to within my college/department”
Question 4: The UO is going through tremendous changes in leadership and governance. How do you feel this may affect your work on campus and do you have any hopes or concerns about these changes?

Respondents share a sense of uncertainty about changes in top UO leadership, the faculty union, the new governing board, and changes in budgeting procedures. While many were hopeful that changes would lead to more efficient procedures and better policies, there also is broad concern that the changes could add to workload, destabilize the workplace culture, threaten job security and pay, and create new layers of rules and bureaucracy that would make it harder for OAs to do their jobs. Several OAs voiced concerns such as, “I do not know exactly what or how these changes will impact my work. There are too many variables for me to make a determination.”

Many OA respondents felt some uncertainty stems from communications challenges. Information needed to do their jobs is insufficient or was not communicated in a timely manner from their directors and/or central administration. While OAs understand that central administrative departments are overloaded, they still are frustrated by the lack of transparency and dearth of information. They want to understand how all the pieces fit together. In addition, Portland OAs voiced concerns that communication flow and opportunities to engage with colleagues were substantially less for them than their Eugene counterparts.

Key concerns

- **Increased workload:** There is a concern about new requirements from the CBA and changes in governance structure when many OAs are already over-worked.
- **Collegiality:** Many OAs wonder how the new faculty union will impact OAs and collegiality within departments. Specifically they are concerned that as the only unrepresented group, they may not be heard. They are also uncertain about future pay increases and OA-specific employment processes. “[I] hope that the new faculty union won’t create divides between faculty and OAs – how can we bridge the gap?”
- **Fiscal challenges:** OAs also noted that their departments are experiencing funding uncertainties and potential cutbacks on spending, despite growing enrollment. In addition, OAs noted that the time-consuming budget processes do not seem transparent and do not help them with their internal budget management. OAs also commented that more information on the purpose and outcome of these processes is needed.
- **Morale:** Concerns were also voiced about decreasing morale due to job insecurity and high workload without additional compensation. As one OA described it, “… many people in the UO will likely experience a period of serious shock and many people may feel demoralized by the changes that are about to happen.”
Hope for the future

Several OAs stated that they hoped the changes stabilize budgets and streamline procedures. Respondents mentioned the challenges of decentralization and the desire to have more things centralized:

- “... (I) hope is there is a move toward centralization of policies and procedures [...] so budget efforts are consistent with centralized fiscal policies.”
- “... our administrative infrastructure is antiquated and does not at all reflect our goal of being the best. We’re using technology over 30 years old. I hope leadership recognizes the cost of old, inefficient systems (both $ and wasted personnel time)”

A few were optimistic that changes will allow departments to “be more entrepreneurial and seize opportunities for funding programs.” OAs are also hopeful that reorganization will increase job security, salaries, and benefits.

Some OAs noted that while the current situation is placing a strain on morale, they hope that in the end the changes will create new energy and a greater recognition of the contributions that OAs make. As one OA stated, “My hope is the changes in leadership will recognize the tremendous efforts by the OAs to support the [University’s] mission.”

Many people view the changes as a step in the right direction: “I have every confidence in this President's moral compass.”

Another OA wrote, “I am very hopeful about these changes. I think there has been a lack of documented commitment from the highest levels of leadership. I believe this will be changing, and that it will make a substantial difference in improving efficiencies and accountability across the university. This has the potential to streamline my work and to reduce frustrations.”
Conclusion: Steps into the future

The Listening Tour report will serve to guide the OA Council for the upcoming year. We plan to hold a forum to discuss the results of our report and allow for greater participation in planning how best to use this information to improve the climate on campus for OAs.

This information will be shared widely, and we hope to meet with members of UO senior administration to hear their ideas about how to use this information to address employment climate for OAs, shared governance and opportunities for further engagement.

This report was created by and submitted on behalf of the 2013-2014 Officers of Administration Council:

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Appendix A: Demographics of listening tour respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th># participants</th>
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<tr>
<td>Academic Affairs</td>
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<td>VP Equity and Inclusion</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>VP Finance and Administration</td>
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