ModernThink

EMPLOYEE COMMENTS ANALYSIS REPORT

Oakland University

**2025 Oakland University OU & You
Employee Engagement Survey
Spring 2025**

*This report was prepared by the
Consulting Team at:*

ModernThink

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ABOUT THE EMPLOYEE COMMENTS ANALYSIS REPORT

The Employee Comments Analysis Report provides additional insight into the experience of your faculty, administrators, and staff and is valuable for understanding workplace culture and identifying areas for improvement. When your employees completed the 2025 Oakland University OU & You Employee Engagement Survey, they were asked two open-ended questions. Responses to these questions were analyzed by a ModernThink Consultant to create this report.

When analyzing the employee comments, our consultants first categorize the feedback into different themes/dimensions from the survey to identify the most common issues or concerns that employees have, as well as any patterns or trends in the feedback. These themes are based on The *ModernThink Higher Education Insight Survey*© which measures the 10 core dimensions reflecting managerial and organizational competencies specific to higher education. The definition of each dimension is also provided for reference.

We also consider the context of the comments. For example, comments from a small group of employees may not be representative of the entire workforce, or comments made during a particularly stressful time may not accurately reflect persistent and prevailing employee sentiment.

Our analysis is anchored in the quantitative data provided from the survey to understand issues from multiple standpoints. Employee comments often provide "the story behind the numbers" and supply depth to challenges and opportunities that first surfaced in the quantitative data. Because of this important connection, there may be references to statements from the survey and data that can be found in quantitative reports and previous deliverables from the survey project.

In this report, comments have been cataloged by dimension for each question. Please note that multiple themes may appear within a single response, therefore the "n" for each theme will not add up to the total number of responses for each question. For example, multiple themes appear in the comment below thus this comment could have been part of the thematic analysis under, "Students," "Co-workers," "Vacation Time," "Job Flexibility," etc.

> *"I enjoy interaction with students, co-workers, I also enjoy working at a university and most importantly the vacation time. I appreciate the flexibility of my job."*

You may find that some comments have been included to illustrate a point. In these cases, we intentionally do not provide any identifying information about the respondent to protect their anonymity.

If you have any questions or would like to speak to a ModernThink consultant about these comments, please call us at 888.684.4658 or refer to the contact information above.

SURVEY OVERVIEW

The report is based on employee comments collected from faculty and staff at Oakland University during the *2025 Oakland University OU & You Employee Engagement Survey* conducted **April 10, 2025, to May 5, 2025**.
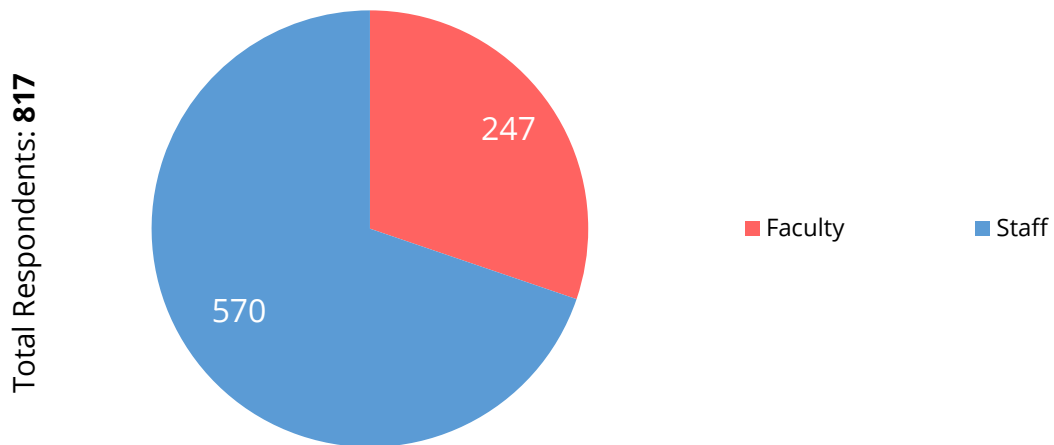
When the Oakland University faculty and staff completed the *2025 Oakland University OU & You Employee Engagement Survey*, they were asked two open-ended questions. To encourage honest, candid feedback and protect the anonymity of individual respondents, we advised employees not to include any self-identifying information.

1. What do you appreciate most about working at Oakland University?
2. What would make Oakland University a better place to work?

The response rate for the survey was **54% (1091 /2003)**. Response rates were also generated by Pre-loaded Oakland Job Category. Job Category designations were supplied by Oakland University with the email addresses of survey participants. The response rates listed below are based on those designations.

Pre-Loaded Job Category	Total	Responded	% Responded
All Employees	**2003**	**1091**	**54%**
Faculty	849	367	43%
Staff	1154	724	63%

NUMBER OF COMMENTS BY PRE-LOADED JOB CATEGORY

Question 1: What do you appreciate most about working at Oakland University?

Total Respondents: **817**

- Faculty: 247
- Staff: 570

Question 2: What would make Oakland University a better place to work?

Total Respondents: **817**

- Faculty: 256
- Staff: 561

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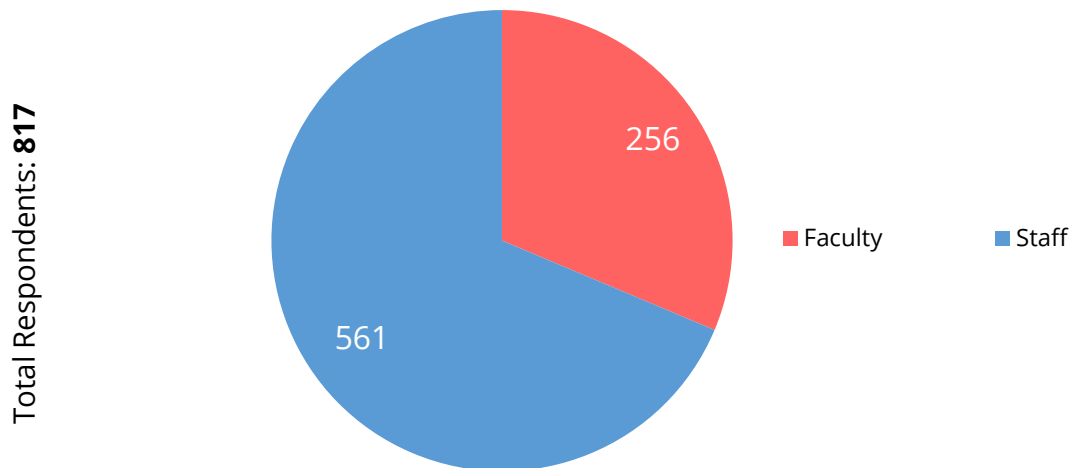
Question 1: What do you appreciate most about working at Oakland University?

SUMMARY

The total number of unique responses for this question were **n = 817 / 1091** which is **75%** response rate.

The responses to question #1 reflect a wide range of appreciations among employees at Oakland University. A strong appreciation is expressed for supportive colleagues and supervisors who foster a positive work environment. Many employees value the flexibility offered, such as the ability to work remotely, which helps maintain a healthy work-life balance. Autonomy in one's role and the opportunity to engage in meaningful work are frequently highlighted, with many employees feeling valued and trusted to execute their responsibilities effectively.


Word cloud generated from responses to question 1

The benefits provided by the university, including health insurance, retirement contributions, and tuition reimbursement, also garner significant appreciation. Employees appreciate the collaborative, community-focused atmosphere and enjoy working on a campus that supports students' educational and career goals. Additionally, the sense of being part of a mission-driven institution, contributing to students' lives and helping shape future generations, is a common theme.

Some responses also highlighted the beautiful campus environment and the opportunity to work in a diverse and inclusive community. There is a shared sense of pride in being part of a university that supports education and personal growth. However, while the overall sentiments are positive, some responses also indicate areas where improvements could enhance these appreciated elements, such as more competitive salaries and improved infrastructure.

The overall sentiment is a score to reflect how positive, neutral, or negative themes in your entire dataset are. The score ranges from -100 to 100 and represents the ratio of positive to negative themes. The higher the score, the more positive your themes are. The numbers at the bottom of the arc show the breakdown of comments by sentiment. The comments were mostly positive, with **93%** of comments falling into the positive category, **2%** in the neutral category, and **5%** in the negative category. This is expected as the question is phrased from an appreciative inquiry.
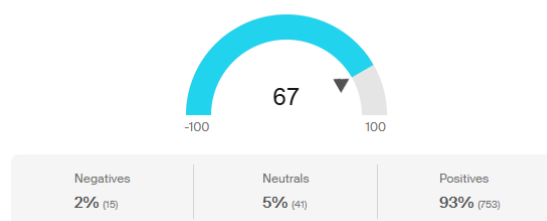
Question 1: What do you appreciate most about working at Oakland University?

ANALYSIS BY THEME

In addition, we've provided a breakdown of the themes surfaced from this question.

Collaboration

The goal of this dimension is to measure the perceived cooperation and collegiality within workgroups and across the institution. Five different statements comprise this theme, including item *#23: People in my department work well together.*

393 mentions, 49% of respondents

People are the heart of any institution and the employees at Oakland University who responded to the first open question have positive things to say about the teams they work with, their immediate colleagues and supervisors, and the overall atmosphere of collegiality across units. One representative response reads, "The people. Much of what is accomplished is due to the ability to work with others – there are many committed faculty and staff who work hard and are dedicated to helping our students succeed."

Supportive Work Environment: There is a sense of a supportive work environment where individuals feel valued and respected by supervisors and colleagues. Teamwork, collaboration, and a positive atmosphere are highlighted as essential for fostering personal and professional growth. They appreciate the teamwork and open communication that collaboration fosters, which helps in achieving common goals and enhancing job satisfaction. One commenter wrote: "As a staff member, I love the department I work in and the people I work with. They make you feel valued and included. I feel part of something special and important by working here." Another commented, "The culture in my department is very supportive and collegial. My overall satisfaction with my job at OUT is directly tied to the department culture."

Appreciation for Workplace Relationships: A number of faculty and staff highly value workplace relationships, often citing them as a key aspect of their job satisfaction. These include relationships with colleagues and, importantly, students. They appreciate the camaraderie, support, and teamwork among colleagues, which contribute to a positive and collaborative work environment. Several respondents specifically mentioned supportive supervisors, who respect employee expertise and decision making, citing these relationships as key to a positive workplace environment.

Academic Departments: Some comments came from faculty members who praised the collegiality and leadership in their home department, acknowledging that this is not a given in academia. Representative comments here include: "Our department is superb. We have meaningful relationships and the workplace environment is exceptional. I have rarely seen a department that gets along as well as we do. The workplace culture is very good." And "I find my department extremely collegiate, eager to welcome new colleagues, and responsive to the needs of the campus. My department chair is exceptional."

Job Satisfaction & Support

This dimension provides insight into the satisfaction with job fit, autonomy and resources. This dimension is composed of seven statements such as item *#4: I am provided the resources I need to be effective in my job*.

252 mentions, 31% of respondents

The most significant themes in comments addressing job satisfaction were Oakland's excellent benefits package, individual staff and faculty autonomy, and meaningful work—especially for faculty who appreciate the balance between teaching, research, and service that OU supports.

Overall Benefits: There is widespread appreciation of Oakland's benefits package, including PTO, retirement, health insurance, and tuition assistance. Comments indicate that many employees are aware that these are excellent and competitive benefits and offset the lower salaries that working at OU brings. One employee summed it up, "OU provides great working conditions, work-life balance, competitive pay, and outstanding benefits."

Autonomy, Flexibility & Independence: A number of faculty and staff highly value autonomy and flexibility in their roles, appreciating the freedom to manage their work independently and make decisions relevant to their job roles. They find the ability to adjust their schedules and work remotely when needed to be significant benefits. Several respondents specifically mentioned supportive supervisors, who respect employee expertise and decision making, citing these relationships as key to a positive workplace environment. Representative comments regarding autonomy and flexibility include: "I love the freedom and independence that my position allows. I'm able to engage with my colleagues and receive feedback support from my administration, but I'm trusted to work within the confines of my position in accordance to my education and experience." And "I appreciate the family atmosphere of our department, and being allowed the freedom to be creative in what we do without the fear of any repercussions if something doesn't go exactly how it should."

Engagement in meaningful work: Individual faculty and staff commented that the ability to do meaningful work was a significant positive factor in their employment at OU. One wrote, "What I appreciate most about working at Oakland University is the ability to lead meaningful change. Even as a mid-level manager, I have the opportunity to lead from my position." In a similar vein, a faculty member responded, "I feel I have a direct impact on my students' work, and am regularly given the support to introduce and try out new techniques, and acquired skills in teaching, theoretical and practical situations." Additionally, several faculty members mentioned their appreciation for Oakland's support of excellent teaching, even as the institution is pursuing a more research-oriented mission, as well as the perceived balance between teaching, research, and service requirements.

Mission & Pride

This dimension evaluates the sense of pride and connection faculty/employees report regarding their affiliation with the institution. Seven different statements comprise this theme, including item *#55: All things considered, this is a great place to work.*

244 mentions, 30% of respondents

Many faculty and staff express a strong sense of pride in the institution's mission as a regional university serving students who are juggling higher education along with other significant responsibilities. They are motivated by the meaningful work they do and the positive difference it makes in students' lives and the community. This alignment with the institution's mission contributes to their overall job satisfaction. Representative comments include, "With our student body, a university degree changes their lives and often those of their family, so that is rewarding," and "I believe in the mission of the university; I find my scholarship, teaching, and service work meaningful, and I'm glad to serve a diverse student population."

Appreciation for Students: Employees express a strong appreciation for students, often highlighting their enthusiasm, seriousness, and dedication to learning. They find working with students to be rewarding and fulfilling, noting that students' success and gratitude make their efforts worthwhile. Many employees feel that their work directly contributes to making a meaningful difference in students' lives. Several comments reflected this sentiment: "The culture. It feels like everyone is working toward the same goal of helping our students and our community."

Reputation and Respect: Several comments to question #1 pointed to OU's long history and its significance in the region as one of the things they appreciated most about working there. One commenter wrote, "I appreciate that OU recognizes that it is a regional-serving institution and leans into what it means to be that. (...) I appreciate that we are working to make progress without tossing aside our roots as an institution that's meant to serve a specific area." They value the connections with the community and the opportunity to make a positive impact on students' lives and the broader region are highly valued. This shared sense of belonging and collaboration among colleagues plays a significant role in creating a positive work experience.

Campus Appreciation and Environment: Many faculty and staff appreciate the institution's beautiful campus, its grounds and facilities, and its small-community feel as assets to appreciate. The grounds and biosphere receive multiple accolades, as do the Rec Center and the frequent cultural, artistic, and sporting events that enliven campus and the community. The location's beauty and proximity to home are frequently mentioned as positive aspects of their overall work experience.

One commenter wrote, "Best of both worlds. The resources and opportunities of a world-class, Division I school, with the beautiful campus and close-knit community of a small, private college."

Faculty & Staff Well-being

More than ever, employee well-being is being recognized as a vital element of the overall work experience and ultimately employee engagement. This dimension includes five statements that address an employee's physical, emotional, and mental well-being. For example, one statement included in this dimension is item *#15: My supervisor/department chair shows genuine interest in my well-being*.

124 mentions, 15% of respondents

Nearly every employee who addressed wellbeing in their comments mentioned flexible working and teaching schedules, including hybrid working arrangements, such as the opportunity to work two days per week remotely, and the support of their chairs and supervisors in allowing them to take advantage of this flexibility. Respondents directly tie this flexibility to what they see as a culture of work-life balance at Oakland. One respondent wrote, "I have flexibility here that I would not be able to find anywhere else." Similarly, another wrote, "It seems the majority of the university supports downtime and is respectful of time away from the office."

Inclusion, Belonging, and Community

This important dimension gauges faculty and staff perceptions of the levels of diversity, inclusion, and belonging at the institution. It asks employees to evaluate the institution's diversity and inclusion efforts, as well as the individual's own personal sense of belonging. Six statements compose this dimension, including item *#46: We are making progress towards becoming a university where everyone feels included*.

118 mentions, 15% of respondents

Community: Several responses to question #1 foregrounded the community feel of OU, both within individual units and across campus in general. One representative comment indicated their appreciation for "The small community feel, while also offering our students the educational opportunities of a bigger university." This theme of community and belonging resonated in positive responses across the data set.

Inclusivity: Another aspect of the community feel reported by many in the questionnaire is that of inclusivity. More than one comment agreed with the responder who wrote, "It is an inclusive place where different people are valued for their contributions." Comments such as these pain the picture of Oakland University as enjoying a community made up of people from a variety of racial and ethnic, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds.

Diversity: Amidst changes in federal guidelines around diversity policies in higher education, several employees responded with their appreciation for OU's continuing commitment to respecting diversity, especially within the senior leadership. One commenter wrote simply that they most appreciated, "The university's ongoing commitment to DEI practices fosters a supportive community." Similarly, another respondent called out the diversity of thought that is welcome at OU as connected with identity diversity, writing, "The overall university environment, which promotes diversity of identity and thought. I feel comfortable in such an inclusive community."

Professional Development

Support for faculty/staff professional development is critical both in terms of building organizational capacity and acknowledging and supporting individual development needs. The dimension provides insight into the reported satisfaction with career/professional development opportunities for staff and support for research and clarity of the tenure process for faculty. There are four statements/questions in this dimension including item *#6: I am given the opportunity to develop my skills at Oakland.*

75 mentions, 9% of respondents

Two primary themes emerge in the comments to question #1 that address aspects of professional development.

Career Growth: Several faculty and staff members commented that they have been able to, and encouraged, to grow their knowledge and skills to benefit their work and their career progression. One (presumably staff member) employee wrote, "I've been able to change jobs and grow career wise without having to leave OU." Others echoed this sentiment, voicing their appreciation for the "excellent" and "numerous" professional development opportunities and "educational and insightful conversations with area experts." The ability to advance one's career and continue to grow without changing employers is seen as a significant asset by faculty and staff at OU.

Lifelong Learning: The other aspect of professional development highlighted in employee comments are the avenues for lifelong learning for faculty and staff. Commenters appreciate, "The opportunity to be a lifelong learner, with continuous growth both personally and professionally." Similarly, another commenter wrote, "As an employee there are plenty of ways to ensure I am able to connect, expand my network and skills and celebrate the campus overall. Lifelong learning is very important to me and OU provides and encourages this."

A small number of faculty also specifically mentioned that the "Support to attend professional conferences to present research is strong" at Oakland.

Confidence in Senior Leadership

This dimension measures the confidence faculty and staff report in the capabilities and credibility of senior leadership. Senior leadership is defined as the most senior members of the institution (e.g., chancellor or president and those who report directly to him/her). There are six statements on the survey that directly reference senior leadership, one example being item *#27: Senior leadership provides a clear direction for Oakland's future.*

63 mentions, 8% of respondents

The senior leadership at Oakland comes in for appreciation from faculty and staff for their obvious care for the community, the values senior leaders are seen to embody, and their visibility around campus. Additionally, some comments voice appreciation for the senior administration's efforts to enhance Oakland's reputation and overall academic excellence.

Care: A few employees directly commented on the visibility of care expressed by the senior leadership at Oakland for their university community. Commenters wrote, "I appreciate senior leadership because it is obvious they care about the university and work hard to make OU the best place possible." And "I appreciate that senior leadership are at a lot of events; I feel that if I needed to speak to a senior leader, I could make that happen."

Values-based Leadership: Multiple comments highlighted how senior leadership, including the president, have navigated political and other crises with integrity and skill. Comments attesting to this belief include, "The president has a strong sense of values and how to make sure that OU continues to be able to continue to live by its values, even in difficult times. She has done a good job of managing OU through the current stresses on higher education, and previous issues that impacted the entire OU community." What the comments in this vein have in common is the importance of the messaging coming from senior administration that reinforces OU values and helps to "quell the anxiety" that federal political changes have brough in their wake.

Performance Management

This dimension measures the efficiency of policies, procedures, and processes within the college. It also evaluates the college's efforts in employee recognition. An example statement included in this dimension is item *#17: Oakland's review process accurately measures my job performance.*

52 mentions, 6% of respondents

A number of employees expressed their appreciation for the rewards programs that exist at Oakland University. This sentiment is echoed in comments that indicate employees are recognized and promoted for working beyond expectations. This indicates that policies for employee appreciation are intact and working. One employee said as much, writing, "I appreciate how organized and well-structured things are at Oakland University, especially the compass."

Supervisor/Department Chair Effectiveness

This dimension provides insight into the relationship faculty/employees report with their department chair or supervisor and assesses critical managerial competencies. There has been significant research measuring the importance of the relationship an employee has with his or her supervisor or direct report. Accordingly, there are five statements that measure managerial competencies and the health of this important relationship *(e.g. item #3: My supervisor/department chair makes their expectations clear).*

34 mentions, 4% of respondents

Both faculty and staff who wrote about supervisors and chairs commented on the supportive leadership style of the people in these positions. These leaders were praised for "going to bat" for their reports, for paying attention to workload, being "supportive of daily work" and having a keen awareness of what each person (faculty and staff) bring to their respective departments.

One appreciative commenter wrote, "My team is wonderful to work with and I highly commend my supervisor for the way she has developed an atmosphere that fosters openness along with feeling comfortable to express concerns that are addressed without hesitation." This employee describes working in a very psychologically safe environment. Parallel to comments relating to overall Job Satisfaction and Support (above), several employees additionally mentioned the autonomy they enjoy, commensurate with their authority and skills. Faculty comment on the support for teaching and research innovation; staff write about being trusted to work within their area of expertise and grow that area to benefit the work.

The lack of micromanaging and the preponderance of supervisor support are appreciated by faculty and staff at Oakland.

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Question 2: What would make Oakland University a better place to work?

SUMMARY

The total number of unique responses for this question were **n = 817 / 1091** at about **75%** response rate.

Faculty and staff have expressed a range of concerns and suggestions about making the institution a better place to work. A significant number of comments focus on the need for a thorough evaluation and modification of Okland University's strategic priorities, the resourcing of those priorities, and retaining high-quality faculty and staff through salary increases.

*Word cloud generated from responses to question 2*

Negotiations between OU and the faculty occur every three years and comments from faculty in the survey indicate that these have grown more acrimonious and hostile. Many voices called for an examination of the university's bargaining strategy, communications, and professional support. The picture that emerges from comments is of fractured and strained relationships between faculty and administration that do not heal once negotiations are over.

There is also a desire for more effective and empathetic leadership, with better communication between senior leaders and unit management and more involvement in decision-making processes. Faculty and staff alike would like to see decisions and processes emerge from a clear, unified mandate from the President and VP offices, instead of perceiving division and "empire building" at the highest levels of the university. Concerns about favoritism, nepotism, and a lack of accountability among some leaders were also raised.

The overall sentiment is a score to reflect how positive, neutral, or negative themes in your entire dataset are. The score ranges from -100 to 100 and represents the ratio of positive to negative themes. The higher the score, the more positive your themes are. The numbers at the bottom of the arc show the breakdown of comments by sentiments. The comments were leaning more on the negative, with **53%** negative, **15%** neutral, and **32%** positive. This is expected, as the question is solution oriented.

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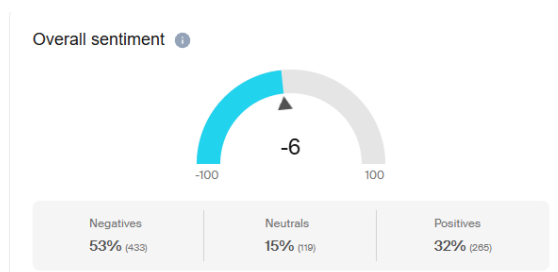
Question 2: What would make Oakland University a better place to work?

ANALYSIS BY THEME

In addition, we've provided a breakdown of the themes surfaced from this question.

Job Satisfaction & Support
This dimension provides insight into the satisfaction with job fit, autonomy and resources. This dimension is composed of seven statements such as item *#4: I am provided the resources I need to be effective in my job*.

471 mentions, 58% of respondents

Compensation & Benefits: The majority of the 394 comments in this section address faculty and staff concerns about compensation and benefits. Calls for cost-of-living raises and performance-based merit raises are numerous in the written comments, as are calls for an evaluation of salary compression for long-term employees. The rising cost of health insurance, together with the decreases to OU's 403b contributions are a related concern for many employees, as they contribute to what they describe as a worsening financial picture for them. These two issues were raised repeatedly by employees in all categories. Individual comments mention not being able to recommend working at OU due to low salaries and feeling underappreciated by the institution as each round of negotiations brings more "claw backs."

Similarly, people are attuned to the systemic cuts to operating budgets in their units. One representative comment: "My overall satisfaction with OU stems from my department, coworkers, immediate supervisor, and the fulfillment I have from doing a job I love. However, I cannot emphasize enough how demoralizing the working conditions can be especially when the president or other senior leadership emphasize the money spent on expensive projects, while our department funding is cut."

Compensation and benefits impact not only the financial bottom line for employees and their families, but also their overall job satisfaction. Feeling underpaid equates to feeling underappreciated by many and this disillusionment with the university impacts how employees feel about the mission of the organization and their commitment to it.

Consistent and Reasonable Remote Work Policies: As with employees at most institutions, there are differing opinions about whether increased work-from-home opportunities are a blessing or curse. At OU, all but two employees who referenced remote working arrangements requested more of them (especially for non-student-facing roles) and more support from leadership at the unit and institutional level for these arrangements.

Enhance Infrastructure: Employees have expressed concerns about outdated and inadequate infrastructure, including unreliable classroom equipment, inadequate lab space, and outdated office spaces. They are asking for continued updates and renovations to facilities, as well as improvements in technology to support their work effectively. These infrastructure issues are seen as obstacles to productivity and overall job satisfaction.

Faculty Concerns: In addition to improved classroom and office infrastructure, faculty are interested in improving elements of the workplace that are specific to them. Comments from faculty call for increased support for research, including direct financial support, research office support, and library collections and facilities.

Special lecturers call out the dissonance between their essential role in staffing courses and the language used to refer to them and the policies that apply to them. They would like access to similar benefits as other teaching faculty during the term of their employment.

Pre-tenure faculty report feeling the tension between OU's research expectations coupled with a teaching load that is higher than at research-intensive universities. One assistant professor commented, "the number of in-load courses and credits required in my unit is not compatible with scholarship expectations for pre-tenure faculty." A more senior scholar remarked: "Support for faculty is woefully inadequate; my teaching load is too high for my service and research expectations, and my research funding is pathetically low compared with my peers. Oakland needs to decide whether it wants us to conduct research at an appropriate level."

Confidence in Senior Leadership

This dimension measures the confidence faculty and staff report in the capabilities and credibility of senior leadership. Senior leadership is defined as the most senior members of the institution (e.g., chancellor or president and those who report directly to him/her). There are six statements on the survey that directly reference senior leadership, one example being item *#27: Senior leadership provides a clear direction for Oakland's future.*

137 mentions, 17% of respondents

Several employee comments point to a lack of mutual trust between senior leadership and faculty. Not only are these comments often asking for more transparency, they are requesting more honesty and ethical behavior from senior leadership – suggesting that there has been a significant breach of trust on campus that requires repair.

Strengthening Faculty-Administration Relations: Multiple comments from faculty address the tone and content of triennial negotiations between OU and faculty and faculty governance, in general. These comments lament the acrimonious nature of these negotiations and cite their long-term demoralizing impacts on the workplace culture at OU. Two comments are worth sharing. Here, one faculty member sums up the feedback in this regard well: " I would also like the administration to understand that their consistently adversarial, demeaning approach to faculty contract negotiations profoundly damages faculty morale and working relationships between faculty and the administration. No amount of holiday parties, raffle tickets, or theme days will make me forget that every 3 years my academic leadership belittles me both publicly and privately, devalues the work that I do, and tries to claw back incrementally more of my modest salary and benefits." These sentiments, in whole and in part, are echoed throughout faculty comments. Regarding the tone and messaging from the university during negotiations, more than one person mentioned the university's negotiating team, "A big note though - the lawyer that the university

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employs for contract negotiations is exceptionally nasty. I think negotiations would go much better if the administration did not use a lawyer who continually denigrates and ridicules faculty and who believes that faculty are lazy and only out to grab as much money as possible from the university. His attitude has over the years been unrelievedly negative, and I think it would go a long way to improving faculty morale and the ease of negotiations to choose someone who was more respectful of the quality and hard work of the faculty."

Enhanced Transparency: Employees consistently express a strong desire for increased transparency across various levels. They highlight the need for clear and open communication from leadership, especially regarding decision-making processes around anticipated changes and future planning. As part of this transparency, employees call for senior leadership to establish cohesion around priorities at the senior level and cascade that thoroughly and with integrity through their teams and portfolios. One succinct comment sums up this theme: "Clear direction from Senior leadership is lacking. We operate as multiple villages and the village leaders don't get along. This leads to a lot of dysfunction across teams. There are pervasive issues with favoritism."

Leadership Accountability and Effectiveness: Faculty and staff express concerns about leadership accountability and effectiveness, highlighting issues such as a lack of transparency, poor communication, and ineffective leadership practices. They are asking for senior leadership to be more accountable to discussion and decision making within established structures, as some employees believe that critical decisions are made in ad hoc meetings steered by politics or proximity, rather than the vision of the institution and established priorities.

Multiple commenters remarked that cohesion and alignment in vision and priorities are lacking at OU, starting with senior leadership and cascading all the way down to individual departments. Several responses indicate that departments "do their own thing," rather than work to support the shared goals of department, school, and university.

A number of respondents also referenced what they see as a top-heavy, and growing, administrative cadre emerging at the same time as student-serving units of the institution are experiencing an ever-harder squeeze.

Performance Management

This dimension measures the efficiency of policies, procedures, and processes within the college. It also evaluates the college's efforts in employee recognition. An example statement included in this dimension is item *#17: Oakland's review process accurately measures my job performance.*

121 mentions, 15% of respondents

Streamline Administrative Processes: Comments from both faculty and staff point to a shared belief that core administrative functions at the university are not as efficient or integrated as they could be. Contracts, purchasing, HR, Facilities all receive mention as areas where automated, integrated systems would improve function and decrease the time faculty and staff in individual units spend on work in these areas. Individual comments include "I am consistently amazed by the manual processes still in place across various departments that could be easily automated with the right technology. There's significant potential to improve efficiency and reduce time-consuming tasks through automation." And "For instance, there is little to no coordination between human resources, payroll, Grant management, purchasing, accounts payable, etc. This makes doing any type of externally funded work a complete nightmare, and has decreased my productivity and increased my stress levels dramatically."

Enhance Employee Recognition: Comments that address recognition programs for faculty and staff paint a picture of employees who are hungry to know in more than just financial terms that their work is valued and integral to the mission of the university. Comments in this area range from general calls to increase opportunities for recognition:

"Recognize outstanding faculty and students in every way you can even without money award" and "More recognition for breadth of scholarly achievement within departments."

To specific ideas for types of recognition employees would like to see:

"Enhancing employee appreciation and offering more meaningful performance-based bonuses—rather than minimal increases like 1%—would make a significant difference." And "Add employee of the month in each department."

As pertains to faculty in particular, faculty comments frame recognition in both general and specific terms. In addition to calling for more general recognition from senior university administration for the work and achievements of faculty across campus, in terms of actually announcing or communicating that recognition, faculty as for specific improvements to the processes for recognizing and rewarding faculty contributions. To wit, "While Oakland University offers many strengths, I believe it would be an even better place to work with greater transparency and equity in how faculty contributions are recognized and rewarded."

Resource Allocation and Accessibility: Amidst the recognition that Oakland, as with many universities, is experiencing financial difficulties, multiple comments call for the university to address its expenditure ratio when it comes to senior administration on the one hand, and faculty and staff on the other. Numerous comments specifically mention OU's 13 Vice Presidents as an excessive amount of senior administration at the university.

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Professional Development

Support for faculty/staff professional development is critical both in terms of building organizational capacity and acknowledging and supporting individual development needs. The dimension provides insight into the reported satisfaction with career/professional development opportunities for staff and support for research and clarity of the tenure process for faculty. There are four statements/questions in this dimension including item *#6: I am given the opportunity to develop my skills at Oakland*.

108 comments, 13% of respondents

Career Advancement & Promotion: Two major themes emerge in the comments from faculty and staff about career advancement at OU. One is the frustration of staff members who cannot move up in pay bands without moving positions. Multiple comments refer to this frustration and call for performance-based advancement within position. For example, "A way to move up within your department or in your job without having to go to a different department. Right now if you hire in at the bottom tier, you will stay there unless you change jobs no matter how well you perform." The lack of possibility for pay raises or promotions is seen as de-motivating by employees.

The other theme concerns opportunities to grow professionally through learning. While commenters appreciate OU's internal offerings, there are multiple requests for "reimbursement options for certifications that aren't done through Oakland" and "the opportunity to take classes as a benefit without pursuing a degree."

In addition to staff concerns about limited promotion opportunities in their roles, faculty comments request greater clarity about research expectations related to tenure and promotion, and a desire for those expectations to be reasonably aligned with teaching and service expectations within their departments. Some faculty express interest in moving into administrative or project-based roles and request the OU become innovative in this area.

Comprehensive Training Programs: Comments that address training uniformly request the creation or improvement of training opportunities at all levels of the institution. Staff comments point to ineffective use of the systems that are in place and indicate that coordinated and comprehensive training would improve work efficiency. An illustrative comment is, "Do a better job with training, we need to be trained on how to use tools be aware of the tools that are available." Cross-training within departments that work closely together was also requested.

Other comments related to training point to the need for people stepping into leadership and management roles to receive both technical and leadership training to address the challenges of their roles. One comment regarding chairs specifically sums up the desires of many who ask for training for chairs, associate deans, deans, and senior leaders at the institution: "More healthy, self-aware, grounded and mindful department supervisors that lead with their hearts and with purpose." Other comments request that managers and supervisors receive training in conflict management, communication, ethics, and employee engagement.

Collaboration

The goal of this dimension is to measure the perceived cooperation and collegiality within workgroups and across the institution. Five different statements comprise this theme, including item *#23: People in my department work well together.*

103 mentions, 13% of respondents

Lead with Collaboration: There is a general sense among the comments regarding collaboration that competition or complacency takes precedence over collaboration between academic departments and schools and between administrative units. Long-time employees experience this reality as a shift from previous workplace culture at OU. One representative comment reflected this general sense as follows: "For all the departments and schools to work together in prioritizing goals and collaborating towards a shared vision." Multiple comments indicate the belief that the lack of collaboration towards a shared vision is a phenomenon that occurs at the highest levels of senior leadership at the university, as the following comment illustrates: "Administration trusting each other and acting as a team by agreeing on a direction, making a plan, committing to it, following through by communicating out clear direction, resources, and steps and holding each other accountable."

Creating more Opportunities to Collaborate: Additionally, Faculty and staff alike request that the university explore various ways to bring both the intellectual and the administrative work of the university into deeper collaboration with other units. Faculty suggest that "Creating more opportunities for cross-department collaboration could foster fresh ideas and make OU feel more connected and cohesive." Several example opportunities emerge from the comments: moving departments that do similar work closer to each other physically; offering in-person training to people in similar jobs across campus; requiring that decisions that impact other units include those units as stakeholders in change discussions.

Themes from other dimensions emerge when employees talk about collaboration: a desire for leadership to model collaboration, collaboration that fuels consistency in procedure, collaboration as a sign of mutual commitment to mission and vision, and collaboration via consultation across various internal stakeholder groups. The degree to which employees feel that they are all on the same team is often reflected in how they talk—or don't—about collaboration across the university.

Inclusion, Belonging & Community

This important dimension gauges faculty and staff perceptions of the levels of diversity, inclusion, and belonging at the institution. It asks employees to evaluate the institution's diversity and inclusion efforts, as well as the individual's own personal sense of belonging. Six statements compose this dimension, including item *#46: We are making good progress towards becoming a university where everyone feels included.*

93 comments, 11% of respondents

Employee comments pertaining to diversity, inclusion, and belonging address both what are traditionally thought of as DEI practices within the institution, as well as individual employees' sense of a diverse body of stakeholders in the university.

Regarding traditional DEI practices, the current federal directives regarding DEI are putting not only those who speak publicly on behalf of the university under increased scrutiny, but they are also eliciting comments on the how DEI policies have played out at OU in the past. Comments from faculty and staff included both calls to increase the university's commitment to ethnic, religious, gender, sexual preference, and ability diversity as well as calls to abolish such policies and initiatives entirely. Given the increased politicization of diversity, what several comments call for – a clear and unified message and set of directives from the President and cabinet – emerges as a frequent request across comments.

Individual comments that provide an indication of the overall tenor of the responses include, "Oakland University would be a better place to work if senior leadership took clear, consistent, and decisive measures to ensure that every member of the campus community felt welcomed, valued, supported, and respected." And "For all the talk of inclusivity, I don't know a single conservative faculty member in the university. That suits me personally but if we are truly a campus that welcomes all backgrounds, surely that would include more conservatives." And "Working for a university means adhering to high ideals about diversity and standing firmly in defense of intellectual freedom and curiosity."

There are also several respondents who specifically request that the university engage more with the communities of Pontiac and Detroit, in terms of community engaged teaching and learning and research, and in terms of providing opportunities for those communities to experience OU's campus and campus communities as a way of increasing the wider sense of community and belonging at OU. One commenter acknowledged that increased community outreach was a part of the Strategic Vision 2030 and hoped that this outreach would be organized and concerted, rather than haphazard.

Belonging at the university, regardless of role or demographic markers, is also impacted by the managerial culture of the university. Several comments emerge that give the impression that individual supervisors are afforded a great deal of leeway to behave in ways that disrespect and marginalize people, both because of their gender, age, race, or sexual orientation, or simply because the manager has no accountability for toxic behavior. One of several comments along these lines reads, "We cannot allow bullying or dismissive behavior to persist, and we must acknowledge that at times, voice (especially those of women) are minimized, interrupted, or sidelined."

As with collaboration, above, the sense of pulling together as a team seems to be missing from the university when it comes to how to acknowledge, celebrate, and work with the variety of viewpoints, backgrounds, and abilities of the OU community.

Supervisor/Department Chair Effectiveness

This dimension provides insight into the relationship faculty/employees report with their department chair or supervisor and assesses critical managerial competencies. There has been significant research measuring the importance of the relationship an employee has with his or her supervisor or direct report. Accordingly, there are five statements that measure managerial competencies and the health of this important relationship *(e.g. item #3: My supervisor/department chair makes their expectations clear).*

91 mentions, 11% of respondents

Supervisor and Leader Accountability: Parallel to comments about senior leadership (above) multiple employees commented on the fragmented nature of goals and priorities across units in the university. An illustrative example of such comments, "Currently a lot of departments seem to function independently almost as if they are running their own fiefdom and do not seem to worry about impacts on other departments or the university as a whole." And "I do not feel supported in achieving my actual job responsibilities. There is a lack of focus and clear direction from leadership."

Chair & Supervisor Integrity: A picture emerges in the comments of a fragmented management and leadership culture at OU. Multiple comments reference leadership issues viewed as systemic, such as "But to become a better place to work, we must confront systemic issues that hinder trust, collaboration, and belonging. We need greater transparency and consistency in how decisions are made."

Leadership Training: Comments regarding managers, particularly managers of staff, indicate that OU does not have, or take advantage of, high-quality leadership training for those entering management and leadership positions. Employees raise concerns over favoritism, ad hoc decision making outside of established processes, and inconsistently applied policies across units. Survey comments include multiple requests for management development training for new leaders. One supervisor commented, "The decision to cut the Leadership Academy—and to make departments pay for participation—was short-sighted. OU should be investing in leadership training across all levels and developing its people proactively. Without institutional support, that responsibility falls to supervisors like me, who are already stretched thin."

One illustrative comment came from a chair, writing, "I am frustrated a lot in my job as department chair. I have been here long enough to know that it is a combination of lack of training for my role, my tolerance for ambiguity, lack of support and resources, and leadership and communication within my unit." This comment echoes calls for inter-departmental collaboration and training to create a culture where supervisors and chairs know where to go for information, have adequate support for implementing policies, and feel included in the university's mission.

Mission & Pride

This dimension evaluates the sense of pride and connection faculty/employees report regarding their affiliation with the institution. Seven different statements comprise this theme, including item *#55: All things considered, this is a great place to work.*

88 mentions, 11% of respondents

Improving Supports: Several comments in this area suggest evaluating where and how limited financial resources can be used to support work central to Oakland's mission. These include enhancing supports for units that work with first-year students, faculty research, and technology enhancement for the sake of efficiency.

One commenter summed up the words of many by writing, "I feel as though Oakland is going through a bit of an identity crisis (...) OU is currently both a research intensive (R2) institution and remains a teaching intensive institution, at least in my School. If you want me to do more research, you have to cut back on the teaching and service obligations. There just aren't enough hours in the day, especially if anyone cares about work/life balance or mental health." This speaks to a need for clarity across the institution about current strengths, future priorities and goals, and key strategies (and timeline) for achieving those goals. There is a pervasive sense in the comments that ambitious goals for OU are supported or resourced in a manner that would allow employees to achieve the goals with current levels of staffing, funding, and support.

Evaluating Standards: A number of faculty suggest there is a need to evaluate admissions standards for students and/or the teaching and teaching evaluation process at OU. There is a sense that OU's enrollment standards are "very low" or "too low" for the supports in place to support those students and the faculty teaching them. Mention was also made of a committee on student evaluation of teaching that emerged with recommendations several years ago that have apparently died on the vine.

Specific comments from faculty point to the tension between talk of becoming an R1 university, on the one hand, and the realities of teaching OU's student population, on the other. The following comment sums up the responses of several faculty grappling with the mission and direction of the university: "Right now, we have a struggling student population, and they deserve the best of our efforts and investments."

Communication

The purpose of this dimension is to assess the quality of internal communications specifically related to transparency, clarity, and interactivity. Five specific statements summarize this theme, like item *#21: In my department, we communicate openly about issues that impact each other's work.*

62 mentions, 8% of respondents

While communication and collaboration go hand in hand, survey comments offer particular insight into how the communication channels at Oakland University function and where they experience challenges with them.

Better Communication Practices: Faculty and staff express a strong desire for better communication, emphasizing the need for more transparent interactions from leadership. They highlight issues with inconsistent communication across and within VP portfolio areas that leads to some employees receiving less information about important decisions and changes. Consistent communication is seen as essential for building trust, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that all employees are informed and engaged. Key in many of the comments regarding communication is the employees' desire for OU to present a united message and vision, both externally and internally.

Barriers to Feedback: A few employees feel that barriers feedback stem from a lack of genuine listening and two-way communication, where leadership often makes decisions unilaterally without adequately considering input from faculty and staff. Faculty are critical of what they view as the administration's hostility to shared governance and the required communication and consultation. Several employees also call for increased opportunities to offer suggestions and feedback to their supervisors, pointing out the difficulties in doing so in the absence of good systems and practices and the requisite psychological safety to do so.

Multiple comments request that leaders at all levels request consultation and input from front-line staff when changes are forthcoming to gain insight into opportunities and obstacles from those who are charged with implementing the work. Several comments suggested that supervisors undergo periodic 360 evaluations to improve management culture at Oakland.

Enhancing Interdepartmental Collaboration & Communication: Some employees express a strong desire for enhanced interdepartmental collaboration. Many believe that fostering collaboration would lead to more efficient processes and a more cohesive work environment. Employees believe that improved faculty and staff communication is tied to technological training, implementation, and collaboration.

Committee Involvement: Several employees, both faculty and staff, express frustration in how consultation takes place and decisions are made at OU, pointing out that they do not always see a connection between issues taken up in committees, university procedures, and the resulting decisions and implementation. Faculty and staff both request an increased transparency and frequency of communication regarding who is responsible for decisions, how committees are assembled/appointed, whom the decisions will impact, and how they will be implemented.

Onboarding: Both long-time and newer hires among the faculty and staff emphasize the need for more training and support and communication of the university's, and their unit's priorities in that training. They express a desire for better onboarding processes and ongoing professional development opportunities to enhance their skills and career growth.

APPENDIX

2025 Oakland University OU & You Employee Engagement Survey

Definitions

University refers to Oakland University or Oakland.
Senior Leadership refers to the most senior members of the University (e.g. President, Provost, Deans, and the Cabinet).
Department refers to your most immediate academic unit, functional area or team.
Supervisor/Department Chair refers to the individual to whom you directly report or has the responsibility for exercising academic leadership in the teaching, scholarship, planning and other activities of the department.

Statements by Dimension

Job Satisfaction & Support
1   My job makes good use of my skills and abilities.
2   I am given the responsibility and freedom to do my job.
4   I am provided the resources I need to be effective in my job.
11   I am paid fairly for my work.
24   The work I do is meaningful to me.
31   The facilities (e.g., classrooms, offices, laboratories) adequately meet my needs.
34   Oakland's benefits meet my needs.

Professional Development
6   I am given the opportunity to develop my skills at Oakland.
10   I understand the necessary requirements to advance my career.
28   I have access to the training I need to do my job well.
30   Our onboarding processes prepare new faculty and staff to be effective.

Faculty & Staff Well-being
15   My supervisor/department chair shows genuine interest in my well-being.
33   Oakland's policies and practices give me the flexibility to manage my work and personal life.
39   Oakland University takes appropriate steps to protect the health and safety of faculty, staff and students.
44   At work, I know where to go for help with my mental or emotional well-being.
47   My supervisor/department chair supports my efforts to balance my work and personal life.

Performance Management
9   I am regularly recognized for my contributions.
16   Promotions in my department are based on a person's performance.
17   Oakland's review process accurately measures my job performance.
18   Issues of low performance are addressed in my department.
35   Our recognition and awards programs are meaningful to me.

Supervisor/Department Chair Effectiveness
3   My supervisor/department chair makes their expectations clear.
7   I receive feedback from my supervisor/department chair that helps me.
12   I believe what I am told by my supervisor/department chair.
19   My supervisor/department chair is consistent and fair.
20   My supervisor/department chair actively solicits my suggestions and ideas.

Communication

8 When I offer a new idea, I believe it will be fully considered.
14 I can speak up or challenge a traditional way of doing something without fear of harming my career.
21 In my department, we communicate openly about issues that impact each other's work.
22 Changes that affect me are discussed prior to being implemented.
43 At Oakland University, we discuss and debate issues respectfully to get better results.

Collaboration

13 We have opportunities to contribute to important decisions in my department.
23 People in my department work well together.
26 I can count on people to cooperate across departments.
42 There are sufficient opportunities to participate in institutional planning.
53 There's a sense that we're all on the same team at Oakland.

Inclusion, Belonging & Community

29 In my department, we welcome people of all backgrounds.
38 Oakland University has clear and effective procedures for dealing with discrimination.
40 At Oakland University, we value people of all backgrounds.
46 We are making progress towards becoming a university where everyone feels included.
48 I feel a sense of belonging at Oakland University.
50 Oakland University places sufficient emphasis on having faculty, administrators and staff of all backgrounds.

Mission & Pride

5 I understand how my job contributes to Oakland's mission.
25 Overall, my department is a good place to work.
36 I am proud to be part of Oakland University.
49 Oakland University actively contributes to the community.
51 I would recommend working here to my family and/or friends.
54 Oakland's culture is special - something you don't find just anywhere.
55 All things considered, this is a great place to work.

Confidence in Senior Leadership

27 Senior leadership provides a clear direction for Oakland's future.
32 Senior leadership has the knowledge, skills and experience necessary for institutional success.
37 Senior leadership shows genuine interest in the well-being of faculty, administrators and staff.
41 Senior leadership communicates openly about important matters.
45 I believe what I am told by senior leadership.
52 Oakland University is well run.

Faculty Experience

56 The role of faculty in shared governance is clearly stated and publicized. (Faculty Only)
57 Faculty are appropriately involved in decisions related to the education program (e.g., curriculum development, evaluation). (Faculty Only)
58 There is appropriate recognition of innovative and high quality teaching. (Faculty Only)
59 Advancement and promotion processes are clear. (Faculty-Only)
60 There is a good balance of teaching, service and research at Oakland University. (Faculty Only)

Additional Faculty Only Statements

61 There is appropriate recognition for high-quality scholarship.
62 There is appropriate support for high-quality scholarship.
63 At Oakland, the teaching expectations are reasonable given the scholarship and service expectations.
64 At Oakland, the service expectations are reasonable given the scholarship and teaching expectations.
65 At Oakland, the scholarship expectations are reasonable given the teaching and service expectations.