REPORT ON UVIC'S 2014-15 INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

In the Fall of 2013, President Jamie Cassels conducted a series of campus conversations designed to develop focus and priorities for the subsequent five years. He identified several institutional priorities, including communicating and engaging more effectively with all UVic faculty and staff.

To that end, the Campus Communications Strategy and Engagement Framework (CCSEF) project was initiated, led by University Communications + Marketing (UC+M) with support from an advisory committee with membership from across the campus community. The project, initiated in April 2014, has a mandate to:
- recommend ways to coordinate existing and emergent internal communications channels for maximum/effective information flow;
- ensure consistency and complementarity with the new UVic Edge brand;
- produce a high-level internal communications strategy document; and
- create a campus engagement framework document.

For the purposes of the project, internal communications covers how and what information is shared within the university, while engagement is about creating a sense of *belonging* within the organization, and *identifying* with its activities and beliefs. Strong internal communications can contribute to enhanced staff and faculty engagement. However, the project is not intended to address the full range of existing and potential activities to strengthen overall engagement.

2014 ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY

To establish a baseline on the current state of internal communications channels on campus, a quantitative online survey was conducted in December 2014 by Strategic Initiatives, Inc.—a local market research firm with strong ties to the UVic community. All faculty and staff were invited to participate, with extra effort made to encourage employees who may not regularly work at a computer to respond. The survey focused on the effectiveness of current internal communications practices, types of information faculty and staff needed or wanted, and how much people felt engaged in the campus community. A total of 4,380 staff and faculty were invited to participate in the survey and 1,073 people completed the survey—an excellent response rate of 24.5%. A big thank you to everyone who took the time to participate.

The specific objectives of the online survey were to:
- Identify and assess the effectiveness of UVic's current methods of communication within the campus community;
- Identify the preferred methods and style of communication within the campus community, and the types of information faculty and staff require in order to do their jobs and feel part of the university community; and
- Within the context of internal communications, assess whether faculty and staff feel they are informed about direction, policies, initiatives and developments that impact their areas.

The survey consisted of 32 questions that covered the following topics:
- General sense of effectiveness/level of satisfaction with internal communications;
- What types of information were most important to the participant;
- Which specific online/electronic, social media, print and in-person communications channels were most popular;
- Suggestions for improvement; and
- Demographics of the respondents – age, gender, role/position, length of employment at UVic, number of people in department, etc.

REVIEW OF THE RESULTS

Data analysis and tabulation was undertaken in Jan/Feb 2015, with a full written report submitted to UC+M in March. In consultation with the project's advisory committee, the report was evaluated to draw out the top-level findings and conclusions, and to make recommendations on desired outcomes and next steps.

In April/May, the findings and conclusions of the survey report and additional input from the committee were reviewed and considered by Executive and by the President's Advisory Council. Executive has endorsed the report and is committed to supporting the ongoing work on this important initiative.

TOP-LEVEL FINDINGS

The survey results offer diverse insights that are valuable in considering how to strengthen internal communications. Given the diversity of audiences, the wide variety of interests and needs, and the range of perspectives expressed through this rich data, a thematic approach to analysis has been used. Key findings are outlined below.

Participant demographics:

- 71% of survey respondents came from three core groups: the PEA (administrative and academic professionals), Faculty/Librarians and CUPE 951 (office employees, library assistants, technicians and child care workers). The strong rates of response from these three constituencies was counter-balanced by the low numbers from several other UVic employee groups.

- The highest participation rates came from Exempt Support staff (76% of whom completed the survey) and Management Excluded (at 60%). At the other end of the spectrum were CUPE 917 (11%: trades, grounds workers, security officers, facility attendants and janitorial, maintenance and food service workers), CUPE 4163, Comp 3 (7%; sessional instructors and music performance instructors) and CUPE 4163, Comp 1&2 (6%; teaching assistants, lab instructors, computer lab assistants, academic assistants, ESL instructors and cultural assistants).

- The majority of respondents were women: 61% of those surveyed identified themselves as female, 29% identified as male, and 10% preferred to not answer. This is generally consistent with campus demographics: women comprise 56% of all UVic faculty and staff.

- All polled age groups were well-represented, with 20% of those surveyed in the 19-34 age bracket, 35% between 35-49 and 33% between 50-64. The remaining 12% were 65 and older or preferred to not answer.

- Nearly 40% of those surveyed had worked at UVic for more than 10 years. Newer employees also had strong response rates: 26% had worked 1-5 years here, and 22% from 6-10 years. 9% had worked at UVic less than 1 year.

Overall satisfaction with and effectiveness of internal communications:

- When asked about overall satisfaction with the quality of internal communications at UVic, 24% indicated dissatisfaction, while 36% of respondents were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied." It is important to note that 40% of respondents were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" with the overall quality of internal communications. This indicates that, while there are significant opportunities for improvement, over three-quarters of faculty and staff are either satisfied with or neutral about internal communications.

- Satisfaction scores with specific areas of internal communications were relatively low on all counts—with less than half of respondents satisfied that internal communications provide them with the information they need to do their jobs or knowledge about how/where to access that information if it wasn't provided directly to them. About 40% were satisfied with opportunities to provide feedback and input to their unit and leaders and get answers to their questions. Slightly more than a third of respondents (36%) were satisfied or very satisfied with the general quality of internal communications. However, the percentage of respondents expressing dissatisfaction in any of these areas was also relatively small (29% somewhat or very dissatisfied with opportunities to provide feedback and input to their unit; 23% for quality of internal communications).

- In terms of effectiveness, the majority of respondents agreed that internal communications are effective in: keeping them up to date on news, events and success stories (64%); providing important/urgent news swiftly (60%); being inclusive and respecting diversity (60%); and providing them with important information (52%).

- They were less likely to agree that internal communications were effective in: helping them understand decisions and how they are made (24%); providing opportunities for 2-way communications about campus activities (26%); or sharing news around and between departments/units/areas effectively (30%).

- 39% of all respondents overall were somewhat satisfied (27%) or very satisfied (12%) with the opportunities to provide feedback or input to unit or university leaders. This ranged from a combined 25% for faculty/librarians to 54% for management excluded employees.

- Fewer than half of respondents (43%) were satisfied or very satisfied that internal communications gave them the tools they needed to do their jobs; and 44% were satisfied or very satisfied that they knew how to access information if it hadn't been provided.

- Faculty and librarians demonstrated consistently lower levels of satisfaction compared to those with other roles/positions, while Management Excluded, PEA, Exempt Support and CUPE 951 had generally higher satisfaction scores with internal communications.

- When asked what kinds of information were important to receive, respondents rated all the stated categories highly. In order of importance: UVic's plans for the future (81%); new/revised policies or programs (75%); challenges and trends affecting UVic (73%); UVic's community activities/involvement (69%); overall financial picture (68%); new research initiatives (64%); and success stories (62%).

- Consistently, female respondents rated their satisfaction with internal communications higher than males, as did those who had worked at UVic for shorter periods of time (under 5 years). Younger respondents and those without direct reports also tended to indicate higher levels of overall satisfaction with internal communications.

Online/electronic channels

- The most regularly accessed online/electronic communications channels were the UVic.ca homepage's featured stories (67%). These had high ratings for ease of access (80%), amount of information (73%), timeliness (67%) and relevancy (53%). Emails from the President or VPs (61%) were the second most accessed channel in this category.

- The bi-weekly Campus Checklist e-newsletter was accessed regularly by 44% of respondents and generated many positive comments. Department-specific websites (42%), the Current faculty/staff page (37%) and Featured News on the UVic homepage (37%) were the next most regularly accessed. The online *Ring* (17%) and digital signage (12%) were the least accessed.

Social media channels

- Interestingly, the largest single group of respondents (39%) indicated they do not access any of UVic's social media channels regularly.

- Roughly a third indicated they access department-specific social media sites, while about 20% accessed UVic's Facebook and/or Twitter accounts.

- For timeliness of information, Twitter ranked highest (71%) among social media users, as well as being considered a credible (69%) and relevant source of information (56%). Nearly half (49%) of those who regularly access UVic's Twitter account felt it provided opportunities for 2-way communications. Facebook was rated similarly, but with slightly lower rankings. Twitter (31%) and Facebook (34%) were accessed regularly most by 19-34 year olds.

Print channels

- Campus notice/poster boards were ranked highest (52%) for being regularly accessed, with *The Ring* newspaper close behind (50%). *The Ring* paper was rated highly for credibility (75%), providing the right amount of information (69%), and providing relevant information (67%). 63% of faculty/librarian respondents regularly access the print *Ring*.

- The online version of the Ring also rated highly for its attributes, but only 17% of respondents indicated they accessed it regularly.

In-person channels

- In-person communication channels were clearly the most regularly accessed by respondents, with 1-on-1 with colleagues ranked highest (83%), followed closely by staff/department/area meetings (81%), and 1-on-1 with people to whom they report (76%). These channels were also rated strongly for credibility, relevancy, amount and timeliness of information, as well as for opportunities for 2-way communication.

- Fewer than a third of respondents indicated they regularly attended consultations/ presentations on new campus initiatives, while 37% access the Campus Update sessions. These channels are considered to be credible and relevant, but less timely or conducive to 2-way communications.

- Less than half of respondents were satisfied with aspects of the way academic/administrative leaders deliver internal communications to their staff/department/area, including: clarifying key messages appropriately (41%); distilling key messages effectively (41%); and ensuring people receive information that applies to them (40%). They were less satisfied with the way these communications encourage 2-way communications (36% were either somewhat or very satisfied).

Suggestions for improvement from open-ended questions

- Three of the survey questions were open-ended, asking respondents to provide detailed suggestions for improvements that could be made to internal communications at UVic. The responses were sorted into similar themes that varied widely; there will be value in examining them in more detail in the near future. There was an extremely high response rate to these questions, each of which generated between 400-525 responses or 38-49% of respondents.

- General comments included appreciation for the survey itself, as a positive step in the right direction to improve internal communications. Comments also included the desire to repeat the survey on a regular basis, both to support internal communications and to measure the effectiveness of activities undertaken to improve internal communications.

- **Question 1: What suggestions do you have for the university in terms of how to improve existing internal communications channels?** Nearly half (46%) of all respondents (493) commented, with the most common responses summarized in these areas:
  o More relevant information, less hype/PR/irrelevant/trivial information (12%)
  o Consult with/involve all staff more in policy decisions (9%)
  o Too many communications channels/outlets, no time for all (7%)
  o More senior leadership visibility (7%)
  o Better communication between departments/areas/units (5%)

- **Question 2: What topics or content, or additional opportunities for engagement or feedback, would you like to see in UVic's internal communications?** Of the 412 responses, the most common suggestions were:
  o Campus events/updates/entertainment/day to day life/ etc. (9%)
  o More opportunities for consultation/feedback/2-way interaction (8%)
  o Strategic planning/goals/vision (8%)
  o Personnel matters (job opportunities, new hires, staff/faculty losses, etc) (7%)
  o Clear statements from upper admin about how/why decisions made (7%)
  o Budget/financial details (7%)

- **Question 3: What is the single most important thing that UC+M or the University could do to enhance your satisfaction with internal communications at UVic?** 49% of respondents (524) provided suggestions, including:
  o 2-way discussion/Faculty seek greater access to speak directly about issues/Less top-down communication (face-to-face, open dialogues, etc.) (9%)
  o Opportunity to share between and within departments (create engagement, interactions among staff, work together, share research, etc.) (5%)
  o More transparency/honesty (5%)
  o Better information (accurate, timely consistent, directly from source, clear, unbiased, etc.) (5%)
  o Relevant information only/filter information (5%)

- When the various suggestions received from the open-ended questions were cross-tabulated to the question of overall satisfaction with the quality of communications, it was clear that dissatisfied respondents were significantly more likely to request more consistent/relevant information, less "hype"/public relations/irrelevant/trivial information, and more openness, honesty and transparency. They were also more likely to feel that faculty/staff feedback/input may be solicited buts seems to be ignored or left unacknowledged. Very dissatisfied respondents formed the group most likely to comment that they would like UVic to ensure information is passed down by all levels of management.

- Suggestions from the large neutral "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" category were more likely to focus on more information regarding policy and procedures, as well as weekly/daily information bulletins, better 2-way communications, and to indicate there are too many communications channels, comment that it's hard to keep up with all the information available, and ask for more information/training on how to use the existing channels.

The top-level findings are drawn from the survey results and Strategic Initiatives, Inc. survey report available at (*http://www.uvic.ca/communicationsmarketing/assets/docs/UVic-Campus-Communications-Survey2014.pdf*).

CONCLUSIONS

The President's Campus Conversations provided anecdotal indications of the issues and concerns that many in the campus community have with internal communications. While the survey data is neither exhaustive nor exactingly precise in some ways, it does provide a clear set of 'signposts' that

allow legitimate and reasonable conclusions to be drawn, as well as indications of areas where deeper examination (i.e. focus groups, pilot projects) may be needed.

Based on the analysis and discussion of the survey findings, **eight key conclusions** have been developed that form the basis for a communications strategy and next steps.

1. **Three areas of communications responsibility:** The kinds and sources of information faculty and staff want to access mean that the responsibility for internal communications does not lie solely with one department. Rather, there are three distinct sources or 'buckets' of communications responsibilities; each of which needs to have clear, consistent guidelines and action plans in place to disseminate information and gather/respond to feedback:
   - **Leadership**—high-level, strategic information; future plans, policies and priorities; key institutional messages; etc.
   - **UC+M**—news; and information about events, successes and initiatives, direction, policies, procedures, decision-making processes; etc. of campus-wide interest
   - **Department / unit / area**—department and job-specific information

2. **Need to promote awareness of reciprocal responsibilities among all** facultyand staff**:** leaders have responsibilities to inform others; faculty/staff also have responsibilities to keep themselves informed.

3. **Need for opportunities for 2-way communications:** The desire for more 2-way communications channels was strongly articulated throughout the survey responses.

4. **Desirability for fewer, more effective 'authorized' channels of communications**: The survey provided a strong sense that faculty and staff find the number of communications channels available to be challenging, and have no clear sense of the best ways to get the information they want. Focusing on a core set (or network) of fewer channels with clear statements around what kind of information will be found in each and when, will help people find what they want and need.

5. **Recognition that different groups have different communications needs:** Cross-tabulated responses to many of the survey questions indicate challenges in specific areas that need to be considered and customized in any communications strategies and activities. Two clear examples are: 1) the desire of faculty/librarians to have more access and input to strategic decision-making, budget planning, etc.; and 2) many, if not most of CUPE 917 workers do not use computers as part of their daily work, and so do not regularly access electronic communications channels (including on-line surveys); as a result, they can feel isolated and disengaged from the rest of the campus community.

6. **Recognition of the importance of department/unit/area meetings:** Survey results indicate that in-person communications are overwhelmingly the most highly valued and frequently-accessed channels. Excluding lower results from CUPE 4163 (all sections), staff/ department/area meetings are accessed regularly by 95% of exempt support; 91% of faculty/librarians, management excluded and PEA employees; and 83% of CUPE 951. The reliance on and credibility of these in-person channels can be enhanced and strengthened by establishing consistent expectations, guidelines and tools for each department to utilize and follow. Even where local practices for unit meetings vary, clear expectations about frequency and role in information sharing should be established.

7. **Need to assess content of communications:** A number of themes emerged through the open-ended questions in the survey, pointing to a need to assess the content delivered through internal communications. Themes that stood out included:
   - Too much "good news," "hype" and "PR" (although this needs to be considered in the context of current perceptions about the absence of information about issues and challenges);

- Need for more information on difficult current issues that cause anxiety (e.g. labour relations, budgets);
- Lack of trust in what is being communicated—need for verification of facts;
- Perception of "us vs. them" between senior administrators and faculty/staff;
- Need for more information on strategy, vision and long-range goals—the direction of the institution.

8. **Need for further research:** The survey has provided a strong baseline of information on the current state of internal communications at UVic. However, it has also raised, or pointed to, gaps in that information that would benefit from deeper evaluation through focus groups or other types of consultations. Some of these gaps are flagged in the "Desired Outcomes and Activities" section that follows, while others will become more defined as the project progresses.

DESIRED OUTCOMES and ACTIVITIES

Based on the survey findings and conclusions, five desired outcomes for strengthened internal communications have been identified to support faculty and staff engagement.

1. <u>_Outcome:_ **Stronger sense of community and shared purpose**</u> _through increased knowledge and understanding by leaders, faculty and staff of policies and procedures, key initiatives, decisions and how they are made, and overall university direction_. To be accomplished by activities such as: continuing to schedule town hall/Campus Update sessions, and improving understanding of the roles of Senate and Board of Governors.

2. <u>_Outcome:_</u> **Enhanced transparency and accountability** _through improved access to information using fewer, more effective channels of communications that serve the information needs across the board._ To be accomplished by activities such as: reducing the number of "official" channels and define how they are used, and exploring ways to better engage staff who don't access computers as part of their work.

3. <u>_Outcome_</u>: **Enhanced dialogue and engagement** _through opportunities for two-way and multi-party communications that provide information needed by faculty and staff to do their jobs._ To be accomplished by activities such as: exploring ways to enhance 2-way communications, and developing and promoting information-sharing best practices for departmental and interdepartmental communications.

4. <u>_Outcome:_ **Improved clarity on and support for roles and responsibilities**</u> _as well as expectations and ownership for internal communications and engagement._ To be accomplished by activities such as: enhancing professional development activities around internal communications and engagement for academic and administrative leaders, and creating a inventory of best practices, reference tools, etc.

5. <u>_Outcome:_ **Higher level of overall satisfaction with and effectiveness of internal communications.**</u> A follow-up internal communications survey will be conducted in 2-3 years to measure progress.

NEXT STEPS

Based on the survey findings, conclusions and desired outcomes, the vice-presidents are now working with staff and faculty in their portfolios on how best to strengthen communications keeping in mind specific needs and opportunities in their respective areas. President Cassels and the vice presidents are also looking at how to coordinate these efforts across the institution and will be reporting back regularly on progress to the campus community.

Over the rest of 2015, UC+M will be working on key activities that fall under its mandate, including identifying a small set of "official" communications channels and, through discussion and consultation, developing a clear role and user guidelines for each; exploring technology and electronic means to enhance 2-way communications within and between departments/units/areas, as well as between faculty/staff, academic and administrative leaders and executive; and using the survey analysis and subsequent consultations to develop a campus communications strategy to assist the university in improving internal communications on campus over the next 2-3 years.

This year will also see other internal communications activities such as:

- Continued implementation of the UVic Edge branding program at the unit level, including identifying opportunities for departments/units to bring the UVic Edge to life in their areas;
- Additional Campus Update and other town hall sessions, building on the success of these to date; and
- Creation of an inventory of principles, best practices and practical approaches to internal communications for ongoing use by unit heads and managers.