

FORWARD Forum (April 26, 2016) Addresses NDSU Employee Retention



An overflow crowd at the second FORWARD Forum participated in a highly interactive presentation/discussion to address the question “How Can We Retain Valued Colleagues at NDSU?”

Dr. Christine McGeorge, Professor of Human Development and Family Science, presented data (from the most recent NDSU Work-Life Survey) on faculty considerations for leaving or staying at NDSU. Responses indicate that nearly 65% of responding faculty had considered leaving NDSU based on their work environment, and nearly half of these individuals had applied for other positions. The top three factors influencing consideration to leave for women were climate of the department/unit/lab (28.3%), lack of support for research (24.3%), and climate for women (18.2%); most common factors cited by men were salary and benefits (22.0%), lack of support for research (17.4%), and workload allocation, work/life satisfaction, and geographic location (14.7% each). The most common factors that contributed to women faculty members' consideration for staying at NDSU included quality of community (19.2%), colleagues in department/unit/lab (17.2%), and salary and benefits (14.1%); top factors contributing to staying for men were colleagues in department/unit/lab (22%), quality of community (20.2%), climate of department/unit/lab, and work/life satisfaction (15.6% each).

Dr. Greg Lardy, Professor and Head of Animal Sciences, provided perspective on the cost of departures. Obvious financial costs involve searches to refill the position, retooling labs and other start-up costs, loss of grant funding and research productivity, important work left undone, and uncovered class sections. Dr. Lardy also stressed the nonfinancial costs associated with departures of valued colleagues including morale decline and work group disruption, with resulting detrimental effects on the overall unit climate.

Dr. Ann Burnett, Professor and Director of Women and Gender Studies, facilitated discussion/idea generation around 1) what NDSU as an institution can do to better retain valued colleagues, and 2) what we as individuals or within our units can do to facilitate retention. Recognizing that departures result from the balance of “push” factors that essentially push individuals toward other employment, and “pull” factors that more tightly tie the individual to the institution, this session explicitly focused on the push factors. The large group of participants including staff, administrators and faculty individually contributed many valuable ideas, with considerable emphasis on dual career hiring improvements at NDSU as an institution, and better handling of bullying or other micro-aggressions at the individual and unit level. A complete listing of ideas generated through discussion at this first FORWARD Forum can be obtained on request from nds.forward@nds.edu.

Follow-up activities as a result of these ideas include establishing an institutional mechanism for faculty exit interviews; moving forward with a proposed anti-bullying policy; scheduling a workshop in early fall on micro-aggressions and micro-interventions, and a FORWARD Forum focused on the “pull” side of employee retention – “What is special about NDSU?” that encourages people to stay and contribute.

FORWARD Forums are interactive presentations/discussions aimed at surfacing issues and generating ideas and action plans for making NDSU an even better place.