# Project Final

# Group #3

# Nathan Ellison, Osbert Garza, Stacey Havel, Angie McCormick, Tony Jerod-Eddie

# EHRD 618 - Evaluation Models in HRD

# Dr. Khalil Dirani

# Texas A&M University

# December 8, 2021

**Executive Summary**

Texas A&M’s Engineering Staff Advisory Council has existed for nearly ten years and receives funding each year to create a better environment for staff within Texas A&M Engineering. As a team, we conducted an evaluation to determine if ESAC has been effective in reaching their goals, to be a voice for staff to the Vice Chancellor and Dean of Engineering. We decided to use a mixed methods approach to conduct our evaluation. By using this approach, our team was able to collect both qualitative and quantitative data for a more in-depth analysis.

First, we identified the goals that ESAC has set out to achieve. Once the goals were identified, we created a questionnaire that would measure the objective opinions of council members on ESAC’s ability to achieve its goals. The questionnaire used for the evaluation was sent to current and former members of ESAC who are also currently staff members within the College of Engineering, or Texas A&M’s Engineering Experiment Station. This allowed current and former members of ESAC to confidentially voice their opinion on the effectiveness of ESAC as a whole. Our team used this information to evaluate whether or not ESAC was reaching its goals, and if any improvements could be made to boost the council’s productivity.

We analyzed the data for what Fraenkel et. al, (2016) describe as manifest and latent content. The quantitative data was analyzed to build the framework for understanding the individuals involved in ESAC, and their general opinions regarding the council. While the qualitative data was analyzed and coded by multiple members of our evaluation team, looking for significant behaviors or trends amongst the group. The results of our evaluation show that ESAC has some improvements to make, like many organizations, however, the council’s actions are supporting the works of what ESAC is aiming to achieve.

**Project Description**

Texas A&M’s Engineering Staff Advisory Council (ESAC) serves as the liaison between staff and the Vice Chancellor and Dean of the College of Engineering and Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station (TEES). Staff members are nominated to serve on the council for two years. ESAC has established programs for staff appreciation, a yearly staff workshop, development, engagement, and service, and falls under Engineering HR’s leadership. The council evaluates the needs of Engineering staff, communicates those needs to Engineering leadership or HR, and implements programs to create a better work environment for staff.

**Key Objectives**

ESAC’s mission is to bridge the gap amongst the staff, faculty, and the administration within each unit. It operates as a starting point for employees’ perspectives to be acknowledged on different topics that may arise within the workplace. Their website states, “The goal is to empower staff employees within the Texas A&M University College of Engineering and TEES, enhance their work environment and build a sense of community” (Engineering Staff Advisory Council, 2021). This goal allows the organization to create a culture of appreciation throughout these facilities which in turn allows everyone to operate more effectively and efficiently.

**Purpose of Evaluation**

The evaluation will serve to examine the efficacy of the current communication links created between faculty, staff, and administration by the Engineering Staff Advisory Council. This will allow ESAC to determine what alterations are needed in order to better achieve its four-fold purpose. Through this evaluation, ESAC will be able to determine which of their four purposes (facilitate communication, empower staff employees, enhance their work environment, and build a sense of community) is experienced by the community as the strongest and which of these purposes are weaker and therefore needing specific attention. This evaluation will also serve to identify any additional needs that have arisen since the inception of the council in 2014 and provide potential solutions.

**Key Evaluation Questions**

1. Of ESAC’s four purposes (facilitate communication, empower staff employees, enhance their work environment, and build a sense of community) which do you feel has the strongest buy-in? Which has the least buy-in? Why?
2. To what extent has ESAC contributed to greater institutional outcomes for engineering students?
3. How has ESAC contributed to your sense of community?
4. In what ways ESAC changed the way you communicate with other faculty, staff, or administration in the department of engineering?
5. Do you feel there is clear communication between ESAC and staff? What have been the largest errors in ESAC communication?
6. In what way has the program produced or contributed to the intended outcomes set forth by ESAC for engineering staff members?
7. How has the ESAC continued to influence relational harmony between engineering staff members and heads of the engineering department? What are some tangible examples?
8. How has ESAC had an impact on how effectively engineering staff members are supported from the vice chancellor and deans office through the work of the ESAC?

**Logic Model of Evaluation**

| **Inputs** |  | **Outputs** | |  | **Outcomes -- Impact** | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Activities* | *Participation* |  | *Short* | *Medium* | *Long* | |
| Engineering Staff  Staff time & skills  Vice Chancellor & Dean of the College’s time & skills  Campus Facilities  Funding  Programs  Volunteers |  | Staff Appreciation  Staff Workshop  Engagement  Service  Staff Development  Communications | All Engineering Staff  All Engineering Staff  Staff choosing to participate  Staff choosing to participate  Staff choosing to participate  All Engineering Staff |  | Increased Communication Among Members of ESAC  Increased Collaboration Among Members of ESAC  Improved Value of Opinion from Employee | More Specified Traings That Meet the Needs of ESAC  Increased Employee Engagement | | Increased Staff Retention  Enhanced Work Environment/ Culture |

| **Assumptions** |  | **External Factors** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Employees engage with ESAC’s programs | TAMU policy changes, COVID-19 restrictions |

**Methodology**

For this project, we decided to use a mixed methods approach to conduct our evaluation. By using this approach, the group was able to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Mixed methods can be defined “as research in which the investigators collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry” (Russ & Preskill, 2009, p. 261). In doing so, we were able to gain an idea of the culture the organization has while also being able to measure the quality at which it operates.

For this project we found surveys and questionnaires to be the best instruments to conduct our evaluation. There are a few reasons that led us to choose these over other types of instruments. Questionnaires are a practical instrument that is both cost and time effective. It is easier for us to gather data from a larger number of people without having to schedule individual or group interviews. Also, living in a current/post-covid world has led many people to be hesitant to meet with people they do not usually encounter. Questionnaires allow us to collect information from these individuals while still allowing us to be socially distant. Another reason we decided on surveys and questionnaires is that we can ask a variety of questions while the respondents can keep anonymity. Through distributing the surveys and questionnaires through Google forms, we hope the respondents felt comfortable enough to be honest when answering as we are not able to pair specific respondents with their answers. We also incorporated overall observations detected through the participants' answers for significant trends or attitudes.

The Google form survey can be found here: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1bgjnD84JlCSFduxd-_5VdpeO13snd9PUVuTB6hku5No/edit>

The following questions are used in the above survey:

1. What role do you have in ESAC?
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. Of ESAC’s four purposes (facilitate communication, empower staff employees, enhance their work environment, and build a sense of community) which do you feel has the strongest buy-in? Which has the least buy-in? Why?
4. I feel ESAC does an effective job at communicating urgent needs and concerns
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Neutral
   4. Agree
   5. Strongly Agree
5. I feel ESAC needs to improve communication among different levels (Reverse Score)
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Neutral
   4. Agree
   5. Strongly Agree
6. If not satisfied with communication, in your opinion, what have been the largest errors in ESAC’s communication?
7. How has ESAC contributed to greater institutional outcomes for engineering students?
8. ESAC contributes to my sense of community?
   1. Strongly Disagree
   2. Disagree
   3. Neutral
   4. Agree
   5. Strongly Agree
9. In what ways has ESAC changed the way you communicate with other faculty, staff, or administration in the department of engineering?
10. ESAC has met the intended outcomes for engineering staff members?
    1. Strongly Disagree
    2. Disagree
    3. Neutral
    4. Agree
    5. Strongly Agree
11. How has the ESAC continued to influence relational harmony between engineering staff members and heads of the engineering department? What are some tangible examples?
12. How has ESAC had an impact on how effectively engineering staff members are supported from the vice chancellor and deans office through the work of the ESAC?

Surveys were distributed among ESAC members and employees in the College of Engineering and TEES in November. As an employee, Stacey reached out to those she has a professional relationship with and asked about their experiences with ESAC. All information is confidential and was given voluntarily to the group in order to provide appropriate feedback to ESAC for improvements.The data we gathered through our mixed methods approach was then analyzed in multiple ways. Our data was divided into quantitative and qualitative data and analyzed for manifest and latent content (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2016). The quantitative questions were compiled and analyzed to build the framework of understanding the individuals involved in ESAC, how they access the structure, and their general opinions regarding ESAC. While the qualitative survey portions were read and coded by multiple members of our evaluation team for each question as well as reread for an overall assessment. Within the qualitative portion we also incorporated observations and informal interviews looking for significant behaviors or trends.

**Results**

Our team collected data directly from current and former members of the Engineering Staff Advisory council. A short survey was distributed to ESAC through the current ESAC chair. The survey was created using Google Forms for a user friendly format. The questions included fill in the blank questions, open-ended questions, and Likert-type scale questions. We analyzed the collected data using the following categories: individual experience (IE), collective experience(CE), recipient of service(RS), giver of service(GS), enjoyment(E), frustration(F), ambivalence(A), and efficiency increase(EI) for each response as well as overarching posture of the participant responding. These categories helped us determine any themes of the feedback we received from ESAC. Additionally, in our analysis we color-coded the Likert scale questions to help draw out additional trends or themes. As the purpose in this evaluation is to uncover which of the four-fold ESAC purposes are perceived as strong or weak by the community, our questions seek to draw that information out in a variety of ways while also achieving our secondary goal of identifying any additional areas that need attention since the founding of ESAC in 2014.

In our results, our team was able to assess both the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the survey. The quantitative data proved to have some interesting data because when asked if “ESAC does an effective job at communicating urgent needs and concerns”, 62.5% of participants answered “Neutral” with both 12.5% answering “Strongly Agree” and “Disagree”. However, when asked “I feel ESAC needs to improve communication among different levels”, 62.5% answered “Agree” with only 25% answering “Disagree” and 12.5% staying “Neutral”. This allows the organization to begin identifying the gaps in departments that feel a sense of a communicational breakage. The following question asked how “ESAC contributes to [the participants] sense of community”, with 25% answering “Strongly Agree”, 62.5% answering “Agree” and only 12.5% answering “Neutral”. The final question of quantitative data was able to show the team how “ESAC has met the intended outcomes for engineering staff members”, with 87.5% answering “Agree” and 12.5% answering “Neutral”. These two questions allowed the team to conclude that actions are supporting the works ESAC is aiming to achieve. Overall, the quantitative data shows ESAC has improvements to make in their communications across the different departmental levels but has been able to meet the intended outcomes for its engineering staff members.

The qualitative data shows some trends in the responses. ESAC’s employees felt the strongest buy-in was empowering staff employees. They discussed that there are many conversations in their organisation that have come out of excess stress over the last few years. They explained their response to feeling excess stress is to have conversations about how to empower staff in their current positions. The majority of the respondents indicated they feel communication needs to improve. They indicated a variety of responses when asked about the largest error in communication. The trend that came out of their responses was the need to improve email communication. They state a majority of ESAC’s emails will either be ignored or go to an “other” box in their email. They also stated there is too much communication via email, which makes the urgent matters get overlooked. However, overall all of the respondents indicated ESAC contributed to institutional outcomes for engineering students. The majority of the respondents felt ESAC changed the way she communicated with others by helping them meet and interact with various departments they would not otherwise. When asked about ESAC’s influence on relationships between engineering staff and heads of departments the respondents did not feel there was much influence. Two respondents indicated it may make the deans and department heads aware and appreciate staff members exist, but nothing in terms of “relational harmony.”

**Conclusions & Recommendations**

In conclusion, the evaluation was able to show how well the organization is operating while still being able to address the key issues that needed attention. The survey results presented the strongest purpose experienced, by the ESAC community, to be “empowering staff employees” while having “facilitating communication” as the weakest. The organization understands the need to empower their staff but is failing to upkeep a robust exchange of information across departments. In regard to administration and the staff, the efficacy of the current communication tactics was shown to need improvement, yet the results revealed the organization is able to meet their intended outcomes. This gives hope, for ESAC, as improving these communication tactics would send them to new heights.

Our recommendations would improve communication across all fields and establish stronger communication methods between administration and their staff. Implementing an ESAC Weekly Newsletter would be able to deliver all the information needed to be shared for that week, allowing for a reduction in the number of emails individuals would have to keep track of. The newsletter would also contain important information the organization would like the staff to share with students in their courses. This would open the door for student engagement occurring through the organization. To improve the communication amongst administration and staff, the organization would have to integrate 1 on 1 monthly meetings to discuss more in-depth matters that need to be discussed. These meetings will create a safe environment allowing members to share their thoughts on improving the organization and expanding its involvement in the community. The final recommendation would be employing “Accountability Touchpoints” which would be applied during the follow-up 1 on 1 meetings. These touchpoints would keep the leaders accountable in discussing topics, members brought up during their previous 1 on 1 to see how they are/were being handled. The recommendations suggested would bridge the gap the organization is currently facing amongst their leaders and staff while also solving their congested email complications.

**References**

Engineering Staff Advisory Council. (2021). <https://engineering.tamu.edu/information/esac/index.html>

Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, H. H. (2016). *How to Desgin and Evaluate Research in Eduation, 9th edition.* New York City: McGraw-Hill Education.

Russ-Eft, D., & Preskill, H. (2009). *Evaluation in organizations: A systematic approach to enhancing learning, performance, and change*. Perseus Publishing.