Discussion Highlights

July - Sept 2021
Focus Groups & ThoughtExchanges
Background & Engagement Results

• Between July 29 – Sept 20, 2021, focus groups were hosted to explore emerging challenges and opportunities as identified in conversations with Department Heads and Managers/Administrators, and as per staff survey results.

• As part of a phased approach to SEEES solutions design, challenges and opportunities were prioritized for discussion based on their connection to Dean’s Office core functions (i.e. Student Support, Finance, Marketing & Communications, Advancement, and Human Resources).

• 62 staff participated focus groups (some in more than one), with representation from 29 FAS departments and units.

• Additionally, parallel ThoughtExchanges on these five topics were conducted to capture asynchronous feedback and allow flexible options for those who wished to participate but were unable to attend focus group sessions, resulting in:
  - 142 total staff and faculty participants (non-unique)
  - 84 thoughts shared
  - 889 ratings
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Discussion Highlights: Student Support
Focus Group (Student Support): What We Asked

Participants were asked to reflect on the following:

“What does effective “student support” mean to you? When you’ve experienced effective student support in the past, what did this look like? Was it streamlined? Personal? Timely?”

“To ensure an equitable and consistent student experience, which elements of student support are best handled directly by departments? Which are best handled centrally and/or could be handled in a shared services approach?”

“How can we re-think the way that we work together to increase staff support and enhance the student experience?”
Focus Group (Student Support): What We Heard

- Student support should be: friendly, student-centric, personalized, timely, patient, proactive, and empowering.

- More consistency is needed between depts, both in terms of information sharing and approach to handling certain elements of student support (eg: Academic Integrity or Accommodations).

- Central services are a key to ensuring consistency and equity across the board.

- Shared approaches to support could be particularly helpful with respect to Academic Integrity, Student Accommodations/Considerations and Experiential Learning.

- Departments are best equipped (and best positioned) to handle course/program-specific information (eg: course registration, plan advising).

- Additional training for staff and instructors in certain areas (eg: accommodations, academic advising) could help to enhance the student experience and increase staff capacity.
**ThoughtExchange (Student Support): What We Heard**

Notable thoughts re: **Accommodations:**

We must centralize handling of QSAS and Student Wellness accommodations, plus academic considerations, at the University level. Inconsistent action by the three sources, and differences among faculties, create confusion and extra work for instructors.

I think that accommodations for exams should be administered centrally, by the exams office ideally. A significant amount of time is taken up dealing with these and there are more and more every year.

In my view, the main challenge with accommodation requests, challenges to academic integrity, etc. is the amount of individualized paperwork required. Reducing the amount of time instructors need to spend on creating this documentation would help make the system more efficient.

Notable thoughts re: **Academic Integrity:**

On integrity issues it should not be necessary to deal with multiple faculty offices if your class has students from more than one. Avoid confusion for students and workload for instructors.

There should be a policy across FAS for how to deal with issues of academic integrity. So professors feel like the faculty has their back.
ThoughtExchange (Student Support): What We Heard

Notable thoughts re: Student Advising:

Each central advisor should be assigned certain departments to support. Expecting an advisor to know everything about CHEM and ENGL is asking too much. It’s important to have specialists who work closely with depts. so dept. feel well supported by central services and have a main contact person.

Central FAS and department admin staff should work more closely together and share information - such as student academic advising notes, all advisors need to have access to the information other advisors have provided students. Right now dept. advisors don’t have access to student files.

Additional, noteworthy thoughts:

During the pandemic the CTL assigned a support person to each department (Kendall is amazing!!) and this model could be carried over to other services that was an awesome model to streamline communication between central services and depts. and kept everyone in the loop on changes in live time.

International students need more support and faculty need to work to understand their experience. Because faculty often discuss International students solely in terms of writing skills.

The calendar should have additional detail on their courses, such as instructor and link to syllabus for each offering. Students often ask for this information, and it’s not easy to find, especially syllabi. It should be easy to get instructors for each term from SOLUS.
Discussion Highlights:
Finance
Focus Group (Finance): What We Asked

Participants were asked to reflect on the following:

“What’s working well with the current FAS finance support model? What isn’t? Are there gaps, redundancies, or inefficiencies that need to be addressed?”

“How might we re-think the way that we work together to best support departments?

Which finance-related tasks are most effectively handled at the department level? Are there tasks that could be best (or more effectively) handled centrally and/or in a shared approach?”
Focus Group (Finance): What We Heard

• A shared support model could be helpful for smaller departments, particularly with respect to ongoing transactional functions such as procurement services (i.e.: acQuire) and the ERS.

• Shared support partners would need to be knowledgeable and well-integrated into depts.

• All departments could benefit from: “go-to” contacts for specific finance functions and increased overall role clarity; more (easier to access) standardized operating procedures, checklists, and workflows; assistance/guidance with training, onboarding and granting permissions/access to key systems.

• More support is needed for those in research finance.

• Communities of Practice or opportunities for best practice/information sharing/practical problem solving among smaller groups would be widely appreciated.
Notable thoughts re: the need for central resources/onboarding support:

More central assistance/guidance with training, onboarding and granting permissions/access to key systems could help to increase overall efficiencies.

a guide would be handy I think something that directs someone new about who to talk to would be handy for those just starting out. Can be rather tricky to navigate.

Notable thoughts re: shared support:

Any shared finance support partners would need to be very knowledgeable about dept needs, and well-integrated into depts. Depts are unique and rely on partners who understand their needs/culture.

Shared support could be helpful for ongoing transactional functions (eg: procurement services, ERS etc). These functions can take a lot of time, and don't necessarily need to be handled by individual depts.

Smaller departments do not use Acquire frequently and it is not intuitive so small tasks take significantly more time than they should. If FAS had a dedicated Acquire purchaser, departments could provide the required info and FAS staff could enter and/or provide vacation coverage.
ThoughtExchange (Finance): What We Heard

Additional, noteworthy thoughts:

More support - either centralized or shared - is needed for research accounting. As Queen’s research footprint increases, there is greater need for budgeting support, oversight, training etc for large-scale research projects.

It would be great to connect administrator, managers, financial coordinators between FAS departments. It is often easier/less intimidating to navigate these processes with our peers. It is also less time consuming than searching websites/how-to docs.
Discussion Highlights: Advancement
Focus Group (Advancement): What We Asked

Participants were asked to reflect on the following:

“How can we increase Advancement support for departments and/or best empower teams with the information/tools they need? How might we re-think the way we work together?”

“How can we increase Advancement support for departments and/or best empower teams with the information/tools they need? How might we re-think the way we work together?”

“From your department/unit’s perspective, what are the most important factors to ensuring a positive alumni and/or donor experience? Are current FAS processes/procedures set up to optimally achieve this, or are there gaps and/or areas for enhancement? Why is this important to you and your stakeholders?”
Focus Group (Advancement): What We Heard

• More regular touchpoints with Dept Managers/Administrators and identifying key Advancement contacts within each unit would help to foster stronger, more productive relationships (for both staff and alumni).

• Related to the above, department input/involvement in the early development stages of new ideas/processes is key to successful programming and positive working relationships.

• As a faculty, we need to focus on the holistic student-to-alumni journey, and departments need training/education/support to understand this and more intentionally leverage key touchpoints.

• Role clarity is needed for both internal and external stakeholders, both in terms of who to contact in FAS Advancement and in departments.

• Personal connections (particularly at the department level) are essential for effective alumni/donor engagement.
ThoughtExchange (Advancement): What We Heard

Notable thoughts:

More regular touchpoints with Dept Managers/Administrators would help to foster stronger, more productive relationships (for both staff and alumni). Department input in the early development stages of new ideas/processes (before things are finalized) is key!

Training on how to connect with alumni/donors online! Need to understand how best to engage folks in our new virtual world...

We need more clarity on who to contact (both within depts and on the FAS Advancement team) for what purpose and when. This would help to facilitate smoother, more efficient experiences for all, including alumni/donors.

Depts need a framework for understanding the student-to-alumni journey, and how we can best support this at key junctures along the way.

In the past there was training for heads in advancement and encouragement for e.g. preparing newsletters. That might be a good place to start Heads know best what is happening in their units and can respond to questions and interests as they arise

it is hard for small departments to devote a great amount of time trying to reach out to donors, having Advancement take on a large part of this would be a great help.
Discussion Highlights:
Marketing & Communications
Focus Group (MarCom): What We Asked

Participants were asked to reflect on the following:

“From your department/unit’s perspective, which marketing and communications tasks take most of your team’s time?

Where would you most appreciate additional/increased support, and why is this important to you and your stakeholders?”

“By necessity, marketing and communications projects often require input from multiple stakeholders.

How might we re-imagine/streamline current processes to allow projects to move more efficiently, with input from the right people at the right time(s)?

Could shared approaches to support help to accomplish this?”
Focus Group (MarCom): What We Heard

• Shared and/or enhanced MarCom support for departments would be particularly appreciated with respect to managing social media and websites (guidance on strategy, implementation, maintenance etc).

• Navigating the balance of “department voice” and staying true to the Queen’s/FAS brand is a common challenge. Guidance/support would be appreciated in this area.

• Related to the above, departments would appreciate increased access to strategic planning guidance/expertise.

• Easily accessible faculty-wide marking templates/graphics/visual identity standards could help streamline content creation and ensure consistency across departments.

• Increased opportunities for cross-department collaboration could help to streamline/strengthen FAS MarCom efforts overall.
Notable thoughts re: the need for **social media/website support**: 

Keeping website and social media accounts active takes a lot of time, and I don’t have enough time in my day to do this. A shared support person could help to provide training, tools and resources.

Website maintenance is a challenge... A central (or shared) approach to website design/maintenance could help to alleviate strain on depts and increase consistency overall.

Social media having support from FAS to create a dept. social media strategy and having regular check-ins for assistance would be useful.

depts. need to be supported by FAS marketing platforms, websites, and social media there are 27(?) depts. and 52 weeks in the year, featuring one dept a week in a collaborative effort between FAS & the dept. is a place to start.

Notable thoughts re: desire for support with **communications strategy/planning**: 

Communications strategy/issues can be challenging to handle at the dept level. Would be great to have access to shared support to assist with communications strategy and/or implementation.

Developing a mission statement, communications strategy etc is very challenging without a dedicated MarCom person in our dept. Would be helpful to have a central/shared point-person to work with on these things.
ThoughtExchange (MarCom): What We Heard

Additional, noteworthy thoughts:

When marketing/communications isn't the main focus for your role, content creation can take up a lot of time... Marketing templates, graphics, visual ID guidelines etc that are easy to access for everyone could help to streamline this process.

Each department needs a Mar/Comms person. Departments are unique and the large ones in particular need a dedicated full-time marketing and communications person to support staff/faculty.
Discussion Highlights:

Human Resources
Focus Group (HR): What We Asked

Participants were asked to reflect on the following:

“What does excellent Human Resources support mean to you and your stakeholders?

Have you experienced excellent HR support in the past? If so, what did this look like? Was it streamlined? Personal? Timely?”

“What gaps and/or areas for enhancement do you see in the current FAS Human Resources support model?

How might we streamline key Human Resources processes and/or adapt existing structures/systems/processes to increase efficiencies and better support departments?”
Focus Group (HR): What We Heard

• “Excellent HR support” is defined by: proactive approaches with the “user-journey” in mind; clarity of information and processes; consistency and continuity; transparency; responsiveness (and timeliness of responses); approachability and willingness (on the part of HRAs/HRSRs) to “go the extra mile” to find answers.

• Streamlining and/or automating key processes (eg: submitting multiple forms with similar information) could help to reduce administrative capacity strain and increase overall efficiencies.

• More frequent, regular touchpoints between HR teams and FAS departments would be helpful and appreciated. Additionally, either as part of these meetings or separately, departments could benefit from opportunities to share HR best-practices amongst each other.

• Process changes need to be communicated more effectively and consistently across the faculty. The above point re: more frequent HR touchpoints with departments could help to address this.
Focus Group (HR): What We Heard (cont.)

• Key HR documents and resources need to be easily accessible via intuitive pathways. Currently, finding resources can be time consuming/challenging, especially when they are scattered across multiple locations.

• Across FAS, the hiring process needs to be streamlined and made more intuitive to avoid lengthy vacancies.

• To help streamline the onboarding process, it would be helpful to identify (and consistently track) mandatory training for all positions across FAS.
ThoughtExchange (HR): What We Heard

Notable thoughts re: **onboarding support** & opportunities to **streamline system access**:

Shared onboarding materials and assistance with system access and removal of access. System access/removal requests that sit within several different depts. (i.e. HR, finance, research etc.). A central site/document would be beneficial.

Streamline/provide more central support for granting permissions/systems access for new faculty/staff. Could permissions be linked to positions, rather than people? New Term Adjuncts require system access at least 30 days in advance but many times do not receive access until start date.

A system that allows hiring data to be entered once for numerous purposes. Decrease errors and work.

Access to consistent onboarding resources, tools and training for new hires would help to ensure a smoother, more consistent experience for all. Onboarding for new staff/faculty is inconsistent between departments. Redundancies are also common, with depts re-creating similar resources/training.

Notable thoughts re: the need for a more **consistent training framework**:

Create a more consistent training framework (and tracking process) for new hires. Currently, training for new staff/faculty is very disjointed, with no central means of tracking completed training and/or indicating required training for positions.

Provide optional meetings and/or training seminars for targeted tasks (i.e. contracts entry, using commonly used forms, running queries, etc.). This will really help new hires as well as maintaining current knowledge on these processes for all current staff.
Notable thoughts re: the need for **more consistency** and **regular HR touchpoints**:

- **Common position/procedural documents across depts**: Consistent approaches across FAS for common positions/depts and procedures (academic depts, finance, vacation/timekeeping) 
  - Rating: 4.1 (9 votes) 
  - Ranked 5 of 17

- **Touch base meetings with individual staff**, similar to what FAS Finance is doing with individuals would be really good. Having dedicated one-on-one time with Bill, Natalie, and/or Kellie is always productive. 
  - Rating: 3.7 (13 votes) 
  - Ranked 14 of 17

- **Monthly touch-point meetings with our HRAs, FAS HR, or even other Departments** would be a great way to share information on HR processes. Helpful for building inter-unit relationships, discussing ongoing concerns, and keeping managers accountable. Ensures equity across departments 
  - Rating: 3.3 (2 votes) 
  - Not enough ratings to rank

Additional, noteworthy thoughts:

- **The term adjunct appointment process is very cumbersome. It would be helpful to streamline it. It takes far too much time to complete** 
  - Rating: 4.0 (10 votes) 
  - Ranked 9 of 17

- **Ensure more consistency in HR rep portfolios. HRAs tend to switch portfolios often, which can lead to confusion over the long term.** 
  - Rating: 3.9 (10 votes) 
  - Ranked 10 of 17

- **Assistance with vacation and extended leave coverage for common positions. Unexpected extended leaves happen; depts are left to fill complicated positions (ie, UG/Grad prog. assisht.) that require thorough knowledge/training** 
  - Rating: 3.6 (9 votes) 
  - Ranked 16 of 17

- **Having one HR rep for larger units and having one rep for three smaller units as a point person would be great. Sometimes there is a long waiting time for getting responses to HR issues.** 
  - Rating: 3.6 (14 votes) 
  - Ranked 15 of 17
https://www.queensu.ca/artsci/seees