

Survey: PCC faculty divided over chancellor's leadership

- By Carol Ann Alaimo Arizona Daily Star, Feb 27, 2016

Faculty at Pima Community College are divided over whether the school's CEO is doing a good job, a recent survey shows.

Nearly half of the full-time instructors who responded said it's time for a "formal vote of confidence" on Chancellor **Lee Lambert's** leadership, and many said they're thinking of leaving the troubled institution, the results show.

Some fear the findings could harm PCC's efforts to convince its accreditor that the school has fixed the problems that have kept it under accreditation sanctions since 2013.

Some of the problems cited in the survey are the same ones that led to the sanctions, including low morale, mistrust of leadership, poor internal communication and inadequate faculty input on major decisions.

The survey, sent to about 350 full-time faculty members late last year, drew 263 anonymous responses. A summary of results recently was posted to the website of the Pima Community College Education Association, the group that represents faculty on issues such as compensation and working conditions.

Forty-eight percent of respondents favored holding a confidence vote, 32 percent did not and 20 percent were neutral.

Lambert said a certain amount of discontent is normal when an organization is making major changes and said he has redoubled efforts to improve communications in the three months or so since the survey ended. But he downplayed the significance of the survey findings.

The results aren't "statistically valid," Lambert said, because responses were anonymous, which means "one person could have voted 10, 15, or 20 times."

Ana Jimenez, a spokeswoman for the faculty association, said the survey format is the same one used for years to solicit feedback on morale, working conditions and other issues of concern.

She disputed the suggestion that educators might try to skew the results by taking the survey repeatedly.

"We believe in the integrity of our faculty colleagues and feel that the open and honest answers fostered by anonymity greatly outweighs the need to track responses," she said.

The survey also indicates:

- Faculty morale is worse now than when Lambert arrived. The percentage who said they're unhappy more than doubled between 2013 and 2015, from 24 percent to 57 percent.
- Of the 46 percent who said they're considering leaving PCC, the reasons included heavier workloads unrelated to teaching; not feeling valued or treated fairly; too many changes occurring too quickly; "distrust, low morale and fear" and "general administration concerns."
- Faculty are split on whether PCC is properly prepared to address its accreditor's remaining concerns during a follow-up inspection later this year. Thirty percent said the college seems well-prepared, while 29 percent said the opposite. The largest group, 32 percent, was neutral on the question of preparedness.

While Lambert minimized the importance of the survey findings, internal emails obtained by the Arizona Daily Star through a public-records request show some school officials are deeply worried.

"These issues have now risen to the point that the college's future is at risk," PCC Governing Board member **Sylvia Lee** wrote in a November email to new board member **Martha Durkin**.

In a different email to a faculty member, Lee said it's part of the board's job "to protect the college from the damage that will ensue" from questioning Lambert's leadership.

"It is very distressing that the damage is already spiraling. It is so unfortunate that it will be played out in the media and is already pitting faculty against faculty and faculty against administration," she wrote.

Lee, an ardent supporter of Lambert who pushed for the Governing Board to hire him in 2013, suspects a small cadre of faculty is out to undermine the chancellor.

"My guess is that (the confidence vote question) was crafted by a handful of individuals with motives that are destructive," she wrote to another employee.

Jimenez, the faculty association spokeswoman, said the confidence question was included because some faculty members have been asking it among themselves, and the association felt obliged to find out how widespread the concern is.

A few days after the survey results were released, Lambert held a two-hour open forum with faculty at PCC headquarters. He highlighted the progress the school has made in many areas and urged faculty to pull together.

"PCC is going through a tough stretch," he said. "The good news is that we can meet our challenges by working together, and that we share a common belief in the transformative power of Pima Community College education."