Perceptions of Department Governance by U.S. Medical School Faculty

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Faculty Forward
The Alliance for Advancing the Academic Medicine Workplace

AAMC

Introduction and Methodology

Engaged medical school faculty are critical to the success of our nation's medical schools. Research demonstrates that faculty perceptions of department governance are associated with satisfaction with one's department—an essential component of faculty engagement. Research also describes the importance of an employee's understanding of their supervisor's goals in directly impacting their performance and individual contributions to the organization. An employee's behaviors and attitudes are shaped by the trust and integrity displayed by leaders in communicating important messages, enacting the organization's values, and involving employees in decision-making. (See reverse for references)

Medical school and department administrators and leaders who seek to maximize faculty satisfaction and engagement can benefit from an understanding of faculty perceptions of specific components of department governance by specialty.

In this analysis, we use data from the AAMC Faculty Forward Survey to examine 1) how specific components of department governance differ by department type, and 2) faculty perceptions of department governance in nine basic science and 24 clinical specialties.

Data were collected from 19 medical schools between 2011 and 2013. The distribution of faculty respondents across departments approximated the overall distribution of faculty in U.S. medical schools. The survey response rate was 63%. We explored the survey domain of department governance in this analysis. We aggregated departments into 33 higher-level department classifications for comparative purposes. Summary scores reflect the sum of the total number of responses for each category on a condensed response scale (i.e., Agree/Strongly Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree/Strongly Disagree) for each item. Each category total was the divided by the total number of responses for each item.

Department Name (number of respondents)	Department Governance Summary Score		Satisfaction with Department as a Place to Work	
Clinical Department Name	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree	Department Ranking[a]	Percent Satisfied or Very Satisfied	Department Ranking
Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (n = 90)	74%	1	79%	4
Otolaryngology (n = 200)	74%	2	81%	2
Family Medicine (n = 480)	73%	3	81%	3
Neurosurgery (n = 152)	73%	4	82%	1
Dermatology (n=88)	68%	5	76%	8
Orthopedic Surgery (n = 250)	68%	6	75%	12
Emergency Medicine (n = 325)	67%	7	72%	17
Ophthalmology (n = 218)	66%	8	78%	5
Radiology (n = 640)	65%	9	75%	14
Anesthesiology (n = 597)	65%	10	77%	6
Pathology (n = 539)	65%	11	76%	9
Pediatrics (Subspecialty; n = 1167)	63%	12	75%	11
Radiation Oncology (n = 189)	62%	13	76%	7
Psychiatry (n = 609)	62%	14	76%	10
OB/GYN (n = 395)	61%	15	72%	19
Neurology (n = 393)	60%	16	67%	22
Surgery (General; n = 233)	60%	17	67%	23
Other Clinical Departments (n = 202)	59%	18	73%	16
Urology (n = 145)	58%	19	73%	15
Medicine (Subspecialty; n = 1318)	58%	20	69%	21
Surgery (Subspecialty; n = 368)	57%	21	66%	24
Pediatrics (General; n = 329)	56%	22	72%	18
Cardiology (n = 282)	56%	23	75%	13
Internal Medicine (General; n = 632)	55%	24	71%	20
Basic Science Department Name				
Neurosciences (n = 126)	77%	1	83%	2
Microbiology (n = 273)	75%	2	77%	5
Physiology (n = 245)	73%	3	80%	3
Pharmacology (n = 230)	70%	4	74%	6
Biochemistry (n = 255)	68%	5	74%	7
Other Basic Science Departments (n = 264)	68%	6	78%	4
Genetics (n = 46)	62%	7	83%	1
Molecular & Cellular Biology (n = 123)	60%	8	70%	8
Anatomy (n = 44)	57%	9	58%	9

| Department Governance Questions	Percent (No.) Agree or Strongly Agree		Significance	
	Clinical Faculty	Basic Science Faculty	χ^2	P value
The department chair sets a good example to reflect our medical school's values	73.3% (6360)	78.8% (1117)	22.33	<.001
The chair's priorities for the department are reasonable	66.6% (5766)	74.5% (1062)	35.91	<.001
There is sufficient communication from the department chair's office to the faculty about the department	65.4% (6069)	72.2% (1103)	27.14	<.001
In general, the department chair's priorities are aligned with the dean's priorities	66.0% (4548)	67.8% (745)	4.32	0.115
The department chair's priorities for the department are clear	65.0% (5821)	71.4% (1051)	23.47	<.001
The pace of decision making in the department is reasonable	56.7% (4967)	70.5% (1013)	97.51	<.001
There is sufficient opportunities for faculty participation in the governance of this department	55.1% (4835)	64.4% (934)	43.83	<.001
My department does a good job explaining departmental finances to the faculty	52.6% (4865)	58.8% (888)	26.26	<.001
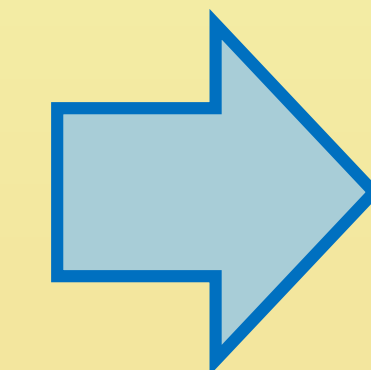
Key Findings: Perceptions of Department Governance by Department Type

- 63% of all respondents agreed with positive statements about their department.

- Perceptions of governance significantly differ by clinical versus basic science departments

- Across all but one item, faculty in basic science departments more often agreed with the statements than did their clinical department faculty counterparts

Key Findings: Perceptions of Department Governance by Specialty

- Departments with the highest level of agreement with items in domain were:
    Clinical Departments: Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation and Otolaryngology
    Basic Science Departments: Neuroscience

- Lower scores in the department governance may correspond loosely with lower overall satisfaction with one's department.
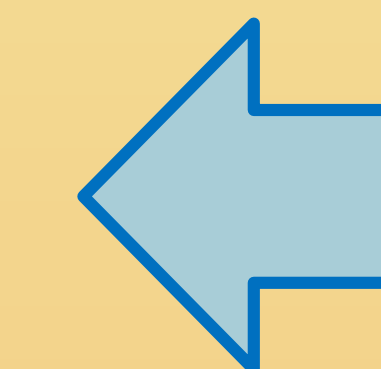
Discussion: How Can We Improve the Department Workplace?

As satisfaction with department governance is a driver of overall satisfaction with one's department, understanding departmental differences may suggest specific strategies that department chairs could use to improve the workplace for their faculty members, and, in turn, influence positive change within the medical school. From these results, we suggest that:

1. **Clinical department leaders should strive to improve financial transparency and encourage greater faculty participation in department governance.**
2. **Training department chairs and division chiefs in effective communication, management, governance, and leadership skills may be an effective strategy for engaging faculty members.**
3. **Leadership training may be beneficial for both department chairs and division chiefs, particularly in general medicine.**

In sum, these results offer a more nuanced understanding of perceptions of specific components of departmental governance and differences by individual departments, which can inform decisions as efforts are made to improve faculty satisfaction and engagement in the medical school workplace.