

AAMC StandPoint™ Survey Strategic Recommendations Report

Of the Working Group on Decision Making and Shared Governance

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Executive Summary

The AAMC StandPoint™ Survey and subsequent ZSOM follow-up survey have highlighted significant concerns among both faculty and staff regarding institutional communication, transparency in decision-making, and opportunities for meaningful participation. A core issue is the perceived lack of clear, timely, and actionable communication, which at its worst can foster sentiments of frustration, distrust, and disenfranchisement.

Our findings indicate a widespread lack of understanding regarding shared governance mechanisms and how critical institutional decisions (notably those relating to finances, promotions, and curriculum) are made. Furthermore, ineffective communication channels may lead to information overload without clear calls to action, and a perceived disconnect between leadership and the broader ZSOM community. There is a strong desire for greater clarity on roles, career advancement pathways, and compensation structures.

To address these challenges, this report outlines six strategic recommendations:

1. **Enhance Participatory Decision-Making:** Actively involve faculty and staff in institutional decision-making processes.
2. **Optimize Communication Strategies:** Implement clearer, more targeted, and forward-looking communication across all levels.
3. **Clarify Roles and Career Pathways:** Update and publicize role descriptions and transparent career advancement criteria.
4. **Strengthen Supervisory Effectiveness:** Provide comprehensive training for supervisors on communication, advocacy, and mentorship.
5. **Improve Onboarding and Integration:** Develop a robust onboarding program with a dedicated peer mentorship component.
6. **Establish an Ombudsperson Role:** Create a neutral resource for conflict resolution and confidential concerns.

Successful implementation of these recommendations will foster a more transparent, inclusive, and communicative environment at ZSOM, ultimately improving faculty and staff engagement and institutional effectiveness.

Background & Problem Statement

ZSOM leadership initiated a comprehensive assessment of the institutional climate through the AAMC StandPoint™ Survey. We supplemented this data with a customized internal survey. These assessments aimed to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement in the experience of faculty and staff. Through the combined survey responses, faculty and staff have identified six interconnected areas requiring attention:

1. **Lack of Transparency in Decision-Making:** Insufficient clarity on how institutional goals, curriculum changes, and administrative decisions are made.
2. **Ineffective Communication Channels:** Communication is often seen as retrospective, lacking forward-looking clarity, and/or contributing to information overload without clear calls to action.
3. **Disconnection Between Administrative and Faculty/Staff Perceptions:** Differences exist between administrative intent and how faculty and staff interpret or are impacted by those decisions within the ZSOM community.
4. **Challenges in Shared Governance:** A lack of awareness and understanding of shared governance principles and mechanisms.
5. **Overemphasis on Collaboration Leading to Delayed Action:** A perception that collaborative efforts sometimes lead to inaction or stalled initiatives, causing frustration among those who invest their time.
6. **Need for Inclusive Leadership and Diverse Perspectives:** A desire for leadership that actively seeks and values diverse input in decision-making.

Collectively, the DMSG working group concludes that these issues largely converge on a critical need for ***improved communication and enhanced transparency between leadership and the faculty and staff*** at ZSOM.

Relevant Data & Insights from AAMC StandPoint™ and ZSOM Follow-up Surveys:

Analysis of the bottom ten items on the AAMC StandPoint™ Survey results for both faculty and staff consistently highlighted concerns related to transparency and decision-making. Specifically, "transparency" was mentioned five times (e.g., "Senior leadership in the dean's office is transparent about medical school finances," "To be promoted in rank, what I must do in this mission area is clear to me"), and "decision making" appeared twice (e.g., "Satisfaction with my opportunities for faculty input in management or administrative decisions," "The pace of decision making in the dean's office is reasonable"). An overarching theme across these low-scoring items was a profound lack of understanding regarding institutional decision-making processes, policies, procedures, and the outcomes of critical decisions.

The ZSOM follow-up survey further corroborated these findings and helped distill the six thematic areas identified by the DMSG working group. These findings underscore a systemic challenge where current communication and governance practices fail to adequately inform, involve, and empower the ZSOM community.

Key Findings & Analysis

Our deep dive into the AAMC StandPoint™ and ZSOM follow-up surveys, alongside qualitative feedback, revealed several root causes and barriers contributing to the identified problems:

1. Lack of Knowledge of Shared Governance and Institutional Decision-Making:

- **Finding:** Most respondents are unaware of or unclear about ZSOM's definition of shared governance and how institutional decisions are made.
 - *Data:* On the follow-up survey, 25 out of 28 staff members and 14 out of 16 faculty members responded "not sure" or "no" when asked, "I am aware of how the school defines shared governance."
 - *Data:* No staff members answered "very clearly" when asked, "How clearly do you understand how institutional decisions are made?" The majority (16 out of 28 staff and 8 out of 16 faculty) answered "not very clearly."
- **Analysis:** This fundamental lack of understanding creates a vacuum that can be filled by speculation, distrust, and a sense of disenfranchisement, directly impacting engagement and morale.

2. Minimally Effective Communication Strategies:

- **Finding:** Dissatisfaction exists with both the content and the delivery methods of institutional communications.
 - *Data:* Responses to "What communication processes would you want to be improved, and why?" indicated a desire for clearer departmental communications, operational updates, policy changes, and events.
 - *Data:* Feedback highlighted issues with how messages are communicated (e.g., "special announcement emails [seem] confusing, unclear, or purposely vague," "leadership communication needs greater transparency and accountability...").
 - *Counterpoint:* The "Med School Minute" and similar updates may contribute to information overload, and important information may be lost if it lies "below the fold."
- **Analysis:** The current communication approach leads to information saturation without clarity or specific calls to action, causing recipients to feel overwhelmed or to miss critical information.

3. Perceived Disconnect, Unclear Roles, and Insufficient Inclusion in Decision-Making:

- **Finding:** Many faculty and staff feel excluded from decision-making processes, often leading to a sense of being "blindsided" by promotions or structural changes. There is palpable frustration when significant effort (e.g., input for Curriculum Renewal) appears to lead nowhere, creating a sentiment of betrayal.
 - *Data:* Six of the bottom ten items on the original StandPoint™ survey related to career advancement, compensation, and decision-making:
 - "I am satisfied with the opportunities to advance my career at this medical school" (34.9% satisfaction).
 - "I am familiar with potential career paths that I could pursue at this medical school" (46.9%).
 - "satisfaction with my overall compensation" (47.5%).
 - "the pace of decision making in the dean's office is reasonable" (48.4%).

- "staff can express their opinions about the medical school leadership without fear of retribution" (54.0%).
 - "There are sufficient opportunities for staff participation in the governance of this medical school" (56.2%).
- *Qualitative*: A sentiment often expressed was, "what can I contribute to, e.g., Curriculum Renewal, if it's being run by expert doctors?" highlighting a perceived hierarchy in whose input is valued.
- **Analysis**: This disconnect creates a barrier to a collaborative and engaged community, with faculty and staff feeling that their contributions are not genuinely sought or valued, especially in strategic initiatives.

4. Inconsistency in Supervisory Communication and Advocacy:

- **Finding**: Significant variability exists in how supervisors communicate with their superiors and supervisees, and in their advocacy for employees regarding role advancements and pay raises.
- **Analysis**: This inconsistency can lead to unequal access to information, uneven workload distribution, and a perception that career progression and compensation are dependent on individual supervisor effectiveness rather than clear institutional processes. This fuels the concern that one must be a "shameless self-promoter" to advance.

5. Unclear Definition of Roles and Career Advancement Pathways:

- **Finding**: The lowest-scored item on the AAMC StandPoint™ Survey was satisfaction with career advancement opportunities. There is a lack of clarity on job functions, how they map onto pay, and what translates to a pay raise beyond cost-of-living adjustments.
 - *Qualitative*: A staff member noted, "New or different positions (and the rationale behind them) at the school could be announced much better. Some people find the special announcement emails to be confusing, unclear, or purposely vague."
 - *Qualitative*: There's a desire for clarity on who to involve in inter-departmental collaborations and understanding the roles of different departments.
 - *Data*: Compensation was rated highest among both faculty (13 out of 16) and staff (19 out of 27) for areas needing more transparency around decision-making in the follow-up survey.
- **Analysis**: This ambiguity hinders professional growth, creates anxiety around compensation, and complicates efficient workflow due to a lack of understanding of others' responsibilities.

Strategic Recommendations

Based on the foregoing key findings and analysis, we propose the following strategic recommendations to foster a more transparent, inclusive, and effective ZSOM environment:

Recommendation 1: Enhance Participatory Decision-Making and Transparency

- **Rationale**: Faculty and staff strongly desire a "seat at the table" and transparency in *how* decisions are made, not just what the decisions are. This will build trust, foster buy-in, and leverage the diverse expertise we have at ZSOM.
- **Proposed Action Steps**:

- **Revise All-Hands Meetings:** Reimagine All-hands meetings as interactive forums that provide genuine opportunities for dialogue, Q&A with leadership, and input on proposed initiatives.
- **Establish Clear Channels for Input:** Create formalized, accessible, and well-publicized mechanisms for faculty and staff to provide input on strategic decisions (e.g., dedicated working groups with defined scope, online feedback platforms, town halls for specific issues).
- **Feedback Loop on Initiatives:** Implement a clear communication strategy for initiatives where faculty and staff input has been sought, clearly outlining the outcomes, next steps, or reasons for any changes (e.g., status updates on Curriculum Renewal).
- **Stakeholders Involved:** ZSOM Leadership (Dean's Office), Department Chairs, Standing Committees and Sub-Committees, Office of Communications
- **Estimated Resources Needed:** Staff time for planning and facilitating engagement sessions, potential platform costs, leadership commitment to open dialogue, and transparent follow-up.

Recommendation 2: Optimize Communication Strategies

- **Rationale:** Faculty and staff seek improvement with how decisions, updates, and initiatives related to the operation of ZSOM are communicated. To avoid information overload and confusion on actionable items, we recommend targeted, concise, and forward-looking communications that can improve engagement and understanding.
- **Proposed Action Steps:**
 - **Segmented Communication:** Develop a strategy to tailor communications to specific audiences (e.g., faculty, staff, department-specific) to reduce redundancy and information overload.
 - **Standardized Communication Templates:** Introduce templates for official announcements that prioritize key information, calls to action, and relevant links, ensuring the most important details are prioritized.
 - **Leverage Technology to Optimize Communications:** Increase the effective usage of internal platforms like Microsoft Teams and Qualtrics for specific project-based or departmental communications, fostering dynamic exchange rather than one-way broadcasts. Use AI technology to reduce redundant communications (i.e., reminder emails when an RSVP has already been sent).
 - **Forward-Looking Communication:** Shift from retrospective announcements to proactive communication about upcoming initiatives, potential changes, and opportunities for involvement.
- **Stakeholders Involved:** ZSOM Leadership, Office of Communications, IT Team.
- **Estimated Resources Needed:** Communications staff time for strategy development and content creation, potential software/platform enhancements, training for communicators.

Recommendation 3: Clarify Roles, Responsibilities, and Career Pathways

- **Rationale:** Ambiguity around roles, responsibilities, and career advancement causes frustration, inefficiency, and perceptions of unfairness, particularly regarding compensation.
- **Proposed Action Steps:**
 - **Publicize Role Duties:** Revamp the ZSOM website and/or intranet (e.g., [Dean's Office](#)) and internal directories to include clear, up-to-date job descriptions for all leadership,

faculty, and staff roles, especially where titles might be similar or recent organizational changes have occurred. Ensure that detailed descriptions of duties for each role are publicly accessible within the institution.

- **Develop Transparent Career Ladders:** Establish and communicate clear career advancement paths for both faculty and staff, outlining the criteria for promotion, salary ranges, and skill development opportunities.
- **Compensation Transparency Framework:** Develop and communicate a framework for how compensation decisions are made, differentiating between cost-of-living adjustments and merit-based raises, and linking compensation to defined roles and performance criteria.
- **Stakeholders Involved:** ZSOM Leadership, HR Department, Department Chairs/Supervisors, Office of Communications, IT/Web Development.
- **Estimated Resources Needed:** HR and administrative staff time for role definition and framework development, web development resources, leadership approval and communication.

Recommendation 4: Strengthen Supervisory Effectiveness through Training

- **Rationale:** Inconsistent supervisor communication and advocacy directly impacts employee morale, development, and retention. Investing in supervisors will improve overall communication flow and employee support.
- **Proposed Action Steps:**
 - **Mandatory Supervisor Training Program:** Implement a comprehensive, mandatory training program for all supervisors covering effective communication, performance management, employee advocacy, mentorship best practices, and understanding HR policies related to promotions and compensation.
 - **Regular Refresher Courses:** Offer periodic refresher courses and workshops on emerging leadership topics and communication strategies.
 - **Resource Development:** Provide supervisors with clear guidelines and tools for communicating institutional decisions, advocating for their team members, and conducting effective performance reviews. Leverage our relationship with Northwell and Hofstra HR.
- **Stakeholders Involved:** ZSOM Leadership, HR Department, Organizational Development/Training Teams, Department Chairs.
- **Estimated Resources Needed:** Budget for training materials (i.e.: digital certification modules, workshops, etc.), external trainers (i.e.: resources at Northwell and/or Hofstra, if necessary), staff time for program development and delivery, and supervisor time for attendance.

Recommendation 5: Improve Onboarding and Integration

- **Rationale:** A robust onboarding process is crucial for new faculty and staff to understand institutional culture, roles, and resources, fostering immediate engagement and reducing confusion.
- **Proposed Action Steps:**
 - **Comprehensive Onboarding Program:** Expand the current onboarding process to include detailed information on ZSOM's organizational structure and resources, decision-making processes, communication channels, and career pathways.

- **Mentorship "Buddy" Program:** Implement a formal "buddy" program where new hires are paired with an experienced colleague from a *different* department to provide informal guidance, help navigate the institution, and foster inter-departmental connections.
- **Campus/Building Orientation:** Include thorough physical and virtual tours and introductions to key departmental contacts and resources.
- **Stakeholders Involved:** Hofstra and ZSOM HR Departments, Team Supervisors and Managers, Faculty/Staff Mentors, Office of Communications.
- **Estimated Resources Needed:** HR staff time for program development and coordination, mentor time commitment, development of orientation materials.

Recommendation 6: Appoint an Ombudsperson

- **Rationale:** A neutral, confidential resource is essential for addressing conflicts, providing impartial advice, and offering informal resolution mechanisms for faculty and staff concerns, especially regarding sensitive issues like fear of retribution.
- **Proposed Action Steps:**
 - **Define Ombudsperson Role:** Clearly define the scope, authority, and confidentiality protocols for the Ombudsperson position, aligning with international standards for organizational ombuds.
 - **Recruitment and Appointment:** Recruit and appoint a qualified individual with strong mediation and communication skills, independent of direct reporting lines to ZSOM leadership.
 - **Communication of Role:** Publicize the Ombudsperson's role and how to access their services across the entire ZSOM community.
- **Stakeholders Involved:** ZSOM Leadership, HR Department, Legal Counsel (for defining scope), Communications Department.
- **Estimated Resources Needed:** Salary for Ombudsperson, office space and administrative support, training (if needed), communication materials.

Implementation Roadmap

The successful execution of these recommendations requires a phased approach, clearly defined responsibilities, and ongoing monitoring.

Phase 1: Immediate Actions (Next 3-6 Months)

- **Kick-off:** Formal announcement of commitment to address survey findings and implementation of recommendations.
- **Communication Audit & Strategy Revision:** Begin a thorough review of current communication channels and practices (Recommendation 2).
- **Supervisor Training Design:** Develop the curriculum and identify facilitators for the mandatory supervisor training program (Recommendation 4).
- **Website Content Audit:** Start gathering content and outlining changes for the website to clarify roles and responsibilities (Recommendation 3).
- **Ombudsperson Decision & Planning:** Confirm the decision to proceed with an Ombudsperson and begin defining the role and recruitment strategy (Recommendation 6).

Phase 2: Short-Term Initiatives (Next 6-12 Months)

- **Launch Supervisor Training:** Begin initial rollout of supervisor training modules.
- **Website Update Implementation:** Launch updated sections of the ZSOM website with clearer role descriptions and organizational charts.
- **Enhanced Onboarding Pilot:** Implement a pilot version of the expanded onboarding program, including the "buddy" system (Recommendation 5).
- **Revised All-Hands Meetings:** Introduce the new format for all-hands meetings, incorporating more interactive elements (Recommendation 1).
- **Recruitment for Ombudsperson:** Commence the search and selection process for the Ombudsperson.

Phase 3: Medium-Term Development (12-24 Months)

- **Career Pathway Development:** Finalize and widely communicate transparent career ladders and compensation frameworks (Recommendation 3).
- **Ongoing Communication Refinement:** Continuously evaluate and refine communication strategies based on feedback and effectiveness (Recommendation 2).
- **Full Onboarding Program Rollout:** Fully integrate the enhanced onboarding and mentorship program for all new hires.
- **Sustained Supervisor Development:** Embed ongoing professional development for supervisors into the ZSOM calendar.
- **Ombudsperson Functionality:** Fully establish and promote the Ombudsperson's office.

Phase 4: Long-Term Integration & Culture Change (24+ Months)

- **Culture of Transparency:** Embed principles of transparency and participatory decision-making into ZSOM's organizational culture.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Establish regular cycles for reviewing and updating all policies, communication strategies, and development programs.
- **Regular Feedback Mechanisms:** Maintain and evolve mechanisms for continuous feedback from faculty and staff beyond formal surveys.

Dependencies & Barriers:

- **Leadership Buy-in and Sponsorship:** Strong, visible commitment from ZSOM leadership is paramount.
- **Resource Allocation:** Adequate financial and human resources are required for developing and implementing programs.
- **Change Management:** Overcoming resistance to change and fostering a culture receptive to new communication and governance approaches.
- **Communication Effectiveness:** Ensuring that changes and their rationale are clearly and consistently communicated throughout the implementation process.
- **Data Availability:** Ongoing access to data and feedback for evaluation and adjustment.

Metrics for Success

Measuring the impact of these recommendations is crucial to ensure accountability and demonstrate progress. While avoiding "survey fatigue," a multi-faceted approach leveraging various data points will be employed.

1. Re-evaluation of AAMC StandPoint™ and ZSOM Follow-up Survey Items:

- **Metric:** Improvement in satisfaction scores for specific items related to transparency, decision-making, communication, career advancement, and compensation.
- **Frequency:** Re-administering key targeted questions every 18-24 months (not the full survey) to track longitudinal progress without causing fatigue.

2. Communication Effectiveness Metrics:

- **Metric:** Engagement rates on internal communication platforms (e.g., open rates for newsletters, participation in Teams channels for specific initiatives).
- **Metric:** Qualitative feedback collected through anonymous suggestion boxes, small group forums, or focused interviews.
- **Metric:** Reduction in queries related to basic policy or structural information (indicating clearer communication of roles and processes).

3. Shared Governance & Participatory Decision-Making:

- **Metric:** Number of faculty/staff serving on key committees or participating in decision-making task forces.
- **Metric:** Feedback from committee members on the effectiveness and transparency of governance processes.
- **Metric:** Qualitative assessment of leadership's communication of decision rationales and outcomes.

4. Career Development & Compensation Transparency:

- **Metric:** Increase in the percentage of faculty and staff who report understanding their career advancement pathways.
- **Metric:** Employee turnover rates, particularly for highly valued staff, as an indicator of overall satisfaction and perceived opportunities.
- **Metric:** Feedback from employees on the clarity and fairness of the compensation framework.

5. Supervisor Effectiveness:

- **Metric:** Improved scores on supervisor-related questions in internal climate surveys or 360-degree feedback processes.
- **Metric:** Participation rates and feedback from supervisor training programs.

6. Ombudsperson Utilization (if implemented):

- **Metric:** Number of inquiries, types of issues addressed (aggregated and anonymized to protect confidentiality).
- **Metric:** Satisfaction rates with the Ombudsperson's services.

7. Onboarding & Integration:

- **Metric:** New hire retention rates after 6 and 12 months.
- **Metric:** Feedback from new hires on the effectiveness of the onboarding program and "buddy" system.

This report provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges identified through the AAMC StandPoint™ Survey and ZSOM follow-up, along with actionable recommendations and a framework for their implementation and evaluation. It is designed to guide ZSOM leadership in fostering a more transparent, engaged, and supportive environment for all faculty and staff.