

SUMMARY OF PULSE ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

January 2025



UNIVERSITY OF
South Carolina

Arnold School of Public Health

SUMMARY OF PULSE ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS

- > 40 individual meetings (administrators, staff, center directors, select faculty)
- 5 team meetings (large research groups, research themes, centers)
- 5 coffee chats (staff, faculty, grad students, postdocs; > 150 people)
- Dean's Student Advisory Council
- Visits to undergraduate courses
- Campus leadership (deans, vice presidents)
- Alumni engagement
- Anonymous portal feedback

The process: Data collected from all sessions were combined and analyzed for collective themes. The identified themes in the areas of 'what we are doing well' and 'what opportunities we have' are summarized on the next pages.

WHAT WE ARE DOING WELL

1. Collaboration and Teamwork: The academic unit excels in fostering a collaborative environment that promotes positive relationships and enhances both internal teamwork and external partnerships. Team members demonstrate strong synergy and work effectively together to achieve shared goals. The unit also excels in supporting one another, sharing responsibilities, and collaborating to solve problems. There is a solid, positive relationship with departments and administration, ensuring smooth communication and coordination across organizational levels. Additionally, the unit has cultivated valuable local and statewide partnerships, extending its impact and creating further opportunities for collaboration with external stakeholders

2. Research and Education: The academic unit offers a very strong research portfolio that is addressing critical health issues in the state and beyond. There are valuable research options for students. Teaching is modern and effective, incorporating current best practices to engage and support learners. Faculty create a supportive learning environment, fostering student growth and skill development. Mentorship is a key strength, with faculty providing guidance and support to students. Additionally, students are well-informed about internships and job opportunities, particularly at the undergraduate level, enhancing their career prospects. There is excellent mentorship support for junior faculty.

3. Infrastructure and Resources: Excellent resources were identified, including our in-house information technology and communications teams. This was also noted at the institutional level for certain services such as the IRB. Overall infrastructure was described as very good. The unit supports renovations to space to remain current.

4. Staff Professional Development: Staff appreciated the existing professional development opportunities, particularly those that support skill-building and career advancement. There was a shared recognition of efforts to invest in staff growth, with many highlighting the availability of encouragement to pursue promotion. A frequently mentioned strength was the positive, trusted relationships between staff and supervisors. There was a general consensus that supervisors genuinely care about staff well-being and professional growth. These strengths were widely appreciated by employees and seen as essential elements of organizational success.

5. Organizational Culture and Visibility: The organization's culture was widely regarded as one of its strongest assets. Employees praised the inclusive, collaborative, and supportive environment that is cultivated across departments. There was a strong sense of camaraderie and teamwork, with employees frequently mentioning the mutual respect they share with colleagues and leadership. The culture encourages open communication and professional growth, making it an attractive and positive place to work. Many employees also noted that the college's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is integral to shaping the culture and ensuring all staff feel valued and heard.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES WE HAVE

1. Visibility and External Engagement: Key themes included a strong desire to increase the institution's presence outside of USC, with a focus on promoting research programs, centers and graduate offerings. Participants also emphasized the importance of engagement with the legislature and fostering connections between current students and alumni for mentorship and career development. A clear call emerged to develop a strategic approach to Global Health, enhancing the institution's recognition and growth in this field. Additionally, there was an expressed need to advocate for public health careers, positioning them as valuable, long-term options and encouraging broader workforce engagement in the sector. These efforts would collectively raise the institution's profile and strengthen its impact both locally and globally.

2. Faculty and Staff Development: There was strong support for providing faculty with training in team management to enhance leadership skills. Participants expressed a desire to foster greater creativity in teaching, particularly at the undergraduate level, allowing faculty more freedom to innovate in their classrooms. The need for seed funding and grants to support high-risk or innovative projects was also emphasized, as well as a call to expand mentorship initiatives with other units on campus (i.e. physician mentorship program) and with a focus on clinical faculty. Finally, there was a push to establish more recognition for faculty excellence, including the creation of honorary and distinguished professorships to celebrate and retain top talent.

3. Curriculum and Program Development: Several opportunities for enhancing curriculum and program development were identified. Participants emphasized the importance of integrating career advising directly into the undergraduate curriculum to better support students' career planning. There was also a call for expanding hands-on learning opportunities, such as shadowing in fields like physical therapy and nutrition, to provide students with real-world experience. Cross-listing courses to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and offering more relevant seminars tailored to student needs were also highlighted as ways to enrich the academic experience. Additionally, there was strong support for increasing opportunities for students to engage with one another, fostering networks and peer support. Finally, a broader promotion of graduate programs was seen as key to attracting more students and enhancing the institution's academic offerings.

4. Support and Well-Being: The listening tour highlighted the importance of prioritizing support and well-being for faculty and staff. Participants stressed the need to emphasize self-care, recognizing the demands placed on faculty and staff and the value of promoting mental and physical health. Additionally, there was a call for a more structured orientation process for new staff, ensuring they are well-informed about HR policies and departmental procedures from the outset. To further strengthen workplace culture, participants recommended organizing events such as Staff Appreciation Day to recognize contributions, foster a positive environment, and enhance staff morale. These initiatives aim to create a more supportive and cohesive work atmosphere. Undergraduates expressed the need for increased and creative communication about wellness resources available to them on campus and within the ASPH.

5. Innovation and Infrastructure: Employees expressed a strong desire to enhance innovation and infrastructure across the school. Participants highlighted the need to streamline processes and create more structure, including improvements such as an HR portal and a more organized school calendar. There was an emphasis on leveraging data from reports and surveys to inform better decision-making and planning. Additionally, there was a call to forecast future educational and workforce trends to ensure the institution remains responsive and adaptable. To support research and academic growth, the development of services (i.e. biostatistics core) was suggested, along with enhanced support for specialized facilities (e.g. BSL3 labs), to advance scientific work. These efforts aim to improve operational efficiency and strengthen the schools and institution's capacity for research and innovation.