Study Makes the Case for Employee Engagement in Higher Education Institutions

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Cornerstone OnDemand and Ellucian survey uncovers reasons behind employee disengagement in higher education institutions and how employee engagement programs can impact organizational success.

SANTA MONICA, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE) A recent Gallup survey revealed that more than half of higher education faculty members (52 percent) are not engaged in their work, and an additional 14 percent are actively disengaged. But what are the causes of this lack of engagement, and what are the broader implications? A new study from Cornerstone OnDemand (NASDAQ: CSOD) and Ellucian, and conducted by Human Capital Media Research and Advisory Group, suggests that faculty members and staff at higher education institutions are disengaged at work due to several factors, including a lack of professional development opportunities and overwhelming workloads. Ultimately, this disengagement leads to high employee turnover rates.

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Conducted by Cornerstone and Ellucian, the “2016 Employee Engagement and Retention in Higher Education” study surveyed 469 respondents who work at higher education institutions, including public, private and for-profit colleges and universities. For the purpose of the survey, “faculty” includes professors, assistants and researchers, while “staff” includes administrators, as well as support and grounds personnel.

According to the study, faculty and staff are seen as having a great impact (81 percent of respondents) on student success. However, despite this influence, nearly half (47 percent) of institutions neither track nor measure employee engagement. And, 39 percent of higher education institutions surveyed do not offer any form of employee engagement opportunities, such as leadership development, recognition programs or coaching.

Other key survey findings include:

- Attracting and Retaining Employees in Higher Education is a Common Challenge. The survey results indicate that academic institutions are having a hard time sourcing and retaining top talent for both faculty (61 percent sourcing, 59 percent retaining) and staff alike (62 percent sourcing, 69 percent retaining). Although this is due in part to compensation, it’s reported that workload, workplace culture and competition from other colleges and universities are all top drivers of employee attrition. Additionally, 41 percent of respondents
say turnover is above average for staff at their college or university, and 27 percent say the same is true for faculty. Nearly three-quarters agree that there is a direct correlation between employee engagement and employee retention (71 percent for faculty, 80 percent for staff).

- Few Higher Education Institutions Calculate the Financial Impact of Employee Turnover. Despite the sourcing and retention challenges flagged in the survey results, only 29 percent of respondents said their institution calculates the financial impact of employee turnover. Employee engagement programs, such as professional development, employee mentoring and flexible work options, can result in better retention rates and significant cost savings for the organization over time. For example, Iowa State University estimates an average savings of more than $83,000 per faculty member retained when engagement practices are applied, according to the American Council on Education.

- Learning and Development Opportunities Lead to Employee Loyalty. In an open question to respondents asking what employee engagement initiatives could improve student outcomes, there was an overwhelming amount of feedback pointing to more professional development and learning opportunities. According to the survey, 97 percent of respondents feel that personal development programs for all employees have an effect on student success.

What's more, the institutions that offer development opportunities to their employees are approximately twice as likely to have less turnover than those who don't, which underscores just how important it is for employees to feel valued at work. Those who are given opportunities to learn and grow and who feel they are being invested in are much more likely to remain loyal to their employer.

**Comments on the News**

“One definite conclusion we can draw from the results of this survey is the need for continuous learning and development for higher education employees. At academic institutions, learning is heavily focused on the students, and rightfully so. However, research shows that the colleges and universities that invest in learning and development programs for both faculty and staff have more engaged employees, which can greatly impact the success of the students,” said Mike Bollinger, global AVP of thought leadership and advisory services for Cornerstone OnDemand. “Faculty and staff members help create the student experience, and it’s up to the institution to provide their employees with the learning curriculum, professional development opportunities and recognition they deserve to help both higher education employees and their students succeed.”

“Higher education institutions face unique challenges in regards to sourcing, retaining and engaging employees. Nearly half of all higher education institutions don’t track employee engagement, and less than 30 percent measure the cost of turnover, which stresses the need for academic institutions to reassess priorities and implement change,” said Laura Weathersby, human capital management expert and director of product management for Ellucian. “One of the first steps in overcoming these challenges is evaluating employee engagement and sentiment to establish a baseline, then setting achievable goals for improvement. Employee engagement can’t be a one-size-fits-all approach. It’s important to really listen to employees and source feedback and suggestions from them to build an effective engagement strategy that will benefit employees and students alike.”

**Additional Resources**

- To access the full results of the 2016 Employee Engagement and Retention in Higher Education survey, visit [www.cornerstoneondemand.com/highereducationengagement](http://www.cornerstoneondemand.com/highereducationengagement)

- To learn more about Cornerstone OnDemand’s products and services for higher education, visit [www.cornerstoneondemand.com/higher-education](http://www.cornerstoneondemand.com/higher-education).
For more information about Ellucian’s higher education software offerings, visit www.ellucian.com.

About the Survey

Cornerstone OnDemand and Ellucian collaborated with the Human Capital Media Research and Advisory Group to conduct the “2016 Employee Engagement and Retention in Higher Education” survey from June 20 to July 18, 2016, among 469 participants ages 18 years and over who are employed full or part time at a higher education institution. The survey was sent to HR professionals at the manager level and above, and has a margin of error of 5 percent. Results were collected online and all responses were voluntary. Respondents came from institutions of all types, including public, private and for-profit institutions.

About Ellucian

Ellucian is the worldwide leader of software and services designed for higher education. More than 2,400 institutions in 40 countries rely on Ellucian to help enable the mission of higher education for over 18 million students. Ellucian provides student information systems (SIS), finance and HR, recruiting, retention, analytics and advancement software solutions. With more than 1,400 institutions subscribing to Ellucian’s cloud services and SaaS offerings, the company is one of the largest providers of cloud-based solutions. Ellucian also supports the higher education community with a range of professional services, such as application software implementation, training, education, and management consulting. Visit Ellucian at www.ellucian.com.

About Cornerstone OnDemand

Cornerstone OnDemand (NASDAQ: CSOD) is the global leader in cloud-based learning and talent management software. The company’s solutions help organizations realize the potential of the modern workforce. From recruitment, onboarding, training and collaboration, to performance management, compensation, succession planning and analytics, Cornerstone is designed to enable a lifetime of learning and development that is fundamental to the growth of employees and organizations.

Based in Santa Monica, California, the company's solutions are used by more than 2,700 clients worldwide, spanning 26.3 million users across 191 countries and 42 languages. To learn more about Cornerstone, visit us on Twitter, Facebook and our blog. www.cornerstoneondemand.com

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