Brian Flaherty's candor is refreshing. “For years, we’ve seen the [ND Voice] data that shows we have issues around respect and fairness,” the Graduate School’s operations director discloses. The details behind the data, though, have been harder to uncover. “When I drilled down into our data and talked to folks, most of my team would say they get treated fairly, but they hear stories of people who don’t.”

Human Resources consultant Lori Maurer understood where those stories were coming from. “It often comes out, in some way, that staff who work in the academy feel a disconnect with the faculty,” she says.

Flaherty knew bridging the gap between faculty and staff would be a sensitive and challenging area to tackle, “but the Graduate School decided to take that on.”

The Graduate School’s ND Voice committee recommended the creation of a book club for staff, and even recommended a specific book: *Working Effectively with Faculty* by Susan Christy.

Written by a professor, the book helps readers understand what faculty do and why they do it. “We had Graduate School faculty sitting at the table with us,” Flaherty says, “and we had open and honest discussions about our experiences, the author’s suggestions, and how we might close the gap.” Though the book offered hypothetical scenarios and techniques for addressing them, “it’s another thing to hear your own colleagues share their experiences and ideas,” Flaherty says. “And it’s a giant leap to be able to have that conversation with faculty members sitting at the table.”

Flaherty now notices the stories have changed – participants say reading and discussing the book has improved their working relationships immensely. “Since its inception, the ND Voice process has created an environment in the Graduate School where all issues are on the table, and every voice matters. This is just another example of that culture.”

Flaherty is also hopeful that perceptions of respect and fairness have increased accordingly, “but we’ll have to see the ND Voice 2014 results to confirm that.” As for encouraging staff in his immediate unit to participate in this year’s survey, Flaherty’s confidence is high. “Our unit is small. The drive to get participation is easy, because we don’t get to see our data if we don’t,” Flaherty says. “That’s the way I sell it to our team – ‘without everyone’s participation, Notre Dame will hear us but we won’t hear ourselves. So if you want to impact what we do here, speak now.’ And we get almost 100% every time.”

To other departments seeking to encourage participation, Flaherty offers his own support for ND Voice 2014. “A lot can change in two years,” he notes. On the other hand, “some of the things we try to tackle are culture shifts, and they take time.” The bi-annual ND Voice survey “is how we can tell if we are moving in the right direction.”

ND Voice 2014 is the University’s fifth bi-annual employee engagement survey. This confidential survey asks your opinions on workplace topics such as training, benefits, management, and more. Your feedback helps the University – and your department – spot opportunities and take action.

How is the survey used? The University looks at the overall results, and each department also looks at its own. When compared to previous surveys, trends emerge. Did prior action areas improve? Have new opportunities developed? Your feedback starts the sort of conversations that can lead to positive changes like this one.