PRESIDENT'S CABINET RETREAT

LISTENING TO UNDERSTAND:
ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

Overview

The listening tour initiative began in January and concluded the first week of August. This included a campus listening tour, a state-wide alumni tour, and an online feedback form open to all members of the internal and external TU community: students, faculty, staff, alumni, parents, Towson area neighbors and local business leaders.

During this stretch, President Ginsberg hosted 54 listening tour meetings on campus, which were attended by nearly 2,000 TU community members. Individual sessions were held with each academic college and administrative division, as well as student organizations, alumni and external community partners. In addition, there were 3 large-scale forums for all university faculty, all staff and the entire student body – each hosted in conjunction with the respective shared governance organization. A final, university-wide forum was held virtually for any community members who had been unable to attend previously scheduled sessions.

President Ginsberg also took to the "Tiger Trail" and embarked on a state-wide tour to meet with alumni. This included receptions for alumni residing in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, and the District of Columbia. There were 9 receptions attended by a total of 527 individuals.

A listening tour feedback form was available to campus and community partners to provide input on campus opportunities, challenges, and points of pride and allowed respondents to suggest future initiatives and discuss what TU will be in 2035. There were 216 feedback form submissions at the conclusion of the listening tour sessions.

Table 1 highlights the number of listening tour and Tiger Trail session and participants as well as the number of listening tour feedback form submissions.

Table 1: Listening Tour by the Numbers

Event	Number of Sessions	Number of Participants
Listening Tour	54	1,959
Tiger Trail Receptions	9	527
Feedback Form	n/a	216
Total	63	2,702

Meeting Format

The goal of each session was to hear directly from constituents through honest, authentic conversation. President Ginsberg began each meeting with a brief introduction and his vision for the listening tour, then posed a series of open-ended questions to solicit feedback on various aspects of the university, as well as the employee and student experience.

Participants were largely responsible for leading the conversation. To encourage honest dialogue among employees, senior leaders were asked not to attend their respective sessions. This included deans, associate/assistant deans, vice presidents and associate/assistant vice presidents. With exception to President Ginsberg and his staff, no university employees attended the student-focused sessions. In addition, listening tour session participants were informed that their responses would remain anonymous.

To maintain the same experience for every unit, a standard set of six questions were developed and used at each session. As needed, President Ginsberg asked additional questions that were specifically relevant to the group's area of focus within the university. Examples of such instances included the Resource Planning and Advisory Committee (RPAC) session, which primarily focused on the university budget model; sessions with public safety; and any student group meetings.

STANDARD DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

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1. What makes you most proud to be a member of the Towson University community?

2. What are the most important things that you and your department do in support of Towson University's mission?

3. What are the greatest challenges that TU and/or your unit will face in the coming years? How can we be prepared to address them?

4. Thinking ahead to 2035 – what are your long-term goals for the future of TU?

5. If you were president for a day and had a magic wand to make anything possible, what's the one thing you would change or implement?

6. What else would you like for me to learn about your perspective?

Feedback Form

The feedback form launched in November 2023, prior to the start of listening tour sessions. Respondents were required to provide their TU affiliation (e.g., student, community member). Individuals had the opportunity to submit responses anonymously, and each question was optional. There were 216 submissions, with the percentage of respondents in each group reported as follows:
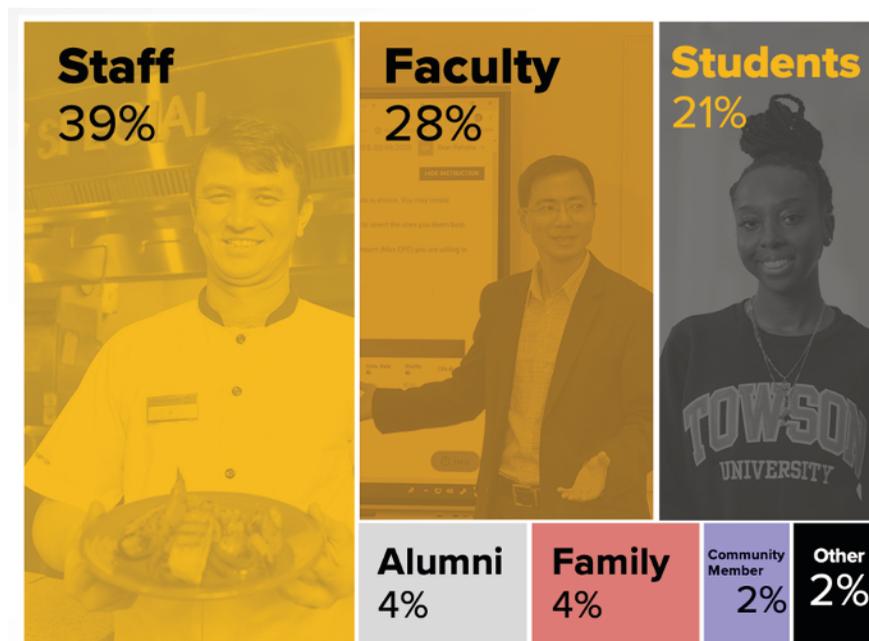
A standard set of six questions were developed. There was no character limit for responses. The following standard discussion questions were provided.

1. Where are the opportunities at TU?

2. Where are the challenges at TU?

3. What about the university makes you most proud to be associated with TU?

4. If you were president for a day, what's one initiative you'd address?

5. What initiatives or programming would make this great university even greater?

6. Is there anything else you'd like President Ginsberg to know about TU?

ANALYSIS

Overview

Responses from Questions 1, 2, and 3 (Q1, Q2, and Q3) from the listening tour feedback form are provided in this section. Analysis compares responses in the listening tour feedback form to information shared during listening tour sessions and alumni receptions, where available. In addition, the most reported initiatives identified from Q5 in the listening tour feedback form and Q4 and Q5 from the listening tour sessions are also provided. As Q6 in both the listening tour sessions and the feedback form are specific to information President Ginsberg should know about TU or the community, responses are excluded from this analysis.

Opportunities

Table 2 reports the key opportunities identified for each thematic area and the percentage of responses for each identified theme from Q1 of the listening tour feedback form. The response rate for Q1 was 65%.

Analysis of these responses identified 14 key themes, with specific opportunity areas outlined in Table 2. **Employee support and development** (34%), **student support and engagement** (27%), and **campus resources and facilities** (22%) were the three most common responses. Because no similar or equivalent question to Q1 in the feedback form was identified from the standard listening tour session questions, only responses from the feedback form are provided.

Table 2: Q1 Listening Tour Feedback Form Responses

Identified Theme	Key Opportunities		Percent of Responses
Employee Support & Development	Research mentoring Support outside of disciplinary silos New faculty training & orientation	Research collaboration Understanding TU community Involvement in PLCs FACET	34%
Student Support & Engagement	Undergraduate and graduate research Extracurricular events & activities Collaboration Performing arts Diversity	Clubs & organizations Value of student learning & growth Job opportunities and internships Athletic academic advisors & support Commitment to student success	27%
Campus Resources & Facilities	Cook Library Science Complex Center for Student Diversity	Writing Center Career Center Small class sizes	22%
Program & Curriculum Development	Expanded majors & graduate programs Emerging majors & programs General Studies major	Comprehensive Learner Record Online & hybrid programs Osher Institute	21%
Administrative Support & Development	HR workshops & Training Efficient department operations Professional development opportunities	Administrative assistant advancement Development of administrative pipelines Process improvements (e.g., StraTUs)	21%
Diversity & Inclusion	Diversity initiatives Affinity groups	Office of Institutional Inclusion & Equity Diversity fellows	20%
Financial Support and Opportunities	Funding for academic conferences Funding for internships Tuition remission	Scholarships & financial aid Hill-Lopes Scholarship	15%
Community & External Relations	Baltimore business collaborations Partnerships with local hospitals Community engagement	Connections with Baltimore area Engagement with local partners StarTUp	9%
Campus Safety	TUPD		8%
Marketing & Recruitment	Enrollment growth as recruitment tool Leveraging faculty for recruitment	Athletics as a marketing tool COFAC for marketing and recruitment	7%
Events & Social Engagements	Student social footprint	TU Today promoting campus events	6%
Technology & Infrastructure	Integrated data systems Online education and tech advancements	Student technology experience improvement	5%
Health & Wellness	Systematic responses to mental health	Mental health support for athletes	4%
Political Advocacy	Progress towards MSI designation	Commitment to progressive ideals	2%

+Percentages may not equal 100%, as respondents may have provided feedback in one or more thematic area.
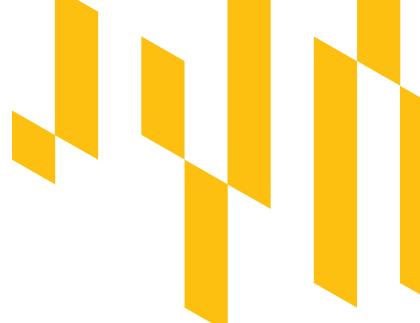
Employee support and development was the most identified opportunity theme for listening tour feedback respondents, with 34% of responses providing feedback in this thematic area. Research mentoring and collaboration, professional learning communities, and FACET were offered as potential opportunities for growth and sustainability.

More than a quarter of responses noted **student support and engagement** as a key opportunity area for TU, with student supports such as undergraduate and graduate research, student diversity, and extracurricular events and activities highlighted as engagement opportunities to build student success. Around 20% of responses identified **campus resources and facilities** such as Cook Library and Science Complex, program and curriculum development through creating and expanding innovative programs, administrative support and development to include process improvement, and diversity and inclusion initiatives such as the diversity fellows program as key opportunity thematic areas.

About 15% of responses reported **financial support** as a key theme, providing options including funding for academic conference and internships, scholarships and financial aid, and tuition remission as prime opportunities. The remaining seven opportunity themes received fewer than 10% of responses. Themes include c**ommunity and external relations, campus safety, marketing and recruitment, events and social engagement, technology and infrastructure, health and wellness,** and **political and organizational advocacy.**

Challenges

Table 3 reports the key challenges identified for each thematic area and the percentage of responses for each identified theme from Q2 of the listening tour feedback form. The response rate for Q2 was 73%. Analysis of these responses identified 9 key themes, with **campus operations** (82%), **finance** (78%), and **staff support** (58%) reported as the three most common responses. Specific challenges related to each thematic area are noted in Table 3.

Table 3: Q2 Listening Tour Feedback Form Responses

Identified Theme	Key Opportunities		Percent of Responses
Operations	Workload management Telework policy Parking policies & transporation Process improvement Resource allocation Communication transparency	Technology systems Performance assessment Dining hall quality Housing and cleanliness Campus facilities Safety & security	82%
Finance	Compensation Parking (cost) Budget allocation	Tuition & fees Financial aid Fee structures	78%
Staff Support	Workload Turnover & retention Compensation Career ladders Professional development	Lack of diversity Morale Unclear roles & responsibilities Communication Hiring practices	58%
Administration	Parking (availability & accessibility) Turnover Career ladders Lack of uniform processes	Unclear decision-making Leadership Communication & transparency Creep of responsibilities scope	47%
Communication	Transparency Protocols Information sharing Between departments	With leadership With students With alumni With families & the community	42%
Diversity & Inclusion	BIPOC turnover Lack of diversity in leadership Gendered-racism	Lack of support Discrimination Cultural sensitivity	34%
Faculty Support	Workload Advising Tenure & promotion Compensation equity R2 expectations, roles & responsibilities Recruitment Turnover & retention Grant writing support	Lack of diversity Visibility and communication Curriculum Morale Professional development Unaddressed complaints DFW rates MHEC	33%
Student Success	Advising Mental health Diversity mismatch with faculty & staff Scholarships & financial aid	Engagement & traditions Retention Course scheduling & availability Accommodations	33%
Engagement Gaps	Campus culture Athletics Traditions Alumni	Community building Arts & entertainment Greater Baltimore Local neighbors	23%

+Percentages may not equal 100%, as respondents may have provided feedback in one or more thematic area.
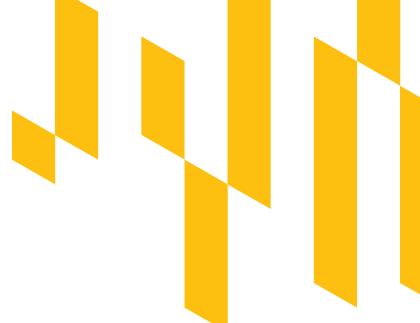
Q2 from the standard listening tour session questions was identified as similar or equivalent to Q2 from the listening tour feedback form. Information provided during the listening tour sessions aligned with responses from the feedback form. The most reported challenge in the listening tour feedback form was **campus operations** and **administrative policies**, with 82% of responses reporting key challenges such as **workload management, parking,** and **telework**. Workload difficulties were reported for both faculty and staff in listening tour sessions. **Parking** was mentioned as a challenge in more than 50% of listening tour sessions, with difficulties reported for employees, students, visitors, and campus partners. Additional campus transportation challenges, most notably unreliable shuttle service, cause delays for those that need to commute to the campus core from exterior lots. Units also shared concern about **inconsistent telework policies** across the university.

Nearly 80% of listening tour feedback form responses highlighted **financial challenges. Compensation, budget & resource management** were frequent topics of concern in listening tour sessions, which is consistent with feedback form responses. Listening tour session participants often noted that the university's budget does not match campus growth and that as TU increases enrollment, programs and buildings are expected to be developed without increased funding to support these projects.

Staff support was the third most reported challenge from the listening tour feedback form, with 58% of responses indicating challenges such as **silos** and **career growth.** Participants in listening tour sessions echoed a desire for more **professional development** and internal career growth. It was often noted in staff sessions that employees do not feel there is an upward trajectory within their current roles or departments.

Frustration with **administrative processes** and **inconsistent policies** communicated during the listening tour sessions reflected findings from the feedback form. Several units noted the **lack of integrated programs** across campus for sharing information and streamlining processes. **Mandatory supervisor training** was a common topic referenced as a method to mitigate inconsistent administrative processes and policies.
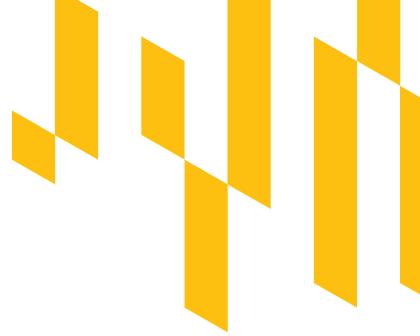
Employees often noted a **lack of transparency in decision making** during listening tour sessions, consistent with feedback form findings. Employees expressed a desire to engage in dialogue with leadership.

About a third of listening tour feedback form responses cited **diversity and inclusion challenges** such as a lack of diversity among faculty and senior campus leadership and **high turnover** for BIPOC faculty and staff.

Confusion about R2 expectations, grant writing, workload, and advising were indicated as **faculty support challenges**, consistent with statements made during listening tour sessions.

Student groups often mentioned **dining challenges** and **lack of weekend programming** as student success challenges. Student **housing, affordability** and **basic need insecurity** were also mentioned, especially among faculty and student-support teams. Lack of campus housing was frequently reported as a major challenge, especially for transfer students, and several students and student-support teams shared instances of students struggling with food insecurity.

Other topics that were common among listening tour sessions participants that were not as frequent in feedback form responses include:

- **Lack of flexible class offerings** for working students
- **Lack of alumni involvement** in giving and engagement opportunities
- The **future of higher education** and **proving value** in a college degree
- **Athletics attendance** as a measure of pride and community engagement
- **Perception of TU** as a teacher's college and commuter school
- **Lack of recognition** outside of Maryland
- **Mental health and well-being**
- **International recruitment** and better **financial support for graduate students**

Points of Pride

Table 4 reports the points of pride identified and the percentage of responses for each identified theme from Q3 of the listening tour feedback form. The response rate for Q3 was 62%. Analysis of these responses identified 27 points of pride, with **student diversity** (58%), **positive culture** (55%), and **good colleagues** (49%) as the most common responses.

Table 4: Q3 Listening Tour Feedback Form Responses

Identified Theme	Percent of Responses
Student Diversity	58%
Positive Culture	55%
Colleagues	49%
Reputation	47%
Commitment to Student Success	45%
Beautiful Campus	38%
Caring Faculty	31%
Programs & Opportunities	27%
Community Connections	19%
Resources for Students	15%
Campus Safety	14%
Faculty & Staff Support	13%
Undergraduate Research	13%
Career Center & Job Opportunities	12%
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion	11%
Arts & Culture	11%
Family-Oriented Environment	10%
Financial Accessibility	9%
Supportive Community	8%
Athletics and Athlete Support	8%
Leadership & Mentorship	7%
Alumni Contributions	6%
Events & Activities	5%
Innovation & Change	4%
Academic Excellence	3%
Career Readiness	2%

+Percentages may not equal 100%, as respondents may have provided feedback in one or more thematic area.
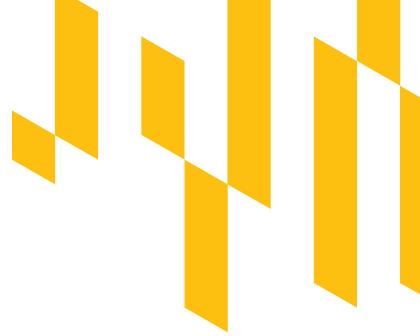
Q1 from the standard listening tour session questions was identified as similar or equivalent to Q3 from the listening tour feedback form. Information provided during the listening tour sessions aligned with responses from the feedback form. Both faculty and staff participants identified pride in **student success, appreciation for colleagues,** and **beautiful campus facilities**.

Caliber of students and **student success** were often the first pride points mentioned and often echoed by colleagues throughout the conversation during listening tour sessions. **Diversity of the TU student body** was frequently mentioned, in alignment with feedback form responses.

Employees frequently praised their **colleagues** and noted that TU is home to a **positive culture** and very **caring community**.

TU's beautiful campus was a major point of pride among both listening tour session participants, in line with feedback form respondents. Aspects of TU's beautiful campus include native landscaping and impressive new facilities such as Science Complex, College of Liberal Arts, and the College of Health Professions buildings.

Employees feel as though TU and their work help **make a difference in people's lives** by supporting students through the transition to adulthood, helping students thrive, and community outreach programs.

TU faculty, staff, and community partners noted pride in the **institution's growth** – both in its physical campus and in prestige/recognition.

Hands-on experiential learning and **undergraduate research participation** were frequently mentioned during listening tour sessions, more often than reflected in the feedback form.

LOOKING AHEAD

Upcoming Initiatives

Based on analysis of feedback and listening tour comments, 28 initiatives have been identified as potential administrative priorities.

- Updating university budget model
- R2 infrastructure & support
- Performance-based merit & compensation
- Parking policies
- Advising models
- Career ladders and professional development
- Supervisor & managerial training
- Grant writing support
- Sustainability practices
- Promotion & tenure policies
- Systematizing & simplifying policies across the university
- Telework policies
- Faculty and staff diversity
- Campus dining options
- Adjust market-based compensation
- Investment in employee well-being
- Transparency in decision-making and increased communication
- Promoting faculty and staff research, projects, successful grants & presentations
- Increasing alumni engagement (leveraging faculty, staff, students, and existing alumni networks)
- Strengthening partnerships with neighbors (TU community, Baltimore City, other universities)
- Cross-discipline collaboration – breaking down silos, supporting interdisciplinary research opportunities
- Expanding student research opportunities
- Market and elevate the reputation of the university
- Enhancements to the university's resource base
- Innovative new academic programs
- International student recruitment
- Student support services – food insecurity, housing, support for working students
- College readiness expectations for future students