As we conclude this academic year at the University of Vermont, Staff Council has had a very busy year! Most recently, on April 11th we offered a Staff Women’s Forum for all female-identified staff. Over 100 attendees were present. We were honored that our presenters were amazing women from our University community. Lynn Budnik, Advising & Recruitment Manager, presented *Game Changing Career Tips for Women – Be a “Fearless Girl.”* Patty Prelock, Dean of the College of Nursing and Health Services, presented *Women as Leaders: Finding our Sense of Purpose.* This event was a huge success. The forum prompted thoughtful, reflective and meaningful conversations and the feedback we have received has been overwhelmingly positive. We plan to offer another event of this kind soon, and are considering offering two a year due to the overwhelming interest in additional sessions. We sincerely appreciate the University administration for funding this event for the staff.

Considering all aspects of employees’ working lives, in April Staff Council submitted recommendations to administrators regarding the parking and commuting needs of not only non-represented staff, but also the entire university community. Given the new construction on campus, this is an ideal time to begin the conversation of how to ensure that the University’s parking situation is sustainable.

Parking has been an increasing concern of our employee community for the last several years, particularly as parking spaces continue to be eliminated through various construction projects. While the University provides outstanding support for commuting via public transit, this option is not feasible for all employees, particularly those who live a significant distance away, those who have children and those who cannot take advantage of flexible scheduling. Many employees must park a significant distance away from their places of work and shuttle coverage can be scarce, necessitating long walks to and from one’s office. For much of the year these long walks take place in the dark, which can create safety concerns. The waiting list for a Green Zone permit – encompassing the most desirable and most convenient spaces – is estimated at more than a five year wait. Meanwhile, employees have become concerned because it appears that the University has not taken these commuting needs into account when developing our long-term strategic plan.

The Personal and Professional Development Committee, which also works on all issues relating to employees’ work environments, has been closely partnering with Transportation & Parking to develop recommendations for policy and infrastructure changes to improve the situation. Options exist for expanding our parking capacity, and Staff Council urges administration to reassess and
improve old parking policies, but also to work with Transportation and Parking to develop a reasonable plan for parking expansion and to dedicate resources to making this a reality.

In other areas, Staff Council has been grateful for our partnership with HRDMA, which resulted in much collaborative work this year. HRDMA recently released online performance management tools (and associated trainings) which will improve the rate at which staff receive comprehensive performance evaluations to support their professional needs. However, the recently-released salary increase for FY18 allows for only half a percent discretionary merit awarded to excellent staff, an amount that we feel is not sufficient to inspire excellent performance (half a percent merit increase on a $30,000 salary grosses approximately $6 more per pay period). We support HRDMA and the administration’s efforts to build a merit system for rewarding our exceptional staff, but we hope the amount of merit will eventually increase in order to truly reward those employees who go above and beyond.
Staff Council President Karmen Swim’s Remarks to the Board of Trustees
May 19, 2017

As has been outlined in my reports to the Board throughout the year, we have had a busy year. Some of the highlights include:

- Improved communication with the staff around FY18 increases to clarify and make the process more transparent around how merit increases are earned at the University (concerns we heard from many staff last year).
- This year, the only feedback we are receiving around FY18 staff increases is that they feel the additional .5% for merit isn’t enough to truly reward exceptional performance. We continue to support the President’s vision to reward exceptional staff with merit increases and hope the amount of merit will increase over time.
- We have seen the roll out of the online performance management tools at the University along with educational trainings on how to give a Performance Review and how to use the system.
- We have scheduled four Focus Groups in the next couple of weeks to discuss the experiences of staff and HR Reps around the Performance Review and Merit process. We look forward to receiving valuable feedback to continue to make improvements next year.
- We recently submitted a recommendation to administrators regarding parking and commuting needs. We outlined concerns and we urged administration to reassess and improve old parking policies, and to work with Transportation and Parking to develop a reasonable plan for parking expansion and to dedicate resources to make this a reality.
- In additional to all the Committee work, Staff Council Leadership presented a Staff Women’s Forum to provide a safe place for female-identified staff to come together to hear inspirational speakers (thank you Dean Patty Prelock & Lynn Budnik) and have an open discussion on working at the University. The forum was well attended…with over 100 staff joining us. It was such a big success that we have decided that we want to make it an annual event.
- I had the honor to Chair the Our Common Ground Staff Award this year –

I have served on the committee since inception of the award and each year and when reading the nomination packets (21 this year, by the way) I am humbled. We clearly have extraordinary staff who work here at the University!

Thank you, President Sullivan, for your vision of this award.

In closing, the Council representatives continue to inspire me with their tireless commitment to helping bring positive change to the University. They should all be applauded for their work.
Of particular interest to UVM staff members may be:

1. Discussion in the Financial Report about the importance of liquidity, debt considerations, “spendable cash” (i.e. cash on hand that’s not allocated to restricted purposes) in the decision-making of the BOT when considering financial decisions. The committee is working with “projected outcomes from strategic financial planning model” that is projecting UVM’s financial position as the university moves forward to complete the current capital campaign and consider a campaign to build the new proposed athletic complex. These projections are based on scenarios that include different admissions targets for students, level staff-funding, increasing the number of FTEs, with different levels of salary increases, variances in fund raising income, capital projects’ costs, health care, maintenance, utilities and more. The report that was shared is not available to pass along here, but worth noting is that the university’s leadership of administrators and trustees have all of these (including salary increases and the implication of creating new staff positions) as factors in the discussion.

2. Not as vigorously discussed but still present in the considerations of UVM’s financial rating is the reality of Post-Retirement Medical Benefits (PRMB) as a financial obligation on our balance sheet. VP Richard Cate shared that the rating agencies say that as long as UVM is meeting its obligations (i.e. paying those obligations), these will not affect the bond rating. We are not unique as many other institutions carry those costs.

Other notes from the report:
- The university approaches the end of the fiscal year with projections of $10M “to the good.”
- A strategic decision to reduce the number of non-degree summer students has, as expected, reduced enrollment in those programs.
- Again noted: when comparing UVM with other state schools’ financial pictures, important to note that other public institutions receive much more money (for tuition, debt, and capital projects) from their respective state governments.
- In UVM’s endowment investments, the US equities portion has been underperforming and the Investment Sub-Committee has a close eye on this.

Respectfully submitted,

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UVM Extension Center for Sustainable Agriculture