The Personal and Professional Development Committee of the Staff Council is pleased by the progress that has been made within the Division of Human Resources, Diversity and Multicultural Affairs to address the concerns it raised in the "Supervisory Training and Staff Performance Appraisal Recommendation" that was sent to President Sullivan in June 2013.

To further achieve one of President Sullivan’s main goals of “Promoting Academic Excellence and Cultivating Talent” in his Strategic Action Plan we must find ways to promote staff development.

As an organization, Staff Council has long heard examples of staff employees never receiving a performance appraisal during their tenure at the University of Vermont even though the Staff Handbook expresses that it is the general practice of the University for “each staff member to receive a thoughtful appraisal each year, although individuals may be evaluated more often.” To move beyond anecdotal feedback, Staff Council looked into this concern more in depth by incorporating questions in our 2014 Staff Council Survey. As a result, we found of the 628 individuals who participated in the survey, 35% had not received a review within the last year per staff handbook guidelines. More concerning is the 13% of respondents who had received their last performance appraisal more than 5 years ago.

The findings suggest that employees are not receiving feedback to improve their performance or to acknowledge their successes. We recognize that the recent announcement regarding flexibility in setting salary increases for FY16 sets the foundation for performance appraisals to be done each year for staff and we are
encouraged by the possibilities this cultural shift will produce to address salary equity, market compression and merit among staff employees.

We understand that a major component of addressing the specific concerns around performance appraisals involved a complicated update of the PeopleAdmin system and that work is currently underway to add a module to the system in order to be able to track performance appraisals. We also understand that once the module is live, it is the aim of the Division of Human Resources, Diversity and Multicultural Affairs (HRDMA) to begin a comprehensive review of the performance appraisal process which will also look at how it is related to a number of other systems and structures including, but not limited to UVM’s job classification system, career path progression, and supervisory training.

As this comprehensive review begins, we wish to play an active collaborative role in creating a performance appraisal process that incorporates best practices, addresses staff concerns, and builds confidence in the process among staff throughout the University. In support of the Statement of Collaboration between Staff Council and HRDMA, our hope is to engage in ongoing discussions with HRDMA leadership overseeing the work to update the performance appraisal process and potentially have members of our committee serve on the Advisory Group put together to assist with this effort so as to act as liaisons between our committee and HRDMA.

To this end, our committee has spent the majority of the 2014-2015 academic year looking into best practices around performance appraisals in higher education nationally and in the private sector locally. This background research was done by conducting a literature review on performance appraisal and by conducting informal interviews with local business leaders. Using the background information we have collected, we would like to discuss how these ideas could be incorporated and benefit the performance appraisal process for staff at the University. The following themes identify key ideas to consider in this important endeavor.

**Efficiency and Effectiveness**

One of the most important pieces of information we have learned for a performance appraisal process to be successful is that it must remain efficient and effective. This means having a structure or system in place that creates a foundational framework from which to start and that allows for flexibility and adaptation to address the diverse and often unique roles of employees across the University.

Integral to any performance appraisal structure or system are updated position descriptions that accurately articulate the role and responsibility of a position. There are concerns that position descriptions for many staff are outdated and do not recognize additions to individual workloads. This is a concern in instances where a staff member is doing more within the same body of work as well as when new tasks and more advanced skills are added and required. An added benefit to accurate position descriptions is that it prepares a department for changes in personnel so that the workload can be assessed and then appropriately distributed or realigned. Having accurate position descriptions is a daunting task, but one we hope can be incorporated into a revamped performance appraisal process.

We are encouraged by the Administrative Unit Review (AUR) process and the role it will play in also ensuring that position descriptions are updated and departments are held accountable for aligning their work with the Universities strategic goals and following best practices in their particular field.

In addition, we must also consider how we keep supervisors/managers and staff employees accountable for the completion of regular performance appraisals and recognize that it is not only the responsibility of the supervisor/manager but also that of the staff employee to engage in this process. This means understanding what pieces in the performance appraisal process belong to the supervisor/manager and the employee so as to
make the process transparent while fostering space for an earnest, honest discussion about performance to take place.

Guidance must also be provided on how the timing of performance appraisals impacts the budget building process and the awarding of salary increases especially as we consider years of service, education, and experience of our staff employees.

Citations:
- L. Kinney, HR Business Partner, General Electric Healthcare (personal communication, January 2015)

**Training**

In order to have an efficient and effective process, it is important to train those who are conducting performance appraisals while providing tips and strategies for engaging in discussions about performance. At the same time, it is important to help an employee better understand how the process works and their individual responsibilities and rights within it. This requires a comprehensive training approach and one that meets the needs of diverse supervisors/managers throughout the University who have different positions such as physicians, faculty, and staff. We also cannot be afraid to hold others accountable and mandate training so as to minimize the risks of retribution to the University and so that there is a common understanding as to the purpose and execution of performance appraisals. We would like to talk more about creating a timeline for the roll out of a comprehensive approach so that over a course of a few years, all supervisors and managers currently in their positions are gaining these important skills while making it an expectation of new hires to educate themselves on UVM’s performance appraisal process.

Citations:

**Competency vs. Skills/Matrix System**

We have also come to understand that having a competency based model vs. one focused on specifics tasks may help address issues regarding how staff can improve their skills while advancing in careers. We see an opportunity for a matrix around competencies to create a culture of improvement at what we need to do to meet the institution’s strategic goals. It also allows for preparing others without the intimidating or threatening feelings that may have occurred in past performance assessments.

We also learned about the importance of looking forward and setting clear and attainable goals within a performance appraisal process. Based on this background information we are concerned about ways in which we are developing our staff not only for their professional development, but also for the development of the University. While not the focus of our concern, access to professional development opportunities within and outside of UVM must be considered. This includes internal educational opportunities, such as those provided by Learning Services or through tuition remission, but also external opportunities with other institutions or organizations that would allow for continual and specific professional development necessary for the staff with unique roles at the University.

Citations:
- A. Routhier, HR Partner at DealerTrack (personal communication, January 2015)
Reframing the Purpose of Performance Appraisals

For several years, the Staff Council has argued against merit based increases until after a performance appraisal process was in place that built accountability so that consistent and fair reviews occurred. The recent announcement regarding flexibility in setting salary increases prepares us for attaining this goal. However, we also recognize that it has put emphasis on performance appraisals being tied directly to salary. This concept has made it difficult for staff throughout the University, but especially in our organization, to understand that there are multiple reasons for making the effort to conduct performance appraisals such as assessing an employee’s past performance and competencies, planning career progression, rewarding good performance and/or identify opportunities and talent. Research has shown that timely and well-constructed feedback by supervisors may improve organizational attitudes, reduce turnover, increase employee self-esteem, and may contribute overall to organizational human capital (Bontis et. Al, 2009). For these reasons and many others, we wish to begin reframing the discussion around performance appraisals so that we can discuss this in ways that better express its importance to individual growth and development as well as promoting efficient and effective behavior.

Citations:
- Article 1 “Contributing to Organizational Success Through Effective Performance Appraisal” by Robert Greene.

We thank you again for the dedication of the Division of Human Resources, Diversity and Multicultural Affairs to address our concerns and look forward to partnering with you on reviewing the performance appraisal process for staff at the University of Vermont through ongoing discussion and ways for our committee to be engaged in this work.