Summary of the February 5, 2013 Staff Council Meeting

The meeting included approval of draft minutes, an update from Staff Council President Catherine Symans, announcements from Staff Council Administrator Jeff Bukowski, updates from Standing Committee leaders, and discussions pertaining to next month’s edu@uvm workshops, progress of the Ad Hoc video campaign, improving internal communication at UVM, Staff Council Leadership’s upcoming meeting with President Sullivan, and changing the setup of meetings to foster more open communication during Staff Council meetings.

Staff Council President’s Update – Catherine Symans

Staff Council Leadership Meeting with University President Tom Sullivan

At her recent meeting with Vice President for Executive Operations Gary Derr, Catherine discussed the possibility of scheduling quarterly meetings with President Tom Sullivan as an opportunity to provide him with direct updates on staff concerns and the work of the Staff Council.

Also discussed were the Provost and Senior President search processes. On Tuesday, Feb. 5, ten members of Staff Council’s Executive Board met with a representative from the search firm Isaacson Miller to discuss what UVM considers to be the most important challenges for the next Provost. Johanna Brabham, manager of Residential Life and the Davis Center’s Custodial Services, is serving as the staff representative on the search committee. Staff Council will communicate with Johanna regularly to provide support. Staff was led to believe that two staff members would be placed on the search committee, not one, so Catherine will follow up on this and assured the group that Johanna “will do a good job for us.” In addition, it was suggested that some members of the search committee may technically be considered staff, even if Staff Council didn’t nominate them.

An external review committee will be looking at the structure of the President’s Commissions with a goal of concluding the review by the semester’s end. Catherine will provide more information as it becomes available.

President’s Advisory Council

On Jan. 23, the council met to discuss distance education and web-based learning. Following an introduction and overview of the topic by Dean of University Libraries Mara Saule, Dean of Continuing Education Cynthia Belliveau, and Vice President for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies Domenico Grasso, council members discussed the opportunities and challenges that distance education presents. President Sullivan sees this initiative as supplemental to UVM’s platform as a traditional, residential university.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees’ Executive Committee met on Jan. 14. President Sullivan reported that fiscal year ’14 budget discussions had begun in earnest with deans, vice presidents and the Faculty Senate committee on finance. The plan is to proceed with a multi-year approach to fiscal planning, which will be discussed at the Budget, Finance and Investment Committee meeting on Friday, Feb. 8.

Upcoming Meetings/Conclusion

Upcoming meetings include a quarterly meeting with Vice President of Human Resource Services Barbara Johnson, which will take place Tuesday, Feb. 12.

This Thursday, Feb. 7, Catherine, Renee Berteau, and Jeff Bukowski will meet with President Sullivan for the first of three quarterly meetings scheduled for this semester. On the agenda are the outreach video project, internal communication (i.e., obtaining news from the media versus from UVM) and the need for more institutional support of Human Resource Services.

The Board of Trustees Committee of the Whole will meet on Friday, Feb. 8, at which time Catherine will present her second Staff Council Report to the Board.

Catherine concluded her report by thanking Vice President of Staff Council Renee Berteau for chairing the Jan. 28 Staff Council Executive Board meeting in her absence, as well as for her “excellent and informative contribution” to the February edition of Staffline.
Announcements

Administrator Jeff Bukowski reminded Staff Council representatives that ski vouchers, as well as coupons for The Pump House and Bolton Valley, are still available in the Staff Council Office.

Only a few slots remain open for the Feb. 18 Casino Bus Trip to Montreal. A flier for the upcoming Boston Bus Trip on March 16 was distributed, and representatives are encouraged to spread the word around their units/divisions.

Jeff is still accepting nominations for positions up for election with the Board of Trustees’ standing committees. These include Educational Policy and Institutional Resources and the Audit Committee. The deadline to nominate is Feb. 22.

Staff Council is hosting two upcoming edu@uvm sessions on Thursday, March 7: a Town Meeting from 1 to 2 p.m., and “Taking Classes While Working at UVM” from 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. The former, open to all staff, provides the opportunity to learn about the work of Staff Council, voice concerns, ask questions and provide feedback. The latter – for which staff are already beginning to sign up – details information on taking classes at UVM while maintaining work/life balance. Registration information is available here.

Additionally, there will be a Town Forum for “Socially Responsible Investing” on Feb. 20 from 4 to 6 p.m. in the Silver Maple Ballroom, Davis Center. This will provide an opportunity for the UVM community to share their ideas about how UVM’s endowment funds should be invested. Marie Tiemann updated the group on this event, explaining that this town forum replaces the old “call for proposals” – so community members can submit questions and concerns, or put forth a proposal if they’re shareholders, and UVM can glean a sense of what the community is feeling. For example, many student groups do not support investing in fossil fuels.

Public Comment Period

No public comments were offered.

By-Law Updates

The required 2/3 of the Staff Council Representation was not present, so changes to by-laws regarding gender neutral language will be voted on at the next meeting.

Standing Committee Reports

The Social Committee reiterated details regarding the upcoming trip to Boston on March 16 for a flower show (optional for participants). Tickets are $36 for UVM staff/retirees, $41 for non-UVM guests, and an additional $20 to attend the flower show. Marie noted that the flower show’s Tea would take up most of the afternoon. The deadline to register is Friday, March 1 by 1 p.m.

The Compensation, Benefits and Budget committee has been unable to meet with University Budget Director Alberto Citarella due to scheduling conflicts. The committee is working to improve internal University communications with Vice President of Finance & Administration Richard Cate; the February Staffline includes a summary of their recent conversation about the budget, and representatives are encouraged to make their constituents aware of this to aid in increasing internal communication. Rodman Cory reported that the communication around the budget and the involvement of the committee have expanded. Richard will attend the Staff Council meeting on April 2.
The **Ad Hoc Video Committee** on the creation of a Staff Council Outreach Video will be rehearsing and filming this month between Feb. 13 and 22. More information will follow detailing speaking parts and rehearsal/filming dates and times. Meetings with UVM TV have been informative and productive.

**Other Business**

**Staff Council Leadership Meeting with President Sullivan**

Catherine asked representatives to contribute ideas to bring to the table at this upcoming meeting (which can also be [emailed](mailto:) to her). Some ideas included:

- Encourage informative, open letters to all UVM employees from President Sullivan, similar to communications from Former President Dan Fogel
- Encourage regular communication from President Sullivan in a tone to move the UVM community forward with a sense of community while valuing employees’ contributions
- Provide President Sullivan with Staff Council standing committee updates to increase his awareness of issues affecting staff on campus
- Address rumors regarding the FY14 budget

**edu@uvm Workshops**

The following suggestions were made in regard to the Town Meeting and the workshop on taking classes while working at UVM:

- Catherine and Renee would lead discussion
- One member from each standing committee would be present to talk about the roles and accomplishments of their committees
- Pose questions and ask for feedback so Staff Council can figure out how to best move forward
- Keep a conversational tone to foster comfort and an “organic” experience
- Encourage anyone to submit questions in advance; Staff Council will have a list of participants one week in advance so follow-up is possible
- Impress that Staff Council is open to all ideas
- Encourage staff to get involved in Staff Council as representatives or as part of standing committees

In regard to the workshop on taking classes while working, representatives raised the following concerns that may come up:

- Front end staff are less likely to be approved to miss work for class
- Accessibility varies from job to job and by supervisor
- In spite of tuition remission, student-employees are still taxed for their education and the taxation comes at the end of the year (this is not the case for children of employees)
- Scholarship is taxable when it exceeds a certain amount and graduate students don’t have the option for a tax write-off
- The taxation process is complex but it’s possible for Payroll to take out more money each pay period as an alternative to one lump sum at year’s end
- Michelle Chapman has a colleague in the School of Business who can answer general questions about tuition and taxes via email
More generally, the group discussed some of the pros and cons of edu@uvm. A wide range of workshops are offered, from basic computer skills to higher level courses. A positive response from University employees will generate a higher likelihood that courses will continue to be offered. Staff who work for Extension brought up a concern that it’s difficult for them to attend edu@uvm because they work off campus. Some suggestions to improve this included providing a podcast or live web streaming, delivering classes remotely and offering classes in Colchester. There are some hindrances due to HRS’s very small budget, but it may be possible to rent a video camera from the library to record the classes so that off-campus staff can download a .wav file of the workshop. Rodman encouraged any staff to contact HRS if they find difficulty in obtaining permission from a supervisor to attend.

**Public Comment Period and Room Setup**

Concerns have arisen regarding the setup of Staff Council meetings – namely, the setup discourages freedom of discussion, fosters conversational and physical distance, and makes it difficult for representatives to get to know each other. However, it does allow for a clearer view of the projected image on the screen and of name tags. The group decided that it will test out new arrangements – including “lecture style,” atrium circle, chevron and round tables, in an effort to encourage freer and more open conversation and a sense of community. This will occur over the next few meetings and afterwards, the group will decide what they liked best.

The next Staff Council meeting will be held in Waterman Building, Memorial Lounge on Tuesday, March 5, from 12:05 to 1:30 p.m.