Jon Reidel, Vice President Staff Council, will serve as Moderator of today’s Open Forum for Presidential and Vice Presidential Elections. He explained the Open Forum is bound to the meeting procedures and protocol of the Staff Council and that he would serve as moderator. Jon detailed the procedures and then introduced each candidate. The candidates were then randomly chosen to give their opening remarks, telling us a little bit about themselves and explaining why they are running for election.

Opening Statement by Ida Russin, Presidential Candidate:
Ida Russin: I work in the Graduate College, and have worked at UVM for just over five years. I work with a wide range of graduate students – US and international, young and not so young, pleasant and sometimes demanding. But I love the job and my coworkers, and we make the best of each day and provide quality services.”

A little bit of personal information – I’m married. I have a husband, a daughter who is a sophomore here at UVM, and a son who will be a freshman at Johnson State in the fall.

Even though I’ve been at UVM just over 5 years, I’ve been a Staff Council representative for two years, Chair of the Recreation Committee for those same two years, and a member of the Mastering the Maze Committee for three years. Through this volunteer work I have made wonderful friendships and connections throughout the University.

There are brilliant professors teaching brilliant students to do brilliant things at UVM. Our job as staff is to also be brilliant. The professor is teaching the course, but much more goes into that class. It is the planning of facilities to make the space available; it is the custodian who provides a clean place for the students to learn; it is the office support person who helped that student register for the course; it is the IT personnel who helped that student when their computer crashed; it is the registration and financial personnel that have kept everything behind the scenes in motion to allow the student to be able to be attending that class.

I believe that we all play an important part in the sustainability of the University. President Fogel has brought UVM to a higher level of enrollment and of academic prestige. Dean Grasso promises to make great strides in making UVM a premier small research University. I’d be very happy to help make sure that an honest and open dialogue continues from the executive level to Staff Council, and that everything is openly, honestly, and swiftly communicated to all staff.
Opening Statement by Michelle Smith, Vice-Presidential Candidate:
Michelle Smith: I'm the Green Building Coordinator here at the University. I work within Capital Planning and Management to assist in the planning processes to reduce the environmental footprint of our new capital construction and major renovation projects.

I have been part of the Staff Council for three years, always as a member of the Employee Environment and Facilities Committee; the last two years I have served as the chair.

I grew up in Vermont and graduated from the University in 2002 as an Environmental Studies major with a focus in ecological design and renewable energy systems. As a student and now an employee, I continue to explore and support what it means for UVM to be the "Environmental University", and in particular, what that means to staff. I see the Staff Council as a wonderful tool to be able to connect and educate staff members with the many existing resources available, as well as a mechanism to allow staff voices to be heard by senior administration.

I believe that it is appropriate to continue to encourage staff representation on existing administrative committees that recommend decisions to the senior administration which affect all staff. I also support the efforts to continue to educate each other and really facilitate the sharing of our collective intellectual knowledge amongst staff; there's a tremendous amount we can learn from each other, especially in terms of creative problem solving in this difficult financial time.

Lastly, I continue to support and promote social justice and the planning of events that offer something for all staff members. Everyone is receptive to a variety of information delivery, and by continuing to reach out in a variety of methods, I'm positive that Staff Council will continue to grow and evolve into the fantastic resource for staff that it was designed to be.

Opening Statement by Eric Hoefel, Presidential Candidate:
Eric Hoefel: Thank you for taking the time to come to today’s open forum, I look forward to your questions. My name is Eric Hoefel and I currently work in Enterprise Technology Services in the client services area, within the Division for Finance.

I am running for Staff Council President because while staff council has built a strong foundation over the past several years, we need to get better – we must improve because staff will continue to feel stress from budgetary pressure and the increasing pace of change. Staff salaries and benefits are 1/3 of the operating expense budget-benefit reductions and FTE cuts will likely be on the table when balancing future budgets.

To address this I will propose the following initiatives:

1. Develop and perform a staff survey – redone on a regular basis – build a database to back proposals and track trends in staff needs and concerns
2. Continue to push for a standardized appraisal process – critical as a basis for merit pay and professional development-the best way to increase the value of staff to UVM is by continuously improving knowledge and skills
3. Reduce stress related to change by advocating for better change management practices around initiatives that affect staff-who, what, when, where, why and most importantly, what does it mean for me?
4. Develop a standardized proposal format that addresses the issues that resonate with senior administrators and the board of trustees when they are determining how to allocate
resources-return on investment, how the proposal supports the university’s strategic objectives, and the risks or opportunities to the University it addresses

We will likely face significant challenges over the next several years but I am confident that together we can overcome them. I urge you to vote and get your co-workers to vote. Staff Council is the primary advocate for over 2,000 staff members and we need your support and involvement to succeed. Thank you.

**Moderator:** This brings us to the Q & A section. All things are on the table.

**Audience Member:** This is a short question. What specific skills do each of you bring to this role?

Michelle Smith: Where I sit in Capital Planning, I do know a lot of people and work with multiple groups of people from students, to faculty and staff. In conjunction with that, if I don't know the answer to the question, or the contact to address a question or problem, I can easily find that out.

Eric Hoefel: I know about the budget issues. I understand what the Board of Trustees is looking for and what they're willing to address. On the other side, I was one of the potential people who were targeted in layoffs last year, so I understand the stress. It was not handled well, so I can bring that side of the discussion together. Seeing both sides of an issue will help us to develop proposals that can be brought forward.

Ida Russin: I'm very organized, I run effective meetings, and I get things done. I don't like wasting my time in meetings, where no one is taking the action to get things done. We can achieve the goal or move on.

**Audience Member:** What do you see as the purpose of your role, as president, when conducting meetings and your role in the meetings you attend, and how do you translate that to staff?

Eric Hoefel: Great question. Again, as president, the key role is being the go-between, to listen to and address the issues brought before Staff Council, and have the ability to communicate and present proposals before senior administration. It's the president's role to see if things can be done, or know why they can't. So it's that go-between in running meetings and keeping the work of the Council on track. I'd like to help Council meetings become more like work sessions, and spend less time on process, and more time discussing issues before us.

Ida Russin: When I thought about running for president, I was worried about being out of my element. But after thinking about it, what I can bring to the Council is the ability to communicate messages that everyone is going to understand. We're not lawyers and accountants. We need information that we understand. I think I definitely would keep on with an agenda at the meetings, and make sure we can understand. I’ll work to bring proposals before administration. The answers to our questions maybe yes or no, but I will really push for those answers and communicate back no matter what level you're at.
Michelle Smith: One of the key pieces of being on the Staff Council is helping people know what resources are available. In addition to pressuring the administration, it's about educating staff on opportunities. I would be happy to support either candidate and although I am running unopposed, I'm happy to help communicate to the staff.

Audience Member: I think the vice president can focus on where they want to go and what they want to do, so have you thought about what you want to do with that role?

Michelle Smith: Yes. I was an Environmental Studies major, and I've done a lot of work with sustainability, and I hope to be able to present the larger picture to staff about what it's like to work at a university, but with the natural environment as a huge example. We can point in lots of directions, but I have lots of conversations about what kind of a catastrophe is it going to take to change people's minds, but I don't believe that's what it will take to begin taking care of our environment. I personally think it's done by educating people on an individual, person to person basis.

In my role, I understand that a lot of staff feel that there's an "us" and "they" feeling with things. There's a lot of education that needs to take place. I know there are budget aspects and things along those lines, but for me, it's important to work at a university with environment as the main focus.

Audience Member: As Staff Council president, you're going to hear a lot of different opinions on things, so how will you go about presenting a fair balance with the different points of view, like with a pedestrian campus, it's going to come with lots of different opinions. So how are you going to face that?

Ida Russin: I think I might be well qualified in trying to resolve disputes because I have six older sisters. You try to make everybody happy. But one thing that the Staff Council president has to do is know that not everyone is going to approve every choice you make. With the Mastering the Maze committee, you know you can make a beautiful luncheon, but someone isn't going to like it.

As far as the pedestrian campus goes, I was so happy the day I got my green parking pass, I ran to make sure it wasn't a mistake. I don't love walking two miles, and I like to access my car when I need to. I'm torn by the same things everyone else is. You get opinions from staff, and take that into consideration, and you move forward.

Eric Hoefel: I think one of the mistakes that is often made on campus, and I've enjoyed, is the idea that consensus means that it's 100% agreed upon. It's important for all people to feel heard, and you can put forth a solution that people might not be happy with because it didn't go their way, but depending upon the issue, it might be important to know about what was proposed, but be aware that some people aren't going to be happy with this part of things. They want to feel that you've truly listened, even if you can't solve that particular piece of the problem. Bottom line, you want people to feel they've been heard and when you do get feedback on how or where things might not work, that's okay. You do your best to be on target.
Michelle Smith: I think it's important to come up with new ways to solve problems, like with a green parking campus, but if the shuttle is running, or needs aren't being met, the staff has a direct way to get to get through to administration – through Staff Council. It's about getting solutions that work for lots of people.

Audience Member: For Ida, I appreciate what you both said in opening remarks. Eric gave a list of his priorities including the need for an annual staff survey. It's not essential that you have these things identified, but if you did, I'd like to give you an opportunity to share your ideas for things to address right off.

Ida Russin: I'd like to protect the benefits that we have. Health care costs keep going up; it's still affordable compared to what you can buy on your own, but I'm concerned with cost. The tuition remission and things like that could take a big hit with future financial troubles. Whether it's the 10% match for our retirement accounts, or something else that we don't ever want administration to cut. It's important for them to know how important our benefits are.

Audience Member: When I go back to my office and people ask about each of you, and I can give a quick synopsis on each of you, what would you like that to be?

Michelle Smith: That's a great question. It's the elevator speech. I always end up thinking about it longer than I should. I would suggest that the reason I'd like to be vice president of the Staff Council is because there's a lot of opportunity for staff to be heard, and for the Council to become an advisory body in a more true sense. A large part of Staff Council is to be peer educators. We can use our resources as they are, and I don't think we do that yet.

Eric Hoefel: Again, I'm in a unique position to represent both sides of issues. The three previous places I worked before coming to UVM that were here faced issues that could have put them out of business, and all the organizations continue to thrive at this point. I see both sides of most issues and I'm able to translate this into action. Since I've been here for the last three years, I've been told my position might be cut twice. I didn't know if my job was safe, what were they going to do with me?

I'm in a position to bring those two viewpoints together. I understand what it means to you. If you invest $100,000, what's the payoff? The question of 'what's in it for me' has to be addressed. We have to address things in that way. I think that's the elevator speech for me, and I can bring those parts together.

Ida Russin: I would approach the position of Council president with the same energy that I do my job. I work really hard at doing my job well. I don't let the ball drop. I get back to people. If I don't know the answer, I get back and send them in the right direction. I follow through on things, I really do, and would continue to do that as president. I'm a great writer, although not a great public speaker. I can take in a lot of information, and I learn fast. I can focus where I think action should happen. As Student Services Specialist I can bring that to the position.
Audience Member: What impressed me in 2008, when Beth Walsh ran for president was that she addressed the need to connect with all staff. Maybe because the university is so big, there's a core group that will always step up, and another group that isn't interested. There have been some efforts at outreach. How do you plan to reach out to these people? How do you suggest they receive communication so you can serve them fully?

Eric Hoefel: I've given that a lot of thought. One of the first ways to address the interest in Staff Council is to get better at what we do. If we have a track record of success, the numbers will grow. Also, improving communication will go a long way. Staff can let us know how they feel, and there are technology tools, and it's dangerous to get into this, but Twitter is a great way to get things out there. If a meeting has been held with senior administrators, instead of waiting a month to know what happened, you can get a Twitter feed to find out how it went. There are things to tout, some of the things we do for staff, and as we become an effective organization, I think the issue of greater involvement will take care of itself.

Ida Russin: I think the Staff Council needs to market itself. Especially as it's grown, and we need to get out there and tell staff that it's because of this Council things happen that benefit staff. Beth hands out cookies to students and tells them to thank a staff member, and I applaud that, but I think it's important to look at opportunities like the five year luncheon. It's a great opportunity to ask them what they've participated in and really get out there and talk about Staff Council. Instead of a table set-up, as a Staff Council representative, we should ask staff what they'd be interested in. Many people don't read Staffline or UVM Today. There are so many resources out there. It can be narrow in the scope of your work, but you can look around and see the effect.

Michelle Smith: I think the survey is a good idea. We've been working on this for like ten years, but haven't done anything with it for a variety of reasons, but it's critical to take a snapshot to know how we can be most effective. I also think Educational and Professional Development reaching out to staff members, and knowing what the resources are is important. It helps existing staff members to know what's out there. I know the outreach tables have had some success, but there's something to be said about targeted contact. It's important to meet with staff departments that have special needs. Sometimes it's about the one on one, because there's so much information coming in. Some people are technically minded, and some want a phone conversation.

Audience Member: Coming from an academic unit, before I joined Staff Council I only worked with my department, I almost never left the building. It's great to go from department to department, but do you have any ideas on how to get people out of their cubicles to meet other people? Or is that important?

Ida Russin: I think opportunities like the luncheon, or Staff Recognition Week, where everybody is going to be at the picnic is wonderful. I know there was talk that Staff Council has a less visible role at the picnic, but it's a rare opportunity that staff all get together at one time. We have huge speakers that come, and a tiny audience. So it's trying to find opportunities wherever they are, and trying to get the word out about who we are and what we do. That is partly to expand your knowledge of the world and UVM. I appreciate that it's important to do that.
Michelle Smith: We need to plan for a variety of events, because some staff people just don't respond to small talk situations. There should be an allowance for different events. As long as we make opportunities available for staff to be engaged, I don't think we can get everybody out of their cubicles, but being able to support everyone is important.

Eric Hoefel: Taking advantage of the opportunities is very important. As we identify initiatives and projects for Staff Council Representatives, it allows for people to be pro-active in their areas. With the annual survey, there are people that are great at creating them, and making them usable. Bring those people in, ask if they want to participate, and ask others with like interests if they want to participate. Staff Council is doing great things, so you might want to get involved, and it's getting people to help with that.

Audience Member: It occurs to me that there's a short line from you, Eric, to the president of finance services, and some people might see it as a conflict of interest, so I just wonder if you can speak to that.

Eric Hoefel: It's a fair question. Given my background, people might see me as a management stooge. I've talked a lot about the fact that I can speak that language. Two things to think of, when deciding to vote for me or not, I do have that insight and I have the relationships with higher up people so I can hit the ground running. I now work in ETS, but I'm about three steps removed from where I used to be, working directly for Richard Cate, VP for Finance. So I won't have direct pressure from my supervisor, saying 'I don't want you to do this or go there.' I think the critical piece I can bring to this position is that I can talk with the people there. They value what staff does. We're a third of the operating expense budget. They're going to look at us. Our benefits will be a target, I guarantee it. Let's look at tuition remission as a target. It's not a target now, and I haven't heard that. But if that's something we like about working here. If you pull that away, you're running a real risk of losing them and having to replace them, and this is what that costs. So I can present that in a way that really relates to them. The benefit of my past is that they know me and my work. I feel confidence in that they respect me, too.

Audience Member: I think we'd all agree that the best way to get things done is to work with the administration and work together. If you have a survey or ground swell of staff that feels strongly against what the administration wants to do, I'd like to know how you'd deal with the administration if you were not in agreement.

Michelle Smith: I have a very grey perspective. I think it depends on what the topic is. There have been lots of issues at various times where specifically as a student, which is an odd thing to say now, there were lots of initiatives that couldn't be funded. So part of my tactics are to find out what the opportunities and resources are to continue to move an initiative. So if the Staff Council wanted to put something forward and administration wasn't in agreement, I could ask if it's a time frame problem, are there other stakeholders that we haven't considered. Do other studies need to be done? It depends on what it was. But I feel communication is essential.

Eric Hoefel: It's always difficult. Most issues here always get down to resources. In a case where the staff feels strongly about something the administration won't do, it's often that there's no money. So we look for solutions where it doesn't require resources. We're (staff) are always going to be third in line. We've looked for ways to look at more professional development
opportunities. UVM’s training department is three or four people and isn't going to get any larger. Having a mentor is a way to get things moving forward. As we identify needs the staff has, we as a Council have to be better at finding solutions that won't take resources.

Ida Russin: With my sisters, I know how to argue well. It doesn't mean I'll always win, but things that are important to the staff should be fought for. You need to pick your battles. You don't need to rise up to the administration about things served at a picnic, but instead, things like salary increases and benefits. By making sure that the Staff Council representatives always represent staff, you can always be sure the recommendations made are because the staff wants it because it's been agreed upon with the consensus. You present arguments when you have a collective body. That's how I would approach those opportunities.

Audience Member: We somehow managed to get this far without the hot button topics. I want to know how you'd approach a particle topic. If you buy cornbread in the bottom of Waterman, it's under a buck. In Davis, it's a three digit number. Is the administration getting a cut on corn bread?

Eric Hoefel: In the case of that particular example, what Sodexho chooses to charge in one building over another, it's outside the scope of what we deal with. If we're talking about a metaphor, and we're talking about executive salaries, again, that's not something that we can really affect. Those are set by the board, and a number of categories. If you look at this, we have one of the flattest sets of salaries. The president here makes 10-12 times the average salary here. But what can we do to bring staff up? In a time of cuts, we had a 1-2% increase, and that's not much. If it's going to be 2%, how can we distribute that? If that's not reality, how can we address that? The other part is professional development. People can move around the campus.

Ida Russin: I'm going to look at the question specifically. It drives me nuts. You can buy one sandwich for half the price in other places. It's the little things that impact staff. It should be consistent throughout the university. Sodexho has the contract with the university. I don't know who is responsible. But it's important to provide good and healthy food. If any of the food outlets weren't clean, we wouldn't stand for that. The prices keep getting higher and higher. We need a place to buy an affordable lunch, or a place to have a refrigerator or kitchen sink. Little things can be important and critical to staff.

Michelle Smith: I want to be your VP because I can tell Ida who to contact and tell Eric who to fight in sandwich prices. I don't know if it's a female/male thing, but it drives me nuts. Literally speaking, we can find the answers. That's probably one of the best things about my job, is I like to solve problems and find out where the answers are. So why is it so different across campus? We have 13 dining places on campus. That's a lot more than campuses three times our size.

Audience Member: This is an angry question. We've heard about encouraging participation, and mentioned that we have a diverse staff, but did we take into consideration that people have many different positions. Some people don't have access to a computer, and the supervisor won't give them release time for events and professional development, so how would you face that issue?
Ida Russin: That's a good question. I think I would begin by looking at the number of people that are impacted. Number one, do the people want to be involved? It's up to them, of course, but administration does support Staff Council meetings. No one should feel threatened for wanting to take part in this. Who falls into the mainstream with these? Is it those people that work regular work day jobs; and then look at those other categories, and see how we can reach out to those groups.

Michelle Smith: I think you really have to understand, it's a lot about our resources, figuring out how to connect people to the resources that everybody should have access to. Risk Management has addressed such an issue. Our custodial staff speaks numerous different languages, and there are interpreters going to Risk Management’s training meetings so the workers can know what's dangerous to them. Its elements like that, making sure safety is met first. And then what do we do about that?

Eric Hoefel: It is a difficult issue. There's a very diverse population here. We have lots of non-English speakers. We often talk about how to address those people. It costs money to translate things. In the case of safety, the money is there. With professional development, we often hear that people can't leave their job to take a class, or something like that. So we've asked if someone will come out and answer phones or things like that, or looking for solutions where resources aren't there. But being aware to accommodate those issues of (like coverage) as much as we can, is where we can begin to talk about and address issues that affect staff.

Moderator: There will be another opportunity to address other questions at noon on Thursday. Looking at where the Council has been, Beth has done a great job of transition and thinking about where we should go next. It doesn't have to be a radical change. There have been some radical questions about what we want to change, where we want to go. I think we respond to staff, but also push for other things. Thank you for coming.

The Open Forum concluded at 1:30 p.m. A second Open Forum is scheduled for Thursday, May 6, 2010, from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. in the Davis Center’s Silver Maple Ballroom.

[End.]