To: Tom Sullivan, President
    Deborah McAneny, Board of Trustees Chair
    David Rosowsky, Senior Vice President and Provost
    Gary Derr, Vice President for Executive Operations
    Richard Cate, Vice President for Finance
    Wanda Heading-Grant, Vice President for Human Resources, Diversity & Multicultural Affairs
    Barbara Johnson, Associate Vice President of Human Resource Services

From: Catherine Symans, Staff Council President
      Renee Berteau, Staff Council Vice President

Re: Annual Update from Staff Council

In an effort to better communicate with the Administration, the Board of Trustees, and the wider University of Vermont community, Staff Council publishes this Annual Update to highlight significant accomplishments of the past academic year, speak to a number of ongoing efforts, and address areas of concern to staff.

Words of Appreciation

Staff Council’s reach and scope continues to expand as evidenced by our increased role in the governance process of the University. We have participated in committees for ongoing initiatives, (including Incentive-based Budgeting and Tobacco Free UVM), where we have influenced the decision making process, and we have regular access to key University leaders who seek out opportunities to collaborate and respond to the questions, concerns, and ideas of our organization.

We appreciate the recent creation of the President’s Our Common Ground Staff Award, recognizing staff who exemplify the qualities of this statement of aspirations and shared values. We also appreciate the Holiday Party which builds a sense of camaraderie among all University employees, the continued improvement of internal communications at UVM, the creation of the Office of the Vice President for Human Resources, Diversity and Multicultural Affairs, and the Incentive-based Budgeting Initiative that is addressing longstanding budget concerns and will undoubtedly lead to increased fiscal responsibility and heightened collaboration.

Staff Council Accomplishments

The Staff Council is proud of the work we have completed over the past year, including:

- Executing the second comprehensive Staff Council Survey to track organizational effectiveness and identify staff needs and concerns.
- Working with the Administration to address the challenges and opportunities facing UVM, helping to seek out solutions that benefit our entire community.
- Addressing the needs of Nursing Mothers at UVM by working with Human Resource Services (HRS) to establish a new facility in Waterman while increasing awareness of the needs of nursing mothers in the UVM community.
- Working with HRS to develop a Growing Your Family web page in a continued effort to bring attention to the issues and challenges around Parental Leave.
• Collaborating with HRS to address the issue of remuneration by providing more information online through the HRS website, and helping to educate staff to advocate for themselves in the areas of updated position descriptions and reclassifications.
• Increasing the loan amounts from the Staff Emergency Loan Fund, helping staff to cover the higher costs associated with unexpected financial challenges.
• Awarding $250 in donations to local and national 501(c)3 non-profit organizations in recognition of UVM staff members’ volunteer work with these groups.
• Building community among staff by providing opportunities for staff to interact in social settings including the annual Holiday Bazaar and Food Drive, the Third Annual Staff Art Exhibit and Reception, UVM Staff Night at the Vermont Lake Monsters, and many other events throughout the year.
• Developing an appeal process and adding clarifying language to the Staff Handbook in collaboration with HRS for staff unreasonably denied access to the tuition remission benefit by a supervisor.

University Culture and Community

Staff Council has been pleased by the efforts of UVM leadership to address longstanding concerns with the institutional culture. We know that culture change takes time, but we recognize the foundational role that leaders play in building inclusive communities that recognize the needs and concerns of individuals, and we wish to highlight the following areas that need continued focus and improvement:

Staff Morale, Respect and Value
We continue to hear from staff who feel undervalued or underappreciated in their roles at UVM and recognize that this is often related to poor communication, supervision and leadership. Addressing issues regarding equitable pay, good supervision, annual performance appraisals, accountability, and the communication of change are key to staff feeling invested, respected and valued at UVM and in the work they perform.

Workforce Capacity Issues
We have said before and will say again that we believe a serious capacity issue exists that needs focused attention. In light of ongoing budgetary constraints, we fear that future spending cuts will further complicate the current situation. If we are going to continue to do more work with fewer people and take on new projects and initiatives, then some old work needs to go away—which is often talked about but rarely happens—and attention needs to be focused on determining truly sustainable workloads in departments across the University.

Staff and Faculty Relations
We continue to seek equity between staff and faculty in ways that are appropriate and inclusive, including the scheduling of community-building events and the creation of initiatives to break down the walls that in some parts of the University divide staff from faculty in ways that are neither healthy nor affirming for individuals.

Particular Areas of Concern

The following eight paragraphs represent the key areas of concern for Staff Council:

The Expectation of Standardized Performance Appraisals for All Staff
We understand that work to update the PeopleAdmin system is underway and that once completed, a module will be added that will enable position descriptions and performance appraisals to be linked and tracked. This process will create more accountability in the future, but more emphasis on the importance of performance appraisals and training is needed in order to sustain what may well be a large cultural shift in some areas of the University.

The Expectation of Supervisory Training
We believe that REQUIRED supervisory training coupled with continual professional development will result in a healthier work environment for everyone. We must make it an expectation and requirement that managers and supervisors—staff and faculty alike—have adequate and up-to-date training to serve in the roles in which they find themselves.
Better Management of Change through Improved Communication
We are especially interested to see the University develop an intentional discipline of ongoing communication (not just in times of crisis) and believe that a structural change is required to see this need realized. While some improvements have been noted, and there are specific situations where timely communication may not be possible or appropriate, we recognize the need for additional improvements to internal communications to promote transparency while building trust and confidence in our leadership.

Disconnect Between President’s Desired Open Dialogue and the Benefits Cost Share Experience
The recent discussion on Benefits Cost Share raised great concern among staff on the question of whether they are really valued and appreciated by the Administration. We believe that this unfortunate result is counter to President Sullivan’s intentions when he asked the University Benefits Advisory Council to gather input on possible changes to the cost-sharing formulas for employee medical benefits. Considering how this discussion played out from start to finish, there are important lessons to take away regarding internal communication at several levels within the University. Staff Council will work in the coming year to identify those lessons and share the information with the President’s team.

Professional Development and Implementation of a Career Path Program
In order to maintain a knowledgeable workforce that is invested in the University, it is essential for staff to take advantage of professional development opportunities that meet their needs. With the Incentive-based Budget model and further decentralization of funds, it is time for the University to develop a policy or procedure on professional development funds in order to provide clear guidelines so that staff are treated equitably across Units/Divisions and Colleges. The creation of such guidelines for professional development should be made in tandem with the creation of a Career Path Program that clearly identifies for staff what experience and knowledge is needed to advance their careers at UVM.

A Reasonable Provision for Parental Leave for Staff
We strongly support the creation of more childcare facilities on campus and we continue to encourage the Administration to consider a paid parental leave program (maternity and paternity) for all employees—not just for faculty.

Tobacco Free University Initiative
While Staff Council has been collaborating with this initiative, the decision to go Tobacco Free has been perceived as being made without the University engagement initially outlined in a plan to determine if, when and how UVM would make such a transition. We ask that more dialogue and transparency occur so that it is clear that the needs of smokers and non-smokers alike are being addressed in a respectful and considerate manner.

The Voice of Post-Docs at UVM
Due to the way UVM categorizes Post-Docs as either Associates or Fellows/Trainees, it is difficult to discern which established governance body should respond to the concerns of this group. Staff Council believes more work needs to be done to engage and communicate with Post-Docs so that this group is recognized, heard and better integrated into the UVM community.

Thoughts on Moving Forward
The Staff Council serves in a unique capacity at UVM, allowing for the incorporation of staff’s voice at the University in a way that models respect and innovation and openness and justice. We believe that we are a stellar example of how the concerns and thinking and energy of higher education staff can be fully invested in the governing structure and decision-making processes of a university. We are grateful for an Administration that listens to us and seeks to really hear, and we look forward to continuing to serve together with you in the years ahead.

A more extensive report can be found at www.uvm.edu/staffcouncil/pdf/full_sc_annual_update_fy14.pdf