



TO: Tom Sullivan, President
David Rosowsky, Provost and Senior Vice President

CC: Wanda Heading-Grant, Vice President for Human Resources, Diversity and Multicultural Affairs
Gary Derr, Vice President for Executive Operations

FROM: Renee Berteau, Staff Council President
Johanna Brabham, Staff Council Vice President

RE: Staff Council Outreach Effort Report – Spring 2015

DATE: July 6, 2015

Staff Council has and continues to play an integral role in the shared governance of the University of Vermont. To this end, we have committed ourselves as an organization to be forward looking while balancing our advocacy with data and the stories of staff employees as we strive to fulfill our mission to create a cohesive community, have a positive impact on staff culture, and promote the betterment of all.

Staff Council has long stressed the real need for strategic support and investment to address the long standing issues and areas of concern that are often voiced by the staff we represent at UVM. While we have seen positive improvements, we need to take the next step to strengthen our community and create new standards of excellence and accountability.

In March, Staff Council conducted four focus groups to better understand the needs and concerns of staff at the University. This effort was fully supported by the President and the Vice President for Human Resources, Diversity and Multicultural Affairs who stated that they looked forward to receiving the results from our outreach. Notwithstanding University initiatives already in motion of which we are aware, this report reflects the thoughtful input received from staff who participated for your awareness.

Through the assistance of the Office of Institutional Research, staff were randomly selected and invited to participate from among a list of employees who serve in the Clerical, Technical and Specialized job classifications at the University. Over 40 staff members attended these focus groups.

The Focus Groups were asked the following questions:

1. If you were to identify one issue or area of concern you have as a staff member at UVM, what would it be?
2. What are reasonable expectations for staff to have of UVM as an employer?
3. Are there areas within the expectations you have identified that could be improved at UVM? Which ones, and how could they be improved?

The input gathered during the focus group was then analyzed by the Staff Council's Outreach Committee and Executive Board to identify Common Themes. The five most salient themes were 1. Salary Equity 2. Benefits 3. Professional Development/Career Growth 4. Institutional Integrity and Respect 5. Inclusive Decision Making.

These themes were then used in the April 14 Staff Council Outreach Brainstorm Session to focus discussion. Using a speed-dating model previously employed in the Strategic Initiative Project, we collected ideas on what reasonable actions should be taken by Staff Council or the Administration to address staff concerns in the areas identified by the themes.

Over 60 staff participated between both outreach efforts which provided anecdotal information that echoed results from our 2014 Staff Council survey. We are confident that the information we received during this recent outreach effort was an expansion on long-standing staff concerns and desires for solutions.

Below, we provide a summary which outlines the themes discussed at the Outreach Brainstorm session, and the ideas generated. We then provide objectives for Staff Council and the University, grounded in ideas and suggestions put forth by staff throughout this process. We believe these objectives are the areas that need the most attention, and we would be ambitious in trying to address them all in one year. Still, we will be working with colleagues and leaders throughout the University this summer and forward to determine initiatives already underway, areas that are able to be addressed now, and determine Staff Council involvement in future initiatives to find reasonable solutions to bring about change that makes a positive impact on the UVM staff experience and strengthens our institution.

SALARY EQUITY

Question:

What reasonable actions should be taken by the Administration or Staff Council to address staff concerns on the theme of salary equity?

Brainstorm Session Ideas:

- ❖ **Compensatory time:** Establish guidelines and standardize a process to enable compensatory time so supervisors can track and approve time and staff are encouraged to take the time off when they have earned it. Staff also asked that if compensatory time is earned due to a busy period, supervisors should help manage workload so that the release time can be taken without work piling up, causing another busy period upon the staff member's return
- ❖ **Position Descriptions/Salary Review:** Position descriptions need to accurately represent the body of work being done by an employee. Reviews and updates of positions descriptions should occur when a staff member receives additional responsibilities within the same body of work as well as when the body of work changes. Avoidance of reviewing and updating position descriptions should not be tolerated especially if it is to prevent appropriately compensating an individual due to budget constraints. The process to update a position description and/or review salary should be clear, transparent and timely, with an opportunity for both the supervisor and employee to be fully informed and involved.
- ❖ **Supervisory Training:** Those who supervise staff must be formally trained through the HRS Learning Services' **Supervisory Learning Series, or alternate but equal training**, that highlights conscientious leadership, commitment to diversity, self-awareness, and relevant skill development. Any supervisor at the University of Vermont needs information to uphold the standards and practices outlined in University policy and operating procedures, especially in regards to human resource matters. It is the expectation that supervisors engage in ongoing additional professional development and networking with colleagues to stay abreast of best practices and institutional changes but form

collaborative relationships from which one can seek feedback. They must also support staff who must enforce policy when performing work on behalf of the University.

- ❖ **Classification System and its relationship to a Career Path Program:** Staff need to better understand the way in which salaries are determined. To this end, more information about what an individual needs to do in order to move up or out of a position to achieve greater compensation must be outlined. In addressing salary, a clearer understanding of job classifications with additional steps within each job family may assist in helping staff understand pay bands and increase transparency. A robust Career Path program must be incorporated with the job classification system in order to provide staff with ways to plan for career advancement at UVM.
- ❖ **Merit Raises:** In order to award merits raises, a structured but flexible performance appraisal process tied to accurate and current job descriptions must be established to keep supervisors and staff accountable while not only addressing lackluster performance but also recognizing excellence. Any merit raise would give supervisors a chance to incentivize/reward accomplishment, and employees to feel rewarded for hard work and accomplishments. Rewarding and acknowledging one's service is the underlying message.
- ❖ **Market Compression:** There should be a transparent review of long-term salaries for classifications that have new hires to ensure that new hires are not earning more than long-term, experienced employees. Long-term salaries should be raised if a new hire indicates an adjustment is needed.

OBJECTIVES:

- 1. Establish a career path program that helps staff understand what skills they need to advance in their profession at UVM in the current classification system.**
- 2. Increase transparency and awareness of the process to update a position description through outreach and education, but also provide a mechanism within Human Resource Services for staff to request an update and review when they are unreasonably denied by a supervisor.**
- 3. Require robust training of individuals, faculty or staff, who serve as supervisors to ensure efficiency and effectiveness by making supervisors fully aware of their rights and responsibilities while ensuring consistence interpretation and application of policy and operating procedure at UVM.**

BENEFITS

Question:

What reasonable actions should be taken by the Administration or Staff Council to address staff concerns on the theme of benefits?

Brainstorm Session Ideas:

- ❖ Most staff think that UVM benefits are the best around, and highly value the tuition remission, health care and dental benefits. It was cited as the reason for choosing to work at UVM, both for themselves, and for recruiting new employees.
- ❖ Employees with long service should be grandfathered when benefits change.
- ❖ Changes to benefits impact staff morale and need to be discussed and communicated in inclusive and transparent process and manner

OBJECTIVES:

- 1. Establish an inclusive, transparent internal process for the discussion of potential changes to benefits to ensure the input from staff and other employees and incorporate a communication plan that provides information in a clear, thoughtful and sensitive manner.**
- 2. Better define and communicate the purpose and role of the University Benefits Advisory Council while increasing transparency about the work of this organization at UVM.**

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/CAREER PATH

Question:

What reasonable actions should be taken by the Administration or Staff Council to address staff concerns on the theme professional development/career path?

Brainstorm Session Ideas:

- ❖ Develop different tiers within the classifications: i.e. Generalist 1, 2, etc. Each should have clear levels of duties outlined, with a clear path on how to get from one to the next.
- ❖ Career counseling: Staff should have access to career counseling similar to what students have in the Student Career Counseling Center.
- ❖ Establish a Staff Professional Development Award: Create an institution-wide award or pool of funds for staff professional development that ensures that staff members who are otherwise unable to take part in courses or development opportunities can afford to do so.

OBJECTIVES:

- 1. Review the job classification system and establish a career path program that helps staff understand what skills they need to advance in their profession at UVM.**
- 2. Review access to professional development opportunities (i.e., internal and external) for staff across the University with attention to the diverse needs of the UVM staff population.**
- 3. Establish a professional development award or pool of funds where staff apply for financial assistance to support their professional development when funds are not available within their Unit/Division/College.**

INCLUSIVE DECISION MAKING

Question:

What reasonable actions should be taken by the Administration or Staff Council to address staff concerns on the theme of inclusive decision making?

Brainstorm Session Ideas:

- ❖ Unit/Division/College Communication: Deans, Vice Presidents, Chairs and Directors should be provided materials for communication to their units/divisions/colleges of university initiatives and organizational change. Communication is inconsistent across units/divisions/colleges.
- ❖ Input from Staff: Processes for gaining input from staff (and other stakeholders) should be clearly communicated as well as who staff representatives are on committees for University wide initiatives or organizational changes. Training and support should be given to encourage collaborative input gathering

OBJECTIVES:

- 1. Further incorporate the gathering of UVM community input for large scale institutional initiatives and organizational changes and clearly identify and communicate who are the staff representatives who are serving on committees, workgroups, etc.**
- 2. Create clear communication lines to ensure that information from large scale institutional initiatives and organizational changes are reaching all employees at all levels, but especially staff.**
- 3. Incorporate the gathering of UVM staff input from individuals serving in a wide range of positions when working on initiatives or change at the Unit/Division/College level.**
- 4. Provide training and support to University leaders to incorporate employee input and maintain accountability for creating transparent, open, inclusive and well communicated processes.**

INSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY AND RESPECT

Question:

What reasonable actions should be taken by the Administration or Staff Council to address staff concerns on the theme of institutional integrity and respect?

Brainstorm Session Ideas:

- ❖ Updated Staff Handbook: Provide a clear and updated staff handbook (paper and website) that guides and informs non-represented staff so as to avoid confusion among staff employees. Articulate and expand on important policies such as those managing compensation and grievance/mediation.
- ❖ Reinvigorate *Our Common Ground* throughout UVM: Better align and reinforce our operational and business practices with the tenets of the values outlined in this document. Provide support and training to maintain these cultural values within the institution.
- ❖ Standardize Onboarding: Staff should have a strong understanding of what to expect from UVM as an employer and that the values of *Our Common Ground* are foundational to our organizational culture. Staff need to know more about their rights and responsibilities as employees beyond the basic information.
- ❖ Mandate Supervisory Training: Those individuals supervising staff must be trained and held accountable for their actions.
- ❖ Performance Appraisals: Conduct consistent and constructive performance appraisals tied to accurate and current position descriptions which include a professional development plan, career goals, and relation of work to the University's mission.

OBJECTIVES:

- 1. Update the Staff Handbook in a manner that it can be used as a tool for providing guidance to non-represented staff about their individual rights and responsibilities as employees of UVM.**
- 2. Review and update the Performance Appraisal process for staff to incorporate best practices and provide training to supervisors and employees on a standardized but flexible process for performance appraisals moving forward.**

Our institution is strengthened when advocacy is informed by the input of others which leads to change that occurs through collaborative processes within a reasonable timeframe. Our goal is make UVM a strong leading employer within the State of Vermont and an exemplary model of staff employment within the field of higher education. Staff Council is ready to collaborate with University of Vermont leadership and community as we take steps to lead further discussion and potential advocacy on the issues outlined in this report. We thank you for your ongoing support and look forward to new partnerships in the year to come.



The University of Vermont

Office of the President

July 30, 2015

From: Tom Sullivan, President ¹⁵
David V. Rosowky, Provost and Senior Vice President

To: Renee Berteau, President Staff Council
Johanna Brabham, Vice President Staff Council

Re: **Staff Council Outreach Effort**

We want to express our appreciation for the excellent work Staff Council undertook this past Spring Semester to engage staff in an important dialogue around issues facing our staff. We especially appreciate your efforts to expand participation in this process with a broader group of staff.

We share your commitment and dedication to creating an outstanding work environment for all employees at the University of Vermont. Further, we believe that this can best be realized by a cooperative effort by all involved. We applaud the Staff Council for its willingness to take a leadership role in both defining and determining appropriate courses of action.

The Report identifies a diverse range of essential issues and concerns of the staff. It is important to note that many of the issues are either being addressed by appropriate offices or are already resolved and may require expanded communication strategies to assure that staff are aware of the resources available to them currently. One overarching issue that emerged is a need for improved communication. We welcome both your input on ways to reach staff and also to expanding and diversifying Staff Council's communication strategies.

We are pleased that you are working with Vice President for Human Resources, Diversity, and Multicultural Affairs Wanda Heading-Grant and Vice President for Executive Operations Gary Derr on the specific issues identified. This collaborative effort will help assure that the issues are responded to appropriately. We look forward to regular updates on the progress of responding to the report.

Thank you again for your efforts and for the leadership you provide to the Staff Council.

Cc: Wanda Heading-Grant, Vice President for Human Resources, Diversity,
and Multicultural Affairs
Gary Derr, Vice President for Executive Operations