



Board of Trustees Presentation – June 4, 2021
Caleb Gilbert, Staff Council President

50 Years of Staff Council: Accomplishments and Aspirations

2021 marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of UVM's Staff Council. Over the last five decades, the organization has worked with Administration to achieve essential benefits for staff, like dental insurance, bereavement leave, unlimited accumulation of sick leave, paid personal days, and so much more.

Our advocacy work has influenced every aspect of campus life — in 1990, we successfully pushed for UVM to begin purchasing environmentally friendly and energy-saving products; in 2005, we led efforts to improve the campus Smoking Policy; in 2019, we helped lead the way to significantly expand breastfeeding resources on campus.

We've established and maintained staff-centered events and vital assistance programs like Staff Appreciation Week, the Staff Emergency Loan Fund, and the Staff Council Professional Development Fund. And at either end of our half-century of advocacy, we've cared for staff through serious crises—switching to 10-hour days and 4-day work weeks during the fuel crisis of the 1970s, and switching to remote work during a global pandemic.

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In a period when fear and uncertainty were off the charts, Staff Council consistently offered our ears and hearts to our constituents. We provided practical, helpful information through a weekly newsletter. And while senior leaders grappled with simultaneous, urgent responsibilities and decisions, we helped staff voice how they were doing each week, then shared their testimonies with Administration.

We've strongly advocated for policies that would address the economic realities and inequities many staff face, demanding reinstatement of salaries, recommending raises that would employ racial and economic equity considerations, and requesting a racial and gender equity study of UVM's payroll. We've insisted on meaningful staff representation on all committees and commissions tasked with addressing campus-wide issues, and when unilateral decisions were made without staff input, we invited senior leaders to attend Staff Council meetings to directly engage with staff members' concerns, increasing leadership accountability. We've publicly held both ourselves and administration accountable for our collective, ongoing participation in systemic racism at UVM, and we are actively working on ways to grow both Staff Council and UVM into antiracist organizations.

We've endeavored to be a source of social and emotional support for UVM staff. Our Community Engagement and Social Committees have worked hard to find alternative ways to bring staff together to play and learn, through online trivia and bingo games and an antiracism-focused book club. We established a popular staff recognition hashtag, #UVMStaffRock, and lauded the accomplishments of staff through special features in our e-newsletter.

We've remained invested in maintaining and expanding training opportunities for staff, partnering this year with Professional Development and Training to ensure that EDU@UVM—an annual array of peer-led educational workshops—would be a great success. We also secured an increase in the Staff Council Professional Development Fund, and a promise of its continuation.

Before the pandemic, our Compensation, Benefits, and Budget Committee had already begun examining ways to modernize the UVM telework policy to better meet staff needs and capabilities. Then, as so many of us worked remotely over the last 15 months, the committee continued to monitor and research how telework revolutionizes the efficient performance of duties and the balancing of work and life demands. They've formally submitted their recommendations, with the hope that the “new normal” will be more supportive and inclusive than the old.

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The future, we know, holds more change, more uncertainty. As we continue to advocate for non-represented staff, we may adjust the shape and structure of Staff Council to fit the evolving needs of the UVM staff community. We will continue to support the university's goals of providing an inclusive, safe climate for students, staff, and faculty of all identities, by continuing our participation in antiracist work and education, and by focusing on both attracting and retaining diverse staff. We will invest in community building by forming staff affinity groups, and by organizing and formalizing volunteering and community outreach efforts.

Staff Council's Mission Statement makes it clear that we are not only focused on elevating and supporting staff – we work to “promote the betterment of all.” We know that lifting up staff also lifts up the entire UVM community. As we emerge from a difficult time, we look forward to a stronger future - and I know I leave Staff Council in good hands, with incoming President Jon Reisenweaver, and continuing Vice President Laura Clayton. Thank you.