



Staff Council President's Report

Board of Trustees – Committee of the Whole

Friday, September 25, 2020

Stephen Lunna, Staff Council President

My first order of business is to inform you that this will be my final communication to the Board as President of Staff Council, with my resignation from this position becoming effective September 30, 2020. Unfortunately, juggling the vital duties of both this position and my work serving veterans has become unfeasible. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as President of Staff Council for the past 27 months. I know that incoming Staff Council leadership will continue to embody an open, honest, and collaborative spirit in their relations with UVM administration.

My updates on non-represented staff are the least positive of my tenure as president. Morale is very low. In July, the 2.5–5 % cuts to the salaries of non-represented staff went into effect. This loss of pay has been difficult for many struggling to meet essential needs during the pandemic. When combined with the lack of a cost-of-living raise, as well as increased expenses around childcare, goods and services, and utilities (for working from home), this loss becomes much more significant—probably closer to 5–10%. When UVM salaries are compared with the [actual minimum wages required to rent lodgings in Vermont and in Chittenden County](#), it becomes even more clear how difficult these cuts are on staff.

However, the low spirits are not only attributable to financial hardship. In reflecting on recent direct communications with staff, and examining the last 2.5 months' worth of comments on the open-ended "How Are You Doing" survey which Staff Council has made available throughout the pandemic, I find additional reasons repeatedly and consistently cited:

- Non-represented staff feel they are shouldering the bulk of the financial burden for the University, since as of this report, they are the only employee group at UVM to experience a loss of income. Staff had hoped that any necessary financial sacrifices would be spread more equitably, both across campus and across income tiers.
- Staff feel unheard by senior administration, and are angry and frustrated at the perceived disengagement from collaboration with their representation (Staff Council).
- Staff feel frustration with regards to the infrequency and timing of communications to them from senior administration, whom they feel do not understand the full impact this can have on staff.
- Staff report experiencing a dismissive and sometimes hostile climate for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) members of the community, including (but not limited to) the recent decision to discontinue flying the Black Lives Matter flag.

- Staff report feeling overwhelmed, as pandemic-related duties are added to their regular duties, student staff are not re-hired, and open staff positions remain unfilled, resulting in both longer hours and expanded work expectations.
- Staff are experiencing a great deal of fear around the safety of returning to campus.

Positive feedback has also come through, specifically around the following:

- Staff enjoy the flexibility, safety, and eco-friendliness of telecommuting. When asked to rate from 1–5 their experience with telecommuting (with 1 being terrible, 5 being great) the average response from respondents is 4. Most express the desire to continue to have this flexibility post-pandemic, and the hope that UVM will reach for more sustainable norms with regards to telecommuting policies and related issues of childcare and parental leave.
- Staff have expressed gratitude for UVM’s ongoing flexibility with school-age parents’ schedules.

For the first time in recent memory, Staff Council finds itself boasting a full complement, having filled every representative position. As the year opens, new energy and new ideas are combining synergistically with the dogged ongoing work of longer-term representatives. We are examining ourselves and re-aligning our policies, procedures, and values, with the aim of becoming a more antiracist organization. Each committee is re-investing in their duties to represent and serve UVM staff, with a particular focus on making sure no one is left behind or left out of the conversation.

We look forward to better times, but are focused wholly on addressing and tackling the myriad challenges of the current moment. Thank you.