

UVM Staff Council Meeting Minutes
June 9, 2020
12:05-1:30 p.m.
Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

****Please note that these minutes are meant to give a general idea of the meeting dialogue – please refer to the video for a complete documentation of questions and responses.**

Members Present:

Mindy Kear, Shirley Pine, Alex Howe, Allison Spain, Barbara Asimwe, Bethany Wolfe, Brendan Andrews, April Berteau, Bridget Tully, Caleb Gilbert, Christa Hagan-Howe, Cindy Lee, Claire McCollough, Deb McAdoo, Donna Stevens, Erin Wertlieb, Aimee Gale, Heather Allard, Holly Pedrini, Jay LaShombe, Jen O'Donnell, Jon Reisenweaver, Katherine McGinn Hall, Katherine Spence, Katrina Preiss, Kristen Cella, Kenneth Viglucci, Lacey Ure, Laura Clayton, Mary Parent, Miriam Harrison, Michael O'Sullivan, Nick Hall, Robert Bolyard, Richard Wolbach, Stephanie Loscalzo, Tatiana Andrievskaya

Staff:

Elisabeth Blair, Alan Shashok

Guests:

Richard Cate, Gary Derr, and approximately 250 staff members.

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Call to Order

President Stephen Lunna called the meeting to order at 12:05.

Description of Proceedings

Alan Shashok gave an overview of the Staff Council meeting format to all the guests.

Approve Draft Minutes

May minutes were approved.

Public Comment Period

Notice was given for a workshop by the Women's Gender Equity Center being given today.

Q: Does Staff Council (SC) think that Administration is being forthright and transparent?

A: Staff Council has advocated repeatedly for the retention of jobs. No communication regarding furloughs/layoffs/reductions was received by SC leadership until Thursday morning, when Richard Cate notified us in a meeting that an email would go out later that day regarding staff pay reductions, which it did, 2 hours later.

Standing Committee Updates

Personal and Professional Development (PPD) – In their last meeting, they discussed next steps for the Parent Advocacy Group, and Stephanie Loscalzo shared the items on their agenda, asking which ones PPD would like to help with. PPD decided to take on the universal changing table project, lactation space improvements and additions, reaching the benchmark set by Oregon State University, and expanding parenting education. The committee also continued ongoing discussions around exit interviews and telecommuting.

Social Committee – The Committee discussed several events that are still uncertain. The Lake Monsters game date is August 16th but the Committee is still waiting to hear if it will happen. It's unknown whether Smugglers Notch Daycation will be open for the season. There is still no new date for *Matilda*. The Committee is attempting to move forward for the annual golf outing, but when the contract was submitted for approval, it was not immediately approved because it's not an essential service. The Champlain Valley Fair has been cancelled. The Vermont Corporate Cup run is in September and will take place virtually.

Community Engagement – The Committee discussed volunteering, food insecurity, and translation services. They also took an overview of this past year's successes and areas for improvement. Bob Bolyard reminded those in attendance who are not SC representatives that they can join a SC committee without being a SC rep.

Compensation, Benefits, & Budget (CBB) – At the last meeting, they discussed the recent “How are you doing?” survey in the Staff Council newsletter. The SC office staff have been getting these comments to senior leadership. They also discussed professional dev and training – how supervisors need to get the tools to supervise during these times. There is a partnership between CBB and PPD about telecommuting. The other questions are how to help and partner with HRS, and how to be proactive. A meeting with Jes Kraus will happen soon about how to best partner together.

Question regarding Parking, and payment for the months unused in the pandemic.

The parking question is pending. Steve and Caleb are regularly contacting Transportation Services and others to inquire about this issue.

Richard Cate Q&A

He spoke on the University's budget and how deficits exist outside of COVID-19, due in part to competition with other institutions, high school grads in VT and northeast declining, inability to raise tuition and therefore to meet bill payments. COVID-19 will bring some aid from the federal government, and maybe some help from state government, but the real issue is the structural gap that happens every year. Right now UVM has a \$13.5 million dollar gap, but this could double by September. The reduction in salaries provides \$2.5 million dollars towards solving this.

Q: Was SC given a voice at the table to discuss the percentages?

A: In this instance it's important for everyone to give an input. The challenge though is that we're dealing with very different circumstances and we'll put other people in a difficult situation if we spend a lot of time going back and forth on topics that will never be popular. Over the years we've learned a lot from SC and continue to, but in some cases the best result is to not have too much engagement in advance, when we already know the options are so limited.

Q: How was the tier structure developed and why doesn't it go past the 80k?

A: It's not perfect. A lot of people would like to see a heavier cut on upper level salaries. It was discussed but at the end of the day this is what was decided on. We tried to protect those on the lower end of the pay scale.

Q: Will there be a reimbursement of the Parking Permit fees?

A: In the beginning we didn't know how long the pandemic would go on, so we didn't make changes. If people stop paying for the permits does they will have to start over on the green list. Follow-up

conversations will be had with SC leadership. Virtually none of the costs went away, however, and if that gets reimbursed it will just be one more amount we'll have to cut elsewhere.

Q: How did the paycut decision and the manner in which it was communicated reflect the Our Common Ground values? Also, concern about which groups of people are being affected most.

A: As we're trying to lessen the impact on lower salary people, it reflects Our Common Ground (OCG). They looked at the median salary in VT, 51k, so they took inspiration from that as some sort of benchmark. But adhering to OCG values relies on a certain amount of resources and we don't have the resources. The whole higher ed sector is challenged, and UVM more so than some. Financially we're stable but we want to keep it that way. So OCG is a guidepost but it doesn't mean everything will stay the same – it can't. We have to deal with the longterm issues. And it's not just COVID-19. We need the high school grad pool to grow rather than shrink.

Q: Can you speak about the closure of the childcare center?

A: The Childcare Center received \$500k of funding and had a positive impact on the lives of a very limited number of employees. We are unable to reopen it at the same site because of virus constraints in terms of spacing etc. It's located in a residence hall, so even if there was enough space, you'd not want to put young children next to 18-19 years old who are congregating, etc. So that is the shorter-term issue. The longer-term issue is prioritization. Since this only was a benefit for a small number of people on campus, we chose to drop that before dropping something that affects all employees, like cuts to retirement contributions. We are trying to work with local organizations to expand options for UVM employees. This challenge is however a statewide problem – there are not enough childcare providers and the cost is high (despite how little providers are paid).

Q: Can you speak about the vacation accruals?

A: There will be no change in the accruals. It's simply that the payout will stop for anyone leaving employment at UVM after July 2021, so staff should simply use the vacation. We want to encourage people to use vacation. Research points to people becoming more efficient when they take breaks. Vacation liability sits on UVM's books, \$19 million dollars. That liability appears on our balance sheet. So in essence we're just ending that aspect of it.

Q: Can you expand on the Early Retirement offer?

A: More to follow on that. It will be based on operational needs and the needs of the individual, and savings must be demonstrated. So it is not a broad offering to everyone. It will depend on the situation in particular units. We are still looking at one more aspect and will announce more details soon.

Q: HR changes – why were these changes made?

A: It wasn't my particular decision – it was between Dr. Heading-Grant and President Garimella. But my understanding is that it was in order to further enhance Dr. Heading-Grant's ability to work on diversity and equity issues directly. Meanwhile Richard Cate is in charge of most business functions in HR, hiring people, etc.

Q: Senior Admins are giving back 5% permanent cut plus a 3.3% voluntary cut for next year. Will they still be receiving a retirement contribution on the 5%?

A: Admins will not get a retirement contribution on the 5% portion. So they'll be the same as staff and then many will be volunteering to give a little more.

Q: If the budget cuts are due to longstanding issues, then some big changes should be made.

A: Salaries and benefits and wages are 68% of the UVM budget, so it's hard to do anything without having an impact on them. In the last 11 years we've managed to balance the budget without taking this type of action. We have sometimes not filled vacancies but we have not reduced salaries until now. We need to drive more revenue. We are in a business that is mature, and the population of young people in this state has declined.

Q: Early retirement: why is this being offered only to those over 60?

A: After looking at a lot of options, 60 seemed the best route. They are still holding ongoing conversations about it.

Q: Can you explain why the lowest pay rate aren't getting a cost-of-living (COL) increase and take a little more from the folks making more?

A: Because the COL is supposed to decline this year in the recession environment, we thought it'd be better not to increase one set and decrease others. There may be differing opinions but this was our decision.

Q: Can you again address the loss of the childcare space? It was so important to the families using it.

A: Everyone has one particular aspect of the university that they especially love. This institution simply can't provide this for everyone, and not even for 55 people.

Q: Please address the questions around diversity and equity which have been posted to the chat. It's important that white leadership takes part in answering these questions, and doesn't just push them all off to Wanda Heading-Grant to answer.

How does sending a memo while we are having one of the most heightened racial series of protests humane? Was last week really the time you chose to send it, dropping a grenade without dept heads being in the know, unable to triage the impact and harm. Apart from Wanda Heading-Grant's communication, University communications have not been addressing this and UVM is not working towards having a community that ensures that Black Lives and POC matter.

A: The situation has been terrible for a long time. The timing of the memo was slated to go out on that date, for a long time. It was indeed a week with lots of other stressors, and the general stressors of COVID-19. I feel badly that POC felt that this could have been done differently, and I suspect it could be, but if I did it sometime in the future, the reality is there would still be a lot of conversation about this going on nationwide. It wasn't a good time, but it was necessary. It was addressed, and considered, but we couldn't think of a better time, and wanted people to have a lot of notice for what's been happening. Salary cuts were not based on anything but salary, so affected everyone.

Q: Given that the childcare center was built around serving women, how will administration continue to support women?

A: It was only 55 children, with 600 people on a waiting list. The biggest problem was, this was a benefit that was providing advantages to just a very small proportion of staff, and thus difficult to justify.

Q: Can you speak to the issue of compression and cut-off points in the salary ranges for the cuts?

A: If someone is making 81k the 5% will mean they make less than someone making 79500. If your 5% cut takes you below the tier, then it'll be 5% to the mark, and then 3.5% from the next lower tier.

Q: What you are saying is racist, "all lives matter." You can't separate salary from race/gender/class. What you're telling us is rich people's lives matter and you're discounting other members of our

community.

A: I don't agree with your premise but will not debate it. You have a right to your own opinion.

Q: Will there be an impact from the budget cuts on Union-represented staff?

A: Yes, ongoing conversations are being had with the unions right now. There are two different situations. These salary ranges will have more relevance with faculty because the salaries are higher. A lot of people in UE have salaries below 45k. But they will be discussing this.

Q: Why are salaries being reduced for faculty and staff whose positions are funded by grants as opposed to the general fund?

A: It's a matter of fairness to other employees that those positions would receive pay cuts.

Steve Lunna spoke and said he will put something together for a Q&A with Wanda Heading-Grant.

There will be guidance coming out on these cuts, and an FAQ on the website. Every single question is being gathered and will be addressed.

The Staff Council Executive Board will be discussing ways to address the concerns and questions raised in the chat portion of this meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:28 PM.

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