

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

Members Present:

Heather Allard, Brendan Andrews, Tatiana Andrievskaya, Barbara Asimwe, Amanda Broder, Kristen Cella, Laura Clayton, Stephen DeVoe, Jenna Emerson, Bech Evans, Caleb Gilbert, Stephanie Glock, Cheryl Herrick, Christa Hagan-Howe, Alexandra Howe, Mindy Kear, Jay LaShombe, Deb McAdoo, Claire McCollough, Katherine McGinn Hall, Jen O'Donnell, Michael O'Sullivan, Holly Pedrini, Katrina Preiss, Jon Reisenweaver, Carri-Ann Rock, Allison Spain, Joe Speidel, Katherine Spence, Emily Taylor, Bridget Tully, Kenneth Viglucci, Erin Wertlieb

Staff: Alan Shashok

Call to Order

President Caleb Gilbert called the meeting to order at 12:05.

Approve Draft Minutes

September meeting minutes were approved, with a minor amendment.

Public Comment Period

No public comments were made.

Standing Committee Updates

Social Committee: They voted not to record meetings. Ongoing items they are working on include online trivia, potential partnerships with drive-in events, and a potential virtual Holiday Bazaar. They discussed the Hurly Burly but as it was close to ending based on weather, they will just include it in *Staffline* as long as it's going on. They returned the *Matilda* tickets. With regards to reimagining the Committee's functionality during the pandemic, they discussed working with Elisabeth to grow the Staff Council social media presence. They also announced that Mary Parent resigned from the Social Committee due to work-life balance issues.

Community Engagement: They voted to record meetings and automatically make those recordings available to folks in the committee, and to others upon request. Three areas of focus were voted on. Food insecurity has five people working on it, compiling community and volunteering resources has four people working on it, and creating affinity spaces for staff and amplifying staff voices has three people working on it.

Personal and Professional Development (PPD): They discussed their areas of focus which now include exit interviews, sick time, staff awards, telecommuting (combining forces on this topic with CBB), and tuition remission. They are also continuing to work with the Working Parents group.

Compensation, Benefits, and Budget (CBB): They examined the option of recording their meetings and the ramifications thereof, with concerns about balancing accessibility with the

ability of members to speak candidly. They discussed hazard pay, as well as alternative approaches for addressing the needs for people who are at a higher risk for catching COVID-19. They examined their primary responsibilities: the annual salary recommendation letter, maximizing staff's participation in decision-making processes, and enhancing communication with constituencies. They are looking at amending telecommuting policies beyond the pandemic. They also discussed the proposed earned-time reductions (accrued vacation time not being paid out).

New Representative

Carri-Ann Rock introduced herself. She works in the Physics Department as their Department Coordinator. She is serving on the PPD committee.

Officer Updates

Caleb will begin sharing out an Officer's Report so that the Staff Council meeting itself can serve as a discussion zone, rather than a forum for providing those lengthy updates.

Antiracist Working Group:

The group is focusing on identifying ways to amend the SC Bylaws which will help the organization become more antiracist. They are also examining alternative governing structures that would be more council-led rather than having a hierarchy of a President and Vice President. They hope to put together a retreat for SC that will center antiracism as the theme, and bring in external facilitators to give some presentations or workshops that will likely be staggered over time (not occurring all in one day). Every idea the group settles on will be presented to the whole SC for discussion and voting. Caleb noted that he would like for various campus committees to have SC representatives serving on them rather than just him, the President.

Davis Display Group:

This is a group which President Garimella formed, and which Caleb is part of, to advise on installing a display in the Davis Center that would celebrate diversity. That committee will report out to the community about its progress/plans.

Meeting with President Garimella:

The agenda addressed the need for administration to hear staff. Laura specifically asked President Garimella to take CBB and their salary proposal seriously. She reported that he seemed able to recognize that times are difficult for staff right now; she was working remotely from her car because of a family emergency and felt there was a connection made, and that he expressed understanding of the gravity/complexity of the situations many staff find themselves in. Salary recommendations and the budget cuts were discussed. Caleb asked how we will get back to the idea of making the pie bigger, rather than smaller. President Garimella didn't have a great answer about how to get there, though he does want to get back to a revenue-generating approach rather than a cut/deficit-oriented approach. Caleb would like CBB to look into where UVM is at in its budget so that SC can get ahead of the curve in making a salary recommendation, with hopes for restoring the money that was cut. A representative commented that they would like to invite President Garimella to be more open to innovation and ideas from staff on solving the complex problems the university faces. Caleb noted that going forward, he

will be notifying the SC when meetings with leadership are coming up, along with a call for SC representatives to submit proposed agenda items.

Meeting with Gary Derr:

Gary shared that his concerns with the flag policy were that the BLM group might receive different treatment from other groups. However he has now put the Student Government Association in charge of putting forward a policy for the flagpole outside of the Davis Center. A discussion was held about the flag policy situation. It was pointed out that there are two aspects to this situation – the actual flag situation, and the way that in which it was handled. In other words, SC did not receive any response or feedback to their letter asking that the BLM flag be re-flown. Further, there was frustration that staff were not mentioned ultimately in the response Administration issued. With regards to UVM community or cultural changes, staff need to not be sidelined or omitted from communication and consideration. A Representative reported that the flag policy always limited the flag hanging to 5 days but that the preceding person in charge used his own discretion. It was also reported that the BLM flag was flown from student residences and by Athletics and each time they were told to take it down. So there is a larger question and issue still remaining here.

An associated concern was discussed around UVM administration not feeling comfortable declaring that Black lives matter, and that they are silo-ing the cause into a “political” statement. This is despite UVM having made history as the first institution to fly the BLM flag in 2016. It was noted that Staff Council is often asked by Administration to comment on policies but that we have not been as responsive or engaged in this process to date as we could be. Caleb suggested that it could be helpful to create a process to encourage SC to take on a greater leadership role in providing feedback on policy.

Meeting with HRS:

Staff Appreciation was discussed in the HRS meeting - particularly the smaller sums of money for gift cards in lieu of normal appreciation events, and the feedback that although it was nice to receive something, it felt insincere, being a form letter with no signature. Staff Council does sit on the Staff Appreciation Committee. Jes Kraus mentioned that he had not received any negative feedback but that there may be a survey sent out to see how these cards were received. One Representative felt insulted by the Google form they were sent, asking them to note their appreciation of a colleague, saying that including staff in decision making and acknowledging our stake and our contributions would be a much better way to show appreciation. This Representative did send Jes Kraus these thoughts but received no response, and feels that the remark that “no negative feedback” had been received is part of a larger pattern of administration erasing the voices of staff. Caleb spoke about the journey his unit has gone through with staff appreciation.

Exit interviews were discussed in the meeting with HRS, including the fact that any involuntary departures will not get interviewed. Caleb suggested conducting Stay Interviews, and although Jes Kraus agreed this would be a great idea, there is not bandwidth to do this now. There will soon however be more alignment between the faculty and the staff exit interview forms (which are given to those voluntarily leaving the university). They did seem open to improving the current system.

The idea of using Appreciative Inquiry related to Stay interviews was discussed in the SC meeting.

Childcare Working Group:

A survey was written and sent to Provost Prelock; she decided to table the survey and instead move towards providing relief for working parents as soon as possible with some sort of third-party solution. It isn't clear what that will look like. At the next meeting, Jes Kraus will come prepared with some clarity on what the parameters would be around using a third party. They are likely going to work with Let's Grow Kids to provide this third-party solution. One approach might be to house a location on campus. Another might be to have a preferred vendor.

Other Business

The question of President's Day was brought up. It is supposed to be a holiday, but it was recently announced that classes will be held that day, and so it's unclear if staff will be expected to work that day. This question is on the agenda for the meeting with HRS on Monday.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 1:18 PM.