

UVM Staff Council Monthly Meeting Minutes
November 3, 2020
12:05-1:30 PM
Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

**Please note that all dialogue presented below is in summary form only;
for the full context the video recording of the meeting must be referenced,
available on the [Staff Council website](#).**

Members Present

Allison Spain, April Berteau, Barbara Asiimwe, Bech Evans, Bethany Wolfe, Brendan Andrews, Bridget Tully, Caleb Gilbert, Carri-Ann Rock, Cheryl Herrick, Christa Hagan-Howe, Cindy Lee, Deb McAdoo, Emily Taylor, Erin Wertlieb, Heather Allard, Heather Cochran-Rock, Holly Pedrini, Jay LaShombe, Jen O'Donnell, Jenna Emerson, Joe Speidel, Katherine McGinn Hall, Katrina Preiss, Kenneth Viglucci, Laura Clayton, Nichole Hathaway, Stephanie Glock, Stephen DeVoe, Tatiana Andrievskaya, Amanda Broder, Kristen Cella, Rejeanne Jalbert, Mindy Kear, Michael O'Sullivan

Staff

Alan Shashok, Elisabeth Blair

Call to Order

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

Approval of Minutes

October 2020 minutes were approved.

Public Comment Period

A staff member thanked Staff Council for the letter to administration that was a response to the recent communication about the Faculty union impasse. Caleb spoke briefly about the letter and how it was directed to staff but also to Administration and the Faculty Union.

Committee Updates

Compensation, Benefits, and Budget Committee (CBB)

Greg Paradiso attended their last meeting and reviewed all staff benefits. The committee discussed ways they could work together with him and with HRS to help keep costs down. The annual salary recommendation letter has been drafted. It will go to the Executive Board soon for approval.

Personal and Professional Development Committee (PPD)

On the topic of exit interviews, they recently met with Human Resource Services (HRS), who noted that units/departments need to notify HRS when a staff member leaves, because they are not always automatically updated. The Committee also discussed staff awards around campus, including employee recognition (without any attendant specific prize or reward). The Professional Development Committee had received two applications at the time of the last PPD

meeting, including one from an applicant who had been unable to use the funds awarded to them last year, due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Alan Shashok added that 6 total applications did come in by the deadline, which was October 31st. He also noted that the Professional Development Committee is looking for members. They only meet 4 times a year to review applications. Please let the Staff Council Office know if you're interested in joining or if you have any questions.

Social Committee

The committee discussed holding possible trivia events. Drive-in movies had been of interest but with the cold weather these are no longer occurring. They discussed the possibility of holding a virtual holiday bazaar but decided against it for the time being; instead they are exploring moving such an event to Valentine's Day. They received an email from Magical Memories Entertainment Events with a proposal, but the cost seemed too high for a virtual event. They noted that were they to do a virtual event, they would hope to support local businesses rather than national ones. They discussed social media promotion with Elisabeth, including #UVMstaffrock which she began last month. The committee is considering holding an event or events in the heated tents next year or in the Royall Tyler Theatre. Suggestions from Staff Council members are welcomed.

A staff member attending the Staff Council meeting noted that the Fleming Museum is open, and its exhibition, called Reckonings, will be on until 11/21. To create this exhibition, Fleming staff selected pieces from their current collection that reflect relevant, timely topics, including COVID-19, systematic racism, and voting. The space is COVID-safe and would make for a good social outing on campus.

It was clarified that UVM employees should complete the online health form before visiting the museum. It was reiterated that employees should complete the health form whenever they are coming to campus, regardless of the reason.

Community Engagement Committee (CE)

The committee discussed the letter from Mary Brodsky extensively at the last meeting. Soon the subcommittees will begin meeting individually (these subcommittees are focusing on food insecurity for staff, volunteering opportunities for staff, and amplifying staff voices, especially marginalized voices on campus). These committees will also be working with the results of the listening sessions, once that report is published.

Officers' Reports

This month, the written Officers' Report was sent out one week prior to the monthly Staff Council meeting so that all could read it in preparation for having a discussion about the items, rather than spending time in the meeting itself to give the actual updates. A question/comment-led discussion between SC representatives and SC officers followed:

Union Organizing:

Q: Are there any prohibitions around union support for Staff Council representatives? What

kind of relationship is permitted between Staff Council and a possible union?

A: The Bylaws mention union organizing. The general idea is that it should be done outside of and separately from Staff Council work and roles. As Staff Council members, we serve in this capacity in an unspoken agreement that we won't be using the Council to create a union. However, a Staff Council representative **can** do union organizing on their own time and not in their capacity as a Staff Council affiliate. Staff Council's official position on unions is that we have no position.

SC's [Recent Letter](#) to Administration Re. the Impasse with the Faculty Union

Caleb described the SC letter to Administration as trying to paint the overall feeling on campus. He appealed to SC representatives to try not to see Administration as an unworkable partner but to instead try to think as collaboratively as possible.

A comment was made that the letter from Administration was communicated after the workday had ended and that staff had interpreted it as a threat and added that part of our duty as Staff Council is to provide the feedback to Administration that something didn't work.

A discussion was had about the loss of trust in the ongoing conversations between non-represented staff, administration, and the faculty union, and feeling ignored and dismissed and patronized. Some recent steps forward were also acknowledged, with our feedback being heard and engaged with, such as when Mary Brodsky attended the Executive Board meeting.

Annual Staff Council Retreat

Caleb spoke about setting up a series of training sessions as a replacement for the retreat. SC leadership and the SC office staff are putting together a virtual mini-retreat that will tie into DEI initiatives and may include Appreciative Inquiry as an introductory framework to that series.

Q&A with Gary Derr:

Gary Derr offered brief updates on the ongoing COVID-19 safety requirements, and urged staff to take advantage of the ongoing, free, on-campus testing. A question-and-answer session was then held.

(Again, please note all dialogue presented below is in summary form; for exact wording and context please reference the video recording of the meeting [available on the SC website.](#)):

Q: Can you provide feedback on your attendance at the recent Executive Board meeting?

A: I found it to be a frank and candid conversation from which I learned a lot. I felt important information was shared by both parties, and noted the limitations of emails and letters, as they do not provide the opportunity for real-time discussion and dialogue. I noted also that the ways in which UVM is using the CARE act funds is also being shared with staff. I regret the sense of lack of trust on the part of staff. I feel that as an institution we've been extremely supportive of staff.

Q: Have you been in a position where you've been able to hear feedback on the various measures taken (like telecommuting) and whether they've been working for staff?

A: I aim to be very responsive to any emails I receive, administration held information sessions specifically for staff over the summer, I keep in touch regularly with SC leadership, I attend a lot of SC's meetings, and I have been receiving the staff feedback from the "How Are You Doing" survey, and it's all been very helpful to hear.

Q: Overall, are your impressions that the decisions Administration has made have had a positive effect on staff?

A: In making decisions, the university has worked very hard to be attentive to the needs of staff and is trying to be supportive of the various circumstances as well as we can. I always welcome feedback on how we can do better. See the recent HRS survey too.

SC Rep's Comment to Gary Derr: A lot of the "benefits" that are being provided to staff are not aimed at staff but rather are things that ultimately protect our main source of revenue. COVID-19 testing and telecommuting allows the university to welcome back students, so these steps shouldn't be framed as perks or benefits to employees. Non-represented (NR) staff are working in conditions that involve a level of risk like never before, and yet only NR staff have had their wages cut. Staff use the word "feel" a lot but the "feeling" of powerlessness is actually a fact. SC is essentially a big suggestion box for senior leadership, and that's a fact, not a feeling or emotional experience. COVID-testing and telework should be a bare minimum. I am proud of the students I work with who are stringently complying with the Green & Gold Pledge.

Administration's Intentions

A discussion was had around the intent or lack thereof from senior leaders for staff to feel engaged and appreciated. It was noted that SC leadership has yet to formally thank Administration for the three extra Winter Break days, and will shortly.

Longstanding Issues vs. COVID-19-related Issues

A Rep shared that in their program, vis a vis recruiting, we cannot keep using COVID-19 as the excuse for why higher ed is in its current position. Yes, it has brought awareness to it, but those issues existed already. Staff are getting hit hard with this, but there is a positive twist to this, which is that we are really being forced to look at these long-term issues.

Discussion around how equity needs to be high up on the list, as it's super hard to get by right now on a lower income in Chittenden County.

Rep: Senior leaders flexibly alternate between two opposing truths according to when it's convenient. Senior leaders are using COVID-19 in the same way as presidents abuse wartime powers. Effect is to mitigate the accountability for these decisions. Sometimes they say they're due to longstanding issues, sometimes they say it's due to COVID-19, using it as a license to make changes that are responses to long-term problems and/or are about laying a new trail for the future. They attribute their changes to one reason or the other, according to when it's convenient for them.

It was suggested that we have a town hall between Staff Council and senior administration before the Winter Break. President Garimella and Provost Prelock have both expressed a willingness to meet with staff or to ask for their time. It was reiterated that staff want to be part of the decision-making processes, as they have a lot of experience, instead of wanting to be just asked to comment on decisions after they've been made.

Narrative Framework

A discussion was had around what SC's narrative framework is, or should be, and whether we have facts to back it up? For example, is our narrative frame that there are alternative solutions which senior administration leaders are not choosing? In other words, we should be action-oriented and make sure we ask the right questions.

Budget

A suggestion was made that we should request a budget presentation, perhaps from Richard Cate, or from Claire Burlingham, who is the Controller for the university. The presentation would not be a justification for decisions already made, but a broader view of the overall finances of the university.

Meeting Adjourned

The meeting was adjourned at 1:30 PM.