

Provost Employee Communication Council Meeting Minutes
February 12, 2003

Present: Brian Bader, Annamarie Black, Alan Cohn (ex-officio), Susan Fogler (Chair) Tom Gausvik (ex-officio), Pat Hartsook, Linda Hunt, Lauren Killgallon, Roger Morris, Doug Moseley, Rob Schuett, Sarah Seat, Kathy Soule, Glenn Taylor, Anda Webb (ex-officio), Ann Zook

The March 2003 meeting of the Provost Employee Communication Council was called to order at 8:30am in Clemons Library, Room 201. Council discussed our current council representative election provisions in our by-laws, which were re-written in part by council member D. Moseley. Council Vice-Chair A. Black, who oversaw last year's election, has made some minor changes to this section.

Among the questions debated: should Council standardize ballots? Should we standardize the election process across departments? Should we have web-based elections, with the ballots on the Council's website? Is it appropriate to have reps appointed by the area dean, if there are no candidates who volunteer to run in that area? Regarding the last question, a Council member expressed reservations about appointed representatives, and added he believed that a person or persons had been denied the opportunity to serve on council by their area supervisor. Tom Gausvik responded that he was not aware of any past situation where an employee had not been allowed to serve on council by their manager, and that senior University management would feel uncomfortable with such a situation happening. Another council member asked if there was a standard amount of time a council representative was allowed to do their council work, and Mr. Gausvik responded that the standard is "reasonable accommodation", arranged on an individual basis with your department supervisors. Anda Webb reminded council that there has been significant turnover in recent years among deans, and that senior management has had to re-focus and tell these newer deans about the employee communication councils. As to our election, she referred the council to the General Faculty Council's election process as a model. Ms. Fogler responded that she believed that the General Faculty Council's procedures had been looked at last year in our election by-law revision process.

And with communication in general, is it better to send out summary emails, with links to the full text on our website? A council member expressed concern that some employees still don't have registered computer access and would not see these messages. Mr. Gausvik observed that a majordomo email list becomes outdated rather quickly, and that it might be more efficient to generate an employee mailing list using Oracle. He also cautioned that such a list would need a gatekeeper to avoid mass distribution of political or other inappropriate messages.

On the representative election issue, council decided to table a final decision until the March meeting.

Chief Human Resources Officer Tom Gausvik then reviewed several benefits questions and issues, which had recently come up through the council. He mentioned that the opportunity for employees to convert from monthly to semi-monthly paychecks had been placed on hold, since due to the earlier imposition of delayed, or “lag” pay periods, if an employee paid monthly were to convert to semi-monthly pay, it would require a one-time 4.17% addition to their salary to adjust for the earlier lag, which would be a problem in the current fiscal climate.

A question came up regarding employees having availability in using a FlexAmerica MasterCard. (FlexAmerica being our employee flexible spending account manager.) Human Resources is checking into this and it could become available in 2004.

In regards to retiree health premium increases, last year was a wake-up call. There was a 30% hike in costs, as employees are using our health plan more and medical technology advances and labor costs have grown. Our Executive Vice President decided that the University should absorb the bulk of the past year’s claims costs, with only a modest premium increase for employees. The University is estimating a 15-20% increase in claim costs for this year, which will present a dilemma. UVa Benefits only raised our retirees’ premiums the same rate as the state did for its retired members. We currently have about 500 retirees in our health plan, and their rates did go up more than those of active employees, but the University still pays over half their premium costs and active employees still currently subsidize retirees.

Mr. Gausvik continued to say that the health insurance discussion by mentioning that the state is in the process of overhauling its health insurance program, and the University may need to review its program this year also. One new state provision we will follow is the elimination of the “Double-State Employee” premium option. Our Benefits Office will need to look at employee co-pays, co-insurance, and deductibles, likely following the principle of shifting costs more to UVA Health Plan users. We also need to balance comprehensiveness of coverage with cost.

Mr. Gausvik also briefly touched on the Virginia Retirement System (VRS). The recent stock market crash has hurt the value of VRS’ portfolio; causing them financial difficulties and making it unlikely the state will offer any early-retirement buyouts for classified employees. As it happened, just before the stock market dive, the VRS lowered the amount that agencies had to contribute to employee retirement accounts from 9.25% to 5%. Currently the University pays both the employer and the employee contributions to VRS, but longtime employees will remember that until 1981, employees had to contribute the employee share to their VRS account themselves.

Then chair then introduced the Council’s guest speaker, University Librarian Karin Wittenborg, who proceeded to tell us about our library system.

The University of Virginia Library actually consists of eleven different libraries. The Darden Graduate Business Library, the Law Library, and the Health Sciences Library are administratively separate from the UVA. Library and do not report to Ms. Wittenborg.

When she arrived at UVA. 10 years ago, Ms. Wittenborg was surprised that the Law School and Health Sciences Library had their separate catalogs, but in the meantime, both have migrated to the Sirsi integrated library system which the University Library uses and merged their catalogs with the Library's, to the benefit of all users.

Ms. Wittenborg briefly touched on her professional background; she has worked most recently at the libraries of UCLA and Stanford, and before that at M.I.T. and the SUNY, serving in reference, collection development and management. She then turned her focus to the University Library.

The University of Virginia Library is the best big library system in the country she asserted, and further, even considering its very strong collections, the Library's staff is its greatest asset. They are knowledgeable, helpful and adaptable—in fact about 98% of them are doing different jobs in the library than they used to. Moreover, hardly a week goes by that she does not receive a letter from a library user thanking her for the help that Library employees recently provided him/her.

The Library has three priority clientele groups—University undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty. The undergraduates' information needs tend to focus on core print collections, digital information access, and physical study space. The teaching faculty want broad, deep collections. The graduate students fall somewhere in between in with their needs.

The continually- and rapidly-evolving nature of information technology has been stressful for Library employees. They perform traditional roles in helping users find information, and now also help them build websites and databases, and teach user education classes in myriad information technologies and formats.

Additionally, Clemons Library reaches out to first-year students through its orientation program. Clemons Director Vicki Coleman encouraged students to make their own library orientation video [to view video, visit the Library's homepage, <http://www.lib.virginia.edu/>, then click on "The Library Video" link] Clemons Library is open to students, faculty, and employees 24 hours a day, and serves not only as a center of learning, but also as a social focus for undergrads, as evidenced by "Club Clemons" on the first floor. In short, the Library in all of its departments is about service and support to the University community.

The Library was and is a focus of the University. Until the construction of Alderman Library during the Depression, the Library was housed at the head of the Academic Village, in the Rotunda. Current University President John Casteen worked in Alderman Library's Special Collections as a student assistant when he attended the University. Moreover, the Library's Special Collections Department is recognized as having the finest collection of American literature in the world. Ms. Wittenborg invited Council representatives to tour Special Collections' McGregor Room to view the current exhibit on the Lewis & Clark expedition, on display until May 5th [you can get an overview of exhibit highlights by visiting: http://www.lib.virginia.edu/speccol/exhibits/lewis_clark/],

and to arrange viewing some of Special Collections' print treasures, including items such as the original Board of Visitors' record book with the signatures of founder Thomas Jefferson, first editions of "Leaves of Grass," "Red Badge of Courage," "Grapes of Wrath," etc. The Library's Special Collections will soon be housed in the new Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library/ Harrison Institute for American History, Literature and Culture under construction in front of Alderman. Library construction is scheduled for completion in April 2004.