

## Provost Employee Communication Council Approved Minutes—January 8, 2003 Meeting

Present: Jo Ann Addison, Brian Bader, Alan Cohn (ex-officio), Susan Fogler, Mary Gentry, Brad Holland (ex-officio), Linda Hunt, Roger Morris, Douglas Moseley, Diane Russell, Sarah Seat, Kathryn Soule, Glenn Taylor, Anda Webb (ex-officio), Sue Wharam

Guest: Nancy Rivers, Director, And State Government Relations Office

Chair Susan Fogler called the January meeting of the Provost Employee Communication Council to order.

The meeting began with discussion of various Council business/"house-keeping" issues.

The Chair thanked volunteer webmaster Glenn Taylor for his work in helping to transfer Council's website to a new server over the holidays, thanked Sue Wharam for her skillful parlaying of some \$60 of Council reps' donations into a number of gifts for the local elderly lady whom Council "adopted" for the holidays, and thanked Joann Addison for the appealing spread of breakfast foods and coffee she set up for our meeting. Also mentioned: November 2002 meeting minutes are now mounted on Council's website [NB: Dec. 2002 meeting was a non-business, holiday gathering]; the co-worker letter on performance evaluations read anonymously in the Nov. 2002 meeting has been shared (without attribution) with Human Resources for a response; the chair suggested reviewing Council bylaws and attendance issues starting at our February 2003 meeting—the voting bylaws will be reviewed as well to make sure we have everything covered in this bylaw that was experienced in last year's voting process. It was noted that the council's bylaws have not been revised since 1996.

The Chair also brought up for Council members' consideration whether we should repeat the all-councils meeting the PECC hosted jointly with the other University staff communication councils last July, at which our Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, our Vice President and Provost, our Vice President for Finance, our Vice President for Student Affairs, and the Medical Center Chief Executive Officer answered questions forwarded from the councils' constituents. Several representatives expressed reservations about repeating this event this summer, as the July 2002 joint meeting had a somewhat low attendance, our Council and its officers expended a lot of effort to organize it, and initial contacts this year with other staff council chairs re a July 2003 joint meeting have gotten no response to date. A couple of Council members suggested that we should not take on this burden if there is no expressed interest from other councils, and additionally it might help attendance, if we do repeat this joint session, to schedule it for the fall rather than July. Another Council member expressed confusion as to whether employees in the Provost's area really thought they were invited, and whether they could have release time to attend or not.

Questions of attendance/participation led the chair to mention that she had been disappointed at the weak showing of employee council officers at a recent training meeting she participated in with John Lord, especially as none of the council chairs and vice chairs have had any formal training on how to perform their duties. A Council member then expressed concerns that her department was not participating in the Recognition and Rewards program. Anda Webb explained in response that, though the departments in our area did all have their Recognition & Rewards plans reviewed and approved by the Provost's office, individual departments did have discretion to opt out of certain parts of the program.

The Chair then turned the meeting over to Nancy Rivers, who had just joined us to brief Council on the current General Assembly session, especially about bills and initiatives affecting the University and its employees. She first reviewed the State Governmental Affairs Office mission—to advise the President, the Provost, and other senior administrators on the impact of state legislative and executive actions in their areas of responsibility (however, the majority of questions her office fields come from classified staff) explained how our State Government Affairs Office is organized broadly around our budget divisions. Melody Bianchetto and her staff follow state actions affecting our operating budget, Tom Leback follows state actions affecting our capital budget (new buildings, facilities, maintenance, etc.) and Ms. Rivers herself follows changes in the Code of Virginia and Administrative Code that affect the University. Ms. Bianchetto and Colette Sheehy will analyze the state budget after Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>, and every 5-6 days the Legislative Update website is updated (see URL below). Nancy Tramontin works on the website and if you have any ideas on its content our layout please let Ms. Tramontin know.

Ms. Rivers then responded to council representative's questions about the recent article in The Daily Progress that suggested UVA (Virginia Tech and the College of William and Mary) wanted to have more autonomy from the General Assembly. The University does want to negotiate a different relationship to the state government, though with this being a short legislative session dominated by budget issues, it will likely be 2004 before UVA can go forward on this with the General Assembly. She pointed out that state general funds will provide only about 7% of our budget next year, that staff haven't had raises for two years, and that it's been 14 years since faculty have been at benchmark salaries. The University would want more control over setting tuition rates, so that UVA can engage in long-range planning with reliable funding estimates.

Ms. Rivers further clarified that the form of this looser relationship with the General Assembly—whether it be modeled on “codified autonomy” (similar to our Medical Center), an “authority” (similar to MCV) or some other scenario, is still being flushed out. Employees sometimes confuse these ideas with the “decentralization” initiatives that have been implemented since 1994; though part of the larger picture of more autonomy from the General Assembly, decentralization mainly entails having more local freedom in matters like purchasing, where we could go to a post-procurement audit process rather than wait two weeks for state approval for the University to buy any vehicle for our fleet.

Some of these decentralization pilots are being made permanent during this General Assembly session, and legislators seem open to more decentralization.

Ms. Rivers confirmed the sentiment in that there will be no further cuts to higher education in this state budget. The University did also receive some non-general revenue funds, for example, \$1.3 million towards employee health insurance costs this year, but we have to get state approval even when we spend our own money, sponsored programs being just one example. Another recent example of state control was that the University was only saved from having to advertise all its job openings in the Richmond Times-Dispatch with other state agencies because the state had problems negotiating a contract with the paper.

Ms. Rivers then mentioned that the University was following several bills with impact on Virginia Retirement System and state employee retirement, on faculty tenure, with international and foreign students, and with the UVA Medical Center. [NB: For a recent update on the status of bills of interest to UVA employees, visit our State Govt. Relations Office website at: <http://www.virginia.edu/governmentalrelations/> and click on the Legislative Update link.] As background, Ms. Rivers also mentioned the sense in Richmond that nothing with a negative budget impact would get passed this year, there would be no tax increases, even for cigarettes, and that the 2003-2004 raise for state employees had been taken out of the budget. President Casteen plans to go down to the General Assembly next week [week of 1/13-1/17] and will mention our staff and faculty salary situation, but with a November election coming up, he's not hopeful they would appropriate any money for raises.

In response to Ms. Rivers' discussion of UVA's desire for less control from Richmond, a Council representative replied that his coworkers felt ok with the University cutting red tape in the finance area, but they were very nervous about the possibility of less state oversight of us in the human resources area, especially losing the option of a grievance appeal to the state Department of Human Resources Management, or not having the Virginia Retirement System as our primary retirement fund. Council's Human Resources ex-officio Alan Cohn asked how having a locally-controlled grievance procedure would make us different from any private business, to which the Council member expressed his reservations about referring to the University as a business, when it is rather a non-profit organization that adopts certain best practices from business when appropriate for us. The Council representative then asked Mr. Cohn how many UVA employees appeal their grievances to Richmond. He responded that it was only a handful on the academic side, and he was not familiar with grievance stats from the Medical Center side.

In response to Mr. Cohn's observation that as employee council representatives we may be apt to hear more from areas where things are not going well rather than the areas where things are running smoothly, a Council representative replied that the best way to get a quantifiable and objective fix on how things are going in our various departments is to go forward with an employee satisfaction survey, as the University had originally planned to do before the budget crunch. Instead of waiting, perhaps for years, until we

have the \$60,000 or so an expert survey consultant firm would charge to survey employees here, why couldn't we conduct a survey internally, using our own resources? Ms. Webb cautioned that she felt conducting a flawed survey would be worse than doing no survey at all, and that an experienced survey firm had the expertise and objectivity, which we could not provide on our own. Another council representative seconded the idea of UVA conducting its own employee satisfaction survey, and that it would make a positive impact for him just to receive in the mail even a one-page survey from our Executive Vice President, asking how he felt about his job currently.

There was also discussion and recognition that there would be more feedback if an outside agency conducted this survey. One council member said that he would feel more comfortable having a non-biased agency reviewing his comments than having a UVA employee reading his survey. The costs of having an outside agency conduct such a survey was noted and it was also noted that in the President's report that there is non-allocated donations. It was asked why couldn't these funds be used for this survey?

After receiving consensus that UVA does need to have an employee survey, the chair was asked to bring this issue up at the next Executive Employee Communication Council.

A final council topic of discussion was the recent experiences of Oracle timekeepers with the Time Management application. Chair S. Fogler read excerpts (without personal or departmental attribution) from a letter an Oracle timekeeper wrote to her Council rep that expressed a high level of frustration and stress with the employee time recording procedures the OTM software forces on her and colleagues. This letter also expressed serious concerns about certain comments made at the December Grounds-wide Oracle users meeting, concerns confirmed by a couple of Council members who were at the meeting. Ms. Webb responded that if anyone answering questions in that meeting was using inappropriate humor in this stressful transition time, that this needed to be addressed. Mr. Cohn suggested that the chair forward a copy of this letter, minus any identifying information, to our Chief Human Resources Officer for his information and response. Ms. Webb went on to reassure timekeepers and representatives that management was aware of the problems and glitches the Oracle HR and time management software has had, and that it was understood that this situation could not remain as is and that processes had to begin working better. She recounted a situation in which she was performing a procedure in Oracle that ended up taking some 48 hours and locking up the system, but by getting a patch from Oracle she was then able to have the procedure run smoothly and quickly.

At 10:30, after reminding Council that our February meeting will convene at Clemons Library, with University Librarian K. Wittenborg as guest, Ms. Fogler adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,  
Douglas Moseley, Council Secretary