

Minutes

Provost Level Employee Communication Council meeting – January 14, 2004

Present: Brian Bader, Doug Moseley, Kathy Soule, Suellen Hill, Linda Hunt, Michael Kidd, Ann Zook, Faye Snyder, Rob Schuett, Iva Gillet, Alan Cohn, Glenn Taylor, Anda Webb, Carolyn Laquatra, Jean Varner, Kathy Woodson, Susan Fogler, Christopher Loss, Patricia Scott (Medical Center Employee Council vice chair); Gloria Smith (Medical Center Employee Council chair)

Linda Hunt called the meeting to order for Jo Ann Addison who was absent.

Nancy Rivers, Assistant Vice President for Management & Budget, Office of State Governmental Relations, began the meeting with a discussion of her office's activities and recent developments in efforts by UVA, Virginia Tech, and the College of William and Mary to seek greater fiscal and procedural autonomy from the Commonwealth of Virginia through the proposed Commonwealth Chartered Universities and Colleges Act of 2004. Ms. Rivers pointed out that her office serves as a bridge between UVA and the state government in Richmond and encouraged council members to visit her office's website at <http://www.virginia.edu/governmentalrelations>. She also encouraged staff to contact her (nan9k@virginia.edu) or her assistant Susan Williamson Hill (srw4m@virginia.edu) with any questions about her office's activities or the autonomy issue. Ms. Rivers handed out a copy of the 2004 Virginia General Assembly session dates, viewable at http://www.virginia.edu/governmentalrelations/2004_Session_Calendar.pdf.

Ms. Rivers then discussed the recently publicized autonomy campaign which can be described as an evolutionary process and arguably one whose time has come. She credited UVA Vice President for Management and Budget Colette Sheehy as leading UVA's pre-2004 decentralization initiatives. Since the 1990s state funding for UVA has decreased from 28 to 8 percent. In the meantime, the Board of Visitors, which has authority to set tuition rates, has been unable to do so because of state mandated caps and freezes on tuition, while high enrollment demands for UVA continue, and the University offers below-market tuition costs. The autonomy proposal for UVA, Virginia Tech, and William and Mary is now in a draft stage. Ms. Rivers will email weekly legislative updates concerning autonomy to Provost Employee Council chair Jo Ann Addison. The updates should describe any potential effects on classified staff.

When asked if legislation for autonomy has any sponsors, Ms. Rivers said that legislators are not surprised by the proposal but understandably need more information about it. There is great support for higher education in Virginia and UVA is talking with House and Senate leadership about the matter. Examples of situations which might be alleviated by greater autonomy include: UVA's inability to offer classified staff a merit pay increase such as the 1.75 percent increase given to faculty in the fall of 2003, and the need to get state fire marshal approval for fireworks used in a UVA stage presentation (after having already met UVA fire safety requirements). Securing greater autonomy must not cost UVA its institutional prestige or its ability to make quality education accessible to all through such mechanisms as financial aid to low- and middle-income students.

Mention was made by the council representative from the UVA Darden Graduate School of Business Administration of Darden's and the Law Schools' experiences in their securing autonomy from UVA. Darden and Law staff were concerned about a possible loss of benefits, reduction in retirement funding, isolation from UVA as North Grounds entities, and losing the prestige of official ties to their parent institution. In fact, such negative impact did not befall Darden and the Law School, and one positive outgrowth has been the ability of Darden to fund locally its technical staff which has grown considerably in recent years.

A meeting attendee pointed out that UVA needs to keep classified staff abreast of developments in the push for autonomy, since change is often stressful and of great concern to staff. It was then pointed out that newspapers such as the Daily Progress and Washington Post have been more prolific sources of information concerning autonomy than UVA itself. Another observation was that rumors instead of facts have been sources of information for many. Ms. Rivers indicated that there will likely be an article in Inside UVA on Friday, January 16 and pointed out that legislative language is still not set, details are still being worked on, and the proposal is in its initial stages. Many issues affecting classified staff are under discussion. UVA must also work with Virginia Tech and William and Mary on language for the proposed legislation. Though similar developments in higher education are taking place nationwide and by all indications the timing is right for autonomy, the top priority in Virginia lawmaking this year is Governor Warner's proposed tax legislation, not transportation, K-12 schools, and higher education. Under the Governor's proposed budget, the next staff raise would take place on November 25, 2005, -- 3 percent for contributors plus 1 percent for extraordinary.

With over 3,000 bills under consideration, the proposal for UVA, Tech, and William and Mary autonomy must be considered as one element of intensive legislative activity. January 23 is the last day to introduce legislation in the General Assembly. When asked about opposition in the legislature, Ms. Rivers responded that there is more support than opposition. The proposal could potentially free up funding for other state universities and colleges which lack the financial endowments of the three collaborating institutions. One potential negative impact might be the need to move certain state jobs from Richmond to Charlottesville or other places.

A council member from the library reported a conversation with a coworker in which she (the coworker) recounted often hearing that Medical Center staff had morale problems and that she worried morale/job satisfaction could worsen among academic staff in a decentralized environment. Classified staff in the Hospital experienced codified autonomy in the 1990s. The chair and vice chair of the Medical Center Employee Council, present at the meeting, responded that uncertainty about, and an abundance of, change have been most disconcerting for staff in the hospital experience but that things are not as bad as they sound. Leave issues are a major concern, with time off often allowed at the discretion of one's supervisor and a lack of holidays like on the academic side at UVA. Ms. Rivers responded that the Board of Visitors would likely have authority to set up a personnel system in a UVA plan.

A council member made mention of a combined employee councils forum in Minor Hall Auditorium, some two summers ago, in which administration officials from the academic side and the hospital fielded pre-submitted questions/issues from constituent staff. One official said (paraphrased) that he wondered if it would not be better to have fewer classified employees here, pay them a higher salary, and expect more work from them. Ms. Rivers was not familiar with this statement. Next, it was pointed out by a meeting attendee that increasing numbers of classified staff must get second jobs to make ends meet, enduring salary freezes and at the same time increases in taxes and services costs. One council member indicated that this was the member's situation, working part-time at Piedmont Virginia Community College while remaining full-time at UVA.

Ms. Rivers mentioned that attendance at the January 9, 2004, legislative forum was low. Classified staff may have kept away because of snowy weather. It was also suggested that resignation and apathy may have been factors in the low attendance. This completed Ms. Rivers' presentation.

UVA Health Plan Ombudsman Anne Dawson next responded to questions solicited from classified staff by the council. Ms. Dawson encouraged staff to email her (abd4f@virginia.edu) with any questions concerning health benefits. (Later on in the question and answer period with Ms.

Dawson, council members reported that there had been some problems with the mail order component of the new health plan, i.e., mail order contact people were not very professional. Ms. Dawson had not previously received any comments of this nature and said she would like to hear from staff regarding any problems they might be having with health or prescription plans.)

Q. Can University Human Resources (UHR) give a statistical/percent breakdown on how many employees opted the new direct access health plan vs. staying with point-of service?

A. From 12,000 staff members, there was a 96.1 percent return rate of responses in the recent health plan open enrollment. 1.9 percent opted for the new plan. 3.8 percent were defaulted into the new plan. It is not known what portion of this 3.8 percent actually selected the new plan.

Q. Several employees also complained that the new plan option took little note of their voiced concerns/preferences. Was the Benefits Committee forwarding employee needs/preferences to UHR-Benefits before the new option got designed?

A. The UVA Direct Access plan is similar to that of other entities. With 1.25 million dollars spent per week on claims, there is indeed a financial driver behind the plan. The UVA Benefits Committee is a non-voting organization and mainly passes on to the UVA administration coverage concerns.

Q. Should every employee have gotten a new insurance card from Southern Health this month?

A. All classified staff should have received new Southern Health insurance cards. Additionally, new cards were issued for eye/vision discounts and prescriptions/pharmaceuticals.

Q. Are part-time classified or hourly employees now able to get coverage in the UVA Health Plan? Are all full-time employees covered (employee asked this because she saw an article in the current "Cville Weekly" newsmagazine about the Charlottesville Free Clinic, and the article mentioned a UVA "full-time employee" who said he had no UVA health insurance.)?

A. On the academic side only, all 32-hour, salaried staff with 6 months or more employment are eligible for health care coverage. Staff in wage positions are not eligible.

Q. I've heard on the local news that the General Assembly will be considering a bill to let the Virginia State Employee Plan buy prescription drugs from Canada.

A. Canadian prescription drugs are not approved drugs under the health plan, due to safety issues and lack of Food and Drug Administration oversight.

Q. Has UHR-Benefits considered covering more of employee's UVA gym membership fees, as an employee wellness initiative to lower UVA health plan costs? Could Benefits or the councils poll employees' interest in participating in exercise classes with employer-covered membership? Is IQ Health currently reaching out to UVA staff with wellness/health info? Are they also helping local private industry workers, as our UVA Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is now doing?

A. UVA's contribution to the gym membership subsidy will not increase for budget reasons, but this may be revisited later. In discussion between Ms. Dawson and the council it was determined that the IQ Health Program has apparently received inconsistent promotion. Darden staff are aware of it; library staff are not. Activities in this program are offered at central locations and are well attended. By contract Employee Assistance Program (EAP) assistance is offered to local private industry.

Other topics covered during questions and answers with Ms. Dawson follow.

There is now a \$30.00 co-payment for all specialist treatments including mental health consultations. Going through the EAP, one is still allowed eight sessions with no co-pay, after which one must make the \$30.00 co-payment. Ms. Dawson encouraged staff to take advantage of the flexible spending account plan which allows tax-deferred savings to be put aside for

payment of health care costs. Several council members described positive experiences with this plan. Ms. Dawson said that it is difficult to predict if health care premiums will increase as health care costs continue to climb.

Several council members then went on a tour of Alderman Library, organized by library council representative Doug Moseley.

The next council meeting will be held on February 11, 2004, in the Rodman Room, Thornton Hall. Council members must provide questions to Jo Ann Addison for guest speakers Leonard Sandridge and Gene Block no later than February 2.

Submitted by Brian Bader