

Minutes

Provost Level Employee Communication Council meeting – September 10, 2003

Present: Brian Bader, Doug Moseley, Kathy Soule, Jennifer Hitchcock, Suellen Hill, Linda Hunt, Michael Kidd, Melody Palmer, Sarah Seat, Faye Snyder, Brenda Boyd, Jo Ann Addison, Jason Dalton, Iva Gillet, Alan Cohn (*ex officio*), Rebecca Peters, Deirdre Davie, Anda Webb (*ex officio*), Jean Varner, Susan Fogler (past chair), Chris Loss (guest)

The meeting began with introductions by all attendees. As a reminder, the July 2003 minutes are still needed. Another reminder was that the November 2003 meeting will cover benefits. It was noted that benefits meetings have not been well attended in the past, but that after these meetings, typically, classified staff have many questions about benefits and changes in them. It was noted that questions about prescription drug benefits being denied due to generic drug substitutions should be directed to Anne Dawson of Human Resources.

A list of the Council's members, a copy of the council's by-laws, and the council's 2003-2004 schedule were then handed out.

Council members then voiced particular concerns and issues. One concern was the lack of communication between Human Resources (HR), the various Schools and the classified staff. Employees don't always know the procedure for trying to resolve their problems and relying on their supervisors for information has not proven useful. An example of one concern was a situation involving an Arts and Sciences (A&S) staff member with a medical condition affecting the employee's work schedule. The employee went to her supervisor, who in turn referred her to the Dean's Office, she was told nothing could be done. The council member thought this situation should have been referred to HR. In discussing this situation, it was determined that increased awareness of lines of communications might help employees better address their problems. Similarly, better lines of communications might have helped other A&S staff who had not received information on the upcoming Employee Work Profile (EWP). Information on the EWP has in fact been disseminated but in this situation had not reached some A&S staff.

In discussion about expectations for the council several ideas and issues concerning awareness of council activities, or lack thereof, were mentioned. One was to develop an awareness program about the council and its activities. Another was to create an anonymous suggestion box like the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences uses. In the past, the council has had a presence at new employee orientation fairs (the one scheduled for March 2003 was cancelled for budgetary reasons). It was agreed that the council should be represented at the November 2003 faculty and new employee resource fair. In discussions concerning publicizing a council meeting open to any interested staff, one idea focused on having small group meetings, such as brown bag lunches, in areas where a larger department wide council is lacking (as is the Law School experience), then promoting an open-to-all council meeting.

In a discussion of constituency v. individual issues, one suggestion was made to focus primarily on the former at council meetings so that issues of importance to a broader audience are discussed by the council. It was noted, however, that individual issues are sometimes recognized by council members as issues affecting their areas and can also be useful for discussion. In any event, individual problems should always be referred to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for help in resolution.

It was noted that in some areas, notices concerning minimum wage, handicap access, and employment guidelines, as mandated by Federal and State law, are not being conspicuously posted. A suggestion was made to post them in some central location frequented by classified staff, such as Newcomb Hall.

In a discussion of possible speakers for council meetings in the upcoming year, representatives from the following areas were mentioned:

Athletics
Benefits
Community service (program allowing staff 16 hours per year)
Architects office
Facilities
Development office
Police
Vice President/Chief Operating Officer
Continuing education
Tour of the Special Collections department of library
Oracle Integrated System

A discussion of training publicity, too much v. not enough, noted that the amount of publicity classified staff receives can depend on participation in previous courses. ITC and Alderman Library are two areas which offer a lot of valuable training; the former in general is well publicized, while the latter, which offers a lot of diverse courses, might not be as well known.

Finally, in discussion of the upcoming 2.25% pay increase in base salary for classified staff in November 2003, a question arose about budgetary support for the increase. Officially, the pay is "guaranteed" for six months, until the new fiscal year begins, but tuition and state money should allow the increase to carry over. Budget appropriations for two years do not necessarily guarantee an increase for that time period because the budget is reviewed annually, but as a rule, increases do carry over, and in only one extreme case in recent memory was one actually cancelled after being enacted.

Submitted by Brian Bader