UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD
STAFF ASSOCIATION MEETING MINUTES
January 9th, 2013, Woods Family Classroom, Mortensen Library - 1:00 pm


MINUTES: The December, 2012 meeting minutes were approved.

GRIEVANCE OFFICER AND COMMUNITY REP DISCUSSION

Changes requested to two confidentiality forms, (University of Hartford Staff Association Grievant Confidentiality Acknowledgement, and University of Hartford Staff Association Grievance Officer Confidentiality Agreement) were made as requested in the December 2013 meeting. Each updated form was provided in hard-copy to attendees.

Recommended changes to the current Staff Association Bylaws for job descriptions for both the Grievance Office and Community Representatives will be emailed to all Staff Association members in advance of the February 2013 meeting. A vote will be taken at the February general meeting regarding acceptance of these recommendations.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING WITH UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION

The Staff Association Executive Board attended a quarterly meeting with President Harrison, Provost Vasquez, VP of Finance and Administration Arosha Jayawickrema, and Executive Director of Human Resources and Development Lisa Belanger. The meeting was held late in the afternoon of December 12, 2012. There was a positive tone to the meeting and a genuine concern by the President regarding all issues discussed.

The primary focus for the Executive Board in this meeting was inquiring about policies, process, and procedures relative to Staff who will be displaced by Foundations of the Future. Evelyne Haldimann reported that the Executive Board queried Administration about what they felt the Staff Association’s role might be relative to supporting the University (generally) and the staff (specifically) as the University makes its final decisions and begins implementing FoF program divestments and restructuring. That request was well received by the Administrators present and thoughtful answers were returned.

Regarding general support of the University, the Staff Association was asked to encourage staff to begin to refocus on students. It was suggested that the role of all faculty and staff during this time is to look for ways to ensure a better future for the University. Resources need to shift to improve recruiting and retaining students. When prospective students are visiting the University and specific departments, it is hoped that everyone in the department will be aware and that prospective students are personally greeted to a clean and friendly environment. As staff members are often the first point of contact, each of us is asked to find ways to continually improve the student experience.
Discussions then turned to the more specific role of supporting Staff employees who may be displaced by FoF initiatives. Administration asked us to share our concerns. The Executive Board posed questions and stated concerns which included issues about displaced employees being given first option to post/interview for open positions on campus for which they possess appropriate qualifications; to providing consistent policies and processes for restructuring of staff positions across the University (ensuring that all colleges are "playing by the same set of rules"); to providing possible job fairs and resume writing seminars for displaced employees. Questions regarding time-frame and actual process for any necessary employee layoffs were also posed.

Some specific requests included:
- Improving/revamping the overall job posting process to find ways to ensure current employees are notified of new openings at least two weeks prior to the posting being made available to the general public. This process used to occur by using a paper posting site before postings were sent to publications. Since moving to internet posting, it became more difficult to ensure first notification to current employees as we don't have an "intranet" versus the "internet." (Meaning there may not be a great way to electronically post positions to current and/or displaced employees that is not readily accessible to the public.) It was suggested that a Web page, or "Ned Forms page", or an internal HRD web page for internal postings could be made available. This will be looked into.
- Ensuring that at a minimum all internal candidates with appropriate qualifications for the open position be provided an interview.
- Making every attempt to match a good-to-high performing employee from a divested program to a potential opening in a program slated for investment.
- Ensuring that current positions are not eliminated and restructured with the purpose of eliminating current employees (without regard to high levels of performance) to allow hiring outside candidates to attempt to achieve higher value.

Members of the Executive Board also provided personal examples of how they have seen layoffs and downsizing handled in other institutions/business. They expressed concerns that poorly handled processes damaged not only the employees being let go, but also gravely affected retained employees. It was acknowledged by all that the actual process of informing employees that their job has been eliminated very much needs to strike a balance between doing what needs to be done to protect the University and doing what is most thoughtful and humane for the affected employee. A general consensus was that knowing the "plan of action" will be most helpful to employees regardless of the specifics that ultimately have to be used within the process. Although Administration has not yet decided how the process will take place, they will all strongly consider processes for the very best outcome. Thoughtful consideration and humane treatment of those affected was of utmost importance to the President. The possibility of displacement services was also shared to the EBoard.

The Executive Board especially wishes to note that the members of the University Administration were extremely empathetic, caring, and respectful of the concerns expressed at this meeting. It was very clear to the Executive Board that concerns were being heard, understood, and will be very thoughtfully considered.

Lisa Belanger provided an update on progress being made on two Staff Association requests as follows:
1. Allowing part-time employees working less than seven hours per day to waive the University policy requiring the employee to take a half-hour unpaid lunch break (which basically increases their required daily time commitment by that half an hour). This issue became most apparent with the advent of the online time sheet for part-time employees. Employees’ daily input of reported time caused their time-sheet to be “yellow flagged” and questioned if the employee opted to forgo lunch in order to leave work a half hour earlier. In some instances the requirement to include the half-hour lunch within the daily hourly commitment reversed the advantage of opting for part-time employment. Lisa reported that there will not be a need for part-time employees to sign a physical waiver form. Instead language will be inserted into the Staff Employment Manual which will allow employees who work less than seven hours per day to choose not to take a break. Employees who work seven hours or more per day will continue to be required to take/record a lunch break. This is a state mandate for full-time employees as well as a protection for employees, ensuring that they are provided a break in their day. For part-time employees, the on-line time sheet system will not be changed, meaning that the yellow flag will still appear. It is too expensive to request the modification to the system. However, that flag will be ignored. The language for this issue is still being reviewed for final approval by Administration. As soon as this wording has final approval it will be submitted to the Staff Association for its records and the issue will be closed.

2. Eliminating the 2-month longevity requirement for Flexible Work Schedules. Currently, employees are not allowed to request a flexible work schedule that will last less than two months. The two-month duration requirement basically precluded employees from working a flexible work schedule only long enough to take/teach summer term classes. Lisa reported that new wording regarding flexible work schedules will be inserted into the Staff Employment Manual stipulating that requests for shorter flex schedules will be allowed and can be agreed upon between the employee and immediate supervisor. Winter Term classes remain very difficult for flex schedule implementation as there generally simply aren’t enough hours in the week to allow for work time requirements and class time requirements. The language for this issue is still being reviewed for final approval by Administration. As soon as this wording has final approval it will be submitted to the Staff Association for its records and the issue will be closed.

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE REPORTS

BAT The meeting scheduled for January 10th has been canceled. No report.

PURE WELLNESS Kathy Snow was not present, but Evelyne reported that a Zumba class will begin the First week of February and will run on Thursday evenings at 5:15. A Cardio exercise class will be held Monday, February 4th at 5:15. Yoga classes are coming soon. A healthy food festival may be coming soon, perhaps sometime in February.

BTF BTF did not meet, so there is no report. However, Evelyne was asked to provide clarification regarding personal days. It is important to note that an employee still needs to inform/obtain approval for use of “personal days,” but is not required to provide personal information.
SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE – No report.

STAFF ASSOCIATION REPORTS

WEB ADVISORY COMMITTEE – Barbara Dessureau reported that soon all links for Google Mapping all floors for University buildings will be in place. It was also mentioned that corrections have been made to the main University web page for the email directory.

FACULTY SENATE – Ben Ide reported that the main focus of Faculty Senate has been reviewing program closures that were recommended by FoF.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE – No Report.

MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR’S REPORT – Most recent membership count is 163.

TREASURER’S REPORT – There was no change to the balance since the December 2012 report. The current balance is $2,596.06.

OLD BUSINESS –

1. Membership annual verification – still needs resolution.

Respectfully submitted by

Nancy Fields, Secretary