

Staff Council End-of-Year Report

I. Executive Summary

The Staff Council has had a productive year, focusing on internal operations, employee welfare, and engagement with university leadership. Key achievements include refining internal roles, advocating for employee benefits, and enhancing communication channels across campus. The council also facilitated important dialogues with university administration and initiated various community-building events.

II. Membership and Internal Operations

The Staff Council began the year with 10 members in July 2024 and aimed to reach a full capacity of 20 members. Recruitment efforts were discussed, with a focus on word-of-mouth and spring recruitment to counter the difficulty of recruiting in the fall. As of March 2025, the council was operating with nine members but saw an increase in attendance to 13 members in April 2025, including new representatives.

New role designations were approved in July 2024, with Abby Yates as Chair, Caitlin Woolsey as Vice Chair, and Bryn Best as Secretary. A Treasurer position was also voted to be added, pending bylaws review. Zoe Meuth assumed the role of Secretary in February 2025.

Meeting times were retained as 1 PM on the third Wednesday of the month.

III. Key Initiatives and Accomplishments

A. Employee Benefits & Welfare:

- **Staff Council Recognition Award:** Discussions continued regarding expanding the Staff Council Recognition Award, with historical notes of it being a larger event held at Carter Hall with picnic games. Nominations for this award are still being encouraged.
- **Bereavement Policy:** The Staff Council voted to support the addition of cousins to Part B of the Bereavement Policy, following discussions with Tricia Teagan from Admin Senate.
- **Tuition Benefits & Sick Bank:** The council discussed potential updates to tuition benefits and the implementation of a 2-day sick bank or bereavement allowance for starting employees. The idea of a SickBank for support staff was considered beneficial if already used for admin/faculty.
- **Work-From-Home Policy:** The council reflected on the work-from-home policy, noting its effective use in the summer and the inability of custodial staff to utilize this benefit. Mixed feelings were expressed regarding the policy, with some finding unnecessary rules.
- **Student Worker Wages:** The council explored advocating for a student worker wage increase, suggesting a \$2/hour raise to improve retention. This initiative involved discussions about who advocates for students (Student Affairs, SGA, Dean of Students) and the historical context of previous attempts by the Faculty Senate.
- **Fiscally Neutral Benefits:** The Economic Benefits and Communications (EBC) Committee

has been actively researching fiscally neutral policies and benefits given that wage increases are not currently possible. Ideas discussed included a free guest pass for immediate family members or spouses, though its fiscal neutrality was questioned due to its impact on RFW funding.

- **Breaks and Lunches:** The EBC Committee emphasized the importance of employees taking their breaks and lunches as a federal right and a benefit.
- **Time To Get Fit Program:** Advertising the "USI Time to Get Fit" benefit was identified as a goal due to its lack of promotion. The council is advocating for supervisors to provide written justifications for denying requests to use this benefit, which employees should be able to see.
- **Summer Hours:** The possibility of implementing summer hours, allowing employees to work slightly fewer hours while maintaining full-time pay, was discussed, requiring consultation with Human Resources.
- **Employee Tumblers:** The Staff Council discussed extending unlimited refills for USI employee tumblers from a semester to an academic year and plans to contact Sodexo for this proposal.

B. Community Engagement & Events:

- **Fall Food Drive:** Claire Sinvil organized a fall food drive in August/September 2024, placing drop boxes in the Orr Center and across from the advising center. The drive collected a significant number of donations, with the Library having the most. A new trophy without food was to be made due to a hazard with the previous one.
- **Monthly Employee Luncheon:** Admin Senate is hoping to make desserts for a monthly employee luncheon to foster community.
- **Pumpkin Voting:** Abby Yates planned a SharePoint for a pumpkin voting event, with 3D pumpkins and time slots for volunteers.
- **Town Hall / Listening Session:** The council decided to host a town hall/listening session for staff in November to address concerns like wages, turnover, and unfilled positions.
- **Listen and Engage Staff Council Session:** An open session was held on March 19, 2025, allowing staff to ask questions in a casual setting. Snacks were provided, and efforts were made to spread awareness about Staff Council nominations and operations.
- **Archie's Closet Mini Drive:** A successful mini-drive for Archie's Closet was held, with a focus on hygiene products. The Orr Center had the most donations. Claire Sinvil is in charge of Archie's Closet and is preparing for a future handoff as she will be leaving her position.
- **Summer Picnic:** The Employee Relations Committee is planning the summer picnic.

C. Communication and Transparency:

- **Document Management:** Caitlin Woolsey initiated a drive to centralize documents, aiming to prevent knowledge loss and streamline information transfer for future councils.
- **Strategic Marketing Collaboration:** Abby Yates and Caitlin Woolsey are working with Strategic Marketing to extend communication, exploring special events, creative print, and email as cost-effective methods.
- **University Bulletin Boards:** It was noted that university bulletin board communications require approval.

- **Email Octopus:** Lance suggested Email Octopus as a free email marketing site for communications.
- **Transparency with Leadership:** Staff Council is advocating for transparent communication with USI leadership regarding budgetary decisions and changes.

IV. Engagement with University Leadership and Departments

- **Admin Senate:** Tricia Teagan, Chair of Admin Senate, spoke to the Staff Council, noting their open meetings and work on IFCs with President Bridges.
- **Human Resources:** The council had discussions with Sarah from HR regarding the Treasurer position, student worker wages, and the unwritten vacation policy. Hesitancy was expressed about having an HR advisor, especially the HR Director, due to potential conflicts of interest.
- **Facilities, Operations, and Planning (FOP):** Bob Gober from FOP presented on the Mpulse work request system, providing details on submitting and tracking work orders.
- **University Archivist:** Jennifer Greene, University Archivist, discussed Archives Madness and promoted the archives blog, encouraging staff to visit for tours.
- **Institutional Equity Office:** Jennifer Roberts from the Institutional Equity Office explained their role and opportunities for employee involvement as trained investigators, adjudicators, or advisors. DEI was also discussed, with assurances that internal policies would not be changing.
- **President Steve Bridges:** The newly elected President Steve Bridges introduced himself to the Staff Council in April 2025, expressing his commitment to engagement, transparency, and addressing staffing and enrollment goals. Future meetings with President Bridges are planned.
- **Provost:** The Provost requested Staff Council members to join HLC committees, with Megan Knox, Zoe Meuth, Claire Sinvil, and Abby Yates volunteering.
- **University Committees:** The council is clarifying its responsibilities on various university committees, as many have not met regularly since COVID-19.
- **Pott College Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee:** This committee is discussing language changes in anticipation of possible state and federal changes, which is a concern for many on campus.

V. Ongoing Concerns and Future Focus

- **Recruitment:** Continued emphasis on recruiting new members to reach full capacity remains a priority.
- **Treasurer/Finance Advisor:** The finalization of the Treasurer's duties and the search for a finance advisor are ongoing.
- **Bylaws Update:** A bylaws update is anticipated to make the Treasurer position official in the next fiscal year. The bylaws were last updated in June 2023.
- **Wage Increases:** The council continues to address wage increases, acknowledging that fiscally neutral benefits are a current focus given the limitations on direct wage increases.
- **University Phone System:** USI is transitioning its phone system to Teams.
- **Support for Employees in Crisis:** The council offered resources to an employee dealing with an abusive spouse, referencing the YWCA as a potential source of help.