The following web submissions will be discussed during the September 8, 2020 meeting.

Idea/Rationale: I have concerns about how restrictive the new interim faculty/staff conduct policies might be on off-campus gatherings. I am especially concerned with how far they might go in abridging the constitutional rights to assembly and free exercise of religion of everyone employed by the university. The healthy web compact and associated distancing framework go well beyond current health guidance and are extremely restrictive in this regard. I sincerely hope the university will not force such draconian and patently unconstitutional restrictions on faculty and staff.

Response: The following response is from a communication with Brittany Schaal on August 6, 2020, when a similar concern was addressed:

The Healthy Web Compact is intended to be a statement of shared principles and practices – not a detailed and binding contract. While the University encourages each employee to sign the Healthy Web Compact, signing the document is not a condition of employment. However, all employees will be required to comply with the University’s interim health and safety policies and the Physical Distancing Framework, regardless of whether they commit to the Health Web Compact. We hope that employees who agree to the Compact are signaling an individual commitment to promote the health of our students, faculty, and staff and motivating fellow colleagues to do the same. Shared individual and collective responsibility can become a powerful tool in mitigating health and safety risks within the University community.

While on campus students, faculty, and staff must comply with the guidelines established within the Physical Distancing Framework. Off-campus, individuals are encouraged to follow public health guidance and abide by the guidelines established within the Governor’s Forward Virginia Plan.

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Idea/Rationale: I thank USAC for all its advocacy for staff, I know you are all working hard. I do think that this pandemic has made it painfully obviously that we are a distant third in the communication priorities, after faculty and students, as well as the amount of thought that went into how we should adapt to the school reopening. I think we need to figure out how to raise the volume of our voices, and maybe the structures of accountability to staff. The last open USAC forum indicated that upper administration didn’t know how staff should work during a red stage when in a student-facing office. Staff serve many different functions and have different needs, but we seemed an afterthought. It was disheartening at best. And it’s not that I don’t think everyone was working really hard, and probably at capacity, but the execution of the messaging was unclear, and ill-thought out. I know we can do better.

Response: As a council, we are committed to bridging the gap between faculty and staff regarding access to information, decision making, and proximity to upper leadership. To this end, we have invited members of the President’s Council to attend USAC meetings to provide updates and address concerns. Additionally, constituent questions and concerns received through the web submission process and by way of USAC representatives are regularly shared with Dave Hale, Jeff Legro, and Carl Sorensen (at least once a month). We accept that this is a small step in the right direction and acknowledge the hurt and disappointment this web submission brings to light.

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Idea/Rationale: With many staff having to use technology more and more, has the University considered bringing back the interest free computer loans that they used to offer so that staff that may not be able to afford a computer otherwise would have a way to purchase such an item. I was just trying to think of a solution for many of our staff who need the technology at home to check emails and do the daily survey as well as those who have children now virtually learning.

Response: Information services was contacted on August 19 about this web submission. An email response from Doug West (via Melody Wilson) shared that the above-mentioned was an HR program and that IS was part of the execution phase. Given this context, Carl Sorenson was contacted on August 19. As of September 1, Carl responded that HR was still looking into this web submission and was “trying to ascertain the need and effectiveness of a program.” USAC will continue to inquire about this web submission until a final decision has been made.

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Compliment: Just wanted to say thank you to USAC for the great communication and providing opportunities to staff to connect via zoom to campus leaders. The communication we have received since July has been great. I know that USAC has a tough job, and often tough questions come up, so thank you for facilitating.

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Idea/Rationale: Could HR publish a location map of available private breastfeeding/pumping locations? I work in food service there is nowhere private to do this.

Response: Tracy Kitt, HR Business Partner, shared the following response to the web submitter on August 31: Here's the link to the lactation support program that's on the HR website, https://hr.richmond.edu/benefits/work-life/lactation-support.html. As you will see there are a couple of designated locations across campus for lactation, which has refrigerators. I know when this program was put in place, there was a lot of research that was done. However, HR is always open to suggestions or feedback on how we can make any program better. I'm sharing your email with our Director, Compensation & Benefits, Laura Dietrick. Please feel free to reach out to her if you have ideas or suggestions that will be beneficial for mothers. There are also other resources on this website.

The submitter expressed additional concern that there is a lack of lactation rooms on the Westhampton side of campus and that staff who do not have private offices are disproportionately affected. Prior Vice Chair, Meg Pevarski, shared that this concern was addressed during her term on USAC and that they tried to engage HR on the following:

1. A training for supervisors on how to best support the transition of new mothers back.
2. The location of lactation rooms. If you look at the locations- there are virtually none on the Westhampton side of campus. Having to walk to the gym to pump in the middle of the locker room every 2/3 hours is not something that is feasible for many workers on-campus. There were many people who shared with us that they pumped in single-use bathrooms because it was the only private space they could get access to.

After discussing this web submission during closed session, USAC Council members expressed support the creation of a supervisor training and making resources easily available to parents returning from leave. These suggestions will be discussed with HR.