

# UNIVERSITY STAFF ADVISORY COUNCIL

## June 2017 Web Submissions

### 1. Date Submitted: April 12, 2017

**Web Sub:** *While the Heilman Dining Center welcomes all patrons to their facility, it would be nice if large departments who regularly meet/eat at the Heilman Dining Center would carpool instead of taking the limited number of spaces for staff who work in the Heilman Dining Center and Campus Post Office. Dining Hall staff are often times forced to seek another lot or get to work super early just to get a parking space so they are not late for work.*

**Response:** Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this web sub. At the University of Richmond, we are fortunate to have free parking so close to our places of work. That is not the case at most schools. The University works hard to maintain this level of convenience for its employees, but we are impacted by the unintended consequence of becoming a car-centric campus. Our 2011 Campus Master Plan addressed this issue and prioritized safer, more convenient pedestrian circulation. University Facilities staff have made tremendous progress in this area with increased walkways and traffic calming devices to slow vehicular traffic. Likewise, Transportation offers multiple options for commuters, including free bus passes and ride sharing opportunities, which decrease the use of single-occupancy vehicles. From an environmental perspective, it is important to remember that our vehicle emissions contribute to climate change. The opportunity to access electric or low-emitting vehicles is not in everyone's immediate control, but most people who commute by car still have the choice to drive once on campus. From the Office for Sustainability's perspective, it would be excellent if those who are able prioritized walking or biking to our campus destinations over driving when possible. (Rob Andrews)

### 2. Date Submitted: April 20, 2017

**Web Sub:** *I've read through the University of Richmond's new strategic plan, Forging the Future, Building from Strength, and in the spirit of this plan, which talks about building a thriving and inclusive university community by retain(ing) more diverse faculty and staff and by provid(ing) professional development and mentoring opportunities that support rewarding career paths and encourage faculty and staff to engage fully in the life of the University,? (<https://strategicplan.richmond.edu/thriving-community/index.html>) I would like USAC to consider the following suggestion: Make education benefits and Wellness Center benefits inclusive and available to all employees. Tuition Remission (1 course immediately and then 2 courses per semester after the first year of employment) is a wonderful employee benefit that helps retain employees and that supports rewarding career paths and engages employees in the life of the University. It educates and therefore creates more knowledgeable and loyal employees for this University, but it is not currently inclusive. It is currently a benefit for full-time employees. There are many of us working here on campus in a part time capacity, not because that is our first choice to do so but because that is what the hiring manager was budgeted to hire. Many of us take the part time job, hoping it will lead to something full time and we also just love working here and being a part of this world of education. The irony is that since we have a shorter work day, we have plenty of free time to take classes (something we would get as a full time benefit when we do not have quite so much free time). We are told that we can go sit in the Ukrop Auditorium to watch a movie on a Friday afternoon, but we cannot go sit in one of the empty seats of a class that will take place whether we are there or not. This doesn't make sense. This is not a benefit that costs the university to give; those classes will take place whether or not we*

*sit in a few of the empty chairs and join in. I'd like the University to allow all employees (full time and part time) to begin taking 1 course immediately and 2 courses per semester after 6 months of employment (instead of 4 years). Personally, I'd like to be full time well before I reach 4 years, and when I am full time, I won't have quite so much time to spare for taking classes. Wellness Center benefits are also not inclusive as they are never offered to part time employees not even after 4 years. My argument is the same. The Wellness Center is open right now, whether I am there or not, so my going there after my work day is done at 2pm will not cost anything extra. Healthy employees are a good thing. Let the part timers get a healthy workout too.*

**Response:** Like all other benefits, tuition remission is not free. Every time an employee or dependent takes a class a payment is made from our fringe benefit pool. Last year, the University paid almost \$3.5 million for employee and dependent tuition remission. The University is very appreciative of the work of our part-time employees, but there is simply no room in the University's compensation budget to expand eligibility for the Tuition Remission benefit. (Carl Sorensen & Dave Hale)

We believe the current membership fee structure provides a great benefit to our part time students, staff and faculty. Before opening the Weinstein Center we looked at how we were going to control access and who was currently eligible. We experienced a difficult challenge determining who and how to charge employees because there seems to be no clear and consistent definition for full-time and part-time employees and significant disparities in their workloads and differences in their benefits.

We studied what fees other universities charge for part-time students and employees. Our research clearly indicates most universities charge membership fees to everyone except full-time students. The number of institutions charging membership fees continues to increase as more universities invest millions of dollars to renovate and build new recreational facilities. We feel very confident we researched this matter carefully and our decisions were made in the best interest of the entire University community. (Tom Roberts)

### **3. Date Submitted:** May 15, 2017

**Web Sub:** *Why did we have to find out that a member of the president's cabinet (and our athletic director) was leaving the university through the local news? Where was the campus announcement from Dr. Crutcher? We hired a new VP of communications last year, and it seems that we still can't handle controversy or communicating to our community well (e.g. the sexual assault scandal, this new seeming scandal with Keith Gill leaving, according to the news).*

**Response:** We acknowledge that we need to do a better job communicating with faculty and staff. As was mentioned in the recent *Spiders in the Know* program, we have recognized this deficiency and are developing communications that will improve faculty/staff communications in the future.

We are not always at liberty to share all the information we might like. In some instances, we are prohibited by law. In other instances, such as the appointment or departure of a staff member, we try to coordinate our communications in accordance with the needs of the person involved. In the instance referenced, we were coordinating a message with Keith Gill when news of his planned departure was reported by a local sports columnist. In deference to Keith, and in accordance with his wishes at that time, we immediately issued our statement. This approach was made necessary by the "leak" of Keith's plans, but it was not how we had planned to share the news with the campus. (John Barry)

#### 4. Date Submitted: May 16, 2017

**Web Sub:** *I suggest that Accounts Payable's "Office of Strategic Sourcing & Payments Missing Information Notification" be sent electronically instead of via interoffice mail. The check request process is already slow, to begin with, and waiting days for interoffice mail pick-up and delivery and then pick-up again and re-delivery drags it out even longer. Especially when it could easily be shortened using simple electronic tools - fillable PDFs and e-mail. Delivering the form electronically would save resources. The pricier colored paper on which the forms are printed could be eliminated. And the most valuable resource of all - time - would be saved; not only that of those involved directly with the check request but also of the post-office employees. I recently witnessed a co-worker receive forms back from AP that should have been directed to HR first. And the same has happened to me. Although it is true that we didn't follow the proper procedure and needed to be educated - it is the University of Richmond's partners who suffer for the glacial pace of the "Missing Information Notification." Instead of AP sending the forms directly to HR and then notifying us of the correct process, they sent them back to us via interoffice mail and we then had to put them back in the exact same interoffice envelopes and send them to HR ourselves. That drawn out method easily added 2-3 days onto an already 2-week long average transaction. I frequently have contracted presenters and vendors lamenting and following up with me about the length of time it takes them to receive payment for their services. In my opinion, it's not great for a university with a reputation for being "rich" and "snobby" to also have the reputation with its partners of being slow to pay for services rendered. Especially when we're trying to overcome the negative stereotypes. Notwithstanding negative opinions, it's just good practice to streamline and improve processes to benefit everyone involved, but indeed our valued partners.*

**Response:** Thank you for your candid comments about our Missing Information Notification form. The Accounts Payable Office is currently in the testing phase of automating the process of returning documents for correction. Our target date of going Live with this automation is July; more information will be forthcoming as we finalize the date for the rollout. We are hopeful the change will bring more efficiency to the payment process.

In reference to vendors or speakers being paid an average of two weeks or longer, please let your vendors and speakers know that the University's payment terms are "net 30", which is quite standard and means that vendors should receive payment within 30 days of Accounts Payable receiving the properly completed invoice or payment request. Payments are, however, issued an average of 10 business days from receipt in Accounts Payable. We consistently review our procedures and strive to streamline and improve efficiencies so that payments to vendors and reimbursements are made as expeditiously as possible. If you have instances when payments were not paid within 30 days of Accounts Payable's receipt of the request, please contact me offline so that we can discuss. (Jean Hines)

#### 5. Date Submitted: May 17, 2017

**Web Sub:** *Our division is going through USAC elections right now, and it appears that part time staff members cannot taking part in the election process. I don't see anything in the bylaws regarding part time employees voting, just that they are not eligible to be nominated or serve. I think all staff employees should have a voice and a vote in regards to who gets elected to represent them, regardless of how many hours they work a week.*

**Response:** Thank you for alerting us to our oversight regarding PT staff voting in the USAC election. We were unaware that PT staff had not received notification about voting. A list request was made to HR on May 18 and received later that same day. It contained 89 records. Of those 89, two employees did not have an active email on file.

As of noon on May 19, those employees whose elections were currently open were all added to their respective elections and emailed notification of their option to vote. They had until May 31 to cast their vote.

For the Academic Affairs and Business Affairs at-large elections, which started the following Tuesday, PT employees were added and were sent notification when their election opened. They will had until May 31 to cast their vote.

Here is a breakdown of the elections and PT employees who were added:

Academic Affairs (launched Tuesday, May 23): 23

Advancement/Communications: 1

Business Affairs (launched Tuesday, May 23): 41

Athletics: 6

Enrollment Management: 1

IS: 2

Student Development: 13

A complete election report is available in the June 2017 meeting minutes. Thank you again for alerting us to this oversight. (Kirsten McKinney)

#### **6. Date Submitted:** May 17, 2017

**Web Sub:** *Currently, the University of Richmond has inequality in its benefit packages. Prior to marriage equality, UR provided same-gender benefits to same-gender domestic partners that met certain requirements, and I congratulate UR on being so bold in this conservative bastion of Old Virginia. These benefits were not extended to opposite-gender domestic partners who were not legally married. The rationale, as I understood it, was the opposite-gender domestic partners could marry and therefore access benefits. Now that marriage equality is the law of the land, I ask that UR consider eliminating same-gender domestic partner benefits or opening these benefits to opposite-gender domestic partners. The logic of having benefits for a specific group of individuals, who have full access to marriage equality, while denying the same benefits to others is inherently questionable.*

**Response:** The University is aware of the situation and will address in the new academic year. (CS)

#### **7. Date Submitted:** May 18, 2017

**Web Sub:** *Hello, We learned today in Spiders in the Know that the cost of employee health insurance has increased significantly. The University is paying a substantially higher premium and I am wondering if HR has considered increasing the benefits to employees that waive health insurance. Currently we are offered 5 days of vacation time or \$500. and this has been the case for at least 8 years. It seems that we are saving UR more and more money each year, yet the benefit remains the same. Do we know if this has been considered? Thank you!*

**Response:** The purpose of the medical insurance waiver is to give employees who have medical insurance elsewhere a small incentive to ensure that appropriate consideration is being given to all available options. The intention is not to subsidize employees for the employer cost of the medical plan. Many employers have eliminated these waivers in recent years but the University has decided to retain this benefit. There hasn't been any serious consideration given to stopping the waiver but there does not appear to be a compelling reason to increase this incentive. As the Benefits Committee considers our employee healthcare benefit plan design, this

question could arise and may be considered as part of overall plan design changes. (Carl Sorensen & Dave Hale)

**8. Date Submitted:** May 19, 2017

**Web Sub:** *Of the last 40 University staff positions in which the new hires were University staff, how many of the positions were filled from within the same department?*

**Response:** A response is still being researched and prepared.