**UNIVERSITY STAFF ADVISORY COUNCIL**  
**WEB SUBMISSIONS**  
September 14, 2021

**PREVIOUSLY RECEIVED WEB SUBMISSIONS WITH UPDATES**

**Idea/Rationale:** What is the University doing to address the rising concern of the Delta variant? Is going back to work the safest choice for employees based on recent data and evidence? The data is clear—the Delta variant is more contagious and more severe. Why has there been no communication from the University on this rising threat? I am worried about going back to in-person with people I know for a fact are unvaccinated. What is the University doing to address this?

**Response:** Submitted to Counsel on August 2, 2021. No official response was received directly from Counsel, but this question was addressed during the Staff and Faculty Town Hall on August 19, 2021. A recording of the town hall is available online [here](#).

**Idea/Rationale:** It seems like a lot of offices are picking and choosing whether to be in office by the August 2nd deadline date. Others are being told they "absolutely need" to be in office regardless if their position actually requires a lot of "in-office" tasks or not. Some of these people are immunocompromised but have been denied work-from-home opportunities. HR and higher-ups have been slow on the process of approving flexplace applications. I understand that there are lots of moving parts but this is ridiculous. With over 3000 students coming back from multiple locations, wouldn't you think that this is a priority situation? Especially with the rise of the Delta variant, I think those that are requesting a flexplace should be prioritized for the health and safety of our campus community. Is there anything we can do to expedite this process? The rise of the Delta variant is a serious risk for those inside our campus community. Because the University is such a bubble, the risk of a strain of COVID multiplying is very high. I don't understand why the University doesn't prioritize the health of their employees who need flexplace accommodations. It seems like this is being taken as a joke or being thrown to the side but WE ARE STILL IN THE MIDDLE OF A PANDEMIC.

**Response:** This web submission was sent to HR on August 19, 2021. The Executive Committee addressed this concern in our meeting with leadership. Dave Hale and Jeff Legro acknowledged that there was a delay in response due to work at the VP level to look at staff requests holistically across the university and address any concerns about inequitable approvals from different divisions. As a note, any medical-based requests should be routed through HR as an ADA request instead of the typical FlexPlace accommodation system.
NEW WEB SUBMISSIONS

Idea/Rationale: Will the university be providing COVID testing for workers this fall? Also, even though the university is requiring vaccines, we are primarily operating under the honor system. Will that change once the vaccines pass emergency use?

Response: This web submission was sent to HR on August 18, 2021. It was addressed in the Faculty and Staff Town Hall on August 19, 2021. A recording of the town hall is available online here. A written response was also received from Carl Sorensen and is copied below.

I think there will be something specific about this in an email from Dave, Jeff and Shannon later this week. We are trying to make this work for those who are identified as close contacts. We are continuing to trust our staff and faculty to provide us with accurate information about their vaccination status.

The following two web submissions both address concerns on pay equity. As such, HR responded to both web submissions at once. You can find the response from Carl Sorensen below the second web submission.

Idea/Rationale: I am curious about a new policy in Dining Services to attract new employees to work. I understand that this is a very difficult time in hiring and a new program with higher hiring bonuses have been added. I am all for doing what is best on getting new people in the door, but you have staff that have been here through all of Covid and have worked hard to keep everything running and feel as if they are under valued compared to new employees.

Idea/Rationale: Does the University plan to re-evaluate compensation or survey the current pay rates of long term employees versus new hires? We are all aware that the University is paying well for new hires, sometimes giving as much, or more, pay as long term employees receive for the same positions. Long-term dedication and experience is earned and should be appreciated if you wish to keep the staff that have stuck with the demands and continued to devote themselves to our campus. Imagine finding out you gave 10 years of service and never had a position open to be promoted and then be told by the new guy he makes the same wage and will require you to train them. If this issue cannot be addressed by the USAC, where can concerned employees turn for support before finally giving up and taking a better job? I have given nearly 20 years of my life to service to this establishment and 6 different positions. I have always went above and beyond, fighting hard for promotions and equal pay in my department. Does the University not reward for this commitment? How can it be fair to hire new employees at similar pay rates I have fought so hard for. I have never felt such an insult as to be shown all my dedication is worth just as much as the new person hired that I now must train.

Response: These web submissions were sent to HR on August 18, 2021. The following response was received from Carl Sorensen. It addresses both of the previous two web submissions.

The University has addressed salary compression needs that surfaced as a result of the University's increase to its minimum wage from $12/hr to $14/hr effective July 1, 2021. The University is also actively addressing other compression issues brought
about by increasing wage pressure, particularly in certain dining/food service positions.

Moreover every year we perform a review of staff (and faculty) salaries to ensure that the University offers competitive compensation for all positions. As part of the budgeting process we review salaries for internal equity and make adjustments when necessary. This year, as we respond to a very tight and competitive labor market, we are reviewing current salaries and addressing any compression as it comes up.

The University is also committed to pay equity and we concur that an updated analysis would be beneficial, though we are not yet committed to a timeline for such an analysis given the intense hiring and recruiting pressures HR is currently working through.

Thank you very much for the inquiry.

Idea/Rationale: I have been disheartened at the inconsistent flex work arrangements around campus for the non student facing offices. With the new mask mandate, it seems only appropriate for HR to communicate to managers that a hybrid schedule is acceptable for all rather than just for a chosen few. This was on my mind even prior to the change in mask policy. All admin. employees would have a better work/life balance and it should be an opportunity that is equitable for all rather than subjective by managers and HR.

Response: This web submission was sent to HR on August 30, 2021 and the below response was received from Carl Sorensen. Please note that, with the exception of medical-based requests, work flex arrangements do not go through HR but are instead routed through your immediate supervisor and your division head at the VP level. More information on the process for work flex arrangements is available on the policy webpage.

As announced in the July 22, 2021 message from Dave Hale and Jeff Legro, “The University’s residential education mission demands a high degree of staff work to be done on-campus. However, the University has a longstanding Flexible Work Arrangement Policy that allows some staff, in limited circumstances, to have flexibility in their schedules and on occasion to work remotely. When a flexible work arrangement is approved, employees and managers must ensure that the same or enhanced level of service required of the position is being provided in support of our educational mission and the various requirements associated with the position. The majority of staff positions at the University do not fit with remote work given our essential commitment to providing our students with small class sizes and a wide range of co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities.” In consultation with Human Resources Business Partners, leaders in each division are in the best position to determine if any single position lends itself to a flexible work arrangement.
**Idea/Rationale:** Will employees who got exemptions for "strong" individual beliefs still be permitted to go without the vaccine? I ask as I know of at least one employee who simply doesn't want it and made up a strong belief. This is unfair to the community and I hope that only medical reasons or verified religious belief are allowed from now on as this is a health not a political issue and lives are at stake. What is the deadline for folks to be fully vaccinated that are not presently? Also, will people who are exempt be required to have weekly COVID-19 surveillance testing in order to work on campus? What is the result of not getting vaccinated if not exempt? Will employees be dismissed like at VA Tech? They have an excellent FAQ https://ready.vt.edu/vaccinations/employee-vaccine-faqs.html

**Response:** This web submission was sent to HR on August 30, 2021 and the following response was received from Carl Sorensen.

The University acknowledges that some employees have very strong personal convictions against receiving the Covid (or other) vaccines and will continue to allow these individuals to be exempt from receiving the vaccine. Current employees who have not been approved for an exemption must be fully vaccinated no later than October 6. Employees who do not comply with the vaccination requirement will face disciplinary measures up to and including separation from the University.

**Idea/Rationale:** Can staff have an all-staff-discuss listserv? Faculty have an all-faculty-discuss listserv, what are the options for staff to have a similar platform? Who manages this? How is it moderated, if at all? Do faculty opt in/opt out or are they automatically added when they start?

**Response:** The Vice Chair investigated these questions directly and found the following information. According to the listserv’s webpage, the faculty-discuss listserv is unmoderated and is managed by Gina Flanagan, an administrative assistant in the Provost Office, as well as by Tim Vest, the Senior Director of Finance & Operations. I reached out to Gina for further information concerning the faculty-discuss listserv. Her response is copied below.

Faculty are added to the allfaculty list serve (allfaculty-list@richmond.edu) by us prior to the start of each semester. We do not remove them as this is for official university communications. They must request to be added to the faculty-discuss by clicking the link here. I verify their @richmond.edu email and then approve. We can also remove them at their request. Staff can sign up for both if they choose, and many do.

**Idea/Rationale:** Noting our new President's emphasis on the gender pay gap and equality, will there be an open and honest analysis of UR's current pay structure? In addition, with current changes in higher education, are we considering a pay compression study? There are several women in my division who are paid less than their male counterparts even though they have equal or additional education and experience. In addition, several new hires (with less education and experience) are being brought into positions at higher salaries than those currently in these positions.
are earning. The pay gap between genders, old and new hires, and supervisors and their employees (who often work similar hours with similar levels of stress) is incredibly frustrating.

Response: This web submission was sent to HR on September 2, 2021 and the following response was received from Carl Sorensen.

Recruiting and hiring new employees to fill vacant positions has been challenging for all employers this year, including UR. Each year, the Human Resources Compensation Team compares staff salaries against the benchmark salaries at our market peer institutions to ensure that we are competitive. In addition, we review salaries internally to identify and correct any internal inequities that may exist.

The following four web submissions all address holiday and leave policy changes as they pertain to Public Safety. These web submissions were brought to senior leadership, as were submissions on similar themes since the policy changes were announced. USAC advocates for the inclusion of impacted staff voices in future policymaking processes. A response from Carl Sorensen is included below these four submissions.

Idea/Rationale: In recognition that essential personnel in shift work positions are completely unique in their obligations to the University as compared to non-essential personnel and non-shift working employees, those employees should have equal access to time away from work. There is no justifiable reason to have one group of employees who only receive 120 hours off per year, with a maximum of 160 hours off per year for longevity, when all other employees received 240-280 hours off per year. HR has implemented a one-size fits all plan for holiday time. While the new holiday policy MAY adequately address situations where employees OCCASIONALLY have to work a holiday to cover an emergency, it adversely affects shift workers deemed essential personnel so that there is a wholesale loss of 120 hours of time-off per year. For public safety personnel, there is a pretty even split of holidays that are worked, and holidays that occur on our natural day off (the equivalent of our weekend). Under the new proposal, if we work the day, we get paid, and if we’re off that day, we get paid, but we don’t get to take the time off. This was attempted once before right after AVP McCoy arrived. In the last ten years there has been a plainly stated notion that public safety personnel working 12-hour shifts get more days off than other UR employees, and too much time off. Attempts to reconcile this misconception have failed, but these statements need to be publicly and factually repudiated: FSLA is based on the 40-hour work week, not the number of days worked in a week or year. Working 40 hours a week on a 12-hour shift is equivalent to working 40 hours on an 8-hour shift. At the end of the year, both groups are scheduled to work 2080 regular hours. In addition to the regular 40-hours per week, we work a multitude of overtime events, with multiple employees logging over 200 hours of overtime annually - that averages to about 4 hours of overtime every week of the year. With our overtime commitments, we work more, not less than most other employees at the University. We already miss out on perks like free football game tickets with our families, because we’re either scheduled to work our regular shift, or to staff the game on our day off. While most employees were given months off to inhibit the spread of Covid, we worked right through it without a peep of complaint. Then, as Covid appeared to be winding down, our thanks for working through the pandemic was to have our holiday time stripped away, and a policy that provides us with less time-off than other employees. HR policy states that employees receive 15-20 vacation days based on years of service, added to their holiday time they receive 30-35 days off annually. Now that twelve-hour shift workers have lost holiday time off we receive 10-13.3 (12-hour) days annually based on years of service, and THAT’S IT, THAT’S AS GOOD AS IT EVER GETS, 13.3 DAYS OFF PER YEAR. All we are asking for is an equitable amount of time away from the workplace. This is especially reprehensible when one considers our role in this organization, to give our lives if necessary
for all of the other employees. Why should we receive less access to benefits than non-essential employees?

**HOW CAN HR NOT RECOGNIZE THIS IS BACKWARD AND COMPLETELY INEQUITABLE?**

Where is the oversight for the administrators? Who can we appeal to? It's time to involve Mr. Hale and our new president in USAC meetings to see what what's going on in this institution.

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**Idea/Rationale:** When many police, security, dispatchers, and REACT employees began working here, the system for holiday time was simple: although we didn't get Christmas, Thanksgiving, and a whole host of other holidays off, we were given those hours in a lump sum to take on other days of the year that were significant for us. This arrangement was equitable as it provided us with an additional 112 (now 120) hours off per year for our physical/mental health and relationships, even if it wasn't on the appointed holiday. A huge part of one's decision to take employment is anchored in the benefits package and how it affects one's personal life. Without the arrangement for holiday time off many of us would not have taken our positions here, as it's a significant aspect of the work/life balance. The last time this was attempted the employees hired under the old system were grandfathered. There never should have been grandfathering, this is an unfair and inequitable situation for ALL public service employees and REACT, not just the one's who started under the old system. ALL employees deserve an equitable amount of time away from the workplace with peers of equal standing. Regardless of what should have been done, it stands that employees who were hired under the old system were grandfathered into that system. A principle part of any agreement is that all parties involved HONOR the agreement. We were given nothing in writing, we accepted the word of those administrators who had authority at that time. Those same administrators are now rescinding the agreement, and taking away holiday time off for those hired under those terms. Thankfully, we work at a University where at least we can acknowledge we are getting an education? specifically we learned that honor is a word that has little meaning when it comes to agreements made by certain administrators. Shouldn't a basic principle regarding the implementation of benefits be an equitable amount of time off for employees of equal standing? Isn't everyone who works here entitled to the same amount of rest and repose with only rare exceptions for unforeseen emergency circumstances? It's not rare for us to miss holidays, it's a fact that every holiday either falls on a work day which we have to work, or falls on the equivalent of our weekend which provides no additional benefit away from the workplace. The University at some level must understand the importance of time off as they provide most employees with Fridays and Mondays off when holidays occur on weekends, and I'd like an explanation why we aren't afforded that same benefit. We have tried to explain this to administrators, yet, they are comfortable with taking time off away from Police, security, dispatchers, and REACT, apparently because they see us as a group too small to fight, and to unimportant to treat equitably. Imagine what would happen if the University were to suddenly take all holidays, or three weeks of vacation from all University employees. How do you justify doing this to your essential shift workers? When many police, security, dispatchers, and REACT employees began working here, the system for holiday time was simple: although we didn't get Christmas, Thanksgiving, and a whole host of other holidays off, we were given those hours in a lump sum to take on other days of the year that were significant for us. This arrangement was equitable as it provided us with an additional 112 (now 120) hours off per year for our physical/mental health and relationships, even if it wasn't on the appointed holiday. A huge part of one's decision to take employment is anchored in the benefits package and how it affects one's personal life. Without the arrangement for holiday time off many of us would not have taken our positions here, as it's a significant aspect of the work/life balance. The University at some level must understand the importance of time off as they provide most employees with Fridays and Mondays off when holidays occur on weekends. The last time this was attempted the employees hired under the old system were grandfathered. There never should have been grandfathering, this
is an unfair and inequitable situation for ALL public service employees and REACT, not just the one’s who started under the old system. ALL employees deserve an equitable amount of time away from the workplace with peers of equal standing. Regardless of what should have been done, the fact remains that older employees who were hired under the old system were grandfathered the first time. A principle part of any agreement is that the parties involved HONOR the agreement. We were given nothing in writing, we accepted the word of those administrators who had authority at that time. Those same administrators are behind rescinding the agreement, and taking away holiday time for those hired under those terms. Thankfully, we work at a University where at least we can acknowledge we are getting an education, specifically we learned that honor is a word that has little meaning in this institution when it comes to agreements made by certain administrators. Shouldn’t a basic principle regarding the implementation of benefits be an equitable amount of time off for employees of equal standing? Isn’t everyone who works here entitled to the same amount of rest and repose with only rare exceptions for unforeseen emergency circumstances? It’s not rare for us, it’s a fact that every single holiday either falls on a work day which we have to work, or falls on the equivalent of our weekend which provides no benefit away from the workplace. In spite of our attempts to garner understanding, administrators are comfortable with taking time off away from Police, security, dispatchers, and REACT, apparently because they see us as a group too small to fight, and to unimportant to treat equitably. If the University were to suddenly take all holidays or three weeks of vacation from all other employees, there would be a firestorm of backlash that would melt the bricks of Weinstein Hall.

Idea/Rationale: There are questions regarding the change to the holiday policy that I would like clarified. When inquiries have been made about the changes to the holiday policy it has been stated that having anything other than the new policy creates too much work for managers and HR, and that holiday time is creating gaps in the scheduling that can’t be covered adequately. In our department I have consulted every manager who handles scheduling and none can cite a situation where we were unable to achieve our minimum staffing as a direct result of holiday time being taken. We have yearly schedules going back to 2011 and I’m unable to find a single instance of holiday time creating a staffing shortage. Furthermore, holiday time has always been handled at the department level, by the administrative assistant, HR has never been responsible for tracking or handling the scheduling of holiday time. In light of those facts, I’d like Mr. Sorenson to answer the following questions: 1. When some managers claimed there were issues with adequate staffing due to employees using holiday time, did you ask for specific examples (empirical data) to evaluate? 2. If yes, how many examples were given, and over what period of time. If no, why not? 3. If evidence for this situation was given, how many times per year did it have to occur to be deemed a serious issue to take away our holiday time? 4. In relationship to our holiday time, all of the manual processes you’ve reduced were at the departmental level, and no one I can find believes tracking holiday time for employees to be burdensome or time consuming. Can you provide an example where HR was responsible for tracked the holiday time of those who were on the grandfathered system? 5. Please explain the rationale behind MANDATORY overtime during weeks containing holidays, and then not paying overtime for being there? (E.g. The week of Thanksgiving, employees are required to come in and work a basketball game.) 6. Is there a formal process for complaining to your supervisor, or is that typically just done through a meeting or email? We are tired of the false narratives and the manipulation of facts that are prompting bad decisions. There is no justifiable reason for us to get half of the time off as all other employees. We have reasonably pursued answers through our AVP, HR, and now USAC representing our concerns, but we continue to get answers about some managers and the manual processes, or, in the case of our AVP, we’re told that truth? he thinks we have too many days off already. That’s not a good enough reason to cut our
time off in half when we work the same 40 hours as everyone one else plus all of the overtime we\'re
scheduled. With the football games and \(\text{pop-up}\) graduation, two of our shifts will work five weeks
without have a full weekend off? I bet things like that were never considered when you took our
holiday time. We want clear, unambiguous answers to simple questions, and if we\'re going to be
ignored we want accountability for the people wrecking what little work-life balance we had. At least
you get kudos for removing the words \(\text{work-life balance}\) from the HR website as it clearly no
longer represents the philosophy of the administration.

**Idea/Rationale:** How is it right that public service shift workers get less time off than all other
employees? As was stated in last month\'s USAC minutes, we are a professional organization. We
undergo and extensive training academy, require annual and semi-annual training and recertification,
comply with accreditation standards and oversight that ensure the highest level of professional
behavior, provide a multitude of services to the community (vehicle safety day, women\'s self-
defense, Operation ID, student and employee orientations, opening doors for employees/students
locked out, jump starts for vehicles, and more). Putting all of that aside, every one of us prepares,
trains, and is committed to putting our lives on the line to save all others, and this is the group you
chose to reduce the benefit of time off? Shameful!

**Response:** The following response was received from Carl Sorensen. Please see above these four
web submissions for USAC\’s response.

The changes we made to our leave policies and practices were designed make those
policies consistent across all employee groups. I believe we accomplished that goal.
One outcome was to increase the number of vacation days all new employees
receive while allowing all employees to carry greater vacation balances. All
employees now receive a total of 30 vacation and holiday leave days – six full weeks
of leave time. There are some departments on campus where employees are required
to work 12 hour shifts and we are working to identify and address holiday leave
challenges unique to these units.

**Idea/Rationale:** I\’m concerned with the lack of empathy some staff have of those who are
immunocompromised or unable to work-from-home. The COVID dashboard still states that the
FlexPlace accommodations can be submitted for a COVID-safe workplace – yet, we\’ve been told
(specifically in my department) that NO FlexPlace accommodations would be approved. The idea
that an "in-person" campus experience is the only answer we\'re getting but no one seems to
understand these are real health issues we\'re facing. If we get sick, we have the possibility of being
hospitalized and incubated, the percentage being more than the average person. With hospitals being
full because of COVID patients all over the state and country, this isn\'t something we want
obviously. Personally, I\'ve submitted an ADA request with one of my conditions and yet I\'m still
being told to come into the office when the rise of a new variant is eminent. Is there a chance that
the University of Richmond will begin to approve more FlexPlace accommodations during this
time? We are still not out of the pandemic and we are certainly not in a "post-COVID" world. It
seems odd that my supervisors would rather I use my PTO if I feel sick than allowing me to work
from home. Wouldn\'t it be beneficial to still allow work from home accommodations to allow our
jobs to still get done instead of being completely absent? We have proven that we have the
capabilities to work and meet remotely - and while some prefer in person, that can still be an option.
It still seems silly, in the middle of a pandemic, to absolutely abolish the notion of work from home when we've proved it works, when no one will approve our FlexPlace or take our ADA requests seriously, and when we've showed for the past 2 years that we can do this whether in-person or remote. Why show us a change can be made and then take it away?

Response: This web submission addresses questions and topics addressed in previous web submissions. Information on ADA accommodations can be found on the HR website at this link. We ask that the submitter review the information provided above and submit any further questions as a new web submission or contact HR directly.

Idea/Rationale: Is it really necessary for staff to wear masks in their office if their doors are open? The mask policy this semester states that you have to wear a mask indoors unless you are in a closed off area, such as your office or an isolated area of a building. This has put some staff in the position of choosing to either wear a mask for the entire day or close their door and cut off contact with coworkers, faculty, and students. Is it really necessary to close your door or wear a mask for the entire day if a physical distance of 6 feet can be maintained?

Response: This web submission was sent to HR on September 13, 2021. The following response was received from Carl Sorensen.

We understand and appreciate the inconvenience associated with the indoor mask-wearing requirement. However, we ask that everyone continue to adhere to the University mask-wearing policy and unfortunately, this may lead to office doors being closed during portions of the work day. Many thanks to everyone for their perseverance as we work to protect ourselves and one another during the pandemic.

Idea/Rationale: I know of at least one incident where a manager was exposed to COVID as a close contact, was not required to quarantine but still called an in person meeting for their subordinates, telling the subordinates after the meeting had already started. The CDC recommends that even vaccinated people get a test 3-5 days after a confirmed close contact, avoid close quarters and wear a mask for 14 days after as part of due diligence. UR should make it a managerial policy that if you are exposed *and* have not tested for COVID after that exposure, meetings should not be in person. The technology is present and in person meetings increase risk after a known close contact. There are power dynamics at play when managers call in person meetings where subordinates do not have the ability to advocate for themselves, thus policy should be written to protect employees.

Response: This web submission was sent to HR on September 13, 2021 and the following response was received from Carl Sorensen. USAC strongly encourages HR to return all staff who are not entirely remote to the daily check-in emails except where in-person temperature checks are occurring.

CDC guidance is that vaccinated employees identified as a close contact may return to in-person work as long as they wear a mask for 14 or, if they have a negative PCR
test 3-5 days post exposure, they may discontinue wearing a mask. Since wearing masks are required indoors until October 8, this last part would not be an option for university community members. We will share this concern with members of the President’s Cabinet and the academic Deans to ensure that supervisors/leaders are attentive to not putting their colleagues in an uncomfortable situation when organizing meetings. Of course, employees who feel uncomfortable attending a meeting in person are encouraged to ask meeting conveners if they may attend remotely.

**Idea/Rationale:** Would it be possible to disclose the proportion of faculty and staff or community-wide covid cases that contact tracing has determined were caught on campus? Or at least some general idea of whether or not covid is being spread on campus. I personally find the faculty and staff numbers somewhat concerning, especially given the fact that almost everyone is required to work on campus now (This is background, not a critique about that). In the past, University leadership has said that the overwhelming majority of cases originated outside the community and hasn’t said so yet, not even in the open forum recently, which makes me suspicious that is not the case this semester and they aren’t being transparent about it. Additionally, given the facts that asymptomatic spread by vaccinated people is possible with delta, and the University is not doing prevalence testing of vaccinated community members, the known cases could potentially be the tip of the iceberg.

**Response:** This web submission was sent to Counsel on September 13, 2021 and will be updated when a response is received.