UNIVERSITY STAFF ADVISORY COUNCIL
WEB SUBMISSIONS
June 14, 2022

The below web submissions were received before June 7, 2022 and were addressed during the closed session of USAC's meeting on June 14, 2022.

Idea/Rationale: I recently learned that only Faculty can go into The Hub - including the conference room. Staff members cannot attend any meetings that are held in the conference room since they are not faculty. Why would space be restricted like this? I'm not saying that all conference rooms on campus should be open for anyone to schedule. But not being able to attend a meeting that is scheduled in that space because a staff member is not part of the faculty is discriminatory. We should work hard to make every employee on this campus feel included. Staff is constantly told there is no hierarchy and staff is as important to this community as faculty. I was pretty shocked to hear about such a policy.

Response: This question was sent to Linda Boland, Director of the Teaching and Scholarship Hub, who provided the response below. Staff interested in Hub events can find them on the Faculty Hub’s website. They are also advertised via the Faculty Hub’s monthly newsletter and a faculty SpiderByte.

Policies on Faculty Hub usage do not prohibit staff from entering the space nor from attending meetings in the conference room or other spaces, and staff are welcome at most events and meetings held in the Faculty Hub. There may be some events that are restricted to certain groups (such as a meeting specifically for Associate Professors or a closed event for a faculty search committee or a faculty mentoring meeting). Many faculty professional development opportunities have included staff from various units on campus. Faculty Hub spaces are reservable by faculty, instructional staff, or staff who support faculty in their teaching and scholarship. Any questions about whether a meeting or event is appropriate for the space can be sent directly to the Faculty Hub at facultyhub@richmond.edu.

The following three web submissions all focus on the university’s COVID-19 Dashboard, which was discontinued on May 5, 2022. The web submissions are presented together, with a single response following.

Idea/Rationale: Why isn’t the Covid dashboard being updated over the summer? Cases are going up again in our area, so I’m curious about the rationale for discontinuing that data reporting.

Idea/Rationale: Why is the COVID dashboard not being updated over the summer? There is a rise in COVID cases nationally, locally, and on-campus. I check the dashboard regularly and looked at it earlier today before I attended both Spiders In The Know and the SummUR Sounds events today. I was surprised to see that there were only 8 cases still listed, knowing that 2 colleagues very close to me currently have it, but I recognize that the dashboard is typically updated on Tuesdays and Thursdays and gave grace for it not being updated until later in the day. I just looked at it and, all of a sudden, it says it will not be updated over the summer starting May 5, 2022. We had an email
from leadership on May 17 about COVID cases rising and Spiders in the Know this morning (May 19), in which COVID was addressed in a theater of people sitting next to each other, many of whom were not wearing masks. This seems secretive, negligent, and dismissive of staff (primarily), students, and faculty, who are still on campus over the summer.

**Idea/Rationale:** I’m concerned that we aren’t being given COVID numbers updates anymore and that our dashboard won’t be updated over the summer. I’m not suggesting that we move backward in our physical distancing framework, but I notice that there’s a spike in cases in the surrounding areas right now. Our ability to be successful operating in a world with COVID depends on transparency and our wellness depends on knowing when it’s appropriate to wear a mask. By not sharing COVID numbers, UR is making this a dangerous place to work and potentially harming its employees and our families. I am asking that you advocate for a return to updating the COVID dashboard.

**Response:** These questions were sent to Shannon Sinclair, VP and General Counsel, who responded with the following.

In early May, we announced via SpiderBytes that the dashboard would not be updated after May 5, 2022. As other colleges and universities are doing, we are taking the summer to evaluate the purpose and utility of the dashboard. Data regarding COVID-19 cases in Virginia and the local area is readily available on the Virginia Department of Health and the CDC websites.

The staff who have been on the front line of the University’s COVID-19 response for over two years now have worked tirelessly to promote the health of our campus community, in addition to handling their normal responsibilities. It currently appears that we will need to continue living with COVID-19 for the foreseeable future. Given that “new normal,” we have recognized that we cannot ask our staff to continue to function in a constant state of emergency. We need to evolve to more sustainable response protocols consistent with public health guidance and will take the summer to evaluate how to do that.

We are continuing to monitor COVID cases in the local community and on campus and will continue to communicate with the campus community about significant developments, as we did with the message that was sent on May 17th.

Finally, as we evaluate the evolution of the University’s COVID-19 response this summer, we will maintain those aspects of our COVID-19 response that have helped us navigate this pandemic, including access to free self-test kits for staff, faculty, and students, access to high-quality masks at no cost, isolation housing for students, dedicated contact tracing teams, bi-polar ionizers and UVC filters in air handling systems on campus, and the current COVID-19 vaccine requirements.

**Idea/Rationale:** Has the university considered adding a "chat" function to email/outlook profiles? I get so many, many of which are not required long-term. It looks like this function is available through skype for outlook.
Response: This question was sent to IS and the following response was sent by Troy Boroughs, Assistant Vice President for Systems & Networks.

As far as I know, we have not considered adding a chat function to email/outlook profiles. However, “chat” may mean different things to different folks. For instance, do they want to chat with colleagues that only have valid network accounts/passwords or do they want to chat with “the public”? Or, are they looking for an instant messaging/collaboration tool like Slack? It comes down to…what are they trying to do and with which audience(s)? What options have they already tried/researched?

Current “chat” tools used across campus:

- Zoom provides a chat and an instant messaging function (whether or not you are in an active Zoom session)
- There are hundreds of people and many small workgroups that use Slack or other “free” cloud tools.
- The IS Help Desk used to have a chat tool on the IS web site, but I no longer see it posted.

One of IS’ goals in the coming year(s) is to research/recommend directions for collaboration/productivity platforms (email, content storage/sharing, video conferencing, phone/fax, chat, etc) and determine the pros/cons of adopting a single enterprise platform vs supporting/integrating multiple best-of-breed products.

Idea/Rationale: Has there been any discussion regarding changing the mileage for reimbursement rate during road travel in a personal vehicle? Gas is very expensive.

Response: This question was sent to the Procurement & Strategic Planning department, and Wendy Burchard provided the following response. After this response was received, the IRS did update the federal reimbursement rate, and Wendy Burchard confirmed that the university’s reimbursement rate will be updated to 58.5 cents per mile effective July 1, 2022. USAC would also like to take the time to remind staff that car rentals are allowed by the university for work-related travel.

Thank you for your inquiry. The University’s mileage reimbursement rate is indexed to the rate released by the Internal Revenue Service each January. If the IRS adjusts its official standard mileage reimbursement rate before January, we will reassess our rate at that time.
Idea/Rationale: Since Richmond and the surrounding counties have returned to high transmission levels, will the university be following CDC guidance and requiring masking indoors again? Because we are no longer receiving information about cases on campus, using the city and counties' statistics is the only way for staff to be informed beyond anecdotal, personal experience. CDC guidance for high transmission areas indicates that everyone should wear a mask indoors. Senior leadership have previously used CDC guidance as their reasoning for relaxing COVID protocols, so it stands to reason that we should follow them and start masking up.

Response: This question was sent to Jeff Legro, Dave Hale, and Shannon Sinclair, who provided the response below.

Thank you for your expression of concern. The City of Richmond along with the counties of Henrico, Chesterfield and Hanover are currently classified by the CDC as experiencing high Covid-19 transmission levels. As noted in the question, the CDC recommends that individuals wear masks when indoors in areas experiencing high transmission levels. We support this recommendation and encourage any individual who chooses to wear a mask while in a campus building to do so. The University continues to provide employees and students working on campus with a supply of masks at no cost to the individual.