

GENESEE STAFF COUNCIL

Minutes: April 3, 2020

All Via Zoom

Attendees: Chairs: Marc Seigfred and Catherine Caiazza **Members:** Melinda Adelman, Chris Apple, Rani Bhagwat, Kristi Brock, James Chudyk, Laurel Contomanolis, Celeste Cooper, Theresa Danylak, Robert De Leon, Sherri Gunter, Yennifer Hernandez, Kari Kofka, Janelle Kohlman, John McIntyre, Dawn Marshall-Hosier, Michael Osadciw, Amanda Sharpe, Anthony Siragusa, Jon Spenard, Matt Spielmann, Katie Papas, Alexander Pita, David VanWey, Andrea Walton, Rich Wattie, James Wentworth, Paul Wlosinski, Leslie Zornow

Ex Officio Members: Terra Buttram, Maggie Cousin, Eleanor Oi, Leah Stormo-Soles

Zoom Protocols and Best Practices (Co-chairs)

- *Welcome and Thank you for participating via zoom during this difficult time.*
- Reminder Staff Council to join faculty senate meeting to discuss financial impact of COVID-19 on April 7
- **Approve March Meeting Minutes*
Motion to approve- Keri Kofka, seconded by Anthony Siragusa

Member Updates:

Each staff council member gave an update how individually and as unit they have been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. *Note: Members making individual comments are not identified and common themes have been grouped together.*

Role Changes

- Initially staff felt confused as to why they were not being protected. Moving forward we should plan for this and be explicit about which roles are essential and which can work remotely. Improved communication needed.
- Many events were cancelled. So there could be free time, but with cleaning and other news things they are keeping busy.
- Staff with less work can help with new or different projects, but they also need training, so those who have to do the training may feel overburdened at first.
- Several units had refocused on communication to core groups, alums, graduating seniors, donors, and even University communications, virtual graduation, helping with Some units transitioned to working from home quickly and pretty seamlessly. Groups that are scattered anyway, and many folks work at home periodically. Some also regularly use project management tools regularly as well
- We helped put up the tents...which made it real. Helped moved students out of dorms to prep the buildings for other critical needs.
- Administrative staff is doing OK working remotely, but being a lab science department, the research and technical staff have faced challenges.
- The guidance was changing so quickly, and who was essential was unclear. It got easier when everything got "shut down"... many times those technical staff get overlooked, so that's a lost grey area, but the department leadership has been doing well as far as communication.
- Using this time to organize past projects and catch up on documentation.

Challenges

- For essential employees, the toughest thing is that we are working parents with children home from school. Managing being an essential worker, teacher and caregiver is challenging.
- Is hard to feel connected with people via Zoom. Maybe we could have voluntary contact list (with email and phone) in an attempt to stay more connected. Missing the use of phone vs email for timesaving.
- Several folks discussed missing social connections, which makes it difficult to adapt.
- NO overtime is tough in some areas that are still essential- particularly those who do shift work.
- Equity & Inclusion needs to stay at the forefront throughout this time and many folks are trying to make sure someone with an equity lens participates in all conversations that are taking place.
- It has been an adjustment with 2 small children who do not understand independent play.
- Some people talked about their family who are essential employees in the community and how social distancing is not an option for their families. This has been a struggle. Both spouses are going into work every day, have small children and no childcare.
- Newer faculty, and grad students who teach had to switch from teaching in person to online in such a quick and stressful way. Now, it's amazing how much things have settled down. Kudos to all the people that are making this work.

Concerns and Fear

- Moral is low, folks are nervous. Some units usually shut down after graduation, but now more may be laid off or may be reassigned to other roles. Our salaries and benefits are whole for right now, but people are worried and super scared for what may lie ahead.
- I'm hearing about anxiety. I know the university offers services, but since we're all in crisis mode, we all need to make sure that we're taking care of ourselves. Dealing with anxiety surrounding potential exposure, and job status. Trying to keep folks busy and motivated.
- Folks are worried there will be a draft for help. Trying to keep things calm. Many voiced concerns about the the labor pool request for reassignment, and trying to figure out who that would be, the people that get identified are our least paid, sort of admin type people, which may be an equity issue, so it's hard for managers to make those decisions. More clarity would be helpful.
- Some units scrambled to find computers for work from home, and it's been a real challenge.
- Some units lost some contractor employees, and many projects are on hold, because people have been shifted to other projects. Some employees are leaving for other opportunities. Worried about contractors and their families.
- Some of our employees are developing sensitivities to all the cleaning chemicals. Some employees have underlying health issues and were asked not to work, but they are "essential", and we're worried this won't be covered by disability. We are being told that the governor and other laws need to be followed
- Department leadership has been proactive asking for lists of work, and the proactive prep helps staff feel like the leadership is prepared to defend their jobs from layoff if needed.
- New budgetary concerns. This just adds to everyone's previous concerns of no overtime, no spending-even for supplies, no hiring.

- Focusing on office members who are immuno-compromised. There is understandably a lot of anxiety from these folks, trying to support and keep them focused as much as possible
- Trying to offer support but feels spread very thin. Trying to keep spirits high never anticipated how quickly we got to this point.

Communication, Policy, and Planning

- In some units communication from the University is going well, but communication in the department is not on point for contingency plans.
- Some folks feel disconnected from much of what's going on.
- Some units have daily zooms, or whole department meetings. Some staff appreciate this level of communication, others find it oppressive.
- In some places the TAR employees were not yet terminated, or furloughed... but they have no new jobs. IN other places TAR employees and student workers had been let go.
- Some units were struggling with lack of guidance from the government, and quick changes in polices, but things are starting to stabilize.
- The university has often confused good luck, with good policy. We've gotten so lucky that people are coming together, and the silos are breaking down, but this is luck... it's not good policy.
- Our council should encourage more systematic planning going forward. What's working, what's not working. How can we learn from this pandemic to prepare for the next.
- Encourage folks to assign someone in your department to keep track of what is working well, and what is not—to help improve policy in the future.
- We were planning to hire for two open positions, so the hiring freeze impacted our team.

Working with Students and Alums

- Many international students are still on campus.
- Previously international students were not legally allowed to take more than one on-line class, but now we have more guidance from the government.
- For those still on campus, the hardest thing is seeing the fear and anxiety in the students, and even the parents. We are all going to need EAP and therapy.
- We worry for our families, but we worry even more for our students who need to be taken care of. They are away from their families, and they need to be taken care of. A lot of the students are worried about their families, but they have given props for the online class support. Luckily technology helps them communicate with their families, but they are scared.
- I've been doing a lot of crisis management. Lots of communication with students about all the changes.
- Some departments are trying to find balance between giving students space, and also transitioning to online programming for positive distractions.
- Lots of concern about recruitment for our program, we generally recruit a large number of international students so there is a lot of nervousness about that.
- Some units with student-facing roles are doing more mediation now to assist students. Adjusting to how to address issues students need now.
- Reaching out to Alum trying to keep them engaged with newsletters and happy hours.
- Units trying to anticipate job losses and how do remain supportive to students. We are also doing contingency plans. Looking at cost saving as well as revenue generating.

Updates from the Chairs:

- Cathy and Marc have met with Faculty Senate. Received feedback that one university wide-staff council is the goal. The original proposals were one for Academic Med Center and one for the clinical side. Faculty Senate encouraged us to push for a unified Staff Council.
- Cathy and Marc have met with President Mangelsdorf and Tony Green to discuss having one council. We have been doing well as a pilot and want to move forward to move to the Med Center and create one council for the University. The President reinforced she is supportive of moving forward with this idea.
- We also discussed getting support from an administrative prospective. The question was raised of how much admin. support we really need.
- Timing may be difficult with the Med Center and all that is going on there right now.
- It will take at least a year before we start working together towards one university-wide staff council. Groundwork will need to be done in advance.
- President Mangelsdorf suggested it would be helpful if we looked at cost containment. Can we consolidate some things to create savings?

Bright Spots!

- Trying to embrace technology and repurpose people in creative ways.
- Some units have put together a list of supplies they could donate to Strong, but they didn't get a response yet.
- Facilities department rented extra utility vehicles to keep our employees safe and not sharing vehicles.
- I think everyone has come together to press through these difficult times.
- Lots of real challenges, but Herculean efforts all around, infrastructure and all of the service needs are urgent... it's intense. We're doing anything that they ask of us to keep people safe. I'm so proud of our staff and our University
- We've had to be extraordinarily creative. The greatest challenge is determining priorities during this time when everything seems (and likely is) critical.
- Eastman Connect Concerts are offered virtually!
- No rebates on parking fees yet but fees may be pro-rated until next year.
- Trying to do whatever we can to help and support the situation at hand.
- Some units are encouraging team zooms, Once or twice a week a couple of fun ideas, trivia, funny sock day...etc.
- Lab sciences and animals are being protected and well-cared for.
- Spirits are high and everyone is trying to make the best of things.
- We appreciate all everyone is doing. Don't hesitate to reach out.
- Check out the new newsletter for the Office of Equity & Inclusion (OEI) podcast also available. Link to subscribe <https://rochester.us7.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=82230ccc566bb6c2a8293cc0b&id=91ca98a381>
- Thank you everyone for all that you are doing.

We ran out of time for Committee Breakouts. We took a GSC zoom photo, and shared on social media.

Next meeting:

May 1, 2020 9-12 on ZOOM

<https://rochester.zoom.us/j/186078457>