

**May 1, 2020
Genesee Staff Council Minutes**

Attendees: **Chairs:** Marc Seigfred, Catherine Caiazza **Members:** Melinda Adelman, Chris Apple, Rani Bhagwat, Kristi Brock, Laurel Contomanolis, Celeste Cooper, Theresa Danylak, Robert De Leon, Sherri Gunter, Yennifer Hernandez, Kari Kofka, Janelle Kohlman, John McIntyre, Michael Osadciw, Amanda Sharpe, 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
Not Present: James Chudyk **Not Present Due to Covid-19:** Dawn Marshall-Hosier, Anthony Siragusa
Guests: Holly Crawford and Tony Kinslow

Introductions -Co-chairs

Discussion with Holly Crawford and Tony Kinslow about COVID-19 impacts

Holly: I understand that these are stressful and upsetting times for everyone. We must do everything that we can so that we assure we stay on stable financial footing so that we all have jobs in the future. We don't know yet if we're going to have a residential campus in the fall, and we're working hard to make that happen, but there are decisions that are out of our control and we're waiting on the Governor's decisions on many things. It all plays into the processes and procedures that we have to do to ensure that when our employees come back to campus they are safe.

We also don't know if we're going to have any new international students, which as you may know, is a large part of our population. As such, we still have so many unknowns, which has caused us to take these awful steps. We lost lots of revenue this spring with refunds of room and board, and we have incurred additional expenses trying to get classes online very quickly.

Summer is our time for lower cash income as new tuition does not come in until late July and . We typically are relying on cash reserves that are mainly in the hospital during the summer, but they too have lost a lot of revenue due to their reduced occupancy and inability to do elective surgery. They are typically at 110% or 120% capacity, but with cancelling elective procedures to prepare for a potential COVID-19 surge, they were down as low as 65%. They are now ramping up, but it is a slow process and they are still losing money. We hope to be at 90% of typical hospital volumes in September.

I put out that memo that said we'd try to continue everyone's pay, but as we continued to see the medical center's revenue decline, we decided we have to do this now to protect future jobs, to continue to do the important work that we all do. We're trying to get back onto financial footing so that we can resume normal operations and get everyone back on payroll and ensure everyone's important work continues.

We can't do a standard percent cut across everyone – like everyone reduces their job and pay by 20% - because we all do individualized work, and so we're

continuing to work through these plans by department so that the work can continue.

There will be partial layoffs, where you can still do your job but maybe you don't have 5 days' worth of work so you come in 3 days a week, or come in one week and then take the next week off... and frankly there is a lot of work that's not going to get done now.

Co-chairs **Managers have been asked to look at “what are the critical needs”... but can you give us more insight into best practices or supports managers are being given to make these difficult decisions.**

Tony: The HR team has been working really hard to pull together materials for managers, but we've never been through this before. We re-did [Policy 354 on Layoff and Recall](#) to add flexibility for furloughs rather than layoffs. The other aspect of this has been trying to get 3 other key pieces together. First, a list of FAQ to provide to managers and HRBPs so that they can answer questions. Second is a PPT we hope to get out today, that walks people through the process of applying for unemployment, and the third is a step by step guide for how to talk to someone about this over zoom. Some departments have been working on this for some time and are ahead of the tools, and others have been waiting for guidance. Right now, the extended HR group is going through the materials. UR has also called unemployment agencies asking NYS to dedicate resources to us... and we're hoping more people can do this over the internet rather than call in since, as you can imagine, the call in is where the back-log seems to be.

Co-chairs **Aside from furloughs, how else is the UR trying to recover costs?**

Holly: Mid-March we froze all hiring (aside from critical needs- nurses etc.) and we stopped all capital projects (aside from critical projects like ones that create hospital beds). All (non-salary) discretionary funding is frozen- we saved about \$4M in central areas only. We have about \$125M on lines of credit. I'm working on getting another \$200M on lines of credit to help us with our payroll expenses as we go through the pandemic. We're working with government relations to make sure that we understand every piece of the CARES Act and all potential ways that we can save money or recover money or apply for new funds. For example, we can defer the employer portion of the social security payment/taxes for a few months, which saved us \$5M in the month of March. These funds will have to be paid back eventually, but it helped our cash position immediately. There's a lot going on to continue to reduce expenses and avenues to increase our cash.

Co-chairs **We know there are discussions about reduction for faculty, but can you tell us anything about how they are sharing in this burden?**

Holly: The Med Center has been working with their clinical faculty and they already seem to have a plan. Our academic faculty are working through the Faculty Senate process with Sarah and Rob and have convened a small committee to look at different models and how they might share in this burden.

Co-chairs **Can you discuss what is being done to ensure the equity of cuts?**

Tony: One of the ways we're working towards this is to give people an equal target. The 20% mark for 4 months is designed so that people will be sharing this burden fairly equally. For example, for senior leaders, the target is about 14 months of salary

reduction, starting in May and going through the next fiscal year. We've had faculty members raise their hand, saying we should not be exempt from this either. They are on contract so it is somewhat different.

Member Question: **How are we flexing for already very lean departments?**

Holly: Managers are going to have to make hard decisions, which is why each department has to work through this locally. We couldn't just say that everyone is reduced to 75% effort and 75% pay. There is certain work that will need to be done over the summer where this overall method would not work.

Tony: We were asked to look at departments in two ways: to look at this with and without vacancies. A department of ten that has three openings is in a different situation than one that doesn't have any openings. We're offering departments the flexibility to make these decisions so they can keep doing the work that's critical to do now, during the pandemic. For example, we have to keep paying people, so we need payroll.

Holly: I also asked people to look at the risks. If facilities has to reduce maintenance, what are the risks with this reduction, and how are we going to work around that?

Co-chairs: **Sharing the cost across the campus, there is a difference between taking a voluntary reduction of salary, to being put on furlough – it feels like the level of risk is very different. There is concern that once you're on furlough you may not be brought back. Reducing salary and job security are very different things.**

Holly: We intend to bring everybody back. We want to be the University that we were. We don't want to be a community college or an online institution. We have to get back to where we were and we will need our staff to get there; but there are so many unknowns. One scenario could be that we don't have a residential campus in August, but we have one that starts in October or November, in which case we might have to extend some of the furloughs. We just don't know. The international student piece is all unknown – we're trying to work every avenue to get back. We do not want to be a campus that doesn't have all of you here. We want to be fully restored. That's our reputation and we're working really hard to get there. I'd love to be able to say for sure what will happen, but this all depends on the governor's decisions, and then on the safety for students and staff – how can we assure safety for all. We're really working every possible angle.

Tony: We're already thinking about how we get there. Our safety folks, Mark Cavanaugh's area and Dr. Manchester are making sure we have protocols for bringing people back. We're approaching it with optimism, but there are no guarantees.

Co-chairs: **Can you talk about the gap between the CARES act ending in July and our furloughs going through August?**

Tony: There is a real desire by the folks who are doing the planning to try and do as much as they can through July to maximize the utilization of the CARES Act dollars. Our government relations folks are talking to the governor and our federal contacts to get those benefits extended, but the politics are complicated. There are not guarantees so we're trying to plan the furloughs so that people can get the most benefit out of that.

Co-chairs: How can GSC help you, and how can we ensure staff's voice is part of the decision-making?
Tony: You can continue to let the staff know that we have a lot of people working on this that really do care. There have been numerous discussions about how to maintain benefits for all of our folks. And it would be helpful if you let folks know that to the greatest affect possible, everyone is looking at this with care – as if everything that happens is happening to a member of my family. We're trying to ensure that we're doing the right thing each step of the way.

Co-chairs: I hope we can help in that way, curating the questions, so that the staff questions and concerns get brought to your attention in a meaningful way, and we're happy to do that work for you. As one of the largest employers in the state, how are you making plans to help staff apply for unemployment?

Tony: We're developing a number of resources to help employees, such as a guide, a narrated powerpoint and zoom call-in sessions for questions. We're making sure employees have the employer information that they need when they apply. We're also trying to set up some training stations. The bottleneck seems to be with the call ins, so we're trying to set up some computer labs and train folks to help people walk through unemployment online.

Member Question: Is there a way to create a staff emergency fund? For food, pay rent, buy groceries, etc.? Also, can we create a hotline for cost-reduction ideas?

Holly: We don't have a staff emergency fund but we can definitely look into that. The student fund is funded through alumni donations, and I'm not sure how they administer it, but we can look into it.
I have a hotline for cost-reduction ideas that was created in 2008. I have a separate e-mail address for that and it's monitored; it's SVP_CFO@ur.rochester.edu. Ideas can be sent there.

We will get through this. It will be painful, but we will get through this. Thank you for all of the work that you're doing.

GSC Debrief and discussion

Co-chair announcements: Meeting minutes approval—minutes approved.

Questions for our HR ExOfficio Members

There are lots of questions about vacation benefits. If people are partially furloughed, there are lots of questions about what you can or cannot do with your vacation time. When we come back from the furlough, will there be changes to the policy so that more vacation can be carried over? For those who are not furloughed, can they use their vacation? Also, can we donate vacation time?

HR and Leadership are aware of the vacation carry-forward issue, and the Senior Leadership Group (the President's direct reports, plus Tony Kinslow during the pandemic) are discussing a one-year change to the policy. There hasn't yet been a decision.

Update: on May 7 the Senior Leadership Group agreed to increase the amount of vacation that could be rolled-over to 1.5x an employee's annual vacation accrual for calendar year

2020/2021, and 1.25x for calendar year 2021/2022, before it returns to the standard 1x the following year.

In terms of using vacation if not furloughed: like any vacation, it's a departmental decision so it comes back to what's the operational needs.

Vacation donation: There was talk of this early on but since the purpose of the furlough is to reduce costs, vacation cannot be used when someone's on furlough – so any donated vacation wouldn't be able to be used by someone on furlough. If there are other reasons people might want to donate vacation time, please let me know and we can re-open it.

Within certain departments there is concern that furlough decisions won't be made equitably – that managers will let employees they like stay, and others will go. There's also concern from some that if you're on furlough and closer to retirement that there's a chance you won't be invited back.

[Policy 354 on Layoff and Recall](#) was just updated to include a COVID addendum that outlines furloughs, and decisions for furloughs follow the same process and criteria that are used for layoffs. It's structured and starts with determining the business need, and then which specific jobs or classifications can be reduced, and then assessing everyone in the department or unit in those jobs or classifications. There are set criteria – skill, performance, seniority (seniority is one aspect but not the only one) – and the managers need to follow the policy and guidelines when making these decisions. There are HRBP reviews and checks along the way, as these plans are being approved. The policy calls out that decisions can't be made on the basis of any protected class, so age won't be a factor in decisions, in accordance with the policy and the law.

I work collaboratively with other departments and am worried about how furloughs will affect our work processes. How do we know who is furloughed at what times?

It's a giant puzzle, and there will be bumps. We're trying to make sure everyone considers coverage before they're out. A manager guide helps ensure managers think about it; the letter to employees and employee resources webpage remind people to set an out-of-office notice. We're trying our best to minimize the bumps, but they will still be there and we'll have to do our best given the specific situation.

Tony spoke about the 3 resources to help managers and employees through this. Do we know when they will be available?

We hope the Manager Guide will go out today. The employee website will likely go out on Monday with links to lots of resources. Websites, tools and documents to help folks navigate these challenges.

The resources mention our benefits will continue but I assume we still need to pay our portion of the insurance premiums. How will our insurance premiums be paid while on furlough?

That's correct, health coverage will continue and employees will continue to be responsible for paying their portion of the insurance premiums. Employees who are on partial furlough and still receiving some pay will continue to have their cost deducted straight from their paycheck. Employees who are on full furlough and do not receive a paycheck will be billed.

How does applying for Unemployment Insurance work?

Unemployment eligibility is determined on a weekly basis. To be eligible for unemployment for a given week, an individual must work less than 4 days and earn less than \$504. For NYS unemployment insurance (UI), a person can earn up to \$504 per week in UI benefits, and the amount is calculated by NYS based on past earnings. For every day of the week that you work, regardless of the amount of time you work during the day, your unemployment insurance benefit is reduced by $\frac{1}{4}$. The Federal stimulus is an additional \$600 per week through the end of July, and if someone qualifies for any NYS unemployment insurance at all, they automatically get the full \$600 for the week. Some folks may make more with the \$600 stimulus than they do when they're working.

We are being really careful to not tell people they will get unemployment insurance. That decision is made only by NYS, and they consider a number of factors which are not always known to us – so we just aren't in a position to know for sure whether or not someone will be approved. Two examples are if someone has a second source of income, or if someone's already received unemployment insurance benefits in the last year – those two things could impact someone's ability to qualify for unemployment insurance, and we wouldn't know about it. We don't want to give people incorrect information about something as important as this.

It is currently taking roughly 2-3 weeks to apply for unemployment. Online is easier. Staff will need employer ID numbers. The new website for employees with COVID furlough information will contain that information.

What if I'm furloughed one day a week, how will I complete my work in less time?

Managers should be figuring out the critical functions and work needed now, and helping employees prioritize as needed.

Since managers are identifying jobs that are deemed non-essential and that can be furloughed to reduce costs – does that mean they may consider that those jobs just aren't needed anymore at all?

No – I don't think anyone would look at how we're operating now and think that's our normal operations, and that we could use this as a guide for how we should operate long-term. There are so many things we're just not doing, but we want to be doing them again. Bare bones operations are not ideal for institutions.

What is your advice to help with morale? What is UR going to do when people return to avoid negative feelings?

We don't have the answers, but it might be an opportunity for GSC to help. I think there's an opportunity to remind people of the ways – the concrete things – that the University has done to help them: continuing pay for 7 weeks even if people couldn't work, creating furloughs in a very flexible way to try and minimize impact on employees, continuing benefits, trying wherever possible to do the furloughs in a way to help them get unemployment insurance, approaching this in a way where we're planning to return to work as soon as possible and making this temporary. People don't always believe that decisions are made in their best interests, but there are so many examples here where the University is doing so much to try and help employees, and I hope we can point that out to people. We all must remember this is not just UR, it is a

worldwide pandemic and affecting everyone. UR is trying to minimize impact on everyone as much as possible.

On an individual level, EAP is available to staff. It is a valuable thing to do and there's no shame to it. Excellus is currently waiving fees for all mental health care telemedicine appointments.

What are rules around tuition benefits while on furlough? Would I be able to take advantage of benefits if partially furloughed?

Tuition benefits are still available for partially furloughed employees. See [Policy 354 Layoff and Recall](#).

Is UR anticipating another wave of furloughs? When would this decision be made?

As Holly and Tony mentioned, things are so dependent on the broader situation with the pandemic in New York and in our community, and what the direction is from the Governor. We're furloughing the minimal amount of employees now to hopefully bring folks back in a few months.

How are salaries being paid from grants and donor funds being managed?

The cost savings focus is on University operating funds. Grants will be handled through individual departments.

Can we change FSA benefits for dependent care if we don't need them once furloughed?

The dependent care FSA amount can be updated with the [2020 Qualifying Event Form](#). You'll be asked for the qualifying event that supports the reason for the change; in this instance it is "change in cost for dependent care".

Could HR share this information with employees?

We're creating a website with employee resources and can add new information as appropriate. Please send us ideas if there are critical questions you're getting or things you're hearing that may be helpful for us to highlight.

Can I continue to take advantage of Well-U benefits while furloughed and continue and earn points?

Benefits will depend on whether you are fully or partially furloughed. Partial furlough is still considered active.

Will people that continue to work have to pick up extra workload? If hourly employees cannot complete their work due to the extra workload with they face disciplinary actions?

Everyone will have to work differently. Think flexibly about your own workload, and what needs to be done vs. what needs to be put on back burner. At the Senior Leadership level, they understand that and have shifted expectations and priorities, and that should cascade down, so in some instances many of our regular activities will stop for now and that will make the workload more manageable. The project that was so important a few months ago may be on hold. We are supporting managers through this process. Staff needs to have conversations about workload with managers and get help prioritizing if needed. Also, the furlough plans are being developed at the department level and with a lot of flexibility for how furloughs are taken, so

that should help too. Keep in mind that some managers will also be part of the furlough, it is across the board.

How will this affect Staff Council members if they are unable to attend meetings, will there be any type of penalty?

There will be no penalties for missing meetings.

What are expectations for staff evaluations since there will be no merit increases this year?

There's understanding that evaluations may be late depending on workload and schedule, and some departments have moved their deadlines. It's important to complete performance evaluations regardless of merit increases, to document goals and accomplishments for the year.

How the Council Will Continue Its work

- Chris Apple has been appointed to chair a Staff Council Continuity Task Force
- Terra will be added to the committee so there's an HR perspective
- They will hold a meeting on Tuesday, May 5th to discuss issues and continuity of work
- GSC members cannot volunteer their time to participate in GSC activities

What is considered an “extended period” for full furlough?

May 11-August 31 is the full furlough time period.

Upcoming events:

Eleanor sent out an email with meeting dates for the remainder of the year:

June 19 (this date was changed to June 12)

August 7

September 11

October 9

November 13

December 11

- **Zoom Happy Hour scheduled for next Wednesday, May 6th.**
- **University Town Hall next week, Thursday evening**
- **At the next meeting, Mark Cavanaugh from Environmental Services will discuss the impacts of COVID-19 on the University and plans for return to work.**
- **Please notify Eleanor if you find out that you are furloughed.**

Reminder: Part of our role is to let everyone know we are trying to figure this out together. We are here for each other.