

Staff Council Submission – HLC Accreditation

Prepared by the Executive Committee of the UNM Staff Council, April 2018

General Statement on Shared Governance

Since its founding, the UNM Staff Council has been involved in shared governance at The University of New Mexico, and has participated in many of the decision-making processes that have taken place. Through the last three decades, the role of the council has always been to advocate for Staff, and our interests through the process of shared governance, as well as to facilitate Staff involvement and inclusion in the campus community.

At its founding, the council was included often and had a vital role in many early decisions, but as campus climate and financial resources changed, the council, and the voice of staff, have occasionally felt sidelined and silenced. In 2016, the UNM Staff Council even felt compelled to write a resolution calling for a return to good-shared governance (see [UNM Staff Council Resolution 2016 3](#)). The challenges that face our university administration, as well as our Student and Faculty counterparts, in working with the current membership of the Board of Regents are shared by Staff Council, and have often been daunting. Despite this, the council has been able to work well with Interim-President (now Provost) Abdallah, even presenting him with an award for his efforts on behalf of Staff, and is extremely encouraged by the tone, demeanor, and communications, so far, with of our newest president, Garnett Stokes. Additionally, Staff Council has worked well with many university administrators, and continues to be encouraged about what appears to be a renewed sense of attention to Staff, our concerns, and our inclusion in the university's shared governance.

Staff Council Background Information

Staff Council is a representative body founded in 1990 to be the voice and advocate for staff at The University of New Mexico. Staff Council participates in shared governance through one-on-one meetings with campus administrators, by producing [resolutions](#) and commentary on campus issues, and provides opportunities for Staff and Staff Councilors to engage in leadership through participation in [UNM committees](#), [internal Staff Council committees](#), and the Staff Council monthly business meetings. Additionally, Staff engage with the Council and the campus community through email listservs and events that are designed to assist Staff in disseminating information, collecting opinion and perspective, and reaching professional and personal goals.

As stated in the [Staff Council Constitution](#), the UNM Staff Council exists to represent the interests of all Staff, but only those employed in regular status, with an FTE of at least .50, are eligible to serve on the Staff Council. The Staff Council encourages full and equal participation - no staff member is denied full and equal participation for reasons of race, nationality, sex, sexual preference, religion, political belief, age or

handicap. In addition, all staff, regardless of status or FTE, can participate in any Staff Council standing committee, whether or not he or she is an elected representative on the Council. Membership on the Council is broken up between precincts (based on the Vice President reporting structure) and salary grades.

The Staff Council Executive Committee is made up of elected individuals from the membership of Council. A President, President-Elect, Speaker, Treasurer, and four at-large positions representing grades and precincts, two positions each, meet regularly to discuss opportunities and concerns relating to campus issues. The Executive Committee is also primarily responsible for executing the business of the council and interfacing with external partners including Faculty and Student counterparts, University administration, the UNM Board of Regents and the New Mexico state government. Recent administrative leadership at the Offices of the: Provost, VP, HR, Policy, Health Sciences Center, and the President have been receptive to Staff Council concerns and have worked to address these concerns faithfully and expeditiously.

Successful Interventions

Despite initial successes and inclusion, Staff Council experienced a period of time where Staff, and Staff Council, were not as included as Staff would ideally like to be. Over the past few years, however, Staff Council has taken a more active role with leadership to encourage change, and reclaim our role in shared governance. This work continues, today. We believe that our Staff are a great resource and usually stay at UNM longer than Faculty or Students. We are often former students ourselves, thus claiming Lobo status throughout a lifetime: starting as students, becoming Staff, and then on to active retirees. Given our institutional knowledge and wide range of skills, UNM has a huge advantage in its labor force because they can use that knowledge in processes and delivery to inform best practices for change. A full list of the UNM Staff Council's accomplishments can be found [here](#), and we believe we have earned our role in shared governance, and are especially proud of these highlighted recent accomplishments, listed below.

(1) Successfully advocated for security improvements to lighting and cameras on campus, see [UNM Staff Council Resolution 2017 #2](#)

This resolution resonated with the acting President who worked with UNM security and police to inquire about what UNM currently had available, cost of expanding access, creating monitoring plans, and creating a position to help communicate with departments and stakeholders on campus.

(2) Successfully lobbied for additional days to be added to Winter Break, see [UNM Staff Council Resolution 2016 #4](#)

Due to the lack of compensation increases at UNM relating to budget constraints, Staff Council spoke to administrators about using non-monetary incentives to enhance staff retention and productivity. One of

these ideas was extending the winter break schedule to include more days. This request was expressed multiple times to leadership through different mediums including: emails, meetings, town halls, and the resolution. Leadership did add days to the winter break in 2016 and 2017 and to the 2017 Fourth of July Holiday. In addition, UNM leadership added specific wording to UNM policy that empowers the President to use this option when they feel it is appropriate.

(3) Worked with university stakeholders to successfully lobby for an increase in compensation, at the NM Legislature.

The Staff Council worked with Faculty, Students and administrators to engage with legislators through UNM's lobbying day at the State Capitol.

(4) Engaged in budget decisions through involvement in the 2018-19 Budget Leadership Team

The Staff Council has a seat at the table in working with stakeholders in developing the budget for each FY by providing feedback on cost allocations, budget cuts, and efficiency ideas. Staff Council also gets the opportunity to present at the Budget Summit and assist in disseminating information to, and collecting feedback from, Staff about the decisions before the Team. Over the past two years, Staff Council increased its dissemination of information, and sought to highlight how the budget process takes place at UNM. By communicating this information, Staff have a better understanding of who has the power to influence compensation increases and to direct resources in specific situations.

(5) Successfully lobbied to retain and preserve benefits and discouraged increases except in circumstances where it has been necessary to keep benefits whole

Staff Council worked hard over the past two years to communicate with UNM leadership and HR about the importance of the health benefits staff use. Due to increasing costs Staff Council worked with the Faculty and Staff Benefits Committee to identify how best to deal with rising costs without losing co-pays, access to care, and procedure options.

(6) Retained regular meetings with UNM Administrators

To achieve these things, we have cultivated relationships with Administrators, which have resulted in greater access and receptivity to the concerns voiced by Staff.

This has also resulted in greater receptivity to general staff concerns when voiced through typical channels, (HR Policy Feedback process, as an example).

Barriers and Challenges

Many of the barriers and challenges to better-shared governance at The University of New Mexico, both historically, and currently, are related to the Board of Regents. While our perspective on university administration has changed and has been improved, our relationship with the Board of Regents has been lacking the frequency and professionalism that we expect at a flagship institution. Other challenges we face are due to the nature of Staff, and their role, in participating the opportunities to serve Staff Council and its functions.

(1) Our institution seems to have no single point of authority to ensure that all departments are adhering to written financial policy and procedures.

Consequently, the UNM Athletics Department misused state and Foundation money to take staff and donors on a golf trip to Scotland. The financing for this trip was only revealed when a whistleblower went to the media.

Additionally, a former member of the Board of Regents charged the University for Travel Expenses, which appeared to reimburse him for trips connected to his daughter's activities on campus. This information was also only revealed through an anonymous source on social media.

(2) A majority of the membership on the Board of Regents does not seem to be making decisions with the institution's best interests in mind

We have observed in Regent's meetings that they seem to take directives from the Governor and do not consider well-considered recommendations from Staff and Faculty committees on the financing and governance of the university.

We are aware that one current member of the Board of Regents opposed the design of a new campus building and took it upon herself to bully the planning staff into changing it. This same member decided that a campus department would be moved, which would cause another department to be displaced. This was only stopped when Students stood with Faculty and Staff, and got the media involved and protested at a Regent meeting. Additionally, they have allowed nominees to the Board (who have not been confirmed) to vote, they deciding to dissolve the UNM HSC Board of Governors, and decided to cancel the UNM Ski Team, a decision that was later reversed over widespread outcry.

It is our belief that members of the Board of Regents have used their position and appointment by the New Mexico Governor to overstep their role of fiduciary responsibility, institutional goals, and overarching oversight of the University. Over the past eight years, the regents have moved toward encroaching on the responsibility they vest in the UNM

President, which is the operation and management of the institution. Members of the Board have been disrespectful at meetings to Faculty, Staff and Students along with changing rules and roles without proper oversight.

(3) Staff Council has not had a productive relationship with members of the Board of Regents, overall.

Current members of the Board of Regents have declined to meet with Staff Council leadership despite numerous requests for meetings and invitations.

Additionally, one member of the Board of Regents who did meet with us encouraged us at the idea of building a relationship, but he quickly resigned from his post citing the inability to work with the other members to achieve meaningful work.

Further, Staff have observed a lack of respectful communication from members of the Board of Regents to Staff and Staff Council. In some arenas, it is seen as permissible for the members of the Board of Regents to ignore or belittle the input and opinions of Staff at meetings, in email messages and commentary shared with other UNM leadership.

Finally, Staff Council is aware that other constituency groups do have relationships with the members of the Board of Regents, and that it is not an aversion to interacting with anyone, but rather a special exclusion for Staff.

(4) Being able to take time away from work to attend meetings and participate in the benefits allotted to Staff participating in Staff Council is difficult.

Fewer Staff and an increasing workload, combined with year after year of budget decreases, have made it difficult for Staff to escape their offices to attend town hall events, Staff Council meetings, appreciation events, and to participate in other shared governance activities.

(5) Information is often provided late, and rushed, regarding decisions that should be affected by shared governance processes.

Dissemination of information in a timely fashion, in an effort to share information, but also to collect feedback about budget, policy and benefits decisions is key to practicing good, shared governance.

(6) Transparency is highly variable, and dependent upon who currently holds leadership positions.

Staff do not often know all the opportunities, which are available to exert our role in shared governance. Emphasis is not always placed on

highlighting the ways that Staff can engage and since information is often provided on an abbreviated timeline, Staff do not realistically have time to provide input. While UNM leadership has taken a more active role in including Staff in their decision-making processes, this is still an uphill battle.

Next Steps and Ideas for Improvement

Addressing the barriers and challenges to greater Staff participation in shared governance is key to moving The University of New Mexico forward, and into the future. To that end, Staff Council recommends the following measures be taken.

(1) Utilize Staff expertise and Staff Council in decision-making at UNM.

This has been done through advisory comments at the regents meeting, meeting with UNM leadership on a regular basis, holding a voting role on regents ASAR subcommittee, being offered to site on committees to represent staff.

(2) Ensure Equity between the stakeholders who participate in shared governance.

Overall, UNM is moving toward a more inclusive model of shared governance but could endeavor to be more inclusive and transparent in the future, offering the same role in shared governance to Staff, Faculty and Students.

There are also still differences in the stipends, salary coverage or time allotted to attend meetings (even though time is allowed per [UNM Policy 1150](#)) due to Staff competing demands and supervisory approval.

(3) Build transparency into processes, to eliminate the variability by position and person.

Highlighting decisions and best practices is a good place to start, but placing emphasis on providing enough time for feedback and information dissemination, as well as actively reaching out to explain processes, would go a long way to changing how many people are able to engage in these decisions.

(4) Engage in sustained conversations with Staff (and other constituency groups).

We encourage the idea to have regular town hall events, (2 times per year) to share information with non-Staff Council Staff members, that allow for anonymous feedback or questions. These town hall events can be used to share possible changes in budget, policy, programs, and to elicit feedback before changes are made to include Staff ideas in creating best practices.

(5) Continue to pursue current initiatives, like UNM Re-Engineering, that seek to assess our current operations, and look for opportunities to streamline, and enhance what we are uniquely positioned to provide to the community.

UNM does a lot – and we are proud of that! Despite that, in a changing Higher Education landscape, UNM must determine what makes us unlike any other university. We are optimistic that these efforts, and the mindset behind them, will serve our campus well.

Closing

We have appreciated being a part of this process and we are excited to share feedback and ideas for improvement at the university during this accreditation process. If students are the heart of UNM and faculty are the brains then we see staff as the body – the skeleton that holds everything up, the muscles that encourage movement, the immune system that identifies when problems arise, and the skin that holds everything together, sustaining life. Staff, and the UNM Staff Council, are looking forward to being, and expect to be, a full and equal part of the university's shared governance, going forward.

Danelle Callan, President

Rob Burford, President-Elect

Mary Clark, Speaker

Carla Sakiestewa, Treasurer

Ryan Gregg, At-Large Rep

Autumn Collins, At-Large Rep

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