

Minutes: WCU Staff Forum October 1, 2012

The October 1<sup>st</sup> Staff Forum was sponsored by the Staff Senate and offered WCU employees and campus leadership an opportunity to meet and share ideas and for employees to ask questions of campus leadership. WCU leadership was represented by David Belcher (chancellor), Angela Breton (provost) and Robin Hitch (chair, Staff Senate). The forum was moderated by Jason LaVigne, past chair of the Staff Senate. The following represents the general discussion and flow of the conversation at the forum and is not meant to be a word for word recording of the event.

Question: Why were we able to give raises to EPA and not SPA employees?

Answer: Salary increases are dictated by whether employees are designated as SPA or EPA. SPA reports to the Office of State Personnel (OSP) and OSP can only give salary increases approved by the legislature. Even if WCU has extra funding we cannot give additional increases. For EPA, the UNC system allowed the universities to give modest raises. Kathy Wong's office is researching two things: 1) what flexibility we have pertaining to raises, and 2) a review of salaries as compared to market standards. The results of this research will help to make the case for future salary increases.

Question: Career banding was meant to give the university more flexibility – University Police and IT were allowed to bring salaries closer to market value. What happened?

Answer: Kathy Wong is the best person to talk to about that.

Jason LaVigne (moderator): After banding, HR was looking to bring salaries up to 80% of market value. HR worked on this with the IT division, but quickly ran out of funds. Currently, we're at the point where other UNC schools have been able to adjust salaries on their campuses and WCU has employees leaving for jobs of lesser responsibility with significantly more salary, which obviously indicates staff at WCU are being asked to do more with more responsibility for less salary than their peers.

Question: Is there any conversation at the state level about being able to issue merit increases?

Answer: This was addressed by SB 575. The UNC chancellors were in favor of SB 575 because it would have allowed for a great deal more salary flexibility than we currently have. Problems with the bill as related to job stability made it very unpopular with staff. The bill didn't pass the legislature and it doesn't currently have a champion. It is unclear whether the issue will gain momentum again.

Question: Is there a protocol in place where SPA employees are regularly reviewed for salary increases?

Answer: At the UNC level, the salary discussion isn't specific to SPA or EPA. The system wants to push hard for salary flexibility for everyone.

Comment: This is the third unfunded personnel mandate that I've seen in my 24 years here at WCU. The administration can push for new personnel flexibility but it's nothing without equal emphasis on funding. Taking parking permit and health insurance increases into consideration, even with 1.2% raise,

WCU employees are still making less money than we did before the economy fell apart. Additionally, a 1.2% increase for those on the lower end of the salary could potentially be as low as \$16/month.

Question: Are there other ways to recognize and benefit staff in lieu of raises such as offering ticket discounts or parking discounts?

Answer: it's something we can consider. Any discounts offered would depend on a cost/benefit analysis. This is especially true when it comes to Athletics – we can't break into their profit margin. The Athletics budget is currently being subsidized and that subsidy is being phased out in a year. Other opportunities for staff would include the leadership academy that's currently being developed for faculty and staff. There is a possibility of recognizing years of service. Bottom line, it's important to have ways to recognize people and provide professional development and training for staff.

Comment: In some offices on campus, new employees are being trained by peers in other departments due to lack of new employee orientation and other training.

Answer: We will be working to re-institute a culture of professional development on campus.

Question: With the lack of raises in recent years, is there special salary consideration for those nearing retirement?

Answer: Not that I know of.

Question: Offices with staff with large workloads need to be given the flexibility and the support from HR to reclassify positions.

Answer: This is a common issue on campus. When we don't have institutional funds to support raises, departments need to find the funds to support raises from reclassifying positions. The UNC system has to approve every single reclassification. When position reclassifications are successful, it's almost always because a position was eliminated and the position being reclassified took on the responsibilities from the position that was eliminated.

Question: Is there any training or a committee looking at providing training opportunities?

Answer: There isn't a committee but you could work with HR to create a committee on training.

*General discussion on employee training and how it was/has been done in the past and at other institutions.*

Question: How did other UNC schools address salary inequities – can we do the same?

Answer: Other universities are much better funded. For example, UNC Charlotte is growing quickly and allocating enrollment growth funds to salary among other things.

Question: There's a faculty orientation and a faculty travel fund because these are priorities. The faculty orientation doesn't cost a lot of money and is offered because it's a priority. We could do the same for a new employee orientation.

*General discussion on the types of training that would be useful to have instituted in a formal way on campus for everyone.*

Question: The salary issues are a UNC problem but some of the other issues we are talking about are local issues. Let's figure out how we address these local issues.

General Answer/Response: We all need to take ownership of the enrollment mission by providing exemplary service and experience so students want to stay at WCU. If we retain students, funding is positively impacted and we will be able support different initiatives.

Belcher/Brenton: The attitude of WCU staff is extraordinary and does make a difference with students.

Question: There are staff working on campus who make at or below poverty level – is there any flexibility like waiving parking fees, etc.?

Answer: It's a shame when an institution has employees working at or below the poverty level.

General discussion on impact of parking expense and the possibility of finding ways to alleviate expenses for those in the lowest salary ranges.

Question: Is it possible to create separate email listservs for faculty and staff to better route email?

Question: Coulter Faculty Commons conducts great training for faculty. Could they do something specifically for staff during the summer?

*General discussion regarding expanding Coulter Faculty Commons' spring leadership workshop and the possibility of reserving good parking spots for 'employees of the month' as a possible way to recognize high performing staff.*

Question: What are we hearing from students on why they aren't staying or why they aren't happy at WCU? We know the issue is being researched, but the results of those studies aren't being distributed. It would be nice if this information was more widely available.

Answer: OIPE would be the most likely office to have that information. In general, national studies show students are looking for excellent academic programs, affordable education, facilities, IT connectivity. Responding to students via email and in a timely manner makes a big difference as well.

Question: Thinking of 2020 strategic plan, what are the initial steps we will be taking to meet these goals?

Answer: There are several initiatives in place to address the strategic plan. Dr. Breton is beginning program prioritization for academic units this semester and Craig Fowler and Diane Lynch are conducting a review of the non-academic organizational structure; specifically investigating whether we are efficient and effective and which processes are overly bureaucratic and what can be automated. The campus master planning process will also begin this year. We need to focus on renovation and infrastructure prioritization. At issue is that we have many important issues that are priority and we lack

appropriate funding to support all of the important priorities (staff salary, infrastructure, academics, etc.). We are also reviewing the enrollment management process investigating whether we are being as strategic as we can be with the goal being improving retention. There are also several interim leadership positions that are important to fill and provide stable leadership for the campus. The Millennial initiative is also important and we have developers interested in possible partners but we want to make sure we have the appropriate mix of partners and collaborators.

Question: Can you give us an update on WCU Programs at Biltmore Park?

Answer: I think we will look back on Biltmore Park and consider it a game changer for WCU. We are paying less for better space and there's a lot of excitement in Asheville about WCU Programs at Biltmore Park. We will be conducting a needs analysis to decide what programs to offer in Biltmore Park. From an enrollment management standpoint, we need to focus on transfer, graduate and distance students.

Submitted by:

Alison Joseph and Shawna Young