

Report from Juella Sparks on the UA Staff Alliance ad hoc committee for reviewing UA Board of Regents Policy 04.08 Dispute and Grievance Resolution, September 2013

Background:

Staff Alliance launched an ad hoc committee in response to complaints regarding the grievance process and because President Gamble opened all regents policies and regulations for review. The committee membership includes; Juella Sparks, past chair of Staff Alliance, Mike O'Brien, General Counsel, Julie Queen, staff representative and Brad Lobland, UAF Interim HR Director.

This committee met a couple of times over the summer. It started by discussing the existing policy but quickly discovered that the process or policy itself is only part of the issue. One fundamental challenge will be to help staff to understand what a complaint is versus a grievance. From here the committee discussed several things such as protected class complaints, an online and anonymous mechanism for making complaints and a staff awareness campaign.

Mike O'Brien also indicated that President Gamble asked him to participate in the development of a "bullying in the workplace" training. He later noted that the Alaska Supreme Court ruling on Yauna Taylor's non-retention suit was likely to trigger a review of Regents' Policy Part IV – Human Resources. This may mean any re-write at this time would be premature.

At the last meeting Mike also noted that Statewide was in the process of evaluating vendors for an "employee hotline" to meet the requirements of Human Relations, Risk Management, Audit and Student Services. He stated that vendor presentations were starting soon and he asked if I was willing to participate. I have attended all three of the presentations and will make comments below.

Next Steps:

Takeaways from these meetings include:

- The need for a staff awareness campaign that provides to staff the information they need to make decisions regarding when and how to communicate their concerns or issues regarding their work environment.
- Bullying in the workplace training, which has already come before Staff Alliance.
- "Employee hotline" – this is being driven by Statewide with a goal of having it operational by the end of the calendar year. The vendor presentations have shown that there are a lot of features in common. For example, they all allow for confidentiality and anonymity while also enabling the employee to determine what the resolution or response is with respect to the issue.

Reporting is also a part of these applications and those reports should be provided to governance as well as the administration. I recommend that Staff Alliance work closely with Statewide to implement and encourage use of this communication tool.

- Changes to Chapter IV – I encourage you to make it known that Staff Alliance welcomes the opportunity to contribute to a revised and improved Regents' policy on Human Resources. The grievance process is just one piece of this policy that so strongly affects your constituents' everyday work environment.

Summary:

Mike O'Brien's participation on this ad hoc committee provided an opportunity to engage in a conversation with the administration, albeit short. At this point, I would consider this ad hoc committee on hiatus until Staff Alliance has conferred and communicated with President Gamble on the takeaways listed above. After these things occur, you may decide to dissolve the committee or redirect it.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.