Minutes
Staff Alliance
Special Meeting
Tuesday, March 29, 2022
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Join Zoom Meeting
ID: 884 2666 8118
Password: 242756
(Please mute unless speaking.)

Voting Members:
Juella Sparks, Vice President, UAF Staff Council; Chair, Staff Alliance
Dawn Humenik, Co-President, UAA Staff Council; Vice Chair, Staff Alliance
Monique Musick, Representative, System Office Staff Council
Lauren Hartman, President, System Office Staff Council  Absent
Ronnie Houchin, President, UAF Staff Council
Eric Lingle, President, UAS Staff Council  Absent
Tania Rowe, Co-President, UAA Staff Council
Michelle Nakamura, Vice President, UAS Staff Council

Call to Order and Roll Call

1. Adopt Agenda
   Monique motions to approve. Tania seconds.

2. Guests
   2.1. UA Regents Karen Perdue, Dale Andersen
   2.2. Others as Invited

3. Introductions and DISCUSSION
   3.1. Each staff governance representative will state their name, university, university department, years of service and greatest concerns for the university
   Dawn Humenik is concerned about declining enrollment and the solutions that will be employed to remedy that. Staff is declining with low morale due to leadership turnover, budget impacts, and the pandemic.
Monique would like to see meaningful governance practices. We have 2500 fewer staff members, we are trying to improve all of these services, improve our enrollment and take on new initiatives. What are the methods which are outdated so we can be more efficient and effective as staff?

Ronnie is concerned that many of our staff are experiencing extreme burnout. This has very real impacts in our ability to do our jobs well. There are also health impacts; higher stress levels, higher levels of anxiety and depression. The pandemic has exacerbated those problems but those issues predated the pandemic. The reduction of resources available to us at the University has trickled down to staff in a challenging way. The question is how do we deliver those services, those products in a high quality way and what are some of those things that we can let go of that are not critical of our mission and the university’s needs. There is a tension between leadership and middle management. There is not a real clear sense of direction at any level.

Tania’s biggest concern is how much knowledge we are losing when we lose staff. How do we stop losing so much talent and how can we attract more talented employees.

Michelle has the challenge that UAS is such a small university, everyone is spread thin already. It is a huge impact when just one person leaves. It’s been a challenge to get those positions filled. When people have been in a position for a long time, they take away all that knowledge and getting a replacement onboarded and trained is difficult. The question is how do we attract and retain employees and keep them happy to be here so that we can all do our jobs effectively.

Matthew Mund believes it is important to maintain the trust between the governance and the board. A perfect example is related to how President Pitney was appointed President. It would be great for the Board to spend a little time thinking about their relationship with these governance groups and how we can strengthen that. The general wellness and mental health of the staff needs to be considered, for example: paying people to do volunteer work or the time to do an exercise class during the day. These types of things were not allowed under the previous structure. Whatever we can do with policy and regulation for innovative ideas to come forward. There is more need for wellness and mental health efforts than before. The board should look at how much the university is investing into equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Juella’s greatest concern was there were no planned reductions, there was not a strategy to downsize the university. It was up to each individual department to be given a figure that they needed to work with, yet the workload was not reduced. Because of that there is no real understanding where the challenges are right now. We are obviously building back HR and there are challenges to update IT.

Karen Perdue’s response:

There are a number of issues in general in society. Where are the students? What are they doing? Where are the employees? What are people doing and what will it take to
get talented people to stay with us and back in the workforce after Covid. Governance would like to restructure the university. Alaska is challenged because of the lack of volume in the population. Other universities might have thousands of students and we treasure the 300 or 400 students that we have. We live with that in Alaska all over the place. We still owe our community access to higher education. It is a rural issue. the tension that we face when we have these horrific cuts in the budget. That doesn’t mean there can’t be improvements. There has never been the trauma that we all felt in that summer when the budget cuts were delivered. We need to focus on resources to get more money to increase the Universities budget.

Juella adds the Alliance is looking for a statement on work culture that says work from home is now a valued aspect of work and the university should support and encourage that wherever possible. What is the vision going forward and how can we alleviate the workload to a manageable level. Everything should be on the table when it comes to leadership and direction or vision for the university. The board has to have a realistic and informed view of what’s happening at the university in order to set direction. It is not a view that comes from the administration, it comes from governance.

Monique adds that a hybrid work from home arrangement is up to the specific supervisor. So often, people leave the university not from just stress, it’s from a bad relationship with the people they work with and they have no place to go for conflict resolution. We don’t have the training and support resources to model how a better relationship could exist. People don’t leave their organization, people leave their supervisor.

Dawn adds there doesn’t seem to be a point of pride within the university. We don’t do a good job at the individual level or at the system level. It would be great to instill and develop a sense of pride in our universities. We are doing so many fabulous things for our communities across the state. HR is to protect the university not the staff, so it is a very delicate balance that HR has to play which can leave a staff member feeling very uncared for and welcome which adds to low morale and eventually departure from the university.

Ronnie suggests working to make the University of Alaska the employer of choice in the state. There are significant resources which have been invested into student recruitment and enrollment which is the main reason we are all here. Staff are a huge resource and asset to the university. What real intentional effort is put into growing and retaining staff and making the University of Alaska again, the employer of choice. Bringing that into the Boards priorities as a goal.

Matthew Mund adds that the consolidation of HR has been more traumatic as an employee that anything outside the organization, Covid or otherwise. The staff who volunteer in governance are in charge of making other staff feel appreciated. Are the brown bag lunch meeting and trainings working on creating better supervisors?
Karen Perdue: the Board shares the goal of making Alaska proud of its university. Trust from the public to the university is essential and we should have examples of what is going well and where we can improve. It’s understandable that the broader message is there are many tools to making the University of Alaska an excellent place to work.

4. Adjourn