

December 3, 2010

To: Henry Limouze, Associate Provost for Faculty and Staff Affairs

From: The Unclassified Staff Advisory Council (USAC)

Re: Position Statement on the Equitable Treatment of Staff

“Action expresses priorities.”

-- Mohandas Ghandi

Wright State University has long been a good place to work. While the university has generally treated its employees equitably and acted with some level of transparency, there have been times when the university has not lived up to its own values regarding treatment of faculty and staff. Though, in some cases, it took the unionization of certain employee groups to encourage more equitable treatment, Wright State has a history of responding when issues of equity and transparency are made known.

Despite this generally positive history, fault lines – which in some cases have existed for some time – are becoming more apparent. The recent disparity in raises between faculty and staff, faculty’s increasing influence over non-academic areas of operation, and numerous issues revealed in the recent OD&L survey are all of concern to unclassified staff.

We recognize the university was obligated by its Collective Bargaining Agreement with faculty to honor their agreed upon raises. We also recognize the university made a good faith attempt to see if faculty would be willing to make adjustments to that agreement so the university could provide more equitable raises for all its employees. That faculty rejected these overtures is neither surprising nor particularly unreasonable. Nevertheless, it is difficult to watch as one group of employees receives raises at a rate more than twice the rate other employees do.

Furthermore, it appears the faculty union has significantly increased faculty influence over university decision-making. Certainly, there are many areas within the university’s academic mission where faculty should have their due influence. But it is of concern to us that faculty have now begun to wield approval authority over the actions of other areas of campus decision-making. One example of such authority is their relatively new role in reviewing and approving the university’s technology plans, formerly the primary responsibility of CaTS and the diverse University Technology Committee (UTC).

It’s clear by its actions the university is aware of most, if not all, of these issues. As mentioned, the university made a good faith effort to prevent the raise inequity of the previous two years. Similarly, the university has responded to USAC’s and CSAC’s desire for more input by creating a number of committees that meet regularly. OD&L is currently responding to a mandate to help improve staff development and encourage strong leadership within the university community. These are all positive signs the university takes these issues seriously.

While recognizing the university’s good intentions, we also see that resources are scarce and will likely continue to be for some time. At the same time, the university has big plans for its future growth. In such an environment – one in which, no doubt, sacrifices will be called for – it is of great importance the university signal its support of the many unrepresented staff members who work here. In times of plenty, it is clear the university mostly seeks to act in equitable ways. But in times of scarcity, as pressures to cut costs build, and when it is legally obligated to some employees but not to others, how will the university act?

The pressures of these times threaten to deepen the fault lines that exist. While the university is making an effort to close those gaps, we believe the university needs to rededicate itself to these tasks and make clear their intentions to treat all employees equitably, even those without legal representation. To that end and at your request, USAC offers some principles to guide university actions. We ask the university to commit itself to the following:

1. **Raise and benefit equity.** It is a sometimes unfortunate truth that money is a representation of value. We understand the university is constrained by law in what it can publicly declare about its negotiations with collective bargaining units. However, we ask the university to take the strongest public stance that it can and make an internal commitment not to negotiate any raise structure or set of benefits with any bargaining unit that it cannot provide to all of its employees. Furthermore, we ask the university to work with USAC, CSAC, and the faculty senate to develop innovative and sustainable ways to structure compensation and benefits that reward employees equitably.
2. **Fair and consistent evaluation.** The university has adopted a mixed compensation model. Typically, our raises are an equal mix of across the board / cost of living increases and merit increases. However, inconsistencies and inequities in the university's review and evaluation system as well as structural flaws in the merit pay system¹ often lead to an inequitable distribution of these funds. Furthermore, as revealed in the OD&L survey, too many employees do not receive evaluations or feel they have clear development and career paths available to them here. We urge the university to work with all of its constituents to develop and refine a system of review and retention that addresses these issues for all of its employees.
3. **Fair influence over university strategy and policy.** The university has created numerous committees, councils, and advisory boards to help it direct its mission. While we appreciate the responsiveness to staff concerns, we also believe many of these committees have been formed in an *ad hoc* fashion and that this patchwork of committees, etc., has become unwieldy. We urge the university to work with USAC, CSAC, and the faculty senate to create a more streamlined and equitable system for the guidance of university administration.
4. **Proactive, open, and honest communication.** The university has made numerous efforts to communicate with staff and faculty. Still, communication is often perceived as reactive or insufficient to address the concerns of university employees. Where distrust of the administration exists, it sometimes stems from the perception the university is withholding information from its employees. We urge the administration to work with all of its constituents to develop a more clear, consistent and timely communication strategy to support its mission.

Wright State claims to value people, relationships, and partnerships. It has vowed "to maintain high ethical standards in all of [its] relationships and operations" and claims to "recognize the inherent value and promise of each individual." As employees of the university, we agree with and embrace these values. However, a value not acted upon is a mere longing. "Action expresses priorities" and action expresses values as well. We urge the university to work even more closely with us in acting to express our shared values as we face our challenges together.

¹ These flaws are laid out quite nicely in an article entitled, "Whither Merit Pay" in the February 2007 issue of *The Right Flier*.