

RIT | Staff Council

Meeting

Thursday, February 5, 2025

Location: CSD (055) 1300/1310 Student Development Center

Present: Gene Vogler (Chair), Jeremy Zehr, Noah McMullin, Erin Hartter, Amanda Hughes, Susie Freeman, Marc Goldman, Christine Smith, Lisa Crittenden, Katey Sackett, David Brault, Dianna Kleckley, John Ponder, Richard Albarran, Noella Kolash, Paige Drake, Naomi Ruetz, Karen Braun, Georgeanne Hogan, Lauren Shields, Andrew Cirillo, Evan Smith, Sarah Connolly, Eliza Fowler, Joanna Prescott, Linda Searing
Absent Excused: Becky Kiely, Maria Nikolaou

Call to Order - Gene Vogler

Leadership Updates - Gene Vogler

- Huge shout out to all of the folks over in FMS who have had quite the month between managing over a foot of snow in one day to a major power outage across 50% of campus.
- Search for Dr. Watters' replacement is expected to be wrapped up by end of fiscal year.
- Middle States re-accreditation will begin at the end of March. 4 members of the executive committee will be attending the welcome for the Middle States committee.
- The election nomination period is over, as has been the case all year, we have strong numbers of nominees. Keep your eyes out for the acceptance period for those who were nominated.
- PAOS is well underway; Jeremy and Lisa can provide more information for anyone who is interested.
- As a reminder, the PAOS ceremony will be held on March 19th. This will replace our normally scheduled SC meeting, so reps' attendance is expected.
- New rep Linda will officially join the events and engagement committee.
- Our meeting today will include a conversation with President Bill Sanders, while we won't be able to get to every topic, we have selected 3 topics to discuss today.
- In upcoming meetings we will have presentations on Ai, Political Events and Climate, United Way Campaign, Enrollment Management, Policy 18.2 and Policy E12.4.
- Committee Updates will be in our meeting on March 5th.
- I will end with a note of appreciation for all of our SC reps and all of our partners on campus. Just in the month of January we've seen Campus make a decision to have a snow day and the emergency alert message system go out quickly during an

emergency. Both are topics that Staff Council has passionately asked for in recent years.

Motion to Approve the Minutes of 1/22/26

- Carried 19/0, 2 abstained

Featured Wellness & Tiger Perks - Communication and Outreach Committee

Tuition Waiver Benefits

- Undergraduate waivers are tax-free
- Graduate waivers are taxable unless job-related
 - Job-related courses require documentation and supervisor approval
 - Taxable waivers create a payroll bill
- Submit graduate tax waiver in Workday by Drop/Add
- Link: [Education Benefits | Human Resources | RIT](#)

Motion to Approve the SC Bylaws edit

- Carried 21/0, 1 abstained

President Bill Sanders

Remarks:

- Has spent a significant amount of time going over the budget
- Has met with 20-plus groups getting feedback as they've shaped the Strategic Framework, which has received the endorsement of the Strategic Framework Committee, and the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees. The official launch will be around March 9th. It is a framework on which to do 2 things: to inspire everyone in the university community to come up with ideas that they think fit within the framework, and a yardstick with which to judge the ideas and launch initiatives to further the strategic framework. For instance, one we already know we need to improve is our retention rate. About 12% of our students don't come back. Our graduation rate is somewhere between 75 and 73%. Other universities are in the high 80s or even 90s.

Questions:

- What can RIT continue to capitalize on, that we are currently doing?/What can RIT capitalize on that we are not? And how can staff and Staff Council be engaged in making RIT better?
 - I truly believe the strategic framework is where we should be going...what do we have going for us? This is a place that is fundamentally in good shape. The more I have learned, the more I strongly believe this. We have a balanced budget, and we've had a balanced budget for a long time. We have increased our enrollment, and we have a great model of shared governance. This is a great place to start from.
 - Some of our challenges; we have been able to maintain that position by not taking as many smart risks as maybe we'd like to, particularly on the people-side. There has been on the facility side, like the performing arts theater. We have to figure out in this challenging environment, we have to

figure out how to create space to innovate, we don't have money to do this in the current budget. The challenge is to figure out how to go from that safe but conservative position, but creating space to innovate.

- Do you see any emerging disciplines that RIT might need to jump on?
 - In this upcoming board meeting, we are working intensely on ideas related to AI, from several colleges within the university, and how it applies all over campus. That will definitely be an initiative.
 - Also with how we are going to move forward with Health Science and Technology.
 - These will be the first things emerging from the Strategic Framework:
 - Retention and graduation rates
 - AI
 - Health Science and Technology
 - How we integrate Technology and the Arts is very different from Carnegie Mellon, and I'm excited about that.
 - Thinking about Entrepreneurship and innovation, we need a campus-wide plan.
 - Concerning Retention: Conflicting messages between departments across campus; is there a way to create more collaboration moving forward?
 - I'd like to learn more about that. With the retention and graduation rate, I've been meeting with the team talking about this. 5% percent of our students that came in September did not return in January - that's several hundred people. I've asked to know what the reason was for each of those people, so that we can learn from that. I think we do need to change how we do business. Feel free to reach out to me separately and tell me what you know. We absolutely need to break down silos.
- With the selective position replacement in place the topic of workload management and the effects on work/life balance continues to be a hot topic especially with engaged managers and staff further down on the organizational chart. With well-being, being so critical, how can we explore options to assist our staff that are struggling to fill their roles alongside vacated roles?
 - The well-being of individuals and the collective health of our community is very near and dear to my heart-it is what we have and we have to preserve that. It's one of 4 pillars in our strategic plan, and we have some things that we believe will help with that. The preview on budget and finance: we are worried about what is to come. Basically every position is considered at the highest level, and we are making decisions on every single one. We are in this situation right now, where there is so much uncertainty about what our budget will be next year. We are trying not to get in a position where we have to do anything draconian next year...by doing these somewhat painful things right now. I believe we have to support the faculty and staff we have. We are balancing our budget right now by the positions that are empty. And I don't know when we are going to be able to fill those. The trick for work-life balance is to increase

enrollment, and there are some glimmers of hope. We have to find ways to contain costs, and do that by supporting the people we have, and we have to do that by increasing efficiencies. A glimmer of hope; we already have more applications so far this year, than we had the entire year last year. Applications are up by about 28%. Many schools aren't seeing that. We are getting that in domestic undergraduate students. Our numbers at the graduate level are not looking good. Masters are down 40-50%. Graduate level are down by a third. The bottom line is that applications are up, the number of students we have admitted are up significantly. Last year at this time it was 13,500, this year it is more than 17,000. The tempering news is that we've admitted a lot more, we now have to turn that into RIT being their first choice. The average student now applies to 10 universities. There's still a lot of uncertainty and variance on where we're gonna land for next year.

- Thank you for advocating for the merit increases this year. Regarding the merit pool: typically it's around 2%, and another .5% for outstanding performance. Can you speak to the felt improvement gap between pay disparities?
 - My guidance is to not be overly mechanistic in the raises we give, such as if you give higher percentages at the lower end of the pay scale, and not as high on the higher end of the payscale. This year I met with the deans and all of the VPs in August and I said, I don't want to have all of these rules about what's for merit and what's for exceptional performance. I want you to be able to use your discretion to integrate all of the factors in making these decisions. Those that are performing well, might be at the very low end of their market range- and try to bring them up. At Carnegie Mellon I had these conversations and I did my best to bring them up in their market range.
- Financial stability and the financial health of RIT is a common topic, with much of the messaging being around the reliance on tuition dollars and the enrollment cliff and the long-term survivability. Much of the future is unknown at this point but can you share some light on your impression of the future? We're hoping this will help calm fears by having an open conversation on the topic.
 - I'm always an optimistic person; let me start with a base for how I think we should think about it. I get frustrated when anyone makes broad statements about the education business, and thinks that we are going to be the average. I believe there are going to be some universities that thrive, and universities that fail, and I believe we are going to thrive. Yes, there will be a demographic cliff in the average. Our applications from CA for example have gone up 38%. It's our job to create the brand and reality so that we are not part of the average. We are a technical school that gives the degrees that they can have strong careers with.
 - I'm also a realist; the rising costs of energy etc. I ask how we can optimize to make sure that we're gonna be on the right side. We have a lot we are

gonna have to manage. There are gonna be some tough times ahead. We may ask- we had to look at this at Carnegie Mellon- what would you do if you had to make up 5, 10 or 15%? I think this is a good exercise. We are planning to make sure that we don't get in trouble, and doing everything we can to realize an upside. We will know more in March, and in July, but we won't really know until the fall.

Old/New Business

- Gene Vogler, update on old business:
 - Open positions are starting to post in Workday
 - They are still working to eliminate extra hurdles in Workday. We are still new in the process.
- Library Advisory update from Marc Goldman: they are dealing with challenges around funding and space.
- Questions remain about how they divided up the tiers within the health insurance brackets. We will bring that question back around.
- Benefits Advisory Group update from Noah McMullin is reconvening next week, with more info to come.
- The power outage; communication was quick to come out, but it would've been helpful to have some information about what systems were going to remain affected.
- Can non-exempt RIT employees be RIT 365 Facilitators?
Because of labor and wage laws surrounding the hourly nature of non-exempt work, we are unable to hire non-exempt employees at this time. We recognize that this is a tremendous barrier and excludes many qualified people from pursuing this opportunity. This is a restriction that exists at both the University and State levels and is beyond the control of our department. Link: <https://campusgroups.rit.edu/365facilitators/faq/>

3:30 PM **Blocks**

3:45 PM **Committees**

4:00 PM **Adjourn**

The **voice of staff** in shared governance

Staff Council is an advisory body to the President (or their representative) on issues and decisions which impact RIT. Staff Council Members communicate to staff about university news, events and initiatives, and act as a conduit providing staff feedback and insights on university issues. Additionally, Staff Council initiates policy proposals and revisions, and raises issues for university consideration.

<https://www.rit.edu/staffcouncil> | stafcoun@rit.edu