



# WPI

## Staff Council

### 2023 Spring Staff Forum – Summary Report

On Monday, May 22<sup>nd</sup> an in-person Staff Forum was held on the upper level of the Rubin Campus Center from 2:30-4:00 pm. There were approximately 112 staff members in attendance. Additionally, a virtual program mirroring the same format was held on Wednesday, May 24<sup>th</sup> from 11 am –12 noon with approximately 270 staff members logged onto the event.

Staff Council Chair, Theona Scola, welcomed the group and acknowledged the additional Staff Council members in attendance.

President Grace Wang provided opening remarks for the Staff Forum in which she took the opportunity to share her gratitude for the critical role that staff serve throughout our campus. President Wang acknowledged that staff positively contribute to the success of our students, deepen partnerships, and support research that broaden WPI's global impact. She highlighted how students, alumni, and faculty all benefit greatly from the work that our staff do. During the in-person event, President Wang also announced the winners of this year's Board of Trustees' Outstanding Staff awards: Nicole Caligiuri and Matthew Barry.

Lauren Turner shared the major projects underway in Talent & Inclusion that have a direct impact on staff. Lauren also provided a short overview of the performance review process for this year which will be completed over the summer. Staff Council Chair Theona Scola also asked Lauren to provide the rationale behind the decrease in summer hours decision based on an influx of feedback expressing disappointment in the decision. Lauren explained that the 4-hour summer weekly blocks were never meant to be permanently adopted and caused issues of inequality amongst different roles. Lauren stated that the use of paid time off has decreased in the last two years across all University divisions. While this results in a concerning increase in the university's accrued financial liability for vacation balances, more importantly, it indicates that employees are not using their accrued time to take breaks that are essential to health, well-being, and balance. Lauren acknowledged that the Staff Council was not informed of this decision prior to the campus wide email and committed to being more diligent in soliciting feedback from the Staff Council in future decisions that affect staff. We were reminded that we can use the 3 allotted summer personal days this summer, as well as taking advantage of flexible hours/remote work opportunities and utilizing accrued vacation time to support our wellbeing.

Both President Wang and Lauren Turner acknowledged the importance of opportunities such as this Staff Forum to allow for open discourse, networking among colleagues, and learning about ongoing topics important to staff. They both also commended the ongoing work of the Staff Council to elevate the much-needed voice of staff, encouraged attendees to provide feedback



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and suggestions through the Staff Feedback Form, and to consider running in the upcoming Staff Council election.

Theona shared how important and effective the new Staff Feedback Form is because having a formalized way to collect feedback allows the Council to best gauge what concerns might be shared or are common issues. Theona closed the remarks with an overview of the format of the remainder of the program.

Staff members at the in-person event enjoyed light desserts and refreshments while networking and connecting with their colleagues before breaking into breakout sessions of their choice. Below are summary reports of each of the five breakout sessions offered to staff members.

**Topic: Center of Wellbeing (Speaker: Paula Fitzpatrick)**

This session reviewed the Center for Well-Being's collaborative work in cultivating a culture of care at WPI during the Center's first year. An overview of important milestones, our holistic well-being programming model, and comparison of the CWB and SDCC was reviewed. Metrics about CWB engagement and the impact of the Kognito Suicide Prevention Program and Wellness Days were shared. The session ended with a discussion of ways employees can foster their own well-being and how departments and offices can partner with the CWB. Staff are encouraged to visit the CWB and take advantage of our summer offers. Approximately 20 staff members attended the in-person breakout sessions and ~ 75 engaged in the virtual breakout sessions.

**Topic: Benefits (Speaker: Joellen Andrews)**

This session included a summary of 2022 milestones and an overview of what goals and initiatives are priorities. Joellen shared a focus on an improved customer service standard internally and through vendor relationships. ~30 guests joined and had an opportunity to ask benefit-related questions during Monday's in-person event. Common topics included the transition for Life Insurance provider, tuition remission policy, open enrollment, inclusion of two-person pricing tier for health insurance offerings, and the current HSA benefit. During the virtual event, ~135 staff members attended one of the offered Benefit breakout sessions. There were additional questions regarding the transition in Life Insurance providers, Medicare, and the retirement plan contributions.



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**Topic: DEIB and Professional Development (Speakers: Tony Liang and James DeLeon)**

This joint session involved presentations on work undertaken during FY23 in both units (e.g., faculty and staff of color receptions, Lunch and Learn series, Mark Thomas BBI/ WPI K-12 Frontiers pre-college scholarship, the Leadership Academy, Inclusive Search pilot training for Faculty, WPI Values workshops, and the HERS reunion) as well as news for the upcoming academic year (e.g., learning and development's new certificate programs, the Women's Leadership Program). This was followed by the staff having the opportunity to ask questions to both presenters. Some discussions included the suggestion of required DEIB training for all staff and faculty and the value of having a suite of DEIB training options at WPI. Collectively, almost 120 (40 in-person and 80 online) staff members attended the session.

**Topic: Talent and Inclusion (Speakers: Lauren Turner and Hilary Clark)**

This session covered FY23 accomplishments and FY24 goals related to Workday improvements, compensation, and partnerships across campus and was an opportunity for staff to ask questions and provide feedback. A specific area of interest was the staff compensation and classification project including the job description process, which is now at a 77% completion rate, and next steps which will involve working with our consultant partners on job leveling, creation of a transparent compensation grading system, benchmarking, and equity review. Talent Operations & Strategy shared a continued area of focus and collaboration will be towards improving Workday to streamline administrative processes and make necessary data available for staff to complete work more efficiently and effectively. It was also shared that the Payroll department has transitioned to T&I. Approximately 200 employees joined this breakout session over the two forums.

**Topic: Staff Council (Speakers: Staff Council members)**

This session involved informal conversation where staff had the opportunity to ask questions about topics relevant to the Staff Council. Common topics included the upcoming election process, goals for the upcoming academic year, and questions pertaining to the workload and expectations of Council members. The Staff Council gave some insight into the process surrounding the new Staff Feedback form and how this translates into an effective tool to understand common staff concerns. Collectively, there were ~17 staff members who attended these breakout sessions in-person and ~85 engaged in the virtual breakout sessions.