



WPI

Staff Council

On Monday, May 20, 2024, Staff Council hosted the 2nd annual Spring Staff Forum in partnership with Talent & Inclusion. There were approximately 80 staff members attending the in-person event in the Rubin Campus Center, Odeum and approximately 140 staff members logged on virtually.

Staff Council Chair, Theona Scola welcomed those in attendance and introduced the members of the Staff Council. Theona recognized long-time past employee, Heidi Startz as she recently past away on May 15th. Heidi had been an employee at WPI for 16 years before retiring in March 2024. A moment of silence in Heidi's honor was observed.

Theona shared the outlined for the program that included updates that highlight some of the Council's major accomplishments. She shared that Lauren Turner, Senior VP of Talent & Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer along with members of her team, will share some important updates on the topics of the Staff Climate Survey, Staff Compensation Project, and the Performance Management task force.

Theona shared that the program would be heavily information-based, and with the plan to return this forum to an event more focused on dialogue with staff for our future forums.

Photos from the November 2023 "Harvest of Thanks" staff gratitude event were shared that illustrated some of the highlights from the social event.

A list of the current working groups, advisory boards, tasks forces, and committees in which the Staff Council has been a driving factor in establishing and maintaining staff representation was presented. Theona acknowledged the tremendous amount of work and progress made with regards to each of these university initiatives.

Theona shared a recent outcome of that collaboration has been the motion to change Fringe Benefits Committee membership and appointment procedures. The proposal that the Staff Council initiated was for a change in membership; to have a more equitable representation: 5 staff and 5 faculty; A Vice Chair position held by a staff member and including Staff Council in the appointment process. These changes were voted on during the May 2024 Faculty Meeting and approved.

Theona reviewed how the Staff Council utilizes submissions to the Staff Feedback Form. When trends in submissions are identified, they are shared with leadership. She shared that 244 submissions have been submitted since April 2023.

A new e-card recognition program was introduced. GoatNotes is an employee recognition program that staff can use to send notes of appreciation to their colleagues.

Theona acknowledged the inaugural 9 Staff Council members that are completing their 2-year term: Kim Hollan, Bill Battelle, Roxanne Gardner, Diane Dubois, Caitlin Keller, Jen Cluett, Sarah Miles, Amy Curran and Theona Scola.

The pool of nominees for the incoming group of Staff Council members were shared. The voting period is May 28th-June 7th.

Theona shared an overview of the work that the Remote and Flex Work Policy/Summer Working Hours Task Force. In November, the task force began work that was rooted in a commitment to operational efficiency, equity, employee well-being, and institutional competitiveness. It involved an extensive data collection process and has resulted in the development of a series of nuanced proposals aimed at assessing and improving WPI's work environment. Data collection included broad engagement of the community including individual contributors (through in-person and virtual listening sessions), managers and leaders of divisions to gather feedback and insights on their units. Additionally, the task force completed benchmarking on peer institutions regarding summer flex work, summer hours, and paid time off.

The recommendations put forth were grounded in a comprehensive analysis of community feedback, benchmarking, and a commitment to addressing the primary areas of concern. The Council strongly feels that these recommendations fostered a more equitable, efficient, and supportive work environment that benefits all members of our community.

At the beginning of the month, T&I shared with the community an overview of the outcomes (that included the summer working hours adjustment) and our next steps.

A list of initiatives aimed at fostering community engagement was shared. This included a summer activities calendar for staff and the efforts to create/maintain a staff email distribution list. Theona introduced Mike Hamilton, Instructional Technologist II, to share information on the Staff Council's Strategic Plan.

Mike Hamilton shared details about the process to create our Strategic Plan. He shared that through the identification of key strategic goals, the Council aimed to raise visibility, develop robust communication systems, improve staff retention, promote health and well-being, recognize diversity and inclusivity, build community, ensure transparency and accountability, expand the Council's reach, and create a collaborative environment. Each goal is supported by specific objectives, assigned responsibilities, actionable steps, and a timeline for implementation, reflecting our commitment to making WPI a better workplace. Mike referenced the posters displayed around the Odeum as well as a QR code that directed staff members to a survey to collect their feedback. Additionally, he shared the next steps and the timeline to formalize the Strategic Plan. Mike introduced Senior VP of Talent and Chief Diversity Officer, Lauren Turner.

Lauren welcomed the audience and acknowledged the end of another busy productive year and the hard work of all the staff throughout the year. She called out a special thank you to the team that worked to facilitate all the logistics for Commencement ceremonies, hosted for the first time this year at the DCU.

Lauren shared the criteria, nominees, and winners of the 2024 Board of Trustee Outstanding Staff Winners and recognized nominees and winners in attendance. This year's winners were Kimberly LaChasseur and Joel Harris.

Lauren shared some background on the Staff Climate Survey, including response rates and core topic areas. She pointed out that the overall response rate was high: 510/785; 65%. She shared that a staff climate survey hadn't been administered since 2011. Lauren shared the key takeaways from the survey that included areas of strength. She also shared the areas of opportunities that are currently being addressed as well as areas of opportunities that need to be further explored.

Lauren introduced Hilary Clark, Associate Vice President, Talent Operations, to present on the status of the Staff Position Classification & Compensation Project. Hilary shared the project phases and estimated timing for the remainder of the project. She shared that they are currently developing pay administration guidelines and devising the implementation & communications strategy. She shared the framework of the compensation & classification program that places staff positions within pay grades and will help establish pay parameters that allow for flexibility to pay individuals at different levels based on their knowledge, expertise, and performance within defined ranges while also taking into consideration equity within departments and across the institution. She also shared examples of what job-based changes might warrant a reclassification and salary review. Hilary shared the next steps for the project that includes finalizing the pay guidelines and educating and training for managers and employees on the ongoing system and related processes. Hilary introduces James De León, Director of Talent Development, to discuss the Performance Management Task Force.

James provided some background on the project and shared that this was an area of opportunity as identified in the Staff Climate Survey and determined a priority based on staff feedback gathered from focus groups and the Staff Feedback Form. James shared the two-phase timeline for the project and pointed out that the review cycle will begin later than in past years. The target launch date is the end of June. He shared that this two-phase approach means that we will be working on this process throughout the year and progress will be evaluated throughout the process. This evaluation will provide opportunities for training, regular employee/manager feedback throughout the year, and extended Workday functionalities.

Mike Hamilton closed the program by once again acknowledging the nine inaugural Staff Council members that are completing their 2-year terms. He shared with the attendees that light refreshments were being served and members of T&I and Staff Council were stationed at tables in the event space to answer any questions related to the presentation. He also shared that attendees could visit the GoatNote table or Strategic Plan posters and meet with Staff Council nominees during the reception. The program concluded.

