The special meeting of the University Staff Senate Executive Board was called to order at 1:00pm on Wednesday, June 3, 2020 via Zoom by President Toberman.

Present: Ian Toberman, David Balai, Gretchen Fricke, Angela White, Collin Van Meter, William Dusenbery (proxy for Cindy Cobetto), Mark Ferrell, Melanie Schoenborn
Excused: Domonique Crosby
Guest: Denyse Anderson, Jan Caban, Anne Cavanaugh (proxy for Schoenborn as needed), Laura Jacobs, John Milcic, Tiffany Shemwell

Quorum was established. A motion to go into committee of the whole was made and approved unanimously.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE:
At the May Executive Board meeting, a survey of staff was suggested. The Academic Continuity Task Force had also expressed a desire to survey staff, so it was done jointly. There will be some editing required to protect privacy, but the information will be shared. Over 500 responses have been received.

There was a discussion on whether a statement needed to be made by the Staff Senate about staff concerns and communication, and issues were reviewed. The intention would be to send it directly to the Chancellor. There was discussion about the draft letter including content, tone, and length. It was agreed that a letter needed to be sent, and the draft letter was amended with discussion.

The committee of the whole was closed.

ACTION ITEMS:
A motion for the Staff Senate President to send “A Letter and Request to Our Chancellor from the University Staff Senate Executive Board” was made and seconded. There was no further discussion, and the letter was approved unanimously. The final letter is included in the minutes and will be distributed to the Staff Senate body.

ADJOURNMENT:
The meeting adjourned at 2:16pm.

Submitted by Anne Hunter, University Governance
STAFF SENATE EXECUTIVE BOARD
SPECIAL MEETING – Zoom ID 912 6786 6218
June 3, 2020 – 1:00 pm
AGENDA

I. CALL TO ORDER
II. COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
   a. Staff Senate Statement
III. ACTION ITEMS
   a. Staff Senate Statement
IV. ADJOURNMENT
A LETTER AND REQUEST TO OUR CHANCELLOR
FROM THE UNIVERSITY STAFF SENATE EXECUTIVE BOARD

The landscape of a changing world in the face of a pandemic is an unprecedented challenge for SIUE. While students and faculty were adjusting to online learning, we adjusted, too. Staff members—from grounds crew to ITS, dozens of counselors, advisors, and housing professionals, electricians, plumbers, and dining workers, to Head Start and early childhood teachers to support staff—we have literally been at the forefront of response, of support, and of understanding during this crisis.

We understood these plans and transitions would not always go smoothly. We understood that the needs of students and vulnerable operations took priority as plans were made to adjust to the changing dynamics of instruction and safety from system, local, state, and federal authorities. We remained flexible and dedicated to the educational and community missions of the University.

We write to you today, Chancellor Pembroke, not to second-guess or compound what we know has been a troubling time for you, your administration, and our University community. But as representatives of the non-faculty employees at SIUE, we also have a responsibility to inform you, to guide you, and to advise you about the concerns of those employees.

There is concern among staff that the patience and grace offered to students and faculty in this crisis has on the whole, been less publicly, extensively, and willingly extended to University staff. For example, at the outset of this crisis, while students and faculty were directed not to return to campus, staff were not included in those statements. While communications with faculty and students offered reassurances, wishes for safety, and a sense of understanding, the initial response to staff was a repeat of existing human resource policies to be applied at the discretion of their supervisors.

Most assuredly, the University in time came to offer staff the same considerations as others. We were asked to understand the immediacy of the crisis and that future communications would improve. And so, with little guidance, but with all the speed and diligence we could muster, we adjusted to an historic shift to work-from-home. And we waited for the University to turn to us, to assure us that they saw our struggles and sacrifices, and that we were appreciated for our contributions and as valued members of this University community.

But in the past month, we have been given reason to doubt our place, the University’s commitment to our well-being, and that our concerns would be heard.

- The recent article in the Edwardsville Intelligencer, with direct quotes from Vice Chancellor Waple, took many staff by surprise, given the lack of direct internal communication. We expected the University would communicate with its employees directly, rather than through the press.
- The article—implying staff would be reporting to work—was particularly disheartening as it came out shortly after an announcement was sent on the listserv stating that May and June courses would be moved to an online format and all on-ground summer events and meetings were cancelled through August 8.
- The staff have heard in some format from you (in your town halls), Dr. Waple (through regular updates with his staff), and from Dr. Cobb in the Academic Continuity Task Force town halls. It has been requested—in both very private and very public forums—for Vice Chancellor Walker to conduct such an open session to answer questions, provide relevant administrative and
facility updates, and simply show that he understands and is heeding our concerns. He has, of this date, not engaged in an open discussion.

These actions and inactions compromise our ability to trust the SIUE leadership. Instead of open conversation, we have been met with weeks of silence. When information was finally shared, such as the e-mails about return-to-week published this week, the tenor of the information was, for many, hurtful. From the tone and language of the e-mails, it does not seem that work-from-home for staff is truly supported by the University. In one sentence, we are told that employees who can should continue to work from home. In a second e-mail received on literally the same day, we are instead told that our service to students is “best when staff members are physically on campus.” Under normal circumstance, we all fundamentally agree with that statement. But its inclusion in the first work-from-home update staff had received in weeks undermines the extraordinary efforts staff have performed to provide student support, and support of the University’s education mission during this time.

We are told that while our “health, safety and well-being remain [the University’s] top priority,” we are instructed almost immediately not to assume that any continued work-from-home request will be approved. We are given approximately 2 weeks to review our situation with our supervisors, who cannot wholly approve any requests. We are told that we must wait for Human Resource [an office that does not report to or represent all Vice Chancellor areas, but instead are subject to the directions of the Vice Chancellor of Administration] to approve our continued work.

We are told that now, after over 2 months of work-from-home, the University is suddenly concerned about our workspace. We are told that as a condition of any arrangement, we must allow the University direct access to our private spaces. We are told that most costs, save for the errant piece of paper, pen, or toner cartridge, is at our own expense. We are told to continue to use our private equipment, but that University assumes no responsibility for it.

And as supervisors and supervisees, we have not been asked about our work-from-home experience. If we had, you would hear there are some employees who wish to return to work. We miss our colleagues, our students, and the separation that “coming to work” provides in our lives. You would hear that some employees have thrived in a remote setting, and that productivity and efficiency have not been sacrificed. You would have understood our frustrations with a remote VPN that sometimes kicks us out of the system (and the high praise given ITS staff in fixing those problems), the delay in responses that inevitably accompany e-mail discussions, and the challenges of work-life balance while society sheltered in place. But you would have also heard how we have managed children, partners, and parents. Or how we have integrated our children and pets into our Zoom meetings. And how we respond to requests on weekends, after hours, and at a moment’s notice.

We are not simply advocating that all staff must be allowed to work at home forever and without rules. We recognize that some of our staff colleagues must be present on campus for their work to occur. We know our systems and infrastructure need daily attention, and that being on-ground may be unavoidable. We rely on those colleagues so that others can do their work in offices, in classrooms, in conference rooms, and everywhere on campus. We recognize that every office may have its own special needs. We do not advocate for a one-sized approach for all non-faculty employees, but we do advocate for one that respects our work and allows us the same opportunity to act on our own behalf with our own interests in mind.
While shared governance has been used for student and faculty concerns, it has not been utilized for staff concerns in these cases. This Staff Senate has not been consulted in regard to questions and concerns about work-from-home or return-to-work. We stand ready to work with you and your administration to support staff in all their needs, in balance with those of the University. But at this time, it is difficult not to conclude that the University's message to staff is one of reluctance to continued work-from-home, and that policies and procedures are meant to deter us from using it. We have nothing to contradict our concerns that one set of policies is being developed and offered to faculty, and that a substandard and heavily restricted set will be offered to non-faculty employees.

Unlike our Faculty Senate colleagues, the Staff Senate and its Executive Board do not have the power to make decisions that are binding to the University. Our Constitution and By-Laws make it very clear that our primary role is to advise the Chancellor and his administration. We take that responsibility seriously.

Chancellor Pembroke: we have enjoyed working with you to advocate for SIUE. We have appreciated the respect and inclusion that such advocacy has created. We believe we have a shared interest, and desire to be your partner. In that spirit, we respectfully suggest the following.

- Vice Chancellor Walker hold at least one (and preferably more) open town halls in a format similar to the Academic Continuity Task Force, which could also include representatives from Human Resources or other appropriate personnel.
- Information should be communicated clearly and directly to staff without an expectation that it will filter down from department heads.
- A clear and consistent statement that employee work-from-home is encouraged until such time that all students, faculty, and staff are cleared to return to an unrestricted campus. If an employee or unit has proven their ability to continue their work and provide services remotely to students and the University community, the assumption should rest in their favor and be allowed to continue.
- Where remote work is not feasible, workloads and alternative shifts should be distributed fairly among available staff members using consistent guidelines. Overload or shift differential pay should be applied in situations where employees are asked to take on additional duties or work alternative shifts outside their normal work hours.
- Clear and consistent guidelines on quarantine procedures for all employees need to be established and communicated. Employees who need to quarantine should be allowed to do so without penalty or retaliation.
- Where shared governance is utilized on behalf of students and faculty, it should also be utilized on behalf of staff. Constituency bodies should be consulted and included in the conversation when operational plans are being considered, including any revisions to the published work-from-home guidelines.

We have waited patiently for additional guidance in these uncertain times. But we would be derelict in our responsibilities if we did not raise these concerns with you. It is our hope that this communication will allow us to resume the positive relationship our Senate has had with you, your administration, and the other members of the University community. We hope you feel the same.