

## ERAC Committee Meeting January 2014 Minutes

Vicki Ruggiero resigned from the board and ERAC thanked her for her service and contributions. The ERAC board accepted the resignation. Vicki's term would have ended 2014, so no extra nominations will be needed.

### **President Gast's announcement – 10 minutes**

President Gast is leaving for Imperial College at the end of the academic year. Several staff members noticed that while five other constituencies were listed, staff was omitted in the president's farewell letter. We should consider this an unintentional oversight. Tom Yencho had sent out an email stating that if you do get asked why staff wasn't mentioned, please say that ERAC, as staff representatives, is laying the groundwork to be a more assertive and vocal body and that we are being very forward thinking and POSITIVE with how we are approaching these matters. That said, we need to make sure that staff are included in subsequent institutional communications and that ERAC needs to speak up for our colleagues, or oversights like this will continue.

Perhaps reach out to Fred McGrail, the Vice President of Communications, with a letter requesting that staff be considered in future communications.

ERAC thinks we should meet with Pat Farrell and Pat Johnson in the coming months to start an open and transparent dialogue about staff interests.

### **New "Inside Lehigh" page – 20 minutes**

*Lehigh is starting to pull together ideas on the redesign of Inside Lehigh. This is an opportunity to discuss content for the page, particularly as it involves staff.*

We want to focus on communications that are geared more towards staff. Not only how ERAC can communicate with staff but also how leadership can communicate with staff. Feature accomplishments that staff make on a more regular basis. Communications is going through a webpage re-design and Inside Lehigh is part of that. It is not an intranet site; there is no authorization needed to access the Inside Lehigh page. That's why we think a lot of information is kept off that page – it is public, though the navigation link directing traffic to the page says "Students, Faculty and Staff."

If we could insert ourselves into the conversation as to what that new Inside Lehigh site may be, should we take that opportunity and is there a way maybe we can do an occasional profile of staff or do a "behind the scenes" with Van Dobson or one of the facilities guys. Maybe conduct an inside look at all that happens on weather days, or what happens during a crisis, with the idea of providing a perspective that most members of the Lehigh community do not see. We could give the entire Lehigh community an idea of what other staff go through to make Lehigh run smoothly.

Currently there are few places for true employee communications. Spotlight is an effective Human Resources vehicle. Even once logging into the portal, there is no staff portal. Would that be a place to start? There is a disconnect between leadership and staff. ERAC's thought is that most people feel ERAC can't do anything to fix that. We need to step up and make ourselves more visible and proactive. This may be one way to raise our visibility.

We may need to write a letter to Human Resources requesting dedicated staff for communications (If we know of an employee with great ideas – can we provide for additional resources or help?). In the meantime, perhaps we could use undergraduate students to interview staff and write our communications.

ERAC feels if we are to represent staff, we need to move forward with this initiative. We will put this on the agenda for next month. In the meantime, the Communications committee will discuss and bring suggestions.

### **Staff focus groups – 10 minutes**

*As we look to determine ERAC's strategic focus and opportunities for improvement, we need to consider current staff perceptions and how we can accommodate ideas for growth.*

**Campus Liaison Program:** We have been doing a good job with this. Not everyone has been able to meet with their liaisons. For those who haven't, please set up those meetings as soon as possible. During one meeting, the liaison was excited and happy that ERAC is going out and finding out what ERAC can do to help different areas across campus. She offered to do anything she can to help more our initiatives along.

During a separate liaison meeting, the person thought ERAC served as a rubber stamp for Human Resources. This person feels ERAC is not employee oriented the way it used to be. The person also feels that ERAC needs to be rebranded. ERAC needs to be the voice of staff; we need to be the conduit for the university, for the staff to make things happen. A suggestion was that in the newsletter that Human Resources puts out every month, ERAC has a section stating something to the effect of – keeping it unanimous – this was a concern, this is what happened, this is what we've done, and this is the response. Communications going to ERAC needs to go further than just to ERAC. Brown Bags are good provided we keep the topics relevant.

We need to establish the vehicle with which to communicate with staff.

**Weather Issues:** In the recent snow storm, there was no delay or cancellation. Employees were expected to arrive to work for normal start time. When people got to Lehigh, walks weren't shoveled, parking lots weren't plowed, etc. The question came up, what should ERAC have done or what should ERAC do because it's still timely and relevant? Do we have the responsibility to step up and voice our concern? In this specific case, the weather was more of a safety issue. People saw the email that came from the Provost office the night before the snow storm. When nothing was mentioned the next morning, staff around campus questioned the sincerity of that email - especially when the local radio stations were saying if you don't have to drive, don't. Overall staff safety was questioned, too. What are our options as staff? Faculty has the option of cancelling their class. Staff has no option other than to get to work or take a personal day – that is what the personal days are there for. More importantly, once people got to campus, the issue was that they couldn't function. It is unacceptable to be expected to be at work when campus has not been fully cleared. There were numerous problems staff encountered in – an around – campus that caused hardships.

What should ERAC's actions be? Is this something we should voice our concern about? Yes. What does that mean? A Spotlight article? The thought is ERAC should go to the source (Facilities). Consensus was built around submitting a formal letter to both the Provost and Van Dobson, AVP of Facilities Services, stating that as the voice of staff, this is what we are hearing. Also post something in the Spotlight stating that ERAC has heard your concerns and ERAC has written a letter both the Provost and Van Dobson. The result is not up to us but we got their concern where it needed to go.

Tom Yenko asked ERAC members to email Tom, Carla and Brenda with specific issues regarding people's difficulty getting to work on January 3rd. We want these facts just to make sure the letter has merit.

**Staff Focus Groups for ERAC:** We would like to have staff focus groups. Find out where staff stands, what their thoughts are about ERAC, etc. Our goal is to have them ready to be held during March.

**Campus Climate update – 5 minutes**

*Tomorrow, this subcommittee will meet with Tyrone Russell (Multicultural Affairs), Trish Boyles (LGBTQLA) and Rita Jones (Women’s Center) to discuss staff-oriented programming and workshops.*

The campus climate subcommittee will be meeting Thursday, 1/9 with R. Jones, T Russell and T Boyles. It is our goal to play a more prominent and active role in talking about campus climate and how it can be improved. Discussion involved perhaps creating a staff tailored education series around the concept of “climate of respect.” The idea here is not to focus on past events, but rather where we, as a campus community, can go from here.

**Mountaintop Experience (overview and volunteers) – 5 minutes**

Mountaintop is confusing a lot of people, simply because we’re so early in the processing of figuring out what it can be. As reps of the staff, we need to take a look at Mountaintop and how we can be a part of that conversation moving forward. We don’t want to be an afterthought, given the energy and potential resources dedicated to this issue. As Lehigh formulates its idea of what Mountaintop is to become, is there a role that staff can play? Is Mountaintop going to be a welcome environment for staff? Those are the kinds of things that need to be laid out earlier rather than later. That’s what we want to do – just make sure that as Mountaintop updates and developments happen, that staff are involved in that conversation. Perhaps the best way to do this is speak with Alan Snyder or Pat Farrell. If there are people within ERAC who are interested in taking that lead or being part of the discussion, please let Tom Yenko know by the end of this week.

**Tuition Reimbursement**

*ERAC will work with Faculty Compensation Committee to discuss potential changes to the current reimbursement policy.* Carla and Tom will be meeting with Faculty Compensation Committee at the end of January. That committee has been asked by Pat Farrell to reconsider tuition compensation reimbursement, though the specifics have yet to be shared.

**Misc:** - we want to keep these on the radar. If you haven’t met with your liaison, please get that scheduled asap.

- Staff ad campaign: April launch?
- Best Places to Work Lists: Conduct an audit of opportunities?
- Sponsorship: More assertive and visible role in campus programming?
- Regional Award Programs: How can staff be professionally recognized?
- Ongoing projects: Brown Bags, Project REACH and IronPigs games
  - The technology brown bag is scheduled for January 23rd in Lambertson.
  - The REACH cohort is meeting on January 22. It will be a networking session.
- Communications update: Orientation kit?
- Campus Liaison Program Update

The By-laws committee has been asked to meet within the next month. ERAC needs to look at and possibly reconsider who is represented from Human Resources.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:18 am. Glenn Strause made the motion to adjourn the meeting and Carla Kologie seconded the motion.