




A REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT ON

Special Projects

 Presented by
The University of Texas at Austin Staff Council
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and sent forward to the President

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Annual committee on Sustainability

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Executive Summary

The UT Staff Council (UTSC) Special Projects committee's purpose is to take unfinished projects from previous years and see them through to completion. This year we considered several projects, but chose to focus on just a few. We weighed cost to benefit ratios as well as the strengths, weaknesses, and motivations of our committee members to settle on three projects: The UT Green Commute Fair, the UTSC Wiki, and Managerial Staff Training. In the course of the year, we had some successes in some areas and identified long-term needs in others.

The UT Green Commute Fair

April 15th marked the university's first alternative transportation fair, dubbed "UT Green Commute." This fair fulfilled a need identified in Staff Council's 2011 Transportation report: Alternative transportation is an issue that concerns staff, students, and faculty. Because this project had a University-wide reach, Staff Council established partnerships with multiple stakeholders.

We partnered with Parking & Transportation Services, the Office of Sustainability, Center for Transportation Research, Campus Environmental Center, and Orange Bike Project to help educate the campus community on alternative transportation resources on campus and throughout Austin. Staff, faculty, and student representatives held four 30-minute sessions, covering topics on rail, car sharing, cycling, and campus transportation. The event was a success, with coverage from KXAN.

UTSC Wiki

Every year, UTSC takes on new representatives and officers. This presents a challenge for retaining a consistent culture and set of procedures. To address this, last year we created a Staff Council wiki, an online repository of documentation for our reps and officers.

The Special Projects committee continued to update the UTSC wiki, focusing this year on improving templates for UTSC committee chairs, documenting use of the new ReGroup mailing system for contacting our constituents, and creating a FAQ page for UTSC reps to reference when addressing constituent concerns.

We intend to continue looking for topics our reps and constituents need quick answers for, and to update the wiki accordingly. We may also look into documenting a set of best practices for reps, committee chairs, and officers, so we can better serve our constituents and the university.

Managerial Staff Training

Common topics discussed among staff at annual retreats and in our committee meetings are general frustrations with their work environments that we suspect are common in most typical organizations. While these often seem rooted in complex dilemmas, such as compensation and motivation, our committee was not content to throw in the towel and do nothing. Because managers are the leaders of their units, we decided that a potentially constructive path to moving forward in this area was to seek more consistent application of training for supervisory and managerial staff. We found this a complex project that will need ongoing work.

A growing body of evidence indicates that as the workplace becomes more knowledge based, human capital becomes more critical to organizational performance (Crook, et. al, 2011). Training managers and fostering a culture of empowerment, collaboration, and employee initiative grants a wide range of benefits, such as increased composite performance within business units (Harter, et. al., 2013), as well as increased employee job satisfaction, commitment, and individual performance (Schyns & Schilling, 2013). It also reduces the risk of pitfalls such as bullying, sabotage, theft, corruption, and litigation (Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Einarsen, Aasland, & Skogstad, 2007; Shaw; Erickson, & Harvey, 2011; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007).

Human Resources (HR) already offers a means of training our managerial staff, through CareerSmart. Their Management Essentials certificate covers the basics of management as well as key practices, policies, and procedures at the university. They also offer a 360 feedback review as part of their Managing Beyond the Basics certificate for advanced managers.

Why does the university need UT-specific manager training? First, such training keeps managers up to date on state regulations; compliance is critically important to avoid fines, penalties, and litigation. It also keeps managers up to date on UT System and UT Austin policies, both of which are updated often. Lack of awareness or misapplication of these policies can result in losses. Further, managers often do more than just manage. Figuring out the above policies on their own takes time from the work they were hired to do, and may lead to multiple interpretations, causing

confusion and lost time for managers, their direct reports, and others. And training, when done in a way that addresses business needs, tends to increase productivity not just for individual managers, but for their direct reports as well (Collins & Holton, 2004; Harter, et. al., 2013). Training, then, is an investment that mitigates risk and pays dividends in saved time and productivity.

Another potential benefit is more use of career pathing on campus, which allows an employee to chart a course for career growth and development within an organization. Our own Central Business Office (CBO), part of the Shared Services initiative, recently initiated such a model for its administrative staff. Several tiers of progression are available to staff within Accounting, HR, Inventory, Payments, and Procurement. Staff titles in these areas typically begin with Associate and progress through several levels over time to a title such as Senior Business Specialist. Beyond that point, one could aspire to a managerial role in Finance, HR, or Procurement. Several UTSC reps have reported constituent interest in more clear paths of advancement, and career pathing is a way to accomplish this.

A key obstacle stands before the benefits of more prevalent managerial training: At this time, UT Austin does not consistently encourage or reward training of managerial staff across campus. Some departments and business units require training, others offer in-house training programs, some offer nothing at all, and a few discourage training. Also, not all departments recognize or encourage completion of CareerSmart certificates. We would like to see a culture of development that permeates the entire campus, and incentives may help change this. The training grants program proposed by the Professional Development committee this year, and its allocation of funds for subsidizing the 360 feedback review, can help draw managers toward the path of development and signal to all departments that this is something we value as a culture at UT Austin.

Though The University of Texas at Austin is a public institution, it still competes with other universities across the nation and around the world. If UT Austin is to retain or advance its place in the global ranking of public universities, it must recognize and leverage competitive advantages

when possible. Well-developed managers could bring efficiencies to all areas of campus and that will build capacity for the opportunities that will take this university to the next level.

With all this in mind, we simply propose that UTSC form a committee for the 2015-2016 term to work with HR and other stakeholders on how to best steer UT Austin toward a culture that values training for managerial staff, and to continue serving UT Austin's strategic goals.

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