A REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT ON

Creating an Improved Staff Council Communications Framework

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

Prepared by The University of Texas at Austin Staff Council
Annual Committee on Communications

Phil Gavenda (chair), Alanna Bitzel, Tracy Brzozowski, Stephanie Crouch,
Jason Eitelbach, Vickie Grier, Maureen Kelly
Executive Summary

At the August 2012 annual UT Staff Council retreat, during which elected Staff Council representatives decide on topics of concern for the next year, an annual Communications Committee was formed with the goal of enhancing communication among representatives, solidifying the role of communications efforts, reviewing and enhancing Staff Council’s social media profile, highlighting the achievements and accomplishments of UT staff members, and raising the profile of Staff Council via outreach.

Subsequent meetings of this committee taught us that one thing missing from existing communication structures was continuity, from one Council to the next as well as from one technological format to another. While a major goal was to engage in outreach, and strengthen awareness of staff and Staff Council on campus, it became apparent that the highest priority was to establish a systematic method of maintaining existing avenues of communication within Council before embarking on more ambitious outreach projects. Priorities changed to identifying how information was communicated and exchanged within Council, what the communication needs are (e.g., the need for timely monthly summaries), and ways to streamline communication. We also researched current methods and contacts for updating the website, and attempted to find contacts for Staff Council-related social media sites that seemed to have been abandoned (e.g., Staff Council Daily).

Because of the annual turnover among representatives and officers, it became apparent that a permanent committee dedicated to continuity and maintenance of institutional knowledge was critical, so we made an interim goal of creating a standing committee. To that end, the committee proposed modifications to the bylaws to establish a standing committee dedicated to improved communication.

In addition, the committee accomplished the following:

1. Discussed current issues affecting staff communication and identified potential areas for improvement and modification. A lack of consistency from year to year led to members often starting from “ground zero” with each new Council.
2. Researched existing resources available and how to access them most effectively. For example, we established how to consistently update the Staff Council web page with meeting time and date information.
3. Implemented practices and procedures to enhance communications within Staff Council and with the entire university staff, including a monthly meeting summary to be distributed to representatives.
   a. Determined who owned/updated various social media, such as Staff Council twitter, “Staff Daily.”
   b. Included Staff Council events on Know Events.
   c. Revised position of “Communications and Events Coordinator”
4. Established a committee handbook that will serve as a committee record and resource for future members.

Bylaws Change

The bylaws were changed so that the Communications Committee became a permanent, standing committee of Staff Council to facilitate communication within and from Staff Council from year to year.
**Meeting Summaries**

The Committee will produce a summary of each Staff Council monthly meeting to disseminate among the representatives, who will be encouraged to forward it on to their constituents. Staff are more likely to read messages from their colleagues than they are institutional emails, and this will aid those representatives who find their time constrained.

**Communications Committee Handbook**

To ensure continuity the committee has produced a Communications Committee Handbook. This resource will include basic contact information for various modes and means of communication and allow future Councils to focus on important projects. The handbook will incorporate a list of current members with contact information, essential tasks to perform every year, instructions for the monthly meeting summary, ideas for future outreach projects, and the Communications Committee mission statement. Examples of methods of information resource sharing would be a UT Wiki for the Committee, UT Box accounts for sharing documents, and Stache for sharing confidential information such as user accounts for various social media.

**Conclusion**

By becoming a permanent committee, this group will continue to solidify communication within Staff Council by submitting meeting summaries to representatives every month, working with other Staff Council committees to share information and keep representatives updated on current events, and informing all UT staff about services and programs of interest and benefit to them. We also plan to expand our attention to outreach efforts to raise the profile of staff and Staff Council. The Committee will seek to partner with other campus organizations to further these goals when appropriate.