

Chair's Report

June 2021

Submitted by John Smith

Rhonda Gilliland: I could fill an encyclopedia (for those of us who remember what those were) with accolades of my appreciation to the job Rhonda has done for all of us. Three years ago, Rhonda, Marian Vassar and I were elected to the three officer positions of the Senate. None of us had held an office before, which made us a very unique group. We leaned on each other heavily as we tried to get some traction and go through the learning curve of just what we were supposed to be doing. Over the past three years I have continued to lean on Rhonda. We often agree on topics. We often don't, but we always hear each other and always have the best interests of staff at heart. I think she has been a game-changer for our staff both through her involvement with the EC, which is where I first met her, her work with Human Resources on many fronts and certainly in her role as an officer of the Staff Senate. That encyclopedia would be full of professional accolades, but personal ones as well. I count myself as very blessed to be able to call Rhonda a friend. The countless conversations we have shared have fostered that and I value it greatly. I hope we never have to go through anything like the pandemic again but if we do, I can only say we need someone like her on our side. The amount of support she gave me at the start of the pandemic when we were in full emergency response mode was staggering. Many times those meetings were 3 or 4 hours long. Rhonda and I were always on our phones burning up texts to each other about what and how we needed to inject our representation of staff into the discussions. I am so happy she will continue to serve as a senator and have warned her many times that just because she may no longer hold an officer position, the phone calls are not going to stop, or even slow down.

Covid: Vaccinations are being moved from vaccine centers to urgent care and doctor's offices.

President and Provost: Working with the calendars of the president and the provost is very challenging. We have come up with, what I think, is a great new practice. Neeli and Lori will alternate months attending our full senate meetings. That way we will have regular communication and engagement from each of them. We look forward to those opportunities very much.

Miller Hall: construction is on schedule and we anticipate the new residence hall. The Belknap Residence Hall should still be finished by the end of July. Since Miller Hall will be utilized this year, a name other than “New Miller” was needed for the hall. The Belknap Residence Hall can be thought of as a place-holder while Advancement pursues naming opportunities. Furniture will begin moving in immediately thereafter and in plenty of time for students to occupy the hall for the fall semester. The hall is going to be a “game changer” given the financial option it will give many students and its’ location right in the middle of campus, virtually next door to the SAC and the many student activities that take place there. Construction has started on the “new Threlkeld” and is on schedule.

Shared Governance Workgroup: We have completed two meetings and have re-structured the committee to be more representative of actual shared governance and also being more practical to actually convene and meet. Constituency groups and administration each have four spots on the workgroup along with a trustee to be named. To this point, Michael Wade Smith, Jake Beamer, David Schultz and myself have been the attendees at the meetings working on the above items. From this point forward the entire group will start the actual work of the project.

Board of Trustees: Our last meeting was a budget review/workshop. We anticipate passing the approval of our new budget in our June 24 meeting. I have reported before that part of the budget calls for there to be no increase in health insurance costs (the University would absorb the 3.1 million dollar increase), the restoration of the remaining portion of our retirement and not implementing the previously approved parking rate increase from a year ago that was delayed due to Covid-19. There is also work being done on trying to include a raise of some kind for all employees. Much of our budget has become tuition driven and plans are tentative on how those figures look. Obviously, we will know more on June 24.

Meetings Attended:

Wednesday, May 5, Staff Senate Officers, 10:00 AM

Thursday, May 6, Neeli, 2:45

Tuesday, May 11, Staff Senate, 2:30

Wednesday, May 12, Staff Senate Officers, 10:00

Wednesday, May 12, Covid Advisory Committee, 3:00

Thursday, May 13, Student Affairs Assessment Committee, 2:30

Monday, May 17, Spring Forward Provost, 2:00

Wednesday, May 19, Staff Senate Officers, 10:00

Monday, May 24, Huron Planning Workgroup, 9:00

Monday, May 24, Spring Forward Provost, 2:00

Tuesday, May 25, Staff Senate EC, 3:00

Wednesday, May 26, Staff Senate Officers, 11:30

Thursday, May 27, Board of Trustees Budget Workshop, 1:00

Tuesday, June 1, Neeli Senior Leadership, 9:00

Tuesday, June 1, Spring Forward Provost, 2:00

Wednesday, June 2, Senate Leadership, 10:00

Wednesday, June 2, Mark Watkins, 2:00

Monday, June 7, Workday Planning, 9:00

Monday, June 7, Senate Leadership, 10:00

Tuesday, June 8, Dr. Bendapudi Leadership Team, 9:00