Northern Illinois University
Supportive Professional Staff Council Meeting
MINUTES
Thursday, January 14, 2010
Sky Room, 10:00 A.M.

Present

Guests
Karen Baker, Steve Cunningham, Celeste Latham, Jay Monteiro

Absent
None

I. Call to Order
SPS Council President Cesarek called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

Dickey made a motion, seconded by Roznowski, to approve the agenda with the following additions:

A. Announcements: February 14 Remembrance, and Frankie Benson

Fransen made a motion, seconded by Trottier, to approve the SPSC minutes of the December 10, 2009, meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

Attendance was taken and a quorum was confirmed.

II. Guest Speakers—Steve Cunningham, Karen Baker, Celeste Latham
Cunningham, Baker, Latham, and Haliczer addressed questions from the Council.

A. Evaluations. Cunningham reported that a two-year effort to return more SPS evaluations has paid off. Last year they included temporary SPS in the evaluation process. There is a database of SPS who need to be evaluated and every year, supervisors are sent a letter telling them that the evaluation needs to be done. Guidelines and templates are provided to make the process as easy as possible. If an evaluation isn’t received after a certain period of time, a reminder letter is sent to the supervisor, which is then copied to the SPS employee’s supervisor’s supervisor. For the 2009 evaluations, there was about a 75% rate of return; overall the highest return. And they are striving for 100% completion. Cesarek asked if the database has the ability to determine who is consistently delinquent and C. Latham responded that it does have that ability. Bernoudy asked about the timing of evaluations in years with merit-based increments and shouldn’t they be done in conjunction with those determinations. Cunningham agreed that this is the ideal timing. He added that supervisors are told that the evaluation is more than a “point-in-time” instrument and that it should take into consideration the on-going working relationship of the employee.
B. Job Descriptions. Cunningham reported that about a year ago, HRS entered into a new system for getting job descriptions completed and developing a database of job descriptions. C. Latham added that the first phase was to update job descriptions that were older than three years. That effort returned about 300 updated job descriptions. And HRS has about 64% of job descriptions updated that are less than three years old, which meets audit requirements under the State University Civil Service System (SUCSS). It was noted that updating job descriptions is important in order to encompass the scope of positions as they grow and change. Cesarek asked if there was a target date to have 100% updated job descriptions that are over three years old and Cunningham responded that they’d like to have this done by 2011. Discussion followed regarding what happens to employees if the new job description indicates that they need to move from exempt to non-exempt or from SPS to civil service. C. Latham reported that in these cases, employees maintain their current status. However, the position is flagged, and once the position is vacated, the new employee will assume the new status. Cunningham added that, under the SUCSS, all positions are defined as civil service unless they fall into one of a number of exemptions, e.g., faculty, executive, or administrative profession (or supportive professional staff). The pros and cons of SPS versus civil service positions were discussed. Supportive professional staff positions are more like at-will positions. However, the university does provide a year’s notice of termination of the position in most cases, where for civil service employees, in the case of lay-offs, get a 30-day notice. Civil service employees have bumping rights; employees with the most seniority can “bump” a civil service employee with less seniority out of their position, and SPS employees do not have this right.

C. Mandatory Supervisory Training. Cunningham stated that he has always agreed with the Council that supervisory training is important, and it is offered through HRS. However, it still is not mandatory. They have worked on a standardized, integrative program that incorporates many elements from state-mandated policies to the soft skills. It was noted that the Workplace Issues Committee has seen a couple of drafts of the curriculum for the training. Cunningham added that one of the problems with the mandatory supervisory training is defining supervisors, for example, would this include student employees who are supervising other students. Currently the training would present a lot of content with a take-away notebook including references to web-based materials. But because there isn’t a lot of time for training on the soft skills, the mandatory training would simply provide attendees with information on additional, optional training. Cesarek asked what is the current status and Cunningham responded that it is still active and that President Peters, Provost Alden, and the vice presidents are all supportive of the mandatory supervisory training.

D. Preserving Jobs. Cunningham provided a brief overview of the state budget, which he noted was in a drastic situation that has evolved over the years. He noted that the current state revenue stream only covers half of the current deficit of about $13 billion. In the governor’s state of the state address, he noted that the solution would be multilayered. The current effect on state universities is that medical reimbursements are very late, if not unpaid, but NIU is working on that with the local medical community. In addition, pension liabilities are increasing and vendors and vouchered appropriations are not being paid. Cunningham added that the state has provided NIU with only about 20% of its vouchered payroll costs to date, forcing the university to spend down its tuition fees, local reserves, and other assets. He talked about the University of Illinois’ decision to implement furloughs and noted that their situation is worse than NIU’s. He added that President Peters and the cabinet have been on the record that furloughs at NIU will not be a solution to the cash flow problems.
For FY11, the situation is not going to improve and that there is no expectation for any drastic revenue increases in an election year. This may force the university to face budget issues it hasn’t had to deal with before, and Cunningham told the Council that the shared governance would continue to be collaborated with if difficult decisions have to be made. A clarification was made that when the governor refers to state employees and furloughs, this does not include state university employees. Universities are told what their budgets will be and are allowed to operate independently of other state agencies to deal with their budgets. Cunningham asked Council members to please let HRS know when they hear things that concern them so that they may be addressed. Despite the dire budget situation, discussion followed regarding Governor Quinn’s support of education and his acknowledgement in the State of the State address that higher education is vital to the economy of the state.

There was also discussion regarding the MAP funding and that the spring funds have yet to be received. Cunningham reported that the university is doing what it can so that students receiving MAP funds will not be adversely affected by the lack of funds for the spring semester, such as increasing the allowable debt and change deadlines. However, this will further deplete the reserves that the university is relying on.

Dickey asked if positions lost through attrition will be reinstated. Cunningham responded that some high needs positions are still being filled, despite the hiring freeze. He added that it’s important the university is cautious regarding filling vacancies. In the past this stance has helped the university fiscally. It was also clarified that the state has not asked universities to provide a list of assets that can be sold and that a four-day work week during the regular academic year is not being considered and one of the main reasons is that there is a large residential population on campus during the academic year. There was also a discussion about the exact savings of the recent shut down before the regular holiday break. Cunningham stated that the reduction in operational costs was significant, but he did not have the exact figure at the time of this meeting.

The effect of the budget crisis on community colleges was discussed. Cunningham noted that they also received appropriations from the state and are affected by the lack of those funds at this time. However, they also receive local property tax income and are seeing an increase in enrollment as many students choose a college closer to home to save money on room and board.

Cunningham was asked about early retirement plans and he responded that there are none being considered at this time. He added that the last time there was an early retirement option it ended up costing the state and universities more than it saved.

E. HB 4706 (repealing dependent tuition waivers). Cunningham responded that this proposed bill is reflective of the current political and economic environment and that there is a negative perception about benefits that state employees receive. But while he added that the bill does not have a lot of support, he noted that the bill still should be watched by the councils on campus. For the current year, there have been 122 tuition waivers for NIU students and 65 for students at other state universities and about another 70 waivers for employees. Discussion followed regarding if these waivers reflect actual revenue and if these students prevent others from enrolling in courses. Cunningham stated that tuition related to waivers is regarded as forfeited income. There is a cost to process the waivers, but that’s minimal.
F. Increase Responsiveness to Students. The concept of adding to all SPS job
descriptions the need to be supportive of students was discussed. Cunningham stated
that this is very appropriate; it’s why the employees are at NIU and it speaks to the
university’s mission. He would like to do some further brainstorming with the Council on
the concept. Another idea was to include in new employee orientation instruction on
how each employee fits in with the students.

G. Workload. Cesarek noted that due to time constraints, the Council would have to
postpone this discussion. She did mention that as jobs continue to be lost through
attrition and job duties are added, it might be prudent for employees to reevaluate what
they are doing and change priorities.

III. Announcements

A. February 14 Remembrance. Cesarek noted that an electronic notice went out to
employees. Peska reported that there will be two events. The first will be a wreath
ceremony. Attendees will gather in the MLK Commons at 3:00 and walk to the Forward
Together Forward Memorial Garden for a wreath laying ceremony to be followed by a
reception in the HSC Ballroom. The second event will be a Candlelight Vigil from 6:00
to 6:30 in the MLK Commons, also followed by a reception.

B. Frankie Benson. Cesarek announced that Benson’s father had passed away and
provided Council members with funeral arrangements and contact information.

IV. Committees of the Council

A. Awards. Haliczer reported that there were eight nominations for the SPS Presidential
Award for Excellence. The committee met to select the recipients and these were voted
on by the Council, with the recommendations next being forwarded to President Peters
for his approval. The recipients of this award are Bobbie Cesarek, Jes Cisneros,
Patrick Gorman, and Mike Stang. Haliczer also reminded Council members to be
thinking about nominees for the SPSC service award and certificates of recognition.
Smith noted that everyone should also have received the call for nominations for the
Operating Staff Outstanding Service Award. Haliczer added that this is the time of year
when nominations are accepted for a variety of awards across campus and to pay
attention to those, especially during these lean years. Often a word of praise goes a
long way.

B. Communications
No report.

C. Constitution and Elections
No report.

D. Events
Cesarek reported that Ken Zehnder has tentatively been scheduled as a speaker for an
upcoming SPSC event, either for March 31 or April 1. She is looking to have one more
speaker luncheon this spring.
E. Finance
Roznowski reported that committee chairs should let Chemers know if they have any anticipated expenses.

F. Legislative
No report.

G. Technology Resources
No report.

H. Workplace Issues
No report in lieu of guest speakers from Human Resource Services.

I. Vice President
No report.

V. Old Business

A. Sabbaticals.
Haliczer reported that Ostenburg has the materials to send to SPS regarding a short survey about sabbaticals.

B. Grievance Procedures
No report.

C. Ad-Hoc Survey Committee.
The committee has met and is still discussing whether or not this is a good time to do a survey. However, if the Council waits, will things be even tougher (economically, with workloads, etc.), and will that further affect any results. It was also noted that this is an archival document for the Higher Learning Commission, who evaluates the accreditation of the university. Doing a shorter survey is also an option. The committee will continue to meet to discuss these issues before making a recommendation to the Council. In the meantime, Council members will be provided with the questions from the previous survey.

D. May Council Meeting Date Change. The date for the May 2010 meeting will be May 20 to accommodate BOT meetings. Please mark your calendars. Location will remain the Skyroom.

VI. New Business
None.

VII. University Committee Reports
None.

VIII. Adjournment
The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Donna Smith, SPSC secretary