Northern Illinois University
Supportive Professional Staff Council Meeting
MINUTES
Approved
Thursday, April 14, 2011
Sky Room, HSC, 10:00 A.M.

Present
Pat Anderson, Frankie Benson, Karinne Bredberg, Abby Chemers, Walter Czerniak, Neil Dickey, Cindy Ditzler, Bev Espe, Samantha Fisher, Dena Funkhouser, Deborah Haliczer, Anne Hardy, Ryan Harris, Gail Hayenga, Julia Lamb, Todd Latham, Laura Lundelius, Jenifer Montag, Salvatore Morreale, Jonathon Ostenburg, Lyndon Perkins, Scott Peska, Dawn Roznowski, Donna Smith, Kathy Smith, Michael Stang, Connie Uhlken, Rachel Xidis, Phil Young, Rita Yusko

Guests
Tim Griffin

Absent
None

I. Call to Order
The meeting was called to order by Supportive Professional Staff Council President Todd Latham.

The following additions were made to the agenda: Announcements, under Benefits Website, add 1) Survey and 2) NIU Annuitants Association (NIUAA); and add c) president’s report. Under New Business, add four-day work week. Dickey made a motion, seconded by Morreale, to approve the agenda as amended. Motion passed unanimously.

Benson made a motion, seconded by Lamb, to approve the SPSC minutes of the March 10, 2011, meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

Attendance was taken and a quorum was confirmed.

II. Guest Speaker. Jim Lockard, faculty/SPS representative to the State Universities Retirement System Member Advisory committee (SURSMAC). Lockard is visiting the Council to present the facts regarding SURS, to try to alleviate some concerns, and to make Council members aware of new concerns. He stated that the SURSMAC meetings typically consist of reports on investments. At the April meeting, a legislative report was added. SURS is the retirement system for employees of state universities, community colleges, and a few small agencies. There are three sources of income: employee contributions, state contributions, and investment earnings. However, the state has underfunded the system for over 40 years. He added that the more money the fund has, the more it can earn on its investments. But with insufficient state contributions, and with the downturn in the market, SURS’s investments have been decreasing in value. On the national level, Lockard noted that Illinois is not the only state in this situation; but Illinois’s situation is the worst.

SURS operates on projections, based on a lot of factors, including actuarial numbers. They are required to reassess this every five years and make changes, one of which is how they
calculate pensions. For example, employees who joined the traditional plan prior to 2005 are eligible to receive the higher pension based on either the general formula or the money purchase option, which has benefited about two-thirds of retirees. Changes that will result from the current reassessment are projected to reduce the calculated benefit (under the money purchase option only) by 7-8%. The exact effective date will be determined in June, and SURS will give employees as much notice as possible. The earliest likely date is January 2, 2012, and only the money purchase option is affected. Haliczer suggested that any employee who is close to retiring can use the estimator on the SURS website, which will be updated as quickly as possible after the effective date of the change has been set.

Lockard mentioned the constitutional protection of benefits in the Illinois Pension Code, but also noted there is strong opposition (e.g., the “Illinois is broke” advertising, which blames public employees and their benefits for the state’s financial problems and wants to reduce benefits). It appears that the prevailing legal opinions uphold the constitutional protection of state employee pensions, but many legislators appear willing to let the courts decide the issue, which is the goal of “Illinois is broke.” Another strategy would be to amend the constitution, which requires a 3/5 majority in both houses and a vote of Illinois citizens. It appears likely that one proposed amendment will appear on the November, 2011, ballot, a change that would make it more difficult to increase benefits in the future.

Actions in the general assembly have yet to hurt pensions for employees hired before January 1, 2011, when new lower benefits (Tier 2) began for new-hires. Also, the General Assembly has passed an appropriations bill for FY 2012, which includes full funding for SURS. However, there are still a number of bills pending that could adversely affect pensions, for example applying Tier 2 benefits to current employees on future earnings and a cap on the maximum amount of earnings used to calculate pensions. Employees are encouraged to monitor the pension update webpage of the NIU website. Lockard also noted what employees can do, including joining the NIU Annuitants Associate (see discussion below) and contacting their legislators. Haliczer thanked Lockard for all his work. There was discussion that if a lot of employees retire earlier than planned due to changes in calculations or pension amounts, it could be a huge loss of personnel for the university.

III. Announcements

A. Abby Chemer’s Retirement Reception, April 28, 2011, Altgeld 305. Chemers reported that she is not reacting to anything that is happening in the state with regards to pensions and retirement benefits; she has been planning this for a while. Her plans after retirement are to continue teaching yoga and she will soon be on the national registry for yoga instructors. Latham announced that this is Chemers’s last SPSC meeting and she received a generous round of applause.

B. University Benefits Committee (UBC) Website and Survey. Haliczer passed around a copy of the UBC website home page. She also announced that the UBC is doing a survey about health benefits and employees will be sent an e-mail to participate soon. She asked Council members to encourage others to take the survey and the results will be posted on the UBC website. Other items that are posted there are talking points for employees for when they speak to others about benefits, pensions, etc. She added that getting the website up was a collective effort among the UBC members, including Lockard, who helped write the talking points. Haliczer also reported that the Benefits Fair has been cancelled due to lack of information. Once benefits are finalized, she is planning to have several brown bag lunches to help inform employees.
C. NIU Annuitant’s Association. Haliczer and Chemers spoke about the NIUAA. Anyone can join; you do not have to be a retiree. The cost is $1.16 per pay check with payroll deduction. If interested you can contact Lee Ann Henry in the Foundations Office. Once a member of NIUAA, employees are automatically members of the State Universities Annuitant’s Association (SUAA). In exchange for the membership dues, members receive frequent updates on what is happening with their benefits and receive more proactive information in advising employees what they can do to help. The dues also help with lobbying legislators on behalf of university employees. The NIUAA website (http://www.niu.edu/annuitants/) has additional information.

D. President’s Report. Latham reported that he met with Steve Cunningham and presented him with a list of the Council’s top 12 concerns. They discussed the survey results, professional development, workload, pensions and other benefits, internal advancement opportunities, temporary SPS, and rewards/recognitions. Cunningham will also be at the May Council meeting. Latham added that the survey results will go out to the committee chairs for them to review and to see what issues their respective committees can address.

IV. Committees of the Council

A. Awards. Haliczer reported in the chairs’ absence. She passed around a list the recipients of the certificate of recognition and reminded Council members of the ceremony on April 19. She added that the recipients are a good representative of the university. Haliczer made a motion, seconded by Chemers, to approve the list of recipients. Motion passed unanimously.

B. Communications. No report.

C. Constitution and Elections. Stang reported that the last day of the election of representatives and alternates is April 15, 2011. A reminder will go out.

D. Events. Hardy reported that April 20 is the next lunch with President Peters speaking about the Vision 2020 task force.

E. Finance. Chemers reported that she has asked Funkhouser to take over the treasurer’s position after her retirement. Czerniak made a motion, seconded by Benson, to approve the appointment of Funkhouser to SPSC treasurer until the end of June. Motion passed unanimously.

F. Legislative. No report.

G. Technology Resources. Ostenburg reported that he helped with the elections, including troubleshooting an issue that came up because there was no one running for the vacant spot in division 6.

H. Workplace Issues. Benson reported that the committee has not met, but she is staying in touch with Latham regarding the status of the proposal for temporary SPS and filling in missing data. She added that the committee will be looking at the survey results.

I. Vice President. Peska reported that the Academic Policies and Procedures Manual (APPM) committee approved revisions to the personnel section. The Campus Parking
Committee approved an increase in fees; blue permits will increase by $15. Fines will also increase. Ostenburg asked if they provided a justification and Peska will follow-up with the representatives on that committee. The Presidential Commission on the Status of Women will have their annual awards ceremony and Haliczer will receive the Women Who Make a Difference Award.

V. Old Business

A. SPS Survey. Latham has sent the results to the SPSC executive committee and committee chairs.

B. Grievance Procedure Update. Latham reported that this will be on the May agenda of the University Council (UC) and it because it’s a change to the UC bylaws it requires a 2/3 majority vote to pass the amendments.

C. Ad Hoc Public Relations Committee. Smith reported that the committee met and members are taking on the tasks outlined at the last Council meeting. She also passed around the laminated cards and magnets and thanked Xidis for her help in designing those and making the contact in Media Services.

D. Brown Bag Lunches. Latham reported that the three brown bag lunches were fairly well attended considering the short time frame for advertising the events. The presenters were able to get a good feel for the perspectives and feelings of NIU’s employees.

E. SPS Reward and Recognition System. Smith presented the Council with a proposal for service awards, using a gold/silver/bronze format suggested by Latham to indicate ideal suggestions through suggestions that can be implemented with very little cost. She added that the proposal represents all the suggestions she received. Hardy made a motion, seconded by Montag, to approve the proposal and send it forward to the sustainability committee of the Vision 2020 Task Force. Motion passed unanimously.

VI. New Business

A. Election of SPSC Treasurer (see Finance Committee report above).

B. Four-day Work Week. Latham asked Council members for a vote on whether or not they are in favor of the four-day work week. There were 21 votes in favor, 1 in opposition, and 1 in abstention. Stang stated that he would like the administration to consider that it’s difficult for housing and dining to prepare the residence halls when the last week of the four-day work week schedule is the week before students move in. There were other concerns raised that there are other areas across campus that have to be open on Fridays and is there really a savings to the university. Latham noted that Eddie Williams has stated that there are savings, but he did not have the specific numbers. Smith asked that the administration continue to encourage supervisors to allow for flexible schedules, taking into consideration employees who have other jobs, child care issues, etc.

VII. University Committee Reports
Latham stated that he will send these out soon.
VIII. **Adjournment**

Dickey made a motion, seconded by Montag, to adjourn the meeting. **Motion passed by acclamation.** Meeting adjourned at 12:00 a.m.

Minutes respectfully submitted by SPSC secretary, Donna Smith.