

# Operating Staff Personnel Advisor – Annual Review – FY 2022

Prepared for Holly Nicholson, President Operating Staff Council

May 18, 2022

Background: The Operating Staff Personnel Advisor (OSPA) position was created as a pilot program in 2016 through the cooperation of the Operating Staff Council, the University Council, and then Executive Vice President & Provost, and current President, Lisa Freeman. I was selected to serve as NIU's first OSPA, and since then I have been advocating on behalf of the university's 1,600+ civil service employees.

OSPA's Directives: The OSPA serves as a confidential resource and consultant to all civil service employees--both unionized and non-union staff. Specifically, my duties and responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Advise civil service staff about personnel policies and procedures at NIU, as well as with the State Universities Civil Service System (SUCSS);
- Advise and assist staff members who are not covered by a collective bargaining agreement negotiated with NIU regarding personnel or employment concerns;
- Guide employees who are represented by a union that bargains directly with NIU to appropriate resources within their collective bargaining unit for issues related to wages, hours, and conditions of employment, etc.;
- Accompany, upon request, the employee to both disciplinary and performance evaluation meetings, to meetings with ECO staff when filing a complaint or serving as a witness, and to meetings with Human Resource Services staff, and;
- Observe NIU's personnel and employment processes and suggest needed changes or clarifications through collaboration with Human Resource Services and the Office of General Counsel.

Highlights of FY2022 Contact Hours: Here is a quick snapshot of interactions from May 1, 2021 through April 30, 2022-

- Met a minimum of two times (via Teams and/or in-person) with 27 civil service employees. Besides the virtual & in-person meetings, additional communications included emails, texts, and phone calls.

- *Please note: this number does not include communicating with an individual just one time for those either needing simple referrals or those seeking informal advice & further information.*
- Of the 27 employees, I met with 11 of them at least five times or more.
- Highlight two cases -
  - 2 in-person meetings, six Teams meetings on individual's behalf, 163 emails, 14 text messages, and 17 phone calls – resolved through separation (resignation)
  - 14 in-person, nine Teams meetings on individual's behalf, 29 emails, 127 text messages, and three phone calls – still unresolved, waiting for HR to initiate (again) Step 3 of Non-Union Faculty and Staff Grievance Procedures
- 12 were female employees & 15 were male.
- 19 cases are considered closed at this time.
- The remaining eight cases still have pending outcomes yet to be finalized or resolved.

#### Interactions with University representatives:

Over the past 12 months, I have facilitated and attended meetings or conducted phone calls on behalf of civil service employees with various NIU and state representatives, including: Bill Hodson, Greg Brady, Pulchratia Smith, Liz Guess, Chad McEvoy, Matt Streb, Tom Viel, Bryan Perry, Lindsay Hatzis, Lesley Gilbert, Brian Smith, Jeanne Meyer, David Lochbaum, Jennifer Manning, Natasha Johnson, Holly Nicholson, Fred Barnhart and various leaders at the State Universities Civil Service System (SUCSS) office in Urbana.

One area of particular concern is that the OSPA did not receive any referrals from the interim Ombudsperson. In fact, the only interaction between the OSPA and Ombuds office occurred during quarterly meetings between General Counsel, the personnel advisors, and the Ombudsperson. While I understand some of this may have been due to the interim situation of the Ombuds office, I also believe the remote working environment across campus led to some of the disconnect.

Review of Primary OSPA Needs for FY 2022:

1. Increase the 10% release time from current status position and responsibilities up to 15% in order to better serve the needs of NIU's civil service employees as the OSPA.

*Clarify with new bylaw changes*

2. Codify the OSPA (and SPS advisor) role in NIU's Bylaws through the University Council

*On 10/06/2021 the University Council adopted the creation of new Article 12, Supportive Professional Staff Personnel Advisor and Operating Staff Personnel Advisor to the NIU Bylaws – thank you, Holly!*

OSPA's Goals for FY 2023 and Beyond:

Short term-

- Develop and produce OSPA brochure and other digital marketing materials
- Develop and maintain a webpage that responds to current employee issues and concerns
- Continue to actively seek the opportunity to educate campus about the OSPA role

Long term-

- Encourage senior leadership to require (or strongly encourage) all supervisors and foremen to take EAP's "Supervisor Training Program Cohort Group" series
- Establish physical office & meeting space on campus (perhaps a shared space with the SPS advisor)

Respectfully submitted,

*John T. Hulseberg*

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