



Staff Council *Your Voice*

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Dear President Skorton:

As Staff Council representatives for University of Iowa research staff, we met regularly over the past year to discuss issues relevant to our constituents. Through these informal meetings we identified several staff concerns important to the current status and future of the University. We would like the opportunity to discuss with you the following identified issues and concerns heard from our constituents:

- Job Security
- Bridge Funding
- Educational and Developmental Opportunities
- Career Ladder
- Salary Policy
- Quartile System
- Goal Setting

We have attempted to address and present possible solutions to each of the issues separately.

Job Security - Research staff are very concerned with the consequences of being compensated from “soft money.” We feel that the university should do more to ensure better job security for research staff. Current frequent practice is that staff may serve in a term appointment six years before the employee has the possibility of reaching career status and subsequent furlough benefits with that status. Due to loss of grant money, research employees are at greater risk of not attaining career status than administrative employees. A comparable path to career status that considers transitions from one research grant funded position to another with a potential lapse of service is needed. A program should be developed that allows research staff to maintain their years of service towards career status even though a lapse of service has occurred.

Bridge Funding - Research staff are interested in a greater funding pool for use in sustaining a research area that may be caught between funding grants that currently would necessitate furloughing professional staff. Additional thought should be given to the idea that keeping faculty competitive on the national level for research dollars is greatly benefited by maintaining experienced staff. It is no longer practical or competitive for an experienced researcher to start a new grant, take 3-6 months to hire staff, and use the first year solely for hiring, training, and set-up. Investigators must show that they can effectively and efficiently handle the complexity of research questions, immense data sets and methods needed to perform all stages of research in a timely manner. Utilizing inexperienced research staff hampers their ability to perform at the level or in the time needed.

Experienced lab personnel, database managers, project directors, analysts, and manuscript/grant writers with subject matter expertise are becoming the necessity for successful grant battles and publication.

The University should institute an enhanced bridging plan to help maintain research staff in centers and research groups for interim periods between grant funding cycles.

Maintaining staff for the short-term will augment research competitiveness and help insure the continued success of highly productive research groups to meet strategic goals and core values.

Educational and Developmental Opportunities - The university currently has an outstanding “Learning and Development” program that is geared primarily to administrative staff, especially those in supervisory roles. We recommend developing a similar program geared to educational and professional development targeted to research staff to enhance mobility within the University of Iowa.

Career Ladder- We recommend development of a career ladder system for research staff. We believe such a system encourages people to consider their position as more than just a job and demonstrate that the university encourages research staff to establish a career with the institution.

Salary Policy - A fair and equitable compensation policy for all university non-bargaining staff that not only provides a regular and reasonable salary increase based on inflation, but also allows for recognizing and rewarding performance. University Human Resources has provided information that indicates that research staff lag behind non-research staff at similar pay grades. Although efforts have been made and guidance provided in recent years to correct this trend, the situation has not improved significantly. A means to evaluate any policy is crucial and would reduce inconsistencies in how staff are treated from unit to unit, across campus.

Quartile System - Our concerns are that reward, recognition, classification, and compensation issues have stagnated in recent years. The current quartile system leads to an expectation that salaries will progress through a paygrade’s range. Based on 2003-2004 data, median research staff salaries are at the first quartile. Many research staff find it difficult to attain a salary above the midpoint of their pay grade and are frustrated by the system. A scale for salaries which better identifies reward, recognition and compensation issues for staff should be created.

Goal Setting – Due to decreasing appropriations from the State Legislature to the GEF and increased reliance on research grants, we must work together to identify short and long term goals to attain the overarching goal of becoming one of the top ten public universities in the nation. Research is obviously an important component if we are to become a top ten public university. We are interested in issues that affect research staff from your perspective that you are currently considering or have talked about in the recent past. As representatives of research staff, we believe that we must be actively involved in setting goals addressing issues and concerns of our constituents. By uniting our efforts, we can create a better working environment for staff, faculty and students to achieve the goal of becoming a university of excellence.

The Staff Council representatives for University of Iowa research staff would like to meet with you at your earliest possible convenience to discuss these ideas and concerns that are important to research staff. These discussions and ideas are beneficial to the University of Iowa administration, research staff, faculty and students and will enhance the research assets of individual units, departments and colleges. We will be contacting you in the near future to coordinate a time for this meeting.

Sincerely,

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