Staff Council Meeting minutes – Oct. 19, 2023

People in attendance: Brent Dotson, Jolene Sink, Cyndi Dotson, Vanessa Chilcotte, Melissa Graham, Kim Hitt, Tammy Harper, Melissa Fox, Autumn Bender, Beth Woods, Sami Kincaid, Angie Burgy, Martha Leeson, Al Collins and Holly Martin (Faculty Rep).

Special guest speaker Mary Bentz (Executive Director of HR)

Brent Dotson – Calls meeting to order and introduces Mary Bentz.

Mary started by introducing herself and giving a little bit of personal information about herself and her work history and why she is here.

Opens floor for questions.

Autumn Bender – We are losing people because of the time between applying and receiving an offer.

Mary – We understand that it happens and we are trying to move things along faster but because we are a state agency it has many different steps. When we have identified an interest in someone, I send off for their references usually that takes less than a day. For anyone that does not know, we use a vender for references, when we send them a request they contact the person that we want to hire to create a profile, then they reach out to the references. That usually comes back within 24-36 hours. So that doesn’t take long and is not the problem.

Then it goes back to the hiring supervisor or the screening committee, whatever the case may be, has to go into the admin process, (which is a system that we use) and they have to say that this is the person that we want to hire and the date they want them to start. Then it has to be approved the supervisor, the Vice President and then the President, before I can make an offer to the potential employee. Once I make the verbal offer than I can run the back-ground check. The back-ground checks usually take about 3 days but I have had them take 3 weeks. Then I have to wait until the beginning of a pay period because Morgantown only wants us to hire at the beginning of a pay period.

To me, the biggest factor is from the time we post a position and the time until we get through all the interviews. That usually takes the longest time. Because, according to West Virginia law, we have to post a position for a minimum of 10 days. They used to post for 10 business days but I just pulled the WV code and it states 10 calendar days. So we might be able to shorten it by a little bit, but again, you have all these different steps, some of which are part of West Virginia code, some are part of HEPC rules, there are just so many different parts. But we are trying to be a bit more nimble, and all over Higher Ed they are recognize that these procedures are not working and we are losing people.

And it’s not just for length of time, we really attract really good people, we have really good candidates, but when we call them and say we are going to offer you this much money, they say – “see ya”.

So it’s really a combination of factors, and we are aware of it and we are trying to work on it and I have tried to move the process along and make it faster but the workforce right now is so fluid that people just can’t afford to wait.

I wish I had a better answer for you.

Autumn Bender - I understand that there is a process and that can’t be rushed but is that explained to the person on the other end that it takes that long?

Mary – I don’t think it is. I don’t think people realize that.

Autumn – Is there a way that they can know that? Because sometimes I feel if they knew that and they could weigh the pros and cons they might wait. But if they understand some of the process and that there is protocol because we are a state agency that it may take longer than usual.

Mary – Being more transparent about the timeframe.

Autumn – My situation was a little different because I came from a family business and I gave a month notice so I was unaware of the process and how long it takes. I do know that you are not the person who decides how much to offer, is that correct?

Mary – Yes. We are bound by what we have available to us.

Most of you were here during the development of the Mercer Project, which was meant to reward for merit and performance and hire based on experience. In reality that didn’t happen, for a couple of reasons. One reason is, when the state compensation task force got done and presented all their stuff to the state legislature, the state legislature didn’t take any action on it. So here we have all this stuff that had been done and it wasn’t formally voted on and accepted. The HEPC has been running on these rules anyway because that’s all they had to run on, but what happened in between is you have all these schools trying to figure out what do we do? And the truth is, on this campus, they have never really shifted the paragon. In West Virginia there were all these little steps and you got points for each of these steps, and depending on how many points you got determined how your pay was going to go. And the longer you were here, the more points you got and a lot of it was just based on length of service, not your productivity or experience, or skills and knowledge. It was basically based on how many duties you could list and long have you been here. The new paragon was supposed to be based on your skills, knowledge, abilities, experience and your education and productivity, that’s what it was supposed to be based on. So, they were trying to move to that, but in my mind, I don’t think we have completely and successfully shifted there yet.

People should be paid for what they do. I 100% agree with that, they shouldn’t have to absorb duties that they are not paid for however, that shouldn’t be the only way that you get a raise. I think we are shifting but we are not there yet. I’m sorry to say. Right now, we do not have a procedure and in HR we live and die by procedure. So, when we have someone come to us and say how do I give this person a raise, we don’t have a policy that states what to do. We don’t have a policy for that. We are going to get one though.

Brent Dotson – I think that’s what we are working on now with Kim Legg.

She has already met with us and Faculty senate. We already have our sub-team in place and had our first meeting yesterday. Kim asked for some information from the sub team and we have gathered that and I will be giving that to her today. And we will be setting up additional meeting to compile competencies and start laying out what we think the new evaluations should look like, which goes hand in hand with the compensation for performance and not just everything that you do.

Mary – And again, I want to reiterate, people should not get shoved job duties and not get paid for it.

Angie Burgy – It does happen though. I know just for myself, when I started I had 7 or 8 SIMS a week, I have 24 now. I have 3 times the work I had when I started.

Holly Martin – Are your salaries listed somewhere? Staff salaries?

Brent – they are listed on the state’s website.

Holly Martin – Are they determined by the state?

Mary – Not entirely. But the state does determine the range. And they haven’t updated the range in a long time.

I have talked with Alice Harris about this. I asked her about when the Governor gives us a raise it is supposed to bring pay up to the market rate. Why don’t we add that to our pay scale if that’s market rate because our pay scale is supposed to be market rate. We should be able to change the pay scale that was from 2017 and move it to the market rate for now. I think we will see, in the near future, a policy put forth to the Board of Governors stating that we want our pay scale to reflect the current market rate.

Brent – I know that is being worked on.

Autumn – Being in the service part, is there a way with people who apply for maintenance or security or I guess my kitchen would be in that as well, normally want the money to live off of rather that the benefits. Is there a way for those people to opt-out of all benefits would that maybe get them an offer that they would accept money wise?

Mary – I don’t know that I could make an offer like that. They can choose not to take the benefits but I don’t know that I could make an offer separate from that. Because employers are bound to some of that, especially state employers. I can check into that though.

Autumn – I just know that people, who apply to my kind of field are more interested in the money and not the benefits. And if we are offering less than what McDonald’s is offering it puts us in a bind.

Mary – I understand completely. I had a meeting with Tori recently and I told her that we are attracting good candidates and people that we want working here but I can’t hold them.

Autumn – And I did want to say that I had a personal issue the other day and went to HR and everyone dropped what they were doing to help me.

Brent – There’s your cudo’s Mary. Lol

Brent – In your question earlier to Autumn you had mentioned “base” so the base pay for what you are offering them. Then you said flexibility, so I’m curious to know what the base is and what your flexibility is.

Mary – It’s not a whole lot but there is a pay range and the pay range is based upon the pay grade of the position. And you have to always remember that the pay grade is tied to the position and not the person. And for each position it determines what skills, experience and education. That is what ties our hands as to what we can offer.

We are working towards the point were if someone has the requirements for the position and has years of experience in that field but somewhere else, we will be able to offer them a slightly higher starting pay then the minimum.

Beth Woods – So how can they preform those magic acts then? Where somebody comes in, not now so glad things are a lot better now, somebody is a secretary and then all of a sudden, they are making $100k a year with nothing?

Mary – We don’t have any secretaries making that.

Beth – Oh but we did! How do they get away with that?

Mary – Well the President has a lot of authority and they can do pretty much what they want to do. And they can waiver it. That’s not something that HR can control.

Beth – Well luckily that’s all over with now. I was just curious; do they just look at you and say “make this happen”?

Mary – Sometimes. But my main job is to follow rules and procedure. I am cautiously optimistic that we have a President that is transparent and genuine and is going to do her best. It doesn’t hurt that she ‘s got the energy of the Energizer Bunny. And I’m going to work hard to help her.

Mary – For those of us who are non-classified employees, “poof your gone” is a reality for us. One of the things that the state of West Virginia did in the WV code in 2017 was they took everybody who qualified as an “exempt” position, a salaried position, and is based on several criteria, and they said you are automatically “non-classified”. I don’t think that is what non-classified was meant to be. Non-classified was meant to be the President and her “posse”, the people that directly report to the President, and if you read the West Virginia code that is what the original definition was. That is not what it is anymore. Now if you a salaried employee you are automatically non-classified, so now you under the ax and at the will and pleasure of the institution.

Brent – So what are the 3 criteria for non-classified?

Mary – They are Executive, Professional and Administrative. So, a person who has primarily Administrative tasks usually at a higher level. And they have to meet a certain salaried threshold. That would apply to Academic Advisors, some Admissions Counselors. Most of our Admissions Counselors are non-exempt which I don’t think they should be but, some colleges have them exempt some don’t. That’s one thing in the WV code that has them both ways. And that depends mostly on their salaries.

The Executive ones are “policy making people”. Usually that is Executive Director’s and above. Director could also be as well as some Program Coordinators as well. It’s basically someone who has authority to make decisions for a program or unit.

And then the Professional, has to do with Drs and lawyers and computer personnel and stuff like that.

There are also other qualifications or categories besides those that pertain to particular industries but they wouldn’t pertain here, like maritime has some special categories and agriculture has special categories, fishing industry and stuff like that have their own categories. For us what’s the most important is classified and non-classified because that’s what is in the state code.

Brent – I see that the same way. That’s why I requested the list of non-classified, non-supervisory so I could try to include them here.

Mary – I think they should have the same protection that the classified people do and at one time they did. Originally, like I said that non-classified pertained to those who directly reported to the President and frankly they were not expected to be career employees, they would come in with the President and then they would leave with the President. They had a different way that their leave was calculated, and their salary; they usually had long careers but they were not expected to have long careers here they would move on to the next one when the President moved on. That is what non-classified usually meant.

Melissa Graham – Do you see that more positions will be switched over?

Mary – Well, that depends on what happens next in the Department of Labor. The Dept of Labor is right now out for comment, on a bill that wants to change the salary threshold for exempt employees. When I first started the salary, threshold was like $23,000 a year, now it is up to $35,568 minimum you need to meet that minimum or they don’t consider you an exempt employee and now they want to raise it to $53,000. So, if they raise it to $53,000, which is honestly where it should be, we will probably see some people who are exempt(non-classified) that will go back to non-exempt(classified), because they won’t meet the salary threshold.

Kim Hitt – I know they used to list the pay grade on the job postings but I noticed I haven’t been seeing that on there lately.

Mary – That’s because we were asked to take that off of there.

Kim Hitt – But that doesn’t seem fair to people wanting to apply for positions.

Mary – It’s not entirely not there, there’s a way to get to it, but we were asked to not include it in the post, that’s why it’s not there.

Brent – If I was thinking about applying for a position, I would want to know at least a base pay, because if it’s not worth my time, like the woman you talked about before where it was a $20,000 pay cut why would I even waste my time.

Beth – Can we walk into your office and ask you?

Mary – Yes, you can. People come in all the time and ask “what is the pay grade for this position?” and we tell them.

Beth – You allowed to tell them?

Mary – Yes.

Brent – Then why can’t you post it? If you can tell them if they ask, why can’t you just post it?

Melissa Graham – I think it would cut down on phone calls and give you guys less work.

Brent – Because that just doesn’t seem very transparent to me.

Mary – Does it not list a pay grade there?

Melissa Graham – No. There is no pay grade of any sort on there anymore.

Kim Hitt – You have no clue what a position pays anymore. You can see the requirements are for the position but there is no way to see what the correlation of pay is.

Mary – We were asked to do it for Faculty as well, because we were told it was too confusing.

Holly Martin – It might be confusing for faculty now because we have a new scale.

Mary – And the other part of the faculty is based on their credentials. Which we don’t do, Academic Affairs does that.

Holly – Who determines the grades? Like what position gets what pay grade? Is that done internally?

Mary – Not entirely. We have what is called “master specs”, which is on the state CHRO site, and on the CHRO site it lists typical positions and duties and give pay scales for them.

Brent – So if someone makes the minimum of the $35,568 a year are they automatically put salary and called “exempt”?

Mary – No. They would have to meet both the duty standards and salary criteria. If they only meet one of the two they are not “exempt”. But internal policies dictate if they have to be changed to “exempt” or stay as “non-exempt”.

I will tell you, I know there was a time here some people looked at “exempt” as some kind of perk, where they didn’t have to clock in and out, but I will tell you, it is in your best interest to stay “non-exempt” for as long as you can! Because you have far more protections as a classified (non-exempt) employee than you do as a non-classified (exempt) employee.

Brent – I know that with the new pay scale and everything that classified and non-classified is changing to exempt and non-exempt and there are already many institutions in West Virginia that have switched to exempt and non-exempt and have pretty much done away with classified staff.

Mary – Because all of you are critical to the mission and that’s the argument for that.

Brent – Are there any other questions for Mary?

Sami Kincaid – About the pay grade, what is the process of updating job duties? There have been a lot of changes in a lot of the divisions. My job duties have changed a lot since I was hired.

Mary – First of all, as I said earlier, if you are truly doing more work than what is in your PIQ then you need to talk with your supervisor and update that as you go. Now I will say that with the state of West Virginia having more of the same thing does not necessarily increase you. It’s based on “breath and depth” of responsibility. If you started out doing 17 of these and now you have 38 of these, they are still the same thing, you did not change the “breath and depth” of your responsibilities. So that would not define an increase by state standards.

If you work has increased to the point you can not get it done in 37.5 hours then by state standards you would get overtime to complete it.

Brent – So that is like going from working on 1 bicycle to 10 bicycles you wouldn’t get any more money per bike, but if you worked on a car that would change things.

Mary – you’re right. So, the idea is that your job should be within that 37.5-hour window, if it is not within that 37.5-hour window, then that’s another conversation. Now in HR and I’m sure for most of you also, there are times of the year that are crushed and the 37.5-hour window is not enough. Those are the times that the state is supposed to pay you overtime.

Do you guys to Comp time here?

All – Yes

Mary – Comp time and Flex time.

Comp time for the state of West Virginia is equivalent to over time. It’s when you work over 40 hours but you agree that instead of getting paid for it you will get comp time for it. State agencies can do that, private agencies cannot do that. And with comp time if you work over 40 hours it is time and a half, so 1 hour over = 1.5 hours comp time.

Brent – So how does the comp time compensation come back?

Mary – You get it as leave.

Now flex time is different. Sometimes people set up a flex schedule with there supervisor where you work a different schedule than the normal 8 – 4. That is a flex schedule, that is something agreed upon between you and your supervisor.

Flex time is when you stay late one day to get something done and your supervisor comes to you and tells you that they will allow you to leave early one day that week because of it. Flex time needs to occur in the same work week. So that your 37.5-hours stays 37.5-hours for that week.

Martha Leeson – So just so I’m clear over is over 40 hours not 37.5, right?

Mary – Yes. Over 40 hours.

There is one more thing that I want to preach about a little bit. Please, please, please – clock out for lunch and step away. Here’s why, under the Department of Labor, wage and hour rules, if you are eating at your desk and your phone rings and you answer it, you are working and you better be clocked in. And if you do not clock in you do that it is a violation of “Wage and Hour” and it’s a big liability for our campus. There is no federal rule about having to have a lunch that’s up to you, you can have a 30-minute lunch, hour lunch or 2-hour lunch, or not take a lunch at all, there is no law on that. But if you are required to clock out for lunch it has to be 30 minutes.

And while you are at lunch, you are not available. If you are working at all you better be clocked in. It is too big of a liability for the campus to risk it.

I hope that gives you a better understanding of comp time and flex time and please don’t work when you are off the clock. And if you can’t get your work done in the 37.5-hour week, that is a conversation to have with your supervisor. If it only happens during your busy times a couple times a year that’s different but if it’s constant then you really need to have that conversation.

Brent – Is there anything else for Mary? Mary thank you so much for coming.

Mary – It was my pleasure and you don’t have to wait 2 more years to have me back. Lol

Brent – It was just that this whole issue is just now starting to come to light and move forward in the process and it has raised some questions and it just worked out that way.

Mary – It has always been in the past that they want to get people in and pay them the least they possibly can and I can say that has never been my forte, I want to see people fairly compensated and I want to see people treated fairly and I want us to follow the rules.

Brent – And under the current Administration, I believe they are also leaning in that direction with the conversations we have been a part of. But I also know, from an accounting stand point, that in order to sustain compensation you need to grow as an organization.

Mary – I would like to ask you guys, how you view recognition? I know you have an employee of the month and things like that, but what does recognition mean to you?

Melissa Graham – Not getting more work added to you because you’re doing a great job. Lol

Cyndi Dotson – If your going to give me more work, at least pat me on the back. Haha

Mary – How would you like to be recognized? Give me some ideas

Brent – I think that comes from many levels. It comes from an Administrative level, I think it comes in recognition through compensation depending on the work. I mean what other forms are there besides “Atta boy” and pay me.

Mary – I think there are other things that can be done but West Virginia does tie your hands. You have such a limited way to offer things to people.

Brent – It’s Ethics. I attend a cash handling conference every year and they are always talking about the $25.00 a year “gift from a vender” limit. And even though it’s Staff Council we are still considered a “vender” even though its staff rewarding staff. That figure has been in effect for years and has never been changed.

Mary – That is just so weird. So how many of you feel like your supervisors recognize you when you do a good job?

Here’s an example, I used to give my employees candy but I had one employee that was a diabetic. Not very appropriate to give candy to her. So, one year I made her a sugar-free cake, because I wanted her to know that I saw her and recognized her. So, helping your supervisor know what is appropriate for you would help because we are all different and what means a lot to you may not work for someone else. So, I hope whatever form of recognition works for you I hope you can find a way to relay that to your supervisor and that they care enough to listen.

And if they don’t go to HR and complain.

(All laugh)

Brent – That’s another thing, as long as it’s consumable it doesn’t have a monetary value in the Treasurers eyes.

(Conversation about Employee of the month and try to make it more accessible for people to know who the employee is every month. Talked about having it put on the monitors in the halls.)

Brent – We only have a few things to go over really quick.

Martha – I just wanted to say that a couple years ago President Gilmer said if you wanted to do the fazed retirement to let Brady know, I’m not sure where he got that from but it doesn’t exist.

Brent – Not for staff.

Melissa Graham – It’s for faculty.

Beth Woods – It was very misleading when it came out.

Holly Martin – It is for faculty but, we have one person doing it and they will probably be the last one. It’s just really hard because you would have to hire another person and pay the benefits and everything and still pay the first person so it makes it really hard.

Brent – It is a great idea not only for faculty but for staff because you hire someone into a position but there’s no one there to train. So, you’re just thrown into a job and you’re being trained by somebody that doesn’t do the job or hasn’t done the job.

Holly – It really sounds like a good idea but even when I talked to the President, it’s just something that ends up costing the college so much money it’s not practical.

Beth – Needs to repave upper parking lot or at least reline it.

Brent – I will bring it up with Bob Cooper.

We need to vote on scholarships reviews but we don’t have quorum so I will email those out for a vote. The other thing is ACCE. As Martha said she will be retiring so she has asked to step down as the ACCE rep. She will attend the meeting this month but after that we will need another ACCE rep. I will be sending out the ballot tomorrow, there are 2 names on the ballot and voting will close next week.

Vanessa – We bought the employee of the year plague for Lauriel, and spent some for Staff appreciation gift card and candy and gift bags for Halloween. And Olivia is getting me the balances for the scholarships so I will have more next time.

(Talked back and forth about the new evaluation tool and the hopes that things will be better moving forward)

Brent – If nobody has anything else can I get a motion to adjourn?

Melissa Graham – I motion

Vanessa – Second

Brent – Have a good evening and thank you for coming.