

PSO News

February, 1998

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Message from the Chair

It was a busy Autumn Quarter. The work of the PSO never stops. Fortunately we have a dedicated group of staff people on our board and committees who keep the wheels turning all year long. Here's a brief update on our activities and priorities so far this year.

Many of you attended the Staff Awards Ceremony this past autumn. The PSO put enormous efforts into staff awards over the past eight years. We created the PSO awards system and, beginning in 1989, coordinated the annual awards ceremonies for professional staff. Consequently, I am pleased to see the UW administration, not only pick up on the concept of staff recognition, but do so in a well thought out and highly visible presentation for the 1996-97 award recipients. Many of our members were active in setting up the new University awards system, and also served on the committee that evaluated applications and decided on the award recipients. It is a great satisfaction to see the University make this very significant move to recognize the contributions of our dedicated campus staff. Our thanks to the Administration. We look forward to the proposed joint faculty/staff awards ceremony scheduled for this spring. My special thanks to Debbie Prince and Anita Whitney, two PSO members who have devoted many hours to the work of the University staff awards committee.

Every two years the University undertakes a survey of salaries in the Puget Sound area to help measure how well staff are doing and how their salaries compare to other higher education organizations and private industry. The PSO was instrumental in getting this survey started four years ago and believes the survey has been very helpful in documenting the salary gaps that exist for UW employees and convincing the legislature that funding was needed to remedy the shortfalls. 1998 will be a survey year and, as in the past, the PSO nominated two individuals to serve on the survey oversight committee. This year we have nominated Bob Roseth and Fred Nick. Bob, the University's Director of News and Information, has served on the committee for the past two surveys, and Fred, as the Director of the Center for Social Science Computation and Research, brings strong survey and statistical expertise to the task. I thank these two outstanding staff members for volunteering to serve and look forward to seeing the results of this survey in the summer.

The State Ethics Board has been considering some revisions to the current standards on ethical use of computing and e-mail, and has put together some proposed language for consideration. The PSO Board has reviewed the proposed language and has submitted some comments to the Ethics Board as well as the University administration. On the whole, we think the proposed changes are a real improvement and certainly less draconian than the past wording. We support the changes and we hope to see new wording implemented early this year.

The PSO Board has also reviewed and commented on a number of proposed executive orders by President McCormick to regulate reporting of off-campus employment and further define conflict of interest situations that crop up. We continue to lobby for PSO representation on the University committee for developing accountability standards for both faculty and staff and I expect a member of the PSO will sit on that committee beginning in Autumn, 1998.

Our work continues on the scholarship committee and in pursuing more information about dispute resolution processes here. You will find articles on those activities elsewhere in the newsletter. I hope you will join our prostaff email list, if you haven't done so already. We are emphasizing use of the prostaff mailing list this year

and intend to use this avenue of communication more often to distribute announcements and information in a more timely manner than we can in a quarterly newsletter. Let me encourage each of you to sign up for the prostaff list, the directions for which are listed on the front page of each newsletter.

Keep looking to the prostaff email list, the web page, and this newsletter for further announcements as the year progresses. And if you see a topic that interests you or want to learn more about, give us a call or drop us some email at psoboard@u.washington.edu. The Board is available to discuss issues, provide referrals and our committees follow many of these issues closely.

Wishing you a productive and rewarding new year!

Steve Graham
PSO Chair

"At Will" Employment

[This is the second in a series of articles discussing professional staff positions and changes within the University personnel system. ed.]

When a new professional staff employee is hired, the appointment letter usually includes a sentence similar to: "Professional staff serve at the will and pleasure of the employing official." This peculiar phrase refers to "at will" employment. As "at will" employees, UW Professional staff are governed by state and federal employment laws and University policies and procedures rather than by explicit contracts or a civil-service system. University of Washington Professional Staff policies and procedures are detailed in the UW Operations Manual D42.1 "Professional Staff Personnel Program". Many procedures, including those for termination and layoff, differ between the various employee groups.

Firing and Termination

Professional Staff employment at the UW is "at will", but is not "at whim". The UW Operations Manual has a specific, structured procedure for firing, and termination is generally preceded by lesser corrective actions. While termination of contract or civil service employees may be reviewed by outside boards or agencies, professional staff firings are not subject to review outside the UW, although professional staff employees do have the right to appeal wrongful termination through the civil courts.

Layoff

Professional staff appointments are never considered permanent and appointments can be modified or ended for any reason that does not unlawfully discriminate or violate public policy. In contrast, contract or civil service employees become permanent after a probationary period and have layoff procedures which are structured to preserve employment based on seniority.

Layoffs generally occur because of reorganization of the employing unit or lack of funding. Laid-off employees are generally those that are considered least essential to the operation. If a program is discontinued, all employees may be laid off.

Contract and civil service employees can be placed on a "layoff" or "rehire" list and may have "bumping rights" within their "layoff units". These options are not available to professional staff employees, although employees who converted from classified to professional staff may be entitled to revert to classified status if their professional appointment ends. Although protected, laid-off contract or civil service employees are not guaranteed a job identical to their old one. Reemployment always depends on the employee possessing the essential skills needed for the position.

Effective communication with your supervisor will help you understand the mission and goals of your work unit, anticipate change, be effective in your job, or (if you are laid off) to get a good recommendation. In addition, try to avoid layoff by being aware and adaptable to inevitable changes, make opportunities to broaden your skills and keep them up-to-date. The staff employment office can help laid-off professional staff employees identify career alternatives.

Professional staff employees often have highly developed and marketable job skills. Although laid-off professional staff have no hiring preference, their skills and experience may allow them to compete successfully for other University jobs.

Ruth Ludwin

Research Scientist Representative

Professional Development

UW Personnel Services is offering a number of information sessions during winter quarter which may be of interest to professional staff. These sessions are free and are held over the noon hour to facilitate attendance. They do not require registration. Expanded information may be found on the Personnel Services Web Page which is at <http://www.washington.edu/admin/personnel/>. The sessions include:

Feb 19 - Employment Networking

Feb 25 - All You Ever Wanted to Know about the Employment Process

Mar 5 - Performance Review Process Overview for Professional Staff

Mar 12 - Understanding the UW Employment Process (for Supervisors)

Mar 16 - Professional Staff Position/Salary Review Process

Distinguished Staff Awards

Although the 1997 Distinguished Staff Award Ceremony is not yet forgotten, the nomination process for the 1998 Distinguished Staff Awards, a \$3000 award given to five professional and classified staff, is now open. The awards will be presented at the University's annual recognition ceremony also honoring Distinguished Teaching and Outstanding Public Service. This year's event has been scheduled for June 11 at Meany Hall.

All permanent staff at the UW Seattle, Bothell, and Tacoma campuses are eligible for nomination if they have been employed a minimum of six months in a fifty percent or more position.

The nomination deadline is Friday, February 20. Nomination packets and selection criteria are available on the web at www.washington.edu/admin/personnel/dsaward, by sending an e-mail to dsaward@u.washington.edu, or by contacting Pat Wrobel at 616-7503 or wrobel@u.washington.edu

Provost Addresses the PSO

Provost Lee Huntsman was the guest speaker at the this year's PSO Annual Meeting. Huntsman discussed the University as an institution in an era of challenge and change. The four main challenges to be met are demographic changes, political climate, funding issues and information gluts.

Demographics - There is a large wave of some 20,000-30,000 "Baby Boom Echo" and other nontraditional students coming the UW's three campuses over the next dozen years. The UW accepts responsibility for this

access challenge and has chosen to do its fair share. It is a major undertaking. Yet, new students mean new funding and the institution must take pains so that the quality of education is not diminished. In fact it must be improved through innovation and by adding new dimensions to the teaching effort, such as the integration of more students in faculty research and through the utilization of new partnerships with the K-12, community college and four-year college systems. The institution and its professional staff need to look for ways to do what we can uniquely do to serve the state and without compromising our traditional quality of effort.

Politics - There is a suspicion "out there" about government agencies and much public debate over reducing expenditures. The University is asked for greater accountability by Olympia and will work with the legislature and business to develop a better understanding of what we do.

Funding - Future allocations to the UW will be tied to greater efficiency; the ability to serve more students at lower costs. The University is asked to provide more of its current "product" and, yet, is also asked to train students for tomorrow's workforce, which calls for a different kind of education.

Information Explosion - All of us need to deal with an avalanche of new knowledge every week. The work of the University gets done at the unit level. Therefore, we need to develop better "tools" to help units efficiently use information to move forward, such as the synthesis of database information through the University Strategic Analysis Group, as well as to support new ideas through the University Initiative Fund.

External forces push us to reinvent ourselves each day. The citizens of the state worry about affordability and access to a UW education and they expect us to solve the social problems of the day. We are asked for increasing accountability. We cannot underestimate the ability of outside forces to affect the internal workings of the UW and need to make choices and set priorities for the future. The UW needs to affirm its central roles, its values and mission, and, then, be strategic and opportunistic at moving in the right directions. The University has a history of trying to do it all and may need to change that mind set.

Today's message is that the University is in strong shape and in a pretty good place to work with the changing external forces. The administration is optimistic. We need to make our case to Olympia and the public and continue the conversation about internal change. We cannot sit and wait for change to be mandated. The administration, faculty and staff all need to be active participants in shaping the future of the institution.

Bruce Bennett
Past Chair

PSO Scholarship Program

The PSO Scholarship Program is up and running and the committee is very excited about the response from PSO members.

This scholarship program is available to all UW professional staff (whether or not they make voluntary dues contribution to the PSO). One of the goals of the PSO is to foster professionalism and to encourage professional development. This scholarship program is open to all UW professional staff employees, full or part-time, who have been in their current position at least six months. The scholarship award is \$250 per person per year and may be used for full or partial cost of professional development opportunities offered through the UW or other organizations. This may include classes, conferences, professional meetings, workshops or seminars.

It is the hope of the PSO Board that this program will enable more professional staff to take advantage of educational opportunities to expand their professional development. This is another tangible way for the PSO to forward its goal of encouraging professional development.

For an application, please contact any member of the PSO Scholarship Committee:

Lori Colliander (lsc@u.washington.edu)

Diane Cooley (dianec@u.washington.edu)

Gail Gautestad (gautesta@u.washington.edu)

Judith Nyman-Schaaf (nschaaf@u.washington.edu)

Diana Tiegs (dtiegs@u.washington.edu)

Danya Tomlinson (danyat@u.washington.edu)

Deadline for Spring Quarter applications is March 16, 1998.

*Danya Tomlinson
Committee Chair*

All the Better To Hear You With

You may have noticed that the front page of this year's newsletters have a footer entitled "PSO At Your Fingertips." The PSO has always believed that communications is the backbone of any organization. Consequently, in order to provide a more timely exchange of information between the Board and its membership and, conversely, to provide another way for you to send information to the PSO Board, new communication systems have been created or enhanced.

Sending an electronic mail message to **psoboard@u.washington.edu** will cause your idea or inquiry to be sent to all the members of the PSO Board. Of course you can still send messages to any individual member if you wish. All input is appreciated.

You can read about the PSO on the World Wide Web at **<http://depts.washington.edu/psoweb>**.

Copies of current and past newsletters are posted there along with many other items of interest.

All professional staff receive copies of the newsletter and special notices through campus mail. People who wish to receive the special notices via electronic mail, as well as time sensitive items of information which do not allow for mailings, can subscribe to the "prostaff" mailing list. To add yourself to the list, send an email message to "listproc@u.washington.edu" with nothing in the subject and "subscribe prostaff Bob Smith" in the body of the message, where "Bob Smith" is replaced with your name and the quotes are not included. To remove yourself from the list, follow the same procedure but send the message "unsubscribe prostaff".

*James Mock
PSO Communications Committee*

