

*FINAL*

UI Staff Council Executive Committee  
Wednesday, January 6, 2021  
2:30-4:30 pm  
Online via Zoom

**Present:** Mihaela Bojin, Genevieve Johnson, Heather Mineart, Theodore Potter, Teri Schnelle, Glenda Smith, Brenda Van Dee, Mike Weaver, and Kevin Zihlman

**Absent:**

**Administrative Liaisons:** Marla Rosenblum

**Guests:** Dr. Laurie Graham, Yashwant Prakash Vyas, Dr. Meena Khandelwal, Matthieu Biger

**Welcome, Attendance, Approval of UISC Executive Committee Meeting Minutes:**

- December 2, 2020- UISC Executive Committee Meeting – Approved.

**TIAA Farmland Investment Practices – Dr. Laura (“Laurie”) Graham, Professor of Anthropology, Dr. Meena Khandelwal, Associate Professor of Anthropology and GWSS, and Mr. Matthieu Biger, staff member in the Department of Computer Science and a member of the Sustainability Charter Committee**

- SCEC members were given a draft of a resolution from UI Faculty Senate urging the UI Funded Retirement and Insurance Committee (FRIC) and the HR Retirement Fund Investment Review Committee to ask TIAA to address transparency and sustainability issues in its investment strategies.
- Mr. Biger shared his work on the Sustainability Charter Committee related to examining TIAA’s investment strategies, particularly as they relate to sustainability. He worked with the UI Faculty Senate on the draft resolution.
- Dr. Graham shared her knowledge on farmland investment around the world and the devastating effects of Brazilian “land grabs” by investors who force locals off their land and who lease the land to farmers who are not committed to sustainable farming methods. According to her research, TIAA has invested in land acquisition where the owners do not follow sustainable farming practices. TIAA represents itself as a leader in responsible investing by including Environmental and Social Governance (ESG) tenets in its investment decisions, as well as its membership in US SIF: The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment, but its actions belie that representation. She has pressed TIAA on its commitments but has been part of an expert delegation that pressed TIAA on its commitments but these overtures have been rebuffed by representatives who claim that TIAA is following the letter of the law in its investment practices.
- Dr. Khandelwal echoed many of the comments but added that TIAA’s actions have significant negative impacts on indigenous populations, particularly women, because the latter are often the ones responsible for subsistence farming and food provisioning in places where land grabs occur. She encouraged Staff Council to support the Faculty Senate resolution on the basis of the university’s commitment to gender and racial justice, as well as to support food security, justice, and sovereignty for peoples affected by these investment strategies.
- Heather thanked the speakers and said that SCEC will have a discussion of this topic in a future meeting.

**Tuition Assistance – Yashwant Prakash Vyas**

- Yashwant requested time to speak about equity issues related to the UI Tuition Assistance Program and encouraged SCEC to work with HR to address the equity issues.
- Mike Weaver provided some context for what Staff Council advocated for in the months prior to the pandemic (March 2020); the proposal was to ask for double the amount of tuition assistance dollars for a 3-year period to assess the actual need across campus. That proposal is on hold at

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present, but is ready to be forwarded to the appropriate body when operations return to appropriate levels.

- Yashwant encouraged SCEC to consider using surplus Coke Funds to support staff who need tuition assistance but who were not awarded assistance in the first allocation under the Tuition Assistance Program.

**ORG Elections – Kevin Zihlman**

- Kevin said that the Bylaws (Article III, Section 2) provides that Council representation will be re-evaluated every three (3) election cycles and the Elections Committee is the group responsible for conducting the re-evaluation. The committee is reviewing ORGs, particularly in light of one new ORG being created and consolidation within other ORGs
- His committee is considering re-alignment of ORGs and asked SCEC to clarify whether the Bylaws need to be changed in order to implement proposed re-alignments; the consensus was that there is no need to change the Bylaws.
- The Elections Committee will make a proposal regarding re-alignment of ORGs to SCEC; a final proposal will go to the entire Staff Council.

**Coke Funds Status Update – Brenda Van Dee, Budget Officer**

- The CLAS request for \$500 for staff recognition was modified due to the change to a virtual event; the funds would go to hire outside speakers, provide awards, and for technology support for the event. Ted moved to approve the request and Kevin seconded; SCEC approved the motion.
- Brenda showed a spreadsheet that contained proposals, allocations, and remaining funds. In light of conferences and other professional development meetings that require travel assistance being curtailed or disallowed due to Covid-19, HR still has money in the Mary J. Small Award fund; SCEC denied the latest request for full funding from HR for that award fund, which means the SC account has a significant surplus. Brenda will investigate whether SC may carry over amounts unspent, particularly large amounts; she will include an observation from SCEC that there will be pent-up demand once travel restrictions are lifted and conferences/professional development meetings return, and therefore it will be important to have this money to allocate to the Mary J. Small fund. Brenda also raised the concern that the Coke company may not allocate its usual amount next year due to the drastic reduction in revenue from campus.
- Genevieve asked whether the funds could be used for other SC initiatives; the consensus is yes, so Heather asked SCEC members to bring ideas for using Coke funds to the next SCEC meeting.
- Marla asked for ideas as to how to spend the remaining SC office budget.

**SCEC subcommittee read-outs**

- Policies and Procedures – the group did not meet.
- Guidelines and Principles – the group met and discussed updates to the mission and principles; the group wants to finalize ideas and then ask the entire Council for feedback and suggestions.
- Org Rep Feedback/Relationships – Heather reported that the group met. They discussed the importance of org reps having some kind of relationship with the org(s) they represent and feel that the best way to foster these relationships is to start with the orgs Senior HR Rep who manages the ORG Rep elections process. Encouraging org reps to introduce themselves to these senior HR leaders will help them build relationships with their org as well as help them connect with their shared governance groups (should they have one).
- The group also discussed how they can help org /function reps feel more comfortable in communicating with their constituents' and how that can possibly be through orientation and breakout sessions.

**President's Remarks, Heather Mineart, Staff Council President**

- Marla presented staff feedback from the link in the newsletter and on the website; there were 3 responses, with one asking whether there's a way to reduce the number of duplicate messages that

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are sent out. Marla, Heather, and Ted will discuss options and report back to SCEC.

- Heather reported that she attended all 16 listening posts for the Presidential search and that staff were among the largest contingent of attendees. The search committee will meet again on Friday, January 8 and review the draft attributes and position description the search firm compiled from the listening sessions.
- The P3 Path Forward Committee meets on Friday, January 8, 2021; 20+ proposals were submitted and 7 were forwarded to the P3 Path Forward Committee for consideration.

**January Staff Council Meeting**

- Final review Kevin's doc – Kevin will distribute the document that describes SC officer responsibilities and time-commitments so councilors have an idea of what they might be signing up for if they run for office; he will edit the document to make it more concise.
- Breakout room topics - Heather wanted to clarify logistics for the breakout rooms during the SC meeting; the consensus was to allow discussion to flow organically but SCEC member-facilitators should have one or two questions at the ready along the lines of whether councilors might consider running for office or about activities of the council or meetings with the President/Provost, or other concerns.
- Test breakout rooms – Marla conducted.

**Meeting adjourned** – Brenda moved to adjourn and Heather seconded; motion carried.

**Next meeting:** February 3, 2021 2:30-4:30 pm, Online via Zoom