



July 22, 2024

Dear CAPS Council Leadership,

Thank you for your leadership of this important organization, for your pertinent questions, and for annually administering the CAPS climate survey that shares relevant information to aid us in improving the culture for staff throughout the College of Humanities and Sciences. You have given me and our Director of Human Resources Danielle Hairston a lot to think about and to act upon as we enter the new academic year.

Additionally, I recognize that the changes that began in the previous academic year—with the increasing move to a shared services model for fiscal, HR, and SPO—coupled with the proposed changes resulting from repositioning recommendations can create a sense of uncertainty and instability. We seek to do everything we can to alleviate that sense and will continue to look to CAPS Council for guidance on additional strategies.

Below, I have responded to the specific CAPS Council recommendations with the planned action items for the 2023/2024 academic year. If desired, I'm happy to discuss these plans with the four of you as the leadership of CAPS Council or more widely with the group as a whole.

Workload Changes Recommendations

- Continuing the new regular promotion-in-place cycles with training available ahead of the process and communications to staff and supervisors.
- Continued manager training to ensure supervisors know about the tools available to promote staff or receive temporary pay increases when vacancies arise.

CHS Response and Planned Actions

CHS plans to continue the new regular promotion-in-place cycles and will plan at least one training in October and May for staff to share meaningful information in a timely manner. We will create a clear timeline for this process, as well as a clear set of expectations regarding this process. We also recognize the need to provide regular updates in terms of the details of the process so that employees are aware of every step. We held mandatory training for CHS managers, including chairs and directors, regarding the process for promotion in place and will continue to do so. We recognize the importance of having managers who have a comprehensive understanding of these processes—whether promotion-in-place or secondary assignments. Additionally, because of the possibility of changing responsibilities in the face of repositioning reorganization, shared services, and other administrative shifts in CHS, we will explore the possibility of mid-year check-ins with managers to ensure that a staff member's EWP aligns with their responsibilities.

Professional Development and Career Development Recommendations

- Clear communications about how staff can and should apply for professional development funding available in CHS.
- Training managers of staff to promote professional development opportunities, training, and career development with their staff.

Virginia Commonwealth University
College of Humanities and
Sciences
Deans Office

Blanton House
828 W. Franklin Street
Box 842019
Richmond, Virginia 23282-2019

804 828-1674
chs@vcu.edu
chs.vcu.edu

Catherine Ingrassia, Ph.D.
Dean

Darcy Mays, Ph.D.
Executive associate dean for
administration and analytics

Sally Hunnicutt, Ph.D.
Associate dean for faculty and
academic affairs, mathematics and
sciences

Marcus Messner, Ph.D.
Associate dean for faculty and
academic affairs, humanities and
social sciences

Angela Reynolds, Ph.D.
Associate dean for research

Krista Scott, Ed.D.
Associate dean for enrollment and
student success

CHS Response and Planned Actions

Providing staff with professional development opportunities is a top priority, and every year we allocate \$30,000 for professional development funds for staff. Staff can apply for those funds through [the google form available here](#). Requests are due on the 15th of every month.

In the previous fiscal year, we received 16 requests, approved 14 (87.5%), and allocated \$3170. Clearly we have the financial capacity to fund professional development for a much greater number of staff and would love to see an increase in the number of applications received. The availability of those funds is regularly communicated in the weekly CHS newsletter, but we will seek to further improve our communication both with staff but, equally important, with managers to make sure that a high level of awareness remains.

Staff Recognition Recommendations

- Education and awareness of when spot awards can be granted or submitted for consideration, and how they can be used, including clarity on what the review process looks like for spot awards.
- Promote the nominations for staff awards as well as faculty awards.
- Modify the nomination timeline with consideration for the staff and faculty annual review due dates to help improve the nomination rates.

CHS Response and Planned Actions

Recognizing the incredible job our staff does every day is a priority and something we seek to work collectively with you to facilitate.

Currently, information about spot awards is available on [the central HR website](#). As we undertake a refresh on the CHS intranet web pages, additional information about spot awards, including clarity about the review process, will be added to the staff page as well as a link to the central HR website for ease of use. Additionally, we will develop a process for notifying spot award recipients who, we have learned, may not be aware they have received the recognition.

We have already adjusted the nomination timeline for awards with consideration for the staff and faculty annual review dates to help improve the nomination rates; that scheduling adjustment that will be implemented in calendar year 2024/2025 will occur concomitantly with aggressive promotion of nominations for staff awards.

Unit Acceptance and Inclusion Recommendations

- Continue to build on inclusive practices that foster acceptance.
- Advocate for the renovation of Monroe Park Campus buildings to receive updates to allow them to be ADA accessible.

CHS Response and Planned Actions

Ensuring the College of Humanities and Sciences remains a welcoming, inclusive community that fosters acceptance of all staff, students, and faculty is a central tenet of our culture. We seek suggestions on additional strategies for continuing to foster that positive climate.

We agree that the MPC buildings often present challenges in terms of their ADA accessibility. In my quarterly meetings with Meredith Weiss accessibility issues remain a consistent conversation point.

CAPS Recommendations

- Continue to partner with the Dean's office on career communities and support.
- Request support for staff events or professional development opportunities from the Dean's office.

CHS Response and Planned Actions

We would like to continue to partner with CAPS Council to offer career development opportunities relevant to specific career communities at least twice a semester (whether lunch and learns or some other modality/form). We try to hold at least one event three times a year that is purely for staff (most recently the staff breakfast on July 17) and are absolutely open to planning additional professional development opportunities. We support activities that will promote a greater sense of belonging with opportunities for staff to join together for lunch and learns, informal gatherings, and open, regular communication to all staff. While not a professional development item, we also are in the process of ordering CAPS Council swag to further promote inclusion and identity within the organization.

Perception of Dean's Office Recommendations

- The CAPS leadership would like to advocate for additional transparency on issues that affect staff and to have representation by staff on all committees.
- Rather than adding additional titles to members of the existing dean's office staff, we would like the CAPS president to have regular meeting times with the Dean of the College of Humanities and Sciences, as is customary with the leadership of other CHS committees like the Faculty Council.

CHS Response and Planned Actions

As Dean, I meet regularly with the leadership of Faculty Council and IDEC and find it only appropriate to have a monthly meeting with the leadership of CAPS Council; I am happy to begin that practice immediately. At that initial meeting, perhaps CAPS Council representatives can identify on which CHS committee additional staff representation would be appropriate.

Flexible Work Arrangement Recommendations

- CAPS recommends supporting continued teleworking/flexible work arrangements for staff and providing clearer information to staff and managers about which positions are eligible for telework and/or how to support those who may be eligible but are not in a unit that is currently supporting it.

CHS Response and Planned Actions

We recognize that the ability to have flexible work arrangements facilitates a work-life balance, promotes a more equitable workplace, and provides staff with the opportunity for focused time. We also understand that it frequently is a retention issue for many staff. Staff submitted 122 flexible work arrangement requests approved by their manager and HR. If there were no performance concerns about the employee and if the employee was not in a role that required them to be in the office every day, these requests were approved.

Repositioning Questions

While not part of the correspondence regarding the climate survey, CAPS Council also had a series of questions regarding the effects of repositioning on staff, a timeline for changing org charts, and shifting job responsibilities.

The repositioning task force recommendations discussed at the May 1 town hall are in process. ([The materials including the slides from that town hall can be found here.](#)) The specific actions we are working on this summer include the following:

1. The School of Life Sciences and the Department of Biology are merging into one school that will be within the College of Humanities and Sciences.
2. The Department of Focused Inquiry is moving, as a department, into the College of Humanities and Sciences.

Both of those actions require approval from the State Council on Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV); we are currently finalizing the paperwork that will be submitted to SCHEV later this summer. In both

cases, the shifting of those units may involve some staff shifting. We have been in regular communication with the provost's office about those staffing needs (some of the staff support for these units actually reports to the provost's office as part of their shared services model). However, we hope that clarity about the staffing for those units will emerge very soon into the fall semester.

In addition to this SCHEV action, two additional changes are in process:, the faculty teaching languages who currently have an academic home in the School of World Studies will be moving to the Department of English by January 2025; and the Departments of Statistical Sciences and Operations Research and of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics are currently both under the leadership of Dr. Rebecca Segal (chair of Mathematics and acting chair of SSOR).

An important part of this process will be reviewing current staff and their position descriptions to ensure they reflect any new roles supporting changed units areas. If appropriate, we will explore a revision of job titles and a review of compensation if additional responsibilities emerge. Throughout that process, departments and the staff within them will be brought into the discussion regarding position modifications.

Additional Comments

While not captured within the initial discussion of the survey, having gone through a cycle with the regularized promotion-in-place process, we recognize the need for improved communication during the promotion-in-place process—both between managers and staff, and among CHS HR, managers, and staff. A clear articulation of the steps within the process (what occurs within CHS and what CHS cannot control), a shared recognition that central HR may not approve all elements of the manager's request, and a mechanism for providing updates and a reasonable timeline for the requests are all important.

Communication about that process will be added to the Staff Resource page <https://intranet.chs.vcu.edu/staff/> for greater clarity. Alexis Finc is planning some refreshing of all the intranet pages and is releasing a survey about needed updates and additions. Clarity about the promotion in place process will be an essential component of that refresh.

Additionally, [your initial letter](#), as well as any other relevant documentation, has been added to the CAPS Council page on the CHS intranet.

Finally, at the last CAPS Council meeting I attended on July 16, members expressed a clear desire for a more robust and effective strategy for direct communication with the dean's office. I welcome any specific suggestions you have to facilitate the clear sharing of information.

Thanks again for your continued commitment to the mission of the College of Humanities and Sciences.

Sincerely,



Catherine Ingrassia
Dean
College of Humanities and Sciences