



BROWN

Staff Advisory Committee  
Box 1955  
Providence, RI 02912

October 18, 2006

Ruth J. Simmons  
Office of the President  
Brown University  
Box 1860  
Providence, RI 02912

Dear President Simmons,

Thank you very much for meeting with the Staff Advisory Committee last week. The discussion inspired us to think about new and exciting ways to further engage staff in life at Brown.

Due to the time constraint of the meeting, we were unable to share a few items with you. As we mentioned, staff concerns are shared at every SAC meeting when members bring forward any issues they have heard from co-workers and other staff. While our PowerPoint presentation captured some of the concerns that have been successfully addressed, we would like to bring these other issues to your attention. At the same time, we also want you to know about the things for which staff are most appreciative.

Brown has always been conscious of its leadership role and has worked to make major improvements to remain a premier employer. However, to retain that status, Brown must continuously ensure that the leadership, culture, environment, employment practices and benefits offered to staff position us to attract and retain key talent. Brown has made changes over time, both large and small, to make it an even more attractive place to work. To meet this ongoing challenge, the University needs to listen closely to its current employees when discussing the reasons that staff choose to work at Brown, the things that keep them working here, and the things that might make them consider leaving. The University should use employee feedback to plot its future course. Keeping this positive spirit in mind, SAC would like to share with you the following:

Positives:

1. Work Environment: Overall, Brown continues to be a great place to work.
2. Communication: Morning Mail has greatly improved communication on campus.
3. Staff Development Day: Feedback regarding Staff Development Day was very positive because it unites the community and is a morale builder for staff. Despite the rainy weather, staff turned out in droves. Brown Family Feud was a blast!
4. Winter Break and Summer Hours: SAC receives ongoing positive feedback about Brown's generous time-off benefits, especially the Winter Break closing and Summer Hours.
5. Training and Skill Development: Employees bring diverse backgrounds and skill sets to Brown. Brown sets a high level of expectations and offers staff opportunities for growth. For these reasons, Brown employees are on top of their game. Staff are offered the chance to get involved in the community through serving on boards and committees. The new Training website is a great enhancement to help staff add the skills they need to be successful. In addition, SAC members noticed that the new diversity training workshop offered by the Center for Learning & Professional Development (CLPD) filled up immediately and was a great success.

Concerns:

1. Compensation: With expanding work expectations and the rising cost of living, a significant number of employees have expressed a degree of concern with the salary pools. As the University continues to grow and with the addition of new faculty, many staff are being asked to work harder than ever without experiencing a parallel rise in compensation. We are hoping that when the raise pools for staff are approved next year, this will be an important consideration.
2. Communication and Climate: Brown is growing and becoming more decentralized resulting in staff feeling less connected to campus. This makes the need for better communication even more important. The culture and morale at Brown is at times negatively impacted by what is perceived by staff as a general lack of collegiality at all levels. In September of 2004, SAC recommended the appointment of a staff ombudsperson, a designated neutral or impartial dispute resolution practitioner whose major function is to provide confidential and informal assistance to constituents of the University community, specifically focusing on issues between faculty and staff. We would again make this recommendation to complement the existing support provided by Wendy McRae-Owoeye, our Director of Employee Relations. Alternatively or in addition, a training and/or mediation program could be considered as a way to resolve problems related to climate and communication
3. Health Insurance Costs: SAC members have observed that the rising cost of health insurance is an ongoing concern for staff, especially for those who pay a large portion of the premium. As such, the sliding scale for health premiums has also been discussed. SAC has brought these issues to the HRAB, which continues to address the rising cost of health care and how best to keep premiums as low as possible while providing employees with comprehensive coverage.

Regarding the points above, SAC would like to help foster better communication between senior administrators, Human Resources, the Benefits Office, and employees regarding staff work-load and compensation. We must continue to ensure that as the goals of the Plan for Academic Enrichment are being reached, the efforts and accomplishments of staff are being recognized through events such as B.E.A.R. Day, Staff Development Day, incentives, and open discussions and forums with you. Which leads us to number 4:

4. Presidential Forums: Many staff members have expressed a sincere interest in increasing the opportunities to see and hear from you on a regular basis. With the Campaign for Academic Enrichment intensely underway, people recognize the demands this places on a University President. However, they would like to participate in a forum in which they interact directly with you. To that end, Gillian and Ruth will be contacting Sara Tortora to request to schedule such an event in early spring 2007.

Again, thank you for taking the time to meet with us. We look forward to the year ahead.

Sincerely,

Gillian Bell and Ruth Crane  
Co-Chairs, Staff Advisory Committee