Labor-Management Minutes

May 2, 2022

1. <u>Chapter Proposals for Telecommuting / Remote Work:</u> We are presenting our *Principles to Guide a Revised UAlbany Telecommuting Policy*, which was developed through an ad hoc committee of Chapter members and formally endorsed by the Chapter's Executive Committee at its April meeting. The document outlines what our members see as limitations to the campus' current approach to implementing telecommuting and using its other authority to assign employees to remote/alternate work locations and lays out a set of clear priorities for addressing those limitations. We hope to work with management on incorporating these proposals into campus policy.

M. We have until the end of June for the pilot program on telecommuting and we agree with most of the Chapter Proposals. This should be part of upcoming negotiations. Here are some points:

- Supervisory trainings have been done and there's a recorded one on the HR website.
- Appeals need a close reading. There's a defined appeals process in place.
- We encourage any employee to put in an application.
- Karen Chico-Hurst, Registrar, has a good telecommuting model
- We have gone for a more decentralized approach toward telecommuting, giving more say to supervisors, but there needs to be checks.

Telecommuting opportunities are important in gaining new hires. 14% of those who left employment this year have noted the desire for telecommuting in their exit interview. UAlbany has to be remain competitive as an employer regarding this issue.

L. Much will need to be discussed during contract negotiations. Is there a way to structure the 50% standard in a way that's more personal?

M. Yes, that's of interest.

L. ITS has been particularly hard hit with mandated work on weekends without pay.

M. Yes. 21 have left with 8 having retired. This is a very competitive skill set and we need to discuss recruitment strategy for new hires.

L. Make the positions hybrid and defining them that way from the start?

M. Campuses are more or less risk averse and UAlbany is a little more.

2. Promotions being delayed by the Provost: Members from two units—the LIbraries and WCI—have notified the Chapter of delays in the processing of their promotions by the Provost. In both cases members report that their promotions have been waiting for the Provost's approval for a month or more even as they perform the work and carry the responsibilities of their promotional job titles.

M. The promotion process for the Librarians were taken care of last week. Three full-time Lecturers (WCI) are in review, two are being looked at by the Provost. We're looking to start this process sooner.

L. Will the number of promotions increase now?

M. Right now the max is 15. We'll work with HR to see who's eligible and eliminate the maximum number.

L. Good news. If there has to be a cap, it's important prioritize longevity.

3. Departments being required to list 50% of courses as available to be taught on-line: We have learned that all academic departments are being required to list 50% of their courses as available to be taught on-line. We are requesting information as to the reasons for this request.

M. The reason for requesting this information is for program registrations with SUNY and SED, and a distance education form is involved. It doesn't mean we are going down that road, but leaves flexibility. No unit is required to go online. And noting that a course can feasibly go online doesn't mean it stands ready to go.

L. The form is involved asking for specifics.

M. The information is more about preparedness than about curriculum development. It makes Program registrations more flexible. We are aware of the time required to fill out forms but it will save time down the road if there's an emergency. That's the rationale. This is not about taking pedagogical rights from faculty.

L. The form is complex and there's a perception that it opens the door for enforced online teaching.

M. Let's have a follow-up on the form.

4. Campus budget plans in light of new money for SUNY in NYS budget: We were pleased

to see significant new money being allocated to SUNY in the NYS budget for the first time in over a decade and applaud the campus for its efforts in advocating for these resources. When will these new funds be used to start restoring the cuts that were made to personnel as part of the COVID-19 pandemic economic emergency?

L. The NYS budget resulted in great increases for SUNY. Units felt the pain from having lost 20% or more personnel I the past.

M. Pushing NYS was a great collaborative effort. We'll meet with officers over the summer. Here are some wins:

- Tap gap is paid
- Excelsior gap gained $1 million
- $65 million potentially for faculty lines, but keep in mind that 60% of that is diverted to benefits. The reality is that $30 million will be available across all campuses for faculty.
- There are big wins on buildings and capital gains

L. We need an in-depth talk on details. New programs shouldn't take up the money allowing older programs to suffer. Not restoring lines will be demoralizing.

Ending the meeting on a happy note: UAlbany now has the largest solar panel array of the SUNY system. This will pay real dividends for both the environment and the campus budget. Kudos to everyone involved.

The following document has been endorsed by the UUP Albany Chapter Executive and will guide the Chapter's advocacy around improving telecommuting and remote work options for our members. It is based on the input of the some ninety Chapter professionals who participated in our February open forum on telecommuting and was drafted by an ad hoc committee of UUP members—Karen Chico Hurst, Amanda Cosgriff, Nicole DeSorbo, Leslie Hayner, Alison Hosier, Damira Pon, and Penny Stroebeck—chaired by Janna Harton. We would like to extend a big "thank you" to all of the committee members for their thoughtfulness and time in putting a document together that captures our members' concerns with the current implementation of telecommuting and remote work on our campus and hopes for improving this program.

Principles to Guide a Revised UAlbany Telecommuting Policy

March 31, 2022

Initially compelled by the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations are now recognizing the benefits of remote work to their employees as well as their organizations and are making telecommuting a normalized and permanent part of their operations. While the University at Albany also followed the pandemic telecommuting trend, UAlbany has not yet fully embraced the benefits that remote work offers, including those related to recruitment and retention of employees, facilitating employee work-life balance, and maximizing the efficiency of campus operations. A recent study[1] show that "toxic" corporate culture is a predictor of attrition and that remote work options boost retention. Remote work is not new and employees working remotely are often just as, or more productive, than traditional employees. Research indicates employees are more productive and engaged when they have the freedom to work remotely[2].

UAlbany's current telecommuting guidelines only reference benefits to campus operations and do not incorporate elements of SUNY's telecommuting guidance which recognize the role that well-crafted telecommuting policies can play in recruiting and retaining happier and more productive employees. They also make no reference to the role that telecommuting can play in achieving goals of accessibility, diversity, inclusion and equity.

UAlbany professionals want telecommuting options. Over 400 professionals responded to a recent UUP survey and more than 90% said that they want telecommuting and remote work opportunities, but only a third have been approved to telecommute. 30% reported being discouraged from applying by someone in their supervisory chain and

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[1] https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/toxic-culture-is-driving-the-great-resignation/
[2] David Burkus, *Leading from Anywhere: The Essential Guide to Managing Remote Teams,* 2021.

33% reported feeling discouraged by the tone set by campus messaging around telecommuting and so never applied.

These findings point to the need for **a revised, clear, uniform and flexible telecommuting and remote work policy that meets both unit and employee needs and that is supported at all levels of administration and broadly implemented across UAlbany's operations.** That policy should be built around the following principles.

1. **Flexibility, trust and respect are essential** to an effective telecommuting policy and improved campus climate. The campus' Telecommuting Policy must begin from the assumption that professionals are committed to the University and its mission.
2. **Supporting work-life balance, which is top of mind for employees and essential to recruitment and retention.** Employees need to know employers value their time and health and that employers recognize this is important for all, and not just a matter for those with special situations (e.g., younger children).
3. **Remote and flexible work options (including telecommuting, compressed workweek scheduling, and flextime) support campus operations by expanding our services and reach** by prioritizing highly effective and advanced delivery of our mission and allowing more students, faculty, staff, alumni and external constituents to access support and resources where and when it is best for them. Even prior to the pandemic student demand was increasing for more modern virtual and accessible services that fit better with students' school, work, and life schedules. UAlbany must address these needs to effectively compete with other institutions.
4. **No single model fits all.** Each unit and individual has different needs and policies and procedures must be sufficiently flexible to allow all facets of campus operations to benefit from remote work and telecommuting.

These core principles suggest that the following, specific elements should be incorporated to a revised telecommuting and remote work policy consistent with current SUNY guidelines.

1. **Immediate supervisors should be given primary responsibility for remote work decisions** as they best know their unit's needs and parameters. Overly complex approval processes and additional levels of redundant approval reduce the institution's agility and efficiency in meeting day to day demands. Employees and supervisors should work together to review/revise work plans.
2. **There should be a clear appeal process for employees** who believe supervisors are not appropriately implementing the telecommuting policy. It is incumbent on unit management to explain why in-person work is required (beyond a generic "operational need"), with an opportunity for employees to respond, and, should there remain disagreement, a reasonable process for resolution. If denied, there should be a clear process for reapplying.
3. **Employees should have flexible use of telecommuting within the 50% time standard**. Wherever possible, employees should be approved a percentage of telecommuting time and given discretion to use this as fits their professional

obligation. Unnecessarily rigid scheduling of telecommuting days/times is operationally inefficient and does not respect the professional campus community. Not all employees in a unit may be required concurrently in-person and some employees may prefer different work hours. This may allow units to spread available office hours and increase access without increasing total work hours. **Units requiring fixed in-person schedules should distribute work broadly across the unit,** maximizing use of telecommuting time equitably across all employees.

4. **Liberal allowance of alternate work locations for summer/winter sessions, inclement weather** and other appropriate instances when students are not on campus should be implemented. Remote work should also be used in situations where in-person work is hazardous or where work locations are difficult to access (e.g., inclement weather/hazardous travel conditions), or individual cases where employees have health and safety concerns.

5. **Documentation of telecommuting work should mirror that of in-person work**, without adding to workload, being as simple and minimal as possible to maintain compliance with state requirements. Like in-person work, professionals' telecommuting work should be supervised consistent with the professional obligations articulated in performance programs.

6. **Encouraging hybrid meetings should be part of our telecommuting guidelines.** Hybrid meetings contribute to equity and productivity. Making meetings more equitable is not just a social good, it is an imperative. Online meetings have extended our reach and work with more people and can facilitate breaking down silos often found in large institutions. Hybrid meetings not only allow telecommuters to participate in discussions, they enable those with disabilities, health accommodations, unanticipated needs for flexibility, tight schedules, or work locations other than the main campus (e.g., East Campus, ETEC, traveling) to more easily participate in conversations and decision-making.

7. **Supervisor training is needed** to ensure appropriate, uniform and equitable telecommuting and to reinforce models of trust and success. Supervisors should understand, for example, that:
   - Units should not perpetuate old operating models when telecommuting will better serve the institution and employees;
   - Telecommuting requests should not be denied based on job title/unit or an individual's health situation (e.g., recovery from a surgery that doesn't impact successful job completion);
   - Telecommuting is not intended as a substitute for child or elder care; and
   - Telecommuting should not negatively impact performance evaluations or promotions.
   - Remote work should be done in an appropriate alternate space to ensure compliance with state mandates, risk management measures, etc.

Supervisor and employee support groups may be helpful in developing and encouraging best practices and for advice on improving plans and for creating a more consistent campus culture around telecommuting and remote work.

In alignment with UUP and the university's shared commitment to collaboration and consultation, we look forward to working with a committee of university professionals and appropriate administrators to develop an updated telecommuting policy and process.