Professional Council

February 1, 2012
105 Montana Hall, Montana State University

Present: Jeff Littlefield, Nora Smith, Julie Tatarka, Jeanne Wilkinson, Betsey Pitts, Pat Lane, Carolyn Plumb, Chancey Ringer, Erika Swanson, Adam Edelman

Others present: Donna Negaard, Joseph Thiel, Steve Erikson

The meeting was called to order at 10:10 am by Chair Wilkinson. The minutes from the 01/18/2012 meeting were reviewed and unanimously approved.

The meeting began with introductions from all attendees.

Announcements – Wilkinson: The search committee for the new CIO – ITC position has been formed, and though PC did not get to appoint a professional representative, there was a professional employee appointed by the search chair. Duties of the new CIO will focus on the MSU-Bozeman campus where most of the computer equipment resides, but they may also have additional four-campus responsibilities. PC did not attend the BoR in January due to inclement weather however, Wilkinson and Smith are planning to attend the meeting in March. Discussions continue with Staff Senate Chair Thane on how to incorporate PC into the scheduled BoR luncheon discussions. One suggestion for accomplishing that was to change the luncheon name from Classified Staff Luncheon to Staff Luncheon to include both professional and classified employees.: Wilkinson reported that the BoR is forming a compensation focus group. Dennis Defa, the new Chief Human Resource Officer, expressed an interest in meeting with PC, which Wilkinson will arrange.

Professional Development – So far, the public speaking seminar on February 7, 2012 at 11:00 am in EPS 103 has received 45 RSVP’s. Tatarka will place an announcement in MSU Today.

Past Professional Council Member Get Together: - Pitts scheduled the past/present PC membership gathering for April 4, 2012, Wednesday, 3-6, SUB 235. Plumb volunteered to assist.

Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) Charrette (where citizens, designers and others collaborate on a vision for development) – Plumb announced that the SPC has been establishing several goals with measureable outcomes, as well as newly crafted values and visions, for MSU for the past several months. A Strategic Planning Fair is planned for February 8, 2012, 12-6, SUB Ballroom B where all MSU employees are encouraged to attend and participate. Refreshments will be served.

Student BoR Representative – Joseph Thiel: PC members thanked Thiel for his work and for attending the PC meeting. Thiel’s learning curve as the student BoR rep has included meeting s with the MUS Commissioner, heads of councils and those who are familiar with the BoR processes in a compressed amount of time. Wilkinson presented Thiel with the Professional Fact Sheet and gave background information about professional employees at MSU and Professional Council. Wilkinson remarked that over the last few years, PC has worked diligently to make professionals more visible and to establish itself as a resource that will positively interact with other campus constituents, the BoR and legislators. Pitts remarked that up until last year, professionals had never met formally with the BoR, despite efforts
to do so in the past. Thiel encouraged PC to continue to work with the Classified Staff on their incorporation into the scheduled luncheon. Thiel stated that he would like PC to contact him if there are issues or information they would like imparted to the BoR, should they not be able to do so themselves.

Swanson elaborated on the rewards of her involvement in PC in the context of connecting with people and queried what the next steps might be to enhance those experiences. She expressed how PC members would like to become mobilized, become more involved with students and to educate individuals about what professionals do, on and off campus. Thiel suggested collaborating with other campus groups about how PC may coordinate and integrate their efforts. Thiel also suggested professionals collaborate with students, in a grassroots effort, by traveling across the state to speak to Montana citizens, personally, about MSU. Thiel believes that issues brought to the BoR should be a few valuable concerns/issues that all constituents agree on; otherwise, BoR members become overwhelmed with too much information.

Thiel talked about the valuable experiences he has had at MSU, the hallmark of which was his ability to assume responsibility for his own destiny and to contribute to the MSU community. He is a dual major: Chemistry/Biochemistry and Liberal Studies. He emphasized that his research lab experience was valuable in that students are allowed to perform their own research with full support from MSU staff. He is a member of Engineers without Borders and has worked with ASMSU for the past few years participating as a rep on many university committees writing policy and resolutions and experiencing, first hand, how the university works and how difficult decision-making is.

Thiel turned his attention to MUS’s Strategic Plan and asked PC for input regarding prioritization of issues, should particular emphasis be placed on some issues more than others, what may be missing from the list, and how we may better integrate professional employees to determine this strategy.

Thiel rated the issues in order of importance:

- **Need-based Financial Aid** – How to come up with ways (state, private) to maintain the education that should be available to students.
- **Graduate Education** – Accommodate graduate students and focus on how research contributes to the state. What ways may we encourage that?
- **Data and Information** – Create more integrated information system across the MUS to increase efficiency and build into it and improve the ease of transferability.
- **Efficiency** – Program prioritization process across the MUS; reallocate resources to invest in our strengths and performance based funding.

Lane commented on her experiences as an advisor, with transferability and what strides have been made with respect to students being able to take online classes. Plumb believes the graduate education piece is crucial, that MSU should be more competitive with their incentive packages, but strive to balance the faculty-teaching structure for undergraduate courses. Negaard informed PC that last summer, the BoR passed an initiative making non-resident graduates eligible for a reduced tuition rate coming in as TA’s/RA’s. Edelman asked how some of these priorities would be financed, not only in terms of money, but in terms of human resources. Thiel stated that emphasis on those issues that are most important to the campus community would be presented to the legislators to request a one-time monetary infusion of funds to initiate action. Swanson added that student work studies are tantamount
to running her office efficiently. Erikson relayed his experiences with negative student retention in the area of class availability and how financial aid is awarded. Continuing the discussion, Thiel stated that the average student loan debt upon graduation, in Montana, is around $22,000. Broken down into Pell eligibility portions, students racking up the most debt are those just above Pell eligibility. Montana ranks near the bottom in terms of providing need-based aid. Previously, Montana had some of the lowest
loan default rates in the nation; now, those rates are doubling, tripling. Swanson believes that many of the first-generation families need financial literacy training. Thiel noted that Montana needs more creative ways to secure need-based dollars. One thought is to bring the concept of holding back 25% of new tuition increases and funneling it towards need-based students, and to ask the legislature for matching funds. Smith closed with asking Thiel to keep PC informed about how they may assist students at the upcoming BoR meeting in March.

As there was no other business, the meeting ended at 11:00 am.

Gale R. Gough
Administrative Associate
Professional Council