Universal design and ongoing COVID effects are discussed at Staff Council meeting

University Communications
September 2023

Staff Council members heard Ronald Marx, interim senior vice president for academic affairs and provost, discuss what he called a "very challenging but incredibly interesting" first few months on the job during the council’s September meeting.

The council also heard about the Disability Resource Center’s efforts to increase accessibility throughout campus.

Marx, who was appointed to the interim role[1] in May and began on July 1, said he did not accept the job with a particular agenda in mind, but instead came to the role with a "commitment to our collective well-being."

"I have had the opportunity in the three short months that I've been doing this to get around campus to talk with faculty and staff and students and deans and other administrators and get a sense of the really incredible work that's being done right across campus," Marx told council members.

Marx, a professor of educational psychology and dean emeritus of the College of Education, has been with the University for more than 20 years.

When asked by a council member about the biggest issues facing students, Marx identified two: access to financial aid and what he called "the legacy of COVID."

"I think we still have the emotional and social legacy of that year-plus of isolation," Marx said. "I think we're going to have to deal with that for a very long time. We have another nine or 10 years of students who spent some of their K-12 careers in COVID."

Kraus: 'Think bigger' with universal design

Council members also heard from Amanda Kraus, assistant vice president for campus life and executive director of the Disability Resource Center[2], about the University’s efforts to make the campus more inclusive and accessible.

"I think many of us have been taught and trained to think about disability access only as a compliance issue," Kraus said. "While it is an important compliance issue, it is also an issue of inclusion and justice."

While designing facilities and events, Kraus said the University looks to focus on universal design[3], which she defined as design that is usable by all people to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation or specialized design. She brought up Commencement, which is held in Arizona Stadium, as an example. She noted the stage, which offers access on all four sides with ramps rather than stairs, and the inclusion of captioning and interpreting on monitors throughout the stadium.

Other topics discussed at the meeting:

- The Communications Committee is soliciting names for the monthly Staff Council newsletter. Information on how to submit ideas will be detailed in the October edition of the newsletter.
- The council is forming a new Workplace Climate Committee to focus on the atmosphere and environment for University staff members.

The Staff Council is a shared governance organization that represents University Staff and Classified Staff. The council meets via Zoom[4] the last Tuesday of each month throughout the year. Meetings are open to all employees. The next meeting is Oct. 31.

More information about the Staff Council can be found on the council’s website[5]. Anyone interested in becoming a Staff Council representative can apply online[6]. Those who want more information can contact Melanie Madden[7], Staff Council chair and program manager for curricular affairs in Academic Administration.

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[2] https://drc.arizona.edu/
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[5] https://www.staffcouncil.arizona.edu/
[6] https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeBPf3u1Jz3gV8bq_Zd6JKKo5K1VYqAuxemUsMCA6waLBcu9g/viewform
[7] mailto:melaniecmadden@arizona.edu