



DEPAUL

Staff Council

**Staff Council Steering Budget Meeting  
March 15, 2023 | Loop Library 10028 | 2pm-3pm**

Present: Salma Ghanem, Provost; Soumitra Ghosh, VP Enrollment Management; Sherri Sidler, Executive VP; Arbin Smith, VP Strategic Initiatives & Chief of Staff  
Staff Council Steering present: Dani Blackwell, Kumari Christiansen, Aesha Engeldinger, Tom Judge, Matthew Krause, Scott Ozaroski, Laura Swierzbis, Victoria Van Kirk Pride

Questions were given to administration in advance, and follow-up questions were permitted as time allowed.

**Question 1:** How does SRAC [Strategic Resource Allocation Committee] and university leadership address the impending budget shortfall without potentially undercutting support for the President's Designing DePaul vision and areas of innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration? Is the President providing some level of direction for SRAC as they develop their recommendations?

**Sherri:** SRAC is working closely with the President's office to make recommendations from SRAC align with the President's vision and connect to the Designing DePaul focus areas. SRAC is also charged with reviewing longer-term financial plans in order to ensure adequate resources to support revenue growth. The President has been very involved in the SRAC process.

**Soumitra:** The Designing DePaul presentation and follow-up sessions don't show conflict between the SRAC budgeting process and looking at a 5-year plan. There are areas of significant overlap.

**Follow-up 1.1:** What are the timelines?

**Salma:** We don't have the timeline yet. We're working on short term and long term, which will eventually converge. It's a balancing act because we're doing immediate with the future. The President's style is very iterative, so we aren't going to have a formal structure of 'this many steps' and this 'timeline'. Instead, he focuses on hearing different views and refining.

**Arbin:** For example, if you're building a house, you want to make sure that the foundation is strong, so the things you build on top don't collapse in on itself.

**Question 2:** It is widely demonstrated that organizations which are true to their stated DEI values and goals provide a more engaging and productive work force. How will the university ensure a framework of inclusive programs moving forward, especially since

the President led Designing DePaul with DEI? Also, what formal, actionable strategies have been developed to ensure the university supports or retains the most marginalized staff members when layoffs occur?

**Salma:** DEI is extremely important as a principle and as a foundation for what we do at DePaul. When staff leave or shift, HR makes sure we're legally compliant. Every unit has been coming up with DEI strategies and action plans, and the commitment is there.

**Follow up 2.1:** What does legal compliance mean versus the ideal diverse makeup of staff?

**Sherri:** Reorganization efforts are reviewed by both the Office of the General Counsel and Human Resources to ensure that plans are compliant with laws and regulations. There are several factors that go into reorganization decisions and it's a consultative process between these offices.

**Soumitra:** We analyze the impact of reorganization plans to identify the short-term and long-term effects of what's being proposed. For the FY24 budget, the embedded question is around layoffs. SRAC isn't starting by recommending layoffs. Layoffs are the last thing we want to do.

**Question 3:** We have seen net tuition revenue falling short of what has been budgeted for some time now. How has the university adjusted its approach to forecasting and budgeting for enrollment to make it as predictive as possible and to avoid the quarterly anxiety many feel as census data is shared? Are there initiatives within Admissions/Enrollment Management that could enable us to increase our enrollments?

**Sherri:** Yes, we've seen net tuition revenue falling short of both our budgeted targets and the prior year's actual amounts. Historically, our project process has been sound. However, under the current macroeconomic conditions, historical patterns are proving to be less accurate.

**Salma:** The macro that really affected us is on the graduate level, especially in College of Business, affecting many universities across the country, not just DePaul. Enrollment has been decreasing over time, and we've projected it to decrease.

**Soumitra:** Our modeling and methodology have historically been very close. The predictive power of any modeling exercise is unstable and the challenge is how to use traditional modeling and take into account the volatility to balance the readings. We work closely with IRMA and there's an art and science to it, as there are many layers. For example, business schools across the country saw significant declines at the graduate level. International enrollment was lower during COVID, which presents a growth opportunity overall. We want to capitalize on the moment right now for CDM [College of Computing and Digital Media] and College of Business for FY24 and beyond. But that changes what our student population looks like, and the needs

we need to prepare for, especially in the loop. Living in the US and academic culture in the US can be very different from abroad.

**Follow up 3.1:** What percentage of our grad students are also international?

**Soumitra:** About 10-11% and they're much more interested in CDM than Business.

**Question 4:** In which ways do you see staff supporting student retention, particularly among graduate students and among marginalized student populations? And what are the risks to student retention of larger scale hiring freezes and staff reductions?

**Salma:** The work being done on the digital presence will help students find the information online, and it might relieve some of the pressures.

**Soumitra:** It's been my experience that all staff and faculty want to do right by every single student. Therefore, multiple streams of well-intentioned work happen that aren't connected and sometimes we stumble over each other. For example, if a student has a \$500 hold on their account, it could be a long-term financial aid problem or academic problem. At some point we need to see the larger picture, instead of just solving the problem we see at that time. Data sources and the ways we work with students need to be all connected.

**Follow up 4.1:** How much are you hearing about the necessary services we can't provide to students? For example, being down a staff, and not being able to give students answers they need by their deadline, which forced them to find it elsewhere.

**Soumitra:** I hear it all the time, and it's a genuine ask for help because you want to do the right thing. Sharing data and serving students in a connected way could help, by decreasing the amount of time each staff member has to spend finding answers. We have to design this solution for DePaul, and be ready to flex from one type of work to another, because today's students bring different challenges than students will in two years.

**Follow up 4.2:** Data sharing is great, but what about things that only certain departments can do, like arranging study abroad trips? We're serving students and faculty the best we can, and try to give each other grace.

**Salma:** Showing each other grace is important here.

**Question 5:** We have heard several instances in which units, when requesting to refill vacant positions, are asked by central administration, "Can't \_\_\_\_ just do it?" This is difficult to hear after years of staff cuts and many staff already doing multiple jobs. How can on-the-ground staff and managers best communicate the effects of vacancies and reductions up the leadership chain?

**Sherri:** A lot of this work will happen over the next few months, as units work through their cut targets and determine how to continue as a smaller organization. What do we do differently and what do we stop doing? We need to prioritize our efforts and make some really difficult decisions. President Rob has asked us to be present in those conversations.

**Follow up 5.1:** What about when our offices can't stop doing something, like orientation? We tried doing it differently, but it didn't work. Should we invite you into our staff meetings because that is where this work happens? We are looking for the green light to do something differently. For those of us who have been here so long, it's the quality we're trying to keep up.

**Salma:** If I can be of any help, I can come. Decisions don't need to come from above for new program ideas, because you're going to see things differently than your supervisors. We need to get rid of the idea of holding onto the way we've done things. Yes, we have done things really well and we can continue to do things well.

**Arbin:** Institutional efficiency is Vincentian. It's usually not one issue that causes declines in students. It's usually multiple issues, so we need to ask how all resources can be best used.

**Follow up 5.2:** When you're understaffed, it's hard to brainstorm and create new ideas. How do you reconcile that when we still need to make good impressions on new students?

**Salma:** Right now, you are right, it feels like we're running and running, and how do we find time to pause. Sometimes you just need to carve out time.

**Question 6:** Given that decisions will have to be made based on revenue shortfalls, such as hiring freezes, operating budget cuts and as a last recourse, layoffs, and that these decisions can and will have an impact on our community, as well as on individuals, and the delivery of services, how can these decisions be made in the most equitable, just, and Vincentian ways possible? How do you see Staff Council being involved in a substantial way in this process? Can we work together to shore up the morale, the performance, and the sense of community of staff at DePaul?

**Salma:** We always have a guiding principle. It's not Rob's problem to solve, and we all need to work together. There are going to be hard decisions and possibly some people that get hurt. Some of the SRAC solutions focus on how we can approach resource constraints in the most Vincentian way possible. Mission and Ministry has done a great job of infusing the mission in the DNA of our university. It doesn't mean we don't need reminders, but people are always coming from a place of our mission.

We all have a responsibility to make sure the weak links get stronger. We can try to correct as we go. We are the size of a small town. In a short time, we're already seeing a lot more collaboration.

**Arbin:** We're seeing our demonstration of this right now, as we have this discussion. It's not some edict that comes through email that says this is happening, get ready. The process is being thoughtfully crafted. We ask what are the things that don't serve us as well as they once did, now that we're a smaller institution? We hear the feedback in these small sessions and take an iterative approach.

**Follow up 6.1:** In the current severance package dated approved in 2014, it distinguishes between exempt and non-exempt staff with exempt getting more monetarily. Is it equitable and how does it affect timing of potentially voluntary early retirement with regard to potential layoffs? In the past, there have been people who probably qualified to take the VSIP [Voluntary Separation Incentive Program], but they didn't take it, and then were laid off. Will there be a process that will prioritize people who have worked at DePaul many years whose position has been eliminated, and will they receive a certain amount of privilege in the job search?

**Sherri:** We will review the severance policy to make sure it is on-par with other institutions. A vacancy pay policy amendment will be presented to the Policy Review Group in April. Furthermore, I have asked Human Resources to create a process to notify those who have been involuntarily separated from the institution about future openings. If needed, I am happy to connect Staff Council representatives with Human Resources so they can provide staff's perspective and input.

**Salma:** We talk about showing grace to each other, but we also need to show grace to ourselves.

**Sherri:** We ask that Staff Council members continue to stay positive – be the buffalo, not the cow.