



Creating a Staff Council for the Libraries

John Dewees
Sr. DAM Specialist
University of Rochester

Concert of Cats, Rudolph Ackermann, 1817, Cleveland Museum of Art, <https://clevelandart.org/art/1940.1090>



Introduction and Overview

- Defining “staff council”
- Origins of the staff council at RCL
- Scope of the staff council
- Charge of the RCL Staff Council
- Advantages for having such a body
- Implementing the idea
- Post year-one considerations
- Describing governing documents



Interior, Little Girl with Cat (La Petite fille au chat), Alfredo Müller, 1897, Cleveland Museum of Art, <https://clevelandart.org/art/2016.226>



What is a staff council?

Different possible definitions include:

An official mechanism by which the staff body can communicate and advocate directly with the libraries' leadership team, as a supplement to the standard reporting line from direct report to supervisor

Just like the university staff council, but devoted to the River Campus Libraries (such as the RIT Staff Council or the UR Genesee Staff Council)



Origins of the RCL Staff Council

- Originated with the Direct Communication Community of Practice
- The work of trying to figure out how to better communicate with each other led us to advocate for how the organization could better communicate as a whole
- The members of the Direct Communication Community of Practice created a proposal and submitted it to our Senior Leadership Team
- This started a lengthy process of getting buy-in and feedback from myriad stakeholders such as:
 - Senior Leadership Team
 - Past and Current RCL Genese Staff Council representatives
 - RCL and University Human Resources



Honorable Mr. Cat, Helen Hyde, 1903, Art Institute of Chicago, <https://www.artic.edu/artworks/79175/honorable-mr-cat>



Scope of the RCL Staff Council

- University of Rochester Libraries is comprised of:
 - River Campus Libraries
 - Sibley Music Library
 - Miner Medical Library
 - Memorial Art Gallery Library
- The scope of this staff council is only the **River Campus Libraries**



L'hiver: Chat sur un coussin, Théophile Alexandre Steinlen, National Gallery of Art, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.66755.html>



RCL Staff Council Charge

“The River Campus Libraries Staff Council (RSC) serves as the organized conduit for communication between River Campus Libraries staff and senior library leadership. In this capacity, the RSC helps identify challenges, develops recommendations for opportunities, and advises on issues related to staff wellness and organizational performance. The RCS also engages with senior library leadership to identify staff needs and desires and recommend applicable courses of action.

The RSC acts to facilitate a more positive and inclusive culture to improve staff engagement, reduce staff attrition, and to ensure that the work of the libraries can more effectively be accomplished. The RSC accomplishes this goal by providing additional avenues for communication between the staff body and senior leadership as well as for communication across departments.”



Hoped for Advantages of the Staff Council

- Allowing space for more communication to occur
 - Horizontally among staff members across departments (de-siloing)
 - Vertically from staff members to library leadership
- Creating space for staff to advocate for needs they uniquely see from their position in the organization
- Providing another mechanism to support a positive culture and to increase staff retention
- Providing leadership with additional information that might be absent from the reporting line process



Cat Coffin, 305–30 BC, Cleveland Museum of Art, <https://clevelandart.org/art/1917.998>



Implementing the Idea

- Getting this off the ground took about a year of work and negotiation
- The timeframe for this was established to be tied to the UR fiscal year (July to June)
- The first year of the staff council will have some structural differences from all subsequent years
 - One-year terms for three nominated staff members, plus two ex officio members
 - Staff council members will be appointed by Senior Leadership Team
 - This group will get the council up on its feet, determine if three folks are sufficient to do the work, establish elections and foundational activities



Year 2 and Beyond

- Three staff council members elected on for either 2 or 3 year terms
- These variable terms are only for the first election to establish an alternating roster so the whole council doesn't turn over every election
- The first election process will run from April to June of 2025
- The elected staff council will have very much the same responsibilities, and will continue to build on the work of the nominated council



Boy with Cat, Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, 1919, National Gallery of Art, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.103631.html>



Governing Documents

Bylaws

- Approved by the dean and modifying them requires a vote of the staff body
- Describes how the council works at a high level
- Should be relatively stable over time

Practices

- Approved by the staff council itself
- Describes the nuts-and-bolts operations of how the council achieves the work
- Can be modified as often as there is a need for a change





Cat in Garbage Can, Arthur Tress, Environmental Protection Agency, 1973
National Archives and Records Administration, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/547852>



Thank you so much for
listening!

John Dewees
Sr. DAM Specialist
University of Rochester
john.dewees@rochester.edu