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Newly formed council paves way for greater staff involvement in campus life

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Newly formed council paves way for greater staff involvement in campus life



Although their jobs may be very different, a common denominator among many staff members you meet at Illinois Wesleyan is the length of time they've served: 10 years or more is common—and several have been University employees for decades.

Patrick McLane, a 15-year veteran on the Information Technology staff as an instructional technologist as well as the co-convenor/secretary of the IWU Staff Council, has noticed this trend as well. He states, "I think, in general, we have a very long-serving, loyal, professional staff and that's a real asset to the University." He gives the example of a department secretary who has been on the job several years.

Open forums have provided a venue for University staff to give their input on a wide range of issues.

12 years. So clearly someone who had worked in that department, who knows and understands the daily operation of that office, is a wonderful resource for those chairs — someone who knows how things go and when things are due and who has to sign a particular form. Otherwise, the money's not there, the room's not ready, the opportunities aren't there."

"Because of the nature of the University, the chair of that department may change several times over the course of 10 or

Recognizing the importance of such contributions is one of the reasons President Richard F. Wilson formed the Staff Council, which in its first year focused on establishing election procedures for staff representation on several standing and search committees. Staff concerns are also a major segment of the recently adopted Strategic Plan that sets future goals for the University.

In general terms, the University's staff is divided into three main categories: administrative, technical, and support staff — with about 100 workers representing each of those categories.

Last year, tuition benefits were extended to support staff for the first time. Their children who are accepted into IWU attend tuition-free, and there is also a tuition exchange program through the Council of Independent Colleges Consortium that allows children of employees to attend other institutions. All four who attended last year were children of support staff.

This and other new benefits have definitely increased staff morale, says Jenny Hand, a member of the Staff Council who has served as an administrative assistant for the Mellon Center for 10 years and been a University employee for 12 years. However, there are challenges that remain, she says. The growth of the campus has meant that some employees may feel left out of the campus culture, or may not completely understand how their particular job fits in with the University's greater mission. The Staff Council will look at ways to open regular channels of communication, both among staff and between the staff and faculty and senior administrators.

Both Hand and McLane regard themselves as lucky to have jobs where they feel very much a part of the IWU family. "I feel like I have the opportunity to make a difference in somebody's life," Hand says. "The number of students I've known who stay in contact with me just amazes me. Some of them have become quite good friends over time and I wouldn't have had that opportunity other places. I think for many of our staff, that's part of what makes this a special place to work." — *Tim Obermiller*