

# THE COUNCIL CHRONICLE

NEWS FROM THE SMITH COLLEGE STAFF COUNCIL

FEBRUARY, 1996

## STAFF COUNCIL'S PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Throughout the fall, Staff Council has been working on identifying and articulating some broad goals, a vision, for the staff at Smith. At the December Community Forum, sponsored by Staff Council, we brought our preliminary brainstorming to you, and we all joined in talking about what we like about Smith, what we don't like, and what we might do to change things. Staff Council then formed a Task Force to review your ideas, to research suggestions, and finally, to bring forth recommendations, which will ultimately be sent to President Simmons.

We have heard a lot about the importance of staff respecting staff, improving morale, and being a community that supports families during all phases of their interdependency, whether it is caring for young children, assisting aging parents, or coping with extended illnesses. We are hearing that in order to be productive workers in the community, we need to continue to create a climate of support and understanding. The Task Force is excited about the possibilities, and we look forward to sharing our recommendations later this spring. If you have any suggestions or ideas, please share them with us. You can do so by e-mail, campus mail or phone, and specify that your comments be directed to "Task Force." We hope to hear from you!

**Marilyn Woodman, President, Staff Council**

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## PRESIDENT SIMMONS' EMPLOYEE OPEN HOURS

Now that President Simmons has had a chance to meet many staff members in gatherings around campus, she is offering staff an opportunity to "visit" with her. Throughout the spring semester, she will be holding Employee Open Hours monthly in her office in College Hall 20. This time is intended to allow staff an opportunity to meet informally with the president and to share their thoughts and concerns with her. Please feel free to drop-in during any of the following times.

Monday, February 12, 12 - 1 PM

Wednesday, March 13, 2 - 3 PM

Friday, April 12, 1:30 - 2:30 PM

Wednesday, May 8, 12 - 1 PM

Tuesday, June 11, 1:30 - 2:30 PM

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Ballots for 1996-97  
Staff Council Elections  
will be available soon.

Direct questions to  
your Staff Council  
Representatives.

Remember to Vote.  
This Council  
represents you.

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## RADS MEETING WITH PRESIDENT SIMMONS

On 10/1/95 Marilyn Woodman (Chair of Staff Council), called me and asked if the R.A.D.S. staff would be interested in having a meeting with the new President of Smith College, Ruth Simmons. I thought this would be a great way to have the employees meet the President and get a chance to ask questions about her plans for the R.A.D.S. employees.

The meeting was planned for November 30, 1995 at 1:30 at Lamont dining room. A group of about 100 employees and management which is about 2/3 of the total R.A.D.S. staff, attended.

President Simmons promised to look into each program addressed. She also spoke about her meetings with the Alumni all over the country, and each time the subject of dining and housing came up it was noted that it was one of the nicest experiences that the Alumni had at Smith.

President Simmons also talked about eating in many dorms and how wonderfully the food was prepared and how clean everything was. President Simmons compared R.A.D.S. with other food services with which she had been associated and said we came up number 1 (as was reflected by a recent national poll). Just another feather in Smith's cap.

In my opinion it's such a great act of willingness that the President, management and employees can gather in one room and just talk and listen to each other. Maybe this is a step in the right direction! Many thanks to President Ruth Simmons for taking the time to talk to us in the midst of her busy schedule, and thanks to the employees and management of R.A.D.S. for their participation.

**Richard Barnicle, Senior Cook**

## PROFILE

Where were YOU 45 years ago? Kay Burnett was right here. In 1950, the associate librarian at the Josten Library was a Smith graduate student, here to study opera history under legendary professors, Leland Hall and

Arthur Locke. She also won an assistantship to help pay living expenses. The Oberlin College graduate was assigned to assist in the music library in Sage Hall, a department library in those days, "long before there was any library system." "Please don't schedule me Saturday afternoons, I'd miss the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts", she told former music librarian, Mary Ankudowich.

Although Texas born, she settled into the area like a native New Englander. "I felt like a part of me had come home. My grandparents on both sides were from the Valley--Deerfield and Greenfield", she explained to the CHRONICLE recently.

Earning her Master's Degree happily coincided with a vacancy in the music library, "there was only a staff of two, then", and Kay was asked to stay on. "Of course, we did everything back then; ordering, cataloguing, the circulation desk", she said. Specialization, computers, the on-line catalogue, the Mendenhall Center, were still years away. When asked about employee benefits, Kay laughed. "I think the biggest benefit was supposed to be the 'thrill' of working at Smith".

Smith and the Valley offered young professionals a lot to do and Kay soon joined the Berkshire chapter of the Appalachian Mountain Club. According to her Appie colleagues, Kay has been instrumental in maintaining the hiking trails on the Mt. Tom Reservation. She has served as chapter president and is currently editor of its newsletter, BERKSHIRE EXCHANGE.

Kay has witnessed 78 rpm records be replaced by LP's and then tapes be surpassed by CD's and now there are CD ROM's. The on-line catalogue has made the card catalogue obsolete and allowed library patrons, both students and faculty, to know what they want even before they come through the doors at Josten. In answer to a reporter's question about possible retirement plans, Kay firmly assured the listener that she planned to be around for some years to come, thank you. After all, there are all those opera recordings to preview.

**Dick Fish**

## **COMMENTS ON THE BANNER SYSTEM**

I have been working on the Banner project from its most initial stages through implementation, taking part in more than six Banner implementation work groups. It has been a demanding, time-consuming process which has netted some clear advantages for the School of Social Work. Our registration process is greatly enhanced with this system; our various office operations will abandon the use of separate systems incapable of interface in favor of one networked system; and we will be able to share electronic data with other Smith offices.

The down side is that we must revisit all of our routine reports and adapt predesigned Banner reports to meet our needs. Since we are only one of the many offices needing reports from the system, and since we do not have on staff a person who is primarily a report writer and systems specialist, we must rely upon the expertise of Information Systems' greatly overburdened staff. As a result, we fell behind schedule in generating reports that could not wait and resorted to use of dual systems to enable us to draw the reports we need. This is extremely inefficient and cannot continue to be our mode of functioning.

Through frustrating on a **short term** basis, if we can all exercise the patience needed to implement a new networked computer system as large and capable as Banner, I feel we will net its **long term** benefits. I hope the College recognizes the need for augmented staffing in Information Systems to help with report adaptation and training for non technical staff who will need to be able to draw reports on their own.

Mary Lou Wittig

## **RUMOR BUSTERS**

*The rumor: The College is considering dropping HMO Blue. Eileen Corbeil, Benefits Director, responds:*

I have been asked to respond to a question about whether the College is thinking of dropping HMO Blue at some point in the future.

While no decision has been made to drop this health plan, we do have significant concerns about the manner in which HMO Blue sets its rates, the plan's performance on various quality measures, and the number and type of member complaints. However, such an important decision would not be made without input from the Smith community.

### **Monitoring Health Plans**

Throughout the year, the benefits staff monitors all of the health plans. We listen to and attempt to address your complaints and issues. We intervene when necessary. We review the plans' annual reports and meet with other purchasers to discuss common problems. Then in the fall we negotiate with plan providers for the next year and discuss the following: (1) what Smith members spent on medical care vs. how much the health plan charged for that care; (2) what the plan intends to charge for the following year and their rationale; (3) whether member complaints and issues were effectively and promptly resolved; and (4) how the plan "measured up" in areas like preventive care, member satisfaction, etc.

We intend to provide faculty and staff with comparative information on health plan performance in the near future.

### **HMO Blue's Performance**

Over the last 3-4 years, HMO Blue has struggled in a few areas. The plan has not been able to provide us with reports that we routinely get from other plans. Each year the plan has (at least initially) proposed very high rate increases without being able to justify those increases. The plan has been slow to resolve member complaints and has not performed particularly well in some important areas (like coordinating mental health and substance abuse services).

**Please note that none of the concerns mentioned above has anything to do with the quality of care delivered by doctors who participate with HMO Blue.** Our concerns have been with how well HMO Blue manages, prices, and coordinates the health care services it provides (and for which both the college and members pay over \$1 million per year).

Having said all of the above, I want to reiterate that, in spite of our concerns, **no decision has been made to drop HMO Blue**. There is some evidence that BC/BS is beginning to take our concerns seriously, and we will monitor the plan throughout 1996 to judge their progress. If we continue to have concerns next fall, we will discuss them with the Smith community, and in particular with HMO Blue members, prior to making any decisions.

## **ELIZABETH WYANT GAVEL AWARD**

The Elizabeth Wyant Gavel Award is given annually to a staff member (clerical staff, Physical Plant, DRAs, etc). Students nominate a person within the College who they feel should be recognized for their valuable service to them. This year the award went to Beverly Cotnoir, the Recruiting Assistant in the Career Development Office. Congratulations on your award!

## **TQM REPORT - RADS**

In October of 1994, three teams of Smith employees participated in a week of TQM training at Mt. Holyoke. Total Quality Management is a management process that seeks to satisfy the customer first: we refer to it as customer-driven or management from the bottom up. The TQM process forces us to look at the needs of the customer and how we can better meet those needs. In a customer-driven business our goal is to please as many people as possible, most of the time.

The RADS TQM team surveyed a sampling of the student body and department members through 350 personal interviews, to determine what improvements should be made to meet their dietary needs. The following are some of the areas of concern the surveys identified to be addressed: Build flexibility into menu format to meet the dietary concerns of students. Explore enhancements to the board plan--debit card, group meetings at meal times. Provide menu information to students in each dining room. Continue to change menus to

contain less fat and more nutritional variety. Continue to explore flexibility in mealtime hours. Promote menu and nutritional information--posters, resource information. Improve communication--staff and management, staff and student. Establish and provide standards for daily dining room operations. Continual update of kitchen equipment to support meeting the dietary needs of students. Continue to make nutritional education and training available--college-wide education on nutrition, continual update of culinary education, nutritionist on campus more often. Establish food guidelines for staff--i.e., menu substitutions. Continue to implement Residence and Dining Services student survey. Recommend ongoing TQM teams in RADS--continue work of first team, establish future teams to work on recommended concerns.

From that preliminary questionnaire we discovered that communications at all levels needs to be improved. We focused on communication of dietary needs and how the menus respond to those needs. A survey was created to be answered campus-wide. The surveys were handed out at mealtimes, hoping for a high rate of return, with a sundae bar given as a reward to the house with the highest response. The results of these surveys will be used to help create future menus. We attained a 67.3% return from the surveys, with Comstock, Gardiner, Northrop, and Wilson Houses winning a sundae bar during exam week.

Members of the first RADS TQM team were: Sylvia Crafts, Chris Curtis, Bess Langlois, Par Mahar (Leader), Glenn Meakim, Laurie Roberts, Rick Rubin.

REMEMBER TO VOTE:

STAFF COUNCIL  
ELECTIONS

*Ad. e. Hoes.  
Staff Council*