Spotlight on Tom Sero

Tom Sero is a communications officer for the Northwestern University Police Department, and has been serving the University in this capacity for over 13 years. Tom responds to incoming 9-1-1 calls, which include reports of purse snatchings, suicide, and everything in between. He also receives non-emergency calls about matters such as bike thefts. Before coming to Northwestern, Tom served in the United States Coast Guard for five years in Search and Rescue missions. Because of his Coast Guard training in emergency response, police work was the natural progression. Tom was attracted to Northwestern because at the time it had one of the best benefits packages in the country. He is currently in his third year of service on the Council.

What has been your role in NUSAC?

I served on the Communications Committee for the first two years on the Council, now I’m working in the Human Resources Committee. We are investigating staff concerns on matters like the new smoking policy, civility in the workplace, and the University’s promotion policies.

Why did you join NUSAC?

Prior to being involved with NUSAC I did this sort of work for the University Police Department. I really enjoyed the experience because it allowed me to mix up the day, and more importantly, to affect change in the department. I joined NUSAC because I wanted to do similar work on a larger scale.

How can staff be more involved with the University or with NUSAC?

Staff should know that NUSAC is available for them. If they have concerns, they should contact NUSAC and we can look into it, study the issues, and make recommendations to the University administration. The staff should be proactive with being aware of policy changes within the University affecting them. If staff members are not happy with the changes, then they should voice their concerns.

What would you like to see NUSAC accomplish in the next year?

Currently, the staff retirement plan allows most staff to only contribute 2% of their salary to the University matched 403(b), whereas all full time faculty enrolled in the plan can contribute up to 5% of their salary and receive the University 2-for-1 match. I would like to see the policy changed so that all full time staff enrolled in the plan can also contribute up to 5% of their salary.

What do you like to do outside of work?

I have a wife and two children that I like to spend a lot of time with. My children are 17 and 21 years old. Often it is just about being able to all sit down together for dinner. I’ve been playing the guitar for about 6 years now. Some of my favorite songs to play are written by Neil Young or The Grateful Dead. I’m still working on how to play Wild Horses by the Rolling Stones, but it is rather difficult.
NUSAC Helps Create a Unified Statement of Values for the University

Last October, NUSAC’s Chair Rebecca Griffiths and three other council members attended the Forum on Community Values, which was conducted “to identify, understand, critique, renew, and celebrate the values we live by at Northwestern.” The Forum was organized in partial response to recent “hate” crimes on and off campus, as well as student concerns about a perceived lack of “community” at the University and the University’s latest “Highest Order of Excellence” initiative. The Forum was sponsored by NU’s Student Affairs Division, the Office of the Provost, and Associated Student Government.

The NUSAC members were invited to the Forum to represent and articulate the staff point of view, and Rebecca Griffiths was one of several people who were asked to speak to the participants. Rebecca commended the University administration for acknowledging staff in its updated “Highest Order of Excellence” report, which says that, “...Because of the vital role academic and institutional staff personnel play in facilitating every aspect of living and learning in a scholarly community, we believe we need to rethink the models of staffing and support now used in the University...” Rebecca also expressed NUSAC’s interest in being welcomed by the administration and board of trustees as partners in planning the future of Northwestern. She emphasized that staff members “must be involved in development and implementation of the goals, actions plans and evaluation tools that encompass Part II of the Highest Order of Excellence.”

The other invited speakers included William Banis, Vice President of Student Affairs, Alan Cubbage, Vice President for Administration, and Jane Lee, President of Associated Student Government, Carretta Cooke, Executive Director of Multicultural Student Affairs and Timothy Stevens, University Chaplain.

In addition to hearing the panel of speakers, participants met in sub-groups to identify core values that should be affirmed and institutionalized. In the evening, the group heard reports from the sub-groups and a question and answer session.

Accreditation Process and the Staff

While the University is going through re-accreditation this year, NUSAC representatives were invited to participate in the process. On October 11, 2004, four NUSAC members met with three reviewers, all from other accredited institutions, of Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of School and Colleges. Rebecca Griffiths and Jason Groscholski, Chair and Vice-Chair of NUSAC, along with Darlene Peterson, Secretary, Karen Koehler-Davis, Past Chair, and Nancy McLaughlin, Communications sub-committee member, met with the committee to represent the staff.

The accreditation reviewers were most interested in the overall employee experience here at Northwestern. The reviewers were curious to know what NUSAC does, how NUSAC receives input from staff and gathers data, and asked NUSAC to share both the positive and negative feedback we had received from employees. They also asked each NUSAC member how our job compares with those of our friends or family, how well the university processes and procedures are working, and what some of the Northwestern’s technological initiatives are. In addition, they were curious about where the catalyst for change is at the university. The reviewers wrapped up the session by stating that overall, Northwestern seemed like a great place to work. While we concurred that NU is a good employer overall, there are still a few key issues that need to be addressed university wide.

Did you Know?

You can see your last payroll stub ON-LINE. It’s one of the many online services available on the HRIS website. Go to: http://hris.northwestern.edu/hris/selfservice/index.html to see your payroll stub and other self-service payroll and benefit features. You’ll need your Net ID and password.

NUSAC attends CIC Academic Professional Staff Councils Conference

On October 18, 2004 four NUSAC members attended the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) Academic Professional Staff Councils Conference at the Big Ten Conference Center in Park Ridge, IL. The group is a consortium of Big Ten (plus UIC) staff councils like NUSAC that meets yearly to share information and best practices. The University of Minnesota hosted the conference this year. Northwestern hosted the Conference last year.

At this year’s meeting, benchmarking, data sharing, evaluation issues, and university representation were major focuses of the meeting. The attendees voted to establish a CIC website and hold quarterly phone conferences (one coming up in January 2005) throughout the year to discuss issues that cut across all of our institutions.

NUSAC believes that the CIC Conference is a valuable tool for sharing information and ideas to help to foster better working environments for staff in all participating institutions.

Join NUSAC!

NUSAC members are selected from a diverse pool of staff and represent both campuses, various schools and areas, and exempt and non-exempt roles. All members of NUSAC bring their own experience, talent, and desire to improve the environment for all staff. 18 members volunteer their time and effort.

To be eligible for NUSAC membership you must:

* Be a regular full or part-time staff member with two years of continuous service
* Be willing to work as part of a team
* Be available to attend monthly general council meetings (alternating between the Chicago and Evanston campuses)
* Be available to attend additional monthly meetings for one of three working sub-committees of Benefits, Communications, or Human Resources.
* Be willing to serve a three-year term, and are eligible to renew to a second three-year term upon vote of the council.
* Have your supervisor’s approval. NUSAC is a volunteer organization and by committing to participate you and your supervisor agree that some of your work time will be spent attending NUSAC meetings and working on projects on behalf of NUSAC.

For more information, please feel free to send us an email at nusac@northwestern.edu or fill out the application and send it back to the address listed below.

NUSAC MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please print and mail to the address below

Name:____________________________________
Department:____________________________
Campus Address:________________________
Fax:____________________________________
Start date of employment with NU:________
Length of Service:________________________
Applicant’s Signature:____________________
Supervisor’s Approval (signature):__________

Please submit your application to
Sara McGilvra
601 University Place
#109
Phone: 1-5322
Fax: 7-2688
s-mcgilvra@northwestern.edu

Do you have any topics or questions you want featured in future newsletter issues? Send your comments, questions or article ideas to nusac@northwestern.edu with “NUSAC NEWS” in the subject line. Or feel free to contact any of the members of the council to share your thoughts.

GOT NEWS?