**DIRECTOR’S UPDATE**

**October 1, 2021**

**Dear Colleagues:**

My thought for the day comes from Sharon Salzberg: “We can always begin again.” Welcome, to Week Seven! I am hopeful that you have been able to begin again by find a way to thrive and feel a sense of balance while navigating what continues to be a stressful time for most of us. While there are certainly things that we would change if we could, I am constantly impressed with your resiliency in dealing with the problems of the day and your hope for better tomorrows. I will continue to work with you as we develop new ways to keep Nicholson School of Communication and Media (NSCM) moving forward.

**Congratulations to Lisa Mills**

Dr. Lisa Mills, Professor and Assistant Director for Film and Mass Media will receive the UCF Luminary Award on Wednesday, October 6, 2021. Dr. Mills was nominated for the award that represents one of the highest forms of recognition given by UCF to **faculty members across all disciplines** for being academic leaders in their field and conducting work that has a significant impact on the world. Congratulations!

**Hiring Plans for Fall**

It’s time to address a problem that has been with us since we merged into one school on July 1, 2018. Due to the lack of administrative staff, a critical need persists, limiting NSCM’s ability to function effectively. This need has been exacerbated by the departure of several staff members, causing the remaining staff—particularly in advising and administrative roles—to work 60-70 hours a week, including long nights and weekends. With very limited ability to reward staff for these herculean efforts, and the presence of an increasing number of tremendously less stressful positions in and outside the university, we have experienced staff burnout and turnover, especially for newer staff. This turnover only causes greater challenges for the school.

After discussions with the senior staff, considerable strategic planning, and in response to the NSCM Strategic Goal of strengthening undergraduate and graduate programs, the objective of exploring the use of increased number of staff to support program areas and faculty has provided support for present action. Thus, I have approved a strategy to address some of the staff shortages currently being experienced in NSCM. Plans are underway to begin the search process for three new staff positions:

* Administrative Coordinator to be located at UCF Downtown, providing support for the Digital Media and FIEA programs, as well as serving as a backup for human resources and/or financial matters.
* Graduate Admissions Specialist to be located at UCF Downtown, providing support for the Film MFA and Digital Media MA graduate programs, as well as serving as backup for the Communication MA and Strategic Communication programs.
* Student Admissions Counselor to be located in Nicholson Academic Student Services Center on UCF Main Campus, serving as office manager and supervisor of peer mentors.

In addition, NSCM will be moving forward to reclassify and fill an open Academic Advisor position for UCF main campus as soon as possible.

To accomplish these hires, I have reallocated funds from one visiting position in journalism, one vacant faculty position in media production and management, one OPS position, and additional non-salary operating funds. The effects of this reallocation will be felt most directly in the Film and Mass Media program area where a search for two assistant professor (tenure-track) positions in film is already underway, and the search for an instructor/lecturer position in mass media will commence following the launch for the staff positions. I will be meeting with program coordinators and assistant directors to discuss ways to manage teaching needs in the affected areas and to discuss the position description for the instructor/lecturer position.

Additional staff needs remain (e.g., a Communication Specialist, a Facilities Specialist, and a Broadcast Production Specialist). Thus, we will continue to strategize about ways to meet these ongoing needs. I also anticipate changes in NSCM leadership positions during the coming year, so ongoing strategic planning and discussion will continue at the Cabinet level and above.

**School Sets Direction with Strategic Goals**

With the adoption of the Strategic Goals and Objectives at the All School meeting on August 18, 2021, each Program Area is encouraged to identify one to three objectives as priority areas. Assistant Directors will be communicating about these objectives regularly with the faculty and collecting data to determine progress being made during the year. In addition, academic and staff leaders will be identifying particular objectives to address during the year and collecting data for the annual report. As the year progresses, if priorities shift or additional objectives are identified, faculty are encouraged to provide feedback to their Assistant Directors and school leaders.

***Proposed Strategic Goals and Objectives***

Strengthen Undergraduate and Graduate Programs

1. Concentrate on building the quality of our program areas (e.g., determine if classes are designed for right level; curriculum alignment; course caps/appropriate sizing; enrollment management).
2. Explore development of new and innovative academic programs/opportunities and ways to enhance existing programs.
3. Explore use of increased number of staff and GTAs to support program areas and faculty.

Expand External Partnerships

1. Create more engagement opportunities involving college students and high schoolers in neighboring high schools near UCF Downtown and UCF Main Campus.
2. Pursue partnerships with industry and others to enhance educational and research opportunities (e.g., Creative Village, internships, practicums).
3. Increase philanthropic giving to NSCM to support scholarships and development.
4. Track our students and alumni; encourage more alumni engagement in mentorship program.

Build Reputation and Brand of the School

1. Create an environment supporting justice, equity, diversity, inclusion, and appreciation for faculty, staff, and students (scholarships, promotion, CIP code, curriculum, pedagogy, infrastructure, opportunities to enhance cultural interaction).
2. Create opportunities to showcase the scholarly research and creative activity of faculty and students.
3. More intensively marketing NSCM and programs within UCF, Central Florida and beyond.
4. Clarify and distribute service responsibilities equitably across the faculty and staff (institutional level service should be priority).
5. Foster interdisciplinary teaching, research, creativity, and service across NSCM and UCF.

**Interaction Between School Committees and Program Area Faculty**

In an effort to improve communication between the school committees and program area faculty, Assistant Directors will be more purposeful to seek reports from committee representatives and to solicit feedback from faculty for items to be addressed at the school committee level. Faculty and staff are encouraged to share concerns with the committee representatives so that meaningful action can be taken addressing areas of concern for the school.

**In Closing . . .**

As we begin again, I ask for everyone’s patience and goodwill. If you would like to visit with me, I encourage you to contact Jackie.Gomez@ucf.edu and set up a time. I am on UCF Downtown M-W-F; and on UCF Main T-TH. Best wishes for a good wek.

Cordially,

Robert S. Littlefield

Robert S. Littlefield, Ph.D.

Professor and Founding Director

*he/him/his*

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Please feel free to enter our “Virtual Suggestion Box” at the link provided to offer comments, questions, or ideas about how to improve NSCM at UCF: [http://ucf.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\_0wZGWczYENoskBL](https://nam02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fucf.qualtrics.com%2Fjfe%2Fform%2FSV_0wZGWczYENoskBL&data=04%7C01%7CeUpdate%40ucf.edu%7Cd492e1f0fa6d4e4148ed08d98755006c%7Cbb932f15ef3842ba91fcf3c59d5dd1f1%7C0%7C0%7C637689621407943868%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=XHnWoZSEbTbYyu8VC3oJdyQ3BA44A439GYWjMd1LB20%3D&reserved=0)

**
ARMOR UP, KNIGHTS.**
☑︎**Wear a mask.**
☑︎**Wash your hands.**
☑︎**Practice physical distancing.**

*\*\*Please note that I may be sending this message at a time that is convenient for me, which may be outside normal working hours. Please know that I honor and respect boundaries around personal time, well-being, caretaking, and rest. Please respond at a time that is appropriate for you. There is no expectation that you read, respond, or act on this email outside of your regular working hours. Thank you.*