

To: all students, all employees

From: Chancellor Andy Leavitt

Date: 9/12/22

Subj: Moving forward with UWO custodial and groundskeeping services

Dear University community,

After considerable feedback, analysis and reflection, I have made the decision to maintain an internally managed custodial and groundskeeping staff at UW Oshkosh.

I thank the entire UWO community and our many partners and stakeholders for their patience and professionalism while we continued the necessary work to investigate options in the best interest of the institution.

Over the last few weeks, I have received numerous emails, letters, notes and input from current custodial and groundskeeping staff members. Shared governance leaders, other colleagues, UWO alumni and community stakeholders also reached out with concerns and alternatives. The common spirit in all the feedback has been care for and loyalty to the institution. Most input was of a constructive nature, suggesting changes in current operations and structures that might lead to better outcomes. Through this process of open consideration, we have learned much about how we might approach our challenges in new and innovative ways.

So, what is next? We continue to face a daunting challenge. Recruitment and retention of dedicated custodial and groundskeeping employees remains difficult in this economy. Our workforce remains strained, leading to a high employee turnover. "Pay more" may seem like a natural solution. However, as we have seen over the last couple of years, the salary adjustments we made are not a surefire solution. Furthermore, the unacceptable student retention trend Provost Koker and I [outlined at Convocation](#) continues to threaten not only student success but also UWO's financial posture. It makes locally funded wage increases even more difficult to resource.

Not every idea shared with us in the last few weeks is a fit or a fix. However, we want to quickly investigate and integrate some of the most feasible options. I have asked Interim Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration Bob Roberts to develop a management plan that will allow us to get the work done, improve working conditions and successfully recruit and retain new employees. It is my desire to have this new plan in place within 30 days. That is a demanding timeline to enact significant changes, so I ask for everyone's cooperation.

Though we have decided to keep custodial and groundskeeping services in-house, I want to share that my interaction with the prospective management vendor, SSC Services for Education, was productive and professional. This, too, was a result of the open process I insisted we pursue. Staff members' and University Staff Senate leadership feedback was invaluable. Their questions helped us ensure any potential contract with SSC would provide

employees with greater flexibility, resources and opportunities to advance. I want to thank SSC for its leaders' frank and knowledgeable conversations about the multifaceted support they offer their employees and partners.

This entire conversation, while difficult, helped us arrive at the right decision. Shared governance is a transparent process. It may appear and feel messy and raw to some. However, the open discussions lead to better outcomes. I know custodial and groundskeeping staff members have been through a lot over the past couple of weeks. Their work reinforces the foundation of everything we do at this University, which is why we did not take these deliberations lightly.

It is now time to move forward together to solve the critical issues that led to this consideration. I know we will be the stewards our people, this institution, the region and the state expect and deserve.

Chancellor Andy Leavitt  
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