

Exempt Staff Council

Tuesday, August 25, 2020, 2:30-4:00 pm

Via Zoom

MEETING MINUTES

Present

Eric Amos, Brad Briggs, Brian Browning, Emma Burgin, Jessica Cantu, Tom Cervone, Joe Christian, Kevin Frye, John Goddard, Kim Hardaway, Elisha Hodge, James Hodge, Rita Jackson, Johnny Jones, Mary Lucal, Amber Mathes, Heath Nokes, Charles Primm, John Rich, Julie Roe, Theresa Sears, Kevin Thompson, Ken Wagner

Absent

Jeannine Berge, Janet Jones, Kaley Walker, Norma Wilcox

Welcome

Charles Primm, Chair & Office of the Chancellor Representative, welcomed everyone to the August meeting.

New Business

1. Commission Reports

Commission for LGBT People

Tom Cervone reported that the first meeting for the [Commission](#) is on Monday, September 7. He said that he was welcomed to the Commission as the representative from the Council and will provide a report at the September ESC meeting.

Faculty Senate

John Goddard reported that that the [Faculty Senate's](#) first meeting for the new academic year has not yet taken place, and that he has been welcomed as the representative from the Council.

Commission for Women

Amber Mathes reported that the first meeting for the [Commission](#) is on Friday, September 3. She will provide a report at the September ESC meeting.

Commission for Blacks

Elisha Hodge reported that the first meeting for the [Commission](#) is Wednesday, August 26. She will provide a report at the September ESC meeting.

2. Discussion/Other Business

Constituent Issue/Concern(s):

Q: A constituent asked if he/she could watch or observe our meetings. In the past we've had observers from organized groups that made formal requests to observe, such as the IPS Leadership Academy. What is the council's position on observation of meetings?

A: A discussion took place about opening the meetings to anyone who would like to watch. Dr. Mary Lucal clarified that Human Resources doesn't have a role in making the decision as the Council is freestanding with HR supporting the group. She shared an observation that, in her experience being on Councils over the years, having observers during meetings does change the group's ability to speak about sensitive topics. She suggested that the group consider if having observers who are not Council members will make everyone feel comfortable for active participation.

Mr. Primm asked the group for feedback. John Goddard shared his experience as a Past Chair in allowing Leadership Academy participants to observe. Mr. Primm asked co-chairs Ms. Hodge and Mr. Cervone for their thoughts. Mr. Cervone shared that, in other groups he participates in, there is a presumption of confidentiality about what is discussed during those meetings. He said that he is cautious about opening meetings as that might make members feel less comfortable in discussion. Dr. Lucal and Mr. Cervone discussed other groups that they are part of like the Commissions, which hold public

meetings, nothing the differing public context. Joe Christian reflected on the difference between interest in attending to observe for academic purposes and an expectation of confidentiality versus those who have other reasons for wanting to observe. Ken Wagner and Mr. Primm discussed managing discussions in Zoom meetings while also allowing non-members to observe.

Mr. Primm reflected that the meeting minutes are available to constituents and that being available to constituents to provide information and feedback from meetings is good constituent service. He offered that the group could rely on each other for discretion in discussing sensitive topics while also being of service to constituents outside of meetings.

Mr. Goddard asked about allowing constituents to watch recordings of the meetings. Dr. Lucal clarified that the recordings are only used for the purpose of creating meeting minutes and are not publicly posted. Mr. Primm agreed that knowing that anyone could view the video might serve as a source of inhibition for Council members to speak their minds or freely share something from a constituent. Mr. Primm thanked Ms. Hardaway for bringing the issue to the group for consideration, and to let them know that they are free to share concerns or questions with her that will later be shared with them via the meeting minutes. He emphasized the importance of staying connected with constituents.

Q: Prior to the pandemic, the university was discussing paid parental leave and a new family leave policy [<https://news.utk.edu/2020/01/17/ut-system-announces-plans-for-new-family-leave-policy/>]. At least two constituents have asked if there is a status update on this initiative.

A: Dr. Lucal agreed that the issue came up last year when the Governor created a family leave policy, and a System level committee was looking at making a similar policy for the University. No decisions had been made before the state government paused to revisit the policy through legislation. The University wanted to track that and see where legislation went and work accordingly. It was paused at the state level, and she said that they will continue to track that conversation if and when it is restarted at the state level.

Mr. Primm said that in the [Bylaws](#), there is a liaison or Commission position for someone to work with the state advocacy or governmental affairs group. He will review that for the next meeting, and it would be helpful to get information around information of interest to the group. Dr. Lucal and Ms. Hardaway discussed the revised Bylaws. Mr. Primm shared that he knows of a report to inform University officials about the progress of legislation that might affect the University, and offered that the report may be a useful source of information for the Council to consider.

Q: Is there an update about the requirement for faculty, staff and students to get the flu vaccine? Is this mandatory, when does it go into effect, and what is the exemption process?

A: Dr. Lucal responded by affirming that employees will not be terminated over a flu shot and has voiced the same in conversations at the System HRO conversations. She said that there will be a push in partnership with the Student Health Center on campus for staff, faculty, and students to get flu vaccines. She explained the reason for the push is that there is accepted scientific support that vaccines allow for a shorter flu duration and leave you better situated if you contract COVID-19 and have a less severe flu at the same time. She reflected on the possibility of contracting COVID-19 and a severe case of flu at the same time presenting a very difficult health situation.

Dr. Lucal said the effort is to support faculty and staff in getting flu shots, and is intended to be a positive public health initiative. She promised to share more information around how the exemption process will work as it becomes available. She also affirmed that that she is advocating for a process that is easy for faculty and staff to complete. She reflected that it is reasonable to expect the push towards obtaining flu shots, especially as we look towards the winter months when people are inside and potentially gathering.

Mr. Wagner asked if the University is offering flu shot options for Nashville area employees. Ms. Hodge agreed, and Dr. Lucal suggested ideas for local University offices at Polk Avenue or downtown to partner with CVS, BlueCross BlueShield, or the state to host flu shot opportunities for Polk Avenue and the downtown offices.

Mr. Goddard asked about plans for COVID-19 vaccine requirements. Dr. Lucal said that the flu vaccines are the primary focus. Eric Amos said he got an email that said it is likely that a COVID-19 vaccine will be required by the Board of Trustees when it is available.

Q: Constituent comment: “The way that UT Extension has handled this COVID-19 mess has been very commendable; as a new Agent I can say that I am proud to be a part of a great organization backed by so many caring and passionate people. I look forward to continuing to grow into this position well into the future.”

A: Mr. Primm shared the feedback with the group.

Q: How many UT Extension Agent vacancies are there currently? According to the Dean’s Office there are 14 vacancies. A constituent noted, “I appreciate how Randy Boyd has kept his promise for filling Extension vacancies following Unification.”

A: Mr. Goddard said he received the question, and the constituent wanted to know how many vacancies there were since President Boyd highlighted filling agent vacancies was

part of the unification. He said he called the Dean's Office to confirm the number and was told there were only fourteen. Mr. Primm shared that staying in contact with your supervisor or unit HR office will help with answering questions like this.

Q: Are there going to be any raises this year for employees (either across-the-board or merit-based)? People have heard that there are no raises this year.

A: Dr. Lucal confirmed that Chancellor Plowman has said publicly that there will not be raises for FY20. As for FY21, that remains to be seen, but she said she was appreciative that the Chancellor has kept employees paid during a difficult and uncertain time. She asked that employees remind themselves and each other that we are more fortunate than colleagues at other higher education institutions. Mr. Primm agreed, acknowledging that furloughs, layoffs, and pay cuts are happening at universities around the country.

Dr. Lucal suggested that, for those areas who report up through the Chancellor, to watch her [twice weekly COVID-19 update webcasts](#). Mr. Primm shared that his team assists with the production, and that the Chancellor is doing a great job in being open and forthright while sharing strength and hope in her broadcasts. He praised her efforts as a dynamic and compassionate leader. He and Dr. Lucal discussed the updates, and agreed the messaging being a good way to stay up to date.

Mr. Primm asked the group to be good communicators through this time to keep our constituents moving forward. Ms. Hardaway noted that the update website also allows viewers to ask questions, share concerns, and provide feedback directly to the Chancellor's office.

Enrollment Numbers

Heath Nokes asked how the fall enrollment numbers are and if they suffered as a result of the pandemic. A discussion about enrollment numbers took place. Dr. Lucal shared that she understands from Vice Provost for Enrollment Management Kari Alldredge that numbers are very good. She thanked Enrollment Management, Student Life, and Dr. Amber Williams, Vice Provost for Student Success, for their hard work in connecting with students and encouraging them to come back and keep freshman enrollment strong. Ms. Hardaway and Dr. Lucal discussed Housing's numbers for the fall and the Emergency Operations Committee's Policy Group's decision to drop the residency requirement for the fall to de-densify residence halls.

According to campus news, UTK enrollment for the fall semester [was more than 30,000](#).

Compliance Training Project Update

Dr. Lucal shared that feedback from employees around the timing of online trainings such as Code of Conduct, Title IX, Clery Act, FERPA, etc. shows that the timing and frequency of messaging is unpopular, and those trainings would be better centralized into one email.

The Compliance Committee, OIT, and IRIS team including Kate Sowrey worked together this summer to change the way the training information is disseminated and create new infrastructure for annual training notification. By September 14 [a new model will be launched](#) that will notify each employee which trainings they must take by a deadline date and links for each training.

The trainings are role dependent, and if the employee has not yet completed training up to five reminder emails will be sent. Dr. Lucal said that, all together, the information should total about two hours of training time. Unit completion reports will be provided to the Cabinet. Because employees are required to take certain trainings this new process should create a high level of completion.

She asked representatives to explain to constituents that question what the emails are to encourage the constituents to complete the trainings, and expressed her appreciation for their assistance in encouraging a culture of education and better understand how to engage together as a campus community.

COVID-19 Constituent Check-In Meetings

Mr. Primm announced that there was a recommendation for representatives to hold a check-in meeting for their constituents as a group to see how they are doing. Since many employees have been working from home and some are transitioning to returning to work on campus, he said it would be good for Council members to do to engage with their areas.

Mr. Primm suggested that an email or a Zoom call for thirty minutes to an hour are ideas for ways to connect. He said he would follow up at a future meeting about feedback from those check-ins.

Guest Speaker Schedule

Mr. Primm announced that Provost John Zomchick and Rob Chance, Director of Payroll, will be speaking during the September meeting. Tyvi Small, Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement, will be speaking at the October meeting, and Chancellor Plowman will be speaking in November after rescheduling from the spring.

Mr. Primm said he is looking forward to scheduling President Boyd for the spring. He asked the group to share their guest speaker suggestions as well.

Announcements & Other Comments

- Sick Leave Bank Open Enrollment
 - Ms. Roe shared via chat that [Sick Leave Bank open enrollment](#) is currently underway. She noted that it was extended due to COVID-19, and the new deadline is August 31, 2020. The two local banks are the Knoxville-Area/UTSI and UTIA. Visit hr.utk.edu or contact SickLeaveBank@utk.edu for more information.

Distributions

- [Personal and Professional Resources for Employees](#)

Next Meeting:

Tuesday, September 22, 2020 at 3:30 p.m. ET via Zoom
Guest Speaking: Provost John Zomchick & Rob Chance, Director of Payroll

Please send agenda items to Jessica Cantu at jlcantu@utk.edu